

Staging Afropolitans' Selfhood in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's Americanah

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Abstract: Among many emerging Afropolitan authors who write about and for Africa through sharing their own life experiences out of and in Africa is the distinctive novelist Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, who re-opens the debate around African immigrant identities in her award-winning novel "Americanah" (2013). Thus, the aim of this study is to trace the many components that lead to identity formation and the ways in which the Afropolitans fashion their selfhood as presented in Adichie's "Americanah." In this novel, Adichie challenges the Whites and forces dramatic debates on selfhood as well as on discomfiting and unpalatable issues of racism and colonialism. Therefore, and based on postcolonial theory and Afropolitanism, the study displays a multifaceted vision of the protagonists' experience by going full circle and by returning to their home country, as well as their transformation through such experience.

The main theme of the book is the selfhood of Afropolitans, as embodied by two immigrants, Ifemelu and Obinze, who flee Nigeria in search of a better life in the West, the United States, and Great Britain. But racial prejudice in Western countries makes them feel like "others," which makes them feel like they don't belong and affects their decision to go back. This investigation shows how the characters' struggles are caused by complex kinds of gender, race, and class repression that are recurrent throughout the diaspora and manifest as racism, stereotyping, identity alteration, etc. Ifemelu, the protagonist of the main novel, writes an anonymous blog that offers cultural commentary on racial relations in America from the perspective of an African immigrant. Ifemelu boldly expresses her support for African Americans via her blog, but she also reveals how common white Americans believe that all Afropolitans—regardless of their country of birth—share a common identity of cultural oppression.

Lastly, the study highlights the various aspects of Afropolitans' lives that are influenced by their skin tone or place of birth. The results show that the identities of the heroes are portrayed as intricate, multifaceted identities created by crossing international borders. The study also finds that there are similarities in the experiences of Nigerian immigrants with racism, stereotyping, and identity transition. The halfhearted affair shows that Ifemelu and Obinze get demoted while trying to find work in America. In Nigeria, the occupations they can afford are either small-scale or low-status positions that fall below their qualifications. Despite having higher degrees, they work as taxi drivers with master's degrees, toilet cleaners with bachelor's degrees in Obinze's case, or waiters or nannies in Ifemelu's case. Migration, irrespective of their standing in Nigeria prior to their emigration, treats Nigerian immigrants as second-class citizens.

Key words: Afropolitanism, Americanah, Ngozi Adichie, Post-colonial theory, Racism, Selfhood.

Introduction

Among many emerging Afropolitan authors who write about and for Africa through sharing their own life experiences out of and in Africa is the distinctive novelist Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, who re-opens the debate around African immigrant identities in her award-winning novel "Americanah" (2013). Thus, the aim of this study is to trace the many components that lead to identity formation and the ways in which the Afropolitans fashion their selfhood as presented in Adichie's "Americanah." In this novel, Adichie challenges the Whites and forces dramatic debates on selfhood as well as on discomfiting and unpalatable issues of racism and colonialism. Therefore, and based on postcolonial theory and Afropolitanism, the study displays a multifaceted vision of the protagonists' experience by going full circle and by returning to their home country, as well as their transformation through such experience.

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Among the most influential contemporary books, Adichie's "Americanah" follows the protagonists, Ifemelu and Obinze, through a variety of experiences, including emigration, hardship, love, separation, and reunion. In addition to telling the story of the two main characters' love affair, the book focusses on contemporary problems that African immigrants in the United States and Great Britain face, such as migration, displacement, racism, and identity. It's a story about the people that illuminate the postcolonial identity and reality of the African American community in the West. Adejare (2018) highlights that the audience is not only exposed to the self-realization of Afropolitans, Ifemelu, Obinze, and other African migrants in the West, but they are also made aware of issues related to strangeness, displacement, transculturation, and the marginalisation of African migrants. The natural environment that we have colonized—the milieu—does have a significant impact on our conception of the world, our identities, and our bodily, psychological, and emotional well-being (Omotayo, 2019, p. 22).

The novel explores areas for the selfhood where identity and distinction are illuminated, while simultaneously transcending the local and drowning the nature of cultural development in the cause of migration. This article describes how Africans, and notably Nigerian emigrants, attempt to reclaim a space for selfhood where migrant culture is marginalised by affirming, staging, and defining identity.

One major point of contention in the discussion around "Americanah" is the text's discourse, which emphasises immigration and the similarities between Europe and America (Krishnamurthy, 2013, p.

27). The novel, which takes place across three continents, is informed by the novelist's unusual experiences migrating and defines New Intercontinental Writing. The characters' migration home helps to restore the shabby economics and image of the Afropolitan community (Selasi, 2005, p. 3). Obinze goes home, succeeds in his real estate venture, and is forcibly returned to Nigeria from Great Britain for exceeding the duration of his visa. Ifemelu returns to Nigeria and reintegrates into society in spite of her fame as a blogger in the United States. Apart from the reunion of Ifemelu and Obinze, there's the prolonged recuperation of certain Africans who were displaced from their native land by the return migration.

2. Literature Review

Literature is oversupplied with theoretical essays on race and racism in modern America and Europe. These essays analytically examine the racial tension in the various countries with a huge multi-racial and multicultural presence and postulate different strategies for equal cultural recognition and racial justice. Adichie's novel *Americanah* has been studied from different theoretical and critical perspectives, such as problems associated with cross-border migration, racism, representation of female African immigrant experience, and stylistic approach.

The subject focus of contemporary African immigrant writing has also recently extended beyond borders to include selfhood, race, and culture in the process of redefining the African immigrant identity. Afropolitans, a new class of contemporary and outward-looking African immigrants, have emerged as a result of the urgency with which the new wave of African immigrants in America and Europe must define their identities. "Afropolitan is a term developed from the name Africa and the antiquated Greek word πολίτης, signifying 'resident'. It is an endeavour to rethink African marvels by putting accentuation on standard residents' encounters in Africa. Afropolitanism is like the more established Panafricanism belief system. In any case, it characterises being "African" in expressly mainland-wide and multiracial terms and rejects all claims to victimhood. (Selasi, 2005, p. 38). Adichie's *Americanah* typifies such a literary effort at restructuring the newly staged selfhood of Afropolitan identity and providing a literary voice for Afropolitan sentiment. In staging selfhood, Adichie's *Americanah* presents male and female characters that encounter challenges in the West and are forced into a state of identity transformation. Some notable literature in Adichie's *Americanah*, particularly Afropolitan in terms of identity, race, racism, and cultures, is succinct as follows:

In "Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's 'Ameri(2013)," Sabo (2013) evaluates and offers a thorough critique of the novel's *Americanah*. In his opinion, Chimamanda does a fantastic job of addressing racial issues in her blog articles. He finds her account of London to be ambiguous, nevertheless, and concludes that this suggests that she is unfamiliar with the city. He says the following about the plot: Adichie's inclination for overemphasising often betrays her abundant storytelling abilities, leading to the delicate handling of events and characterisations being summarised, sometimes with a complete paragraph (p. 1).

Beason (2013) notes that *Americanah* is enlightening when it comes to the experience of immigrants in other countries in "Americanah: Africans Strive to Become Americans." The author points out that the story goes to considerable measures to help immigrants cope with the difficult social, political, and economic circumstances in foreign countries. Beason states: "Americanah" is a story about the heartbreaking process of figuring out a new place and the extent one will go to, both physically and emotionally, in order to feel complete again. It is both urgently intimate and academically wide. (, page 2)

Beason's account is relevant, but it does not limit the scope of this study, since although the study focusses on identity, it also explores how characters defy the oppressive and discriminatory codes that Ifemelu and Obinze saw in America and Britain in addition to demonstrating the need for self-assertion.

In her analysis of "The Elusive Search for the American Dream," Muchiri (2013) highlights the challenges encountered by immigrants in America and highlights the steadfast commitment of Ifemelu and Obinze. The couple had broken up and were now heading in different directions. Additionally, *Americanah* is a love story that goes beyond the borders of America, Europe, and

Africa, she explains further. Even though there are more chances in the West, the writer argues that one's native country is better than foreign lands. The eventual reunion between Ifemelu and Obinze, after years of separation, is a symbolic reunion that supports this claim. Third page (

This study can benefit from Muchiri's review in understanding Adichie's perspective better. Adichie achieves this by comparing and contrasting the ways in which Ifemelu and Obinze are portrayed as immigrants to the United States and Britain, respectively.

Some of the most innovative insights about *Americanah's* tale have come from studies that centre on ethnicity and identity. These works add to the growing body of literature on the topic of borders by shedding light on the transnational investigation of hybrid identities and diasporic experiences. Racism, exile, and American identity are hotly debated topics in the United States today, and Adichie's novel is a key part of that conversation. The reality that Nigeria is a part of a more and more globalised world is really acknowledged throughout Adichie's work. To be "Black" means to be a racist in the United States.

Though Adichie's *Americanah* has been a talked-about work, to date, none of those studies have considered how this novel is related to African immigrants' proud avowal of their identity under the fears of postcolonial experiences. Additionally there is an unfilled gap in relation to African immigrants' selfhood which is torn between adaptation and acculturation processes in a neo-colonial space.

3. Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie

The Nigerian capital and birthplace of Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, Enugu, was the site of her birth on September 15, 1977. Coming from an Igbo family, she is the sixth child of Grace Ifeoma and James Nwoye. Her parents were pioneers at the University of Nigeria Nsukka in Enugu State; her mom was the registrar and her dad was a statistics professor.

While in Nsukka, Adichie completed her secondary school at the University of Nigeria Secondary School. She spent another year and a half at the University of Nigeria Nsukka, where she pursued degrees in pharmacy and medicine. Adichie, like *Americanah's* protagonist, fled Nigeria when she was nineteen years old to get a degree in communication from Drexel University in Philadelphia. After that, in 2001, she received a summa cum laude degree in communication and political science from Eastern Connecticut State University. In Baltimore, she earned a master's degree in creative writing from Johns Hopkins University. In October 2003, her first book, *Purple Hibiscus*, was published. The book was shortlisted for the Orange Prize for Fiction in 2004 and went on to win the Commonwealth Writers Prize for First Book in 2005. *Half of a Yellow Sun*, her second novel, was published in the United States in August 2006. Also published in Nigeria was the book. She earned a Master of Arts degree in African Studies from Yale in 2008. She was awarded a fellowship by Harvard University's Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study. A lot of thought and discussion has gone into Adichie's works by critics. *Americanah*, her 2013 third novel, was selected for the New York Times Ten Best Books of the Year list, the National Book Critics Circle Award for fiction, and the 2013 Heartland Prize for fiction from the Chicago Tribune.

Like many of her peers, she has become entangled in the current wave of migration. Adichie was sent into the centre to pursue her studies, and it was there that her writing career took off. Despite her denial of the name, she falls neatly into Selasi's (2005) Afropolitan categorisation. She claims repeatedly that the inspiration for her works comes from her early life and experiences: "[Her] work gave [her] permission to write [her] own stories." (Adichie, "The Danger..."). Her writings are about her country Nigeria and addressed to her Nigerian audience. She has produced stories that her people can be identified with and engaged the Western audiences as well to give a public picture about the joys and hardships an African immigrant or a Native from Nigeria can face. Through *Americanah*, Adichie provides her readers with a story that mirrors her own life experience. Consequently, the novel concentrates on the influence of the experience of immigration from Nigeria, being one of the Western African countries, on identity construction and selfhood.

4. Americanah (2013)

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie penned her third book, *Americanah*, in 2013. "Americanah" is a phrase used to describe a new identity that is bestowed upon its bearer after years of traumatic identity struggles in a society that is adamantly unaware that there are other languages, cultures, and skin tones besides those prescribed by the white standard. It makes it possible to have a cross-cultural discussion on what it means to be African Black and Black in America.

The term "Americanah" is not only a book title; in Nigeria, it also denotes a person who has crossed international borders (Adejare, 2018, p. 4). The term "Americanah" is a tongue-in-cheek term used to mock Nigerian immigrants to the United States who have been impacted by American society to the point where they are unable to fully reintegrate into their home culture. Adichie added a new word to Nigerian literature, "Americanah." While "Americanah" clearly bears the markings of hybridity coming from the sojourn in another country, particularly the US, the term "been-to" sounds neutral and indicates the displacement from one country to another.

Literary experts have had a very large and subject diverse discussion about *Americanah*. As may be expected, the story has prompted a variety of readings in the scholarly fields of literature, history, and sociology. It is one of Adichie's literary devices for expressing her African identity as a Western immigrant (Thurman, 2020, p. 11). According to Guarracino (2014), on page 23, the novel's interpretation as a societal commentary presents a critical attitude that stylises Adichie's portrayal of Ifemelu, the character in her work, as a blogger, as a way for the author to impose her will. In a similar vein, Baldomir (2014) has characterised the plot of *Americanah* as "an excuse for the venting of opinions" (p. 23). Baldomir believes that the thoughts conveyed in the text are significantly more credible than the narrative.

Americanah is regarded as an Afropolitan novel since it depicts the life of a new generation of African immigrants to the United States. Therefore, it focuses on the central themes of Afropolitanism such as African bond and belonging, selfhood, and identity (re)formation. It raises a question: where are you from? which is a benchmark notion for the Afropolitan. Further, it asks questions about the place of birth and the place of residence. In "Bye-Bye, Babar", Selasi remarks three dimensions that must be crafted in Afropolitan identity: national, racial, and cultural. Most of the leading characters of the novel are portrayed as examples of Afropolitans' identity problems. Clark (2013, p. 34-35) describes identity problems in this novel as follows:

In her third book, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie explores a number of issues, including what is genuine and what is fake, the number of historical and cultural layers that go into creating a national, racial, or personal identity, and how dependent that identity is on its immediate environment"

5. Race, Racism, and Immigration in the United State of America

Through her life experience as black who spent a span of her life in the United States, Adichie makes a clear declaration that there are still race and racism in nowadays America in this novel. So, race and racism are explored as socio-cultural constructs in this study with reference to the significance of immigration, its effects and consequences in (re)shaping a Afropolitan's selfhood. Racial discrimination is a common phenomenon experienced by Nigerian immigrants abroad. America is a country where racism is at its peak. It also cannot accommodate a black president. Given that its consequences are felt by a wide range of racial and ethnic groups, including immigrant minorities, its existence demonstrates that race in America is, in fact, a sociohistorical construct. Ifemelu says in the book: "I came from a place where race was not a problem; I did not consider myself a black person and I only became black when I came to America" (Adichie, 2013, p.290). Ifemelu is from Nigeria, where race is not taken into consideration while determining an operating category. However, socioeconomic class is. In a blog post titled "To My Fellow Non-American Blacks:" she describes how she came to understand what it meant to be black in the United States. The phrase "In America, You Are Black, Baby" says what follows:

Dear Non-American Black, you choose to become black when you decide to immigrate to the United States. Put an end to the argument. Give up identifying as Ghanaian or Jamaican. America doesn't

give a damn. What if, in your nation, you weren't considered "black"? You've arrived in America. Everyone has their own "initiation" moment into the Society of Former Negroes. I asked to present a black perspective in an undergrad class, but I had no notion what a black perspective was. In other words, I simply made stuff up (Adichie, 2013, p. 220).

Though the article is written in a mocking and sarcastic manner, it reveals a lot of prejudices about black Americans that those who were not born or reared here are generally unaware of (Landry, 2018, p. 53). Race is sociology, not biology, according to Ifemelu. Race is a phenotype, not a gene. Racism is a problem because it is based on appearance, which makes race important. Not about your blood type. Adichie (2013) states on page 337, "It's about the colour of your skin, the curve of your nose, and the curl of your hair.

In Americanah, racism is shown as taking the form of institutional and cultural racism. Stereotypes about Africa and Africans aid in its deeper understanding. Language use is another way that immigrants' prejudices towards African women in the West may be evident. Ifemelu experiences racism from white American women because of her connection with Curt, a white man. Curt introduces her to these women as his girlfriend, and they are astonished. "A surprise that some of them shielded and some of them did not, and in their expression was the query "why her?" Ifemelu claims that they gazed at her in shock. According to Adichie (2013), on page 290, these white female characters treat Ifemelu unfairly, giving the impression that they are better than black women. Ifemelu describes "their faces clouded with the look of people confronting a great tribal loss" (Adichie, 2013, p.290) because the concept is based on the erroneous belief that she is an undeserving black lady of a white man.

The only suggestion I have is... Straighten your hair and get rid of the braids. Though it matters, nobody says anything like this. It is our desire that you get hired (Albert & Raja, 2017, p.202). Curt, Ifemelu's white lover, notices that she has replaced her braids with straighter hair and asks her why. He tells her that her hair was "gorgeous" in braids and that it was "even more gorgeous, so full and cool" in its natural state. Moreover, Ifemelu affirms:

I should try to maintain a businesslike appearance for the interview; ideally, my hair would be straight, but if I must wear it curly, it should be white, loose, or—worst of all—spiral—never kinky (Adichie, 2013, p.204). If I were going for a job as a jazz band's backup vocalist, my long, flowing hair would be an asset.

Stereotyping and racism were combined in this hint. Ifemelu's claim that only white people with loose, spiral, or curly hair types are accepted highlights the statement's discriminatory undertones. Here, having kinky hair denotes exclusion while being white signifies acceptance. African hair, which is regarded as coarse and challenging to handle, is typified by kinky hair. The female attendant refuses to serve Ifemelu when she goes to a beauty spa to have her eyebrows shaped, stating that "we don't do curly" (Adichie, 2013, p. 291). It is only when her white boyfriend shows up to mediate that the attendant "transforms into a solicitous coquette" and apologises, saying that "it was a misunderstanding" (Adichie, 2013, p. 292). The word "curly" in this context refers to black or African. In America, hair is also a contentious issue since it can be used as a tool for discrimination. Due to the colour of their hair, Nigerian women have been excluded from some chances. For instance, Auntie Uju has been informed that wearing her braids to a job interview will be viewed as unprofessional, so she had to take them out before going. Ifemelu finds this puzzling, wondering whether there aren't any doctors in America with braided hair. Since one is in a foreign nation and must follow certain requirements in order to succeed, Auntie Uju advises Ifemelu not to question this (Sharma, 2016, p.119). To attend a job interview, Ifemelu is compelled to undo her braids in another incident, and while getting her hair loosened, she burns herself.

Morgan, Curt's sister, disapproved of her brother Curt's connection with Ifemelu and never imagined the two of them being together. Additionally, Shan's disdain for Black people is evident in their talk. Ifemelu and Shan.

Adichie (2013) notes that while there is a subset of white men in our nation that are exclusive to dating black women, this practice is essentially a horrible fetish.

At the career fair, where Ifemelu is hoping to get hired, she encounters institutionalised racism. The opposite occurs, and she explains this by saying that the recruiters become uncommittal when they learn she is African American rather than American. Their primary concern, according to Nwanyanwu (2017), p. 201, is that they would have to "descend into the dark tunnel of immigration" if they employed her. This is a blatant sign that the female immigrant from Nigeria is put in danger if obtaining her documentation is thought to be a difficult task that isn't worthwhile. In this instance, the bureaucracy in question consistently makes sure that Black people are denied access to specific advantages. Furthermore, Ifemelu addresses the sensitive subject of institutionalised racism in her blog entries.

However, racism is about group power, and in America, white people hold that power. How? It's true that white people in affluent African areas are not treated poorly, and that white people are not refused bank loans or mortgages simply for being white. Additionally, white criminals are not given harsher penalties by black juries than black ones (Adichie, 2013, p. 327).

Americanah illuminates the identity problem that newly arrived Nigerians face. Due to their colour, they come across unfavourable stereotypes. Cristina Tomas, a receptionist at the international students office at Ifemelu University who assists international students, embodies the white caricature of Africans. She stops at every syllable when providing the directions. Because she overheard them speaking with an accent, Tomas is further convinced of the misconception that international students are illiterate in English. She informs Ifemelu, "I need you to fill out a couple of forms. Do you understand how to fill these out?" (Adichie, 2013, p. 133) as an example of this.

Even though this episode is quite funny, its ironic quality is demonstrated by Ifemelu's remarkable English fluency. Cristina conveys the idea that Whiteman's language is of a high calibre through her communication style. It is said that poverty and disease have overtaken Africa and that Africans are unable to speak English.

Racism is most prevalent in the United States of America. A black president cannot be accommodated by it either. Obama's race turns into a multifaceted racial issue that highlights the presidential candidate's sense of belonging. It calls into question Obama's skin tone and how that might affect his standing. Nathan, Paula, Pee, Ifemelu, and Blain's talk demonstrates this: "Whatever people think of Obama, it doesn't matter." Whether white Americans are prepared for a black president is the true question. stated Nathan. "I believe the country is not ready for a black president, but I am" (Adichie, 2013, p. 377). Furthermore, Ifemelu's blog posts regarding the president have drawn criticism, with one comment asking how a monkey could be president. Someone please shoot this guy in the back for us. Return him to the African bush. There's a reason the White House is called that—a black man will never reside there, dude (Adichie, 2013, p.404).

Characters like the carpet cleaner express such abject distaste for racism in Americanah when they see it in action. Ifemelu looks after a wealthy white family as a nanny. When he first meets her and she opens the door, he is "stifled when he saw her" because she is not "what he expected to see in this grand stone house with the white pillars." His features briefly flashed with surprise before solidifying into animosity. His "face sank into a grin" when she informed him that she wasn't the owner. She was also the assistance. The universe was put back in its proper order (Adichie, 2013, p.195). The carpet cleaner's presumptions regarding the correlation between gender and race—namely, that Black people are not meant to be superior to impoverished White people—are exposed in Ifemelu's conclusion.

6. The Influence of Colonialism in Nigeria

Nigeria has a history of tribal conflicts and colonial struggles, but race is not a factor because racial tensions have not affected the nation in the same way that they have other African nations, like South Africa (Onunkwo et al., 2019, p. 37). The development of Afropolitan identity and racial relations in the neo-colonial era are the main topics of Americanah. Ifemelu learns that race is a social construct in America and must adapt to racial expectations. In order for her to adjust to "being black" (McMann, 2018), she must learn how to recognise race in certain ways that she might not have known about otherwise.

In Nigeria, postcolonial cynicism has developed into an amazing, diverse intellectual reality characterised by a bumpy ride. Yohannes (2012, p. 13) identifies a few postcolonialist concerns that are steadfastly firm despite their diversity. These elements merely show how difficult it is to address any aspect of the colonial process without taking its causes and effects into account. These elements, in Yohannes' opinion:

consist of the emergence of new elites within sovereign states, frequently supported by neocolonial institutions; the creation of internal divides stemming from discrimination on the basis of race, language, or religion; and the ongoing unfair treatment of indigenous peoples in settler/invaser civilisations. (Page 14 of Yohannes, 2012)

Homi Bhabha, Gayatri Spivak, and Edward Said are important postcolonial theorists. Said contends that the West believes itself to be superior to the East in *Orientalism* (1978) (10). This reinforces unfavourable preconceptions about persons from the East. In her article "Can the Subaltern Speak?" (1988), Spivak introduces the term "subaltern" to refer to lower social classes. Those who are excluded from social and political activities are seen by her as marginalised (102). Bhabha describes the identity of the colonised in terms of the colonizer's culture in *The Location of Culture* (1994). Postcolonial theory, according to Yohannes (2012, p. 14), is all about discussing different kinds of experiences, such as migration, slavery, suppression, resistance, representation, difference, race, gender, and place. It also includes responses to the dominant discourse of imperial Europe, which included history, philosophy, and linguistics, and the fundamental acts of speaking and writing that made all of that possible. In *Americanah*, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie exposes the corruption, autocracy, migration, racism, unemployment, insecurity, and brain drain that have resulted from Nigeria's postcolonial cynical threat. These ideological forces, according to Chepkorir, "on the other hand, pressed the Colonised to internalise the Colonisers values and in other hand promoted the resistance of colonisers people against their oppressor, a resistance that is as old as Colonialism itself" (2014, p. 365). After centuries of suppression or neglect, most of the indigenous peoples' pre-colonial culture had faded into oblivion. As a result, many ex-colonials suffer from low self-esteem and a sense of estrangement from their own indigenous traditions, according to Hollertz. Postcolonial cynicism, she argues, stems from this. According to Hollertz, the colonists believed that only Anglo-European culture could be considered intellectual, civilised, or "meteoric." (2018, p. 366).

The colonised were indoctrinated to believe in British superiority and their own inferiority, while the colonisers viewed themselves as the centre of the universe. This led to the definition of native people as barbaric, primitive, or even underdeveloped.

Do-Espirito (2016) claims that a number of these individuals made an effort to emulate the colonisers as much as possible in terms of speech, mannerisms, and way of life; this practice is known as "mimicry" by postcolonial critics. This leads to internal conflicts because one feels trapped between two cultures, belonging to neither, and being imprisoned in a state of psychological limbo. According to Do-Espirito (2016), p. 36, this issue "results not merely from some individual psychological disorder but from the trauma of the cultural displacement with which one lives." This difficulty leads to an unstable sense of self.

The two characters, as adolescents, grow up in Nigeria during a complex and tense political climate, as the interpretation of Ifemelu's novel has highlighted. The real economic crisis, which peaked in the 1990s and forced many young, skilled, and well-off people to flee their country in search of better employment prospects, is reflected in the fictional setting of *Americanah*. This resulted in a shortage of skilled professionals in the Nigerian economy (Basu, 2012, p. 23). Ifemelu and Obinze, in particular, suffer from a challenging financial condition while they are in Nigeria. Not only is Obinze's last year of school severely interrupted, but his family must save money because his mother is not employed by the government. Because of this, postcolonial cynicism in Nigeria and throughout Africa has persisted in African creative authors' works, with the threat continuing to be a square peg in a round hole.

7. Afropolitan View of Home and Identity

What makes Adichie's *Americanah* a distinctive work is its touch on the fact that identity and home are inescapably interconnected. Adichie expounds that identity shapes a sense of home. The Afropolitans find their identity formation at home. Their view of a home is referred to as a place of peace in terms of all ramifications, including physical and mental. Home is a place of origin as well as a locality's lived experience (Landry, 2018, p. 96). As a result, home is characterised as both the site of one's birth and the place of one's daily existence. Furthermore, Murphy (2017, p. 33) emphasises that being Afropolitan means being able to "make one's home than on a fixation to a homeland" and does not view returning as merely returning to one's own place.

The characters in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah* started to experience unhomeliness while at a place they could boldly call home (Adejare, 2018, p.8). At a point, this 'home' felt like an alien homestead and the individuals felt like outsiders or not even part of the home (Landry, 2018, p.14). The home is perceived to be a place of stable identity, holds a sense of belonging (Ucham & Kangira, 2015, p.43).

Adichie's *Americanah* portrays characters that are uncomfortable with the situation of their country. Ifemelu and Obinze immigrate to America and the United Kingdom to seek fortunes, employment, and education, which they felt, could not be achieved in their home country due to the poor educational and economic system operating in the country. They feel that their home country is not like home to them. Obinze imagined himself a part of America all due to the fact that in his home country Nigeria, he finds nothing that makes it feel like home to him. He had a kind of feeling that his home is elsewhere, a home where his dreams can be achieved. Although he craved life in America, he later found himself in England where he hoped to create a sense of home for himself by being a legal immigrant.

Moreover, back in Nigeria after his stay in England, Obinze's home and family, which he formed with Kosi his wife really did not feel like home since Ifemelu's return to Nigeria. He found resonance in Ifemelu's home and arms. He expressed his feelings to Ifemelu thus;

'You know what I have felt for so long? As if I was waiting to be happy' (Adichie, 2013, p.447).

Okolocha (2016) contends that "a place where one is psychologically connected to one's physical reality, is, undeniably, better than a comfortable but faceless existence in which one's identity is problematic and cultural space is hard to find." It is home. (161). The home is meant to be a place that brings happiness, just a mere thought of it gladdens the heart, but for Obinze, his stay with Kosi in their supposed 'home' makes him feel a kind of sensation that the home is not really, where his heart belongs. It got to a point that he wanted to divorce Kosi so he could be with Ifemelu. All this is in a bid to tackle this unhomely feeling, which he felt in his own home.

Ifemelu, instead, left Nigeria for America; there she built a life and a home for herself. She had American boyfriends and friends who she related so much with, to an extent she started to see herself as part of America. She admired the American weather and so many aspects of nature there. She did, however, eventually come to believe that "there was something wrong with her." She was not sure what was wrong with her, but it was something. She experienced restlessness, a kind of hunger, and a lack of self-awareness. The feeling that something is out of her reach (Adichie, 2013, p.154). A bleakness that brought with it "amorphous longings, shapeless desires, brief imaginary glints of other lives she could be living that over the months melded into a piercing homesickness" perplexed her, even though she "had a fellowship at Princeton and a relationship with Blaine." (Adichie, 2013, p.155). She felt a sensation that America is not really home to her hence she made up her mind to go back to Nigeria.

The Aunty Uju's son, Dike, had his own share of these unhomely feeling because he grew up in America, he took it as his home because it is the environment with which he is familiar with. But at a point, due to the discrimination meted out on him mostly in school because of his skin color, he began to feel like an outcast in American society. There came a time when he was denied sunscreen and that made him feel the wind of estrangement from his society and peers. He felt cast away because

he is black. He felt that since the home and society in which he grew up and is familiar with rejected him, then there is no point in living thus he attempted suicide, but was lucky to survive. America did not give him that sense of home, which he longed to feel.

Adichie's book contextualises history and memory as trauma and the difficulty faced by emigrants in redefining their identities in new places when it comes to identifying in a foreign country. With a feeling of agony, one recalls the picture of traumatised immigrants detained in UK rehabilitation centres as they await deportation, as portrayed by Obinze:

He was shown into a room with dejected bunk beds pressed up against the walls. There were already three men present. A Djiboutian individual uttered few words, lying motionless and gazing up at the ceiling as if he was reliving his steps to arrive to the Manchester Airport detention facility. There were two Nigerians. The younger one stood up in bed and cracked his fingers nonstop. The elder one talked nonstop while pacing the tiny space (Adichie, 2013, p. 322).

Ginika, a lady of mixed race and Ifemelu's friend, is the first to grasp the nuances of her multi-colored American identity. With a reminiscence of her early experiences, Ginika told her friend, "I didn't know I was supposed to have issues until I came to America," as they drove Ifemelu to Wellson Campus. If you want to raise a child of mixed race in an ideal world, Nigeria is it (Americanah, 2013, p.146). This, like so many other matters of identification, is best left to the discretion of the individual rather than to the judgement of impartial third parties. In order to register for insurance and obtain work, Ifemelu is often made to hide or deny her identity, while Obinze is made to give up his identification in England and go by the name Vincent. To apply for jobs, Ifemelu must change her name to Ngozi Okonkwo, the name that Auntie Uju found for her, so she can be officially recognised. When Ifemelu's new name slipped her mind during an interview, she recounted the ordeal to her rebellious friend Ginika:

A more straightforward explanation would have been to mention that Ifemelu is your woodland name, Ngozi is your tribal name, and a third name is your spiritual name. Any and any false information about Africa will be accepted by them. Adichie (2013), page 154.

Upon receiving her credit card pre-approval, Ifemelu is relieved to see that her name has been properly acknowledged. The benefits of migrating are becoming apparent. Because Ifemelu was afraid she would lose her identity if she adopted an American accent, she "decided to stop faking an American accent" (Adichie, 2013, p.204) so that she might regain it. Because it was "a pitch of voice and a way of being that was not hers," she came to the realisation that the accent she had adopted and used for an excessive amount of time on the day she met Cristina Tomas "had left in its wake a vast echoing space" (Adichie, 2013, p.205). Simultaneously with this turning point in Ifemelu's journey towards reclaiming her identity, she started seeing Mr. Blaine, her African American boyfriend—"a descendant of the Black men and women who had been in America for hundreds of years". (Adichie, 2013, p.207).

8. Re-Appropriation of Selfhood in Achidie's *Americanah*

Selfhood constitutes one's individuality, the state of having an individual or distinct identity or eccentric. In *Americanah*, Adichie uncovers that the best way to secure and preserve their existence as Afropolitans is to establish a sense of selfhood. Ifemelu decides not to identify as a "American" and instead will go by "Americanah" when she gets back to Nigeria. According to Koziel (2015), "the term Americanah is an identity term that is premised on a person's previous experience in America" (p.3) in Nigerian usage. The American accent of the speaker is self-evident. Whereas "American" is the identity denoting rootedness in America, "Americanah" represents an affinity to America without having substantial roots in it.

Adichie presents a first in African literature with the use of this brand-new term, Americanah. The term that has been used thus far is "the been-to." "Been-to" has been prominently included in African (written) literature since its inception. This phrase can also refer to an African who migrates, that is, an African who travels to Europe, usually in search of employment or education, and then returns to Africa.

To illustrate the intricacy of identity, which is always shifting based on location and situation, Adichie uses the character of Alma in *Americanah*: "If Ifemelu had met Alma in Lagos, she would have thought of her as white, but she would learn that Alma was Hispanic, an American category that was, confusingly, both an ethnicity and a race." (Page 1948 of Adichie, 2013). Identity in terms of selfhood is shown here as something that is bestowed by the community in which one lives: Alma would be perceived as white by Lagos residents, but would be mistaken for Hispanic by Americans. She cannot force any community to accept an identity that she has chosen or created.

Additionally, Adichie illustrates the reappropriation of selfhood by portraying Ifemelu as a person who is continuously on the go and who enjoys "driving herself because the roads were empty" (Adichie, 2013, p. 7410). This helps the readers see Ifemelu as a migrant whose identity or selfhood fluctuates. Multiple identities emerge as a result of the relocation. Thus, Adichie portrays having numerous identities as inevitable.

Even more, Aunt Uju believes that adjusting to life in America entails balancing one's actual self with a foreign identity. In the grocery store, Aunt Uju pretends to be an American woman in order to chastise her son Dike. The goal here is to make an impression on the white counter girl. Ifemelu characterises the recently acquired accent as "...a nasal, sliding accent she used when speaking to white Americans, in their presence, and in their ears." Adichie (2013), p. 108: "Pooh-reet-back."

Importantly, Obinze's internal conflict over his identification as a self and the external barriers to his ability to be represented in politics and the judicial system define his time in London. He is aware that his only option for survival is to make self-compromises, such as getting married to an unknown person, adopting a false identity, or taking on unpleasant and menial tasks like cleaning toilets (Dina, 2017, p. 21).

8.1. Ifemelu's Immigration from Nigeria to the USA and Back

At the novel begins, Adichie describes Ifemelu as a character who understands the differences between the minority and the mainstream cultures. She has to follow one culture. Therefore, she migrates from her country of origin, Nigerians fleeing their own country in pursuit of a better life in the USA. After being awarded a scholarship, Ifemelu departs from Nigeria for America in pursuit of a better education and more favourable social circumstances. Given that Nigeria was then under a military dictatorship and that political "strikes were common [in universities]," Ifemelu's mother wanted her to "prosper in America" (Adichie, 2013, p. 77). Ifemelu moved closer to America while maintaining her African culture, but circumstances compelled her to accept American culture. Because assimilating into foreign cultures is the only way to fit in, African culture is being lost. Ifemelu has had to deal with race as a determining factor in her treatment ever since she arrived in America. The observations she makes, which point to people who are straddling two cultures, confound her. This is evident in names, language, and way of life. She met her Aunt Uju and was astonished to learn that, although she was a true example of an Igbo woman in Nigeria, her experience in America had entirely changed her. When she hears her aunt pronounce her name incorrectly on the phone—yoo-joo rather than oo-joo—she is taken aback (Onunkwo, 2019, p.9).

As the concept of home expands, the act of returning is not a straightforward journey back to the original homeland. For those who have assimilated into their new surroundings and feel a sense of belonging in their everyday lives, the idea of returning may hold no significance. The attachment to a place is closely tied to meaningful personal connections, and therefore, returning is only possible for those who maintain strong ties and inclinations towards their land of origin (Adejare, 2018, p.43). Ifemelu and Obinze experience a feeling of displacement, which engenders a sense of not belonging. To overcome this, they reconnect with their African roots, embracing their Nigerian heritage and expressing their sense of belonging to their motherland. For instance, Ifemelu begins to embrace her African identity by refraining from chemically relaxing her hair. One day, she looks at herself in the mirror, runs her fingers through her dense, spongy, and glorious hair, and realizes that she cannot imagine it any other way. In that moment, she falls in love with her natural hair (Adichie, 2013, p.167). From then on, she starts braiding her hair in traditional African styles. Additionally, she decides to stop feigning an American accent, symbolizing her rejection of American culture (Adichie,

2013, p.35). Eventually, she chooses to return to Nigeria, expressing to Dike that he could visit her there (Adichie, 2013, p.292). Despite the passage of time, a traumatic event from her past continues to haunt Ifemelu even after her return to Nigeria.

8.2. Obinze's Immigration from Nigeria to the UK and Back

In a similar manner to Ifemelu, Obinze migrates from his country of origin Nigeria to the UK in search of a job, new home, and better life. Obinze also faces difficult circumstances since, following his graduation, he leaves Nigeria in search of employment and better prospects in London—things that are rapidly disappearing in his home nation. His experience is different from that of the female characters, though, because Obinze first enters London with a temporary visa, which expires and makes him an illegal immigrant in reality and makes him invisible to the rest of society. Obinze works as a security guard when he initially arrives in England.

Obinze, a resident of London, battles to obtain the acknowledgement required to be given appropriate social and political considerations. His statelessness, inability to obtain a visa, and undocumented status deny him not only employment opportunities and financial security, but also push him to the periphery of ethical visibility. "The Black man possesses two dimensions: one with his fellow Blacks, and the other with the Whites," claims Fanon (2008). When it comes to another black man, a black man acts differently than it does with a white man (1). Black inadequacy and white superiority are the products of colonialism. As he watches people go by him in a London tube station, Obinze muses on his situation: "These people walked so quickly, as though they had an urgent destination, a purpose to their lives, while he did not." He would say to himself, "You can work, you are legal, you are visible, and you don't know how fortunate you are," as his eyes followed them with a lost longing (Adichie, 2013, p. 227).

Obinze attempts to travel to America from Nigeria to join Ifemelu, but after 9/11, America refuses to grant him a visa; consequently, "he moved to England" (Adichie, 2013, p. 174) in an attempt to reach America. The displacements made by Ifemelu and Obinze do not qualify as forceful. Their movement is solely motivated by a form of discontent that they want to overcome via western wealth. While in London, Obinze reflects during his friend's party:

"People like him, who were raised well-fed and watered but mired in dissatisfaction, conditioned from birth to look towards somewhere else, were now resolved to do dangerous things, illegal things, so as to leave, none of them starving, raped, or from burned villages, but simply hungry for choice and certainty." "[Original settlers] understood the fleeing from war, from the kind of poverty that crushed human souls," the author writes. (Page 216 of Adichie, 2013)

According to Fanon (2008, p. 89–90), black people do not become aware of their black identity until they coexist alongside white people in a society where white people rule:

The black man will never have to experience his existence for others as long as he stays on his ancestral land, with the exception of small-scale internal conflicts. In addition, The black guy needs to be black in relation to the white man, not just black in general.

Like Ifemelu, Obinze chooses to physically return to his native country in an effort to get over his sense of alienation. He readily consents to return when the cops arrest him. Even though his attorney is trying to get Obinze to stay in England, he says, "I'm willing to go back to Nigeria" (Adichie, 2013, p. 219). Since coming home can help them feel less alone, some see coming back as a rejuvenating experience. After coming back to Lagos, Obinze became a successful real estate entrepreneur. Though it might appear that the novel will become merely about their reunion, it really develops into a harsh indictment of Nigeria. The nation is portrayed as being too proud to put up with "Americanahs," or people who return from overseas to disparage their fellow citizens, but ironically, it occasionally unintentionally supports foreign ideals.

8.3. Facing Racism

In order to challenge racism, Ifemelu is journeying to a different state in search of African women who can style her hair in an African fashion. Boarding a train, she contemplates whether the other

passengers are aware of her lifestyle and her blog, where she shares her observations about African Americans. During her journey, Ifemelu conducts random interviews and discovers that racial issues are a prominent concern for those she speaks with. Ifemelu, who hails from a country where race is not a divisive factor, reflects, "I never thought of myself as black until I arrived in America" (Adichie, 2013, p.46). This statement demonstrates her realization of Americans' attitudes towards people of African descent. Even in their perceptions and language, Americans tend to associate slimness with whiteness and fatness with blackness. Although a man in a grocery store insults her by calling her a fat woman, Ifemelu remains unfazed by such remarks.

Ifemelu observes the women watching a Nigerian film on television while they are at the salon. She explores the difficulties experienced by women from different African nations who live in America within this context. They learn that America is not the utopia they had originally envisaged, but rather a hostile country where they are treated like second-class citizens. The problem of racial discrimination is brought to light by the way Americans treat people of colour differently. Halima gives Ifemelu a warm smile in the salon, a greeting only given to fellow Africans. Then Halima tells Ifemelu that she is beautiful and says, "But look how pretty it is, wow, girl; you have got the white-girl swing" (Adichie, 2013, p.74). Even though Ifemelu finds the comment offensive, she decides to overlook it. Racial and cultural critiques surface during her conversation with Aisha when she says she wants to introduce Ifemelu to her two Igbo lovers.

Through a blog post by Ifemelu describing the different layers of racism, the story illustrates how white people are the oppressors and colonisers of the black community.

"The United League of the Oppressed does not exist. But because they are, well, not black, everyone else believes that they are superior to Black people. Lili, for instance, the coffee-skinned, black-haired, Spanish-speaking housekeeper at my aunt's New England home. Her hauteur was immense. She made demands, cleaned improperly, and behaved disrespectfully. My Aunt stated to her before she fired her, "Stupid woman, she thinks she's white.". (Adichie, 2013, p. 125)

Despite the fact that Lily is Aunt Uju's employee, she feels that she is superior to her because she is not black. She thinks that she is protected by her "coffee skinned" that allows her to look down upon all the black including even her employer. Ifemelu's blog – through which she reveals her anger against racism as well as Aunt Uju's dismissal of Lili are blows in the face of racism.

As he deals with the issue of African immigrants in the UK, Obinze experiences bigotry. Despite having a good education, he is barely making ends meet by working menial jobs. He discovers that regardless of their social status in their home countries, he must always create a new identity whenever they travel to a Western nation. "Due to their race, white people have been hired" (Adichie, 2013, p.96). After leaving Nigeria, a lot of people are altering their personality to blend in with western culture. Obinze is willing to alter his identity in order to secure employment and legal residency in London. Initially working as a toilet cleaner, he eventually quits and finds a job at a detergent-packing warehouse, only to be let go due to downsizing. He then takes on a new job working alongside white individuals who refer to him as a laborer. When he injures his knee, one of his coworkers makes a sarcastic comment, stating, "his knee is bad because he is a knee-grow" (Adichie, 2013, p.117). In this situation, Obinze becomes aware of both casual and deeply ingrained racism in London, similar to the experiences Ifemelu encounters in America. He feels disposable as a worker and invisible as an undocumented immigrant assuming someone else's identity. Initially, Obinze is unable to shield himself from racism and endures dehumanizing working conditions. However, he eventually encounters a coworker who treats him with respect, allowing him to experience more of English culture without fear. This coworker, Nigel, becomes a true friend to Obinze, exemplifying a genuine human connection transcending racial and cultural boundaries. This demonstrates that despite differences, a sense of camaraderie exists among black individuals and immigrants in London. During his time in London, Obinze reunites with his old friend Emenike, who has fully embraced the local culture. While visiting Emenike's family, Obinze interacts with other Nigerian guests who argue that America is rife with prejudice and lacks respect for human rights.

8.4. Process of Selfhood and Identity Transformation

The main characters, Ifemelu and Obinze, use identity change as a crucial strategy to counteract the bigotry that is directed at their races and personalities in the UK and America, respectively. Ifemelu's quest for cultural integration in America is dramatised at Mariama's salon, where she starts to create a new identity with other African Americans, including Mariama, Halima from Mali, and Aisha from Senegal. Since hairstyles promote self-esteem, they play a role in the construction of identities. Ifemelu says she loves her hair "the way God made it" (Adichie, 2013, p. 12) as a result of her insistence on maintaining it that way. Even the vocabulary used by the African migrants, who are still in the middle of their transcultural journey, indicates how much they want to blend in with the new culture:

Loud and fast-paced, their conversations were held in French, Wolof, or Malinke. When they conversed with customers, their imperfect English seemed strange, as if they had not fully acclimated to the language before adopting a slangy American accent. The words trailed off, incomplete. Adichie (2013), page 20

A Guinean braider in Philadelphia once exclaimed to Ifemelu, "Amma like, Oh Gad, Az someh," but what she really meant to say was, "I'm like, oh God, I was so mad." Adichie (2013), page 20. Ifemelu "decided to stop faking an American accent" (Adichie, 2013, p. 204) because she believed that having an American accent would cause her to lose her identity. The accent she had picked up and adopted on the day she met Cristina Tomas was "a pitch of voice and a way of being that was not hers," and she realised it "had left in its wake a vast echoing space" (Adichie, 2013, p.205). This pivotal event in Ifemelu's identity recovery occurs at the same time as her relationship with Mr. Blaine, her African American boyfriend who is "a descendant of the black men and women who had been in America for hundreds of years" (Adichie, 2013, p.207). "This was no coincidence; there was a significance to meeting this man on the day that she returned her voice to herself" (Adichie, 2013, p.210) describes how Ifemelu and Blaine, an assistant professor at Yale, are able to cross cultural boundaries in their social and private lives and broaden their horizons.

Ifemelu learns too late that living in America comes with a loss of identity while on her fellowship at Princeton. As she gazed at the pictures of these men and women, she had a dull pang of loss, as if someone had broken through her hand and taken something personal. She was spending her life with them. Nigeria became her destiny, the one place she could establish roots without always wanting to pull them up and shake off the dirt. (Adichie, 2013, p.17)

Obinze's selfhood is portrayed through his work. Edwards (2006, p. 7) asserts that masculinity and identity are formed only through man's job. Significantly, his unemployment in the United States of America, on the one hand, and his dependence on his mother are evidence that his identity is Afropolitan and not American. Then he changes his destination to the Great Britain. His search for a job out of Africa symbolizes his will to find his identity in the eyes of white society. The work that he receives in the UK is cleaning the dirty toilets. Adichie portrays Obinze's feelings about this job through this quotation:

Obinze felt smaller and smaller as he gazed at that pile of faeces for a considerable amount of time, until it finally became a personal slight, a blow to his jaw. And for just three pounds an hour. After removing his gloves and setting them next to the pile of garbage, he walked out of the building. (Adichie, 2013, p.2370)

By this job, which is one example of the jobs he works, he loses not only dignity but also selfhood; the matter that drives him to go back to Nigeria. Obinze's work experiences in the UK shows the state of all immigrants all over the world.

9. Conclusion

The reason for Adichie's success with *Americanah* is that it tackles a variety of topics, including racism, race relations, selfhood, exile, migration, and the effects of colonialism on recently freed nations like Nigeria. Peevish, traumatic, exclusionary, and muzzling concerns are treated. Adichie's book explores topics related to Nigeria's ever-expanding transcultural identity in the postcolonial

world, resonating with the ricochets of transcultural tones. By portraying the sufferings of Ifemelu and Obinze as expatriates, including a sense of belonging to both the homeland and the host country prior to and following migration, as well as the sense of estrangement brought on by being different, *Americanah* succeeds in illuminating the black voice. Characters in the *Americanah* universe emigrate from their home countries in the hopes of starting over somewhere fresh. The main characters go through a lot in order to fit in with mainstream identity and culture. But in their new country, things take a turn for the worst when they are treated like second-class citizens by white people. This makes them feel alone and alienated, which negatively impacts their lives and drives them to return to their motherland, Nigeria, and Africa.

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