



Universidad de Oviedo

Faculty of Humanities

**Department of English, French and German
Philology**

BACHELOR THESIS

**BACHELOR'S DEGREE IN ENGLISH
STUDIES**

***CHALLENGING THE MELTING POT:
AN ANALYSIS OF IBI ZOBOI'S NOVELS***

2023-2024 Academic Year

Author: Lidia Hernández García

Supervisor: Marta Fernández Morales

Co-supervisor: Lena Elipe Gutiérrez

Oviedo, June 2024

Table of Contents

Introduction	1
1. The Multicultural Panorama in the USA	2
1.1. <i>The Historical Evolution of the American Multicultural Panorama</i>	2
1.2. <i>The Melting Pot versus the Salad Bowl</i>	6
2. Assimilationist Devices: The American Dream and the Black Female Body..	10
2.1. <i>Evolution of the Concept of the American Dream</i>	10
2.2. <i>Reaching the American Dream through the Black Female Body</i>	14
3. Exploring Contestations of the Melting Pot in Ibi Zoboi’s <i>American Street</i> ...	18
3.1. <i>The American Dream in American Street</i>	19
3.2. <i>The Black Female Body in American Street</i>	23
4. Exploring Contestations of the Melting Pot in Ibi Zoboi’s <i>Nigeria Jones</i>	23
4.1. <i>The American Dream in Nigeria Jones</i>	28
4.2. <i>The Black Female Body in Nigeria Jones</i>	31
Conclusion	35
Works Cited	36

Introduction

This dissertation aims at studying how recent works of multicultural Young Adult Literature (YAL) in the USA comply with or defy the myth of the melting pot. This exploration is relevant because the origin of migration to the USA has drastically shifted in the last decades, with most newcomers arriving from Latin America and Asia—individuals who are perceived as less culturally compatible than their European counterparts—, thus causing significant changes in the American social fabric. These works provide useful insights on the assimilationist devices in operation within American society, as well as on how individuals who enter the dominant culture react to these acculturating pressures. Moreover, YAL is especially interesting and convenient for the purpose of this thesis, not only because of its potential to acquaint young readers with marginalised environments and make a positive impact on their perception, but also because it usually recounts coming-of-age stories where characters have to fathom out their identity. For this dissertation, two novels by the Haitian-American author Ibi Zoboi have been selected: *American Street* (2017) and *Nigeria Jones* (2023). Both stories are centred around black female characters who have to figure out their place within the American society while trying to remain true to themselves by developing a hybrid identity that allows them to integrate the different aspects that constitute their new sense of being.

In order to analyse the contestations of the melting pot rhetoric in Ibi Zoboi's novels, this paper provides an overview of the American multicultural panorama and examines the progress of this narrative and its importance within the American national discourse, explaining the different interpretations to which it has been subjected and that lead to equating the image with assimilationist models. In addition, the melting pot image is compared to its main opponent, the salad bowl, which is equivalent to integrationist approaches to social difference. This thesis also provides a chronicle of the evolution of the idea of the American dream, given that it is closely connected to the melting pot image as it serves as an incentive to melt into American society and, therefore, as an assimilationist device. Moreover, since both novels feature young black girls as the main characters, a summary of the vindications and dreams of black women in America, as well as their treatment by the dominant society, especially in terms of stereotyping, are also provided. Finally, Zoboi's works are discussed in relation to the American dream and

its treatment of gender issues, especially in terms of their compliance or non-compliance with the narratives imposed on black women by the dominant discourse. Although these works are analysed separately, their approach to the melting pot model will be compared in the conclusions, especially in relation to the different historical moments in which they were produced.

1. The Multicultural Panorama in the USA

Since its foundation on the 4th of July 1776, the USA has been characterised by its diverse ethnic composition. Moreover, national pride in the immigrant origins of the country has been historically manifested. The melting pot metaphor complements the national narrative that portrays the USA as a land of freedom, opportunity, and unity within diversity. The metaphor symbolises the process of Americanisation undergone by immigrants arriving at the country, who are expected to abandon their cultural identity in favour of Americanness, thus blending into the American melting pot. The contrast between this inclusive and amalgamating national narrative and the social reality of the USA propelled other images that oppose the melting pot and approach American society in a more integrationist way, such as the salad bowl. To illustrate this, section 1.1 below discusses how the American multicultural panorama and the melting pot rhetoric developed historically. After that, section 1.2. thoroughly analyses the concept of the melting pot and compares it to the most prominent opposing metaphor: the salad bowl.

1.1. The Historical Evolution of the American Multicultural Panorama

The melting pot is more than a metaphor: it is part of the foundational rhetoric of the American nation, as it “is a myth about the making of the American society” (Paul, 2014, p. 258). Although the term “melting pot” was not popularised until the early 20th century, the ideas surrounding this conception of the USA have been evident since the birth of the country. Moreover, the melting pot is closely connected to other foundational American myths, such as the American Dream, which serves as an invitation to and a romanticising of the process of Americanisation, since “melting” into the “pot” and thus assimilating into the dominant American culture is depicted as the means to enjoy political and economic freedom and stability in the country. The melting pot image is so intrinsic to the United States that it is represented by the country’s motto: *E Pluribus Unum*. Its

rhetoric “evokes a vision of national unity [...] through participation in a harmonious, quasi-organic community that offers prospective members a second chance and a new beginning that molds them into a new ‘race’, a new people” (Paul, 2014, p. 258), a vision which clearly resonates with the aforementioned narratives of the American dream or Manifest Destiny, among others.

As stated above, the melting pot metaphor is essential for the construction of America and the establishment of a distinctive American identity. One of the first discussions about this new national character can be found in Michelle Guillaume Jean de Crèvecoeur’s *Letters from an American Farmer*, first published in 1782 during the War of Independence, when developing an American national sentiment was a necessary form of national cohesion and of international legitimisation. De Crèvecoeur claims that the American race is “a mixture of English, Scotch, Irish, French, Dutch, Germans, and Swedes” (1782, para. 2). Only the immigrants that arrived in the USA during the first immigration wave were considered to conform the American society, therefore excluding black slaves, who were forcedly brought to the American territory, and Native Americans, who were expelled from their lands, from the melting pot. In these early conceptions of America as a European melting pot, de Crèvecoeur is also constructing the idea of the American dream. For him, the new American system opposes the old caste-based European regime, as America allows for greater social mobility, ethnic diversity, and religious freedom: “Americans become as to religion, what they are as to country, allied to all” (1782, para. 12). One year later, in 1783, George Washington writes in a letter to the American Irishmen:

The bosom of America is open to receive not only the opulent and respectable stranger, but the oppressed and persecuted of all nations and religions; whom we shall welcome to a participation of all our rights and privileges [sic.], if by decency and propriety of conduct they appear to merit the enjoyment. (1783, para. 5)

Thus, the image of America as the land of opportunity for the different European ethnicities is consolidated. However, the reality of the USA was not coherent with its first President’s words since neither Native Americans, black inhabitants, or women were granted rights. Even though at the beginning both coloured and white slaves “occupied a common social space” and “shared a condition of class exploitation and abuse”, soon black slaves were completely excluded from the American society as they “were being

degraded into a condition of servitude for life and even the status of property” (Takaki, 1993, p. 55-57). Native Americans were not allowed to assimilate into the melting pot either. In the 1830s, President Andrew Jackson justified the Indian removal claiming that “efforts to civilize the Indians had failed” (Takaki, 1993, p. 87). By the 1870s, Francis A. Walker, commissioner of Indian affairs, had decided to create reservations where Indians would “be given necessary support to help them make the necessary adjustment for entering civilization” (Takaki, 1993, p. 232), thus formalising the segregation of the Native Americans.

The second immigration wave started in the late 19th century and lasted until the mid-20th century. During this period, immigrants arrived from Eastern and Southern Europe, as well as Asia and the Middle East. The American society perceived the rapidly growing numbers of Asian immigrants as a menace, and the media soon named them “the Yellow Peril” in what Erika Lee considers to be a transnational anti-Asian racist phenomenon that extended across the continent (2007, p. 538). In the USA, Asian inhabitants were both legally discriminated against, for instance with the enacting of special taxes towards foreign miners or the denial of citizenship, and socially, as nativist mottos like “California for the Americans” began to be used as an attack on that community (Takaki, 1993, p. 195). The Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 can be considered the pinnacle of this institutionalised discrimination as it remained operative until 1943 (Boyer, 2012, p. 66). The situation for the new wave of European immigrants was not welcoming either, as they were seen as less assimilable than their northern European counterparts. As a reaction to this second immigration wave, associations like the Immigration Restriction League were founded and publications like Madison Grant’s *The Passing of the Great Race* (1916) aimed at proving “the superiority of the Nordic ‘race’ to Jews, African Americans, and southern and eastern Europeans” through pseudo-scientific methods (Boyer, 2012, p. 81).

Another important demographic change must be considered during this period: what Takaki denominates the Black Exodus, also known as the Great Migration. This African American migratory movement towards the north lasted until the 1970s. It was prompted by the abolition of slavery and the subsequent Jim Crow laws, which forced black Americans into segregation and disenfranchisement. However, and contrary to what is commonly believed in association to the abolition of slavery in northern states in the

decades after the American Revolution, “the North for blacks was not the promised land” as they were not completely free and suffered discrimination in the labour market (Takaki, 1993, p. 110). Since they were not accepted into the melting pot, black individuals in the north concentrated in ghettos such as Harlem in New York, where messages like those of Marcus Garvey and Booker T. Washington began to spread (Takaki, 1993, p. 356). The discourses in these black urban communities would be the seed for the Civil Rights movement in the 1960s. The paramount social conquests of this period, like The Voting Rights Act of 1965, or the *Loving v. Virginia* case in 1967, fully emancipated black people and progressively allowed for their integration in the American dominant culture.¹

Lastly, from the aftermath of the Second World War to the present day, immigration towards the US has been comprised mainly by Asian and Latin American populations. Although the American society has largely perceived these communities as non-suitable for assimilation, their numbers and their presence in the media are still growing, with TV shows such as *Jane the Virgin* (The CW, 2014-2019) or films like *Crazy Rich Asians* (Chu, 2018), based on Kevin Kwans novels, reflecting the diverse experiences of these ethnic groups. Furthermore, in the case of Hispanic populations near the border with Mexico, a new Hispanic-American culture has been developing, as “Chicanos [have] been creating a Mexican-American world in the barrios of El Norte” (Takaki, 1993, p. 334), made evident, for instance, in the prominence of hybrid forms of expression that blend Spanish and English features. Nonetheless, racist attitudes that aim at segregating and excluding ethnic groups have been at the centre of the contemporary cultural and political debate in the US, such as Pat Buchanan’s “America First” in the 1990s or Donald Trump’s more recent “Make America Great Again” and his attempts to introduce an “English-only” policy under the English Language Unity Act of 2019. These views oppose multicultural perspectives and notions that arose during the Civil Rights movement in the 1960s and consider cultural pluralism a threat to whiteness and to Western civilization. Currently, metaphors which emphasise the individuality of the different ethnic groups such as the salad bowl or the mosaic are preferred to describe American society, where the different communities, though Americanised, do not mix with each other and remain recognisable (Mauk & Oakland, 2002, p. 64-65; Anderson, 2000, p. 262).

¹ While the Voting Rights Act of 1965 aimed at federally protecting minorities from the disenfranchising methods imposed by particular states, the ruling of the Supreme Court in the *Loving v. Virginia* case of 1967 overturned legislation against interracial relationships nationwide.

1.2. *The Melting Pot versus the Salad Bowl*

Several metaphors other than the melting pot have been employed to describe the multicultural scene in the United States, such as the salad bowl, the mosaic, or the tapestry, all of which celebrate diversity within unity, rather than unity within diversity. These images that oppose the melting pot model became popular with the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s, when minorities called for a different approach to America's multicultural landscape. Yet, the melting pot stands out given that, as I have discussed, it represents one of the narratives that conform American national identity. Out of the multicultural models that have risen in opposition to the melting pot, the salad bowl metaphor is probably the most remarkable in the American context. Furthermore, it resembles the formerly mentioned alternative metaphors, which also focus on retaining the particularities of ethnic groups. Therefore, it could be stated that the depiction of the cultural landscape of the USA can be reduced to two main antithetical perspectives: the salad bowl *versus* the melting pot. The salad bowl metaphor represents the integration of ethnic minorities and their distinctive cultural features in the American society, while the melting pot stands for assimilation into the dominant American culture and incentivises the loss of the original culture. The deployment of one or another metaphor responds to society's treatment of ethnic minorities in different moments of American history, as has been discussed in the previous section.

The melting pot image is usually regarded as an assimilationist model. However, different interpretations of the metaphor have been proposed. It is possible to understand the melting pot as a symbol for a country whose national identity is constantly modified by the diverse ethnic groups that conform that society. Zangwill, the author who popularised the concept of the melting pot in the early 20th century, claimed in an afterword to his play the *Melting Pot* (1908) that "the process of American amalgamation is not assimilation or simple surrender to the dominant type, as is popularly supposed, but an all-round give-and-take by which the final type may be enriched or impoverished" (1908, Afterword, para. 7). According to Zangwill's vision, the melting of immigrants into the American pot did not result in a process of assimilation into the dominant culture. Instead, the immigrants' integration in America implied the acquisition of certain features from the dominant culture while it acted as a catalyst for the transformation of the American society. Despite this interpretation of the metaphor as a dynamic model that

allows for the dominant culture to become hybrid, the melting pot has been historically equated to the concepts of Americanisation and of assimilation.

Park and Burgess defined assimilation as “a process of interpenetration and fusion in which people and groups acquire the memories, sentiments, and attitudes of other persons or groups, and, by sharing their experience and history, are incorporated with them in a common cultural life” (1969, p. 360). The melting pot image of a blending of ethnically diverse cultural elements to conform a new and distinct national identity has been commonly restricted to whiteness and Anglo-conformity, described by Gordon as a “broad term used to cover a variety of viewpoints about assimilation and immigration” that range from white supremacist perspectives to permissiveness towards immigration on the condition that these communities “duly adopt the standard Anglo-Saxon cultural patterns” (1961, p. 265). Thus, the melting pot has functioned as a symbol of acculturation in favour of the dominant Anglophone culture. Although after the second half of the 20th century multiculturalist approaches to the American social fabric became more popular than the assimilationist melting pot model, conservative reactions like that of the 1980s “reaffirmed a national identity based on patriotism and traditional morality”, causing a “return to the melting pot mood” (Vecoli, 1996, p. 23). Former President Donald Trump represents the latest revival of the assimilationist and segregationist melting pot ideology, as he criminalises immigrants and builds his discourse on Anglo-conformist patriotism. Nonetheless, despite its association with assimilationist theories, multiculturalists acknowledge the advantages of the metaphor, which “consolidates the concept of citizenship” and “expands national identity to be inclusive of different ethnicities and the value they bring with them” (Berray, 2019, p. 143).

As a response to the assimilationist model of the melting pot, the salad bowl image became popular in the 1960s, when the outbreak of the Civil Rights Movement and the arrival of large numbers of South American and Asian immigrants triggered different approaches to the American multicultural landscape. The salad bowl metaphor is closely linked to the concept of accommodation, described by Park and Burgess as “an organization of social relations and attitudes to prevent or to reduce conflict, to control competition, and to maintain a basis of security in the social order for persons and groups of divergent interests and types to carry on together their varied life activities” (1969, p. 360). Thus, the salad bowl image is one in which the different cultural and ethnic groups

of a society do not blend into the national whole and lose their cultural identity. Instead, immigrant communities retain their particularities while they are still tied to a broader national identity by the dressing of the salad, which stands for the legislation and common values shared by all citizens of a nation and that allows for peaceful co-existence. Within the salad bowl theory, the influence of the dominant group does not prevail like in the melting pot model, but the bowl “retains the individuality and independence of ethnic groups” and allows their “existence side-by-side dominant cultures” (Berray, 2019, p. 143). The salad bowl model, like the tapestry or the mosaic, arose as a more realistic and representative image of American ethnic demographics. Early multiculturalists, such as Kallen with his essay “Democracy Versus the Melting-Pot, A Study of American Nationality” (1915), already called for a more integrative approach to society.

In the 1960s, although Gleason acknowledged that the melting pot was being contested by models like the salad bowl or the tapestry, he believed that this symbol was superior to other metaphors and could represent a dynamic society that embraces cultural pluralism (1964, p. 46). In the 1980s, Kinkaid described America as “partly melting pot and partly salad bowl”, since efforts that have achieved certain cultural homogeneity have been countervailed by measures to raise visibility and reinforce distinct cultural identities. (1980, p. 1). These counteracting efforts have granted equal rights and consideration for the cultural particularities of these communities (Kinkaid, 1980, p. 1). By the end of the 20th century, cultural pluralism was accepted by Elijah Anderson as the reality of the USA, as he defended that at the last turn of the century the USA had “more of a salad bowl than a melting pot” since people now favour the preserving of their ethnic features, despite there being an unprecedented mixing of countless groups (2000, p. 262). However, other scholars (Mauk & Oakland, 2002, p. 64) were already acknowledging that models like the salad bowl or the mosaic further stratify American society, shifting the epicentre of democratic power from the urban populations to the suburbs, where long-established and successful groups are moving to as newcomers arrive in large numbers to the city centres.

Looking at this issue from the 21st-century perspective, Ed Jonker holds that the “history of traditional immigration countries” cannot be “written within the framework of concepts like [...] the melting pot”, and defends the usage of the “salad bowl, the mosaic or the kaleidoscope to acknowledge the lasting existence of multi-ethnicity” (2009, p. 54). In the 2010s, Pooch asserted that the term “diversity” has now become a

holy concept in America and “is the predominant term used with regard to human rights and the labor market” (2016, p. 38). She claimed that “the trend of globalization and its repercussions” are causing a movement “in the direction of cultural hybridization and multiplicity” (2016, p. 210). Although these concepts resonate with the multicultural salad bowl model, the metaphor does not seem to allow for hybridity, as all ingredients retain their particularities and do not mix with each other. Berray argues that like the melting pot image, “the salad bowl is a combined dish” which does not represent “attention to the individual vegetables” and their accommodation needs (2019, p. 145). Berray’s criticism is related to Nancy Leong’s distinction between the remedial rationale and the diversity rationale: the former “is meant to correct for past injustice”, the latter aims at “improv[ing] the functioning of a particular group or institution” (2012, p. 2170). Thus, the salad bowl model might be criticised for focusing on diversity as a tool to improve the multicultural image of the country, not “press[ing] upon the harder question of racial progress” (Leong, 2012, p. 2171).

Although the melting pot is perceived as a characteristically American symbol that has historically shaped the assimilationist policies in the USA, the salad bowl is currently a more accurate and preferred metaphor, as the American society growingly values diversity and favours integrationist policies. Opposition to the salad bowl model is based on the idea that this approach might put in danger “the historic theory of America as one people” (Schlesinger, 1992, p.16), as it is perceived as a threat towards national identity and cohesion. However, during the 21st century the idea that the American society resembles more a salad bowl than a melting pot has been acknowledged (Anderson, 2000, p. 262) and identified and defended as a reformatory approach to history and sociology (Jonker, 2009, p. 54). Nonetheless, the salad bowl metaphor has been recently denounced by multiculturalists for focusing on the common good of the nation and not promoting emendatory actions towards the different ethnic groups (Berray, 2019).

As discussed above, the melting pot image is part of the foundational narrative of the American nation and, as such, the historical construction of the concept can be traced back to the birth of the nation. Although the melting pot image and its assimilationist rhetoric are still of paramount importance in present day, the model is being contested by alternative images that aim at describing American society more accurately, observing the needs and particularities of ethnic minorities. The most prominent among these

integrative models in the American context is the salad bowl, in which ingredients do not amalgamate or assimilate into dominant culture but remain separate and independent. Nonetheless, although integrationist approaches to the American multicultural panorama are currently preferred, the melting pot is closely connected to another powerful myth within the American national narrative: the American dream. This rhetoric depicts the USA as a land of opportunity for all, inviting people around the world to melt into the American melting pot in order to pursue happiness.

2. Assimilationist Devices: The American Dream and the Black Female Body

The American dream can be analysed as an assimilationist device that conditions individuals to blend into the American melting pot. Its ambiguity and plurality invite everyone to the promised land of freedom and opportunity, allowing for different interpretations and for a malleability that ensures the myth's survival. Nonetheless, despite the inclusive American dream rhetoric, different minorities have been excluded from a narrative that has been predominantly white and masculine. Among the excluded, black women have been within the most marginalised. For this reason, and because this paper focuses on novels whose main characters are young black girls, it is especially enriching to analyse how their bodies and experiences have been used to segregate them or to assimilate them into the American dream narrative and American society.

2.1. Evolution of the Concept of the American Dream

The term "American dream" did not become popular until the 1930s with the publishing of James Truslow Adam's *The Epic of America* (1931); yet, like the image of the melting pot, the American dream is usually considered to be central to the American nation since its inception. Nonetheless, defining the American dream is difficult, as it has been historically constructed as an ambiguous term, therefore making possible the existence of a multiplicity of American dreams (Cullen, 2003; Schudson, 2004). The American dream rhetoric is to be understood as a "progressive myth in which heroes are ordinary" that does not focus on perfection but on perfecting (Rowland & Jones, 2011 p. 131-132). Thus, the American dream narrative is supposedly open to all and dynamic and flexible in its definition. However, the exclusion from the narrative of several minorities will be

showcased as the historical process of the creation of the myth of the American dream is analysed.

Jim Cullen opens his history of the American dream with one of the first European settler groups in US territory: the Puritans. While their influence is concentrated in the region of New England, their impact in the building of the US nation is undeniable. Although Puritans are usually associated with the dream of religious freedom, other elements of the American dream can be recognised in their optimistic views on the building of a new nation. The Puritan dream for a better life stemmed from their faith in reform, from their belief that they could make a difference in the world (Cullen, 2003, p. 15). Thus, the notion of effort and discipline are central to the Puritan culture, as is the idea that these values result in a better life for one's offspring, a basic element of the American dream (Cullen, 2003, p. 14-16). The Puritan dream, like its descendant the American dream, was ambiguous: they believed in accountability without power, as the success of their enterprises depended on their effort but was subject to God's will (Cullen, 2003, p. 19). Their notion of freedom seems contradictory as well, since, as expressed by John Winthrop, founder of Massachusetts Bay Colony, liberty was to be "maintained and exercised in a way of subjection to authority", including women's subjection to their husbands (Winthrop, 1908, p. 239). Puritans' pursuit of spiritual individuality through participation in a community of people who share certain values and emotional connections is paradoxical too (Cullen, 2003, p. 22). Finally, their participation in civil life, which Cullen considers to be proto-democratic, was dependent on their taking part in religious life, making sacred and secular spheres separate while intertwined (Cullen, 2003, p. 21). These Puritan moralistic principles of discipline, spirituality, freedom, and equality, although ambiguous, contradictory, and exclusive to Puritans and converts, have clearly influenced the current ideal of the American dream.

The country's foundational document is, according to Cullen, the *Dream Charter* (2003), a manifesto that lays the basic ideas behind the American dream. As will be discussed below, this document proposes an open-ended ideal that allows for multiple interpretations and modifications of the dream. Again, behind the *Declaration of Independence* lies a firm conviction that change is possible: against strict European class divisions, America's existence is based on the notion that it is true and self-evident "that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable

Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness” (1776, para. 2). Obviously, the phrasing excludes women, and, although not explicitly, non-white males were excluded as well. “The pursuit of happiness” is, according to Cullen, “a phrase that more than any other defines the American Dream” (2003, p. 38). It is precisely its ambivalence that renders it so powerful, that makes people “embrace it instinctively even as they differ on just what it means” (Cullen, 2003, p. 39).

Nonetheless, happiness has especially been associated with the dream of upward mobility, for which the element of education was of utmost importance. Education has been regarded by American society as pathway to economic success, equality, and, ultimately, to happiness and a good American life. The definition of the right to life is blurred by debates on abortion rights, genetic engineering, cloning, assisted reproductive technology and animal rights (Cullen, 2003, p. 39). Nonetheless, it was never equalled to Roosevelt’s “freedom from want” (1941), as American society remains highly individualistic and firmly believes in Booker T. Washington’s “cast down your bucket where you are” ideology (1895). While Puritans associated liberty with subjugation, Cullen argues that it has been equalled to the right to spend money in present-day America (2003, p. 39), as well as to freedom of enterprise, both central elements of the American dream (2003, p. 58). It could be argued that the Second Amendment and its granting of the “right of the people to keep and bear arms” (Bill of Rights, 1791) is central to the American notion of freedom too. At certain points during American history, liberty has also meant the right to own slaves, to exploit workers, or to prosecute political dissidents (Cullen, 2003, p. 57), a distorted notion of freedom linked to subjugation that resembles that of the Puritans.

The dream of liberty and equality was started by the dream of abolition of slavery, with which Lincoln is usually associated. However, as discussed in section 1.1., emancipation did not mean freedom; instead, it meant discrimination and segregation. Lincoln’s dream was followed by Martin Luther King’s. His famous “I Have a Dream” speech (1963) has shaped the myth not only for African Americans but for a majority of Americans. According to Cullen, the American dream depends on racial equality, as one of its principal attractions “and its major moral underpinning is that everyone is eligible” (2003, p. 108), making it the perfect immigrant dream. However, dreams of economic equality in the second half of the 20th century were equalled to socialism, an ideology

considered to be un-American, especially during the Cold War, and which threatened the American dream of the entrepreneur and its definition of liberty as freedom to accumulate money and from regulation (Cullen, 2003, p. 107). In fact, Vanneman and Cannon believe that “the American dream has anesthetized working-class consciousness”, as it blames the individual for not obtaining the opportunity that is supposedly accessible to all (1987, p. 260). For this reason, even individuals marginalised by the dominant narrative of the American dream believe in this myth.

Yet, no component of the American dream is as representative as the dream of home ownership. The demographic changes caused by industrialisation meant that more Americans resided in urban areas than in the countryside for the first time. In the mid-20th century, the emergence of the suburbs, made possible by extended car ownership, consolidated the image of the American dream as synonym with the dream of white-picket-fence houses inhabited by dream white heteronormative families. This conception of the American dream was enforced by mass media products such as *Dick and Jane*’s books or TV shows like *Leave It to Beaver* (CBS, 1957-1963), which portrayed a prescriptive image of the ideal American family as an Anglo-conforming and patriarchal institution. Furthermore, this private sphere of the American dream was the focus for women, who were allured to wish for a nice house, a good husband, and a family to take care of, while remaining always beautiful and financially dependent.

In 21st-century America, surveys show that at least half of the population believes that the American dream has become impossible for most and are pessimistic when asked about prospects (Hanson & Zogby, 2010, p. 576). Despite this apparent discontent with the American economic system, an even larger majority of Americans believe that “most people who want to get ahead can make it if they’re willing to work hard” (Hanson & Zogby, 2010, p. 574). Again, the conceptualisation of the American dream remains ambiguous, and, thus, flexible. John Archer argues that since it is impossible to abandon the appeal of the narrative and its optimism, there has recently been “an ample incentive to redefine the dream in more attainable ways” (Archer, 2014, p. 14). Current representations of the American dream in mass media prove Archer’s stance to be true, as TV shows such as *Modern Family* (ABC, 2009-2020) portray different family models and meanings of happiness and liberty. Although dynamic and under constant modification, the American dream is very much alive, since freedom, home ownership,

financial security, upward mobility, and equality are still represented as the main goals for Americans in media products.

2.2. *Reaching the American Dream through the Black Female Body*

While the American dream supposedly includes everyone, this narrative has long excluded significant parts of the population, as showcased in section 2.1. Within the half of the population that was excluded or conditioned by the dream because of gender, black women suffered the most oppression, as they were discriminated against not only on grounds of their sex, but also their race and class. In order to account for this mixture of elements that shape discrimination, Kimberle Crenshaw coined the term *intersectionality* (1991), which is essential to understand black women's position in American society. This section considers the notion of a black woman's American dream that, while longing for reparations for past and present injustices, serves as a device that entices assimilation into mainstream American society. In addition, it discusses the roles and stereotypes with which the dominant culture has historically defined and categorised black women.

Black women's first dream in America was that of freedom, as they were excluded from the national promise of liberty by the obnoxious institution of slavery. While all slaves dreamt of emancipation, black women dreamt of sexual and reproductive self-government as well. Sexual abuse inflicted upon enslaved women was generally perceived as "both right and rite of the white male dominating group" and as an "apt metaphor for European imperialist colonization" (hooks, 1991, p. 57). Despite the end of slavery, black women continued to be subjects of sexual abuse, both by white and black men, as "both groups have equated freedom with manhood, and manhood with the right of men to have indiscriminate access to the bodies of women", making of racism and sexism interconnected "systems of domination which uphold and sustain one another" (hooks, 1991, p. 59). In terms of sexual freedom, the illegal status of interracial relationships until the *Loving v. Virginia* case in 1967 and social conventions thereafter limited black women's romantic freedom and set their American dream of family and home ownership in segregated environments. Reproductive rights have also been denied to black women, not only during the horrors of slavery but also with atrocious eugenicist programmes. Under this institution, black women's reproductive capacity became a capital resource for slaveowners as the condition of servitude was passed down by the

mother. On the other hand, forced sterilisation of poor black women under state funded programmes lasted until the 1970s (Roberts, 2000, p. 93). Dorothy Roberts has argued that the prosecution of pregnant drug consumers “punish[es] poor black women for having babies”, as they are disproportionately affected by these laws (1997, p. 939). Thus, it can be stated that present-day America still exerts excessive control over black motherhood.

The sexualisation of black women’s bodies perpetuates patriarchal and white-supremacist structures and serves as a justification for intersecting sexual and racial oppression. The figure of the Jezebel was one of the most prominent images of black women during slavery, defined as “a woman governed by her sexual desires”, thus legitimising sexual abuse towards African American women and creating an enduring stereotype that portrayed them as promiscuous (Roberts, 1997, p. 950). The image of the Jezebel has now evolved and is usually connected to the figures of the gold digger and the diva, as both stereotypes convey the idea of a woman who uses her sexuality to obtain material or social reward (Brown, White-Johnson & Griffin-Fennel, 2013, p. 526). Contrary to the sexualised and gender-conforming black woman stereotype, the figure of the black tomboy portrays a masculine, usually angry woman, that defies conventions on gender and sexuality (Wicks, 2022, p. 15). The figure of the black tomboy is related to the masculinising historical perception of black women by American society, who were viewed as never “too delicate to do grueling labor and never needing protection” (Wicks, 2022, p. 5).

Nonetheless, the enduring hyper-sexualisation of black women has recently come to symbolise black female empowerment and economic success, as prominent hip-hop artists redefine their sexuality and assert agency through their bodies, although this means succumbing to objectification in a patriarchal society (White, 2013, p. 621). This contradiction can be understood if we consider the sexualisation of black female bodies not only as a survival tactic or as a way to profit economically from patriarchal oppression, but as a tool through which black women can reappropriate and redefine their sexuality. Despite the fact that women might use their bodies to express sexual freedom and agency, it can be stated that black women’s bodies and sexualisation have become a means to achieve success and acceptance, thus reinforcing the Jezebel image. For white dominant culture, this sexualisation mostly implies fitting in the first of the two roles

assigned to black women: either “the bad girls [...] the ‘bitches’, the madwomen”, or the opposite figure, the “supermamas”, which are usually portrayed as caring, kind, wise and magical (hooks, 1991, p. 91).

The dream of black motherhood has not only been stained by slavery and eugenics. American white dominant society regards black women dually, as has been stated, and this dichotomy also affects mainstream culture’s views on black maternity. The stereotype of the black supermama can be equated with that of the black mammy. During times of slavery, the black mammy was the domestic slave who was “the expert in the home” and fulfilled the role of the protector and the caregiver (Sewell, 2013, p. 310). However, the supermama hooks talks about shares elements with the matriarch: “the strong black woman who [...] has to take charge in her home” (Sewell, 2013, p. 314). The matriarch, unlike the supermama or the black mammy, was not always regarded positively by white people, as she became society’s scapegoat for black children’s problems as mainstream white culture perceived matriarchal families as disorganised (Sewell, 2013, p. 313; Roberts, 1997, p. 950). Daniel Patrick Moynihan’s 1965 report correlated the figure of the matriarch with the “deterioration” of black families, a term that stands for the non-conformity with the traditional heteronormative household, as divorce rates and illegitimate births were higher in black communities. The rise of black families headed by women was also related to a “startling increase in welfare dependency” (Moynihan, 1965, p. 12), thus linking the figure of the matriarch with that of the welfare queen.

Opposite to the stereotype of the supermama and of the good white mother is that of the bad black mother. According to Dorothy Roberts, the devaluation of black motherhood is linked to the previously mentioned figures of the Jezebel and the matriarch, as well as to more recent stereotypes, such as the crack-smoking mother or the welfare queen (1997, p. 950). She describes the figure of the welfare queen as “the lazy welfare mother who breeds children at the expense of taxpayers in order to increase her welfare check” (1997, p. 951). The crack-smoking mother is “portrayed as an irresponsible and selfish woman”, sometimes represented by a prostitute who trade “sex for crack, violating every conceivable quality of a good mother” (Roberts, 1997, p. 949). These figures, especially that of the matriarch, showcase how collective failure related to structural and social problems is blamed on individual black mothers and contribute to the historical devaluation of black motherhood (Roberts, 1997, p. 950). This degradation of black

maternity affects their children, who are subsequently regarded as not innocent, a quality that has historically been reserved to white children and women, as “traditional European American distinctions between childhood and adulthood” did not apply for enslaved communities (Hutchinson, 2014, p. 630).

Finally, alongside freedom, one of black American women’s main yearning has been claiming agency. Historical tensions with white women’s movements have evidenced that special attention must be paid to the position of black women as discrimination against them is based not only on gender, but on its intersection with race and class. For instance, during the fight for women’s suffrage, feminist organisations insisted on separating black suffrage and female suffrage, treating race and gender as disconnected issues (Watkins, 2016, p. 7). Yet, although the 19th Amendment, introduced in 1920, granted all women the right to vote and the 15th Amendment was supposed to protect black people’s rights, “the majority of black women did not effectively gain the right to vote until the passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965”, which outlawed disempowering methods such as literacy tests or poll taxes (Watkins, 2016, p. 16). Currently, minority populations are denied the vote due to felony disenfranchisement, homelessness, and gerrymandering, among other strategies.

The dream of making their voices heard within systems of power also continues to be a difficult one for black women since, due to “the equation of black liberation with manhood”, many are reluctant to support the feminist movement because they “fear that they will be betraying black men”. In addition, within the feminist movement, black feminists have had to challenge notions that “patriarchy [...] diminishes or erases difference” (hooks, 1991, p. 59-60), thus initiating conversations about the intersection of race, gender and class that deeply enriched feminist thought. Intersectional theory emerged in order to account for how the exploration of black women’s experiences either from a feminist lens or an anti-racial lens caused their marginalisation in both spheres (Crenshaw, 1991, p. 1244). However, intersectionality has not only resulted in a more accurate perception of racialised women within feminist and antiracist movements, but the concept has also become essential to mainstream feminism and has been broadened to showcase how different axes shape individuals’ experiences with inequality and discrimination, including not only race and gender but also class, sexual orientation, functional diversity, or age (Rodó-Zárate, 2021, p. 22).

The first section of this dissertation explored the historical evolution of the American multicultural panorama, as well as the acculturating melting pot image and its main contender, the accommodating salad bowl model. Given its success as an assimilationist mechanism, section 2. discussed the development of the American dream and its connection with black women's experiences within the USA. This theoretical framework provides a foundation for the following chapters, which examine contestations of the melting pot image in Zoboï's novels *American Street* (2017) and *Nigeria Jones* (2023). In order to attain a comprehensive understanding of the novels' attitudes towards this sociological model, this paper provides an analysis on how these literary works tackle the American dream narrative, along with an assessment on how black women's experiences and their compliance with or defiance towards the stereotypes imposed on them shape their relationship with the USA.

3. Exploring Contestations of the Melting Pot in Ibi Zoboï's *American Street*

This section analyses Ibi Zoboï's first young adult novel *American Street* (2017) in relation to the concept of the melting pot, the American dream and black women's bodies, elements which, as demonstrated in previous chapters of this dissertation, intertwine, and define black women's experiences in the USA. In her first book, the Haitian-American author narrates "the story of an immigrant girl who, like [her], found her way to the other side, out of poverty and chaos" (Zoboï, 2017, Author's note). This is the story of Fabiola Toussaint, a 16-year-old girl who immigrates with her mother from Haiti to Detroit, Michigan, where her aunt and three cousins, Chantal, Princess and Primadonna, live. However, her American dreams are shattered by her mother's reclusion in an immigration detention centre. Moreover, although Fabiola is American by birth, she maintains her ethnic particularities and, therefore, she faces the challenges of blending her Haitian identity with her new American self, contesting the amalgamating and conforming notions that surround the image of the melting pot. In doing so, she also defies the concept of the American dream, linking her joys and hopes to elements that contradict American cultural hegemony. Furthermore, the protagonist embraces her Haitian culture as she experiences her immediate reality in the USA through a Vodou lens, interpreting

everything as messages from the Iwas, thus incorporating magical realism to the novel.² By linking Fabiola to Vodou, which has been historically perceived as a risk to colonialism and Western powers, Zoboi transforms Fabiola and her faith into symbols of resistance to white dominance. Additionally, Fabiola's family name, Toussaint, is connected to the Haitian revolutionary Toussaint Louverture, further highlighting her insurgent character and her connection to her country. Finally, the protagonist represents the tension that results from immigrant girls folding themselves "into this veneer of what we think is African American girlhood" (Zoboi, 2017, Author's note). The main character in *American Street* challenges these gender norms, which are especially linked to race and, therefore, to the stereotyping of black women present in the dominant American culture.

3.1. *The American Dream in American Street*

Fabiola reaches America with the idea that it is the land of opportunity, of hope and progress, a place where she and her mother can be free and happy, away from the chaos and the material deprivation they left in Port-au-Prince (Haiti). Yet, her dreams for *une belle vie*, a life where good work provides dignity and education brings pride (Zoboi, 2017, p. 6), immediately turn into a nightmare as her mother is detained by the Immigration and Customs Enforcement Agency (ICE). Throughout the novel, Fabiola shapes her identity while questioning and transforming her idea of the American dream as she discovers the truth about the American nation. The fact that the novel is set in Detroit is especially significant as this Rust Belt city, which was once a promise of prosperity and has now become the symbol of decadence, represents the failure of the American dream.³ In Detroit, she finds an economically depressed area in which it seems that the only way to survive is to engage in illicit activities. This de-idealisation of the American nation—that is, the realisation that Americanness does not equal perfection—hinders her process of assimilation and encourages the retention of her ethnic particularities in the new identity she is creating, even if her new world pushes her to reject her authentic self and melt into the American society. This *bildungsroman* follows

² Iwas or Loas are deities or spirits to whom God has transferred some of its powers and which are the focus of Haitian Vodou worship (Pfeifer, 2016, p. 139).

³ The Rust Belt refers to a region in the Midwest where the decline of the manufacturing industry impoverished the area.

the transition in Fabiola's self-image and her relationship with the USA. At the beginning of the novel, she feels like she is "just a pebble in the valley" (Zoboi, 2017, p. 3). Yet, the book concludes denying this statement; instead, the protagonist declares: "I am a mountain" (Zoboi, 2017, p. 324), thus culminating her adaptation to the American context in a position that does not subjugate her to the dominant culture.

As showcased in section 2.1., although religious freedom is a paramount element of the American narrative, this liberty has been usually limited to Christian—especially protestant—religions that adhere to the white dominant culture. Hence, Fabiola's practice of the Vodou religion represents a subversion towards mainstream American culture. The historical background of Vodou further emphasises this rejection of the impositions of the prevailing ethnic group. Vodou emerged as an appropriation of Christianity, which was blended with polytheistic African religions by displaced slaves, and it only started to be perceived as a threat to European powers after the Haitian Revolution (1791-1804), whose aftermath implied the establishment of the Haitian Republic and the abolition of slavery (Pfeifer, 2016, p. 138). The revolutionary leaders were said to be Vodou priests who used their religion to overturn colonial rule and win the revolution (Pfeifer, 2016, p. 138). Fabiola understands her immediate reality under this perspective, interpreting everything as signs from the Iwas, who she believes are embodied by those around her. Zoboi states that this is where her courage stems from, and she believes that this "merging of traditions" makes her more American (2017, Author's note), thus following Gleason's (1964) and Zangwill's (1908) interpretation of the melting pot metaphor as describing a dynamic and multicultural society. Therefore, the magical realism present in the book is also a rejection of the Anglo-conforming interpretation of the melting pot rhetoric. In fact, it could be interpreted that Papa Legba, the Iwa of crossroads who is embodied by a homeless man known as Bad Leg, represents her substitute for the American dream since he is Fabiola's guider and has accompanied her family since they first moved to America until the end of the novel. His last intervention is a farewell as they leave the house in American Street—which, as will be discussed, represents the failed promised of the American dream—driving down Joy Road, a joy to which he has led them. Thus, Fabiola's guidance, hopes and dreams in America are strongly determined by her Haitian belief and value system. However, multiple examples throughout the novel showcase how Fabiola's faith is dismissed, perceived as strange, and sometimes even feared. For

instance, her cousin Pri usually refers to her religious practices as “voodoo shit” and Chantal tends to disregard her interpretations. Furthermore, the aggression perpetrated by Dray—Donna’s boyfriend and, according to Fabiola, Baron Samedi, the Iwa of death—upon Bad Leg can be read as an attack on Fabiola’s beliefs, while the fact that the protagonist’s boyfriend Kasim helped him represents his respect towards her faith.

One of the main symbols present in *American Street* is the family home, located at the corner of American Street and Joy Road. The address already hints at this element being a symbol of the American dream, along with the connection between this myth and home ownership. Yet, after one of the visits of the Iwa Papa Legba, Fabiola realises that Joy and American are not the same: “Joy and American. A crossroads. Intersecting. One is not the other.” (Zoboi, 2017, p. 111). For Matant Jo the house incarnates everything the USA can offer, especially the dream of the structured, heteronormative family associated to the American aspiration for home ownership, along with the dreams of her dead husband, who “thought he was buying American Joy” when he purchased the residence (Zoboi, 2017, p. 57). Nonetheless, the property seems to be haunted by death and misery. Jo’s dreams of homeownership and family are destroyed by her husband’s passing and the subsequent destabilisation of the family. In addition, the novel, by presenting the story of 8800 American Street, chronicles how, through the years, numerous families saw their dreams ruined by economic hardship, addiction, crime, racism and, ultimately, death and grief. Thus, the house can be interpreted as a symbol of the failure of the American dream, a reading which is reinforced by the formerly described closing of the novel, where Fabiola and her family leave the house through Joy Road in search of the protagonist’s mother, Valerie.

Another element of the American dream narrative present in *American Street* is education, a central part of which is the mastering of the English language. In this sense, Fabiola’s assimilation started before her arrival in the USA since her aunt paid for her private international English school in Haiti. Once in American territory, her aunt enforces the use of English and discourages Fab from speaking Creole or calling her Matant Jo. Language is crucial in Zoboi’s novel because the protagonist’s integration is evidenced by her use of slang and swear words, and her otherness is emphasised when she is ridiculed because she does not sound natural when uttering these phrases. Moreover, she employs these words and insults to defend herself from other girls at school, indicating

her Americanness and her belonging in society in order not to be perceived as weak. Thus, Fabiola's linguistic expression becomes the measure of her assimilation. Although there is an instance where Fab's friends from high school show an interest in Haitian Creole, this approach is shallow and focused on curse words. Therefore, the American society is depicted not as accommodating but as assimilating and Anglo-conforming. While Fab remains attached to Creole, she needs to master English and its pragmatics in order to fulfil her desire to fit in and to escalate in an Anglocentric culture. Furthermore, education serves as an assimilationist device not only because of contact with other students, but because of how it modifies Fabiola's approach to knowledge and reality. When she is required to write a research paper, she decides to employ her own knowledge and perspective on the Haitian revolutionary Toussain Louverture. Yet, her paper is graded with a D and classified as a personal essay. Feeling her conception of the world attacked, she realises that education is "another American system [she] needs to game" (Zoboi, 2017, p. 120). The fact that Fabiola retains her Haitian essence throughout the novel implies that she consciously learns how to master American systems by attaining a comfortable position while remaining true to her narratives and perceptions of the world.

Finally, Fabiola's integration in American society is represented by consumerism. At the beginning of the book her dreams are humble and simple, more based on community and spiritual wellbeing than on material elements. She does not understand her cousins' fights about money and feels strongly conflicted about her cousins' drug dealing and her aunt's loaning business. Yet, when Matant Jo gives her 400 dollars, the money, which she equates with the beginning of the good life, makes her "walk taller and speak with more confidence", as well as "feel a little bit more American" (Zoboi, 2017, p. 59). Hence, she associates financial wellbeing with American happiness. Although she still condemns the economic activities that sustain the family, eventually she understands what Chantal explains to her about life in America: "Money's just room to breathe" (Zoboi, 2017, p. 212). By the end of the story, Fab becomes completely consumeristic but she still understands money from the Haitian Vodou perspective: "Here, I will tilt my head back, let it [money] pour into my mouth, and consume it. We have to become everything that we want. Consume it. Like our *Iwas*" (Zoboi, 2017, p. 320). Thus, while she conforms to America's materialist society, this adaptation is tinted by her religious beliefs and does

not imply acculturation. Instead, it is a symbol of her hybrid identity, of her living in between cultures.

3.2. *The Black Female Body in American Street*

This section analyses how the different characters in *American Street* comply with or defy the stereotypes surrounding black women discussed in section 2.2, and how their attitude towards these images conforms an important part of the assimilation or integration process. In addition, romantic relationships between the different characters—namely Donna and Dray and Fab and Kasim—shape their relationship with their environment and their identity and mirror their compliance with the intersecting power dynamics that rule the American nation.

One of the most recognisable figures in the novel is that of the Jezebel, embodied by Donna, who is clearly compliant with American dominant culture and its expectations on beautiful young black girls. Donna wears a lot of makeup, expensive clothes, lingerie, and wigs, items that are usually paid for by her abusive boyfriend Dray. Hence, she is also connected with the stereotype of the gold digger, while her popularity relates to the image of the diva. Yet, the longstanding perception of the Jezebel as not deserving protection from men might be the reason why people—including the detective, which stands for institutional power—do not seem to care about her suffering. However, for Fab, Donna represents Ezili, the Vodou goddess of beauty, which can be understood as a subversion towards the mainstream American imagery of black womanhood. After one of Dray's aggressions upon Donna, Fabiola sees in her the battle wounds of the Iwa Ezili-Danto, who is a warrior. However, she tells her: "You are not a fighter. You are Ezili's child—the lover. The beauty. Leave him alone. I will fight for you, Donna." (Zoboi, 2017, p. 247). Fabiola's image of Donna contests the stereotypes that the dominant discourse places upon her, portraying her as someone deserving of protection and empathy. Antithetical to the figure of the Jezebel, Pri, Donna's twin, is homosexual and does not comply with gender roles and norms. Instead, she embraces masculinity, not only through her appearance, wearing a chest wrap and boyish clothes, but also through her behaviour and linguistic expressions, which are usually violent and manly. Under Fab's perspective, "Pri is Brawn" (Zoboi, 2017, p. 317); she represents Ogu, the male Iwa of warfare. However, while Pri symbolises opposition to patriarchal norms, her adoption of

patriarchal attitudes towards other women, for instance, referring to Donna as a “ho” or wanting to control Fab’s sexual activity, and her aggressiveness make her fit within the stereotypical role of the black tomboy, as well as within the established power dynamics.

Although Matant Jo represents some elements of the figures of the crack-smoking mother and the matriarch, by the end of the novel she breaks with these images. Jo incarnates the figure of the matriarch not only because of her loaning business, which implies exerting dominance and intimidation, but also because of her protective attitude towards her daughters and niece. From the beginning, Matant Jo is the provider, as well as the one trusted with getting Fabiola’s mother, Valerie, out of the detention centre. However, her failure to fulfil these functions affects her family, as her daughters engage in criminal activity to obtain money and Fabiola pacts the price of releasing her mother with the police. Jo’s inability to comply with her duties relates to the demonised figure of the crack-smoking mother. Although Jo does not consume such substances, her room, where she tends to isolate from her family, is full of empty bottles of alcohol and pills, and she does not adhere to the role of the kind, caring mother. Therefore, her compliance with these stereotypes contributes to the devaluation of black motherhood discussed by Roberts (1997). Yet, the novel concludes with the family’s rebirth, and Matant Jo shows a vulnerability that allows her to connect with her family: “She finally breaks. Her whole body looks as if she is fighting—fighting us, herself, the air around her, this house, this city, this country, maybe. Finally, she rests her head on Pri’s shoulder and sobs [...] Her daughters surround her. She cries in their arms” (Zoboi, 2017, p. 332). This moment epitomises her rejection of the American expectations and stereotypes about black womanhood, and especially on black motherhood, which she had embraced and adapted to as part of the process of acculturation she had undergone as an immigrant Haitian woman in the USA.

Chantal, the oldest cousin, embodies the stereotype of the good girl, and, at times, due to the lack of involvement of her mother, that of the supermama. However, her engagement in illicit activities with her sisters contradicts this image, demonstrating how fitting in this idealised role of the perfect black girl is sometimes impossible in American society. Fabiola associates Chantal with brains, with intelligence and, from the beginning, she identifies herself with her cousin: “Everything she’s said sounds like she has a good head on her shoulders. I decide then and there that we will be the second set of twins in

this family. I will pay attention to what she does and how she talks” (Zoboi, 2017, p. 18). Fabiola wants to be like Chantal because she represents the path towards the American dream, the idea that effort and a good American education result in achieving respect, rights, freedom, and material wellbeing, even if you are not completely American—Chantal is Haiti-born and legally not an American citizen. Chantal has mastered American systems and usually changes her expression when in contact with authorities, thus assimilating in order to obtain benefits reserved to individuals who comply with social norms: “Chantal’s English is like that of the newspeople on TV. Her voice is very high and soft, and every sentence sounds like a question” (Zoboi, 2017, p. 11). Just like Chantal, Fabiola fits the role of the supermama because that position is vacant since her mother, whom she has idealised, represents this figure. The protagonist usually cooks and cleans around the house and tries to bring the family closer by performing other caretaking actions, such as braiding Pri’s hair to emotionally connect with her. Fabiola’s engagement in these domestic activities is strongly related to her Haitian identity, as can be seen, for instance, when she prepares a Haitian version of a Thanksgiving meal or when she practices a Vodou ritual for her family’s new beginning away from American Street. Yet, Fabiola’s compliance with this figure is not complete since she identifies herself with the fierce Iwa Ezili-Danto, and, as has been showcased, usually challenges American cultural hegemony.

Fab does not completely abide by any of these roles. Instead, her individuality and the dual nature of her identity pose a challenge to the assimilationist conception of the American melting pot. Her actions and attitudes reclaim a new integrationist national narrative in which diverse ethnic groups retain their particularities against the prevailing culture. In doing so, she does not wholly break with the American dream narrative; instead, exploiting the ambiguity and the malleability Cullen (2003) and Schudson (2004) ascribe to the dream, she modifies it so that it becomes accommodating to her ethnic background. One of the main symbols of this hybridity is Fab’s romantic relationship with Kasim, whose name means “divided among many”. This American cultural hybridity is also displayed by his Muslim upbringing and his respect for Fabiola’s faith. Although Kasim acts as a transforming force, the changes he triggers in the protagonist’s attitude and identity retain her essence. For instance, Kasim gave Fabiola the nickname Fabulous, which is shortened to Fab, just like her real name. Moreover, he disapproves of Fab’s

transformation to fit in the standard aesthetic for black girls imposed by mainstream society. Unlike Donna's boyfriend Dray, who supports and reinforces these modifications, Kasim encourages his girlfriend to remain true to herself instead of assimilating and conforming to American expectations. Like Fabiola, Kasim does not dismiss the American dream either. In fact, his hopes, and expectations about his relationship with Fabiola are based on attaining certain elements of the American dream rhetoric. While he sets to finish college and get "a nice government job" in order to obtain the most representative element of the American dream, which is owning a house where he can have a family with Fab, his American dream aims at transforming the established cultural norm, since he hopes to have "some little half-Haitian revolutionary babies" (Zoboi, 2017, p. 284). His murder by the police forces can be interpreted as a metaphor for the systemic obstacles that hinder the obtention of this multicultural American dream.

As mentioned above, the novel ends with Fabiola's reflections on her new hybrid self and her transformation of the American dream myth:

[O]n the other side, is the wide, free road. Unlike in Haiti, which means 'land of many mountains', the ground is level here and stretches as far as I can see—as if there are no limits to dreams here. But then I realize that everyone is climbing their own mountain here in America. They are tall and mighty and they live in the hearts and everyday lives of the people. And I am not a pebble in the valley. I am a mountain. (Zoboi, 2017, p. 324)

While the American landscape that surrounds her opposes that of her native land and mirrors the established narrative of the USA as a land of freedom and endless opportunity, the protagonist of *American Street* has demystified this narrative and acknowledges the hardships of life in America. Furthermore, she does not wish to undergo a process of acculturation and rejects pressures to do so. Thus, she does not feel insignificant or unremarkable, and is proud of her Haitian heritage. This cultural background is precisely the source of her power and her resistance towards American assimilationist forces, as well as the origin of her dreams and moral code. In saying she is a mountain, Fabiola is not only stating that she is powerful and outstanding within America, but she is also conveying that she is Haiti, that she is representative of her nation, just like its mountains, and retains her identity and ethnic particularities against American amalgamating dynamics.

4. Exploring Contestations of the Melting Pot in Ibi Zoboi's *Nigeria Jones*

This section examines the attitudes towards the melting pot metaphor in Ibi Zoboi's novel *Nigeria Jones* (2023), particularly in connection to the American dream and the treatment of the black female body. In her latest work, Zoboi tells the story of Nigeria Sankofa Jones, a sixteen-year-old girl born into her dad's radical black nationalist community, the Movement, that follows the ideology of the Black Panther Party.⁴ Although she has been raised in this isolated black society, protected from the prejudices and oppression that the American nation exerts on black populations, the changes brought about by her mother's passing make her question everything she has ever known and challenge her father's ideas, especially in relation to gender roles within her native racial justice group. Nigeria longs to fulfil her dead mother's dreams for her, to find freedom outside the Movement and construct her own beliefs and values. In this coming-of-age novel, the protagonist has to navigate intersections between her origins and her dreams which are to be found outside the Movement—that is, within American society—in order to discover her true character. The novel is the protagonist's constitution, the story that establishes her selfhood. By building her own charter, Nigeria defies the American nation and its narrative, editing fundamental national texts to create her own conception of herself and, therefore, her revindications. Her foundational document acknowledges her roots but divests from them as it features a declaration of independence that, like the American, states the grievances perpetrated by her father's movement that justify her separation. This declaration is the manifestation of her own dreams and value system, the basis for her persona. Nigeria's identity is hybrid, since she constructs these principles by blending the national rhetoric with oppositional narratives, especially those created by black women; it is also dynamic as her bill of rights, like the American, contains amendments. By creating her own document, *A Black Woman's Constitution*, she is also challenging her father's ideology, contained in his book *A Black Man's Constitution*, especially in relation to gender norms and her relationship with America. In this process of personal evolution, Nigeria finds a place where she can account for the intersecting forms of oppression that she has to contend as a black girl, establishing bonds between race and gender activism that were not possible in the Movement, thus making of America a place

⁴ Part of the Black Power movement and antithetical to M. L. King's integrationist and peaceful faction, the party promoted black nationalism, socialism, and armed self-defence (Black Panther Party, 2021).

of freedom where multiple causes can be defended at once, and where one's identity can be composed of a plurality of different features.

4.1. *The American Dream in Nigeria Jones*

Nigeria's desire to divest from her father's movement stems from her dead mother's dreams for herself and her daughter. Her mother, Natalie, considered her husband's ideals to be too radical and oppressive. Hence, she wanted to leave the Movement with her children so that they could enjoy the freedom to forge their own ideas and beliefs, attend school and escalate in society. Furthermore, as will be discussed in section 4.2., she wished for Nigeria to have the liberty to defend women's rights along with black rights. In order to fulfil these dreams, Nigeria will have to confront the two opposite systems that shape her character: her father's movement and America. In the process of constructing her selfhood in between these two spheres, Nigeria finds the liminal space that enables her to belong "[w]herever [she] decides to be" (Zoboi, 2023, p. 191), an in-betweenness that allows her identity to be multifaceted. Therefore, by choosing to be part of the American society, the protagonist does not blend into a homogenous whole; instead, she takes elements of her convenience and discards others. Moreover, Nigeria fuses her ideals and beliefs into the melting pot, acting as a driving force for change within the USA. Thus, in *Nigeria Jones* Zoboi also defends a dynamic interpretation of the melting pot that resonates with that of Zangwill (1908) and Gleason (1964).

The protagonist's main dream is that of freedom, of having the liberty to discover her own path and her own truth outside of the Movement's constraints, even if the community at the Village House is all she has ever known and believed to be true. Nigeria's group is hermetic and contrary to her father's preachings of equality, totalitarian, since he holds all authority. Hence, Nigeria's longing for space and fresh air is not only physical but also mental: the racial lens under which she has been taught to understand reality, always applying her extensive knowledge of black history, feels like she is "carrying around a heavy-ass-iron-clad library" in her head, which she can never put down (Zoboi, 2023, p. 300). By distancing herself from the Movement, she wants to be able to understand the new world she is diving into in new terms that allow for plurality and ambiguities: "This feels like the real world—a rainbow, and not my father's black and white with no grays" (2023, Zoboi, p. 315). Contrary to her father, who completely

rejects American society and wants to impose upon Nigeria a monolithic vision of herself and of reality, Natalie embodies hybridity, plurality, and dynamism, as her ancestors' memories link her to her country, as well as to Haiti and to Africa (Zoboi, 2023, p. 109). Thus, the USA is depicted as a territory that allows for multiplicity, and integration is portrayed as an enriching and liberating act. Nigeria's dilemma between the Movement and America can be reduced to the opposition between community and individual liberty. Throughout the story, Nigeria progressively learns to prioritise herself and, in the end, she manages to combine these apparently contradictory elements: "By competing for myself I am competing for us. I am because we are" (Zoboi, 2023, p. 368-369). The development of Nigeria's new identity is symbolised by her new name, as well as by her change of looks. While the new name she chooses, Enitan, means "one with a history", the act of cutting her locks, which hold ancestral memories, is relieving. She does not carry the burden of her ancestors' history anymore, yet she still feels them "hovering", although no longer in an oppressive way, bound to her "like puppet strings" (Zoboi, 2023, p. 359). Therefore, her new self is composed of a balance between collective ancestral memory and individual freedom and agency, it is "somewhere between African memories and American dreams" (Zoboi, 2023, p. 90).

Nigeria's dreams of independence and freedom are especially linked to the symbol of the house, central to the American dream rhetoric. While the house of Katherine Dillon (KD)—Natalie Pierre's white best friend and mother of Nigeria's friend Sage—represents the beginning of her new life, where she can aspire to anything she wants, the Village House represents her father's authority and Nigeria's lack of freedom. The latter stands for a sense of community that is restricted to members of the Movement and becomes oppressive for Nigeria as her family disintegrates and only the activist group is left. Since her individual goals are disregarded in favour of the community's needs and her father's ideals are not to be questioned, Nigeria's house becomes a place where she enjoys no freedom to construct her own identity. Moreover, the Village House represents the mental borders pressed upon Nigeria by her father, who has taught her to understand the world dually, imposing rigid divisions. On the other hand, KD's house, which is a birthing centre both literally and metaphorically, is a portal to a new life because it is a place where truths about herself and her mother's story are revealed "through the smoke, through tarot cards, through Sage's words" (Zoboi, 2023, p. 278). These unveiled secrets about Natalie's life

encourage Nigeria to distance herself from her father's ideals and enter American society. Therefore, KD's house is a symbol of Nigeria's integration in her new world which represents a mystical connection between Nigeria and her mother, who, as has been discussed, represents plurality. In addition, as will be analysed in section 4.2., the birthing house is the space where Nigeria can find a balance between women's cause and black activism, as well as a sanctuary for women's bodies, and, therefore, "the only place where [she] can find [her] own voice without the echo of [her] father's teachings" (Zoboi, 2023, p. 269-270). Furthermore, Sage and her mother stand for hybridity and globalisation, as Sage is biracial and her mother practices faiths and magics from all over the world. Hence, contact with them is a mind-broadening experience that allows Nigeria to approach different and diverse realities in a more comprehensive way, abandoning her father's dual understanding of reality. Nonetheless, in this process of rebirth, in this composition of her new self, Nigeria retains the bonds with her past and her ancestry, as symbolised by her mother's spiritual presence in the house.

The protagonist's separation from her father's group is triggered by her mother's desire for her to attend a Quaker private school called Philly Friends instead of being homeschooled. Although the school is part of the power structures of mainstream, white America, its connection with Quaker values of equality and liberty makes it closer to the salad bowl than to the melting pot. Although most of the students are white, Philly Friends integrates and accommodates pupils of multiple ethnic backgrounds, for instance, with the celebration of the Jewish New Year and Indigenous People's Day, or the implantation of affinity groups where these communities can discuss their needs. The fact that the school has a salad bar "that seems to have every kind of vegetable on earth" and options that adapt to different diets further emphasises the idea of the Quaker school as a salad bowl (Zoboi, 2023, p. 137). Yet, Philly Friends receives the same kind of criticism as the salad bowl model does: most black workers are not teachers, but cooks or security guards, and Nigeria's father, Kofi, is worried about the school taking advantage of his daughter's intelligence by using her as a brilliant token black girl that constitutes an asset for the institution. Kofi's vision is supported by the fact that Diane, the head of the Philly Friend's Diversity, Equity and Inclusion office admits being there only "for the optics" (Zoboi, 2023, p. 298). Hence, the education centre resonates with Nancy Leong's diversity rationale (2012). Moreover, in this salad bowl school, Nigeria feels that she has to

“constantly make a decision between being part of the Black community or the school community” (Zoboi, 2023, p. 304). Thus, this integrationist approach to American society is portrayed as not allowing for hybridity and dynamism. Yet, education at the Quaker school is also represented as a liberating element where new friends and ideas force the protagonist to “unshackle [her] mind, one chain at a time” (Zoboi, 2023, p. 313). Education is also a horizon-expanding experience given that, although Nigeria cannot continue her studies there, it is in the school where she realises that separating from mainstream society like the Movement does is not necessary to attain political change. Instead, she can transform society from within, not to achieve her father or her ethnic group’s goals, but for her own individual purposes. This new vision encourages her to attend college where she perceives she can fully develop the revolutionary ideas inside her, an ambition that was unimaginable at the Movement and that is made possible in America.

4.2. *The Back Feminine Body in Nigeria Jones*

Patriarchal power dynamics within the Movement and within the family are one of the main reasons why Natalie and Nigeria wish to leave. In these intertwined structures, Kofi, whose attitude is dominant and who does not tolerate any questioning of his authority, holds all the power, while his daughter and wife are only used as tools for his own political purposes. In his movement, activities are organised in accordance with traditional male and female roles, with women overseeing kids and cooking and men going to the shooting range. There, conversations about gender are silenced by race, two elements which are deemed incompatible in the organisation. However, the new world in which Nigeria enters shares these sexist elements with her father’s community. Since patriarchy is common to the two systems Nigeria lives in between, her constitution’s challenging of male-supremacist principles confronts both the American narrative and her father’s ideology.

Although Kofi’s organisation is supposed to protect all black people and raise every voice, black women’s issues are usually dismissed in the Movement. In fact, some of the stereotypical roles imposed upon black women by the dominant American discourse are enforced by the separatist movement. For instance, Nigeria’s mother fulfilled the role of the supermama and, in certain aspects, that of the matriarch. Natalie embodies the

supermama because she was the one who made the Village House feel like a home: she provided love, delicious vegan meals, healing, and care, not only for her family but also for members of the movement. The fact that she died after delivering Nigeria's brother, contributes to this idealisation of the supermama as a self-sacrificing care provider. Furthermore, her connection to spirituality makes her fit the magic nature that hooks argues is characteristic of the supermama (1991, p. 91). Yet, her disagreements with her husband, her desire to have an abortion, and her plans to take her children and leave Kofi make her a subversive character that does not completely fit this stereotype. Natalie also represents the figure of the matriarch since, although her husband is already the patriarch and exerted authority over her, she was respected by the community and oversaw its administration. Natalie was the one to obtain funds and permits for the Movement and organise the opening of their new school, as well as the writer of her husband's books, for which she got no credit. After her death, Nigeria feels compelled to take her place, especially the role of her baby brother Freedom's caretaker, a function that she is not willing to share. However, she eventually transfers the burden to Kofi's new partner Nubia, who is happy to have Kofi's children and assist him in everything as he makes her and her non-domestic contributions invisible. Thus, she occupies Natalie's position as the submissive and self-sacrificing supermama.

Nigeria's reclaiming of her bodily freedom is closely connected to the romantic liaisons she engages in. Throughout the novel, the main character develops two simultaneous relationships of this kind: one with Liam, a white boy from Philly Friends, and another one with Chris, a troubled 18-year-old boy that is new to the Movement. These affiliations symbolise the two worlds in which Nigeria's new identity is divided. Yet, she does not completely commit to any of the partnerships, which she uses as ways of exploring reality, herself, and her sexuality. Chris embodies the future of the Movement as well as male dominance, since he abides by Kofi's principles and by the end of the book he has become his successor. Nigeria's defiance of this supremacy is epitomised by their sexual exchange, as she reclaims agency and denies being Chris' property, asserting to feel "brand-new" not because he has completed her in some way but because of what she wanted for herself (Zoboi, 2023, p. 263-265), that is, because of her exploration of her sexual agency. Although Cris personifies sexist dynamics and tries to control Nigeria's relationship with both Liam and the community, he is supportive of her decision

to attend school and helps her escape Kofi's control. Moreover, by the end of the novel, he gives Nigeria her mother's notes on *A Black Woman's Constitution*, allowing her to continue her mother's work. When he does so, Chris also accepts Nigeria's freedom and agency, and understands that she must follow her own path outside the Movement. Hence, Chris represents the ongoing sexist values that dominate black communities and activist groups while hinting at a possibility for future progress on the matter.

For Nigeria, Liam emblemises her newly acquired connection to white people and the interest in understanding them individually, not as an amalgamated and stereotyped whole as is the norm in the Movement. Their bond also mirrors Nigeria's acceptance of her relationship with white people and with white America, and thus, her liberation from her community's limiting values and anti-miscegenation ideals, which make her feel guilty and observed for kissing a white boy in public. Liam does not only symbolise Nigeria's exploration of her country's society, but he also embodies the American dream, as his house has "a literal white-picket fence around it" (Zoboi, 2023, p. 232). This dream, is, nonetheless, non-compliant with the traditional narrative of the ideal American family, as his family is headed by to maternal figures. Moreover, he represents a welcoming and tolerant image of the dominant American society since he encourages Nigeria's dream of intervening in American issues and attaining power within the system, for instance, when Nigeria considers the possibility of becoming a judge in the Supreme Court or when he tells her that "[t]he world would probably make sense" if she held power (Zoboi, 2023, p. 243). During their first intimate encounter, Nigeria directs the experience, "exploring the depths of his soul with just a kiss" while not allowing him to do the same, "never letting him make landfall on [her] body" (Zoboi, 2023, p. 244). Nigeria's control over Liam can be understood as a reversal of the narrative that, as hooks argues, has equated white male dominance over black women's bodies with colonial authority (1991, p. 57). Hence, Nigeria's power over him can be extended to the whole country, which she explores without exposing herself or being compliant with dominant structures.

Above all, *Nigeria Jones* depicts American society as one that allows the discussion of the different aspects that comprise the grounds for the protagonist's discrimination: gender and race. Unlike in the Movement, where everything is centred around black liberation and other social causes such as women's rights or sexual freedom are disregarded, and despite the country's enforcement of patriarchal and racist dynamics, in

the USA Nigeria can discuss the intersection of these elements. KD and Sage's house is a refuge for women where she discovers how to fight for body liberation and black liberation simultaneously, that is, she becomes acquainted with Crenshaw's concept of intersectionality (1991). To embrace this intersectionality, she creates her own rules: "I am nothing, everything, and both at the same time" (Zoboi, 2023, p. 282). Thus, Nigeria occupies a liminal space that allows her to approach reality from multiple different perspectives, and to choose one or other aspect of her fragmented and hybrid identity, or to combine these elements. With this new conception of herself, Nigeria can account for all the components of her persona and, therefore, she is not only able to engage in activism for simultaneous causes, but also to understand herself and her relationship with two intersecting elements of her new identity: America and her African heritage. Nigeria realises that her sorority with Sage is a central part of her American dream after they wear revolutionary Halloween costumes to school—Sage dresses as biracial Lilith and Nigeria as black Eve—through which they reverse the dominant discourse on women: "this sisterhood with Sage is a freedom I didn't know I wanted, didn't know I needed" (Zoboi, 2023, p. 308). Hence, outside of her isolated community, Nigeria discovers herself and learns how to fight for the different fragments that constitute her composite identity.

The novel ends with Nigeria's emancipation and, therefore, with the establishment of her new persona, a process whose completion is illustrated by her change of hairstyle, as explained in section 4.1. Nigeria's new self has a story to tell, but her narrative becomes *herstory*.⁵ Hence, a notable part of her new character is gender consciousness, a lens through which she now understands collective memory. Her liberation and independence are symbolised by her growing wings and her connection to and power within America, as well as the catalyst effect of her presence in its society, are highlighted as she flies over the country and her "body becomes this land and this land becomes [her] body," claiming the territory as hers (Zoboi, 2023, p. 360). Yet, she concludes the novel stating: "This is the sky map my mother, and all her mothers before her, have charted for me" (Zoboi, 2023, p. 360). Consequently, her connection with her ancestors and her father's teachings also constitutes a significant portion of her new self. Hence, Nigeria enters the American dominant culture seeking liberation from the oppressing forces that surround her, but not

⁵ A feminist approach to past and present experiences, as opposed to the prevailing patriarchal attitudes on history.

losing herself to assimilation. Instead, she remains true to her essence and finds a space where she can honour her ancestors from a new consciousness that embraces her hybrid position.

Conclusion

After having analysed the same aspect in two books by the same author, this conclusion compares the image both novels display of America and the attitudes they feature towards the national narratives concerning this dissertation. This evaluation can provide useful insights, especially if we consider the different historical contexts in which the works were produced. *American Street* was published in February 2017, less than a year after the election as the 45th President of the USA of Donald Trump, candidate of the Republican Party, and only a month after his administration began. Donald Trump's campaign and subsequent presidency caused agitation among many sectors of the population, especially within ethnic minorities and women, since his discourse exploited populist rhetoric by scapegoating these discriminated groups, thus fuelling racist attitudes. Under Trump's rule, harsher immigration policies were enacted, and women's rights attacked. In this context, *American Street* depicts a hostile USA where immigrants are not welcomed and where assimilation is encouraged while difference is ridiculed or dismissed. Thus, the American society is portrayed as an Anglo-conforming, patriarchal melting pot where individual efforts are the only way to resist acculturation and to retain one's cultural identity.

On the other hand, *Nigeria Jones* was released in May 2023, under the current Democrat executive of Joe Biden. In present-day America, although some of Trump's policies are being progressively overturned, rights continue to be undermined as the Supreme Court is composed by a majority of Republican justices. Moreover, Trump's political ideas are still shared by a significant portion of USA citizens who support his return for a second term as the 47th president, some of which have become so extremist as to attack the Capitol on January 2021 in a failed attempt to prevent the formalisation of Biden's victory on the November 2020 elections. As a contestation to this radicalisation of the conservative ideology, progressists have become increasingly extremist too. This polarisation of the American political panorama is clearly present in Zobo's *Nigeria Jones* and symbolised by her father's movement. In contrast with these extremist

ideological groups, American mainstream society is perceived as more moderate and even accommodating, resembling more the salad bowl than the melting pot image. Nonetheless, this new integrationist national image still retains sexist and racist power dynamics, an issue that is acknowledged and criticised in the book. In *Nigeria Jones*, the protagonist finds her true self within an in-betweenness that represents this desire for normalisation and moderation and depicts America as a land of freedom to be oneself, as a dynamic system that is to be modified by individual efforts.

In conclusion, *American Street* presents an image of the USA that follows the Anglo-conforming melting pot rhetoric, whereas *Nigeria Jones* characterises the American mainstream society as an accommodating and integrating salad bowl where individuals enjoy the liberty to shape their identity in a more plural environment. While in *American Street* the protagonist's efforts to retain her particularities are discouraged and do not affect the greater society, in *Nigeria Jones*, the main character is encouraged to display her individuality, finding in the USA a place where her actions can have a transformative effect and change the national narrative. Each of the novels provides a window on a different American society which is shaped by its respective historical context. Therefore, comparing both novels offers valuable perspectives on how the American society has changed in regard to its treatment of ethnic minorities and of women's rights.

Works Cited

- Adams, James T. (1931). *The Epic of America*. Litle, Brown, and Company. Internet Archive. <https://archive.org/details/in.ernet.dli.2015.262385/page/n1/mode/2up>
- Anderson, Elijah. (2000). Beyond the Melting Pot Reconsidered. *The International Migration Review*, 34(1), 262–270. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2676023>
- Archer, John. (2014). The Resilience of Myth: The Politics of the American Dream. *Traditional Dwellings and Settlements Review*, 25(2), 7–21. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24347714>
- Berray, Mohamed. (2019). A Critical Literary Review of the Melting Pot and Salad Bowl Assimilation and Integration Theories. *Journal of Ethnic and Cultural Studies*, 6(1), 142–151. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/48710211>

- Bill of Rights. (1791). National Archives. <https://www.archives.gov/milestone-documents/bill-of-rights>
- Black Panther Party. (2021). National Archives. <https://www.archives.gov/research/african-americans/black-power/black-panthers>
- Boyer, Paul. (2012). *American History: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford University Press.
- Brown, Danice L., White-Johnson, Rhonda L., & Griffin-Fennell, Felicia D. (2013). Breaking the chains: examining the endorsement of modern Jezebel images and racial-ethnic esteem among African American women. *Culture, Health & Sexuality*, 15(5/6), 525–539. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23524698>
- Chu, Jon M. (Producer, Director). (2018). *Crazy Rich Asians* [film]. Warner Bros.
- Connelly, Joe, & Mosher, Bob. (Executive Producers). (1957-1963). *Leave It to Beaver* [TV series]. CBS; ABC.
- Crenshaw, Kimberle. (1991). Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color. *Stanford Law Review*, 43(6), 1241–1299. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1229039>
- Cullen, Jim. (2003). *The American Dream: A Short History of an Idea that Shaped a Nation*. Oxford University Press.
- De Crèvecoeur, Michelle G. J. (1782). Letter III: What Is an American. In *Letters from an American Farmer*. The Avalon Project. https://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th_century/letter_03.asp
- Declaration of Independence. (1776). National Archives. <https://www.archives.gov/founding-docs/declaration-transcript>
- Gleason, Philip. (1964). The Melting Pot: Symbol of Fusion or Confusion? *American Quarterly*, 16(1), 20–46. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2710825>
- Gordon, Milton M. (1961). Assimilation in America: Theory and Reality. *Daedalus*, 90(2), 263–285. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20026656>
- Grant, Madison. (1921/1916) *The Passing of the Great Race or the Racial Basis of European History*. Charles Scribner's Sons. Library of Congress, <https://www.loc.gov/item/21014644/>.

- Hanson, Sandra L., & Zogby, John. (2010). Trends—Attitudes about the American Dream. *The Public Opinion Quarterly*, 74(3), 570–584. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40927731>
- hooks, bell. (1991). *Yearning: Race, Gender, and Cultural Politics*. Turnaround.
- Hutchinson, Sikivu. (2014). White Picket Fences, White Innocence. *The Journal of Religious Ethics*, 42(4), 612–639. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24586116>
- Jonker, Ed. (2009). Coherence, Difference, and Citizenship: A Genealogy of Multiculturalism. In D. Rubin & J. Verheul (Eds.), *American Multiculturalism after 9/11: Transatlantic Perspectives*, 51–64. Amsterdam University Press. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt46n1tg.6>
- Kallen, Horace M. (1915). Democracy versus the Melting Pot. Internet Archive. <https://archive.org/details/1915DemocracyVersusTheMeltingPot/mode/2up>
- Kincaid, John. (1980). Political Cultures of the American Compound Republic. *Publius*, 10(2), 1–15. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3329720>
- King, Martin, L. (1963) I Have a Dream Speech. National Archives. <https://www.archives.gov/files/social-media/transcripts/transcript-march-pt3-of-3-2602934.pdf>
- Lee, Erika. (2007). The “Yellow Peril” and Asian Exclusion in the Americas. *Pacific Historical Review*, 76(4), 537-562.: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/phr.2007.76.4.537>
- Leong, Nancy. (2012). Racial Capitalism. *Harvard Law Review*, 126(8), 2151-2226. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23415098>
- Levitan, Steven, & Lloyd, Christopher. (Executive Producers). (2009-2020). *Modern Family* [TV series]. ABC.
- Mauk, David, & Oakland, John. (2002). *American Civilization: An Introduction* (3rd ed.). Routledge.
- Moynihan, Daniel P. (1965). *The Negro Family: The Case for National Action*. Office of Policy Planning and Research. United States Department of Labor. <https://web.stanford.edu/~mrosenfe/Moynihan%27s%20The%20Negro%20Family.pdf>
- Park, Robert E. & Burgess, Ernest W. (1969). *Introduction to the Science of Sociology*. Chicago University Press.

- Paul, Heike. (2014) *The Myths That Made America: An Introduction to American Studies*. Transcript Verlag.
- Pfeifer, Julia. (2016). The Loa as Ghosts in Haitian Vodou. In M. Fleischhack & E. Schenkel (Eds.), *Ghosts - or the (Nearly) Invisible: Spectral Phenomena in Literature and the Media* (pp. 137–146). Peter Lang AG. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctv2t4d7f.16>
- Pooch, Melanie U. (2016). *DiverCity – Global Cities as a Literary Phenomenon: Toronto, New York, and Los Angeles in a Globalizing Age*. Transcript Verlag. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctv1wxt87>
- Roberts, Dorothy E. (1997). Unshackling Black Motherhood. *Michigan Law Review*, 95(4), 938–964. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1290050>
- Roberts, Dorothy E. (2000). Black Women and the Pill. *Family Planning Perspectives*, 32(2), 92–93. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2648220>
- Rodó-Zárate, Maria. (2021). *Interseccionalidad: Desigualdades, lugares y emociones*. Bellaterra.
- Roosevelt, Franklin D. (1941). President Franklin Roosevelt's Annual Message (Four Freedoms) to Congress. National Archives. <https://www.archives.gov/milestone-documents/president-franklin-roosevelts-annual-message-to-congress>
- Rowland, Robert C., & Jones, John M. (2011). One Dream: Barack Obama, Race, and the American Dream. *Rhetoric and Public Affairs*, 14(1), 125–154. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41940526>
- Schlesinger, Arthur M. (1992). *The Disuniting of America*. Norton.
- Schudson, Michael. (2004). American Dreams. *American Literary History*, 16(3), 566–573. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3568068>
- Sewell, Christopher. J.P. (2013). Mammies and Matriarchs: Tracing Images of the Black Female in Popular Culture 1950s to Present. *Journal of African American Studies*, 17(3), 308–326. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43526418>
- Takaki, Ronald T. (1993). *A Different Mirror: A History of Multicultural America*. Back Bay Books.
- Urman, Jennie S. (Executive Producer). (2014-2019). *Jane the Virgin* [TV series]. The CW.

- Vanneman, Reeve, & Cannon, Lynn W. (1987). *The American Perception of Class*. Temple University Press. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv941wv0>
- Vecoli, Rudolph J. (1996). The Significance of Immigration in the Formation of an American Identity. *The History Teacher*, 30(1), 9–27. <https://doi.org/10.2307/494217>
- Washington, Booker T. (1895). Atlanta Compromise Speech. Library of Congress. <https://www.loc.gov/exhibits/civil-rightsact/multimedia/bookertwashington.html>
- Washington, George. (1783). From George Washington to Joshua Holmes. Founders Online. National Archives. <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/99-01-02-12127>
- Watkins, Valethia. (2016). Votes for Women: Race, Gender, and W.E.B. Du Bois’s Advocacy of Woman Suffrage. *Phylon* (1960-), 53(2), 3–19. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/phyton1960.53.2.3>
- White, Renee T. (2013). Missy “Misdemeanor” Elliott and Nicki Minaj: Fashionistin’ Black Female Sexuality in Hip-Hop Culture—Girl Power or Overpowered? *Journal of Black Studies*, 44(6), 607–626. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24572858>
- Wicks, Amanda S. (2022). When UNITY Isn’t Enuf: Black Tomboys as Gender-Bending Social Disrupters (Doctoral dissertation). <https://ir.vanderbilt.edu/bitstream/handle/1803/17755/WICKSDISSERTATION-2022.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>
- Winthrop, John. (1908). *Original Narratives of Early American History; Winthrop’s Journal, 1630-1949, Volume II* (J. Franklyn Jameson). Charles Scribner’s Sons. <https://salempl.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/Original-Narratives-of-Early-American-History-Winthrops-Journal-vol.-2.pdf>
- Zangwill, Israel. (1908/2007). *The Melting Pot*. (Online Distributed Proofreading Team, Ed.) Project Gutenberg. <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/23893/23893-h/23893-h.htm>
- Zoboi, Ibi. (2017). *American Street*. Balzer + Bray.
- Zoboi, Ibi. (2023). *Nigeria Jones: A novel*. Balzer + Bray.