

## IDENTITY CONSCIOUSNESS IN CHIMAMANDA NGOZI ADICHIE'S *AMERICANAH*

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### Abstract

In *Americanah*, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie centers on the problems of African immigrants to America and Europe countries. Because she studied in America, Adichie, as a black woman, is familiar with racial discrimination there. She explores her personal experiences with racism and identity consciousness in America through the characters in this novel. *Americanah* is a term used in Nigerian dialect to describe people who have lived in the United States and acquired American mannerisms. The book *Americanah* tells the story of the protagonist, Ifemelu. Ifemelu first meets Obinze in secondary school, and she instantly falls in love with him. Ifemelu immigrates to the United States to pursue her college education. The story is primarily narrated from Ifemelu's perspective. The narration changes to Obinze's point of view for some of the story to describe the struggles he encountered as an illegal worker in London and his quick rise to wealth upon returning to Nigeria. When Ifemelu immigrates to America, she loses her sense of identity. She had to consider being black in America, but she never had to in Nigeria.

**Keywords:** *Americanah*, black in America, Identity consciousness.

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie is the writer of the novel *Americanah*. It was published in 2013. It is the narrative of a Nigerian girl Ifemelu who moved to America but left after a short while and went back. The storyline explores her life in Nigeria and America as well as her romance with Obinze, a classmate during high school. This novel tells the story of two immigrants from Nigeria who fall in love and then separate from one another over time. In this novel, the struggle to survive is discussed, along with concerns about racial discrimination and skin colour. *Americanah* has attempted a progressive writing demonstration viewed from the perspective of a Nigerian.

The main character in this story is having difficulty finding her within the quality of practically stitched, painful, and delicate relationships that link her to various contemporary social situations. Ifemelu is a brilliant and straightforward young woman who was raised in Lagos, Nigeria. Obinze, a Nigerian man who supports her in obtaining a scholarship at Princeton and ultimately immigration to America, is the love of her life. She initially changes her dialect and reshapes her hair to blend in with American culture, but she subsequently decides to stay true to herself. She started blogging about racism in America to deal with the issue. In the conclusion, she returns to Nigeria after realising that she will find true happiness.

The race is a major theme in the novel *Americanah*. In the social order, those with lighter skin tones appear to be in the lead. Ifemelu initially rejects the idea that she is a black girl, but she is ultimately compelled to embrace American racial politics. She uses her fame as a blogger to speak out against this injustice and she receives support from a large number of people who agree with her viewpoints.

*Americanah* is a story about the condemnation of racism in America, England, and Nigeria. Adichie's opinions on this problem are filled throughout the novel. Ifemelu doesn't identify as black in Nigeria. But in America, she needs to face the problem of racism and consciousness about her own identity. "In America, you don't get to decide what race you are. It is decided for you" (Adichie 337). Ifemelu is supposed to speak for all black people because she is viewed as black in the U.S., even though she belongs to African, not African American, so her native culture and identity are considerably more complex than what the majority of Americans believe. She loses sight of her distinct identity as an immigrant from Africa. First and foremost, she is a black person living in the United States. Her attitude is ironic, especially when speaking to African immigrants who do not wish to be labeled as blacks simply because they fall under a disadvantaged category in the United States. At the beginning of this novel, Ifemelu has a conversation with a man who expresses remorse over having black skin. "Nobody wants black babies in this country, and I don't mean biracial, I mean black. Even the black families don't want them" (Adichie 4).

Ifemelu makes a satirical remark about how Americans mix racial and class discrimination in one of the posts. She raises this issue in a post she wrote about a racist incident she has when serving as a babysitter in a wealthy white family's home. From this incident, we can see race is more essential than class and black complexion eliminates class status. Adichie makes the point that, in terms of societal structure, the combination of race and class is fatal for black people. It is a reality in America that black people are a barrier to white people. In the social order of America, even low-income white people are superior to black people. White people, even those who are poor, can at least reject their race and declare racial inequality, which is what, in the end, defines white privilege.

Ifemelu's shift to American life is at first a confusing, isolating, and risky one. Initially depressed, she experiences black hair politics in white environments, learns about the differences between African American and African campus groups in a college, and learns the expectations that have been placed on her because of the colour of her skin. Because everyone wants to follow the form of the westernized way of beauty they need to show themselves as the white race. "To own more power and acceptance therefore, one has to appear more like the powerful race-the White race" (Yerima 643). Her self-expression is a combination of her physical size, skin colour and hair, which are all connected to concepts of femininity and beauty. But in this situation, these aspects of beauty are seen from a Westernized angle. As a result, the non-Western postcolonial woman fights to uphold these ideals of aesthetics, which confuse femininity and beauty with which she has been raised and which are inherent to her indigenous community.

The narrative also pays particular attention to Obinze as well as his experience as an undocumented immigrant in Britain. Obinze, despite his exceptional grades and youth, is unable to obtain a visa and is thus compelled to work for Vincent, who gives him only 30

percent wages. Obinze finds a job in a factory and begins saving money for a secret wedding that will grant him citizenship. However, before he can save up enough, the Englishman, Ibola, requests a 45 percent reduction and turns Obinze into an immigration consultant when he was refused. Obinze is arrested, taken, and then sent to Nigeria, which resulted in helping him because he then moves on to establish a highly successful agent in Lagos.

In the last part of the novel, Ifemelu struggles to follow a single culture. Since Ifemelu was raised in various environments at various points in time, the evolution of her personality can be linked to the changes in these many environments. Ifemelu is forced to transition from one space to another without having the chance to choose one, making her unfit for any of them and making her appear more like Americanah when she returns home. When Adichie returns after a long absence, the transformation in her characterization of her nation is clear. Her friendships and her communication almost all changed in Nigeria. Similarly, Ifemelu anticipates the notions of fundamental cultural change that are apparent in the people, cultural standards, and social culture of Lagos when she returns to Nigeria.

The fundamental component of perception and comprehension is consciousness. Any living thing's root is consciousness, which is the ability to perceive and understand. Here Ifemelu gains a better understanding of her own identity through her experience in America but in the envisioned world of America somewhat better when she is in Nigeria. Generally, Africans have the interest to settle in America. "To Africans, to be an American citizen is an ultimate gift of freedom" (Nwanyanwu 392). So that she aspires to get an education in America but contrary there she struggles to face the situation as a black lady. "When Ifemelu arrives in the United States, she becomes fascinated by the ways that Americans obviously dissemble about race" (Levine 593).

She assumes that in the US, one's race has become the major indicator of identity. It doesn't matter where someone is from if they are black. Ifemelu's aunt Uju says that all black people appear the same to white people. "All of us look alike to white people" (Adichie 120). Ifemelu rarely discusses her encounters with racism, but she goes into greater detail in her blog. The novel's structure is mixed with blog entries because Ifemelu spends her profession as a blogger. These entries help Ifemelu develop into a self-aware, perceptive person who makes unbiased observations on the people and societal events around her. These frequently mentioned blog posts by her beautifully capture her feelings regarding the racial injustice she experienced in the USA. She uses the blog as a platform to express her views about these experiences with racism.

Ifemelu's posts about racial discrimination become popular day by day. These entries help Ifemelu develop into an inner, sensitive person who makes unbiased observations on the people and societal events around her. In these frequently mentioned blog posts, she expresses her feelings regarding racial injustice in the USA beautifully:

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. (Adichie 220)

She explores the experiences of African immigrants and tries to bring out their reasons for migrating. “Americanah not only makes a case for the importance of comparing the experiences of African immigrants to that of native blacks but also infers that their outcomes differ because of their reasons for migrating” (Okigbo 446). On the other side, her cousin Dike experiences such severe racism that, in the end, he attempts suicide due to his feeling of alienation. For instance, the teacher at the school camp decides that he doesn't need sunscreen because of the dark tone of his skin.

An outstanding illustration of a multicultural novel is *Americanah*. The narrative fits the description of literature about migration and cross-cultural interaction. It's important to read between the lines in this story because these elements are interlaced throughout. Adichie skillfully demonstrates how a character's identity, behaviour, and relationships are formed as a result of their ancestral background, economic situation, accidental contacts, and individual personalities. Adichie skillfully demonstrates how one isn't black as long as they are in Nigeria; rather, they become coloured in the group of white people.

Adichie clearly shows the reality of the African identity in the world of white. She tries to adapt to another culture which makes a problem at the end of the novel. Even though Ifemelu doesn't care about her own identity in Nigeria she comes to know the consciousness about her own identity in America. She eventually finds it difficult to adhere to one particular culture. Her native country's way of life is ruined by mixed cultures.

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