



Transculturalism And Diasporic Black Identity In Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie 'S Americanah

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ABSTRACT

The book *Americanah* by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie delves into the lived realities of African expatriates in Western nations, offering a sophisticated analysis of Black identity in the diaspora. The stories of the book's main characters Ifemelu and Obinze in particular are followed as they traverse the complications of race, cultural relocation, and identity development in Nigeria, the US, and the UK. *Americanah* provides significant insights on the difficulties of cultural assimilation, the reclaiming of identity, and the search for belonging in a world becoming more interconnected by critically addressing issues of post-colonial racial injustices and identity crises. This research attempts to provide a better understanding of the diasporic experience by examining how Adichie's characters go from identity crisis to identity reconstruction.

Keywords: Diaspora, African Diaspora,

Introduction

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah* explores Black diasporic identity and the complexities faced by African expatriates in Western societies. The narrative tracks the lives of its central characters Ifemelu and Obinze in particular—as they navigate racial, cultural, and identity-building challenges in a range of foreign contexts, including Nigeria, the US, and the UK. Adichie's literature critically examines themes of post-colonial racial inequities and identity challenges resulting from immigration. The protagonists battle societal norms that often lead to feelings of isolation and loneliness, reflecting more significant issues that the African diaspora deals with. Through their travels, the novel illustrates the struggle against prejudice and assimilation to maintain cultural identity and a feeling of belonging. Within

the academic discourse around *Americanah*, one component of the diasporic experience that has been discussed is the inter-sectionality of race, gender, and cultural identity. However, the discussion of the characters' path from identity crisis to identity reconstruction is conspicuously absent. This inquiry attempts to bridge that divide by looking at the experiences of Africans who are diasporic in both first and second generations, emphasizing their resilience and strategies for reinventing identity in a globalized world. This study looks at the identification problems that Adichie's characters face in an effort to learn more about the complexities of diasporic identity. It will also consider the bigger implications of the conflicts, such the revival of cultural pride and the awakening of diasporic consciousness, establishing Adichie's tale as a significant contribution to the discourse on identity and diaspora (Adichie 2023)

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's book *Americanah* critically looks at the ways African expatriates create their identities in Western environments. Through the stories of Ifemelu, Obinze, Uju, and Dike, among others, the narrative delves into issues of racial identity, Nigerian immigration, and American and British cultures. Adichie gives a thorough description of the struggles carried out by those impacted by identity issues, cultural disruption, and post-colonial racial injustices. Scholars have now studied *Americanah* in great detail, analyzing its themes of immigration, racism, gender, and the African diaspora using a range of theoretical frameworks. Mona Khaled Alebrahim (2019) on racial misconceptions, Soheila Arabian (2018) and Vida Rahiminezhad (2018) on the diaspora experience, and Shane A. McCoy (2017) with an analysis based on Patricia Hill Collins' concept of the "inner outsider" are a few of the notable contributions. These studies provide insight on identity and the diaspora, but they don't go far enough in explaining how Adichie's characters progress from experiencing an identity crisis to redefining who they are. Through the perspective of identity theory, this study provides a thorough understanding of the identity conflicts and reconstructions faced by first- and second-generation Africans in the diaspora, with a focus on both major and supporting characters. By doing this, it highlights the importance of *Americanah* in depicting the hardship and tenacity of Africans in the diaspora, contributing to conversations across racial and cultural divides. We define "diaspora" and "identity" in this research, and then we use these definitions to analyze *Americanah*'s identity issues within the framework of global interconnectedness. It examines how diaspora dwellers cope with challenges of identity and cultural rootlessness, as well as how they resist assimilation and rediscover who they are via their African ancestry. The essay explores the ramifications in more detail, including issues such as the resurgence of African diaspora communities, the battle against cultural inferiority, and the quest for national self-confidence in a world becoming more linked by the day. The article concludes by highlighting Adichie's significant literary and intellectual contributions to the conversation on identity and diaspora.

IDENTITY AND DIASPORA: COMBINATION

The Greek terms "dia" meaning "across" and "speiro" meaning "to sow or scatter" originally described the act of spreading plant seeds, which is where the idea of "diaspora" originated. This term first appeared in the Bible when it was used to describe the Jewish people's exile from Palestine. It sums up their history of being scattered and deported. The word's original connotation was widened beyond

the Jewish experience by the acceleration of migration brought about by Western imperialism and globalization. In response to post-colonial worldwide migrations, historian George Shepperson widened the definition of "African diaspora" to include all Africans residing beyond their ancestral villages. Critical considerations concerning identity in a globalized society are posed by the fact that diaspora today denotes not just geographical displacement but also the cultural and ethnic absorption into new cultures.

In the 20th century, identity theory surfaced as a critical paradigm for comprehending individual and communal identities. The pursuit of self-awareness, including the answers to the questions "Who am I?" and "Where do I belong?" is intrinsically related to contemplating one's identity. In the midst of worldwide changes, this idea has come to the fore as many marginalized groups contest long-established gender, racial, and sexual orientation standards and seek equal treatment. Contemporary intersections between feminism, postcolonialism, and the academic discipline of identity studies demonstrate the dynamic interplay between personal narratives and larger social contexts. **(Adichie, 2014)**

Identity, according to Western academics, originates with the Latin words "identitas" and "identite," which mean identical or one. A person's identity includes not just their distinctive traits but also their ties to larger social groups, such as their race or nationality. The dynamic interaction between personal autonomy and social membership is emphasized in contemporary studies of identity, which classify identity into four types: self-identification, individual, collective, and societal. There are three stages of identity research that have been identified in academic literature: the enlightenment-era subject-centered identity, the social identity phase, and the postmodern decentralized identity. Descartes' "Cogito, ergo sum" marked the beginning of an emphasis on the independence and inherent characteristics of the subject. After World War II, theorists like Karl Marx and Max Weber emphasized the importance of social institutions in forming individuals' identities, which prompted a change in perspective toward studying identity via societal lenses. Recognizing identity as both a static essence and a dynamic creation, current disputes incorporate essentialist, constructivist, and strategic essentialist paradigms.

AFRICAN DIASPORA'S IDENTITY CRISIS IN AMERICANAH

Erik Erikson coined the term "identity crisis," which is what happens when a person's fundamental beliefs and experiences in life are shaken. Maurice Stein further developed this into "identity anxiety," a term that symbolizes the challenge of severing oneself from one's social and cultural origins. We feel secure and certain of who we are when we're at ease in our own culture. On the other hand, we begin to doubt our identity and values when we travel, which may cause difficult cross-cultural interactions and unpleasant sentiments. Diaspora exacerbates integration problems and psychological suffering. Edward Said claims that exile is honestly portrayed in diasporic literature as a dreadful desire for one's homeland. Fictional works like *Americanah* illustrate the difficulties African diasporans have in acclimating to new environments and discovering their identities. **(Alebrahim 2019)**

Identity crises, prompted by encounters with other cultures, may lead to introspection. This conflict

is reflected in *Americanah's* protagonist, Ifemelu's, journey through cultural displacement and racial prejudice. Amidst cultural dislocation, identity development becomes more difficult as she fights against cultural assimilation, conflicts with racial ideas, and faces language problems. Adichie delves into the complexities of diasporic identity via Ifemelu's story, which examines issues of cultural difference and language adaptation.

Identity crises in Diasporas are exacerbated by cultural differences, linguistic obstacles, economic hardships, and psychological stress and cultural estrangement. After sacrificing her principles for financial security, Ifemelu has a psychological crisis in *Americanah* as a result of the assimilation pressures she feels from mainstream American society. This reflects the larger challenge that people in diaspora face when confronted with identity crises caused by prevailing beliefs. The limitations that people in diaspora encounter are brought to light by Foucault's claim about the effect of social power on identity.

Both Ifemelu and Obinze's experiences of estrangement as a result of fake identities serve to illustrate Saussure's point on the significance of names to self-identity. In the face of cultural superiority and prejudice in First World nations, immigrants often give up on their cultural identity in favor of assimilation, adding another layer of complexity to the identity crisis caused by postcolonial migratory dynamics. Personal choice and inheritance are not the only variables that define an individual's identity; these tales show that it is flexible, disputed, and influenced by other forces as well.

In *Americanah*, Uju's transformation of her Nigerian identity mirrors the larger fight of Africans in diaspora to integrate into American culture, encountering racial prejudice in spite of attempts to blend in. Identity confusion is a problem for Dike, Uju's son, and it shows how assimilation pressures make it hard to hold on to one's cultural heritage. As Ifemelu's interracial relationships with Curt and Brian show, diasporic African experiences in the West are complex and multidimensional, and the challenges of managing one's identity amid racial dynamics and cultural expectations are further complicated.

According to Berry and colleagues, African-Americans living in the West who are descendants of the diaspora are becoming more and more attached to their host country and seeing it as their main "homeland" with each passing generation. Their connection to their ancestral culture is sometimes overshadowed by this assimilation, which is fueled by education and exposure to modern society. But prejudice is still around, making people feel even more alone—like Dike in *Americanah*, who is a second-generation American. These difficulties are exacerbated by racial prejudice and Uju's preference for English rather Igbo, which further separates Dike from his Nigerian roots. The narrative powerfully compares the lives of immigrants from different generations, highlighting the challenges faced by the second generation as they navigate cultural limbo and grapple with identity problems intensified by both internal family decisions and external prejudice. This interaction exemplifies the multi-generational impact of diasporic identity on family, culture, and society. (Bauman 2013)

THE AFRICAN DIASPORA'S IDENTITY RECONSTRUCTION IN AMERICANAH

It may be difficult for people in the diaspora to manage complex identity concerns while striking a balance between their native and adopted cultures. Africans living in the diaspora must reconstruct their identities in America while dealing with assimilation and rejection. The difficulty for those who have escaped persecution is assimilating into new societies without losing their cultural heritage. The narrative highlights the resilience of people like Ifemelu, who maintains her Nigerian identity despite opposing racist and assimilationist pressures in the US. When Ifemelu returns to Nigeria, she emphasizes her close ties to her own country and refutes the notion that success depends only on American culture.

The story relies on Ferdinand Tönnies's distinction between "community" and "society," which he stated in an organic setting, to argue that true social identities emerge from links inside communities. The protagonist, Ifemelu, goes through this in *Americanah*, as she is helped in finding who she is by the diasporic Black community.

By focusing on events that many African Americans can relate to, Ifemelu's blog provides a space for discussion about racial identity in the United States. It highlights the communal efforts of Blacks in diaspora to create a feeling of belonging and identity while away from home.

Through her experiences in the diasporic Black society, Ifemelu is able to rediscover her African roots and feel at home in the story. Along the way, we see how racial awareness and collective action may fortify African traditions in the face of racist oppression. Making concessions to survive in a stratified society manifests itself in accent changes and other adaptations to American culture. (Coulmas 2019)

Ifemelu finds support and affirmation for her African identity via her involvement with Pan-African organizations, which helps her resist assimilationist influences. Following the lead of one's social circles and internet groups, going natural becomes a sign of defiance against social pressures and acceptance of one's own identity.

Tao Te Ching and Fei Xiaotong's sociological ideas are woven throughout the tale, which emphasizes the need of knowing oneself via connections and community while navigating intercultural environments. In the face of hardship, diasporic people may find enlightenment via critically interacting with social norms and reconnecting with cultural origins as they rebuild their identities.

Postcolonial scholar Spivak's idea of the "subaltern," in which recovering language symbolizes regaining power and identity, is reflected in Ifemelu's journey from silence to agency in *Americanah*. Her writings on diaspora experiences, racial dynamics, and identity development from personal reflections into persuasive public criticism.

Kimberly, Ifemelu's white boss, and their exchanges show how complicated racial and cultural relationships can be; these conversations also emphasize Ifemelu's growing subjectivity as she confronts racial stereotypes. She delves into more complex topics, such as interracial partnerships and racial equality, and criticizes the surface progress in these areas. As a spiritual shield against estrangement, Ifemelu's

steadfast attachment to her Nigerian heritage helps her endure the stigma of being called an *Americanah*. Her story exemplifies the strength of first-generation Africans in diaspora and their fight to maintain their culture in the face of persecution and displacement. **(Bhabha 2023)**

Reflecting on the intricacies of identity under post-colonial legacies and the need for belonging, *Americanah* explores Ifemelu's transformations and her choice to shed the "Americanah" label. She frees herself from the cultural limitations she felt while overseas and embraces her African identity, as seen in her relationships, especially with Obinze, which highlight the difficulties of managing racial and cultural dynamics. The book is a reflection on the ways in which the African diaspora's search for identity intersects with broader cultural and historical currents.

In keeping with Edward Said's concept of a public intellectual, Ifemelu's blog, "Raceteenth or Various Observations About American Blacks (Those Formerly Known as Negroes) by a Non-American Black," provides a fresh take on American culture. Ifemelu promotes inclusive discourse by challenging dominant narratives via her African perspective on racial injustices and cultural prejudices. Her position as an outsider allows her the flexibility and legitimacy to write without fear of the disparaging labels that African American voices often endure. Individuals in the Black community are empowered to challenge stereotypes and express themselves via the blog, which is a key instrument for cultural knowledge and identity reconstruction.

Cultural identities in today's interconnected globe are complicated, as Hommi Bhabha's "hybridity" and Stuart Hall's two-sided view of diasporic identity show. A hybrid identity is formed by diasporic people like Ifemelu and Uju as they negotiate their background with their experiences abroad. While Ifemelu's journey shows how her connection with Curt marks her partial absorption into American society, Uju's quest to integrate shows how she struggles with social constraints and her racial identity. The second-generation Dike struggles with an identity crisis due to a lack of knowledge about his African heritage; nevertheless, a journey to Nigeria helps him connect with his heritage and develop a hybrid identity. By focusing on these individuals, Adichie delves into the complexities of diaspora identity creation, highlighting the need to balance one's cultural roots with the reality of multiculturalism.

Ifemelu, Uju, and Dike struggle with cultural identification in *Americanah* since they are "American-Africans" in Nigeria and "Non-American Blacks" in the United States, respectively, and are therefore always seen as "Others" in both communities. Their dual identity, which incorporates aspects of both their African heritage and American upbringing, highlights the constant balancing act between the two, which brings both benefits and challenges. By embracing one's basic identity and background, Adichie argues, one may avoid confusion throughout the diaspora experience and instead construct a coherent hybrid identity. Their stories show how identity is being divided and rebuilt. After returning to Nigeria, Ifemelu finds a sense of belonging because to her blog and the relationships she has made within the African community. The struggles of integration in a mostly white environment and Uju's ultimate coming-of-age are mirrored in her travels. The journey of self-discovery that Dike embarks on, inspired by an unexpected trip to Nigeria, exemplifies the transformative power of embracing one's ancestry. True

self-definition, according to these stories, comes from being genuine and resilient in the face of cultural convergence and the opinions of those on the outside.

DIASPORIC OCCURRENTS

The majority of Nigerian diaspora writing addresses migration and related subjects. Diasporas see identity as the fundamental issue with migration. Their identity crisis in this weird foreign land is exacerbated by all of these bizarre presumptions made about individuals based just on the color of their skin. In *Americanah*, diasporic problems are examined, including immigration and how it affects the characters. The book offers a novel viewpoint on the importance of borders on a global scale. Analyzing experiences of diaspora across borders is also shown. Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's novel *Americanah* uses its characters to illustrate the struggles associated with migrating. The book illustrates one aspect of Nigerians' identity formation in the West. The protagonist of Adichie's work, Ifemelu, depicts the difficulties faced by a middle-class girl attempting to pursue an education in a distant country. (McCoy 2013)

As youngsters in Nigeria, Ifemelu and Obinze fall in love and spend their lives together in this book. When a nation falls under military administration, its citizens often look for ways to escape. Although they are inseparable, Obinze will miss Ifemelu's departure to the United States. Aunt Uju sets up Ifemelu's scholarship in the United States and supports her out. On her blog "Raceteenth or Various Observations about American Blacks (Those formerly known as Negroes) by a Non-American Black," Ifemelu discusses the difficulties, difficulties, and problems that non-American and African-American black people encounter in the United States. Her lover Obinze, who is also an illegal immigrant, has it tough in London, much like Ifemelu. Distance and time have kept them apart. In the process of discovering who they are, they suffer horrific events. At last, Obinze's decision to abandon his wife and kid in favor of a life with Ifemelu brings them together.

The search for one's own identity by protagonists Ifemelu and Obinze is one of the novel's central themes. Ifemelu and Obinze's identities are related to their national and racial identities because of their situations. Obinze encounters a difficult situation as he attempts to adjust to life in England. To acquire a green card before his visa expires, he pretends to be someone else and works under their name. Obinze feels useless as a result of the circumstances, and he is deported to Nigeria upon capture. At long last, he abandons his former ambition of becoming an American and establishes a new identity for himself in Nigeria. After marrying a beautiful lady and amassing a fortune, he achieves phenomenal success. This will continue for him till Ifemelu comes back. Once Ifemelu has resolved her own identity dilemma, she goes back to Nigeria and finds Obinze. Adichie used symbols such as Ifemelu's mother's hair to illustrate how racism and injustice can take root in a person's cultural and personal identity.

A lot of Ifemelu's Nigerian friends and family drop by as she lives in the middle class. She has a deep sense of belonging among them since they all uphold Nigerian heritage. This is the last straw that would convince her to return to Nigeria. Despite her departure to pursue further education overseas, she experiences self-identification while here. She has a soft spot in her heart for her mom's thick, black hair. The question "Is it your real hair?" is often asked of Ifemelu (Rahiminezhad 2018). Like most Nigerians, she wishes she had it. She believes her curls make her a genuine Nigerian and considers it a death sentence if they fade. The systemic racism in the United States is symbolized by the pressure she feels to straighten her hair. The hairstylist said, "Just a little burn, but look how pretty it is." That white-girl swing is just your style, girl. Ifemelu becomes a blogger after facing challenges in America. The struggles she endures on her journey to self-discovery shape her whole life. The Nigerian language, Igbo, was always Ifemelu's first choice above polite English. She was more annoyed by his mannered English as she grew older. While she was with her father and us, she enjoyed speaking her native Igbo language. In an effort to preserve her Nigerian identity, she teaches Dike Igbo and speaks to him in her own tongue.

Trouble befalls Ifemelu when she departs from her village. She hopes that by changing her name, she would be able to get a better job. Later on, when her name appears on the ID card again, she starts to think she has reclaimed her identity. In Ifemelu's class, the contentious term "nigger" appears. The term "nigger" exists. That is real. People use it. America encompasses it. "Bleep it out" is offensive since it has caused a lot of anguish to individuals. The above phrase exemplifies how Ifemelu feels compelled to abandon her identity and adopt an American accent, even if the American language is insignificant. "Speaking like that because of her foreign accent, and she felt for a moment like a small child, lazy-limbed and drooling," Ifemelu realizes to herself at one point (Adichie, 2013). She attempts, at first, to adopt an American accent as other immigrants do, but she ultimately decides against it and quits trying. She emphasizes that she is still Nigerian at heart, even if she succeeds in her American accent after receiving a praise from a telemarketer. The telemarketer's comment did not cause her to choose her American identity above her Nigerian one, and she does not identify as an American. As a result, she is proud to be an authentic Nigerian girl.

When it comes to the American identity, Ifemelu discovers that Black *Americans* have less advantages. Other characters, such as Auntie Uju and Dike, also experience similar prejudice since they only see Africans as Black Americans. The statement "I came from a country where race was not an issue; I did not think of myself as Black and I only became Black when I came to America" is shared by Ifemelu. In the book, America represents prosperity and optimism, but Ifemelu comes to understand that this is all an illusion and that there is a high cost to everything. There is a subtle but noticeable trend of Ifemelu's Americanization throughout the book as she picks up the accent and attempts to fit in. She starts a blog to discuss racism in the United States. After returning to Nigeria, she is referred to as "*Americanah*" due to her adoption of American lingo and problem-solving techniques. Ifemelu has evolved during her years in America, even if she doesn't like this method of addressing her. In *Americanah*, the book looks at Nigeria, the United States, and Britain through the lens of blackness. As a foreigner adapting to a new society,

Ifemelu has a number of challenges, including racism, relationships, and an identity crisis, all of which are deftly depicted by Adichie.

CONCLUSION

Americanah, by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, is a complex depiction of diasporic identity through the eyes of African immigrants negotiating Western culture. In telling Ifemelu's experience, the book delves into the intricacies of cultural exile, the difficulties of retaining one's identity, and the ubiquitous effects of racial prejudice. By showing how her characters deal with the reality and expectations of their new surroundings while maintaining links to their heritage, Adichie explores the complexities of balancing two identities. Furthermore, the book elucidates the malleability of identity by demonstrating how one's life events and cultural milieu impact one's sense of self. A lot of people in diaspora go through the same process of coming to terms with who they are and where they fit in, and Ifemelu's return to Nigeria highlights this. An insightful look at the ups and downs of navigating two cultures is provided by *Americanah*, a moving analysis of the immigrant experience. In a world where everything is becoming more and more globalized, it shows how strong the African diaspora is and makes people think about the complicated relationship between race, identity, and belonging.

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