

Social Difficulties As Portrayed By Adichie In Americannah

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Abstract

The novel *Americanah* explores white individuals' perpetuation of racial stereotypes and its impact on global perceptions of black people. Additionally, it delves into the challenges black diasporic individuals residing in foreign countries subjected to these preconceived notions face. Ifemelu has decided to repatriate to Nigeria from the United States due to her perception of a greater sense of authenticity in her home country while perceiving a sense of illusion in the host nation. Despite the perceived potential for achievement, the individual experiences feelings of vulnerability, invisibility, and social isolation within the context of the United States. A prevailing perception exists among specific individuals of Caucasian descent that categorizes individuals of African descent as inferior and designates them as second-class members of society. Adichie endeavours to elucidate the difficulties encountered by the African diaspora in the United States, skillfully integrating these challenges into forming each person's sense of self. The author's analysis centres on three key attributes connecting the character and their cultural heritage in Africa. She is confronted with challenges related to racial dynamics, societal norms surrounding hair, and linguistic barriers.

Keywords: male chauvinism, identity, recent, diaspora.

Introduction

The novel *Americanah* portrays the challenges faced by Aunt Uju as she articulates her difficulties in pursuing a medical profession, despite her status as a certified Nigerian doctor. Aunt Uju laments, "Throughout my

academic journey, I have never encountered failure in any examination." However, the assessments did not evaluate genuine medical knowledge; instead, they assessed our proficiency in navigating complex multiple-choice questions that needed to be more relevant to practical medical expertise. The individual rose from their seated position and proceeded to make their way towards the kitchen area.

I am tired. I am so tired. By now, things would be better for me and Dike. It is not as if anybody was helping me, and I could not believe how quickly money went. I was studying and working three jobs. I was doing retail at the mall, and a research assistantship, and I even did some hours at Burger King. (Adichie 109)

Considering the circumstance that Aunty Uju possesses a valid medical license in Nigeria, she found herself compelled to apply her medical expertise in a low-paying occupation due to the limitations imposed on her higher degree. The performance of these minor responsibilities hinders her ability to dedicate sufficient time to studying and resting, impeding her progress toward obtaining her medical license. Aunty Uju was able to reduce her expenses on childcare services after Ifemelu's relocation to the United States, thereby enabling her to prioritize her academic pursuits. Aunty Uju's reliance on familial support implies that she may encounter challenges in managing independently. Due to Ifemelu's status as an immigrant on a student visa, she encountered financial limitations that hindered her ability to meet her essential needs. The sole recourse available to her was to utilize Aunt Uju's identification card, which had been acquired illegally. Due to insufficient coverage by her school funds, she is compelled to assume the identities of others as a means of sustaining herself. Dike's endeavors towards self-destruction exemplify the profound impact of the dual identity as an African American and an American African, underscoring its detrimental consequences on his well-being. Dike's connection to his Igbo (Nigerian) heritage has been disrupted due to Aunt Uju's reluctance to disclose his father's identity or facilitate a meaningful connection with his Nigerian ancestry.

In contrast, white Americans tend to perceive Dike primarily through the lens of his black American identity, thereby imposing cultural assumptions upon him. However,

Dike lacks the need to gain the understanding and familiarity to navigate and engage with these cultural expectations. Aunty Uju, on the other hand, maintains that such impositions hold no relevance or significance for Dike.

Migration can elicit emotions such as loss, loneliness, and bewilderment while simultaneously evoking sentiments of freedom, choice, and release. One's profound appreciation and admiration for one's native country often becomes evident solely upon experiencing the process of relocating to a foreign nation. Upon relocating to the United States and subsequent detachment from her native country, Adichie gained a profound comprehension of the challenges faced by Nigerians. Numerous diverse social, cultural, economic, and political factors have prompted individuals to relocate from their original places of residence and migrate to foreign nations. Displacement and instability have emerged as prominent indicators within the evolving global system. It is a significant factor contributing to the rapid transformation of global human development. The phenomenon of mass uprooting can be attributed to the influx of immigrants from diverse backgrounds, each driven by a range of motives to migrate and facing various circumstances. The phenomenon of migration has had a transformative impact on indigenous literary works, primarily stemming from the displacement caused by political motivations such as power struggles or territorial disputes. As a result of the process of colonization and the subsequent intermingling of cultures, the phenomenon of displacement has evolved into a multicultural and global phenomenon.

Adichie consistently advocates for the preservation of one's authentic identity as the sole means to challenge the entrenched assumption (stereotype) that individuals of African descent hold in the collective consciousness of white individuals. Following her journey from Nigeria, Ifemelu undergoes significant personal development as she adapts her identity to assimilate into American society. Despite the difficulties she faces, Ifemelu gradually develops a sense of self-acceptance and achieves a state of equilibrium in her new American life. According to Helen Cousins, in her article "Negotiating Race, Identity & Homecoming in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah*," published in *Diaspora and Returns in Fiction: African Literature Today*, H. Oby Okolocha argues that Ifemelu is

grappling with her sense of identity. Okolocha describes Ifemelu as "sitting on the identity fence" (157) and provides examples, such as altering her hairstyle and adopting an American accent, to illustrate her perceived "identity crisis" (AM 157). Ifemelu underwent a transformative process of constructing her identity, wherein her racial background assumed a prominent role. The examination of the perceived regulation of black hair, specifically in relation to black women, constitutes a significant element of this undertaking. The significance of her hair as a component of her identity became even more complex and meaningful upon her immersion into American culture.

The United States has a well-documented history of racial discrimination and the perpetration of injustices by white individuals against other racial groups. This history is characterized by the extensive practice of slavery and the enduring presence of racial segregation, both of which persist in contemporary society. Consequently, a complex network of inequity and tension has been established, necessitating a thorough examination and acknowledgment of these issues. Nevertheless, Okolocha's suggestions, such as altering her hair texture and adopting an American accent, do not align with Ifemelu's evolving sense of self and her journey of adaptation in America. Okolocha characterizes her experience as a "diasporic evolution," which she perceives as a source of personal liberation (Okolocha 157). Removing the hair of Nigerian women captured as slaves was implemented to erase their cultural identity and transform the relationship between Africans and their hair (Byrd 10). The issue of black hair continues to be a subject of ongoing degradation, persisting even centuries after it was utilized to demean and strip slaves of their ethnic identity. Even after the decline of the prevalence of black hair, a Eurocentric standard for evaluating physical characteristics persisted, undermining the intrinsic value of blackness by promoting and favoring light skin and straight hair over dark skin and curly hair.

The persistent process of dehumanization and devaluation of individuals with black racial identity has led to the internalization of prevailing social norms, prompting individuals of black descent to disassociate from their racial identity. In a scenario where individuals were subjected to involuntary deportation and the removal of their cultural and ethnic affiliations, assimilation into American society

appeared to be the sole viable alternative. The emphasis on physical appearance has led to a rise in the demand for hair products specifically tailored to meet the needs of individuals with black hair. Adichie's objective is to illustrate the American perception that straightened hair holds a higher level of sophistication than braids or cornrows. The exploration of hair politics in America establishes a strong connection between the protagonist and the cultural identity of the United States. Ifemelu reminisces about her mother's elegance while reflecting on the occasions when she would intricately braid her hair.

In contrast, Ifemelu's naturally braided hair is considered unprofessional, leading her to allocate a significant portion of her time to salon visits in an attempt to address this matter. The individual gradually adjusts the texture of her hair, yet she prefers her previous braided hairstyle. She invests effort in nurturing her braids and experiences a sense of self-assurance. The restoration of the hairs to their previous condition signifies her profound affiliation with the cultural heritage of her nation. However, unlike her peers, Ifemelu struggles to convey her affection for America and its cultural aspects effectively.

The novel's protagonist, a Nigerian immigrant residing in the United States, grapples with many identities that she assumes. When faced with choosing a suitable school for their daughter, Kosi, Obinze's wife, experiences heightened scrutiny and emphasis on the identification process. The protagonist is grappling with her national identity, torn between identifying as French or British. However, Obinze reminds them that their grandparents received their education in Nigeria. Consequently, cultivating a positive mindset and pursuing self-discovery are characterized by a yearning for a specific location, a deep longing for a connection to one's origins, and a profound need for a sense of belonging. The formation of Nigerian identity has been significantly influenced by the Western trajectory and the substantial migrations that occurred during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The pigmentation of her skin serves as an additional attribute that connects her to her ancestral heritage. The influence of race on an individual's cultural identity is widely acknowledged. Adichie utilizes language to illustrate the social construction and imposition of 'blackness' on individuals, influenced by their nationality and race. She

states, "Dear non-Americans when you decide to relocate to America, you assume the identity of being black." Cease engaging in contentious discourse. Please refrain from referring to me as Jamaican or Ghanaian. The United States exhibits a lack of concern. According to the research conducted by AM (2016), it was found that... In the blog post, Ifemelu elucidates that their racial identity as black is predominantly recognized and acknowledged only in contexts outside the African continent. Adichie aims to assert that the concept of race lacks true significance for individuals categorized as the 'Other', as it is not perceived as a barrier. However, she contends that this is not the case for individuals of black descent, as they encounter the tangible effects of racial hindrance. Language is a significant component of the narrative. In the narrative, Ifemelu and the other supporting characters engage in conversations primarily conducted in English, wherein they consciously modify their accents to adopt a more Americanized manner of speech. The individual refrains from adopting accents and recognizes the importance of not compromising her linguistic identity for the sake of others, mainly when her Americanized style of speech elicits astonishment and intimidation from those around her. When faced with a particular circumstance, she is keenly inclined to seek refuge in her residence.

Ifemelu's identity transforms upon arriving in America, resulting in a renewed and refined version of herself. Nevertheless, she is willing to fully embrace her Nigerian identity while striving for success in the United States. This is apparent in her choice to discontinue chemically treating her hair and embrace its natural growth. Initially, she harbors a strong aversion towards her appearance and negatively perceives herself. However, her perspective transforms her discovery of 'happilykinkynappy.com,' an online platform that caters specifically to black women who embrace their unaltered hair texture. The protagonist enters this realm with a sense of overwhelming appreciation and experiences a profound affection for her hair (AM 212). The protagonist's identity plays a pivotal role in her personal growth within the American context, as evidenced by her consistent maintenance of a blog throughout the novel. Through this platform, she engages in thoughtful discussions on important themes such as racism and the experience of

being a non-American black individual in America. In the novel's denouement, Ifemelu, having seemingly forged a sense of belonging in the United States, deliberately chooses to repatriate to Nigeria. After a prolonged residence in the United States, Ifemelu decides to repatriate to Nigeria, only to find herself grappling with a sense of displacement and alienation. The individual longs for certain aspects of American society and uniquely views her nation. Her friend playfully refers to her as "Americanah!" while Ranyinudo frequently teases her. The perspective employed here is influenced by an American viewpoint (AM 386).

Due to her complex cultural background, Ifemelu embodies the novel's central theme, as she cannot fully align with either American or Nigerian identity. Adichie does not consider herself or her work affiliated with this classification, as she embraces her African identity. The story's protagonist exhibits comparable emotions, expressing remorse for her association with the club mentioned above and experiencing a sense of comfort within its confines. Ifemelu, the character in question, begins to feel a growing uneasiness as she becomes aware of the club's offerings that cater to her dietary preferences. By AM 409, the protagonist expresses a sense of contentment in her current surroundings while harboring a desire for change. In the concluding portion of the literary work, Adichie brings the two main characters back together as they engage in an illicit romantic relationship. This leads to Obinze deciding to separate from his spouse due to the overwhelming intensity of his feelings for Ifemelu. Throughout the novel, readers have been exposed to Ifemelu's romantic entanglements in the United States. However, it becomes evident that these connections fail to provide her with a sense of fulfillment or a genuine feeling of belonging.

One notable instance is her relationship with Curt, an American of Caucasian descent, where she perceives herself as assuming a role rather than experiencing an authentic connection. The individual in question exhibited a more slender and agile physique. Furthermore, she assumed the position of Curt's romantic partner, seamlessly adopting this role akin to donning a cherished and complimentary garment. I request a revision of my text to reflect a more academic and professional tone. Thank you.

Despite experiencing happiness and fulfillment in this relationship, the individual in question found it effortless to assume the role described as "slipped" to convey the ease and comfort of being in it. However, despite these positive aspects, the individual still feels disconnected from her true self. The portrayal of Obinze and Ifemelu's relationship in the book's final chapters stands in stark contrast to Adichie's depiction, particularly in her description of Ifemelu's physical appearance. The protagonist experiences a profound sense of tranquility (AM 446) in the presence of Obinze. It is also implied that they have their happily ever after, which is intriguing for a novel about race, identity, and immigration.

The novel concludes with a prevailing sense of assurance regarding the relationship. Obinze demonstrates a determined resolve to prevent Ifemelu from evading him again, stating, "Ifem, I am actively pursuing you." In the novel "Americanah" by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, the protagonist, Ifemelu, concludes a conversation by expressing her desire for the recipient to consider giving their relationship a chance. This statement, "I am going to chase you until you give this a chance" (AM449), conveys Ifemelu's determination and persistence. Furthermore, her invitation to "Come in" at the end of the conversation instills a sense of optimism in the reader regarding the potential development and progression of their relationship. The novel's narrative demonstrates a cyclical structure by bringing Ifemelu back to her initial location in Nigeria, where she reunites with her first love, Obinze. The underlying message conveyed by this statement is that the individual experiences a heightened sense of comfort and relaxation within the confines of their residence.

Consequently, the personal growth and quest for a sense of belonging were experienced by Ifemelu in both the United States and Nigeria. This voyage encompasses various factors, such as the influence of racial and cultural identity within the American context. Additionally, the novel incorporates a romantic subplot that consistently emerges, ultimately leading Ifemelu to reconnect with her former high-school love interest. This artwork demonstrates notable strength as it portrays an African woman who consciously opts to repatriate to Nigeria instead of embracing the Westernized milieu, a prevailing theme often idealized in narratives surrounding

immigration. Following a transformative journey of self-discovery, Ifemelu is ultimately reunited with her country of origin, Nigeria, where she can reclaim a sense of belonging that resonated with her at the outset of the narrative.

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