

## The Heuristics of Racial Enculturation: Fraternal Nervousness between African Immigrants and African Americans

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### Abstract

Whereas a lot has already been written about the various manifestations, representations and effects (and other constellations of these three) of race and racism, very little has been said, particularly in literary studies, about how Africans who come to the United States navigate the racial space. This paper presumes that continental Africans experience race differently from African-Americans, and that this experiential and notional difference complicates relations between these two groups. African immigrants *learn* to live black in a matured racial space – the United States – that does not differentiate blackness. It is this *learning to live black* and *becoming black* that I call racial enculturation. In thinking through this problem, this paper will contrast Chimamanda Adichie's *Americanah* with Ta-Nehisi Coates' *Between the World and Me* to unearth the divergences in their accountings of racial encounters. To circumvent the theoretical dearth in communicating this difference, I posit a taxonomy of enculturation anxieties with four nodes: racial levelling, fraternal nervousness, etiquette and political will. These four nodes will be the lens with which to see race from the African immigrants' viewpoint and how it destabilizes what we have always known about race from the African American and white perspective. The paper will further subsume (or perhaps situate) these enculturation anxieties in the grander narratives of all migratory nostalgia, what Ato Quayson pithily captures thus: "the place that one finds oneself in is constantly calling up evidence of some elsewhere, the place that was departed from, or as often happens, a utopia erected in place of the location of departure" so that we empathise with this nervous differentiating as an exigency engendered by the sojourner mentality that haunts all migratory experience.