

PEOPLE'S DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF ALGERIA
MINISTRY OF HIGHER EDUCATION AND
SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH
UNIVERSITY OF AMMAR THELIDJI- LAGHOUAT
FACULTY OF LETTERS AND FOREIGN LANGUAGES
DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH



Ethnocentrism and Identity in Postcolonial Literature
Case Study: *Americanah* (2013)
By Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH IN PARTIAL
FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR MASTER DEGREE IN CIVILIZATION AND
LITERATURE

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Academic Year: 2020-2021

Dedication

To my family and friends

Anfal Bencherif

To my family

Mebarka Boutte

Acknowledgements

We would like to express our deep and sincere gratitude to our supervisor Mr Abdelkader Kourdourli for his guidance. We would also like to thank Mrs Afaf Selt and Ms Fattoum Mouissa for their support and help all the time.

Abstract

Identity and ethnocentrism are among the main issues that are discussed in postcolonial literary works. As a Postcolonial writer, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie focuses on these two issues in details in her novel *Americanah*, published in 2013. This dissertation seeks to explore Postcolonial literature and places the novel *Americanah* in its contemporary context. It also aims to investigate the questions of identity and ethnocentrism in Nigeria as well as in America. This work also tackles issues of race, gender, stereotypes and immigration. The essential objective is to prove that America is not dreamland for African immigrants. In order to achieve this objective, the qualitative-thematic approach is relevant to this work, along with a descriptive-analytical method. The main results of this study are: First, African immigrants have no full freedom in America; second, all African immigrants are subjected to injustice in all aspects of American life; third, the American social system is designed to maintain only one ethnic group's domination over other; fourth, the present study demonstrates that the American dream is unlivable, especially for black immigrants; fifth, it suggests a major consideration of returning to the homeland for the purpose of resolving the identity issue.

Key words: Ethnocentrism; identity; Postcolonialism; American dream; stereotype.

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General Introduction

The need of self-governance and the rise of liberal movements led to the emergence of post-colonialism. The term depicts the era when the colonized countries achieved their independence from European powers. Hence, postcolonial African literature refers to the writings produced after the political independence of colonized nations. Most of these literary works have been written by African authors in their homelands. They reflect the experiences and suffering of Africans during and after colonialism. The major themes of these writings are: ethnocentrism, the question of identity, migration, slavery, racial segregation, and women oppression. In addition, postcolonial literary works offer a new 'counter-discourse' instead of the predominant discourse of the colonial power that had used to prevail on the literary scene.

Regarding ethnocentrism, which is the major theme under study in this dissertation, it fosters the deep-seated belief of a certain group of people in the superiority of their culture over another group's culture. This occurs when people fail to accept cultural diversity and difference. There is a considerable variation among the cultural schemas of different social groups. If this variation could not be appreciated by the different societies, then, the interpretation of the world will be narrowed according to their own cultural filter. Yet, each culture has its own natural code which can determine the right and the wrong. So, any variation might be seen as exotic, wrong, or inferior.

Further, ethnocentrism prevents people from accepting other cultures because the sense of superiority makes them always see others as inferior. It precludes them from understanding other people's lives, cultures, and religions. However, the term itself does not necessarily have a negative meaning. It can involve a positive view of others' race or indicate a positive connotation. But it still can lead to a misunderstanding and a conflict between cultures, because people who are born into a particular culture grow up to observe their values

as their own culture. So, they develop a worldview that classifies their culture as a norm that should never be demolished.

In particular, ethnocentrism is a serious issue that can cause serious trouble between nations such as colonialism and imperialism. Thus, postcolonial African literature focuses on conflict of ethnic groups through the different cultural norms. In addition, postcolonial literature also deals with the issue of identity.

Identity refers to the qualities that make people different from each other. It is basically the extraordinary semblance of specialty, uniqueness, and distinctiveness. Over years, studies on identity have been the concern of many psychologists, anthropologists and sociologists. They commonly use the term 'identity' to describe the uniqueness of humans. Nowadays, however, the concept of identity can be widely seen in almost all fields especially in literature. Therefore, postcolonial African literature holds the responsibility to depict identity and its impact on colonized societies. The question of identity became the main concern and challenge of African authors. This literature aims to restore national identity which had already existed before the harmful experience of colonialism.

In this context, many African writers shift their entire focus to the issues of ethnocentrism and identity. They have sought to spread the sense of awareness and justice in their cultures, by portraying these issues in their works. The Nigerian Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie is one of those postcolonial writers. Her novel *Americanah* addresses explicitly the themes of hope, wealth, social and economic mobility, and most importantly, the questions of ethnocentrism and identity. The novel is about a young Nigerian woman 'Ifemelu', who immigrates to the United States for the purpose of studying at university. *Americanah* keeps track of the journey of Ifemelu's life in both countries (Nigeria and the United States), and the way she is treated within American society.

This dissertation seeks to explore the theme of ethnocentrism, by investigating the one of its major aspects which is ‘identity’. In order to carry on this study, the following questions are addressed: To what extent do ethnocentrism and identity affect post-colonial writers? How does immigration affect the protagonist’s identity, behaviour, and sense of belonging? What are the various experiences that Ifemelu undergoes and that contribute to shape her identity as an individual black migrant woman? Why does Ifemelu decide to return back to Nigeria after fifteen years?

It is hypothesized that African writers can express their ideologies and standpoints concerning the harsh situations in which Africans have lived, especially from outside their homeland. In this regard, the main character, who is an immigrant, is confronted with problems of identity as she is on the edge of two cultures.

The aim of this study is to explore the questions of identity and ethnocentrism in postcolonial literature, and more precisely in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s *Americanah*. Moreover, this dissertation seeks to figure out how the protagonist overcomes the cultural misconceptions that arise in her life in the United States.

Much has been written on the current topic. Frantz Fanon’s *Black Skin White Masks* describes Fanon’s personal experience of racism. He highlights how black people are psychologically affected because of racial prejudice. Kwame Anthony Appiah’s *The Ethics of Identity* (2005) demonstrates several understandings about the concepts of identity and individuality. In his opinion, identity is a wide concept that includes different social and biological components like culture, language, religion, nationality, gender, race, and sexuality.

Appiah attempts to answer the question of how individuality is influenced and affected by identity. More importantly, he describes the different identities of humans including their beliefs and self-conception. He believes that there are many types of identities, but each extraordinary individual has his or her own special sense of identity that can be shared with other persons. He calls this shared identity a 'collective identity'. Further, Appiah argues that collective identities work as means of self-building which bring an aim and meaning to people's lives and solidarity. On the other hand, Stuart Hall and Paul Du Gay's *Question of Cultural Identity* (1996) foregrounds the critical issue of cultural identity which has strongly promoted one of the most contemporary debates, especially in the social and human sciences. In addition, Hall and Du Gay show how identity is shaped during the imperialist and colonial periods of imperialism. In *Homegoing* (2016), Yaa Gyasi portrays the period when the transatlantic slave trade began. She indicates how many Africans were moved from their country into the Americas by force. The novel demonstrates that throughout this procedure, many Africans were affected by the burning issue of identity. In other words, they were faced with the terrible dilemma about their origin: Were they African or American? They were caught in the dilemma of double conscience.

Margaret Wanjiru Njoroge and Gabriel Njoroge Kirori's *Ethnocentrism: significance and effects on the Kenyan society* (2014) shows how ethnocentrism influences some people to believe that their own ethnic group is better than another group. The authors attempt to compare and contrast the concepts of ethnocentrism, prejudice, stereotype, and racism.

Another important work that dealt with the issue of identity formation is a dissertation that is entitled 'Divided Identity and Displaced Self in Fadia Faqir's *My Name Is Selma*' (2015) by the student Fadia Boualem. In this study, Boualem focuses on the themes of identity and displacement. Boualem aims to portray the journey of the novel's protagonist. The latter loses her identity in favour of her stability.

There is still a degree of ambiguity concerning the relationship between the concepts of identity and ethnicity, and the deciding factors that explain self-abnegation and identity transformation. This research differs from the previous studies afore-mentioned in attempting to connect the missing parts in one single part within the scope of Postcolonial literature in general and African literature in particular.

This study depends on different ways of gathering data for a thorough investigation of the main concepts of ethnocentrism and identity. The data will be divided into two categories of sources: one primary source which is the novel under study *Americanah* (2013) and secondary sources which include some books, articles and websites. This dissertation adopts both a thematic and analytical-descriptive method.

The present dissertation is divided into three chapters: The first chapter introduces the concept of post-colonialism and postcolonial literature in general. Then it attempts to define the key concepts of ethnocentrism and identity. The second chapter is dedicated to the theme of identity as developed in the novel *Americanah*. As for the third chapter, it discusses the theme of ethnocentrism.

Chapter I

Broad Overview on Postcolonialism and Postcolonial Literature

Introduction

Before Postcolonial literature emerged, the entire focus was only on what is called colonial literature, which was written during the time of colonization usually from the point of view of the colonizers. Then serious attention was devoted to literature produced by members of the colonized community in regions, such as the Indian Subcontinent, Nigeria, South Africa, and different parts of the Caribbean. This type of literature was described as Postcolonial literature. This chapter presents a theoretical background of Postcolonial literature and is made up of four main sections. First, it defines the concept of post-colonialism. Second, it traces the emergence of Postcolonial literature and identifies its characteristics. Third, it displays postcolonial theory and introduces some of its theoreticians and pioneers. Fourth, it explores key concepts such as identity and ethnocentrism, that often pertains to Postcolonial literature.

1. What Is Postcolonialism?

The term ‘post-colonialism’ is written with a hyphen to indicate the condition and the way of living after the end of colonialism.¹ However, when it is without a hyphen it refers to the theory that describes this condition. The Post-colonial era or post-colonialism refers to the period when colonies attained their independence from European colonial powers such as Britain, France and Spain. The term ‘post-colonialism’ examines the experience of

¹ Colonialism is the practice or policy of control, frequently by creating colonies and often in order to create economic domination. Colonists can impose their religion, language, economy and other cultural norms throughout the colonization process.

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colonialism through the past and present effect on the ex-colonized communities socially, politically, and culturally. The authors of *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-colonial Literatures* state that ‘more than three-quarters of the people living in the world today have had their lives shaped by the experience of colonialism’ (Ashcroft et al. 1). Additionally, the term involves the discussion of experiences that the colonized people suffered from during colonialism, such as, oppression, migration, and identity deconstruction.

The prefix 'post' in the term ‘post-colonialism’ continues to be problematic amongst some critics. On the one hand, the prefix 'post' simply interprets a chronological sequence which refers to the period of time after colonization when the colonized countries became no longer a part of the imperial powers. On the other hand, some critics claim that the prefix 'post' in ‘post colonialism’ denotes the continuation of the colonization process. Although many countries have gained their freedom and independence, the newly-independent colonies are still chased by the ghost of the colonial powers. Eventually, this led to the creation of a new kind of literature which is postcolonial literature.

2. The Emergence of Postcolonial Literature

Postcolonial literature emerged in the countries which attained their independence and freedom from European imperial powers. Postcolonial studies started in the late 1970s and the beginning of the 1980s. But actually, these studies, primarily, appeared after the end of the Second World War, when the process of decolonization began. So, what do we mean by ‘Postcolonial literature’?

2.1 What Is Postcolonial Literature?

Literature is a form of human expression, it has an important role in representing the problems of individuals and realities of communities. Postcolonial literature, in its simplest definition, is all the literary works which were written by ex-colonized people after the independence of their homelands. The *Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms* defines

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postcolonial literature as ‘A category devised to replace and expand upon what was once in Britain called Commonwealth Literature. As a label, it thus covers a very wide range of writings from countries that were once colonies or dependencies of the European powers’ (200). In *Black British Literatures: Novels of Transformation*, Mark Stein writes: ‘post- colonial literatures can be defined as those Europhone literatures that have arisen in the wake of European colonialism’ (201).

Postcolonial writers tend to describe the experiences that the former colonies passed through. Themes like suppression, resistance, race, identity and migration were highly presented in their works. In addition, Postcolonial literature is concerned above all with self-representation and self-determination. Previously, the colonizers considered themselves as superior as far as race and culture are concerned. In their literature, they represented themselves as a civilized and educated race unlike the colonized people who were considered in the eyes of the colonizers as primitive. So, Postcolonial writers decided that it was high time they spoke, expressed themselves and wrote back to the ex-colonizers to recount their history from their own perspectives in a great number of publications.

The 1950s and 1960s witnessed the publication of many inspiring postcolonial texts and works, such as Samuel Beckett’s *Murphy*, Gabriel Garcia Marquez’s *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, Salman Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children*, Chinua Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart*, Tayeb Salih’s *Season of Migration to the North*, Toni Morrison’s *Beloved*, J.M. Coetzee’s *Waiting for the Barbarians*, Michael Ondaatje’s *The English Patient*, Arundhati Roy’s *The God of Small Things*, NoViolet Bulawayo’s *We Need New Names*, Zadie Smith’s *White Teeth*, and Ingolo Mbue’s *Behold the Dreamers*. All these texts and works had marked characteristics.

2.2 Characteristics of Postcolonial Literature

The appropriation of the colonial language, nationhood and nationalism,² the valorization of cultural identity, challenging stereotypes³ and decolonization⁴ struggles are among the features of postcolonial literature.

First, the appropriation of the colonial language is one of the ultimate goals of the postcolonial writers in order to mock the colonizers. Postcolonial writers use the language of the colonizers and disfigure it, though they are able to use it properly. But they tend to do so intentionally in order to challenge the authority of the colonial power over language.

Second, nationhood and nationalism are features incorporated into Postcolonial writing because Postcolonial writers possess a deep sense of patriotism.⁵ Most of their books, articles, and novels display a keen sense of nationalism. Besides, postcolonial literature highlights the nation's cultural, political and social identity.

Thirdly, the valorization of cultural identity is a distinctive characteristic of Postcolonial literature. Postcolonial writers challenge the idea of their oppressors that the

² Nationalism is an ideology and movement that holds the country in line with the state. As a movement, nationalism strives to foster the interests of a specific nation, in particular in order to win and retain the sovereignty of the nation over its native country.

³ A stereotype is a generalized opinion of a certain category of persons in social psychology.

⁴ Decolonization is the process of destroying colonial authority. This means removing the hidden components of the institutional and cultural factors which had perpetuated colonial control and existed long after the achievement of formal independence. Initially, the process of resistance was done in many locations in the conquered world, using institutions that were suitable for the culture of the colonizers.

⁵ Patriotism is the sense of love, dedication and commitment to a nation and alliance with the people who share the same emotions. This bond can include many different sentiments, whether ethnically, culturally, politically or historically, in relation to one's motherland. It includes a number of themes that are closely linked to nationalism.

colonial powers are superior in comparison to the colonized people. Therefore, Postcolonial literature expresses the colonized people's own traditions, culture, and religion.

Finally, to challenge stereotypes is considered to be the main mission of Postcolonial writers. The colonizers believed that they were in a better position, that they were stronger than the colonized people. Thus, they held cultural and racial stereotypes. They saw the colonized people as primitive, weak and savage. The role of Postcolonial literature is to shatter these stereotypes. Postcolonial literature has rested on Postcolonial theories.

2.3. Postcolonial Theories

Colonized societies faced discrimination and subjugation. This resulted in the emergence of theories known as postcolonial theories. In the late twentieth century, other major literary movements, such as Postmodernism⁶ was contemporaneous with Postcolonialism. Schwarz and Ray state that 'one of the claims frequently made about postcolonial theories is that they are, in one way or another, the "child" of Postmodernism' (431).

Postcolonial theory prompts discussions about various topics, such as suppression, resistance, subjugation, and responses to colonial discourses. Duncan Brown asserts that among the debates about postcolonial theory is its theorization of the silencing of the colonized within the colonial encounter. But he adds that 'even though the colonizers attempt to silence the other, the colonized have continued to speak often in unofficial ways and form unofficial spaces, but also from the centres of their societies' (47).

In addition, postcolonial theory investigates the negative effects and the impact of colonialism on the colonized societies. Moreover, postcolonial theory examines the falsified

⁶ Postmodernism is a movement of the late 20th century that is characterized by widespread scepticism, subjectivism, or relativism, wide distrust of reason, and acute sensitivity to ideology's role in expressing and sustaining economic and political power.

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realities about the colonized peoples and their lands which the colonizers depict in their literature.

In general, Postcolonial theory discusses some concepts like Orientalism,⁷ subaltern,⁸ subjugation, and hybridity. Firstly, Orientalism is defined as ‘Western ideas about the Middle East and about East and Southeast Asia, especially ideas that are too simple or not accurate about these societies being mysterious, never changing, or not able to develop in a modern way without Western help’ (*Cambridge Dictionary*).

The field of Postcolonial studies was influenced by the cultural critic and the Postcolonial theorist Edward Said who advances the postcolonial theory of Orientalism. In 1978, he wrote *Orientalism* in which he develops and analyzes the concept ‘Orientalism’ and challenges the standard conventions through which the West portrays the Orient.⁹ Furthermore, Said redefines ‘Orientalism’ and re-examines the misrepresentation of Western discourses about the Orient. Said claims that Orientalism as an idea of representation ‘is a theoretical one: The Orient is a stage on which the whole East is confined’ to make the Eastern world ‘less fearsome to the west’ and that the developing world, primarily the West, is the cause of colonialism’ (363).

⁷ Orientalism is the Western ideas about the Middle East and about East and Southeast Asia, especially ideas that are too simple or not accurate about these societies of being mysterious, never changing, or not able to develop in a modern way without Western help.

⁸ The term ‘subaltern’ designates and identifies the colonized populations who are socially, politically and geographically excluded from the hierarchy of power of an imperial colony and from the metropolitan homeland of empire.

⁹ The Orient is an Eastern phrase that usually includes anything with regard to Europe which pertains to the Eastern realm. It is the antonym of the term ‘Occident’. However, some eastern Asian and south-eastern Asian people regard the term ‘orient’ as an insulting description.

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Next, the term ‘subaltern’ was first adopted by Antonio Gramsci. It generally refers to the lower ranks in society which are convinced by the ruling class that their interests are the interests of all. In other words, it describes the social groups with a lower status, people who lack a voice, who cannot speak, who have been moved to the margins of a society, and who have been neglected from political, social and cultural representation. According to Castle, the term ‘subaltern’ refers to a social group. For example, migrants, shantytown dwellers, emigrant tribes, refugees, the homeless that either do not possess or are prevented from possessing class consciousness and who are in any case prevented from mobilizing as organized groups (322).

Later on, ‘subaltern’ has been used in Postcolonial studies as a theme by some historians and theorists such as Gayatri Spivak. Her work is considered as one of the key theoretical texts in the field of Postcolonial studies. Spivak’s aim is to give voice to the voiceless: those marginalized people who have no voice in their societies. Therefore, postcolonial theorists tend to find space for the subaltern. In one of her interviews, Spivak argues that the ‘subaltern is not just a classy word for “oppressed”, for the other, for somebody who is not getting a piece of the pie . . . In postcolonial terms, everything that has limited or no access to the cultural imperialism¹⁰ is subaltern– a space of difference. Now, who would say that is just the oppressed? The working class is oppressed. It is not subaltern . . . Many people want to claim subalternity. They are least interesting and most dangerous. I mean, just by being a discriminated-against minority on the university campus; they do not need the word “subaltern” . . . they should see what the mechanics of discrimination are. They are within the hegemonic discourse, wanting a piece of the pie, and not being allowed, so let them speak, use the hegemonic discourse. They should not call themselves subaltern’ (12- 45).

¹⁰ Cultural imperialism is the domination of European languages and culture by means of Western education.

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Thirdly, 'subjugation' is the act or the process of controlling a country and governing a group of people by force. This process of subjugating people is viewed as a harmful act for the mental health and the psyche¹¹ of the colonized people who were subjugated into colonies. The theme of subjugation has become the main concern of many writers, such as Frantz Fanon. He is a major figure and postcolonial theorist who wrote some works in which he describes the subjugation by the colonial powers. In *The Wretched of the Earth*, Fanon analyzes the nature of colonialism and describes it as a dehumanizing process. However, the natives should resist the colonial subjugation and react violently to it in order to restore self-respect to the subjugated.

As for the concept 'hybridity', it refers to the mixture of two different cultures in postcolonial societies. As a result of the clash between those two cultures, such as the Eastern and Western. A hybrid person is one who has found a balance between two cultural attributes. Hybridity occurs in postcolonial societies both as a result of conscious moments of cultural suppression, as when the colonial power consolidates political and economic control, or when settlers-invaders dispossess indigenous peoples and force them to 'assimilate' to new social patterns. It may also occur in later periods when patterns of immigration from the metropolitan societies and from other imperial areas of influence (e.g., indentured labourers from India and China) continue to produce complex cultural palimpsest¹² with the post-colonized world. (Ashcroft et al. 183)

¹¹ The psyche is the entire mind, as differentiated from the physical organism in psychology. The term, which in the past had referred to the soul or to the very essence of life, is derived from the figure of Psyche in Greek mythology. In Greek mythology, Psyche is a beautiful princess who is made immortal by Zeus on the orders of her divine lover, Eros, Aphrodite's son.

¹² A palimpsest is a clean, erased or scraped text or document for the reusability of the paper, parchment, vellum, or whatever media it was written on. Various old documents have been restored using ultraviolet light and other technologies to read the deleted writing.

One of the theorists who associated ‘hybridity’ with postcolonial studies is Homi K. Bhabha. His theory of cultural differences provides the concepts ‘hybridity’ and ‘third space’. Bhabha's concept of hybridity is derived from Mikhail Bakhtine’s¹³ concept of hybridization. Bakhtine defines hybridity as a complex notion in postcolonial studies which means the integration between two separate and different entities, cultures, and races which result in the birth of a third space.

The potential of postcolonial theory is to emphasize the effects of colonialism and imperialism on postcolonial countries and their culture. In addition, postcolonial theory aims at giving a space for multiple voices that have been once muted by the imperial rulers. Moreover, postcolonial theorists believe that they have the responsibility to speak up on the behalf of the marginalized groups who have no access to the external world.

Among the major concerns of postcolonial theories and literature, ‘identity’ takes precedence.

3. Broad Overview on ‘Identity’

In its simplest sense, ‘identity’ refers to the qualities that define each person. It includes the memories, beliefs, experiences and values that any one creates for the sense of self.¹⁴ The concept ‘identity’ is a modern concept which has a long history. In the 1940s and 1950s, the modern concept of ‘identity’ became the concern of many sociologists, psychologists, and anthropologists. Nowadays the concept is subject to change, formation,

¹³ Mikhail Bakhtine is a Russian philosopher, literary critic and researcher who has been involved in literary, ethical and linguistic theory. His work, on a range of issues, influenced academics working in different traditional, historical, philosophical, sociological, anthropological and psychological fields.

¹⁴ The ‘self’ is the totality of an individual that comprises all traits, mental and physical, conscious and unconscious. The self has a fundamental relationship with personal identity, being, and experience. Carl Jung claimed that the self developed progressively through an individualization process, which was only completed before late maturity.

and construction. Furthermore, recently the concept 'identity' has developed, and multiple types of identity within individuals have appeared, such as cultural, religious, gender, and national.

First, cultural identity is the sense of belonging to a certain cultural group of people who share a common language, religion, traditions, values and a literature. Basically, cultural identity is the heritage and the traditions that a person has and which help him or her to identify with a specific cultural group. Second, religious identity is another type of identity construction. It is related to the personal spiritual faith and ethical beliefs of individuals. Third, gender identity is the personal sense of how individuals feel towards their own gender. Although male and female are the two known genders in any society, there are various types of gender identities, such as transgender, gender neutral, agender, pangender, genderqueer, two-spirit, and third gender.¹⁵ Fourth, national identity refers to the sense of belonging to a state or a nation. It is the common feeling and the emotion of pride and love that a person shares with a group of people for a certain nation. This feeling of national identity is considered as a positive point for any nation, and people who share these feelings towards

¹⁵ Transgender are the people who have a gender or gender identity that differs from the sex they were assigned when they were born. Gender neutral, sometimes called gender neutrim or gender neutrality, is the belief that policy, language and other social institutions should avoid discriminating between roles according to gender or sex. Agender is a word that may be interpreted literally as without gender. It may either be interpreted as non-binary gender identification or as a declaration that a gender identity is not present. People who identify as agender may be described as genderless. Pangender is a variant of multi-gender and sex flux in which the individual changes over a period of time between agender and pangender. Genderqueer is traditionally defined as neither 'female' nor 'male'. Various non-traditional gender identities are included under the phrase 'queergender'. Genderqueer can identify gender midway between women and men, or more often, all of them from the gender binary. Two-spirit is used to define native people who play a traditional ceremonial and social role in their cultures by some northern American indigenous peoples in their communities. Third gender is a categorization of gender in societies recognizing a gender other than men or women.

their nation are called patriots. The full expression of national identity is known as chauvinism,¹⁶ which is the extreme belief in the superiority of one's nation or state. More importantly, the concept of 'identity' is most dealt with in psychology.

4. Identity from Postcolonial and Psychological Perspectives

This section deals with the concept of 'identity' from a psychological perspective within the context of post-colonialism as a historical era and Postcolonialism as an intellectual movement.

4.1. Identity Crisis within Postcolonialism

The post-colonial period represents the historical and cultural setting for the discussion of the topic of identity crisis because identity is considered to be one of the most pressing issues of the era. This is due to colonialism and the wars of independence that caused a massive loss of identity, in addition to pre-colonial circumstances faced by the newly-freed countries (in their quest for shaping their identity). The majority of colonized peoples at that time experienced traumas as a marked effect of colonization, which destroyed their original identities and caused a heavy psychological damage.

The national identity that has been formed during the post-colonial era has not been accepted. It has been believed to be an altered identity. Stuart Hall argues that 'personality rises as a sort of troubled space or an uncertain inquiry in that space, between various

¹⁶ The term 'chauvinism' derives from Nicolas Chauvin, a French soldier who kept a basic loyalty to Napoleon, pleased with the award of Military Honours and a tiny pension. Chauvin came to describe the cults that were prevalent after 1815 for the adoration of all military things among Napoleon's warriors. Subsequently, chauvinism was used to express an extreme fondness or loyalty to a group or place to which one belonged. Chauvinism may also denote the superiority of masculine chauvinism with respect to individuals of the opposing sex.

converging talks' (10). Additionally, singular and aggregate identities vary, both physically and psychologically. During the early stages of decolonization, there was a huge variety of identities due to diverse social orders. In this way, rather than being imposed, identity may be chosen and employed in the social setting. This is why 'identity' has taken precedence in Postcolonial theory as well.

4.2. Identity in Postcolonial Theory

Postcolonial theory and studies have sought to inspect social orders in the nation that fought for a space in the world in which the question of recognition became a great dilemma. Thus, the most disputable and important issues in postcolonial theory is the issue of identity. Since the outbreak of wars of independence, the subject of identity has risen to the fore.

Theorists and thinkers have shifted their attention to this issue. For instance, Fanon's view of identity is based on the historical connection between the colonizer and the colonized. Fanon argues that the savage legacy of imperialism caused the loss of the actual identity of the colonized. In *Black Skin, White Masks*, he exposes the fears of black men in the post-colonial period. His psychological analysis of racism is a sarcastic view of the black man's breakdown. He provocatively advises black men to try to appear white. He writes:

Every colonized people—in other words, every people in whose soul an inferiority complex has been created by the death and burial of its local cultural originality—finds itself face to face with the language of the civilizing nation; that is, with the culture of the mother country. The colonized is elevated above his jungle status in proportion to his adoption of the mother country's cultural standards. He becomes whiter as he renounces his blackness, his jungle. (9)

According to Fanon, true identity is caught up in the comparison between black and white, between skin and veil. The black man wears a veil under colonial influence, which

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encourages blacks to behave in a natural way. Fanon links this to the consequences of colonialism since he argues that white man's advancement and culture have applied 'an existential digression on the Negro' (12). Thus, he indicates the way in which the colonized individual sees himself or herself unequal to the colonizer. This maintains the dominance of the colonizer. Furthermore, the treatment of the colonized by the colonizer begot a psychological and dysfunctional behaviour within the colonized individual.

In a similar vein, Richards argues that 'liberation is not adequate to remove the impacts of colonialism and to capture the sensation of identity' (11). Richards's purpose is to call full attention to the 'assaults of the identity substance in the colonized by instigating a type of psychological illness' (11). Here, he is referring to Fanon's psychological analysis of the effects of colonial violence on the colonized people. Richards contends that the black man's behaviour is similar to that of an obsessive neurotic, or, if you prefer, he or she puts himself or herself in a total situational neurosis. There is a perpetual endeavour in the man of colour to flee his own originality, to erase his own presence. The black man's attitude towards the white, or towards his own race, almost always mimics a constellation of insanity, often bordering on the pathological (60).

Similarly to Fanon's ideas (of the impact of the colonial power on the colonized), Edward Said explores the issue of identity. For him, identity is shaped through the bilateral relationship between the West and the East. He focuses on the perspective that identity is given by Western hegemony. From his perspective, truth and knowledge are always given by the part that has the power to control. In this manner, the West can play a central role in evaluating and arranging the knowledge of the colonized under their authority and dominance. Said's focal point is that the colonizers have a certain belief system through which they could greatly affect the colonized and make them embrace Western identity. Identity, then, is constructed and arranged inside Occidental knowledge. In this regard, the colonized are no

longer able to recognize themselves outside this view. E. Said argues that to oppose the West, to reject the imposed identity, and to establish one's own pure identity are based on how much colonial power is rejected. Said imagines that, basically, the empowerment of the plan of the West occurred because of the absence of resistance. (*Orientalism* 363)

Nevertheless, the West has become a haven for immigrants and refugees nowadays. In such trying circumstances, new hybrid identities have developed and the sense of rootlessness and homelessness has become the norm. The issues of exile and immigration are reflected in Said's writings that seek to understand the question of identity. Said assumes that the idea of social and cultural identity is a 'generalized situation of being homeless' (18). This indicates that, just like immigration and exile, displacement is intrinsically linked to identity or resettlement. (*Orientalism*)

In Said and Fanon's view, identity manifests itself as pro-colonized imitation, also known as mimicry. The latter consists of emulating the colonizer's lifestyle, behaviour, or distance while rejecting his attitude and ideology. Fanon and Said give careful consideration to the breakdown of post-colonial identities. However, Said claims that there is no pure identity, yet there are diverse and genuine identities that existed in a middle space: the 'in-between'. As a result, the restrictions between the West and the East, as well as alienated identities and their paradoxical nature, are neither fixed nor flexible. Identities always evolve.

4.3. Identity Development Theory

Identity development theory was advanced by two central figures, one in psychoanalysis and the second in social psychology. These figures are Sigmund Freud and Erik Erikson.

For Sigmund Freud (1856-1939), the human psyche is made up of three parts: the id, the ego, and the superego. First, the id is the unconscious part which exists from birth. It is

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responsible for all the instinctive desires and behaviours. Second, the ego is where the conscious mind lives. It is burdened with the challenging task of satisfying the desires of the wild id in an acceptable realistic social way. Yet, it also has to deal with the third part which is the superego. The superego is the internalized part that is responsible for punishing the wrong thoughts or deeds of both the id and the ego, through the feelings of guilt and shame. Freud contends that the three parts are essential to the normal development of personality and the harmonious equilibrium among them engenders a well-balanced personality.

As for Erik Erikson (1902-1994), in his work (*Identity: Youth and Crisis 1968*) he advanced the theory of the psychosocial development of the individual while studying identity. Erikson claims that personality develops from infancy to adulthood, through eight stages of psychosocial development. These stages include trust vs. mistrust, autonomy vs. shame/doubt, initiative vs. guilt, industry vs. inferiority, identity vs. role confusion, intimacy vs. isolation, generativity vs. stagnation, and integrity vs. despair. In each stage, any given individual may face a psychological crisis¹⁷ that may affect his or her character development positively or negatively. In Erikson's view, a healthy personality results from the successful completion of each stage. However, the failure of completing any stage successfully can result in a reduced ability to pass to the next stage. Further, Erikson argues that the fifth stage, which occurs during adolescence, is the most fateful because it is responsible for the core identity of human beings. Erikson gives much importance to this stage. He believes that a proper transition through this stage leads to a strong identity. However, a poor transition may lead to an insecure and unstable identity. (*Identity: Youth and Crisis*)

Freud and Erikson both think that the development of personality starts from childhood. However, their viewpoints vary when this stage ends. Unlike Freud who argues that the largest portion of personality finishes its development in early ages from childhood to

¹⁷ A psychological crisis occurs when a person is threatening to himself/ herself or others, or is substantially out

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of touch with reality; uncontrollable behaviour and/ or hallucinations could be shown then.

adolescence, Erikson proposes that it continues even throughout adulthood. In other words, Freud thinks that identity is no longer developing after adolescence. So, when this stage ends, one's identity would be fully formed. Nonetheless, Erikson contends that this development keeps going till the next stage. For Erikson, even adults have the ability to update their identity.

We move on now to the study of the second most important concept that this research attempts to explore, i. e. ethnocentrism.

5. The Concept of 'Ethnocentrism' in Postcolonial Literature

This section of the study attempts to discuss the concept of ethnocentrism and the major role it plays in Postcolonial literature.

5.1. General Overview on the Concept of 'Ethnocentrism'

The concept 'ethnocentrism' derives from the original Greek word 'ethnos' which is combined with the English word 'centre'. The literal translation of 'ethnos' is nation or people. The term 'ethnocentrism' was first coined by Ludwig Gumplowicz (1838-1909) who used it in his writings. Later on, William G. Sumner (1840-1910) adopted and popularized the concept. Ethnocentrism focuses more on one's ethnic group. It is the belief of the superiority of one group over another group (who are considered inferior). Sumner considered ethnocentrism as a 'view of things in which one's own group is the centre of everything, and all other are scaled and rated with reference to it' (13). He also included the feelings of in-group devotion and cohesion as well as the rejection of out-groups, group superiority, and exploitative intergroup in his explicit conceptualization of ethnocentrism (13). In addition, a recent definition conceptualizes ethnocentrism as 'our defensive attitudinal tendency to view the values and norms of our culture as superior to other cultures' (Ting-Toomey 157).

Put in simple words, ethnocentrism is the preference for one's ethnic in-group over out-groups. It is the belief in ethnic superiority, the desire to maintain ethnic purity, and the approval of exploitation of ethnic out-groups if it is in the interest of one's own ethnic group (Bizumic and Duckitt 7).

While studying ethnocentrism, we often come across another key concept that is 'ethnicity'. The latter is the subject of the following section.

5.2. Theories of Ethnic Evolution

Ethnocentrism has been examined by sociologists from a variety of perspectives, each is based on a distinct theory. These explanations may be grouped into four categories: evolution, threat and conflict, self-aggrandizement, and socialization and norms. The first theory of ethnic evolution is proposed by Charles Darwin. In (*The Descent of Man and Selection in Relation to Sex 1871*) He argues that 'sympathy is directed solely towards the members of the same community, and therefore towards known, and more or less beloved members, but not to all the individuals of the same species' (106). Accordingly, humans like other species, have the pronounced tendency to include within their preferences only the members of their own community, but not others.

The second theory of ethnic evolution is the theory of threat and conflict. This theory emphasizes realistic rather than unrealistic threats to a group. It holds that ethnocentrism and out-group hostility can aid in the defence of groups who face threats. It proposes that ethnocentric conflicting groups are more likely to defend themselves when they are threatened.

The third theory, called self-aggrandizement, predicts that when individuals are divided into in-groups and out-groups, they consider themselves on a different level. They harbour positive feelings towards their group and want them to be superior to other groups as a consequence of a desire for self-esteem.

Duckitt (2001)

The fourth theory of ethnic evolution is socialization and norms. This theory advances that people tend to categorize themselves in a social world and learn about social categories to which they belong or not belong.

But the relevant question that must be asked in the current study is: How much pertinent is the concept of ethnocentrism to post-colonialism?

5.3. Ethnocentrism within Postcolonialism

The end of colonization made people face many domestic problems, such as the issue of belonging to different religions, cultures, nations, societies, and political groups. Post-colonial ethnicity is the ethnic attitude of post-colonial writers as minorities in the ex- colonized countries. Postcolonial writers focus on how small ethnic minorities face problems related to religion, politics, and economy as ethnicity alongside with race, in particular, have continued to shape and influence the economic, social, and political life of independent societies. The new independent nations have struggled to develop into a united nation-state due to their negative legacy of racial and ethnic polarization, which was inherited from both colonialism and nationalism.

Ethnic polarization has not only developed among a few groups, but in all groups. These groups have accused and counter-accused each other of ethnic favouritism. In addition, ethnic minorities in border areas with little economic development and less physical and social infrastructure have felt marginalized from the economy and society, and complained about political and cultural domination bitterly. In education, for example, children from ethnic minorities generally do not have access to education in their native languages, which are usually taught in schools up to the third grade only.

In this context, ethnic tension has remained endemic mainly because of the politics of silence. This silence has been tested on two levels: state and society. At the societal level,

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the politics of silence have seemed evident in the way in which community members avoid or try to silence all discussions about ethnicity in the country. However, at the official state level, the politics of silence have become apparent in the government's reluctance to involve race as an issue in both politics and economy, especially with regard to addressing historical and contemporary factors that have continued to make race an important issue in people's life.

Conclusion

In the light of what has been mentioned in this chapter, Postcolonial literature aims at depicting history from the viewpoints of the people who had experienced the conditions of colonization. It became the only means by which they defended themselves while facing colonial domination. Because the identity and culture of the native ex-colonized peoples were negatively impacted by the fierce onslaught of colonization, especially through colonial discourses, Postcolonial writers have endeavoured to create a new literature that is able to beget a new counter-discourse. That is why most Postcolonial authors have a clear predilection for themes such as identity, ethnocentrism, ethnicity, race and gender.

The key concepts that have been introduced in this chapter will be fully illustrated in the following chapter through an analytical study of *Americanah*.

Chapter II

Immigrant Identity in *Americanah*

Introduction

Many Africans consider America as a utopia where their ambitions and dreams can be fulfilled. However, when they experience life there, they face the painful truth that America is a country of racism and racial prejudice. This negative image of America is depicted in this chapter. Therefore, the present chapter analyses the plight of the Nigerian immigrants, especially women, who flee to the United States in search of a better life. However, they find themselves trapped between their Nigerian socio-cultural norms and those of America. Three major points will be discussed in this chapter: First, the chapter will provide a general overview of the novel under study. Second, we shall study the storyline, the main characters, and the central theme of identity. In this regard, we shall examine how *Americanah* addresses the problem of identity construction¹, notably the black diasporic² and Afropolitan³ identities. Furthermore, we shall find out how certain circumstances dictate the development of the main character's hybrid identity. In the final part of the chapter, we shall discuss the issue of cultural identity through the main character's racial experience as an immigrant who is viewed as inferior simply because of her cultural heritage and white people's misconceptions about Africans.

¹Identity construction is also called identity development or identity formation. It is the difficult process in which humans acquire a distinct and distinctive opinion, a clear and unique view of themselves and of their identity.

²Diaspora is the voluntary or forcible migration of people from their native homelands. The Diaspora in literature focuses on questions of maintaining or altering identity, language, and culture in another culture or country.

³ Afropolitan is an African who was educated in the United States or Europe, and spends a significant amount of time in those parts of the world.

1. General Overview on *Americanah*

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's novel, *Americanah*, was published in 2013. It is her third novel. Actually, the term 'Americanah' is used in Nigeria to refer to a person who has gone to the United States and has come back to Nigeria, suddenly pretending not to understand the Nigerian native languages. Therefore, this Americanah begins to speak with an American accent in his or her own homeland. The story of the novel is about the character Ifemelu, who goes to the United States and spends many years there, then goes back to Nigeria when she becomes 'Americanah'. According to Adichie, 'Americanah' refers not only to the character, but also to America, which serves as a refuge for the new generation of Nigerians who imagine America as dreamland.

In Adichie's view, the reason behind writing *Americanah* is the question of 'what does home mean?' and whether when you leave home you can go back. She thinks that for many Nigerians, home is Nigeria. Hence, Adichie's character, Ifemelu, considers home as a certain kind of Nigeria, but she has changed and Nigeria as well. Eventually, when she returns back home after many years abroad, she finds Nigeria a totally different place. So, the novel *Americanah* keeps track of Ifemelu, the main character, and other characters in both America and Nigeria.

1.1. Summary of the Plot

Americanah is about a young Nigerian woman called Ifemelu, who leaves her hometown in Nigeria and lives in the United States for over ten years. The story starts as Ifemelu catches a train from Princeton, New Jersey, the very expensive university town where she has a fellowship as a writer, to Trenton, which is much poorer. She goes there to have her braids done before returning back to Nigeria. While sitting in the salon, she begins to reminisce about the past and recounts her childhood in Nigeria. She recalls every single

memory, especially her struggles with the prevailing language and culture. She also recalls her two relationships that she had since emigrating. However, none of these two relations could replace her first love with the young man Obinze in Nigeria.

The narration of the events is from the perspective of Ifemelu through her thoughts and posts from her blog 'Raceteenth'. At a certain point, the story shifts to Obinze's point of view. He describes how he has straggled as an illegal worker in London, and how in a short time he has been able to make a fortune upon his return to Nigeria. Ifemelu's plan of going back to Nigeria is delayed because her beloved cousin attempts to commit suicide. Eventually, she returns to Nigeria.

Ifemelu and Obinze live a precarious situation as they must decide about their relationship. Since Obinze is a married man and he has a young daughter, it is very difficult for him to decide whether he should continue his relationship with Ifemelu or forget about it. However, after struggling with himself, he decides to choose his love, Ifemelu, no matter what the cost.

1.2. The Main Characters

Ifemelu, a Nigerian figure, is the novel's protagonist. She is an intellectual, headstrong, and opinionated lady who has left her country to attend university in the United States. Ifemelu receives a fellowship and becomes a US citizen. However, she has a serious problem to adapt there. Later on, she launches her well-known blog about racism in America. She has suffered as a result of bullying.

Obinze, the first love of Ifemelu, finds her honesty and bluntness attractive. He is characterized by wisdom and authenticity. Obinze is a Nigerian man who has been dreaming of America as a future since childhood. However, he could not achieve this dream. The narration of the events sometimes switches to Obinze's life and struggle to work illegally in

London before returning to his homeland. Even though Obinze loves Ifemelu, he gets married to another woman. Unlike other Nigerian immigrants who see the financial opportunities in England as a drastic improvement, and prefer illegal immigration in favour of poverty in their mother country, Obinze decides that he will never leave Nigeria again. So, he chooses the difficult truth over the pleasing fiction.

Aunty Uju, Ifemelu's beloved aunt, has stood beside her since she was young. Aunty Uju immigrates to America with her son Dike, and once there she faces trouble adopting the American lifestyle. She is hardly able to rebuild her life and becomes a doctor to support her son. Even though she offers practical advice to Ifemelu, Aunty Uji has a weak personality. Her willingness to allow everyone to control her life makes her very complex. This character believes that success is dependent on powerful and wealthy people, so she undergoes costly beauty treatments and forms a false friendship in order to maintain her success. Therefore, she begins to Americanize herself to gain social acceptance.

Dike's life (the son of Aunty Uju and the cousin of Ifemelu), totally changes after immigrating to America. His personality transforms from a bright and cheerful child to a confused and depressed teenager. Dike grows up rootless because he ignores who his father is. That is the secret that his mum refuses to reveal. For this reason, Dike is cut off from his Nigerian identity. This rootlessness leads him to search for his true identity. Hence, his American peers treat him as a black American, while his mum always convinces him that he is not.

Ifemelu's parents are shown in the story through Ifemelu's flashbacks. Her mother is a religious woman who tries to reduce the difficulties of her extremist faith while her father is an intelligent man who tries to mask his lack of education with his large vocabulary. He falls into deep depression when he loses his job, so he can hardly support his family.

1.3. Major Themes in *Americanah*

There are several themes in the novel. The following section will summarize the most dominant of these themes.

1.3.1. Race and Racism

Americanah provides a deep analysis of race and racism. In Nigeria, for instance, the protagonist Ifemelu does not really consider herself black. However, there is still an ethnic hierarchy among Nigerian mentalities, with the most attractive people being light-skinned, mixed race, or using skin-lightening products. When Ifemelu goes to America and Obinze goes to England, they feel racism in most aspects of life. Adichie gives several examples of racism in America, such as when the patients refuse to be examined by the doctor Aunty Uju, or when Obinze is mocked for scraping his knee, or when people assume that Ifemelu could not be dating a white man. As a result, Ifemelu starts writing her blog about race. Through her posts, she becomes able to criticize the conditions of black people in America. Many of these posts involve the discussion about the different experiences of Afro-Americans and American Africans who experience racial prejudice.

1.3.2. Disapprobation of Cultures

In *Americanah*, both Nigerian and American societies are criticized through scenes that are both funny and dramatic. The novel focuses on the issues of corruption and materialism in Nigeria (particularly Lagos), where most people become wealthy through fraud, corruption, and bribes. Moreover, even women date or marry for money and prestige. While the majority of Nigerians really lack the most basic facilities, such as water and electricity, everyone is expected to grumble in front of wealthy people who show off their wealth by traveling and sending their children to Western schools. Thus, the local people hold Western culture and whiteness in great esteem over Nigerian culture. Likewise, the novel

criticizes American society because of its racial hierarchies, the severe depression and constant anxiety of its members.

1.3.3. Identity

Identity is the central theme of the novel, as the storyline follows Ifemelu and Obinze as they grow up and discover their place in the world. For each one of them, identity is closely related to race and nation. They have certain characteristics and values that shape their personality since they were young. But, as they grow older, they begin to come in contact with American culture which is totally contrary to what they are used to. Ifemelu, then, has to struggle with herself as an African in America.

First of all, she adjusts to this situation by imitating her American friends. She acquires an American accent and straightens her hair to look more like an authentic African American. She even uses a fake identity to search for a job there. Someone tells her, ‘Very soon you will adopt an American accent. You will start to admire Africans who have perfect American accents’ (*Americanah* 143).

Nevertheless, as events unfold, Ifemelu gains her self-confidence and widely assumes her Nigerian identity and nationality. Moreover, she drops her American accent and lets her hair grow naturally. She realizes that she is just pleasing Americans by doing so. This mixture of cultural identities sounds very normal for Ifemelu. She is neither American nor Nigerian. She is stuck in the middle. Obinze, for his part, finds it difficult to adopt a new cultural identity in England. He is obliged to rely on other people’s identities to continue his work after his visa expires. However, his feeling of being invisible and worthless controls him until he is finally deported back to Nigeria where he liberates himself from the burdens of the fake personality and wears back his true Nigerian identity.

1.3.4. Immigration

The main characters in *Americanah* struggle to find a place for themselves in this world, which emphasizes immigration. For instance, when Ifemelu obtains a student visa to carry on her studies in the United States, she has great hopes and seriously expects much of America. This is what any immigrant hopes from his or her host country. She says, ‘America is my dream country’, ‘all I had was my passion for America’, ‘I love America. I realized I could buy America’ (422). Ifemelu states that the reason that has forced her to immigrate is the terrible conditions of the Nigerian university. Furthermore, endemic bribery and corruption in Nigeria are among the reasons for her leaving the country. ‘Nigerians are known for stealing credit cards and doing drugs and all kinds of crazy stuff’ (189).

Other characters in the novel also decide to immigrate to America since it is seen as a refuge for Nigerians. Ginika’s father, who is a professor, suffers with his family in Nigeria. He says: ‘We are not sheep. This regime is treating us like sheep and we are starting to behave as if we are sheep. I have not been able to do any research in years, because every day I am organizing strikes and talking about unpaid salaries and there is no chalk in the classrooms’ (86).

Those diasporic Africans imagine America as the promised land where all their hopes and dreams can be fulfilled. Ifemelu believes that she can live in better conditions in America than in Nigeria. While she is watching *The Cosby Show* in which blacks are able to achieve their goals and become successful, happy and wealthy, Ifemelu begins to dream. She imagines herself in a house in *The Cosby Show* style, in a school with students holding notebooks miraculously free of wear and crease (103). After a while, Ifemelu realises that she is living in a big lie. She realises that everything she sees on television concerning the United States is misleading, because she experiences the negative effects of being a black African immigrant. She suffers from depression and feels dehumanized because of her white

classmates' bullying. They treat her as if she is from a wild African jungle. Eventually, she suffers from psychological and emotional alienation;⁴ she becomes traumatized and acts weirdly.

1.3.5. Depression

Depression is often referred to in *Americanah*. Ifemelu's depression is caused by spacial circumstances. She is in a strange land, knows just two people, and has just sold her body. Ifemelu is looking for a job and is desperate. When she is able to find one and makes new relationships, she seems to break out of her sadness. This shows that her depression is caused by her surroundings.

Obinze, on the other hand, is the polar opposite. When Ifemelu loses contact with him, he becomes depressed. Because he has no idea where she is, he thinks that she is dead. The great sadness that he is filled with resembles very much the sadness one feels for a lost loved person.

In the next section, the way identity in general and African identity is constructed in the novel will be explored further.

2. The Construction of Identity in *Americanah*

The question of identity is given particular focus in Postcolonial literature. And as Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's novel *Americanah* is a Postcolonial work, it is natural that it brings the theme of identity into the fore. In this novel, many characters undergo drastic changes and painful transitions in their lives. These changes and transitions consist of

⁴Alienation is the feeling that you have no connection with the people around you or that you are not part of a group.

dropping their old identities and adopting new ones by changing their accent, appearance, and sometimes even their culture in order to gain the acceptance of a certain society.

2.1. The Development of the Characters' Identity

Most of the time, the main characters may share common awareness of the dilemma of belonging to their original native culture (which helps them assume a national identity) and belonging to another culture (which helps them forge a hybrid identity). The issue of identity is related to the characters' behaviour, way of thinking, speaking, and dressing. Adichie reflects her own experience of her own search for identity throughout her imaginary characters because some of her characters seem to speak on her behalf and express what all Africans feel towards their search for their native identity.

More precisely, Adichie manifests the struggle in search for identity in *Americanah* through the female protagonist Ifemelu and other characters like Auntie Uju, Dike, Obinze. Before going to the United States, race does not seem a serious big issue for Ifemelu because she looks and acts just like the majority of the Nigerian population. But once in America, she is treated as a black woman and as a complete outsider belonging to a different culture.

Ifemelu's racial experience in America affects some aspects of her native identity. At the very beginning of her journey in the United States, Ifemelu struggles to find a decent job. Because of her blackness, Nigerian culture, and pronounced African accent, she loses a number of job opportunities, including a position as a babysitter. Most of her job applications are rejected outright, which causes her strong feeling of absolute worthlessness and undermines her self-confidence. As a consequence, Ifemelu decides to attend some classes to improve her English accent and succeeds in speaking with a perfect American accent.

Moreover, Ifemelu finds herself obliged to meet the beauty standards and style of American society in order to find a decent job. So, she wears her natural curly hair to obtain

employment in a respected place. Indeed, she adopts a fake identity to look for a job because she has only a student visa, not a visa to work in America. But ultimately, Ifemelu reclaims her Nigerian identity after a bitter inner clash between her American culture and Nigerian culture which ends in her failure to adapt to American life and ways.

As regards Aunty Uju and Dike, they face struggle desperately during their painstaking search for true identity in America. After moving to the United States, Auntie Uju becomes the polar opposite of who she has used to be. She becomes less passionate, less motivated, and despondent about her life circumstances to the point of marrying anyone, no matter how he is. As for Dike, he grows up in America and is subjected to racist sarcastic comments via ‘microaggression’⁵, which drives him to commit suicide on multiple occasions.

Concerning Obinze, he endures extreme hardships in London for the purpose of assimilating a new culture and adopting a new identity. He is forced to steal people's identities to acquire a job and to purchase a green-card marriage. In England, immigrants are viewed as less valuable than native-born citizens. This is why Obinze feels virtually invisible and worthless. Obinze is apprehended by the police and deported to Nigeria. Once there, he reassumes his true native Nigerian identity and becomes utterly disillusioned with life in England and America. After his return to Nigeria, Obinze sets up his own business and becomes wealthy and well-known. He marries beautiful women and settles down until Ifemelu’s return to Nigeria.

Overall, the bitter struggles that the characters are engaged in and the harrowing experiences they undergo are the major factor that contributes to the emergence of their new personalities.

⁵ Micro-aggression is a subtler, unconscious or unintended word or action which indicates a prejudicial position towards the member of a marginalised group (such as a racial minority).

2.2. Erikson's Fifth Stage of Personal Development Theory

Human beings go through eight phases of psychosocial growth, from infancy to maturity, according to Erik Erikson's Theory of Psychosocial Development, which incorporates Freud's Psychosexual Theory. Both Erikson and Freud place a high value on human development through adolescence. Erikson argues that the most important period of human identity creation occurs during adolescence, which he categorizes as the fifth stage of his theory, namely the identity versus role confusion stage. Erikson stresses the importance of this period in determining whether a person will have a strong and stable personal identity or an insecure and weak one in the future. Erikson contends that the individual, during this phase, is on a journey to establish a sense of self by experimenting with several roles and identities before settling on a single one to commit to for the rest of his/her life. Additionally, he claims that external reinforcement and support from one's parents, friends, or society have a significant influence on developing a firm and strong sense of identity. A negative demeanour, on the other hand, such as discouragement or humiliation, will have an impact on the person's identity development, undermine his/her sense of self, and will put him/her in a state of confusion and ambiguity about his/her identity, existence, and purpose in the world. At this stage, this individual is having an identity crisis, or what Erikson refers to as role confusion. As a result, he/she is unable to establish integrity, which allows him/her to live by society's norms and build meaningful connections (235-236).

Taking into account Erikson's study as well as the protagonist's psychological condition, it is possible to conclude that Ifemelu has completed this stage during her adolescence, and as a result, has developed self-assurance, a strong identity and personality. This idea may be proven correct by focusing on the protagonist's early life in Nigeria, where she has forged a close bond with her family and friends. As Erikson points out, this strong bond is essential in building a strong sense of self. As a consequence, Ifemelu becomes an

intelligent, stubborn outspoken woman. When she gets her hair braided, she demonstrates her strong sense of self. She is adamant about what she wants and is not afraid to express her feelings about keeping her hair natural, despite the hairdresser's advice. So, she reveals a better sense of self and confidently asserts a strong personal identity.

However, other characters, such as Dike, Ifemelu's cousin, fails to complete Erikson's fifth stage and ends up with a weak personal identity. Dike exemplifies the failure to embrace one's original identity. He grows up without roots since his mother, Auntie Uju, refuses to tell him the truth about his father, thus, robbing him of his Nigerian identity. This unpleasant situation worsens dramatically when Dike is forced to accept the various identities given to him by other people in the host country. Dike's strong feeling of rootlessness gives rise to growing uncertainty. Dike suffers from depression as a result of his school environment. In other words, he is the only black child in his school and is blamed for every single incident that occurs there. He reveals an abnormal sense of self and expresses a sense of identity that is fairly unbalanced. This is effectuated by severe lack of support, reinforcement, or direction. Moreover, he feels decidedly inferior to his American pals. He eventually tries to attempt suicide. Dike's weak identity is, in the end, the result of his stressful childhood environment, which has left him in a condition of great uncertainty and utter role confusion.

What has preceded has been an examination of the personal identity of a few characters in the novel and how different factors have shaped various personal identities. In what follows we shall examine another type of identity in *Americanah*, namely black diasporic identity.

2.3. Black Diasporic⁶ Identity in *Americanah*

In *Americanah*, the wide disparity between Ifemelu, who has recently immigrated to America, and her boyfriend Blain, who has grown up in America, is shown plainly. Ifemelu and her African-American boyfriend share the same African origin and have the same skin- colour. The unique life experiences of each of them (growing up in Nigeria regarding Ifemelu and as regards Blain growing up in the United States), have engendered distinct cultural identities. Their experiences with racial discrimination, for example, differ; and as a result, they react in opposite ways to racism and racists. Ifemelu has an incident with a white woman who asks if she can touch her hair. Ifemelu gives permission to the woman standing in line behind her. Ifemelu sees no harm in this because the woman may not know any black people, and this may be her first encounter with them. On the other hand, Blain does not like this act, because Ifemelu is not a ‘guinea pig’ for white people to ‘experiment’ (313). He considers that the woman’s request is racist. This incident demonstrates how race and racial discrimination are a significant aspect of Blaine’s identity. Ifemelu’s reaction to such acts is very normal, unlike Blain's reaction. The narrator says, ‘Blain expected her to feel what she did not know how to feel. There were things that existed for him that she could not penetrate’ (313). After all, Ifemelu was born and grew up in Nigeria, so her life experiences are vastly different from Blaine's.

Ifemelu and Blaine are involved in another race-related incident. Blaine tells Ifemelu angrily about an incident that has occurred at Yale University. Mr. White, a black security guard at the university library, and his black friend have exchanged car keys and money

⁶ In Postcolonial literature and theory, the term ‘diaspora’ describes people who live outside of their ancestral homeland.

outside the library. A white library worker has noticed this and has mistaken the transaction for a drug deal. Following that, the white man has called the police, who then have escorted Mr. White to the police station. The incident has been dismissed by the university as ‘a simple mistake that was not racial in any way’ (343). In response, Blaine has decided to organize a protest in front of the library, and Ifemelu, once more, finds it difficult to understand Blaine's strong reaction. Ifemelu is unaware of how problematic and pervasive racial circumstances are in the United States. After all, racism is more common in the United States and less common in Nigeria, and as a result, it has inextricably shaped Blaine's identity.

For his part, Blaine is confused about why Ifemelu is not as affected as he is when confronted with instances of racism. For example, Blaine does not even ask Ifemelu if she wants to join him in the protest because he assumes that she will not. Indeed, Ifemelu does not want to protest and, in an act of defiance, chooses a lunch event over Blaine's protest. Ifemelu acknowledges that Blaine regards her as an external observer of the racism that African-Americans continue to face. This is because Ifemelu may be unacquainted with the experience of hundreds of years of African-American oppression in the United States and, as a consequence, is cannot fully comprehend Blaine's outrage over racism.

The section below is an attempt to explore another distinctive type of identity that is clearly identified in *Americanah*.

2.4. Afropolitan Identity in *Americanah*

Adichie uses the concept of ‘Afropolitan’⁷ to investigate the protagonists’ identity formation. An Afropolitan is an African who has been educated in the United States or

⁷ The term ‘Afropolitan’ was coined by the British novelist Taiye Selasi and the Cameroonian political theorist Achille Mbebe. The term was popularized by Selasi in 2005 in her essay ‘Bye-Bye, Babar’. The term denotes the attempt at redefining African phenomena by placing emphasis on ordinary citizens’ experiences.

Europe and spends a significant amount of time in those parts of the world. In *Americanah*, Ifemelu is considered as an Afropolitan character who immigrates to America to study. Ifemelu's immigrant journey in the United States and then her return to Nigeria shape her into an Afropolitan, by building an identity from vastly divergent elements and, ultimately, transforming her into a transnational citizen rather than an American or a Nigerian citizen. Ifemelu's contentious blog article addressing the Nigeropolitan community, a group of Nigerian returnees in Lagos, is an illustration of this. Ifemelu slams Nigerian returnees who regularly compare Lagos to New York in this blog post. Ifemelu argues, 'Lagos has never been, will never be, and has never aspired to be like New York' (417), and adds that 'though most returnees come back with the finest intentions of creating companies or improving the nation, they spend 'all [their] time whining about Nigeria' (421).

By stating that 'Lagos will never be like New York', Ifemelu emphasizes that the Nigerian metropolis will never be, and will never seek to be, another exemplar of Western culture, since Lagos is, and will always be, a non-Western metropolis. Accordingly, Lagos does not have to resemble New York, and comparing it to a Western city is pointless. Similarly, returnees do not have to integrate into a single culture or bind themselves to a particular nation, they do not have to imitate Americans. Rather, they should appreciate their hybridity and capacity to feel at home in numerous cultures and nations. Ifemelu attempts to disrupt Western values and national identity that pervade the lives of returnees in this blog. This illustrates amply that, unlike other returnees, Ifemelu recognizes that integrating her national and cultural identity into a global identity allows her to rediscover pride in her country.

Another distinctive type of 'distorted' identity is hybrid identity. It is treated in the next section of this chapter.

3. The Hybridization of Characters in *Americanah*

Americanah is a novel that describes how different cultures are assimilated in several ways. This assimilation of two cultures is known as hybridity. Ifemelu personifies this hybridity in the novel because she is able to assimilate the Nigerian as well as the American cultures. As soon as she has come to America, Ifemelu adopts the strategy of mimicry⁸ such as some mannerisms and appearances in order to live up to American standards and be accepted by American society.

Ifemelu starts practising and putting on an American accent after she has got embarrassed during class registration-day at university. Christina Thomas, a white girl who sits at the registration table and talks slowly to Ifemelu, concludes that Ifemelu does not know English very well because of her foreign accent (133). For Ifemelu, this means that if she wants people to take her sincerely, she has to acquire an American accent.

Later, Ifemelu dresses her naturally curly hair with a distressing treatment that makes her hair soft and sleek, like the hair style of white people. This treatment should raise Ifemelu's opportunities to have a respectful job, for curly hair is considered to be 'unprofessional' in America (119). All this suggests the oppressive power of white America. Eventually, she is forced to subdue her Africaness in order to fully assimilate into American society. However, Ifemelu does not want to become white in the first place. It is only a strategy to get accepted by white Americans. Ifemelu meets American standards of beauty and behavior so as to become similar to white Americans. Nonetheless, at the end, she regrets straightening her hair, because 'she did not recognize herself [and] the smell of burning [hair],

⁸In colonial and Postcolonial literature, 'mimicry' is the imitation of the cultural behaviour and attitudes of the colonists by the natives of the colonized society.

of something organic dying which should not have died, had made her feel a sense of loss' (203).

Ultimately, she decides to give up on her American accent after she has a conversation on the phone with a telemarketer. The latter is amazed that even though she is Nigerian, she sounds 'totally American', after which she is very glad, but she starts to feel ashamed of that. 'Only after she hung up, she begins to feel the stain of a burgeoning shame spreading all over her, for thinking about him, for crafting his words' you sound American 'into a garland that she hung around her own neck. Why was it a compliment, an accomplishment, to sound American?' (215). Ifemelu asserts that after having moved to the United States, she has become a hybrid between Nigerian and American cultures, and by becoming a hybrid, she has lost a part of her native and pure identity. So, she starts wondering why 'sounding American' should always be a good thing. Following this, Ifemelu begins to reclaim her African identity by first breaking off her faked American accent.

To sum up, immigration has become an important issue in the twenty-first century, especially from Third World countries to developed countries. This phenomenon has generated another cultural phenomenon that is hybridity.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this chapter has offered a broad overview on the novel under study *Americanah*, by presenting the main characters and themes. More importantly, the chapter has examined various types of identity that are discussed in the novel and has explored their development based on psychological analysis. This has been done through studying a few characters and comparing how their identities have formed both in the host country and the country of origin. The comparative analysis, which has also included two characters who are both black but from different cultural settings, has revealed that these characters cannot view the

world in a similar manner because they belong to different cultures, thus have two different identities. The development of their respective identities is enormously influenced by place of origin. *Americanah* points out to the acute dilemma of cultural assimilation today's immigrants are caught in and its impingement on their identity.

Chapter III

Fundamental Ethnoracial Elements in *Americanah*

Introduction

Ethnocentrism is a dominant theme in Postcolonial literature in general and in the novel under study in this dissertation. It has previously been introduced in chapter one. This final chapter consists of five sections. The first section gives a brief sketch of the notion of ‘American dream’ as the novel’s events unfold in America and the main characters, in the majority, leave their motherland for the United States so as to achieve their American dream. The second section is a cultural study of the various ethnic groups and their languages in Nigeria because ethnicity serves as a socio-cultural background to the novel and helps to make sense of the events of the story and characters’ actions and reactions. As this chapter deals mainly with the central theme of ethnocentrism, the third section discusses the issues of race and discrimination within context of ethnocentrism as considered in the novel and studies the relationship between Fanon's ideas and the way race is reflected in *Americanah*. Moreover, this section examines the way the black American community lives in a contemporary white man’s society. The fifth section reveals that the ‘American dream’ is not only a widespread misconception, but also a monstrous lie. It is the serendipitous discovery of this lie in addition to the glaring contradictions of America that lead some of the main characters in *Americanah* to restore their racial, ethnic and national pride through regaining their true identity and their sense of belonging to Africa.

1. The American Dream

The American Dream is the fact of dreaming of a nation in which everyone’s life should be better, richer, and fuller, with equal opportunity for all regardless of racial or social

origin, or nationality. It is not a fantasy of fast automobiles and rich earnings, but of a social order in which each man and woman can achieve the maximal stature of which they are intrinsically capable, and be acknowledged by others for who they are, despite of fortuitous circumstances of birth or position. America has been traditionally seen as a destination of promise. People from all over the globe have moved to the United States, primarily in quest of jobs and religious freedom. However, there are several elements that contribute to America's reputation as a desirable place to live a successful life.

The United States is a country in which the individual takes centre stage in the process of developing policies, making reforms, undertaking developmental efforts, and so on. Thus, the youth from Third World countries have long found America appealing. For them, the socioeconomic situations in their native countries are diametrically opposed to those found in the United States. The freedom that can be found in America cannot be found in the Third World. However, there is a darker aspect to American culture that must be recognized. Slavery, racism, and other societal issues have tainted the American dream.

The concept of achieving one's goals through hard effort has remained at the heart of the American dream. Immigration to America during the age of industrialization was not limited to Europeans; individuals from all over the world went to America in quest of labour and a better quality of life than they had in their own country. America proved to be a nation where individuals could achieve their ambitions if they were willing to work hard.

One of the most prominent ideas in *Americanah* is Americanization.¹In the novel's background, America is a symbol of optimism, luxury, and socio-economic advancement. Characters, who have grown up in a lower-class area, have been pleased and familiar with Nigerian culture. But they have been forced to leave their country and set out to achieve

¹Americanization is the action of making a person or thing American in character or nationality.

success in this new and foreign environment. They have regarded America as a nation of opportunities as is the case with Ifemelu.

Ifemelu has the opportunity to get a student visa and move to the United States in her early twenties to study and pursue her ambition. She honestly expects to be able to achieve her ambitions and goals in America. She expresses her love for the United States by claiming that 'America is my dream country', 'all I had was my passion for America', 'I love America! I realized I could buy America' (422).

1.1. The Factors of Immigration to America

Immigration, which is a worldwide phenomenon related with the movement of people from one region to another, has expanded in the twenty-first century. There are two sorts of migration: internal migration and international migration. Internal migration is the movement of individuals within a country from one location to another, while international migration is their movement from one country to another in search of work, education, freedom, or a better life. Immigration is motivated by two types of factors that are termed as 'push' and 'pull'. The push factors are the factors that impel a person, for various reasons, to leave a location and move to another location. The pull factors are factors that attract migrants to a certain location. An area's pull factors include opportunities for better jobs, greater earnings, facilities, better working conditions, and enticing amenities.

The key factors that have inspired people to flee their homeland can broadly be categorized into different categories: economic, social, and political. Immigration is primarily motivated by economic factors, such as the desire for better employment due to serious lack of jobs in their home countries, the desire for families to have a higher standard of living, better shelter, and better sources of money and food to secure their lives, as well as the reality that the vast majority of individuals have lived in low-income societies in their countries. So,

people immigrated to other countries to satisfy their aspirations. The social factors, such as lack of health care and educational possibilities in their native countries, as well as support from family and friends, and the influence of media force individuals to immigrate. As for political factors, they drive or discourage immigration from one location to another as a result of lack of governmental tolerance, an unjust legal system, war and terrorism, and corruption.

1.2. Immigration in *Americanah*

Ifemelu argues that bad life conditions in Nigeria are the reason behind her immigration to the United States, especially regarding studies at university. ‘Campuses were emptied, classrooms drained of life. Students hoped for short strikes, because they could not hope to have no strike at all. Everyone was talking about leaving’ (102). Moreover, the rampant bribery and corruption in her country are decisive factors for her immigration. Other minor characters in *Americanah* also prefer to leave their homeland for a better life in America.

Ginika's father, a university professor, chooses to bring his family to America because he suffers a lot in his own country. He says, ‘we are not sheep. This regime is treating us like sheep and we are starting to behave as if we are sheep. I have not been able to do any research in years, because every day I am organizing strikes and talking about unpaid salaries and there is no chalk in the classrooms’ (86).

Next, we shall study the socio-cultural situation of Nigeria as it is the homeland of most characters for a better understanding of the background of the novel. This background includes the study of many aspects of culture and society.

2. Ethnicity and Language in Nigeria

Nigeria is a multi-ethnic country with significant socio-cultural variations among its ethnic groups. This has resulted in cultural diversity among its people. Cultural differences in

Chapter III: Fundamental Ethnoracial Elements in *Americanah*

Nigeria consist of the variations in the country's dialects, dressing, and social systems. Most modern African states' multi-ethnic structure is a fundamental visible element of the wide ethnic and tribal affiliations among their diverse populations. In certain situations, it is referred to as 'ethnic groups', but in others, it is referred to as 'tribes'.

Nigeria, like many other African countries with diverse cultures and ethnic groups, has frequently been forced to address challenges such as national integration among its varied inhabitants. Such incidents occur during highly significant and severe ethnic showdowns (disagreements), which in most cases lead to violent clashes resulting in the loss of both property and precious human lives.

In terms of ethnic variety, Nigeria is one of the richest countries. A total of about 250 ethnic groups live in the country. The bulk of the population comprises the three largest ethnic groups, Hausa-Fulani, who dwell in the North; the Yoroba live the south-western part of the state, and the Igbo are found in the southeast. In addition, around 200 languages are spoken in Nigeria, which include around 400 dialects. After the end of British colonization and independence, English became the official language of Nigeria. But many individuals often speak Pidgin, which combines English and indigenous language features. Pidgin is one of Nigeria's most spoken language. During the colonial period, European settlers were able to communicate with the indigenous people and foster dialogue in social, economic and religious contexts among people from different ethnic groups through the use of Pidgin. In informal circumstances today, Pidgin remains the language of daily conversation. Many Nigerians regard Pidgin as a language of national unity that can serve as a unifying factor in the country. Nigerian Pidgin English can be observed in Ifemelu's conversations with people in which the word "o" adds special emphasis and significance to the speech.

While *Americanah* undoubtedly focuses on conflicts caused by ethnic differences in the United States, the novel also provides an insight of the complex relationships between

different Nigerian ethnic groups. In the first chapter of the novel, in a Trento braiding shop Ifemelu's braider Aisha questions her about her ethnicity. When she finds out that Ifemelu is Igbo, she is surprised. 'I think you Yoruba because you dark and Igbo fair. I have two Igbo men. Very good. Igbo men take care of women real good' (14). Aisha then feels upset because she wants to get married with an Igbo man but she cannot; she says, 'They love me but they say the family want Igbo woman. Because Igbo marry Igbo always' (15). When Ifemelu tells her that her thoughts are wrong, and many of her family members have married non-Igbo men, Aisha asks her to persuade an Igbo man to marry her. This scenario highlights strong African ethnic awareness, but also illustrates that not everybody has the same viewpoint. As the events happen, Obinze hears a man say, 'The wealthy don't really care about tribe. But the lower you go, the more tribe matters' (467).

After returning to Lagos, Ifemelu becomes more involved in ethnic affiliation. For example, when she visits a flat, the landlord informs her, 'I do not rent to Igbo people' (393). At this point, the reader of the novel has the question if Nigeria has changed that much or whether Ifemelu has just become used to the carefully veiled prejudice against America. Unlike Americans, Nigerians discuss ethnicity openly. When Obinze wants to make a deal with a man, the potential client without restraint says:

You see, this is the problem with you Igbo people. You don't do brother-brother. That is why I like Yoruba people; they look out for one another. [...]
A Hausa man will speak Hausa to his fellow Hausa man. A Yoruba man will see a Yoruba person anywhere and speak Yoruba. But an Igboman will speak English to an Igbo man. I am even surprised that you are speaking Igbo to me. (456)

3. Race and Discrimination

The notion of equality amongst people is one of the core concepts of human rights. The article of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) proclaims that 'All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights' (2). Non-discrimination is the implication of the concept of equal rights. Discrimination occurs when people are treated differently in the same setting for no given cause.

In the contemporary world, various criteria, including ethnic, national and socioeconomic, religion, language and gender, are established to discriminate against people unfairly. Political inclinations, sexual orientation, age, health, etc. are among these criteria too. However, forms of discrimination which are based on 'race' claims are still one of the most widespread today. People of different races still suffer from racial discrimination, especially when they immigrate to a foreign country. They find themselves struggling just in order to be accepted within their host society. *Americanah* sheds light on Nigerian characters, who immigrate to foreign countries, such as England and America and face racial discrimination. This sort of discrimination proves extremely harmful to people's psyche, particularly the immigrants', as Fanon discussed in his conceptualization of race.

3.1. Fanon's Conceptualization of Race as Reflected in *Americanah*

Americanah is a great example of how Fanon's ideas about racism against blacks in white society are reflected. The novel deals with a bunch of Nigerian people wedged by events in Nigeria, the United States and England. Ifemelu, the protagonist, suffers from several detrimental racist experiences in the United States that have made her struggle for an identity, an identity that has been adopted for many years as a result of the changes that she encounters. Her life in Nigeria is quite regular and normal. Because everyone is black there, she does not feel the difference. Yet after having moved to the United States, she discovers

the ways that white people treat blacks because of their skin colour. The following passage from Frantz Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks* shows that black people are only conscious of their blackness in a white society. Fanon writes, 'As long as the black man remains on his home territory, except for petty internal quarrels, he will not have to experience his being for others. [...] For not only must the black man be black; he must be black in relation to the whiteman' (89-90). Further, Ifemelu explains, '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' (174).

The characters, particularly, Ifemelu, meets American standards of the whites in order to assimilate into their culture. She, however, fights hard to maintain her individuality in the face of cultural adaptation. Dominant cultures encourage subordination that makes it harder to resolve social and class differences when social groups are excluded from political and legal choices. This is what Frantz Fanon claims, 'The feeling of inferiority of the colonized is the correlative to the European's feeling of superiority. Let us have courage to say outright: It is the racist who creates his inferior' (93).

In order to up to the standards of the whites, Fanon stresses the significance of whitening oneself and thus forcing white people to recognize blacks. This process is described as 'lactification', and comprises not only the whitening of one's body or skin, but also of one's mind (*Black Skin, White Masks* 28-29).

While *Americanah* does not depict the terrible effects of skin bleaching, the story reflects the pressure of the whites to be as white as possible. For instance, Bartholomew, a Nigerian boyfriend of Auntie Uju, uses bleaching creams in America. Bleaching his skin is, perhaps, another way of trying to forget his origin and live up to American standards of acceptability and beauty.

Fanon's ideas about race and racial discrimination account for how black people are psychologically affected because of racial prejudice as it is powerfully reinforced by the white man's gaze, just in order to conform to 'his' norms, especially the norms of beauty.

3.2. Being Black under the White Man's Gaze

A good number of characters, such as Emenike, Okoli Okafor, and Ifemelu have left Nigeria for America and England seeking for a better life. Their preconception of life in America and England has shattered. As soon as they have arrived there, they have been confronted with the dreadful reality of race and racial discrimination. White people have despised them because of their skin colour. Emenike, has once been exposed to a racist situation by a white taxi driver. The incident is related as follows:

He had hailed [the taxi] one night, on Upper Street; from afar the cab light was on but as the cab approached him, the light went off, and he assumed the driver was not on duty. After the cab passed him by, he looked back idly and saw the cab light was back on and that, a little way up the street, it stopped for two white women. (165)

Similarly, Auntie Uju is involved in a racist incident. The narrator describes the incident:

she had gone to the public library the other day, had forgotten to bring out the unreturned book from her handbag, and the guard told her, "You people never do anything right." How she walked into an examining room and a patient asked "Is the doctor coming?" and when she said she was the doctor the patient's face changed to fired clay. (179)

The guard not only discriminates against Auntie Uju, but also the majority of her race, with no regard for her humanity. Yet, her work as a doctor could not protect her from this kind of

unfair prejudice. The white people are not the only Americans who discriminate against black Africans in the United States. Africans have been victims of discrimination by non-white groups. This is what has happened to Ifemelu. ‘When she went to fix her eyebrows in the spa on one of the occasions, an Asian receptionist refused her treatment on the basis that they “do not do curly”’ (292). By stressing this strongly, she is discriminating not just against Ifemelu, but against an entire group of women based on their race.

In addition to white Americans’ racist attitudes towards the blacks, other types of discrimination, such as gender and social class within American society are described in the novel.

3.3. Issues of Gender and Class in *Americanah*

Gender and class privilege are still major issues in modern societies. Many postcolonial writers, including Chimamanda Ngozi, have dealt with those issues in *Americanah*. Several characters experience severe difficulties because of their gender. The protagonist, Ifemelu for example, faces many troubles, since she is a woman. When she goes to braid her hair, she encounters some problems. Aisha, the braider, begins to argue with Ifemelu about her life and background. Immediately, she becomes astonished when Ifemelu talks about her success in America and her ambition to return to Nigeria. Gender inequality is real throughout the world. Obinze's mother for instance, who is a very smart professor, has also been exposed to gender inequality in her workplace. Obinze reports to Ifemelu his mother’s bad experience:

She was on a committee and she discovered that this professor had misused funds and my mother accused him publicly and he got angry and slapped her and said he could not take a woman talking to him like that. So, my

mother got up and locked the door of the conference room and put the key in her bra (71).

Obinze's mother has been annoyed by the fact of being a woman and called her colleagues out. She has been involved in this horrible incident, but she has not allowed this to define her. She has effectively deployed her weapons and made the man apologize for his actions. This event is a perfect illustration of gender inequality that is inherent in the Nigerian community.

In addition to gender inequality, the novel exposes how the world has grown extraordinarily materialistic. In today's culture, a person's social status is quite important. Class privilege concerns are present in the narrative. When Ifemelu visits Aunty Uju's new house in Dolphin Estate, she shows this and says: 'She wanted to live there, it would impress her friends; she imagined them sitting in the small room just off the living room, which Aunty Uju called TV room, watching program on satellite' (90). This episode demonstrates that what one owns is very essential to one's social position in Nigerian culture. As a little girl, however, Ifemelu was embarrassed to show her little house to her pals.

It becomes increasingly clear throughout the novel that class privileges define the values of people. Ifemelu encounters the same class issues in her life in America. The narrator describes her state of mind while she takes a taxi to get her hair braided, 'She hoped her driver would not be Nigerian, because he, once he heard her accent, would either be aggressively eager to tell her that he had a master's degree, the taxi was a second job, and his daughter was on the dean's list at Rutgers' (10). This episode really points class importance up, in Nigerian culture even when Nigerians live in American society.

Another key element that is prevalent in the novel and that is related to racial issues is the issue of stereotypes which is dealt with in the subsequent section.

3.4. Stereotypes in *Americanah*

Stereotypes are preconceived and fixed ideas about particular groups of people, such as immigrants, not least black immigrants. Stereotypes can profoundly affect all aspects of immigrants' social and cultural lives, by exposing them to a wide range of negativity and naming. As a discriminating trait, naming typically uses components of harm and racism in order to decrease immigrants' social comforts and to discredit their cultural history and beliefs. Ifemelu encounters several American cultural codes that are implicitly expressed and which she is expected to be aware of. These cultural codes that she experiences are difficult and mostly prejudiced in nature. These misconceptions and biases are aimed mostly at destroying the faith, appreciation, self-belief, esteem and humanity of black immigrants.

Ifemelu becomes the unsuspecting prey of racial stereotypes on account of her blackness and national origins. She encounters stereotyping issues as soon as she arrives in America, when her American roommates make assumptions based on the fact that she is from Africa. For instance, when Ifemelu tells Elena that she does not like dogs, Elena asks, 'Is that like a cultural thing?' (128). Elena subtly portrays Nigerians as non-dog lovers due to her incorrect assumptions and complete ignorance of Nigerian culture. Edward Said recommends that it is important to look at, in this case, figure of speech, and not the correctness of the representation (21). The use of the term 'like' is extremely clever, as it conveys Elena's serious misunderstanding and utter ignorance of the subject. The point is that if a white man does not like dogs, it is because he or she simply does not like dogs, but if an African person, in this case, Ifemelu, does not like dogs, it comes to mind that it may be due to cultural reasons. The cultural standards of the whites are enforced, thereby, racializing Ifemelu, who does not conform to them. Considering that the dislike of dogs is a cultural attitude, Elena appears to have a distorted view of Africans in general and Nigerians in particular. This is an example of how cultural stereotypes are transmitted by means of discourse. According to

Adichie, this is largely attributable to the media. She discusses this in an article titled 'African Authenticity and the Biafran Experience'. She writes:

If I were not African, and if all I knew of Africa came from the U.S. media, I would think that all Africans were incomprehensible people perpetually fighting wars that make no sense, drinking muddy water from rivers, almost all dying of AIDS and incredibly poor. This kind of portrayal makes it difficult for outsiders to see an African as fully human, prompting the Westerner to ask, even if secretly, Is something innately wrong with these people? (45)

There are several times when Ifemelu is racially stereotyped. For example, while she cared for the children of a wealthy family, a carpet cleaner came to the house. When she opened the door 'he stiffened when he saw her. First surprise flitted over his features, then it ossified to hostility' (166). The man did not anticipate that a non-white woman would possess a prominent mansion. His hostility towards her appeared to be admirable. According to the American's racial social system, he should be in a higher class than her. As soon as she mentioned she was the babysitter, his graciousness vanished. The cause of the disappearance of the white man's enmity is that he finds that Ifemelu is not the house owner but 'the help'. This indicates that, ultimately, he is above her and she is below him. Ifemelu confides serenely, 'As far as he was concerned, I did not fit as the owner of that stately house because of the way I looked' (166). It is because of her appearance that he deems her not to be the house owner. After noticing many of the widespread misconceptions held by Americans about Africans, Ifemelu decides to launch a blog to correct these misconceptions.

3.5. Blogging as a Counter-Discourse

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie uses technology as a means to overcome the limitations imposed on her protagonist 'Ifemelu', and in order for the protagonist to reclaim her identity. Ifemelu creates a blog so as to reveal racist and stereotypical ideas and attitudes that are common in America. Blogging plays an important role in the story, and Adichie reports from the start that Ifemelu's diasporic journey as a young black woman immigrant is recorded and debated.

One evening, Ifemelu writes a long e-mail to Wambui about her experiences. It was a long email, digging, questioning, unearthing. Wambui replies, 'This is so raw and true. More people should read this. You should start a blog' (284). Blogs have been new, unfamiliar to Ifemelu. But telling Wambui what has happened has not been satisfying enough; she has longed for other listeners, and she has longed to hear the stories of others. How many other people have chosen silence? How many other people have become black in America? How many have felt as though their world has been wrapped in gauze? Ifemelu has called her blog 'Raceteenth' or 'Curious Observations by a Non-American Black on the subject of Blackness in America' (134).

Ifemelu establishes the blog to express her despair and fury because of the prejudice which she endures. It is a cathartic device that she uses to show how Black people are constantly humiliated and marginalized. Nonetheless, not everyone can accept Ifemelu's liberating experience. She explains, 'I write an anonymous blog called Raceteenth or Various Observations about American Blacks (Those formerly known as Negroes) by a Non- American Black' (135). Ifemelu adds that this sometimes makes people feel 'uncomfortable' (136). In the first blog post, she addresses the non -American-Black and asks them not to say they are Nigerian or Jamaican because America does not care about where they come from. She reminds them that, rather, America cares deeply about their race; hence, she writes,

Dear Non-American Black, when you make the choice to come to America, you become black. Stop arguing. Stop saying I'm Jamaican or I'm Ghanaian. America doesn't care. So, what if you weren't 'black' in your country? You're in America now. We all have our moments of initiation into the Society of Former Negroes. Mine was in a class in undergrad when I was asked to give the black perspective, only I had no idea what that was. So, I just made something up. And admit it—you say 'I'm not black' only because you know black is at the bottom of America's race ladder (137).

More importantly, the blog targets the Black community in general. Ifemelu wishes to build on their shared experience of being invisible in America. Using the blog allows her question the prejudiced behaviour she encounters. She wants to utilize it as a platform for Black people to make their known. She announces, 'Open thread for all the Zipped-up Negroes. This is for the Zipped-Up Negroes, the upwardly mobile American and Non-American Blacks who don't talk about Life Experiences That Have to Do Exclusively with Being Black. Because they want to keep everyone comfortable. Tell your story here. Unzip yourself. This is a safe space' (308).

Adichie uses the blog as a technique to write back and reveal the ugly situations and conditions that the non-American Blacks experience in their daily lives in America by reason of race. Expressly, Adichie demonstrates that America is no longer the dreamland.

4. America Is No Longer 'the Garden of Eden'

America has a glorious past, which is also a little contentious. America's economic and military powers have been tremendous. Furthermore, has become celebrated for its stable democracy and the great respect it accords to the personal freedom and rights of people. Americans are always one step ahead when they present themselves as the world's

powerhouse because they feel fairly proud of being part of such a great country. *Americanah* vividly depicts this American beautiful scene.

Since its independence from Britain in 1960, Nigeria has become politically and economically unstable. As a result, young educated people have begun to dream of immigrating to countries such as America and Britain for better life conditions. Like many young Nigerians, Ifemelu feels the burning desire for a better life in the United States. But once in the United States, she encounters serious difficulties and experiences alienation in America. She feels marginalized and dehumanized within white society by reason of systemic and racial subjugation.

As soon as Ifemelu arrives in America, she is eagerly anticipating attaining great success, but ends up deeply disillusioned by American society's the American dream. It is within American society that identity issues affect Ifemelu seriously; so, she struggles hard in order to reclaim her original black African identity. If Ifemelu has not succeeded in achieving her American dream, her return to Nigeria can be rightly regarded as ultimately triumphant because it has occasioned the rebirth of her original Nigerian identity along with a real strong sense of belonging and great pride in her nation.

5. Return to Home as Pride in African Origin

Despite the numerous material advantages that America could offer immigrants, Ifemelu is getting terribly homesick as the days and months pass. One of these days is described as follows, 'It had been there for a while, an early morning disease of fatigue, a bleakness and borderlessness. It 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' (6). Ifemelu is very eager to return to Nigeria because 'Nigeria became where she was supposed to be, the only place she could sink her roots in without the constant urge to

tug them out and shake off the soil' (6). She feels alive once in Nigeria because 'to be at home, to be writing her blog, to have discovered Lagos again. She had, finally, spun herself fully into being' (475).

In 'Voluntary Repatriation' and 'The Meaning of Return to Home', Daniel Warner explains what is meant to return back home. He writes, 'Home, therefore, is the association of an individual within a homogeneous group and the association of that group with a particular physical place' (162). Ifemelu chooses to return back to Nigeria, since she is not only proud of her ethnicity, but also of her birthplace. Her clear determination to return to Nigeria stems from the strong sentiment that connects her with the country of her ancestors and ethnic group. Ifemelu is somehow satisfied with America, but does not wish to raise her children there. She confides,

I like America. It's really the only place where I could live apart from here. But one day a bunch of Blaine's friends and I were talking about kids and I realized that if I ever have children, I don't want them to have American childhoods. I don't want them to say 'Hi' to adults, I want them to say 'Good morning' and 'Good afternoon.' I don't want them to mumble 'Good' when somebody says 'How are you?' to them. Or to raise five fingers when asked how old they are. I want them to say 'I'm fine, thank you' and 'I'm five years old.' I don't want a child who feeds on praise and expects a star for effort and talks back to adults in the name of self-expression. Is that terribly conservative? (454-455)

Conclusion

As this work has examined a number of fundamental ethnoracial themes, such as the theme of the immigration of Africans to America, it has been necessary to introduce the

Chapter III: Fundamental Ethnoracial Elements in Americanah

notion of the American dream, since many Nigerian young people passionately believe that America is the perfect dreamland where they can live out all their great dreams. *Americanah* presents an ideal opportunity for gaining inside knowledge of Nigerian society and its culture, by discovering and grasping the real factors that contributed to the massive immigration of educated young Nigerians abroad: This has been done through real-life examples. Next, one section in this chapter has been an attempt to study the social and ethnic composition of Nigerian society in general. Finally, the chapter has emphasized that the immigrant individual can be aware of his/her original identity only when he/she leaves his/her homeland and lives in a foreign country, rendering the return at home the only resolution to identity issues.

General Conclusion

During the second half of the twentieth century and following the independence of most formerly colonized countries, a new historical and intellectual era has begun. This era has become known as ‘Post-colonialism’ for marking the historical period and ‘Postcolonialism’ for marking the emergent intellectual and literary movement that followed decolonization. Colonialism had negatively impacted colonized societies, their cultures, and identities. In response, Postcolonial literature has attempted to restore the national cultures and identities of ex-colonized societies. Therefore, Postcolonial literature brings to the fore central themes, such as culture, ethnicity, and identity.

The first chapter introduced some key concepts related to Postcolonialism. As regards the second chapter, it focuses on the issue of identity in the novel under study *Americanah*. In its examination of the theme of identity, this chapter related it with Erik Erikson’s Stage of Personal Development Theory. On the whole, the second chapter was a psychological analysis of some characters’ identity. Concerning chapter three, it highlighted key themes that seem strongly related to race and ethnicity as these two elements are the major concerns of Postcolonial literature as well. The third chapter also offers a broad comparative socio-cultural study of both America and Nigeria. In addition, it brought to the fore the factors of immigration from Nigeria to America as depicted in the novel. Next, the chapter emphasized how issues related to race are dealt with in the host society; and it overplayed the role of going back to one’s homeland and this act reinforces the sense of identity, belonging, and pride.

This study provided a vivid illustration of the concepts of ethnocentrism and identity in Postcolonial literature. It also formed a sound basis for examining the personal development theory through a Postcolonial novel. The present study made a further clarification of some of the critical factors that operate the abandonment of one’s original

identity and the submission to the culture of the West. Another major socio-cultural significance of the study is that the American dream is a dangerous illusion, especially for Africans who seriously entertain it.

The key findings that this research released are as follows: First, Africans no longer have full freedom in America; they must accept the position that has been assigned to them by the host society. They must mimic Americans in a desperate attempt to become equal to them and avoid being seen as strangers and strange. Second, all African immigrants are subjected to submission and injustice in all aspects of life. As a result, Africans are mistreated and stereotyped. Third, Americans pay great attention to the distinctions between one race and another; they notice people's appearance rather than their attitudes. The American social system is designed to maintain only one group's domination over another. Fourth, the present study demonstrated that the American dream is unliveable. Fifth, it suggested a strong consideration of returning at the homeland one way to solve the identity issue.

Further studies are strongly recommended to gain better understanding of the identity dilemma of migrant people within the scope of Postcolonial literature.

Appendix 1

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's Literary Career



Source of Picture: <https://www.culturebene.com/47564-portrait-a-la-decouverte-de-lecrivaine-et-feministe-nigeriane-chimamanda-ngozi-adichie.html>

Chimamanda, like the heroine of *Americanah*, left Nigeria at the age of 19 to pursue a scholarship to study communication at Drexel University in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. She transferred to Eastern Connecticut State University two years later to obtain a degree in communication and political science, which she received summa cum laude in 2001. She then went on to earn a master's degree in creative writing from John Hopkins University in Baltimore. During the academic year 2005-2006, the author resumed her scholastic career as a Hodder fellow at Princeton University, and in 2008, she graduated with an MA in African Studies from Yale University.

In 1997, her literary career began when she released a poem collection called *Decisions and the Drama for the Love of Biafra* one year later. Chimamanda authored her first novel *Purple Hibiscus*, which was released in October 2003, while remaining in the Eastern part. Her debut book got her prizes in 2004 for the Orange Fiction Award and 2005 for the Best First Book for the Commonwealth Writer Award.

Her second novel, *Half of a Yellow Sun*, dealing with the Biafran War, was released in 2006. In 2014, Biyi Bandele converted this novel into a film with the same title. Chimamanda released a series of short tales in 2009 titled *The Thing Around Your Neck*, and finally, *Americanah* was released in December 2013, first in the United States and then in Europe. For her latest work, Chimamanda has received the 2013 Chicago Tribune Heartland Prize and the 2013 National Book Critics Circle Award. The novel was also recognized by the New York Times as one of the ten best books of 2013. Interestingly, at a TEDxEuston conference in December of 2012, Beyoncé sampled some lines of Chimamanda's speech entitled 'We should be all feminists' in her song *Flawless*, released in 2013. (TED Blog).

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Résumé

L'identité et l'ethnocentrisme sont parmi les principaux sujets traités dans les œuvres de la littérature postcoloniale. Comme écrivaine postcoloniale, Chimamnda Ngozi Adichie se concentre sur ces deux sujets en détail dans son roman *Americanah*, publié en 2013. Ce mémoire d'étude cherche à explorer la littérature postcoloniale et situe le roman *Americanah* dans son contexte contemporain. Elle vise également à étudier les questions de l'identité et l'ethnocentrisme au Nigéria aussi bien qu'en Amérique. Aussi ce travail aborde-t-il les sujets de la race, du genre, des stéréotypes et de l'immigration. L'objectif essentiel est de démontrer que l'Amérique n'est pas un paradis pour les immigrés africains. Dans le but d'atteindre cet objectif, l'approche qualitative et thématique est la plus appropriée à ce travail, avec une méthode descriptive et analytique. Les principales conclusions de cette étude sont: premièrement, les Africains n'ont plus la liberté absolue en Amérique ; deuxièmement, tous les immigrés africains sont sujets à la soumission et à l'injustice dans tous les aspects de la vie américaine ; troisièmement, le système social américain est conçu à fin de maintenir la domination d'un seul groupe ethnique au détriment d'un autre; quatrièmement, la présente étude démontre que le rêve américain est invivable, particulièrement pour les immigrés africains; l'étude suggère une considération majeure du retour au pays natal dans le but de résoudre le problème de l'identité.

Mots-clés: Ethnocentrisme; identité; postcolonialisme; rêve américain; stéréotype.

ملخص

إن الهوية و العرقية من الموضوعات الأساسية المتناولة في أعمال أدب ما بعد الاستعمار. كمؤلفة لأدب ما بعد الاستعمار، تركز شومامزدا نغوزي أديشي على هاتين الموضوعين بدقة في روايتها "أمريكازا" التي نشرت سنة 2013. يسعى هذا البحث إلى استكشاف أدب ما بعد

الاستعمار و يضع رواية "أمريكازا" في سياقها المعاصر. يهدف أيضا إلى البحث في قضايا العرق و الجندر و الصور النمطية و الهجرة. هدف البحث الأساسي هو إثبات أن أمريكا أرض الألم للمهاجرين الأفارقة. من أجل بلوغ هذا الهدف، فإن الطريقة النوعية-الموضوعية إضافة إلى الطريقة الوصفية-التحليلية هما المالئمتان. أبرز نتائج هذه الدراسة: أولاً، ليست للمهاجرين الأفارقة الحرية التامة في أمريكا؛ ثانياً، جميع المهاجرين الأفارقة

خاضعون للذعان و الجور في كل مبادئ الحياة الأمريكية؛ ثالثاً، إن النظام الاجتماعي الأمريكي مصمم ليحافظ على هيمنة مجموعة عرقية واحدة على حساب مجموعة أخرى؛ رابعاً، تظهر هذه الدراسة أن الحلم الأمريكي غير قابل للتحقيق، خصوصاً بالنسبة للمهاجرين السود؛ خامساً، يُنصح هذا البحث اعتبار الرجوع إلى الموطن الأصلي من أجل حل قضية الهوية.

كلمات-مفتاحية: العرقية؛ الهوية؛ ما بعد الاستعمار؛ الحلم الأمريكي؛ الصورة النمطية.