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Theorizing race, marginalization, and language in the digital media

Abstract

Digitization of the communication medium has transformed the mute, marginalized 'audience' into a heterogeneous and credible content 'producer.' Drawing on this dynamics and operation of the digital media, it has urged the need to re-theorize 'marginalization' and 'race.' Hence, this paper critiques the digital-media tool, blogs, using a rhetoric-textual analysis method and critical discourse analysis method for the fictional text, *Americanah*. These methods employ the psychoanalytical-Althusserian critique of Adichie's fictional narrative, *Americanah*. In the psychoanalytical sense, blog-writing can qualify as a mechanism of 'sublimation' in the post-modern world. In the Althusserian sense, blogs become persuasive mechanisms for a subject's interpellation into non-dominant ideology. Among the plethora of marginalized global communities, African-Americans are enormously embracing the virtual communication trends for socio-political motives. This paper theorizes the correlations between race-related blogging, psychoanalytic sublimation, and the socio-political repudiation of power structure by employing the literary text as material evidence. Accordingly, the literary study has concluded that digital-mediums (i.e., in this case, political blogs) can depose the power vested in the ideological-state-apparatuses and impose a high potential for expression of unrestrained, credible, and democratic voice of the marginalized. It also validates that blogs/blogging influences and moulds national/political/racial discourses by lending a liberated voice and context-independent perspective to the racially oppressed.

Keywords
African-Americans, digital media, Dominant ideology, marginalization, race-related blogging, sublimation.

1. Introduction

The Information and Communication Technology (ICT) has progressed immensely since the 1990s. Until the emergence of digitization, traditional modes of mass communication succumbed to homogenization and submission to the powerful ideological-state-apparatuses that they served; consequently, this intercepted the heterogeneous and credible information transmission (Andrews, 2003; Singer, 2006). With digitization, the communication medium has transformed the mute, marginalized 'audience' into a heterogeneous and credible content 'producer.' Specifically, Facebook, Twitter, weblogs (popularly referred to as blogs) and other digital communication mediums have transformed the socio-political arena into an unrestrained and uncensored public debate sphere. Of all these digital environment products,

this study focuses on 'blogs.' A blog expresses the blogger's emotions, opinions, insights, arguments on topics that are deemed pertinent, valuable, and/or important to him/her. Hence, blogging could also be a channel for opening up conversations and discussions with people over topics ranging from politics, economy, technology, home-making, lifestyle, religion, gastronomy and many others. Few illustrations of blogging in the global political domain include, Hilary Clinton, the democrat candidate to American Presidential election in 2016, who adopted political blogging as a campaign strategy and Juantxo López de Uralde, Member of the Spanish Parliament for Álava, who employed his pivotal political position to openly critique on environmental issues through his personal blog (Sánchez-Villar, 2019).

A psychoanalytic perspective could label any creative channeling of emotions as "Sublimation." Psychoanalyst, Adams defines 'sublimation' as anything that "enables the psychical conditions of art productions to be represented in a respectable desexualized form" (2003, p. xi). In this purview, art works such as poems, novels, essays, movies, paintings, architectural pieces and the like qualify to be the products of 'sublimation' (Freud, 2001a, p. 97). Likewise, blog-writing, with its creative-writing feature, can also qualify to be an act of 'sublimation' in the post-modern world. On the other hand, the implication of social interaction (i.e., language) through a critical discernment of 'discourse' has been the focus of sociological theories influenced by Foucault (Antaki,1994; Edwards, 1997; Edwards & Potter, 1992; Potter, 1996; Potter & Wetherell, 1987). Further, Althusser, in his social theory, has argued that 'Ideological-State-Apparatuses' (ISAs) unconsciously persuade in the 'interpellation' and 'subjection' of individuals as 'subjects' into the Dominant ideology through language (1971, p. 181). Drawing on the dynamics and operation of the digital-media, it has urged the need to re-theorize 'marginalization' and 'resistance.' Likewise, many recent studies have argued that the digital environment products not only act as a significant decisive tool for the victory of marginalized representatives (Earl & Kimport, 2011; Papic & Noonan, 2011), they also strengthen their mobilization, political and social advocacy in the ideological power structure (Bennett, 2008; Castells, 2008; van Fossen & Berson 2008). A case in point is US President Obama's victory in an election in a White Dominant nation where the digital media tools played a pivotal role (Earl & Kimport, 2011; Papic & Noonan, 2011).

Of the various globally discussed socio-political cataclysms, race-related issues are critical and relevant in the recent times too. The 2020 twitter revolution #BlackLivesMatter validates the same (Buchanan, Bui & Patel, 2020). Race is a significant social determiner because it is a "highly contested representation of relations of power between social categories by which individuals are identified and identify themselves" (Higginbotham, 1992, p. 253). Studies in the recent past highlight that racial oppression is deemed as "natural" and "appropriate" in the White-dominant nations even in the recent times (Higginbotham, 1992, p. 253). African-Americans are one of the many racially oppressed communities around the globe. This study streamlines the potential of race-related blogosphere through the blogging activities of an African-American protagonist in a fictional text and investigates its correlations to 'sublimation' ego-defense mechanism as well as the ideological power structure. To achieve this, the study attempts to examine the blogging activities of the African-Americans through a textual and critical discourse analysis of the fictional text, *Americanah* by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie.

2. Methodology

The current study is an attempt to understand the role of political blogs as a persuasive online activism so as to establish a counter-ideology, to resist marginalization of the African-Americans, and also to act as the gatekeepers of democracies through unrestrained expression of opinions. Given the changing trends of communication sphere alongside the growing popularity of heterogeneous and uncensored digitized language in the political blogosphere, this paper aims to discern the transformation in the relationship between the

marginalized communities and the ideological power play. In this lieu, the paper raises queries about new-media as a potential "public sphere" that can engender more democracy and more freedom. This study also attempts a qualitative analysis to decipher new-media as a remedial space for resisting marginalization. Blogging, which is a new-media product, is not "corporate-made products but [...] extensions of private and public selves, with media design and use varying according to the interests of the users" (Allen, 2017, p. 1091). Generally, "Social Network Analysis (SNA), content analysis, Discourse Analysis (DA), and participant observation" are the most preferred methods of research in new-media studies (Allen, 2017, p. 100). However, the current study will not adopt SNA/content analysis/participant observation because the data outlined for this study is based on a fictional text; secondly, the former methods are limited to quantitative analysis.

This study will adopt rhetorical method of textual analysis and critical discourse analysis to study the fictional text, *Americanah*. The affinity of both the methods to qualitative studies is the predominant rationale for selecting these analytical methods. Further, textual analysis examines, how any text can "influence, reflect, or reject" social-political perspectives (Allen, 2017, p.1753). Rhetorical method of textual analysis also aims to decipher how the text "fits into a larger social or political or historical or economic framework, to unpack meaning, and to give context to the text" (Allen, 2017, p. 1503). It helps to establish "how persuasive a text or a speaker is in a particular situation and with a particular audience" (Allen, 2017, p. 1503). In doing so, it critically examines, "the rhetor, the audience, the digital text or discourse, and the contexts" (Eyman, 2015, p. 99). In this study, *Americanah* is examined as a rhetorical text to critically analyze the "discourse of power" in the context of African-Americans, their use of new-media in America and the augmentation of blogging as a counter-tool to resist/address racial discrimination and oppression. The protagonist, Ifemelu, who is a race-blogger is analyzed as the rhetor, her blog-readers as the audience, and her race-related blogs as the discourse. Rhetorical method is apt for this study because this study intends to investigate the persuasive power of the new-media for the marginalized African-Americans. The methodology adopted to achieve this is the psychoanalytical-Althusserian critique of language and ideology. In the lieu of psychoanalysis, this study is an attempt to examine the operation of the rhetor's "psyche, whether understood as a characteristic of a subject or a product of language —for example, the unconscious, desire, and the logic of the signs and symbols" (Allen, 2017, p. 1344). Moreover, Althusserian approach would closely examine the text "as a critique of domination and as a critique of freedom" (Mckerrow, 1989, p. 91) of the African-American identities expressed under the canon of the blogs. In doing so, it can also be categorized as a critical-rhetoric method of textual analysis. Secondly, the study adopts critical discourse analysis. This method is the most suited to examine the digital-communication trends which specifically analyze the "historical and socio-political contexts in which texts are produced" (Allen, 2017, p. 294). Theorists affirm that, the purpose of critical analysis is "to expose and to challenge taken-for-granted power structures and to offer alternative perspectives to knowledge, theory building, and social reality" (Allen, 2017, p. 294).

This study aims to examine and establish the following hypothesis: (i) To demonstrate that political blogging can be a sublimation mechanism for the marginalized communities in a White-Dominant nation; (ii) To critically analyze the digital language as a widespread tool for subversion of the Dominant ideological power structure by the marginalized, consequently resisting the "Dominant ideology"; and (iii) To critique if political blogs can act as gatekeepers of democracy, and empower the marginalized. In this purview, the study addresses various research questions including: What are the significant elements for blogs to be analogous to the Freudian 'sublimatory' tool? What constitutes blogs as a counter-ideological-communication tool within a "networked-public sphere" in the digital arena? How do blogs help the marginalized community to overcome repression and achieve sublimation of their unfulfilled/socially unacceptable desires? How does blog become the

virtual and liberated voice of the marginalized free from the constraints of the Dominant ideology? In what sense do blogs repeal the Dominant ideological power-play and contribute to the formation of a counter-ideological narrative? Accordingly, this study will respond to the first two questions in the generic sense and sequentially endeavor to critique the last three analytical questions with the help of the fictional text, *Americanah* by Adichie through a rhetorical-textual analysis and critical discourse analysis. To achieve this, the study adopts the psychoanalytical-Althusserian critique.

3. Discussion

Blogs, as observed by digital sociologists, is a new-media technology that is "networked, computerized, social, mobile, and interactive" (Shaw, 2017, pp. 592-593). A trajectory of blogging as a popular digital medium reveals that the computer programmer Barger established 'weblogging' as a digital medium in 1997 and blogs functioned as a log "of the best webpages I visit" (as cited in Siles, 2011, pp. 781-782). Barger, alongside his programmer friend, James Joyce, took to blogging for their website, namely, "Robert Wisdom" which shared "hyperlinks to other sites on the web" (Siles, 2011, p. 781). Over the years, blogs have transformed into an increasingly popular digital medium for documenting the blogger's opinions or arguments on topics that are deemed pertinent, and/or valuable to him/her. Various studies suggest that blogs allow individuals to "form webs of personal relationships in cyberspace" (Rheingold, 1993, p. 4).

Althusser's theory of ideology asserts that "an individual is interpellated as a (free) subject in order that he or she shall submit freely to the commandments of the Subject, i.e., in order that he shall freely accept his subjection" (1971, p. 182). These lines pinpoint the power of the Dominant ideology and the lack of freedom of the 'subject'. Conversely, the theory of ideology, in the digital sphere, proves that digital media can subvert this Dominant ideology and restore the freedom of the 'subject'. Research in the recent past has affirmed that in the political arena, blogs have changed the way "citizens produce, acquire, and process information and the manner in which social movements that aim to communicate their causes operate" (Sánchez-Villar, 2019, p. 40). Various studies demonstrate blogs as a potential medium that harbingers strong political concerns (Scott, 2007; Tremayne, 2007) wherein "they let activists report on their activities, plans, and aspirations" (Dean, 2010, p. 64). A blog that discusses political issues qualifies to be the "new means of creating […] effective influence in public agenda-setting" (Sánchez-Villar, 2019, p. 9). It is also called as an "alternative journalism" that ensures to surpass the prevalent "democratic deficit" (Harcup, 2015, p. 1). In the United States of America, social researchers Ekdale *et al.* (2010) examine that blogging activities have augmented exponentially for various domestic and political purposes, especially since the September 2001 terrorist attacks. This effect could be a response to the significant characteristics of "bidirectionality and its positioning of the user at the centre of the communication process" (Sánchez-Villar, 2019, p. 41).

In addition to this, another technical rationale for this trend could be the dyadic advantage of "exposure and anonymity at the same time" that the blogs offer (Dean, 2010, p. 64). The decision to reveal one's identity is completely at the blogger's disposal. In this lieu, Israeli-American author Benkler, identifies that these forms of virtual communities communicate in a public network and enable mass communication "in a way that cannot be controlled by media owners and is not easily corruptible by money as were the mass media" (2006, p. 11). The digital medium enables a strong shielding to the blogger's freedom of expression even after expressing their aversions and desires. This feature majorly contributes to the blogger's unrestrained or candid opinions or observations about various issues. From a psychoanalytical standpoint, the expression of thoughts in an unrestrained and creative manner qualifies as "sublimation" of the repressed tendencies. Sublimation is an ego-defence mechanism. Ego-defence mechanisms are the "coping mechanisms" for a social being

whereby he/she defends the ego by repressing the socially unacceptable desires (Washburn, 1988, p. 136). Psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud (2001a) defines 'Sublimation' as a vehicle "for higher psychical activities, scientific, artistic or ideological, to play such an important part in civilized life" (p. 97). It is an intra-psychic condition that transforms the socially unacceptable and repressed energy or desires into a socially acceptable form. Repression is another ego-defense mechanism that is closely associated with sublimation and it significantly influences the human behavior. It is defined as the "state in which the ideas existed before being made conscious" (Freud, 2001b, p. 14). It compresses, postpones, or disguises the socially unacceptable desires by pushing them into the unconscious temporarily; nevertheless "they are not destroyed" from the psyche completely (Dollard *et al.*, 1939, pp. 1–2). Constant repression of the desires induces frustration and tension within an individual. In these circumstances, sublimation mechanism helps in purgation of these repressed tendencies into a constructive and socially acceptable reality. The second dimension is the facilitation of 'catharsis' through creative expression of emotions accompanied by the lack of punishment. In this light, social critic and psychoanalyst Castoriadis emphasizes that 'sublimation' forces the psyche "to replace its own or private objects of cathexis [...] with objects that exist and have value in and through their social institution, and to make them [...] 'means' [...] of pleasure" (1995, p. 29). In the twenty-first century, blogs and other digital-environment products have proven to be the 'coping mechanisms' of the oppressed and weaker sections of the society. Blogs (including political blogs) encompass sublimation characteristics because it is a powerful social weapon that counteracts any form of oppressions or socio-political injustices without the fear of punishments or social disapprovals; anonymity and lack of censorships is a significant reason for this privilege.

This study posits a special focus on political blogging, the psychoanalytical mechanism of 'sublimation' and the Dominant ideological subversion in the purview of racial oppression of the African-Americans. Race is a socially constructed discourse that has adversely affected the mental health of the racially-oppressed with feelings such as, aggression, paranoia, and delusions taking on a predominant role (Brown, 2003). In the United States of America, the African-Americans are "still the single largest racial minority group" (Salkind, 2008, p. 46). Studies have shown that one of the typical responses of the racially oppressed to the inhuman act of racial oppression is a "suppressed anger expression" where the victim is, "very angry about a racial issue but have to hold in his or her anger [...] boil on the inside [...] but smile on the outside [...] lie when a white person asks if she or he is angry about being treated unfairly" (Brown, 2003, p. 297). However, in the twenty-first century, digital-environment products such as blogs, Twitter, and others seem to combat this issue diplomatically/democratically. Recent studies about the African-Americans' use of Twitter platform have proved that accounts such as #BlackTwitter (which includes, pages such as #ICantBreathe and #BlackLivesMatter) have helped the African-Americans to voice out their race-related frustrated tendencies and consequently "mold *[sic]* national discourses" (Graham & Smith, 2016, p. 433). Simultaneously, in the American blogosphere, blogs such as, *The Angry Black Woman* which discusses "politics, race, gender sexuality, anger" ("The Angry Black Woman," n.d.); *Stuff White People Like*, a comic-blog that mockingly discusses Whites' likes and dislikes ("Stuff White People Like," n.d.); *Field Negro*, that deliberates on "all things black on a daily basis" ("Field Negro," n.d.); *Angry Black Bitch*, a political and race-related blog ("Angry Black Bitch," n.d.) are among the plethora of active-political blogs by the African-Americans and for the African-Americans. These real-time statistics support the need to critique the plausible impact of blogs on the marginalized population. This paper specifically analyzes the prevalent marginalized position of the African-Americans in America, and their metamorphosis in this position due to the emergence of digital media from a fictional-literary dimension. The scope of this study is further extended with a critique of blogging as a powerful discourse and as a means of 'sublimation' for the well-being of the African-American persona. In the novel

Americanah, the protagonist Ifemelu is a blogger. She is an African immigrant who maintains a "lifestyle blog" in America (Adichie, 2013, p.4). Her blog emanates high racial sarcasm latently but is overtly only a lifestyle blog. It is named as "Raceteenth or Various Observations About American Blacks (Those Formerly Known as Negroes) by a Non-American Black" (Adichie, 2013, p. 4). In her blog, Ifemelu observes and critiques the lifestyle of a racially victimized African-American in a White-dominant America using a forthright and satirical language. Accordingly, this study employs a rhetoric-textual analysis with a psychoanalytical-Althusserian paradigm and critical discourse analysis to achieve the research objectives.

4. Analysis

Various ethnographical studies prove that there is a rising correlation between the African-Americans and their utility of the digital environment products (Graham & Smith, 2010; Graham & Smith, 2016; Steele, 2016). They are adopting these digital environment products such as blogs to influence, to transform, to persuade their community. The rhetorical-textual method with a psychoanalytical approach suggests that "a contextual understanding of persuasion" encompasses "a set of transcontextual factors relating to the operation of the psyche, whether understood as a characteristic of a subject or a product of language" (Allen, 2017, p. 1344). An examination of language from a Lacanian psychoanalytical standpoint unravels that, language hails the emergence of the subject's formation of the "Symbolic Order" (Lacan, 1966, p. 12). On the contrary, "sublimation" and "catharsis" counter the Lacanian ideas on "Symbolic Order" and the role of "language" is pivotal in this case. Simultaneously, this study adopts an Althusserian approach through a comparative analysis of "language" as a "Dominant Order discourse" for racial oppression before and after the digitization of technology. Specifically, "Language" is analyzed as a "counter-discourse" to the Dominant ideology after digitization. In support of this idea, communication researchers, García-Orosa and López remark that, "Language in the networks is also taken as a legitimate social weapon to consolidate the domination of the hegemonic power, as a subversive tool against the *status quo* and as a cohesive element for a certain community" (2019, p. 107). It follows, then, that the dominant paradigm, in this research, will be the psychological and Althusserian critique of "Language." To further illustrate, in a digital environment, the functionality of language is not constituted by the power of the "Symbolic Order" or by the "Dominant ideology." Accordingly, a blogger, employs his/her language and achieves catharsis through the use of literary devices such as satire, puns, metaphor and the like in his/her blogs. In this vein, the protagonist Ifemelu attacks the racial oppressions through weapons such as irony, humor, and sarcasm in her language as implied in the rhetorical and discursive reading of the text, *Americanah*. This "language" is free from the control of the "Symbolic order" and/or "Dominant ideology." The following sections critically examine blogging activities of the racial victims and its impact on the African-American community through the fictional text, *Americanah*.

4.1. *Political blogs as a counter-tool for dominant ideological subjection*

The eminent philosopher and statesman Kojève popularized the term "desire of the other" (Kojève & Bloom, 1969, p. 6). Kojève describes "desire of the other" as a desire "'to possess' or 'to assimilate' [...] to be 'desired' or 'loved' or, rather, 'recognized' in his [*sic*] human value, in his *[sic]* reality as a human individual" (Kojève & Bloom, 1969, p. 6). The racial victim develops this desire in the process of assimilating and imitating the 'Other'. In this regard, critical theorist Bhabha, affirms that, "It is always in relation to the place of the Other that [...] desire is articulated" (Fanon, 1986, p. xv). In one of the blogs titled, "Understanding America for the Non-American Black: What Do WASPs Aspire To?" Ifemelu demonstrates that:

> Whiteness is the thing to aspire to. Not everyone does, of course (please, commenters, don't state the obvious) but many minorities have a conflicted longing for WASP whiteness or, more accurately, for the privileges of WASP whiteness. They probably don't really like

pale skin but they certainly like walking into a store without some security dude following them (Adichie, 2013, p. 205).

By "WASP" Ifemelu means White Anglo-Saxon Protestants who are the Dominant community in America. Ifemelu, in the above lines from her blog-post, depicts the earnest desire of majority of African-Americans to be loved by the supreme 'Other.' In order to be loved by this 'Other' (i.e., WASPs), they would strive to become the 'Other' and Ifemelu expresses this desire satirically in her blog-post.

A psychological understanding describes this condition as "Acting White" (Salkind, 2008, p. 18) wherein they internalize plethora of socio-cultural norms of the dominant group. Critical race theorist Brown has identified that the obsession to be like the 'Other' could germinate "anti-self issues" within the African-American psyche (2003, p. 296). Brown elaborately discusses the symptoms associated with "anti-self issues" and they include to "wish that he or she was white [...] hate being black [...] try to act white to feel better about himself or herself" (2003, pp. 296-297). Psychologically, this could lead to an intra-psychic conflict in the racial subject. Sociologically, it can cause transformation of the African-American into "black skin, white masks" (Fanon, 1986). This may connote two distinct and antagonistic subject-positions. In this regard, sociologist Hall argues that:

> People who are in any way significantly different from the majority –'them' rather than 'us'– are frequently exposed to this binary form of representation. They seem to be represented through sharply opposed, polarized, binary extremes –good/bad, civilized/primitive, ugly/excessively attractive [...] And they are often required to be *both things at the same* time! (1997, p. 229, author's emphasis).

Both the perspectives suggest a distortion in the sense of 'self' as they try to become the 'Other.' Even though the African-American is forced to become an American, he/she cannot stop being an African completely. This intensifies the psychic dilemma because being "*both things at the same* time" (Hall, 1997, p. 229, author's emphasis) can be highly challenging or even traumatizing for an individual. The character Ifemelu, in one of her blog-posts, discusses the racial nuances associated with the African being "*both things at the same* time" and states:

> Ever notice makeover shows on TV, how the black woman has natural hair (coarse, coily, Kinky or curly) in the ugly 'before' picture, and in the pretty 'after' picture somebody's taken a hot piece of metal and singed her hair straight? [...] (we all love [Beyonce] but how about she shows us, just once, what her hair looks like when it grows from her scalp?) (Adichie, 2013, pp. 296–297).

In this blog-post, Ifemelu exposes the anxiety and pressure of the African-American woman to become like the 'Other' and conform to the Dominant Order norms. These acts of "Acting White" reinstate Althusser's theory which claims that the interpellation is followed by "their subjection to the Subject [...] the mutual recognition of subjects and Subject, the subjects' recognition of each other, and finally the subject's recognition of himself" (1971, p. 181).

Even though the racial subject is constantly trying to become the 'Other,' their racial features such as hair and the skin color prevent them from completely becoming the 'Other.' Hence, most of their desires for mutual recognition are in a state of "deferral" or postponement (Derrida, 1978, p. xviii). A probe into the psychological health of these racial victims reveals that this desire blurs the distinction between their 'real' and 'ideal' selves. Likewise, the African-Americans are vulnerable to "viewing the culture and history of European Americans as supreme and universal" (Schiele, 2005, p. 806). This condition has been termed as "ethnic self-depreciation" (Schiele, 2005, p. 806). As portrayed in the novel *Americanah,* one of the explicit expressions of this desire of the 'Other' rested in taming the curly, kinky African tresses by straightening and smoothening them so that they resemble the White woman's hair pattern. The character Ifemelu, satirizes the African woman's desire to

imitate the White woman in her blog-post, "A Michelle Obama Shout-Out Plus Hair as Race Metaphor" and she blatantly confesses:

> Actually the folks with the Afros and dreads are the ones who haven't 'done' anything to their hair [...] I have natural kinky hair. Worn in cornrows, Afros, braids. No, it's not political [...] I just don't want relaxers in my hair -there are enough sources of cancer in my life as it is (Adichie, 2013, pp. 296-297).

In the above lines, Ifemelu critiques the positive and negative sign-significations associated with the woman's hair as well as questions the process of becoming the 'Other.' Her blog-post becomes the cathartic voice of many African-American women who are forced to use relaxers and other harmful chemicals everyday so that it resembles the hair texture of the White woman. The psychological state of "catharsis" is a striking feature of a blog (Nardi *et al.*, 2004, p. 46). In the psychoanalytical sense, "Catharsis" is the end-result of sublimation wherein the otherwise repressed desires are expressed and frustrations are overcome. As a socio-political rhetoric, Ifemelu has established a hegemonic counter-discourse for herself as well as for her African-American/marginalized readers. The process of production of this knowledge, in an unrestrained fashion, in a virtual-digital-public-sphere is most often "situated at the limits of social production; the decoded flows, at the limits of the codes and the territorialities" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1983, pp. 175-176). Ifemelu and the other marginalized African-Americans are thus situated at the border of various socio-political territories; yet their power to resist the hegemonic discourse continues with the help of new-media tools.

4.2. *Political blogs as a counter tool to re-theorize marginalization and resistance*

The previous sections have analyzed the racially oppressed African-American's predicament with becoming the 'Other' and assimilating into multiple subject-positions as a result of Dominant-ideology-based subjection. Ifemelu, from the novel *Americanah*, represents many other African-Americans who may nurture multiple and contradictory selves within their psychic structure. A psychological theorizing of the same could infer that these acts may intend to achieve 'belongingness' to a social group which is one of the primal desires of a social being (Maslow, 1943). The racial subject incessantly strives to develop "a sense of belongingness, a culture of place" (Hooks, 2009, p. 2). This race-related research, based on the fictional text *Americanah*, has deductively proven that the racial subjects' desire to belong, and to become the 'Other' has been incessantly resisted. The conventional ideology-based-theory would suggest that racial studies are an extensive commentary on marginalization, oppression and resistance. However, this study, through textual illustrations, has proven that digitized technology has unleashed a new potential among the marginalized and the oppressed. Hence, it can be theorized that blogs are a counter-ideological-communication tool with a "networked-public sphere" in the digital arena that can act as gatekeepers of democracy and empower the marginalized. The notion of "public sphere" was addressed by one of the earliest philosophers, Habermas in his work, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (1989). In this work, he discussed the literary public sphere (the public sphere in the world of letters) in relation to the public sphere in the political realm (Habermas, 1989). In his opinion, the augmentation of "public sphere" will lead to formation of equality, transparency, inclusivity and rationality (Habermas, 1989). In the digital-communication domain, Benkler terms this as "networked-public sphere" (Benkler, 2006, p. 11) and blogs can be the literary public sphere of the twenty-first century. The African-Americans have created a separate community-based public sphere for themselves through this "networked-public sphere" in response to the racial oppression, thereby creating a resistant culture against the Dominant Order or the conventional power structure. This digital advancement, through products such as Blogs, Twitter, and Facebook, has reinstated philosopher Heideggar's prophesy that technology will enable the individual to "reveal the real" (1977, p. 24). In the

select fictional narrative, the blogger Ifemelu fathoms that her every blog-post "scraped off yet one more scale of self" (Adichie, 2013, p. 3). As observed in the above sections, Ifemelu's "lifestyle" blog had a confessional and personal tone. Every blog-post was sublimatory in nature culminating in catharsis of the blogger and in all probability, of the reader too. To illustrate the latter, the readers of her blog in the novel such as Sapphic Derrida, respond that Ifemelu has used her "irreverent, hectoring, funny, and thought-provoking voice to create a space for real conversations about an important subject" (Adichie, 2013, p. 5). These lines validate that the digital-medium has empowered the formerly marginalized-racial-subject through this "socially situated relationship between text and reader" (Meyers, 2012, p. 1024). Alongside Ifemelu, the character Derrida, who has also succumbed to the racial oppression, perceives the blog-post as her virtual voice for resistance and against marginalization. From an Althusserian standpoint, this unabashed expression of oppression in a White-Dominant nation, reverses the control of the Dominant power structure; here, the marginalized and/or oppressed are the content producers. The inability of the ideological-state-apparatuses "to control what is being heard and what is being said" empowers the marginalized (Graham & Smith, 2016, p. 434). When the marginalized fictional character claims about the blog's success in creating "real conversations about an important subject matter" (Adichie, 2013, p. 5) it strongly hints at the uncontrollable power that is vested in the "networked-public sphere" (Benkler, 2006, p. 11) (i.e., blogs) and it questions the notions of marginalization and resistance. This restores postmodern thinker Haraway's claims that "Miniaturization has turned out to be about power; small is not so much beautiful as pre-eminently dangerous, as in cruise missile" (1991, p. 153). Blogging that germinated due to digitization is an apt example for the same. The blogger's views on various issues are most often unapologetic, spontaneous, interactive, uncensored, and immensely powerful. The character from the novel *Americanah,* Ifemelu articulates this in her blog-post titled "To My Fellow Non-American Blacks: In America, You Are Black, Baby":

> If you're telling a non-black person about something racist that happened to you, make sure you are not bitter. Don't complain. Be forgiving. If possible, make it funny. Most of all, do not be angry. Black people are not supposed to be angry about racism. Otherwise you get no sympathy. This applies only for white liberals, by the way. Don't even bother telling a white conservative about anything racist that happened to you. Because the conservative will tell you that YOU are the real racist and your mouth will hang open in confusion (Adichie, 2013, p. 220).

The above lines from the novel uphold the idea that political blogs allow the racially oppressed to voice out their opinions in an uninhibited and fearless manner and this could be credited to the privileges of anonymity, high level of autonomy, and lack of censorship that characterize the blog. Consequently, political blogs, which has the power to "create a space for real conversations about an important subject" (Adichie, 2013, p. 5), are embedded with all the potential power to become a political discourse overturning the White dominant ideology. Philosopher Mansfield substantiates this argument by stating that, "We make our revelations not as a way of conquering a world that is fundamentally alien to us, but to show how we belong to the world, even in our apparent alienation from and conflict with it" (2000, p. 157). The character Ifemelu unravels her repressed emotions via her blog-posts which are antagonistic and derogatory to the Dominant Order norms. Yet, she is not punished; rather she has succeeded in forming a group of her own who share similar contradictory opinions and who survive among the Dominant group members. In the psychoanalytic sense, blogs help the marginalized community to overcome repression and achieve sublimation. Drawing on Althusser's theory of ideology, it can be inferred that blogs and other products of the new-media can be labeled as the new and powerful counter-weapons to the ideological-state-apparatuses in the twentieth-first century which become the virtual voice of the minorities on a networked-public sphere. Various blogging instances in the novel *Americanah* prove that

blogs, as a product of the digital environment, possess "social weight and hold consequences for social processes, then by extension they have consequences for racial inequality" (Graham & Smith, 2016, p. 446). They have also proven that blogs carry a "high perceived credibility" with their ability to "cover issues with greater depth" (Ekdale *et al*., 2010, p. 219). To add on to the idea of African-Americans resorting to ego-defence mechanisms such as sublimation is another study that suggests the "White-flight in networked publics," such as MySpace and Facebook, due to their inability to overpower the authentic confrontations about racial oppressions by the marginalized (Boyd, 2013, p. 355). In the novel *Americanah*, Ifemelu's observational blog channelizes the African-American psyche towards a new perspective. The blog, with its humungous number of followers, depicts the impact it bestows on the racial victims. Her blog also succeeds in transforming into a political discourse to enable the African-Americans establish their authentic or 'true self' free from the norms specified by the Dominant ideology.

5. Conclusions

Social theorist Foucault exclaims, "A subject is either divided inside himself or divided from others" (Dreyfus & Rabinow, 1982, p. 208). But the racial subject is divided from with-in and with-out. Althusser's theory of ideology suggests that the divide is due to ideological subjection, and psychoanalytical theory suggests that this divide could be due to constant repression. In both the views, the racially oppressed could be overwhelmed by the anxieties associated with the "fear of non-being" (Giddens, 1991, p. 49) or fear of not belonging. The study has elaborated through several fictional instances that racial oppressions inflict deep damages into the African-American psyche leading to conditions ranging from psychological disorders to existential crisis. This study establishes the idea that in the twenty-first century, an African-American can overcome this marginalization and oppression, relatively, with the help of digital technology. Based on an anatomization of the previous sections, this study infers through Freudian psychoanalytical theories that blogs, specifically political blogs, not only share a close affinity to the creative art forms and act as sublimatory tools, they resiliently endeavor to restore the African-American identity by overturning the Dominant Order. Also, the study has exhibited various instances that prove that the marginalized subject has succeeded in this endeavor to a great extent. Additionally, from the Althusserian standpoint, this paper has vindicated the discursive powers of the blog and the manner in which these political blogs succeed in establishing a "networked-public sphere" in a cyber space by repealing the Dominant power structure (Benkler, 2006, p. 11). These ideas are established through a fictional account of Adichie's novel, *Americanah*. Additionally, it validates the idea that blogs influence and mould national discourses by lending a liberated voice and context-independent perspective to the racially oppressed. The study could also lead to an analogy that blogs metaphorically fabricate a "culture of place, a sense of belongingness" in virtual networked spaces (Hooks, 2009, p. 2) for the racially-oppressed in the digital environment. A blog, with its liberated voice, helps the African-American sublimate their repressed voices, strike a balance between their 'real self' and 'ideal self' and consequently achieve psychological well-being. In doing so, a blog can also engender more democracy and more freedom.

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