

A CRITICAL DISCOURSE STUDY OF RACISM AND INTRA-BLACK DISCRIMINATION  
IN SEFI ATTA'S THE BAD IMMIGRANT

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## DEDICATION

This project is dedicated to God almighty, my parents, Dr Ray Chikogu, my siblings, and my friends

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## CHAPTER TWO: FRAMING, EVALUATION AND SOCIAL POSITIONING

2.1. Introduction	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	12
2.2. Social Representation of Actors	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	12
2.3. Framing	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	12
2.4. Social Positioning	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	20
2.5. Evaluation	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	28
2.6. Conclusion	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	34

## CHAPTER THREE: NATURALIZATION AND IDEOLOGICAL POLARIZATION

3.1. Introduction	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	36
3.2. Naturalization	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	36
3.3. Ideological Polarization	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	46
3.4. Conclusion	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	52

## CHAPTER FOUR: CONCLUSION

Conclusion	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	53
Works Cited	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	--	-	-	55

## ABSTRACT

This research studied the interplay between racism, intra-Black discriminations and the language used in Sefi Atta's *The Bad Immigrant* (2021) to show social inequality and power relations.

The research employed Norman Fairclough's social-critical approach to discourse analysis, and explored how words and communication in the novel fueled racism, classism, and discrimination among Nigerian immigrants in the United States. Drawing insight from critics such as Frantz Fanon, Isabella Fairclough, Norman Fairclough and Friday Darboe, the study situated this work among broader social-political debates about anti-Black racism and intra-racial discrimination in the diaspora.

Findings in the study revealed that language helped to build and maintain social hierarchies. The speech and actions used in the novel reflect how immigrants adapt and respond to prejudice. It showed how characters in the novel face racism and also how they sometimes repeat the same prejudiced behaviors toward others. The research also revealed that African immigrants are not just victims but can also actively reproduce systems of prejudice while trying to survive and succeed in a society shaped by inequality. Overall, this study concluded that language plays a powerful role in shaping identity and social position. It adds to the discussion on intra-Black conflict by showing that discrimination happens both from outside and within minority groups.

## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **INTRODUCTION**

#### **1.1 Purpose of Study**

The aim of this study is to examine the interplay of racism, intra-black discrimination and language in Sefi Atta's novel *The Bad Immigrant* (2021). The purpose is to show how language and discursive structures unveil racism against Blacks and also uncover the reproduction of intra-black hierarchies and racial prejudice between Nigerians immigrants and African Americans in the text.

#### **1.2 Scope of Study**

This study focuses on an in-depth reading and analysis of Sefi Atta's *The Bad Immigrant*, analysing primary characters, dialogues, and plotlines that highlight issues of racial discrimination. This will include an analysis of key scenes of the main characters interacting with their immigrant family, American co-workers, and the other scenes that reflect the American immigrant experience in the USA. It will cover how racism and classism intersect as they relate to identity, assimilation, education, employment and professional marginalization. The study will focus on the interracial (Africans and whites) and intra-Black discriminations (Africans and African Americans) clashes. Attention will be on the characters' American experiences within the United States and not on their lives in Nigeria prior to the immigration. The scope of this study excludes comparisons of Atta's other works or other African diaspora literature, and will focus on this single novel.

#### **1.3 Research Methodology**

This study adopts a qualitative approach. For this qualitative study, textual analysis will be the primary method used. For the first method of data collection, multiple close readings of the text will be conducted, taking notes of relevant dialogues, monologues and descriptive narratives. The textual analysis and close reading of Sefi Atta's *The Bad Immigrant* will focus on the manifestation of word choices, instances of racialized language, class coded metaphors and other rhetorical devices in the novel to identify how racism and intra-black discrimination unfold through dominant dialogues and other forms of language. The textual analysis will also involve discourse mapping in which the speech of the characters will be examined to see how they preserve, reinforce, or challenge the values of the society. This will help the study focus on the text itself as well as significant socio-political issues. All scenes involving workplace and home interactions will be analysed, regardless of explicit mention of race/class, to capture implicit or overt ideologies. Categories like race-coded metaphors, racialized descriptors, and intergroup comparisons will be incorporated.

### **1.3.1 Definition of Terms**

#### **1. Racism**

Racism is a system of belief and practice that discriminates against people based on their race or ethnic background. It operates through both individual attitudes (like prejudice or hate) and institutional structures (like laws, hiring practices, or media portrayals) that give unfair advantages to some racial groups while creating disadvantages to others. Racism is not just about personal bias — it's about power, inequality, and the social structures that keep one group dominant over others.

#### **2. Intra-Black Discrimination**

Intra-black tensions between Africans (mostly immigrants from countries like Nigeria, Ghana, or Sudan) and African Americans connotes the misunderstandings, fights, and prejudices that split people of African descent in places like the US. It is not restricted only to skin colour, it covers tensions due to clashing histories, cultures, and daily struggles. Africans often migrate to the US as immigrants chasing better lives, bringing different languages and work ethics. African Americans, whose families were forced here through slavery, carry deep scars from centuries of racism, poverty, and fights for rights. This can lead to clashes and conflicts of interests, like African Americans feeling Africans "take jobs" or Africans seeing African Americans as "lazy." These tensions hurt everyone by weakening the big Black community's fight against white racism.

### **3. Framing**

According to Fairclough, he sees framing as “a process of offering an audience with salient and potentially overriding premises that they are expected to use in deliberation leading to decision and action” (Fairclough 2016). It involves deliberate inclusion, exclusion and selective emphasis. Framing refers to how information is presented or framed in ways that influence people's opinions or perspectives of a particular situation, group or individual.

**4. Social Positioning:** Social positioning in Norman Fairclough’s framework refers to how discourse situates individuals or groups within particular social relations, hierarchies, and identities. In other words, it is about how people are represented and positioned through language in relation to power, ideology, and social structure. Through linguistic choices such as vocabulary, modality, transitivity, pronouns, and speech roles, texts assign people particular positions (e.g. dominant/subordinate, insider/outsider, expert/layperson).

### **5. Evaluation**

In simple terms, evaluation refers to value-laden language: words or phrases that approve, disapprove, legitimise or delegitimise people and actions. To Fairclough, evaluation reveals ideology i.e. the speaker's moral, political or cultural stance and constructs identities and relationships. It connects language use with power and plays a crucial role in shaping an individual's understanding of the world. According to Norman Fairclough, evaluation is concerned with the values which people commit themselves to. It is "the ways in which values are assigned to people, actions, events and social processes within discourse."

## **6. Naturalization**

According to Norman Fairclough, naturalization is a discursive process through which particular ideas, values, and social relations come to be seen as "natural," "common sense," or "just the way things are." In his Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) framework, Fairclough explains that naturalization happens when ideologies become entrenched in language and discourse so deeply that they appear neutral or unquestionable. This makes social inequalities, power relations, and dominant ideologies seem normal and inevitable rather than constructed and changeable. Naturalization is when people stop noticing that something is ideological i.e. when class hierarchies or racial stereotypes are accepted as normal truths instead of social constructions. In Fairclough's words (paraphrased from *Language and Power*, 1989): "*Ideology is most effective when it becomes naturalized; when the assumptions it embodies come to be seen as simply the way things are.*"

## **7. Ideological Polarization**

According to Norman Fairclough, ideological polarization refers to the way discourse (language use) divides people or groups into opposing sides, typically an "us" versus "them" structure through linguistic and discursive choices that reflect underlying ideologies (belief

systems, values, or worldviews). In Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), ideology operates within language to maintain or challenge power relations. When language is used to polarize (to emphasize difference, opposition, or conflict) it becomes a means of reproducing or contesting social inequality. Ideological polarization occurs when discourse constructs positive self-representation (our side is good, rational, moral) or negative other-representation (their side is bad, irrational, immoral). This polarization often appears through: Lexical choices (e.g., "freedom fighters" vs. "terrorists"), Pronouns ("we," "they"), Metaphors and evaluative language that morally or emotionally separates groups. Polarization works by framing events or people in ways that favour one side's ideology. In Fairclough's framework, ideological polarization is not just about opinion, it's about how language naturalizes certain power structures. It makes one worldview appear as "common sense" while marginalizing others.

#### **1.4 Theoretical Background**

The study adopts the Critical Discourse Analysis (specifically Fairclough's Socio-critical approach with a primary focus being on Textual Analysis) as its framework. This framework will aid in analysing how multiple forms of oppression overlap and are manifested in the language and structure of the novel.

##### **1.4.1 Norman Fairclough's Socio-Critical Approach to Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)**

The British linguist and sociolinguist developed this framework in the late 1980s as European discourse studies expanded. His 1989 book *Language and Power*, published by Longman (now part of Routledge), laid the groundwork for what became an influential analytical tool. Fairclough's approach treats language as social practice that either reproduces or challenges existing power structures. He rejected the idea that language is neutral, arguing instead that it both reflects and creates power relations, ideologies, and social inequalities. His framework

operates on three connected levels: textual analysis (examining vocabulary, grammar, and metaphors at the micro-level), discursive practices (how texts get produced, distributed, and interpreted in specific contexts), and social dimensions (broader ideological and institutional effects on society). He developed these ideas further in his 1995 collection "*Critical Discourse Analysis: The Critical Study of Language*," which brought together essays connecting linguistic analysis with social theory.

Literary scholars have put Fairclough's framework to work in various contexts. Postcolonial texts, particularly African diaspora literature, have been analysed through his lens to reveal colonial legacies and internal community biases. Studies of Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's novels, for instance, use CDA to examine power dynamics hidden between language choices. Immigrant narratives have also benefited from this approach, with Ruth Wodak's research on discourse and identity in multicultural settings providing notable examples. Broader CDA applications to media and fiction have critiqued neoliberal inequalities through linguistic analysis.

The textual analysis component becomes especially relevant here. It involves breaking down linguistic elements like vocabulary and grammar to examine how Atta uses dialogue to expose racist assumptions (stereotypes about "lazy" African Americans, for example) or classist metaphors (equating success with "whitening" behaviours). This approach shows how discourse normalizes inequalities, such as when characters internalize classism as a way to cope with racism, while also critiquing societal structures. By analysing dialogues, thoughts from the characters, as well as descriptive narration, this study aims to bring about the idea that racism and discrimination are multifaceted. It seeks to provide an understanding of immigration narratives, examining how immigrants are not only victims but are also capable of re-producing the same prejudices they are subjected to, and raising awareness of internal marginalization. It

reveals hidden power dynamics, demonstrating how discourse maintains hierarchies while creating spaces for resistance. Fairclough's model works particularly well for this study because it directly connects language use to social power. His insistence that language shapes and reflects power relations, rather than remaining neutral, provides the analytical foundation needed.

Fairclough's approach argues that identity and systemic exclusions are linguistically encoded; allowing analysis of both structure and representation. Fairclough's Socio-critical Approach is therefore a framework that links identity-based oppressions with their linguistic expressions, mirroring the complexities of the real-world in Atta's portrayal of Nigerian immigrants who can be both oppressed and oppressive.

## **1.5 Review of Related Scholarship and Justification of the Study**

A review of recent scholarship reveals both the relevance of this study and the critical gap it seeks to fill, particularly in its focus on multidirectional prejudice, intra-Black hierarchies, and the linguistic portrayal of power in Sefi Atta's *The Bad Immigrant* (2021). This research sits at the crossroads of two scholarly conversations – African diaspora literature and the immigrant experience, and the application of Critical Discourse Analysis to literature. Reviewing these fields reveals where this study fits and what it contributes.

### **1.5.1 Scholarship on African Diaspora Literature and the "Immigrant Novel"**

African immigrant literature, especially from the Nigerian diaspora, has increasingly tackled racism, classism, and identity in Western contexts. Early foundational work by scholars like Paul Zeleza and Simon Gikandi established frameworks for understanding displacement, cultural hybridity, and the politics of belonging in diasporic narratives. However, they do so from a literary approach. Literary criticism has also focused considerable attention to migration narratives, particularly those moving from Africa to the West. Much of this scholarship, seen in

critiques of novels like Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah*, analyses protagonists primarily as victims of Western racism and xenophobia.

Adichie's *Americanah* has been studied for its depiction of racial discrimination against Nigerian immigrants in America, showing how race combines with gender and class to shape immigrant experiences. Gockeen Kara notes that Adichie's narrative focuses on encounters with American racism, including microaggressions and mobility barriers (pp315-320). This is key to the study of racial discrimination as it shows how internalized racism and classism sustain intra-Black discrimination.

????Buchi Emecheta's *Second Class Citizen* examines how racism, classism, and sexism compound in a Nigerian woman's British experience, presenting migration as a source of multiple oppressions where race and class create systematic exclusion. Emecheta's work highlights cultural clashes, identity crises, and racial marginalization. However, while Emecheta and Adichie's works highlight racism, its effects on the Black immigrants and delves into the class-based exclusion, their works fail to highlight tensions between Black immigrants and African Americans.

More recent criticism has shifted toward examining internal community dynamics, including tensions between African immigrants and African Americans, and the role of classism within immigrant communities. Sefi Atta's *The Bad Immigrant* has begun to attract scholarly attention precisely for its unflinching portrayal of these intra-community tensions. In an interview with *Brittle Paper*, Atta talks about the negative labels used to describe African Americans in the novel: "I mention them just to illustrate how absurd they are and how dangerous they can be, even to black immigrants who perpetuate them." She argues that Black immigrants are not "faultless people who are incapable of being prejudiced."

Steve Pfarrer also notes that *The Bad Immigrant* marks a significant evolution in Atta's works: whereas her earlier works focused on gendered oppression within Nigeria, this novel extends her critique to the transnational reproduction of hierarchy. Pfarrer writes: "the novel provides a nuanced look at race relations- not just between blacks and whites but between Africans and African Americans". This aligns with broader trends in diaspora studies. Jemima Pierre's *The Predicament of Blackness* demonstrates that racialization is a global process, and has shown how Black immigrants navigate systemic barriers while also participating in identity-based exclusions.

Frantz Fanon writes about "hierarchies of blackness" in transnational contexts. His book *Black Skin, White Masks* examines the effects of racism on the mind of Black people in a white-dominated society. He argues in the book that the colonized can internalize the colonizer's prejudices, leading to a desire to emulate the oppressor causing a disconnection from their own identity. While both groups, African Americans and Nigerian Immigrants, are racialized as Black in the U.S., their historical, cultural, and national identities differ, leading to hierarchies within Blackness. Foday Darboe (2006) also documents real-world tensions and stereotypes between African immigrants and African Americans, rooted in different historical experiences and identity perceptions

However, most of this scholarship remains sociological or historical. Literary analysis that focus on language as a site of ideological reproduction, especially through CDA, are still rare, creating a methodological gap this study addresses. While recent critics have begun to note immigrant complicity, few have analysed the linguistic methods through which such prejudices are enacted. This study fills that gap by applying CDA to expose how discriminatory ideologies are hidden in narrative discourse. This research engages with this emerging field but takes it

further. Rather than just acknowledging these tensions, it frames them through a CDA lens as perpetuated prejudice, positioning African immigrants as active participants in discriminatory discourse rather than passive subjects.

### **1.5.2 Critical Discourse Analysis as a Literary Tool**

CDA's use in literary analysis has been championed by scholars who view literary texts as social discourse. Norman Fairclough's work (1989, 1995) provides the foundational principle that language is never neutral but carries ideology. Literary scholars like Ruth Wodak (2009) and Michael Toolan (1997) have shown how CDA can deconstruct narratives' ideological foundations. In postcolonial and African literature, CDA has been used by critics like Anthea Garman to analyse how colonial discourses get subverted or reproduced.

Yet, specific applications of Fairclough's socio-critical model to contemporary African immigrant novels like *The Bad Immigrant* remain sparse. Most literary analysis of such texts favour thematic or postcolonial approaches, which, while valuable, may not fully unpack the micro-linguistic mechanisms through which characters themselves enact power and prejudice. This research fills that methodological gap. It proposes close textual analysis of dialogues and narrative descriptions, informed by Fairclough, to expose not just what prejudices exist, but how they're linguistically constructed and normalized within characters' speech and thoughts. Analysing the specific vocabulary a character like Lukmon uses to describe African Americans or white colleagues provides concrete data for multi-directional prejudice claims.

### **1.5.3 Justification of Study**

While existing scholarship provides an essential foundation, it leaves a significant gap. The dominant narrative still largely frames African immigrants as victims of external forces. Studies addressing intra-Black tensions often do so from sociological or historical perspectives,

not through extensive, language-focused literary analysis. The controversial idea of Intra-Black discrimination which refers to prejudice, bias, or hierarchical treatment that occurs within Black communities (between different groups who are all racialized as Black but who may differ in nationality, ethnicity, class, skin tone, cultural background, immigration status, or historical experience) has not fully been explored. For instance, discriminatory behaviours by Nigerian Immigrants against African Americans and other “lower” immigrants.

This study is justified because it examines these underexplored areas. It combines two scholarly fields (Diaspora Studies and CDA) to offer a reading of Sefi Atta's novel. By arguing that the characters in *The Bad Immigrant* aren't merely victims but also, sometimes, perpetrators of discrimination logics they face, this research provides a more complex and socially realistic portrait of immigrant experience. It challenges the field to move past comfortable narratives and employ critical frameworks like CDA to uncover uncomfortable truths about power, prejudice, and complicity within marginalized communities themselves.

## **1.6 Thesis Statement**

This study shows that Sefi Atta employs framing, evaluation, social positioning, ideological polarization and naturalization as tools to portray anti-Black racism, social marginalization, and intra-Black discrimination in *The Bad Immigrant*.

## CHAPTER TWO

### FRAMING, EVALUATION AND SOCIAL POSITIONING

#### 2.1 Introduction

This section will be focused on analysing Sefi's use of discursive strategies in portraying ideologies of racism and marginalization. The novel reveals the issues of racism that have pervaded the African immigrant experience and created a more compounded form of marginalisation and oppression. Sefi Atta depicts the ongoing battle against anti-black racism and class-based marginalisation among African immigrants in the U.S, using discursive tools like framing, social positioning and evaluation.

#### 2.2 Social Representation of Actors

Social representation refers to how individuals and groups represent social events, identities and relations through discourse. This representation shapes or challenges social structures. The characters are the primary social actors in Sefi Atta's *The Bad Immigrant*. Therefore, the ways they are represented is crucial to analysing the social structures in the novel. Through the use of discursive tools such as framing, evaluation and social positioning, the characters in the novel are socially represented either negatively or positively.

#### 2.3 Framing

Framing refers to how information is presented or framed in ways that influence people's opinions or perspectives of a particular situation, group or individual. Sefi Atta uses framing in *The Bad Immigrant* to accurately portray how racism and intra-black tensions between Nigerian Immigrants, Whites and African Americans play out. Through differing contrasts, Americans are painted as welcoming, loving and kind. America itself is painted as a land of opportunities where discrimination does not exist. In contrast, Nigerian immigrants and Blacks in general are framed in a more negative light. Terms like “*lazy*”, “*babied*”, “*failed*”, “*malnourished*”, “*sick*”, e.t.c are attached to Blackness. This creates a preconceived notion of Black as incompetent, infantile and afflicted. These notions promote racist ideologies against the Blacks and also hints at intra-black tensions that have pervaded the African diaspora. Sefi Atta applies framing to correctly construct the complexities of the immigrant experience. Below are some key excerpts that show how anti-black tensions and racist ideology are interwoven into the novel.

### **Excerpt 1**

So I'd asked Taslim and Bashira to greet him appropriately and Moriam to call him Brother Ismail. “In America,” he said, as he drove us to his house, “*every opportunity is given to immigrants to make it, wherever they are from. Those who don't take advantage of the opportunities are not meant to be here. They might as well get in their banana boats and paddle back home. They're failed immigrants. Now, those who persist and succeed are true Americans. But! But! They were born in the wrong countries.*” (3)

In the novel, America is framed as a welcoming and compassionate country. It paints a picture of America as a place of success as emphasized by the phrase “*every opportunity*”. America is seen as a land of wealth which aligns with the American dream. America is portrayed

positively, as a place where there are no discriminations, as seen by the use of the phrase “*wherever they are from*”. However, Nigerian immigrants are painted negatively. Through the use of exclusion, an immigrant’s failure to succeed has been reduced to individual incompetence, “*those who do not take advantage of the opportunities are not meant to be here*”, disregarding important and crucial systemic factors like racial oppression, economic injustice and marginalisation. Through repeated statements “*they might as well get in their banana boat and paddle back home*” and “*they are failed immigrants*”, the speaker indicates a strong belief in this logic, reinforcing societal bias. The word “*failed*” is used to describe immigrants yet to achieve success, suggesting that their failure is due to their incompetency and fundamental lack of ability. This excerpt strongly reveals the intra-black hierarchies existing within the Black community. Such a statement coming from an African man towards his fellow African immigrants is an indication of the tensions and conflicts pervading the African community. It reveals class stratification and marginalisation within the black community as the speaker sees fellow immigrants who are not in the same economic class as he is and are yet to succeed as “*failed*”. The speaker, Ismail, also shows a strong desire to attach himself to the whites. The novel portrays him as modern “*Uncle Tom*”; a Black person eager to please white authority, often betraying their racial identity. Using a derogatory phrase coined by the whites against his fellow Africans “*banana boats*” clearly shows his deep disdain and uncaring attitude towards his fellow Africans. By insisting “*that those who persist and succeed are true Americans*”, he has successfully categorised and attached himself to the country. By focusing on the “failure” of the immigrants, the speaker has successfully reduced systemic oppression and marginalisation to a lack of ability on the part of the immigrants, displaying a strong dislike for lower income earners.

The excerpt is a strong example of intra-black tensions and class-based marginalisation within the novel.

### **Excerpt 2**

I once watched five minutes of a pre-recorded morning talk show with her, during which the host interviewed a celebrity who had *adopted a baby from an orphanage in Africa*. *No country* was mentioned and the host congratulated her for *bringing the baby to a film set*...I was actually quite put off by the way African children in general were portrayed on American television. *They couldn't be healthy or happy*. They had to be *malnourished and sick and tearful, with flies on their faces*. The charity ads were the most offensive in that regard, with their *somber music and self-righteous voiceovers*. If I were American, they would annoy me outright. (83)

In Sefi Atta's *The Bad Immigrant*, there is a clear difference between how the Blacks are portrayed and how Americans are depicted. The excerpt above shows how the media's representation of African immigrants can promote and reinforce racist ideologies. The speaker has just seen an interview between a talk-show host and an American celebrity who just adopted a child from Africa. Phrases like "*adopted a baby from an orphanage in Africa*" depicts the American celebrity as kind, generous and dutiful for adopting a child all the way from Africa. The simple act of "*bringing the baby to a film set*" is endlessly praised and seen as an achievement deserving of congratulations. In contrast, the media's representation of the Africans is more negative and derogatory. This aligns with anti-black racism ideology in which Africans are considered less and as such, cannot be portrayed to be well off. The phrase "*no country*" indicates an erasure of Africa, reducing it to merely a backdrop used to show off the beauty and

kindness of Western countries. The media or in this case, American television, insists on portraying harmful and pervasive stereotypes such as the idea of African children not always being “*healthy or happy*” to represent the Black people. This paints a preconceived belief of Africans as starved and angry individuals. The focus on negative news about Africans and biased framing strengthens racist discourse. Use of images such as “*malnourished and sick and tearful, with flies on their faces*” effectively sends across a message of Africa being a desolate wasteland. Words like “*somber music*” attach a sorrowful tone to the concept of Africa. Lukmon's use of the phrase “*self-righteous*” exposes the American's unfounded feeling of superiority. The American media has been conditioned to uphold a white-racial hierarchy and this has been weaponized to harm Black folks. These narratives reinforce myths of Black inferiority. In extension, the African immigrants are seen as such: inferior individuals migrating to a foreign country in order to escape their countries.

### **Excerpt 3**

He'd had enough of *moochers* who lived on welfare and *did nothing but complain about the system*, he said. Why couldn't they *stand on their own two feet like normal adults*? Why did they always expect to be *babied*?... As for *phony race-baiters* like Jesse Jackson and Al Sharpton, their time was up. People like him had shown the *American dream was possible for black men*. “Even their intellectuals will tell you that race is bogus,” he said. “So why do they keep talking about it? Because *it is a standard excuse for their failures*. It's true! Let's face the facts here! *They're not the only ones who have suffered in America*. (38)

This excerpt discusses the economic power of the Black community, emphasizing the incompetence of Black individuals. The excerpt frames the Black community in an extremely

negative light. The Black community are represented as being incompetent and lazy, always attributing their failures to the American system instead of taking responsibility. They are referred to as “*moochers*”, a derogatory term used to refer to people who live off others without giving anything in return. This is an indication of how the African and African American are perceived in America. The speaker paints a picture of Africans as idle, as indicated by the phrase “*did nothing but complain about the system*”. The excerpt also frames the Black community as infants: a common stereotype used to promote racial bias. Phrases and words like “*babies*” and “*stand on their own two feet like normal adults*” reduce the Black community to infantile status, portraying them as lazy, and cowardly. The excerpt further reduces the decades of racism and oppression to merely a tool used by Blacks as “*a standard excuse for their failures*”. By labelling activists such as Al Sharpton and Jesse Jackson mere “*phony racebaiters*” the excerpt has successfully ignored the decades of racial conflicts and struggles of the Black community. The emphasis that the blacks are “*not the only ones who have suffered in America*” has successfully removed the Blacks from their positions as victims and instead frames them as lazy, unsuccessful and cunning, always blaming the American system for their own failures. This keys into the anti-black racism ideology that voids Blacks of value and systematically marginalizes them.

#### **Excerpt 4**

Based on the few news reports on Africa I saw, I *could forgive Americans for thinking the continent was—not even a country, but an island divided into three landscapes: a drought-ravaged, disease-infested village on one side, a war-torn bush in the middle, and safari park on the other side. The only African leaders the news programs were interested in following were the likes of Mugabe. Nelson*

*Mandela was their sole example of a good one.* Newspapers were only marginally better in their coverage, so I was forced to rely on the BBC World Service. (83)

This excerpt follows the media's coverage of African countries. The speaker laments about how Africa is portrayed according to the Western media. He acknowledges that the few reports on Africa present it as "*a drought-ravaged, disease-infested village... a war-torn bush... and a safari park*". This description effectively reduces a whole continent to a stereotypical image of poverty, war, and wildlife. Africa is framed through two lenses: one of crisis and chaos and the other of exoticism. This represents the two differing but common Western views on Africa. It positions Africa as inferior, dependent, and primitive, and Western nations as civilized, developed, and rational. The speaker notes that African leaders are only covered if they are "*the likes of Mugabe,*" with Mandela as the only good example. This shows how the media frames leadership in Africa: corrupt dictators vs. one exceptional hero. This frame reinforces simplified and moralized views of African politics. Lukmon is beginning to understand why Americans have a biased view of Africa and Africans ("*I could forgive Americans for thinking*"): because of the media portrayal. This indicates the issue is a problem of media representation. The narrator's reliance on the BBC World Service also highlights limited alternatives showing how access to discourse shapes perception. Lexical choices like "*drought-ravaged,*" "*disease-infested,*" "*war-torn,*" "*safari park*" construct Africa as a spectacle of suffering. The phrase "*I could forgive Americans...*" implies an ironic tone, exposing media bias. Through a framing lens, the excerpt reveals the ideological bias in Western media representations of Africa. It shows how discourse reproduces unequal power relations and enforces anti-black racist ideology.

### **Excerpt 5**

*I was prepared for what racist white people could do, not for what black people could do because of what racist white people had done to them.... No white person ever called me a Goddamned African. My own cousin was the first person in America to compare Africans to apes. Separate reasons—the first saw me as a traitor, and the second as a painful reminder of his origins. I was yet to experience the frustrations that would give rise to that kind of reaction, but I knew where their need to lash out at the person closest to them came from...Forget where we were coming from, I said. We were black in America. Black people were supposed to be on our side. What if an African American professor took one look at my CV and thought, African? End of application. What if a Caribbean teacher decided that he or she would not let our children get ahead in school?*

(117)

This excerpt exposes the intra-black tensions in Sefi Atta's *The Bad Immigrants*. The narrator acknowledges being “*prepared for what racist white people could do,*” establishing white racism as a familiar and expected structure. This frame presents racism as an external, systemic force, one that historically shaped both African and African American experiences. However, it also acts as the backdrop against which intra-racial tension unfolds. It provides the causal context: white racism as the original structure producing internalized conflict among Black people. “*Not for what black people could do because of what racist white people had done to them.*” This reframes conflict within the Black community as a consequence of oppression, not innate hostility. By saying “*My own cousin... compared Africans to apes*”, the narrator exposes internalized racism, a psychological effect of systemic white supremacy. African Americans’ or Caribbean people’s suspicion toward Africans is framed as *displacement* “*their*

*need to lash out at the person closest to them*". It shifts blame from individuals to social structures, highlighting how oppression reproduces itself within marginalized groups. *"Forget where we were coming from... We were black in America. Black people were supposed to be on our side"*- Here, the narrator frames Black unity as a moral and political expectation; something that should exist, yet doesn't. The modal *"supposed to"* conveys disappointment and disillusionment, showing a gap between the imagined solidarity and the fractured reality. *"What if an African American professor took one look at my CV and thought, African? End of application."* reveals the narrator's fear of exclusion and being judged not by merit but by ethnic identity. It shows how discursive labels (*"African," "Goddamned African"*) can shape social opportunity and belonging. Words like *"racist," "Goddamned African," "apes"* construct conflict. The excerpt reveals how racial discourse structures identities and relationships within the Black community. It critiques the adoption of racist ideologies by the Black community, showing how oppression reproduces division. The excerpt successfully frames hostility not as personal hatred, but as a social effect of systemic racism. Sefi thus uses framing as a medium to show the disparities between the Nigerian Immigrants, the Whites and the African Americans.

## **2.4 Social Positioning**

Social positioning concerns the way discourse constructs social identities and relationships between participants in communication. Sefi Atta employs the use of social positioning in *The Bad Immigrant* to reflect how discourse positions individuals or groups within particular power relations, hierarchies and identities. In the novel, Americans are positioned as the dominant and leading group. All political, economic and social power are concentrated within their class. As Ismail says in page six of the novel *"The Oval Office is historically white Protestant territory"* indicating that Whites are inherently superior and the gatekeepers of power

and dominance. In contrast, Blacks (the Nigerian immigrants and African Americans) are positioned as inferior to the Whites in terms of power, social class and status. “*But don’t expect to rise higher than them*” as Tim states in page 316 of the novel, reflects the position the Blacks are expected to take. “*Them*” in this statement refers to the white and in a conversation with Lukmon, Tim addresses the reality of the Black experience in the United States. Blacks are always expected to be below the Whites, and anything other than that can bring about the destruction of the Black man. The social identities constructed through these hierarchies reveal some deep-rooted ideology of racism, and intra-black tensions hidden in the novel.

### **Excerpt 6**

He further contradicted himself when I asked if America were ever likely to have a black president, since it was such a progressive country. “*A black president?*” he asked. “*In this country? That will never happen! That will ne-ver happen in a million years! They will have a Hispanic president before they have a black one. They will have an Italian president first.* Listen, Americans will elect a white woman as president before they elect a black man. *The Oval Office is historically white Protestant territory. They barely allow Catholics in there.* The American dream has to end somewhere for everyone. *We have to be grateful for what we have.*” (6)

The excerpt above addresses racial structures and hierarchies in Sefi Atta's *The Bad Immigrant*. Ismail’s repeated insistence: “*That will never happen! That will ne-ver happen in a million years!*” portrays a fixed worldview, positioning him as a resigned to racial limits within American democracy. The narrator positions herself as a progressive, questioning subject, while Ismail embodies a conservative position. The collective “*Americans*” are represented through

Ismail's voice as an exclusive, racially bound group: "*The Oval Office is historically white Protestant territory.*" This constructs America as a racially restricted social space, positioning Black people and immigrants as outsiders. Ismail's use of "we" in "*We have to be grateful for what we have*" reveals an internalized subordination. His statements reflect racial ideologies that naturalize exclusion ("*The Oval Office is historically white Protestant territory*"). The pronoun "we" includes him and possibly other immigrants or Black individuals, accepting a position of inferiority in the racial hierarchy. These signal discursive reproduction of racial ideology, a key point in Fairclough's CDA. Through this interaction, Black individuals have been positioned as subordinate and inferior to the Whites. Ismail's insistence that having a Black president is impossible, reflects the everlasting dominance of the White elites. Comparison to other racial groups "*They will have a Hispanic president before they have a black one*", "*They will have an Italian president first*" is an indication of class hierarchies that exist among the Black or "Others" community. Affirming that other racial groups would be allowed into the presidential seat before a Black man is, proves that among the hierarchies that exist between immigrants and other racial groups considered as "Others", the Blacks (African American and Africans), are still considered lesser. This hints at major intra-black discriminations and racial marginalisation. The excerpt uses language to construct ideological subject positions: "Americans", (as represented), as dominant white Protestant elite positioned as gatekeepers of power and privilege. While Blacks are the subordinates, with internalized colonial/racial hierarchies.

### **Excerpt 7**

Taslim persuaded me to watch another film that was meant to be a serious drama. It was set in an *unnamed African country* during a civil war. An American reporter who was covering the war met an English revolutionary in the bush. This

revolutionary was *fighting for the African people*, yet he still found time to have an affair with the reporter. *The first time she appeared on screen, violins were playing. The first African woman that appeared—drums.* By the middle of the film, *Africans were being slaughtered all over the place and the revolutionary and reporter were busy kissing.* (84)

In this excerpt, the film functions as a discursive text, and the narrator's thoughts exposes how Western media positions Africans as subordinate, voiceless, and othered, while centring Western characters as heroes and agents. Here, the narrator reflects on the portrayal of Africans in Western media (film), revealing how discourse in this case, the movie industry, reproduces ideologies of race, gender, and power. The narrator describes the film as "*set in an unnamed African country,*" immediately setting Africa up for erasure and generalization. The absence of a name depersonalizes Africa, reducing it to a backdrop for Western drama, a common practice in colonial narratives. The contrast between "*American reporter*" and "*English revolutionary*" versus "*Africans*" constructs a clear us/them binary. The Western characters are individualized ("*reporter,*" "*revolutionary*"), whereas Africans are generalized ("*Africans were being slaughtered*"), denying them personal agency or voice. The narrator's observation that "*the first time she appeared on screen, violins were playing*" and "*the first African woman that appeared—drums*" shows a clear difference in positioning between the Whites and Blacks. Violins (Western classical music) connote sophistication, emotion, humanity while drums symbolise savagery, tribalism, and otherness. This contrast is employed to construct racialized emotional hierarchies; a form of positioning. The narrator's tone ("*Africans were being slaughtered all over the place and the revolutionary and reporter were busy kissing*") is ironically detached, exposing the absurdity and meaninglessness of the film's focus. Through irony, the narrator reverses the

power of representation, calling attention to the blindness of Western narrative. In the excerpt, there is a clear social representation of characters. The English revolutionary is active, heroic, fighting “for the African people”, and a saviour figure. Meanwhile African people are positioned as nameless, voiceless, dying en masse and as passive objects, victims.

### Excerpt 8

*He praised every race of woman but black.* He liked white women. He said they didn't give trouble. He liked *Hispanic women*, whom he called Ay Papi. They took *care of themselves and their men*, he said. He liked *Asian women* as well. There was one in his office, *meticulous from head to toe, apparently. She wore black pantsuits and red lipstick, which gave her a mysterious air.* As for the *black women* in his office, this was all he had to say about them: “*Too much junk in the trunk.*” (47)

In this excerpt, language is used to position different racial groups of women within a hierarchy of desirability and worth, revealing internalized racial ideologies. Ismail's speech is structured around categorical generalizations: “*...praised every race of woman but black.*” This sweeping statement is a sign of stereotyping (women are not described as individuals but as racial types). This indicates categorical othering, where language simplifies and devalues identities to sustain social hierarchies. Each racial category is associated with an evaluative comment that reflects stereotyped attributes: White women “*didn't give trouble*” meaning they are docile, compliant; the idealized femininity. Hispanic women “*took care of themselves and their men*” portraying them as nurturing, submissive, and exotic. Asian women “*meticulous from head to toe... mysterious air*” paints a disciplined, controlled, sexually exotic image of Asian women. Black women on the other hand are classified as “*Too much junk in the*

*trunk*”objectified and reduced to body. The speaker elevates whiteness and exotic femininity while denigrating blackness and eroticizing the “other”. It normalizes sexism and racism, making them seem part of ordinary “male talk.” By “*praising every race of woman but black,*” Ismail reproduces the colonial legacy of racial self-rejection, positioning whiteness and foreignness as more desirable. This reflects the ideology of intra-black discrimination where the marginalized subjects adopt the dominant group’s discriminatory values. The intersection of racial stereotypes from both Whites and fellow Blacks produces a double subordination for black women. They are positioned as invisible persons excluded from the hierarchy of desirability entirely. This aligns with the concept of exclusion and inclusion in discourse where the speaker's representation choices mirror exclusion of the Black community.

### **Excerpt 9**

I said I'd already seen evidence of it with students in my evening class. He said, “*Now, for you, as an academic, to get anywhere, you must allow them to lay claim to discovering you and raising you. But don't expect to rise higher than them, and always remember to be as black as they want you to be.*” (316)

In this excerpt from Sefi Atta’s *The Bad Immigrant*, a character reflects on institutional and racial power dynamics in academia. The dialogue exposes how race intersects with classism (professional recognition) and how success for a black academic in a predominantly white system depends on how well they conform to dominant expectations. The speaker warns: “*You must allow them to lay claim to discovering you and raising you. But don't expect to rise higher than them, and always remember to be as black as they want you to be.*” The use of this

disclaimer portrays ideologies of racial hierarchy and control, indicating ideological positioning through discourse. Phrases like “*lay claim to discovering you*” and “*raising you*” reflect class-based marginalisation. Due to their lower income or perceived lower background, the Blacks have to make sure their success is attributed to the Whites indicating that a black man cannot successfully get ahead without help from a white person. This contrast shows the disparity between the privileged Blacks and the lesser privileges. The lesser privileged have to play the role of minorities and subordinates. This greatly raises the superiority of the White community and positions them as the dominant group. The black academic is positioned as a child or subordinate who owes their success to white benefactors. This reflects classic colonial discourse where agency and authorship are removed from the colonized subject. The black academic’s freedom is constrained by social expectations of conformity. The phrase “*as black as they want you to be*” reveals how black identity is socially constructed and regulated by dominant groups. The speaker gives a disclaimer about institutional racism, warning that recognition for black academics often depends on white validation. This shows that the rules of advancement are dictated by the dominant group. The academic system is portrayed as one that claims ownership of minority achievements (white institutions “*discover*” and “*raise*” black scholars, limits advancement (“*don’t expect to rise higher than them*”) and dictates identity performance (“*be as black as they want you to be*”). The black academic is positioned as dependent (“*allow them to lay claim*”), inferior (“*don’t expect to rise higher*”) and performative (“*be as black as they want you to be*”).

### **Excerpt 10**

Earlier that summer, a high school graduate was found hanging from a tree in the front yard of his home...The local news reports said he may have committed

suicide and the coroner's report later verified he had....I talked to Mrs. Turner about the boy when I saw her at the bookstore and she had a different take on the matter....*"That child didn't kill himself. I've known him since he was a baby. He and his mama came to my church every Sunday."* Out of respect, I thought I ought to get more information from Odell.

*"They hanged him,"* Odell confirmed.

"Wow...Really?"

*"Sure. He was messing with white girls...Why didn't anyone call the FBI or the NAACP and how come people didn't protest?... "You don't cross the line,"* Odell said. *"Everyone knows. But young people, you can't stop them. He messed with the wrong girl, that's all."* (325-326)

The excerpt describes the hanging of a young Black man in America. The news calls it suicide, but local people e.g. Mrs. Turner and Odell, believe it was a lynching because the boy was seen with a white girl. Their conversation exposes fear, silence, and racial division in the community. The news and the coroner position the boy as responsible for his own death, a suicide case. This reflects institutional power and how official voices hide racial violence. Local Black voices like Mrs. Turner and Odell challenge that position. They expose what is being silenced; racism and the ongoing danger of being a Black man in white spaces. On the other hand, Odell's phrase *"You don't cross the line"* shows how ordinary people have internalized racial rules. It reflects how ideology controls behaviour, even without open violence. The Black community is shown as powerless but aware. They know what happened but can't act – *"why didn't anyone call the FBI or the NAACP?"* The question shows frustration and silence caused by fear. The phrase *"He messed with the wrong girl"* places the boy as a victim of racial

boundaries that still exist. It positions white men as the silent enforcers of power, and Black men as those who must “*know their place*”. The neutral and detached tone of “*found hanging*” and “*committed suicide*” hides violence and agency: it doesn’t say “he was killed”. This downplays the brutality, showing how language normalizes racial fear. Odell’s version (“*They hanged him*”) restores agency. The pronoun “*they*” gives the act to human perpetrators, even if unnamed. Words like “*may have*” and “*I heard*” create uncertainty and distance. In official speech, uncertainty softens accountability. The silence of authorities and the community’s acceptance that “*you don’t cross the line*” shows a still existing divide between the Black’s and the Whites. Though living together, there is still an invisible boundary that should not be touched. “*You don’t cross the line*” portrays knowledge of a clear distinction between both races. “*He messed with the wrong girl*” positions the Whites as superior: untouchable. This reflects in the killing of a black man and how nothing is done as the consequence is seen as normal. This greatly portrays internalized hierarchies as the Blacks have come to truly believe that the Whites are untouchable and breaking of such rules, naturally warrants consequences not excluding death. The lack of protests and the quick acceptance of the suicide story shows how racism is normalized. The narrative also positions America as still struggling with the same racial issues from its past, suggesting that racism operates quietly through systems and social fear rather than open conflict.

## **2.5 Evaluation**

It describes the expression of attitudes, judgements or value positions encoded in discourse. *The Bad Immigrant* is rich with identity descriptors and expressions which are employed by Sefi Atta to accurately paint a picture of the Nigerian immigrant experience. In the novel, the primary evaluation of the Nigerian Immigrants and African Americans is a negative one. Negative descriptors like “*lazy*”, “*ruining*”, “*useless*”, “*jungle*” and even “*apes*” are

attached to the identity of the Nigerian immigrant. This represents racist ideologies that the Whites have attached to the Black man's identity. Controversial expressions such as “*Can a CEO with dreadlocks command your respect?*” referring to Caribbean men shows the prevailing class discrimination currently running rampant in the Black community. To evaluate Sefi Atta's *The Bad Immigrant*, focus will be paid to the use of negative descriptors, positive and negative phrases/expression, rhetorical strategies (metaphor, irony, simile) and cause and effect phrases/expressions.

### **Excerpt 11**

“Black people are *lazy* by nature,” he said. “*It’s in their DNA*. It’s time we just admitted it and stopped being *politically correct* about it. If I had a business, I wouldn’t employ a black person to work for me. I *would find an Asian to fill my minority quota*. *Watch the Asians*. *Study their ways*. *Hard work and economic power is what gets them ahead*. *Blacks? They’ll end up ruining your business.*”  
(39)

The above excerpt is a discussion between two Black individuals. The phrase “*Black people are lazy by nature*” denotes negative social evaluation. It paints an image of Black people as incompetent and reduces laziness to an inherent racial trait, expressing racist ideology. “*It’s in their DNA*” attributes laziness to being part of the Black's man genetic make-up. It normalizes discrimination by framing racist stereotypes as common sense (“*It’s in their DNA*”). As such, discrimination is naturalized and justified as, if the Black man is “naturally” lazy, it makes sense for them to be marginalized in the workspace. It supports dominant discourses that justify social and economic inequality.

The moral evaluation “*stop being politically correct*” devalues anti-racist discourse, reducing it to a dishonest or weak attempt at explaining why the Blacks are being marginalized. It prevents counter-arguments by discrediting “political correctness”. “*I wouldn’t employ a black person*” is a formal declaration and portrays prejudice turned into discriminatory action, legitimizing exclusion. It promotes the ideology of anti-black discrimination. “*I would find an Asian to fill my minority quota. Watch the Asians. Study their ways. Hard work and economic power is what gets them ahead*” is a positive counter-evaluation. It elevates Asians as “model minorities,” used to reinforce negative stereotypes about Blacks. “*They’ll end up ruining your business*” constructs Blacks as economic threats, reinforcing and legitimizing fear and social distance. The above excerpt reproduces racial hierarchies, with Asians positioned as “*hardworking*” and Blacks as “*lazy*”. It also reveals inner stratification among the Black community, especially between the Africans and African Americans. With this excerpt drawing from the conversation between two Africans, it shows the inner class divide in the black community and efficiently portrays the African view on the African Americans.

### **Excerpt 12**

*The American dream was nothing compared to the Nigerian one, where a halfwit could take over the whole government and make Nigerians wonder if our independence was worthwhile. “Forget that useless country,” he said. “Just be happy you’re here. Actually, you look fresh for someone who has come straight from the jungle. Not a white hair on your head and you’re still trim. Your wife must have been taking good care of you. (3)*

This excerpt is a discussion between Ismail and the newly arrived immigrant, Lukmon. It reflects the speaker's view on Nigeria. The phrase "*nothing compared to*" draws a comparison between the Nigerian and American dream in a harsh tone. The word "*halfwit*" serves as a derogatory evaluation of the political leadership, suggesting incompetence and corruption. This linguistic choice ridicules Nigerian governance and criticizes the outcome of independence, as shown in the rhetorical question: "*make Nigerians wonder if our independence was worthwhile.*"

The speaker uses the phrase to construct a narrative of national disappointment reinforcing the idea that political freedom has failed to translate into good leadership or national dignity. The speaker's evaluation of Nigeria as "*a useless country*" and its leaders as "*halfwits*" reproduces a hierarchical ideology where Western spaces (symbolized by "*here*," meaning America) are considered superior, while African nations are constructed as inferior. The phrase, "*Forget that useless country. Just be happy you're here,*" further reinforces this ideology. The evaluative term "*useless*" does not merely express frustration; it functions to condemn an entire nation. "*Actually, you look fresh for someone who has come straight from the jungle. Not a white hair on your head and you're still trim. Your wife must have been taking good care of you*" introduces personal and racialized evaluations. The expression "*from the jungle*" carries a meaning, which according to history, is associated with colonial stereotypes of Africa as primitive or uncivilized. This evaluative metaphor performs an act of "othering", positioning Africans as culturally inferior. On the other hand, the seemingly positive remark "*you look fresh*" functions as a patronizing evaluation. What appears to be praise is founded on the racist assumption that a person from Africa would normally appear unkempt or aged. The positive evaluation of physical appearance thus hides a deeper meaning, reinforcing cultural stereotypes

and legitimizing unequal power relations between the West and Africa. This evaluative contrast portrays the ideology of intra-black tensions and Western superiority.

### Excerpt 13

*“Would you hire someone with dreadlocks to run your business?”* he once asked about a Caribbean interviewee he'd turned down. “No, I’m just asking. *Can a CEO with dreadlocks command your respect?”*

I saw that as a rejection of an image that threatened the one he had adopted in the corporate world. *“They're always going on about slavery,”* he said another time, about African Americans. *“Everything comes back to slavery with them, and you dare not say anything because you're African, so you have no right to talk.”* (48)

The excerpt above shows Ismail's stance towards African Americans. *“Would you hire someone with dreadlocks?”* implies a negative evaluation of a natural African/Caribbean appearance as unprofessional and unworthy of authority. The rhetorical question frames dreadlocks as incompatible with professionalism or leadership. *“Can a CEO with dreadlocks command your respect?”* aligns appearance as a measurement of respectability and leadership. It suggests that respect is linked to conformity to Western corporate norms rather than competence. *“They're always going on about slavery”* expresses a dismissive evaluation of African Americans' history. It devalues discussions of racial history by labelling them as repeated and exaggerated complaints. *“You dare not say anything because you're African, so you have no right to talk.”* positions Africans as outsiders to African American struggles, marking in-group/out-group boundaries within the Black diaspora. The excerpt reproduces stereotypes and legitimate exclusion, normalizing discrimination as a matter of “professional standards”. The rejection of dreadlocks portrays internalized colonial ideologies; valuing whiteness and Western

corporate looks over African identity. The dismissal of slavery discourse reveals ideological denial of historical oppression, supporting the worldview that blames marginalized people for their conditions instead of acknowledging systemic racism. The discourse also reflects intra-racial distancing, where the speaker adopts a Western corporate identity to differentiate himself from African or Caribbean “others” reflecting intra-black tensions within the diaspora.

#### **Excerpt 14**

*At work, Jill was on the lookout for thieves. She hired a store detective for the holiday period, a middle-aged white woman, who targeted one type of customer— young, black women. This stupid detective would page me after she had surveilled suspects and I would then have to escort them to Jill’s office. What pained me most was that the suspects were always guilty. They hid lip-sticks, foundations, whatever they could in their handbags and pockets. Jill must have noticed the detective’s pattern of singling out young, black women, but I once overheard her say she didn’t see color. She had an evasive way of describing minority customers in general: “That little lady with the lovely eyes” (Asian); “That beautiful woman with the great big smile” (African American); “She was very va-va-voom” (Hispanic). (112)*

The excerpt above focuses on a situation encountered by Lukmon at his work place. “*Jill was on the lookout for thieves*” indicates suspicion and control, presupposing that theft is expected. “*Targeted one type of customer—young, black women.*” reveals racial profiling and discriminatory targeting, rooted in stereotype rather than fact. “*This stupid detective*” is a negative evaluation that expresses moral disapproval of the detective’s prejudice, challenging the dominant racist discourse. “*What pained me most was that the suspects were always guilty*”

shows the narrator's conflicted emotions; empathy for racial injustice but frustration that the outcome reinforces stereotypes. This indicates ideological struggle within the discourse. Jill's descriptive phrases: "*That little lady with the lovely eyes*" (Asian), "*That beautiful woman with the great big smile*" (African American), "*She was very va-va-voom*" (Hispanic), are evaluative stereotypes that are seemingly positive but emphasizing ethnic identity through physical or sensual traits. She uses euphemism to avoid naming race directly, revealing an ideology of polite racism masked as admiration. The excerpt largely promotes ideologies of racism and discrimination through the profiling and stereotyping of young Black women.

### **Excerpt 15**

Ok, I'm not telling you this so you can change my mind. I made my decision as soon as I got back here. I just want you to know why I'm not in touch with him or his mother. *And I don't care if anyone accuses me of putting a sister down. Sondra is the most stuck-up person I know. She looks down on Africans. She even looks down her nose on other African Americans and calls them ghetto.* Yet I'm the Uncle Tom because I'm articulate and behave appropriately. Listen, *let them not fool you with their 'black this, black that' business. They're just as divided as we are. Ours is by tribe and class. Theirs is by class and skin shade.*" (45)

The excerpt above is a conversation between two African immigrants, about His African American ex-wife. Words like "*stuck-up*", "*looks down on Africans*", "*calls them ghetto*" paints a negative evaluation of Sondra, (a representation of the African Americans), and constructs her as elitist, judgmental, and morally flawed. In contrast, Ismail addresses himself as being "*articulate and behave appropriately*" positioning himself in a positive manner; and aligning himself with civility, intelligence, and self-control. Phrases such as "*black this, black that*

*business*” indicates a dismissive tone; the speaker is critiquing what he sees as performative racial solidarity. “*They’re just as divided as we are*” sets up a us vs them discourse. “*Ours is by tribe and class. Theirs is by class and skin shade*” uses a parallel structure to effectively compare African tribalism with African-American colourism/classism. The speaker (Ismail) is portrayed as rational, sincere and fair while Sondra and her group are depicted as hypocritical/divisive. This reveals ideologies of intra-black tensions. Sondra (African Americans) is constructed as arrogant, hypocritical, morally inferior while the speaker (African immigrants) is positioned as morally conscious and culturally balanced (“*Ours is by tribe and class*”). The evaluation personalizes intra-racial tensions yet projects them as structural ideological divisions (tribe/class/skin tone). It demonstrates how racial discourse; intra-Black differences (African vs African American) is reinforced through evaluative contrast.

## **2.6 Conclusion**

In *The Bad Immigrant*, Sefi Atta portrays a narrative that exposes how race, migration, and belonging are linguistically and ideologically constructed within diasporic encounters. Through Fairclough’s lens, the text reveals how discourse functions not merely as storytelling, but as a site where social power and identity are negotiated. Framing in the novel positions Blackness and African identity against Western norms, exposing the subtle and overt mechanisms through which immigrants are othered. Evaluation highlights the characters’ stance toward both the host society and their own cultural background, revealing internalized hierarchies. Finally, social positioning demonstrates how language reproduces social inequalities by placing characters within hierarchies of race, class, and nationality. Atta’s narrative thus reflects broader socio-discursive struggles faced by African immigrants. Fairclough’s critical discourse approach enables a deeper understanding of how everyday interactions reflect and

challenges systemic ideologies of racism, exclusion, and belonging. Ultimately, the novel's discursive patterns highlight the complexities of identity in postcolonial and diasporic contexts.

### **CHAPTER THREE**

## NATURALIZATION AND IDEOLOGICAL POLARIZATION

### 3.1 Introduction

This section focuses on analysing Sefi Atta's *The Bad Immigrant* drawing on Norman Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), particularly his notions of ideological polarization and naturalization. Through these strategies, the novel offers an exploration of how power, race, and identity are constructed through discourse and reveals how language sustains social inequalities by dividing people into opposing categories such as Africans and Westerners, black and white, privileged and marginalized. Atta's characters are used to portray the tensions of migration, belonging, and racial identity through their speech, exposing how ideological assumptions become normalized in everyday interaction. Fairclough's framework provides a useful lens for examining how Atta's narrative both reflects and resists these dominant ideologies through acts of questioning, irony, and self-reflection.

### 3.2 Naturalization

Naturalization refers to the acceptance of class hierarchies or racial stereotypes as normal truths rather than social constructions. In Sefi Atta's *The Bad Immigrant*, certain ideologies like anti-black racism, classism and intra-Black hierarchies is incorporated into the lives of the characters and are now seen as "the way things are" (Fairclough, 1995). In the novel, *The Bad Immigrant*, the marginalisation of the Blacks has become something to be expected, something common and no longer seen as an issue in the country. "I'm sorry, but I've had enough of black people crying racism at every turn." (24) indicates that protest and resistance against racism is now seen as a disturbance and excuse for incompetence among the Blacks. Expressions like "I needed to lose my accent to get ahead. If you notice, I speak with an American accent now" (40), shows the Nigerian immigrants' internalization of American ideologies leading to prejudice

against anything African, reflecting the struggles within the Black diaspora community. Some excerpts have been studied below which reflect Atta's use of naturalization to show how certain ideologies have been incorporated into the Black community.

### **Excerpt 16**

*“I don’t think she was looking down on you,” he said. “She works on commission and has to size customers up. If a customer doesn’t look as though they’re likely to spend money, then it’s a question of “Why waste my time?” “She was rude to us, Brother Ismail,” Moriam said. “That has nothing to do with being black,” he said. “Green is all that matters in this country”. Moriam turned to me for an explanation. “Money.” “But we had money on us,” Moriam said. He shrugged. “She might not have been able to tell. How were you dressed? How did you comport yourself?” “People make judgments based on appearance,” Ismail said. “I’m just saying. Maybe you misinterpreted her intentions. I don’t see why every time someone says something unpleasant to a black person in this country, they have to be labeled a racist. I’m sorry, but I’ve had enough of black people crying racism at every turn.” (23-24)*

The excerpt above, (particularly Ismail’s comments), shows how racism, class marginalisation and inequality are normalized through every day reasoning. He repeatedly dismisses the racist incident as normal business behaviour: *“She works on commission and has to size customers up... Why waste my time?”*, *“That has nothing to do with being black. Green is all that matters in this country.”* Through such language, Ismail naturalizes discrimination, and portrays it as a rational economic act, not a moral or racial issue. Through his casual dismissive tone, he has reduced the shopping incident from a racist act into something commonplace. His

statements fuel the racism ideology that places Blacks as criminals and therefore worthy of suspicion. By normalising this accident, “*I don’t see why every time someone says something unpleasant to a black person... they have to be labelled a racist.*” He effectively strips away the social meaning (racism) from an event and presents it as mere personal misunderstanding. The excerpt also exposes the class marginalisation that Blacks also face. The statement “*Green is all that matters in this country*” reveals that how individuals are treated in America depends on their social class. Here Lukmon and Moriam face the intersecting parallels of both racism and classism; first, they are judged by the colour of their skin, then next, through the way they are dressed which suggests they belong to the lower-class bracket. Upon arriving at the shopping mall, they are categorised according to first their race and then their class (*She works on commission and has to size customers up*). The attendant immediately categorises Lukmon and Moraim into the Black and lower-class bracket and as such treats them with disdain and suspicion (*if a customer doesn’t look as though they’re likely to spend money, then it’s a question of “Why waste my time?”*). Ismail statement; “*She might not have been able to tell. How were you dressed? How did you comport yourself?*” effectively shifts the blame from the racist attendant to the actual victims. His discourse shifts the blame to them carrying the logic of “*If they had dressed better, the attendant would not be racist*”. This normalizes racial acts and discourages resistance, making systemic racism appear as individual oversensitivity.

Modal verbs and evaluative language that express certainty and common sense e.g., “*People make judgments based on appearance,*” “*That has nothing to do with being black.*” are employed. These sentences are declarative, posing as statements of facts and are not debatable; that is how ideology becomes naturalized. Nominalizations (“*judgments,*” “*appearance*”) depersonalize the action, removing responsibility. The racist act becomes just “*judgment,*” a

natural human tendency. This excerpt, particularly Ismail's speech, reduces racial discrimination to normal economic behaviour. This discursive move naturalizes both racism and classism, making them appear as natural features of social life rather than harmful power constructs.

### **Excerpt 17**

“But that doesn't mean there's nothing good to say about Nigeria.” “Okay,” Ismail said. “*So why are you here, then? Why are you not there?* No, answer me. If a lottery for...for Nigerian immigration opened today, who would enter it? Exactly, no one. Yet Nigerians are so quick to open their mouths everywhere they go: ‘Oh, we're so great. Oh, we're so wonderful’ *They're always the loudest people in the room.* For what, I don't know because I'll tell you what Nigeria is good at producing. Corruption. *Plenty of it. Heaps of it. In fact, it is in the genetic makeup of a Nigerian to be corrupt. Nigerians invented corruption.* They export it internationally and now they're all over the Internet with it. *Those Yahoos* can't even spell, yet they've figured out a way to con grandmothers in Idaho out of money. Only a corrupt mind can think up a scam like that. Only a Nigerian's.” He tapped his temple. (59-60)

Ismail's speech naturalizes a negative view of Nigeria and Nigerians. He makes sweeping generalizations that frame corruption and dysfunction as natural characteristics of Nigerians: “*It is in the genetic makeup of a Nigerian to be corrupt*”, “*Nigerians invented corruption*”. These are not factual statements (they are ideologically based stereotypes) but the tone and certainty with which he speaks makes them sound like objective truths. That's the discursive process of naturalization: turning prejudice into “*common sense*”. Ismail's words reproduce colonial ideologies, such as the idea that Africa and Africans are inherently inferior, unproductive, and

corrupt. By repeating and believing these ideas himself (as a Nigerian character), Ismail internalizes and reproduces colonial hierarchies: a process of self-naturalization. His reasoning follows a colonial logic of “*backward Africa versus advanced West*”. When he asks, “*So why are you here then? Why are you not there?*” He implies that migration to the West is proof of Western superiority, a naturalized colonial assumption that migration to the West is the only path to progress.

Modal certainty “*It is in the genetic makeup...*” naturalized this assumption and leaves no room for doubt. Repetition and exaggeration “*Plenty of it. Heaps of it.*” reinforces the racist stereotype of Blacks as corrupt. Metaphor describing corruption as something in the “*genetic makeup*” of Nigerians frames it as biological, unchangeable, and therefore natural. Evaluative adjectives “*the loudest people in the room,*” “*those Yahoos*” ridicules Nigerians while presenting these as descriptive facts, not insults. The excerpt legitimizes and sustains global inequality, portraying African failure as natural rather than as a result of historical exploitation and structural injustice.

### **Excerpt 18**

Ismail and Sondra were actually separated when his affair with the Long Island woman began. The woman was Italian American and they had to keep their relationship secret at work and outside of work because her family would disapprove of her dating a black man. “*They're not prejudiced,*” he said. “*They're just old-fashioned.*” (32)

The excerpt above frames the White's resistance to Blacks as something natural or “*just the way things are*”. Ismail's statement: “*They're not prejudiced... They're just old-fashioned*” naturalizes racism by reframing prejudice as harmless tradition. Rather than acknowledging that

the Italian American family's disapproval is rooted in racial bias, he neutralizes it through euphemism ("*old-fashioned*"), a linguistic strategy Fairclough identifies as a discursive softening of ideology. This turns racism into something socially acceptable or culturally excusable, not morally wrong. It conceals the unequal power relations that underlie interracial taboos, presenting them instead as innocent "family values". Thus, the ideology of racial separation is naturalized and made to seem a normal product of generational difference, not systemic prejudice. The euphemism "*old-fashioned*" replaces "*racist*," softening and normalizing prejudice. "*They're not prejudiced. They're just old-fashioned*" the lack of modal markers (no *perhaps, maybe*) makes it sound like objective truth. It rationalizes and normalizes racial boundaries by turning it into personal preference or cultural difference, framing it as "*old-fashioned traditions*," and not as the oppressive structure it is.

#### **Excerpt 19**

I was still preoccupied with Osaro. No wonder I was the only Nigerian academic he had invited to his dinner. No wonder he was avoiding other Nigerian academics. *He was no better than Ismail, whose way of making progress in the business world was to shrug off his minority status. In Osaro's world, being a minority could give him status. The more disadvantaged he could claim he was, the better.* (99)

In this excerpt, the narrator (Lukmon) compares Osaro and Ismail- two characters who relate differently to their minority or racial status in America. Ismail "*shrug[s] off his minority status*" he normalizes assimilation and erasure of racial identity to succeed. Osaro, on the other hand, commodifies his minority identity, using it strategically for personal advancement. Both are ideological positions that have been naturalized within American societies. The line: "*In*

*Osaro's world, being a minority could give him status. The more disadvantaged he could claim he was, the better.*" reveals the naturalization of neoliberal identity politics, where personal identity (race, disadvantage) becomes a currency for recognition or privilege within academic and professional spaces. The phrase "*could give him status*" shows how marginality and oppression is exploited and turned into capital that can be traded for visibility or prestige. Discourse within such systems treats identity and suffering as resources, an accepted, normalized part of how institutions operate.

Ismail's method of "*shrugging off his minority status*" also shows naturalization, but of a different ideology: the belief that success requires suppressing racial consciousness and conforming to the dominant (white) norm. This is an example of hegemonic consent; when the oppressed accept dominant ideologies as "*the way things are*". Ismail's behaviour embodies the naturalization of assimilation as a rational and necessary act in a racist society. The narrator's critical tone ("*no better than Ismail*") exposes how these worlds are socially produced yet presented as natural routes to success. Both reinforce the same ideological system, a form of anti-black racism rooted in neoliberal order that rewards conformity or strategic performance rather than genuine equality.

### **Excerpt 20**

He went on: *Yahoos were an embarrassment; their grammar was terrible; he'd had to deny he was Nigerian at work to save face.* "No," Osaro said. "No. You don't deny your country. Let me land. Let me land. The fact that one Nigerian does something doesn't mean we're all culpable. One in six Africans is a Nigerian, so we have a higher percentage of crooks" "You've been away too long, my

friend,” he said. “You've forgotten your people. *Nigerians are criminal by nature. Any corner of the globe, they find and ruin.*” (252)

Ismail’s comment “*Nigerians are criminal by nature. Any corner of the globe, they find and ruin.*” is a classic case of naturalization through essentialism. He transforms a social stereotype into truth (“*by nature*”). This phrasing removes all historical, political, and economic context, such as global inequality, corruption, or colonial exploitation, and replaces them with a “natural cause” explanation: Nigerians are “*born bad.*” Thus, Ismail’s language naturalizes a racist and self-degrading worldview, presenting Nigerian corruption as an unchangeable fact rather than a product of structural conditions. When Ismail says he had to “*deny he was Nigerian at work to save face,*” he reinforces a hierarchical racial ideology that privileges Western identity as respectable and African identity as shameful.

The excerpt reflects the internalization of dominant ideology; the oppressed reproducing the oppressor’s view of them. The discourse of shame becomes normalized behaviour as denying one’s origin is framed as rational self-protection, not ideological submission. This is how hegemony operates through consent: by convincing the dominated to view their subordination as sensible or necessary. Nominalization and evaluative adjectives depersonalize responsibility (“*Nigerians are criminal,*” “*an embarrassment*”) not reflecting the systemic factors that resulted in that outcome. Phrases such as (“*by nature*”) frames ideology as biology. Repetition (“*Nigerians are...*”, “*they find and ruin*”) enforces stereotypes through certainty.

These linguistic features make ideological statements appear like factual observations, and not opinions- the essence of naturalization. The colonial belief of Africans as morally and socially inferior is reproduced by Africans themselves (Ismail). The Western gaze becomes internalized and reproduced, leading to a self-sustaining system of self-denigration.

## Excerpt 21

One day, he sat me down in his living room and told me what he had been through in America when he first arrived. *He'd washed plates in restaurants and driven a taxicab in New York. He'd sold real estate for a while in New Jersey, which was how he was able to pay for his undergraduate business degree and part-time MBA before he went into financial planning. He was a fan of Donald Trump's and would sometimes take a bus back to New York to stand outside Trump Tower and look at it for inspiration. 'When I got my present job,' he said, 'I had to take elocution lessons to improve my client presentations. Everyone at work said I was articulate, but I knew I needed to lose my accent to get ahead. If you notice, I speak with an American accent now.'* (30)

Excerpt 21 exposes how naturalization is carried out through the process of assimilation. When the character says: *"I had to take elocution lessons to improve my client presentations... I needed to lose my accent to get ahead."* he reveals how linguistic assimilation (adopting an American accent) has been naturalized as a necessary condition for success. This shows how linguistic power operates ideologically: some accents (white, Western, "standard") are treated as neutral and professional, while others (African, immigrant) are categorised as unintelligent or inferior. This ideology conceals structural barriers of race, class, and nationality, framing African accent as less desirable and a hindrance to success, while American accent is contrasted as being superior. It also fuels belief that success is purely a matter of personal effort. It positions hard work, self-marketing, and individual transformation (even at the cost of cultural erasure) as sure

guarantees of progress ignoring factors such as systemic oppression and marginalisation. Capitalist and racial hierarchies are also reproduced as “motivation” and “inspiration,” rather than inequality. The statement “*Everyone at work said I was articulate, but I knew I needed to lose my accent to get ahead*” exposes how linguistic racism has been normalized. The adjective “*articulate*” carries a deeper meaning; it suggests surprise that a Black or foreign speaker can express themselves clearly. Yet the speaker internalizes this backhanded compliment as motivation to “fix” himself rather than question the prejudice. Evaluative language (“*articulate*,” “*get ahead*”) naturalizes social approval and success as rewards for conformity. Repetition of progress verbs (“*improve*,” “*lose*,” “*get ahead*”) reinforces a narrative of constant self-improvement, which masks the racialized pressure to assimilate. The ideology of meritocracy becomes naturalized; success appears accessible to anyone willing to adapt. Ismail's experience “*He'd washed plates in restaurants and driven a taxicab in New York. He'd sold real estate for a while in New Jersey, which was how he was able to pay for his undergraduate business degree and part-time MBA*” is a reflection of the life African immigrants are forced to live upon their arrival in America. Ismail, a graduate of Bank and Finance, is reduced to doing menial labour because in America, his certificate is not considered “good enough”. This shows how class marginalisation and racism intersect. Due to his African identity, Ismail's educational achievements are perceived as insignificant, which diminishes his social standing and relegates him to a lower income bracket. However, he presents his journey as a series of simple steps on a normal path to success, thereby naturalizing and normalizing his experience rather than recognizing and challenging it as a manifestation of systemic oppression. The racial and linguistic hierarchy of the West is also normalized. Accent loss is seen as a sensible career move, not as cultural erasure.

### 3.3 Ideological Polarization

Ideological polarization refers to the way discourse (language use) divides people or groups into opposing sides, typically an “us” versus “them” structure through linguistic and discursive choices. Sefi employs this strategy in a bid to portray the clear differences that exist between different races in the diaspora. In the novel there is a clear divide between the Whites and the Blacks. Most times, the whites are associated more with the positive self-representation while Blacks are relegated to the negative other-representation. These segregation into opposing sides clearly reflects power struggles, opposition and conflicts and functions to reproduce social inequalities.

#### Excerpt 22

“Telling me there is a shortage of nurses in Africa. Does she come from New Jersey? Why is she not working in her hometown, wherever she is from?”

“You're an African woman,” I said. “Therefore, you're honorable and oppressed.”

“So because I'm *honorable* I shouldn't leave my country to find work? And who is *oppressed*? You should see them in the cafeteria. They can't even eat without abusing themselves. *I'm so fat! I'm so disgusting! I'm such a pig!*” She must have been referring to *white women* because I couldn't imagine black women saying that. (157)

The excerpt creates a clear binary opposition between African and Western/white identities: “*Telling me there is a shortage of nurses in Africa*” Here Moriam challenges a Western narrative that portrays Africa as a place of lack or deficiency. When Lukmon says “*You're an African woman. Therefore, you're honourable and oppressed,*” the statement exposes a Western ideological stereotype. It highlights how Western ideology simplifies

Africans into two fixed categories “honorable” (moral exoticism) and “oppressed” (victimhood). This reveals ideological polarization in how African women are represented:

“They” (Westerners) define “us” (Africans) through pity and moral superiority.

In Moriam’s last statement: “*You should see them in the cafeteria... ‘I’m so fat! I’m so disgusting! I’m such a pig!’*” The evaluative adjectives (“*fat*,” “*disgusting*,” “*pig*”) expose the Western women’s self-critical discourse about body image. Lukmon’s certainty “*I couldn’t imagine black women saying that*” shows another layer of polarization:

Western women as self-deprecating, insecure, and individualistic.

Black/African women as confident, self-accepting, and communal.

This moral and emotional contrast reflects ideological ‘othering’, a linguistic process where identity and values are contrasted to emphasize difference.

### **Excerpt 23**

It was an insult to be preferred by white Americans. What was their assumption? That *we* were too stupid to know what was going on, or too cowardly to fight it? Either way, African Americans had to be given credit for accepting *us*. *We* were in their country and were sometimes exempt from being black, for whatever reason. If the tables were turned, I would loathe them on sight. The least *we* could do as Nigerian immigrants was to stand by them. *We* would probably not even be able to stage a protest in America without their help. Some of *us* were divided along ethnic lines. Most of *us* believed that getting ahead was all about making money. *We would betray our own for a few more crumbs from the oyinbo man’s table.* (106)

The passage immediately sets up multiple binary oppositions. Here, several “us/them” lines emerge. Lukmon’s insistent use of “us” and “we” positions Africans and African Americans as the “in-group”, a united front. Americans are presented as the “out-group”. His use of words such as “*too stupid*”, “*cowardly to fight it*” expresses that Americans are trying to exploit and take advantage of Africans and African Americans. This is a negative self-representation of America as it highlights them as being scheming, immoral and exploitative. Language such as “*preferred by white Americans*” and “*exempt from being black*” reveals the ideological complexity of identity in America, where race is both a social construct and a tool of stratification.

This is a manifestation of hegemony, where dominant ideologies (whiteness, capitalism, individualism) influence how immigrants perceive themselves and others. Phrases like “*Insult to be preferred by white Americans*” expose ideological power dynamics and emotional stance, implying that white approval comes with condescension, not equality. “*Too stupid to know what was going on, or too cowardly to fight it?*” are rhetorical questions that expose the anti-black racist ideology of the Whites which assumes moral superiority. “*Exempt from being black*” shows how race operates as a discursive privilege system, where proximity to whiteness grants temporary safety. These evaluative choices act as linguistic devices that reveal the African attitudes towards Americans, the Whites’ judgments about Africans, and ideological positions of the two races. The passage goes further to expose intra-group polarization, showing how racism fractures unity among marginalized groups: “*Some of us were divided along ethnic lines. Most of us believed that getting ahead was all about making money. We would betray our own for a few more crumbs from the oyinbo man’s table.*” The lexical metaphor “*crumbs from the oyinbo man’s table*” expresses dependency on white systems (economic and ideological) and the

internalization of capitalist and colonial values. It represents the self-othering of African immigrants who adopt the oppressor's worldview.

#### **Excerpt 24**

*Nigeria was essentially the United States with a minority of rich people in place of white people. Those of us who left had expectations that there were more opportunities elsewhere, and the competition was less. Not only did we arrive in America with some advantage, we could return with a greater one. By leaving Nigeria, however, we were opting out of that system. We were basically saying it didn't have enough to offer us, and we no longer wanted to contribute to it. Yet, here I was, coming to the understanding that African Americans were in a situation similar to mine in Nigeria. (315-316)*

The excerpt draws a discursive parallel between race and class. In America, whiteness symbolizes power and privilege. In Nigeria, wealth replaces whiteness as the axis of domination. The opening sentence "*Nigeria was essentially the United States with a minority of rich people in place of white people*" performs discursive equivalence and aligns class privilege in Nigeria with racial privilege in the U.S. "*Minority of rich people*" vs. "*white people*" both serve as dominant groups, positioned above others. This lexical substitution ("*in place of*") highlights that oppression is transferable though its surface markers differ, its ideological structure remains.

*"Those of us who left had expectations that there were more opportunities elsewhere... we could return with a greater one."* Here, the narrator positions Nigerian immigrants as beneficiaries of privilege; a subtle form of in-group bias. The line "*Not only did we arrive in America with some advantage*" places Africans in the position of the advantaged. In America they occupy a higher position than the African Americans and are considered superior. "*Yet, here*

*I was, coming to the understanding that African Americans were in a situation similar to mine in Nigeria.*” This moment bridges the divide. The comparative structure (“*similar to mine*”) shows polarization between Nigerians and African Americans. In America, poor Africans are no longer the minority, instead they have shifted to a higher class. African Americans now occupy the minority positions which lower income earners from Africa previously held in the country. As such, the two are in different groups. Lukmon belongs to the “in-group” characterised by his use of “we”. Here, they are the advantages and privileged. In contrast, the “out-group” consists of African Americans who are the disadvantaged, exploited and minority. At the same time, it exposes how othering is context-dependent: In Nigeria, the poor majority are “others” to the rich elite. In America, African Americans are “others” to white hegemony.

#### **Excerpt 25**

Her inability to express herself well on issues of race was similar to Ismail’s, *but she wasn’t angry about being black. She just wanted what the white nurses at work had—a steady income and all the goodness it brought, without ever having to deal with being black.* (186)

In this excerpt, the difference between the Africans and the American’s is clearly displayed. “*She just wanted what the white nurses at work had — a steady income and all the goodness it brought, without ever having to deal with being black.*” This sentence explicitly draws a contrastive relationship:

White nurses are represented as stable, wealthy, comfortable (“steady income,” “goodness”). Being black is presented as a burden, limitation, social disadvantage “*Deal with being black*”. This binary construction is the essence of ideological polarization. Whiteness is represented as the normative position of privilege, while blackness becomes the marked identity,

tied to struggle. The phrase “*without ever having to deal with being black*” implies that blackness is an obstacle or a burden, something that must be “dealt with”. This phrasing performs othering, a key act in polarization. Whiteness is now the unmarked, invisible norm (no need to “deal with it”) while Blackness is a marked, problematic identity constantly negotiated and explained. The excerpt critiques how racism shapes identity through economic aspiration. Wanting “*a steady income*” is a reasonable goal, but the desire to obtain it “*without dealing with being black*” reveals that economic security and racial identity are unequally distributed and that assimilation into whiteness appears to be the path to comfort. The woman’s longing for the “*goodness*” associated with whiteness reinforces the power of white dominance. Her lack of “*anger*” indicates how ideology works, not through overt coercion, but through shaping what people desire and consider possible.

With this excerpt, the two racial identities are positioned into opposing sides (“*White nurses*” vs. “*being black*”). Here, it constructs whiteness as the norm, with positive attributes associated with it (“*Steady income*” and “*goodness*”). Contrarily, Black identity is represented as a challenge and burdensome (“*Without having to deal with being black*”) The excerpt links material well-being to racial privilege and naturalizes racial inequality. The character's lack of anger reflects emotional conformity, ideological internalization and acceptance.

### **3.4 Conclusion**

Through Fairclough’s concepts of ideological polarization and naturalization, *The Bad Immigrant* emerges as a critique of the discursive systems that shape race, class, and identity. Atta’s portrayal of African immigrants in the Western world exposes how linguistic choices reproduce unequal power relations. Her characters’ struggles to define themselves within these hierarchies demonstrate how language can both reinforce and challenge ideology. Ultimately,

Atta's novel affirms Fairclough's view that discourse is never neutral; it is a social practice through which individuals negotiate power, identity, and the possibility of change.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### CONCLUSION

This study set out to analyse the linguistic strategies employed in Sefi Atta's *The Bad Immigrant* (2021) in order to understand how language is used to construct social structures and influence power relations. The study strove to examine the ideologies present in the novel, identify the discursive strategies used by different actors and explore how language is used to frame positions and analyse the power dynamics at play in the novel. The research employs a qualitative approach, particularly Fairclough's Social-critical approach in discourse analysis to examine the novel.

This research has demonstrated that language and discourse play a vital role in constructing and sustaining social inequalities, such as racism and marginalization, particularly among Nigerian immigrants in the United States. By applying discursive strategies such as framing and social positioning, we reveal how Atta's characters negotiate systemic barriers. The study shows that racism shapes the identities, aspirations, and interactions of immigrants in the diaspora.

The findings of this research show that Nigerian immigrants in the United States occupy complex positions within a racialized and class-based hierarchy. While they are victims of systemic racism, they also, at times, reproduce and reinforce intra-Black hierarchies and class-based exclusions. Through discursive strategies like evaluation, ideological polarization and naturalization, it is revealed how through discourse and interaction, these characters sometimes unconsciously internalize societal structures that privilege certain groups over others, thereby reproducing the same prejudices they experience. This highlights the subtle ways in which

systemic oppression influences both self-perception and social relations among marginalized groups.

Furthermore, this study has shown that Atta's *The Bad Immigrant* does not simply portray African immigrants as passive victims but as active agents navigating a multifaceted area of prejudice. Their use of language, behaviour, and social choices reflects adaptive strategies for survival within a society structured by inequality. The text, therefore, becomes a site where broader social dynamics; race, class, identity, and belonging are addressed.

In essence, this research contributes to the discourse on intersectionality by offering a balanced critique of prejudice as a multi-layered force that operates both externally and internally. It underscores that discrimination is not only performed by dominant racial groups but can also manifest within marginalized communities themselves. Through this portrayal, Sefi Atta's novel encourages readers to confront the complexities of identity formation and social mobility within transnational spaces.

Ultimately, *The Bad Immigrant* serves as a mirror reflecting how historical and systemic inequalities continue to shape the immigrant experience. The study concludes that understanding the intersection between racism and classism requires attention to both linguistic practices and social contexts, as these elements jointly construct the lived realities of immigrants. By analysing the discursive strategies employed in the novel, the importance of language in constructing and reinforcing social identities and intra-black hierarchies is fully represented. Thus, Atta's work invites ongoing dialogue about how individuals and societies might move toward more equitable and inclusive forms of coexistence.

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