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The Immigrant Experiences of Africans in Chimamanda Ngozie Adichie's *Americanah*

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ABSTRACT

This paper aims at portraying the challenging experiences of African immigrants in Chimamanda Ngozie Adichie's *Americanah* who often feel a sense of alienation in their host country due to racism, socio-economic, and cultural exclusion among others factors. The West has a narrow-minded perspective of African migrants as basically people seeking a better life away from the diverse miseries of their homelands such as poverty, conflicts, wars, and many others. As such, these immigrants are often expected to be deeply grateful for being allowed in a Western so-called developed country. Through content analysis, the paper uses postcolonial theory based on the criticisms of Edward Said, Homi Bhabha, and Frantz Fanon among others to analyse the

shift of contemporary African literature from a theme of anti-imperialism to the exposition of contemporary, transnational and multicultural issues as reflected in *Americanah*. Adichie in this text explores different cultures of United States, England, and Nigeria from an African perspective, identifying the Western culture as the “Other”, criticizing Western standards and stereotypes about Africa. The paper finds out that most Africans leave their homelands for foreign lands because they have dreams and want better opportunities for themselves in which case, they may or may not succeed. They however, realise that life out of Africa is not as rosy as envisaged as many encounter difficulties adjusting to a new culture and abode. Those who have not been able to realise their dreams are caught between the mirage of either returning home or remaining there as slaves. The findings also illustrate that race is a hegemonic, normative, American social construction that is engrained in the American society; the reason most of the African immigrants are yoked with frustrations because of the racist culture in which they find themselves.

Keywords: *Chimamanda Ngozie Adichie, Post-colonialism, Immigrants, Racism, Identity.*

Introduction

The complexities of human life and the fast changing socio-economic conditions have made human migration a pertinent issue. The question of African immigrants has over the years, been a subject of great debate both at local and global levels. This has resulted to several discussions by contemporary writers on the subject matter as well as the increasing number of scholarly works in journals, newspapers, and Web pages among others, on immigrant issues ranging from black immigrants’ exit from Africa to foreign lands, to their contributions to Africa from their new frontiers. The basic factors that influences movement of man from one region to another ranges from uneven distribution of resources to unbalanced resource utilization, employment opportunities, escape from violent conflicts and wars, environmental factors, educational purposes as well as reuniting with

family. The principal directions of migration are illustrated by more or less continuous movements from rural areas to urban cities, and from underdeveloped to developed countries.

Throughout history, people around the world have immigrated to America for various reasons. Many immigrate with hopes of accessing the “American Dream” of freedom, prosperity and promise. As such, America is often characterized by some as a “Nation of Immigrants” or “No man’s land”. These immigrants, past and present often face varying degrees of reception, from open arms to animosity. Most of these immigrants share varied experiences of life in America especially in relation to the American dream as well as the misconceptions that often frame immigration in our society. America offers a space in which different groups of people and cultures mingle, negotiate and merge together. Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie was born and bred in Nigeria. She enrolled at the University of Nigeria, Nsuka where she studied medicine and pharmacy. After a year and a half, she relocated to the United States of America to further her studies. While in America she realises the challenges that African immigrants face as a result of their skin colour, dark hair, African accent and a host of other forms of discrimination against the blacks. Ifemelu, the main character in Adichie’s novel *Americanah* is about losing her identity as a Nigerian girl with a rich culture in her struggle of becoming more American, just so she could survive in a hostile environment. As an African immigrant, she must struggle through new forms of marginalization.

Americanah is Adichie’s third and ambitious novel that tells a love story of two childhood friends Ifemelu and Obinze, who later migrate to America and England respectively but are confronted with the issues of identity, loss and loneliness, and dissection of modern attitudes of race. In a review of *Americanah*, Robateou (2014) stresses on the challenges of being an immigrant. “Beyond race, the book is about the immigrants’ quest: self-intervention, which is the American subject, *Americanah* is unique among the booming canon of immigrant literature of the last generation” (1). This indicates that identity crisis is a dominant



theme in the novel as it portrays the major challenging experiences of immigrants in America. Adichie in this text, examines the racial stigmatization that exists in America and the tension that exists between African immigrants and African Americans as well as the relationship between blacks and whites.

Sidiki and Zakari (2019) argue that *Americanah* emphasizes on two significant and essential challenges and difficulties faced by African immigrants in America which are: the complicated relationship between African immigrants and African Americans, and the racial stigmatization that they experience in the hands of white Americans. All these are as a result of their skin colour, accent and the texture and colour of their hair. The first thing that Ifemelu is confronted with when she arrives America is racism. Jane tells Ifemelu that they have to pay huge sums of money to their daughter to a private school because public schools are lowly rated and meant for black children.

The issue of Africans migrating to the West according to Musonye (2007) is a pertinent one as she argues that while the American dream lures immigrants, it however destroys them in the process. To her, it is a common thing to find a multitude of Africans seeking visas to America and Europe for various reasons ranging from economic hardship to unrest in the society. . However, most of these immigrants are disillusioned as many do not get to fulfill the American dream of a better life and future. She observes that:

America has received different types of immigrants from Africa. The first generation was slaves, who were forcefully carried away to captivity never to return home. The second generation was of intellectuals who reluctantly went to America in pursuit of education. The third generation is the current, economic exits, who migrate to America willingly for a new form of enslavement (81).

This third generation of migrants are those who migrate willingly to America in pursuit of a better life. Their expectations are two-fold and rely on the tenets that hard work begets success. These migrants believe

that in the United States of America, they have a reasonable chance to achieve success through their own efforts and secondly that this success can be attained regardless of their background or origin. As such, they undergo all forms of marginalization, torture, and cultural alienation just to live and survive in America as is the case with Aunty Uju. Obinze on his part migrates to England in search of a better life but is unfortunately met with all forms of hardships, humiliation, and identity crisis. He later realized that London was not a bed of roses as many Africans are made to believe. Obinze only regains his inner freedom and independence after his return to Nigeria where he becomes a successful man in business. To him, true freedom lies within and it comes from one's own identity and rootedness.

This immigration phenomena according to Arthur (2012), calls for urgent attention. He takes his argument further into the kind of treatment meted out to African Immigrants by the police and judicial systems. He touches on the experiences of blacks by referring to the negative perception of blacks as a result of institutionalized prejudice. He sees this as a general concern and argues that "it is as a result of this institutionalized prejudice that blacks encounter the kind of discrimination, marginalization, racism and indiscriminate killings through these social institutions in the foreign countries" (2). This argument buttresses the recent protests and calls for 'Black Lives Matter' in America and the entire world that witnessed police brutality and the killing of George Floyd an African American on May 25th 2020 by a white police officer Derek Michael Chauvin who was tried in March 2021, found guilty and sentenced to 22.5 years imprisonment on three charges count of second degree unintentional murder, third degree murder and manslaughter.

To Arthur, Africans coming from black majority contexts do not relate, for instance to the American history of racial discrimination and prejudice. Conversely, black Americans seem to know little of the history of foreign domination and colonization experienced by many black Africans. Lacking such deeply important historical

understandings of one another, potentially places relations between African immigrants and black Americans in a fragile position. He however found that “many African immigrants consider themselves only as “sojourners” in the U.S., with full intentions of returning to their home countries in Africa” (2), though this is not usually the case as many end up caught in a spider’s web.

Other critics are of the opinion that most african immigrants are bound to engage in all sorts of demeaning jobs just to survive in America not because they are not intelligent or qualified to earn white collar jobs but because the society conditions it that way. They are often helpless as racism plays a major role in determining who they are and what they do. Ayodele (2017) notes that:

Majority of Africans who travel outside the shores of Africa go there to engage in self-demeaning jobs like mortuary attendants, wildlife keepers, housekeepers,, nannies, toilet cleaners, gigolos and so on... these immigrants believe that it is better to live abroad and grapple with menial jobs than wallow in abject poverty and hopelessness in their home countries (125).

Bamidele, argues that even after attaining breakthrough and becoming successful, these immigrants still don’t get this sense of fulfillment, for life as an immigrant is not as rosy as many Africans are made to believe. Obinze is not able to secure a job with his true identity. He only succeeds to secure a job that fetches him money by counterfeiting his identity despite a strong sense of longing of his own self. He undergoes depression and takes to reading. It is through his constant touch with some books that he discovered his original self and decides to return to Nigeria rather than living a life of frustration and disillusionment in London.

On the way African immigrants in America identify themselves and how they are perceived by others, Clark (2009) opines that, many of the immigrants are caught between maintaining either an African or American identity and the pressure from family to maintain the former.

Writing as an African immigrant, Clark says “embracing a bi-cultural identity has been personally enriching, ensuring me the best of both worlds” (267), a position that brings to bear the ‘double consciousness’ as an aspect of immigrant experience. Dike, Aunty Uju’s son, a Nigerian by birth though brought up in America, suffers identity issues and alienation in the midst of white Americans. The stress and pressures of identity are what led Dike into attempting to commit suicide because of his sense of otherness. Adichie in *Americanah* through her characters, presents the intriguing experiences of African immigrants in the United States of America and Europe through identity politics and the various challenges of integration they encounter.

IDENTITY POLITICS AND THE CHALLENGES OF INTEGRATION

Postcolonial literature projects the interaction and reaction between the colonizer and the colonized, as well as tackles issues related to people that belong to the colonised countries. One of the most controversial issues in postcolonial literature is the question of identity because it exists in almost all postcolonial communities. The colonized struggle to reconnect to the roots of their identity in all spheres such as culture, art and economy, which was wiped away and lost during the colonial period. Adichie’s *Americanah* portrays the problematic situation of immigrants as one of the results of colonialism. Identity as a focal point in this novel images the crisis and the conflicts of the colonized as he/she struggles to find a way of identification between the previous native cultural heritage, history, and the power of the dominant culture imposed on them by the colonizers. This is in line with Said’s opinion in his book *Orientalism* which discusses the issues faced by the colonized people who suffer or struggle with their identification crisis as a result of Western domination and power. To him, “... The sense of Western power over the Orient is taken for granted as having the status of scientific truth”(46). The identity issue becomes crucial in this context because it is a way in which the author through her characters, seek to

define themselves and show their misery including racism and discrimination to the whole world.

Aschroft, Griffiths and Tiffin (1995) argue on the issue of place and displacement. To them, the post colonial crisis of identity begins with “the development or recovery of an effective identifying relationship between self and place... a valid and active sense of self may have been eroded by dislocation, resulting from migration, the experience of enslavement, transportation, or ‘voluntary’ removal for indentured labour”(8-9). Identity crisis is the central impact of displacement. Displaced people cannot differentiate or determine the link that exists between themselves and the place they are in because displacement also has to do with their emotional side. In *Americanah*, the protagonist migrates to America to further her studies but encounters the painful experiences of identity crisis and racism faced by immigrants in America

Adichie portrays the problems of African immigrants to the West, which commences right from foreign embassies in Africa where these Africans are obliged to obtain a Visa to be able to travel abroad. Obinze walks into the American embassy in Nigeria with hopes of acquiring a visa and reuniting with Ifemelu in America but he is denied a visa on the pretext that he does not qualify to have one. According to Obinze, “the man glances at the forms and said kindly; sorry, you don’t qualify, next person?” (233). He does not give up after the first attempt and three times he is given the same response, “sorry, you don’t qualify”. Obinze’s experience is similar to what Adichie’s brother Chucks went through in an American embassy in London. In an interview at the Aspen Institute, Adichie describes the challenges her brother went through in order to renew his visa. According to her, the interviewer pointed at Chucks visa application and said sharply, “this interview is over”. Chucks’ experience is based on reality which shows the frustrations potential Africans undergo. This explains the reason why some immigrants take the risk of hiding under cargo compartment of



ships, take Trans Sahara route as well as crossing the Mediterranean sea all in search of greener pastures.

African immigrants in America struggle to fit into their new abode despite the odds. Ifemelu is unfamiliar with the American concept of race and, grapples with what it means to be black in America. The concept of Racism is often associated with a stereotypical notion used as a category in distinguishing different human groups on the basis of their physical appearances, skin colour as well as other facial features like hair, eyes and nose. Back in Nigeria, Ifemelu was oblivious of her racial identity and it is only upon arrival in America that she becomes aware of her blackness. She says: "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"(290). This statement by Ifemelu shows that race is a significant factor in America. It highlights a series of episodes of a racist nature in the experiences of the female African immigrants. Ifemelu, gradually learns what it means to be black in America as she shares her critical reflections in her anonymous blog *Raceteenth: Or Various Observations About American Blacks (Those Formerly Known as Negroes) by a Non-American Black*. In another blogpost, "Understanding America for the Non-American Black: American Tribalism," Ifemelu explains that class, ideology, religion, and race constitute the main groups into which American society is divided (184). For Ifemelu, colour in this case, indicates either a state of inclusion or exclusion. The idea of being seen as white is normal while black in most cases is shunned and most likely results in exclusion. Ifemelu, in "Understanding America for the Non-American Black: What Do WASPs Aspire To?" notes that, the differences between white and black people in America is seen in terms of the privileges and opportunities associated to being 'white' as well as the disadvantages associated with being 'black' (205). What she implies here is that, in the United States, race becomes the primary factor to establish one's identity. While in Nigeria, her skin colour is regarded as normal since she blends with the people; but the same skin colour matters a lot once she steps out of

Nigeria unto the shores of America as she is faced with racial discrimination and marginalisation.

Hair Politics in America is a controversial topic since it is used as a form of discrimination and racial identity. African female immigrants are denied various opportunities because of the texture of their hair. Ifemelu and Aunt Uju are compelled to go through the process of identity formation that forefronts their race. A significant part of this process is perceived through the apparent policing of black hair. While hair had already been a consequential part of her identity, its role became much more complex while in America. The history of hair politics dates back to the long history of enslavement of West Africans by the Europeans who often asserted their power through the hegemonic exploitation of the slaves' hair.

Although the slave traders often shaved the heads of the slaves as sanitary measures, some critics are of the opinion that the shaved head portrays the manner in which the Europeans took to erase the slave's culture and alter the relationship between the African and his or her hair. Centuries after black hair was shunned and used to dehumanize and strip off the cultural identities of slaves, black hair is still subjected to constant degradation till today. This continued devaluation and dehumanization of blackness has created an internalization of the existent social hierarchy, propelling black people to reject their blackness. For that reason, in order to survive in the American society, Ifemelu is forced to take out her braids having realized the weight her natural hair carried.

Aunt Uju tells Ifemelu how she had to take her braids out and relax her hair for her interview, because according to her, natural hair in America was deemed "unprofessional" and when you "are in a country that is not your own ... you do what you have to do if you want to succeed"(119). Ifemelu soon learns that "the use of corn rows, braids and dreadlocks" are considered "matted and unkempt" and thus "demonstrates the ugly continuity of this kind of objectification and dehumanization of black people's hair"(74). Though she found this

absurd at the time she was equally advised by Ruth to “lose the braids and straighten her hair” (202) for her own interview some years later, “she knew enough” (203), not to dismiss it and thanked her. She had become acquainted to the American society enough to know that Ruth was right when she said, “Nobody says this kind of thing but it matters. We want you to get the job” (202). The workplace discrimination against black women’s hair becomes a significant issue because black women are at risk of being fired, or not even hired in the first place, for wearing their natural dark hair.

When Curt, Ifemelu’s white boyfriend discovers that she has undone her braids in order to straighten her hair, he exclaims that though her braided hair was gorgeous, he finds her natural dark and curly hair even more gorgeous, so full and cool. Although she appreciates her boyfriend’s remarks about her hair, in her blog, she expresses her observation that hair seemed like “the metaphor for race in America” (297) having discovered that her white friend was completely oblivious to the nature of her black hair. In an interview, Adichie explains how hair can be a metaphor for race, because oftentimes even well-intended people are ignorant of the complexities of race like they are of black hair. She states that,

Hair is something we see, but we don’t understand what’s behind it, kind of like race. It’s the same what that something seems obvious, but it is really complicated and complex ... sometimes the way that your hair grows from your head isn’t considered ‘professional’ by people who don’t know black hair. I don’t think it’s that people are malicious, I think it’s just some people don’t know what the hair that grows from the head of black women actually looks like. (Adichie interviewed by Ashley Weatherford).

According to Ayana and Tharps, there are multiple types and textures of African hair and despite their many differences, the lived experiences of hair by many Africans in America is one thing that binds them together. One could therefore say that, shared features and aspects of identity may unite dispersed identities especially when existing as an

“order” in a society where one finds his/herself in relation to a dominant group. When Ifemelu suffered severe damage to her hair and scalp from continuous use of hair chemicals and relaxer burns, she was encouraged by Wambui to cut her hair and go natural, because according to her, “relaxing your hair is like being in prison. You’re caged in. Your hair rules you... you’re always battling to make your hair do what it wasn’t meant to do”(208).

Ifemelu however, grapples to come to terms with her new outlook as she eventually finds comfort in an online natural hair community at ‘HappilyKinkyNappy.com’, a community of women who “were done with pretending that their hair was what it was not, done with running from the rain and flinching from sweat”(212). These are women who have rejected the Eurocentric norms and have “sculpted for themselves a virtual world where their coily, kinky, nappy, wooly hair was normal”(212). It is also her hair that led her to ‘Mariama African Hair Braiding’ where she enters into a world that is reminiscent of a microcosm of Africa, located in the part of the city that had graffiti, dank buildings and no white people. Here she was welcomed by Halima, one of the braiders with a welcome smile assuring her of a warm welcome by a fellow African.

Language is another major element in the novel in which Adichie uses to portray the negative experiences of cultural alienation and assimilation that blacks go through in America. Adichie, portrays the forced blending of cultures and assimilation that occurs in the American society specifically in relation to Ifemelu’s immigration to America. Ifemelu’s identity formation spans from her childhood and adolescence experiences of growing up in Nigeria through, her early adulthood in America, where her identity is primarily shaped through immigration and assimilation into her new homeland. Ifemelu, upon arrival in America is perplexed by the observations she makes which are indicators of individuals standing between two cultures (hybridity). This is evident from the language, names and lifestyle of the people. This combination of cultures and languages that is evident to anyone

Ifemelu meets the moment she speaks is a double-edged sword. If she keeps her Nigerian accent, she is marked as different in America, and at the same time, she is looked down upon by friends in Nigeria for not assimilating enough, despite the fact that Ifemelu views her accent as a fundamental part of who she is. If she chooses to disregard her identity and speak in an American accent while in Nigeria, she is met with shock because her people perceive that rather as a compliment. This hybridity is negatively presented as it counters the overwhelming majority of narratives that view cultural or linguistic hybridity as something unique and positive that comes about from different cultures coming into contact with each other.

The American experience has completely transformed Auntie Uju who switches from her usual self and feigns an American accent in order to avoid rejection in the American society. This reflects the postcolonial concept of assimilation whereby the colonized had to behave, act and speak like the Europeans. Auntie Uju pretends to be someone else when she is in the presence of the American white people. "Dike, put it back", Auntie Uju said, with a nasal sliding accent she put on when she spoke to white Americans which sounded like 'pooh-reet-back'. With this accent, "emerged a new persona, apologetic and self-abashing" (108). This new persona the narrator exposes, acts differently according to what is acceptable and expected of the immigrants to do and to be:- an imitation of the white Americans. For her son not to suffer the a similar rejection, Auntie Uju tells Ifemelu not to speak Igbo to Dike. "Please don't speak Igbo to him, Two languages will confuse him...This is America, it's different" (109).

Ifemelu is caught up in this language complexity as she begins practicing an American accent after a humiliating incident during the registration-day at the University. Her way of acquiring the American language - words, expressions, accent and sounds culminates in a journey from rejection to incorporation and then rejection again. Ifemelu's foreign accent had propelled Christina Thomas, responsible for registering international students, to treat her condescendingly by

speaking extremely slow (133). In a bid to be accepted, these African immigrants are forced to adopt an American accent as a way of identifying with the West thus alienating themselves from their African culture. This all suggests the oppressive power of white America that eventually forces Ifemelu and Auntie Uju, to subdue their Africaness in order to fully assimilate into the American society. Paul Friere analyses the effects of alienation on the experiences of individuals as he remarks that: "At one point in their existential experience, the oppressed feels an irresistible attraction towards the oppressor and their way of life ... in their alienation, the oppressed want at any cost to resemble their oppressors, to imitate them, and follow them" (33). Although the concept of hybridity displayed by Auntie Uju is negative, it is a pointer to the challenges posed on immigrants by host nations. Ngugi wa Thiong'o while discussing African national culture, contends that, no living culture is static for "a profound change in a people's economy, or in their dwelling place, through trade or migration, will make people organize themselves differently to meet the new set of circumstances. Their ideals and values over a period, are likely to change" (5). This therefore indicates that the environment dictates the need for the African immigrants in America to endeavour to strike a balance between a foreign identity and one's personality.

Ifemelu, however, becomes increasingly unhappy with the American façade that has oppressed her true self and, consequently, she gradually reclaims her African identity, which makes her identity culturally hybrid. Not only is she seen as an "other" in America for speaking with a Nigerian accent, but when she returns to Nigeria her friends joke around about her lack of an American accent. The reclaiming of Ifemelu's African identity includes using her Nigerian English accent again and growing back her natural, kinky hair. To Adichie, African women who maintain their natural accent and hair symbolises their pride in their African identity. Ifemelu, in other words, purposely adopts a hybrid identity that comprises both American and Nigerian cultures to resist white oppressive norms of expression, beauty

and behavior. This coincides with Bhabha's notion that a hybrid identity serves to subvert political, economic, and ideological power structures. Ifemelu also decides to return to Nigeria but upon arrival in Nigeria, Lagos city precisely, she realises that the city has changed as her immigrant experience and subsequent life in the US have transformed her identity and, as such, it is not tied to one nation or culture anymore. This feeling is captured by Ranyinundo's teasing remarks upon Ifemelu's return to Nigeria: "Americanah! You [Ifemelu] are looking at things with American eyes. But the problem is that you are not even a real Americannah. At least if you had an American accent we would tolerate your complaining" (475-476). This encounter between these two friends who had been apart for a long time speaks something much deeper. Even though Ifemelu grew up in Nigeria, and has lived in America for so long, she exists in this strange hybrid space. Neither is she completely at home with the American culture, nor the Nigerian culture she grew up with. Simons (2017) describes Ifemelu as "an Americanized returnee who, initially, seems to have lost touch with the Nigerian culture but soon reconnects with it through the city of Lagos and, more importantly, her high school sweetheart, Obinze, which underscores her ability to construct an identity from various nationalist and cultural discourses" (34).

Adichie also stresses on the value of indigenous languages as a form of African identity. A lot of Africans mimic the whites ways of speaking once in foreign grounds. Nicholas for instance is described as one who speaks only standard English to his children. During a debate titled '*Chimamanda Ngozi: How will History Depict the African Woman?*', Adichie says, "we need to find ways to value our African languages"(1). she goes further to say that she finds it 'silly' that some Africans are afraid to speak their languages. Through some of her characters in the text like Nicholas and Emenike, Adichie ridicules Africans who try to imitate Western cultures and manner of speaking. Obinze and Ajugo were proud to speak the Igbo language while in America as well as

Ifemelu who is proud to speak her Igbo language to Dike, though she is greatly opposed by aunt Uju.

In *Americanah*, economic exploitation is one of the many challenges faced by African immigrants as a result of institutionalised racism. The American system is based on stringent laws on immigrants and lack of proper documentation brands one an illegal immigrant which may lead to deportation. By avoiding the long arm of the law, most immigrants end up with low paid jobs with many living in miserable environments and conditions. The three African women braiders Halima, Aisha and Mariama best portray this economic exploitation although most of the other characters are faced by this challenge as well. They are deprived of proper facilities demonstrated by how settled they are in the neighbourhood of low socio-economic conditions. In order for Ifemelu to have her hair braided, she has to travel by taxi for miles from the white-owned suburbs of Princeton to Trenton inhabited mostly by blacks. Ifemelu is apprehensive of visiting the area and a description of the salon presents a picture that is reflective of the occupants who are struggling to make ends meet. According to her, “the salon is overcrowded and lack air-conditioning and is likely to have mouldy newspapers stuffed between grime and rotten things” (9). This portrays the unhygienic state of Trenton and how America as an imperial power contributes to the social oppression of immigrants through its non-inclusive nature. Furthermore, the tales of these women are heart-wrenching, for example, Aisha’s father passes on but she cannot travel home for the funeral because she lacks proper documentation. She also has a sick mother on the verge of dying whom she cannot visit. From these women experiences, it shows how their status as immigrants is accompanied with challenges like economic and social pressures. A notable aspect based on the experiences of these three African hairdressers is that, gender and class are intertwined. The fact that their jobs pay lowly, confines them to the ghettos making their rise economically next to impossible. Much as they work effortlessly on their feet all day long, they are unable to advance economically or

financially. This situation is worsened by the fact that they are uneducated. This is in comparison to Ifemelu who despite the challenges she meets is able to negotiate her way out because she has achieved financial security as a result of her high level of education which opened up job opportunities for her.

CONCLUSION

Americanah exposes and highlights the challenging issues of African immigrants through racial and identity constructions of the novel's major characters, Ifemelu and Obinze in America and United Kingdom respectively. As immigrants, Ifemelu's situation in America is significantly contrasted to that of Obinze's in London. Obinze initially thinks of the West as a land of milk and honey but his dreams and intentions of getting rich and living a better life there are all shattered as he returns home with nothing to show for but humiliation although he becomes very successful in business back in Nigeria. Ifemelu on her part, does not live in a shadow, as she refuses to change her name, the one thing that identifies her though she faces different struggles, such as racism, discrimination, and the pressure of cultural adaptation, while trying to keep true to her identity. Ifemelu, as an immigrant, student and blog writer, exposes the American contemporary issues such as racism, immigration, as well as Western views on postcolonial countries.

From this narrative Adichie uses her character Obinze to pass across a message to African immigrants that instead of seeking for prosperity abroad, they can still toil in their home countries and become successful in Africa. Their American dreams can still be fulfilled even in Africa. However, the reality in which Adichie places her characters is very different. They represent members of an educated Nigerian middle class who wish to leave their homelands because they have dreams and want better life opportunities in a foreign land. She advocates for a strong tie to the African heritage through her character, Ifemelu, who after establishing a successful life in America, decides to return to Nigeria.

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