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Writing a New Reputation: Liminality and Bicultural Identity in Chimamanda Adichie's *Americanah*

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Abstract

Turner's liminality describes a phase in social life wherein the confrontation between activity which has no structure and its structured results produces in men their highest pitch of self-consciousness. Ifemelu is one of the faces of America's growing youth immigrants whose liminal state is suspended between social structures in a state of continuous transition. The article examines Chimamanda Adichie's modern mythic characters as positive models of Nigerian immigration responding to negative racial stereotypes. The essay analyzes how *Americanah*, as a fiction of reputation management, renegotiates image rights of immigrants and minorities on a humanistic template engendering social compact of respect and mutual understanding. Adichie's redemptive narrative stresses the bicultural fix of economic exiles, affirming vision of a new cultural space for Africans at home and in the Diaspora. Focusing on the survival and agency of Black immigrants, Adichie advocates immigrants' proud avowal of their bicultural identity in a neo-colonial space.

Keywords

liminality, biculturalism, racism, image rights, immigrants

Introduction

Wedge politics and the attendant shift in public attitude have significant sociopolitical repercussions for minorities and immigrants in any pluralist society. Negative advertising further extends the mono-cultural layer of Xenophobia through use of "free speech" to polarize color and race. Corporate right leaning media, spewing ideals and rhetoric of White nationalism, in this end game malign vulnerable immigrant groups as inferior citizens of corrupt and poor third world countries. Right wing elements use such inopportune moments in the national spotlight to try out their playbook of hate rhetoric as political campaign message, attributing the underlying causes of socioeconomic problems to illegal immigrants: a framed monolithic block to be ascribed whatever negativity. Fundamentalist attempts to expunge the mother country's culture from the immigrant grossly underestimate his determination to straddle these two identities while belonging to the new order.

Spivak (1999) engages with the "flotsam and jetsam" or detritus of Western culture industry in a globalized world where media ad campaigns heavily shape information and perception of ethnicities. America seems to be continually mired in this race politics. John Kuo Wei Tchen (1993) analyzes the misleading idea of racial equality in America thus:

> The simple declarative statement "we are modern individuals living in a pluralist society" embodies what Americans would like to say about themselves . . . we can immediately sense some of the limits and complications of such binary terms. Does "we" necessarily mean a legal citizen . . . why are Asians who have been in this country for generations still viewed as foreigners by virtue of their looks? (p. 4)

Discrimination is not a past event in America but a current subject demanding new perspectives and social attitudes. Because American means White, those who are not White are presumed to be recent arrivals and are regularly told to go "back to where they came from" (Rosenblum & Travis, 1996, p. 16). So, historically "American" has meant White, as many Asian Americans are casually reminded when they are complimented for speaking such good English—a compliment which presumes that someone who is Asian could not be a native-born American (Rosenblum & Travis, 1996, p. 16). The 1960s civil rights movement and President Obama's emergence on the American national stage, while improving Black visibility and social status, have not fully corrected racial discrimination. There are still neighborhoods in America where Blacks cannot visit safely: places they

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cannot live and job opportunities denied them because of how their names sound.

The image rights of marginalized Blacks and other minorities have been prominent in discourses of national identity, belonging, and civil rights. Nigeria particularly has experienced mostly negative exposure in global media, a major negative aspect being the myth creation of what its people are perceived to be contrary to what they really are. Decades after Africa's colonial experience, the victor's right to history persists in perpetuating false claims about the basic humanity of Blacks. van den Berghe (1967) explains that "the Negro was defined as subhuman, a disenfranchised part of the polity, as a special form of chattel, assessed as three fifths of a man by constitutional compromise between South and North" (p. 78). However, while differences of color had been long noted, social structure had never before been built on those differences (Rosenblum & Travis, 1996). During the expansionary cycle of the U.S. economy in the 1950s and 1960s, Kofas (2016) opines that the issue of immigration was not the centerpiece of political debates except at the cultural level where stereotypical images remained in the dominant culture about non-Whites. Kofas notes that attitudes of the public regarding immigration evolved remarkably from the time the United States passed the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 and a third of America's demography started viewing immigrants, especially if they came from outside northwest Europe, as a threat to the American way of life and values. The resistance to cultural pluralism is evident in the "us and them" binary social relationship which is the tap root of Western metaphysics (Kofas, 2016).

As a theory of ethics, social utilitarianism provides a criterion for distinguishing between right and wrong action and by implication, an account of the nature of the moral judgments that characterize actions as right or wrong (Anthony Quinton, 1988). Kofas concludes that anti-immigration feeds from the need to find a scapegoat for structural problems in a nation's economy. He traces the recent vitriolic targeting of Mexicans as polluters of the "purity" of American society to ethnocentrism with deep historical roots reflecting the mindset of the Manifest Destiny. Subtle references to such cultural privileging abound in Adichie's *Americanah* with special focus on the disorientation experienced by victims of this anti-immigration rhetoric that have not fully translated their sense of community and identity to their new country. *Americanah* is full of positive experiences in contrast to the stigma associated with such countries these immigrants emanate from like Ifemelu and Obinze's home country, Nigeria, which is battling with cases of corruption, militancy and terrorism. Ifemelu and Obinze are young and in love when they depart military ruled Nigeria for the United Kingdom and United States, reuniting in Nigeria 15 years later to rekindle their passion. Ifemelu succeeds in becoming an American citizen while Obinze deported from United Kingdom after some years, broken but upbeat. Adichie tells the story of Nigerian immigrants with idealized notions of America and United Kingdom who struggle diligently to realize their dreams but return to their home country largely disillusioned. *Americanah* humanizes the story of the undocumented immigrant and empathizes with his economic frustration and resort to such criminality as identity theft. Adichie's redemptive narrative of Obinze's failure overseas and feat of success in the backwaters of Nigeria highlights the possibility that marginalized persons can defy the racist master narrative and write their own success story.

Maureen Reddy (1994) confirms that the slave system flourished on spurious biological definitions of race, the predominant notion being that Black people were not fully evolved humans. She describes this stereotypical attitude toward race in America to be so ingrained in its historical currents that it manifests in right wing propaganda toward immigrants of color who are perceived as subhumans, lazy and only fit for the menial jobs rejected by Americans. "Just as the conquest created the 'native' where once there had been Pequot, Iroquois or Tutelo, so too it created the 'Black' where once there had been Asante or Ovimbundu, Yoruba or Bakongo" (Omi & Winant, 1994, p. 66). Derrick Bell (1987) opines that the unresolved contradiction between principles and ideologies embedded in the U.S. constitution is never fully interrogated due to the selfish interest of the privileged race in perpetuating certain myths. He concludes that this is the root of the race problem in America.

In their article, "Power Sharing: A Strategy to Prevent Ethnic Violence," David Hamburg and Richard Solomon (2000) posit that the solution to the racial malady is structural prevention which consists strategies to help build communal confidence, overcome deeply held mistrusts and restructure institutions that discriminate against certain ethnic groups. To properly grasp the psychodynamics of discrimination, such as the type experienced by Ifemelu when she was denied hair washing service at the White woman's salon, this set of behavioral attitudes need to be analyzed in the context of a society where media adverts largely imprint Caucasoid aesthetic attributes like, hair extensions, bleaching creams, slim body type and even store mannequins. Tzvetan Todorov advances that society is a certain kind of proposition, implying that what is overlooked as neutral is in reality cultural. He observes,

> The term "race" having already outlived its usefulness, will be replaced by the much more appropriate term "culture," declarations of superiority and inferiority, the residue of the attachment to the universalist framework, will be set aside in favor of a glorification of difference (a difference that is not valorized in itself). What will remain unchanged, on the other hand, is the rigidity of determinism (cultural rather than physical now) and the discontinuity of humanity, compartmentalized into cultures . . . (Todorov, 1993, pp. 156-157)

Todorov infers that Western metaphysics, in setting up the Caucasoid race as the master race upon which every other

signifier is to be compared, frames naming categorizations that perpetuate this skewed power process. For example, Asia is oriental only in relationship to Europe and Africa is a jungle in relationship to metropolitan Europe and America. Immigrants like Ifemelu and Obinze having left the African continent populated by people of the same color are blissfully unaware that they have been marked by race until they receive racist acts that reveal their assigned label.

Bicultural Ethos

Historically immigrants have enriched the American experience by contributing meaningfully to industry and culture of their new society. America's immigrant constituency has been largely diverse with each having its own peculiar historical experience. The public perception of immigrants and their mother countries is most times prone to the manipulative rhetoric of powerful political forces of the host country who neglect the pathetic story of the immigrant culturally transplanted from a sociocentric state to an egocentric one. Such acerbic calls for the cultural integration of immigrants often conceal a racial lexicography of xenophobia. Bhugra and Becker (2005) hypothesize that when an immigrant feels isolated from his or her original culture, unaccepted by the majority culture and experiences lack of social support, a consequent sense of rejection and low self-esteem may occur. Chimamanda Adichie's *Americanah* bravely explores the rich tapestry of Nigeria, British and American life to reveal how prejudicial forces affect human beings trying to survive in new complicated societies. *Americanah*, a keen analysis of race and identity in contemporary Western societies, is an insurrectionary narrative challenging the negative perception of the African immigrant and interrogating Western norms of cultural assimilation, metaphysical constructs of self, temporality and history. Chinua Achebe (2007b) describes belief of superiority in races, gender and language, class and power privileges as fictions generated from a warped imagination and the cause of all the trouble in the world. Adichie's novel advocates the protection of the immigrant's cherished values and reassessment of his bicultural fix at the liminal threshold of social assimilation.

Biculturalism represents comfort and proficiency with both one's heritage culture and the culture of the country or region in which one has settled (Schwartz & Unger, 2010). Adaptive biculturalism, the sort exhibited by Ifemelu in Adichie's *Americanah*, is a radical response to discrimination through taking pride in one's heritage and firmly holding onto that legacy through retention of prominent cultural attributes. *Americanah* advances several sites of resistance to the neo-colonialist culture manifesting through the use of the English language and its hegemonic stance on nasal accent. For example, Ifemelu's decision to drop her American accent, and retain her natural kinky hair is an active response and cultural affirmation of her Nigerian heritage. Her communicational preference for broken English and Igbo language with relatives and close friends represents the tilt of her bicultural identity. Ifemelu's adaptive biculturalism synthesizes her heritage and her new country's culture into an individuated culture adaptable to either her heritage or receiving cultural stream. In this way, Ifemelu effectively counteracts the psychological effects of culture loss by holding onto cherished values from her Nigerian background while identifying with the vibe of her new American society; hence, her Nigerian friends term her "Americanah." Ifemelu's identification as Nigerian American rather than just "Nigerian" or just "American" is salient in specific situations such as when she intermixes traditional Nigerian values like respect for parents with American values of individualism and materialism. In this sense, Ifemelu might feel Nigerian just as Obinze, Ginika, Aunty Uju, but also feel American in relation to Kimberly and Blaine. Much of the novel focuses on Ifemelu, who while bearing both American and Nigerian passports, has a larger sense of belonging to her Nigerian roots. As much as she has a high sense of comfort in America, Ifemelu still feels like an outsider: unassimilated and unaccepted in the American society.

Victor Obasaju (2014) analyzing whether perceived hostility by majority White British affect second generation immigrants' sense of identity in a review of multiple studies, highlights their supposed concern for preservation of civic British values. Obasaju reinforces Jean Phinney's claim that a society's acceptance of pluralism, where national and ethnic identities can coexist, likely translates to immigrants' retention of their ethnic identities. Since the formation of ethnic and national identities is framed on the interaction between attitudes of immigrants and the reaction of their receiving society, the failure of stabilizing social forces that ensure this social integration results in the type of immigrant desperation prevalent in *Americanah* where hardworking Obinze finds no material support in a nonpluralist United Kingdom.

Stereotypes and Identity Myths

Stereotype threat is a powerful force affecting all aspects of the immigrant's social life by painting him with a broad brush of negativity and naming. Naming is an assertion of power and redefinition of personal identity (Mohawk, 1992). As a discriminatory attribute, naming often utilizes elements of prejudice and veiled racism to reduce the social comfort of the immigrant and denigrate his cultural heritage and values as culturally inferior. Ifemelu faces different American cultural codes not explicitly stated but implied and which she is expected to be knowledgeable about. These cultural codes that she experiences are complicated and largely racist in nature. The aim is largely to destroy the Black immigrant's self-belief, esteem, and humanity. Adichie's *Americanah* has high moral value as a story of identity assertion and conscious resistance to the advocates of groupthink. Adichie as a writer who has experienced prejudice uses antithesis to show

contrast between the diverse characters and social groups in America. She uses her characters as a subtle political act to interrogate cultural integration and the plight of undocumented immigrants in a diverse Western society that is pluralist in name but nonpluralist in reality.

The manifestations of racism, which can be personal, cultural, and instructional, essentializes culture as a fixed static category. Per America, it is presented as an inaccessible society that resists the universal aspirations of hardworking colored persons: a birther philosophy endorsing a limit to the rights of immigrants. Recently, Mexicans, Muslims, African immigrants, and other minorities have been targeted by populist American politicians whose racial tinged speeches have pushed for a wall on the U.S./Mexico border and called for the eviction of documented and undocumented immigrants to make America "great" again. Referring specifically to Mexico, president in waiting, Donald Trump declared that "they weren't sending the good ones," presuming a selection process wherein the Mexican government nominates representatives for Mexico in the American race Olympics. This view of other nationalities as threat to White American identity, language, and national unity largely derives from ignorance and lack of contact with members of minority groups. The ethnocentric view of anti-immigration thrive on prejudicial beliefs of racial purity and notions of colored immigrants as lazy, fraudulent, and never do wells. It is a racist attitude that burns the Darwinian fuel to justify its discriminatory value.

Ifemelu, is an ideal immigrant exhibiting elements of W. E. B. Du Bois's Cultural Frame Switching by flitting between her Nigerian and American sociocultural spaces. Benet-Martinez and Lev (2002) state that cultural frame switching is connected to cultural accommodation which manifests when bicultural individuals respond to situations with the cultural attitude that apply best to the present situation. As a social justice warrior interrogating how Western constructs of value, identity, and assimilation affect the immigrant dealing with the psychological effects of culture loss, Adichie condemns the racist incentivization of anger and repudiation of immigrants' aspirations. She figures America as a country in dire need of reputation management in race politics, while laying into Nigeria for its penchant for foreign goods and lack of propriety. *Americanah's* moral value as a story of racist resistance has high importance for Nigerians and Blacks as a whole. The novel, in telling a human story of antithetic characters, responds to Western media bias and manipulative narratives that pick only negative stories from Africa. A major lapse in contemporary Nigerian fiction has been the lack of agenda fuel in the discourse on identity politics and the place of Africans in the global scheme of things. By making an argument about the perception of the Black immigrant, Adichie ventilates our knowledge of how racism and oppression shape the world of the ordinary Black immigrant. Obinze and Ifemelu's stories form part of a larger immigrant tapestry consolidating the experiential history of the Nigerian Diaspora and the paradoxes inherent in cultural assimilation. It appears stereotypical images of immigrants largely persist because the dominant White culture perpetuates them to preserve its political, economic, and social structure as diversity threatens the White male majority. This teleological essence of prejudice rests on the assumption that the well-being of a social group can only be guaranteed when other marginalized groups are derided as inferior. *Americanah* presents Whites as gatekeepers of the human race who through the course of history built their capitalist empires on the graves of immigrants and continues in contemporary times to exploit the vulnerability zones of minorities.

As noted earlier, limited information about the cultural details of a social group most often translate to prejudicial judgment. Generalizations are awkward as they filter larger attributes of a social group like the Nigerian community and reduce them to a comprehensible mass of negativity. wa Thiong'o postulates a more centralized worldview through which Africans refuse to accept the view that they are still colonized peripherally by the West. He argues for a more centralized conceptualization of national identity regretting that "The African people are still struggling for a world in which they can control the economy, politics and culture that make their lives accord with where they want to go and who they want to be" (wa Thiong'o, 2007). The low valuation of the color Black, which Ifemelu and Obinze experience, arouses feelings of shame and desperation.

Power and knowledge are inseparable components of the intellectual binary relationship with which occidentals claim knowledge of non-White nations. Robert Young (1995) argues that world histories had really only ever been histories of the West, seen from a Eurocentric perspective. Edward Said (1993) identifies applied power of such cultural knowledge as enabler that allows Whites to rename, redefine and thereby control them.

> In language murder, a socially prestigious language gets used in more and more circumstances so that previously bilingual speakers have little opportunity to practice the old language . . . language death is a social phenomenon, and is triggered by social needs . . . (Scholes, 1982, pp. 208-209)

Adichie analyzes this politics of identity creation and control by exploring how the functional relations of social and political power sustain racial prejudice. Through nonresentful White characters like Kimberly and Kurt, Adichie reviews the White response to race as power elites who possess unequivocal power in the race discourse. The crux of the matter is that sympathetic characters Kimberly and Kurt, as privileged middle class Whites, are educated not to notice how different social reality is for minorities and the lower class. Adichie portrays passive Whites as voyeurs silently assenting to the marginalization of African bodies under the guise of conformation to a discriminatory integration process. Ifemelu and Obinze represent the new stylistic attitudes

of self-confidence and resistance by young contemporary Nigerians like Adichie who have understudied American racial crosscurrents and strategized their own bicultural identity like Latinos. Ifemelu still encounters acts of stereotyping when she finds it difficult to wire money to Nigeria through Bank of America. She is repeatedly cautioned about the danger in transacting business with her home country. Nigeria has been denoted by these American banks as a site of perpetual bedlam, rife with corruption and populated by criminals. Ifemelu's insistence on continuing with the financial transaction is one of her first acts of resistance to the antics of right wing ideology.

Acquisition of language is an essential part of the socialization process as language is not only a tool for communication but a cultural carrier. To counteract the effects of what Benjamin Whorf (1956) tags a "Linguistically determined thought world". Marta Moreno (1993) argues for the establishment of a common language grounded in the principles of equity and parity. Upon realization that she cannot meet certain cultural expectations of her new society, Ifemelu retrieves her Nigerian accent, ditches her hair extensions for a more African hairdo and starts taking pride in her culture. She opts for an English language that would be able to carry the weight of her African experience. Achebe describes this type of language as "a new English," still in full communion with its ancestral home but altered to suit new surroundings. Ifemelu's preference for hair color four at the hair salon is a stubborn refrain from Western aesthetic customs. Though Ifemelu receives certain satisfaction from the compliments of Aisha and other African customers at the hair salon, due to her Ivy League status and 13-year stay in America, she still feels infuriated that Africans are not appreciative of their God given endowments like kinky hair and Black skin. As Yagazie her friend observes, it is ridiculous that Africans do not value their natural hair. Ifemelu's decision to braid her hair reflects her adoption of a new identity and she is relieved to hear from Aisha, the Malian hairdresser, for the first time in her American excursion, that some Nigerian movies are perceived good. This is contrary to Ifemelu's perspective of the high rate of violence and ritual depiction in Nigerian movies. Aisha's social perception of Nigerians, especially Ibos, is that they are caring husbands though with cultural restrictions that nudges them to marry from their ethnicity. Aisha attempts to introduce Ifemelu to two of her Nigerian Romeos so that she can convince them to abandon cultural sentiments and marry her. She is not worried about corruption in Nigeria as she is from the neighboring Malian society and with intimate awareness of how the materialism pull propels Nigerians to get rich. As Obinze remarks, "Nigerians can be so obsequious. We are a confident people . . . it's not difficult for us to be insincere" (Adichie, 2013, p. 488). Adichie observes that it is this desperation to meet up to the social expectations of material wealth that sows the seeds of corruption and makes Nigerian public officials to steal.

As Ifemelu plunges into the intricacies of American life, making new friends and new experiences, she still manages to retain her cultural beliefs. She initially gets satisfaction from people's approving comments about her American accent and her ego further balloons when she is celebrated in academic circles for her successful race blog. Ifemelu, as a proselyte apostle, urges her African salon mates to return to their authentic identity. Having finally realized her unsettled status as a prodigal exile, Ifemelu sells off her belongings and returns to Nigeria to find a society in transition; optimistic about the future, as Nigerians always are, with shopping malls for the elite and even bread hawkers brandishing cellular phones.

Liminal Interludes

Arnold van Gennep's (1960) Les rites de Passage, introduced the idea of liminality: the threshold or initial stage of a process. He described the rites of passage as comprising a three-part process of separation, liminal period, and reassimilation. Victor Turner (1967a) borrowed and expanded upon van Gennep's concept of liminality focusing specifically on the middle stage rites of passage. La Shure (2005) declares that the status of liminal individuals is socially and structurally ambiguous. Such group of liminal individuals, like Ifemelu, Aisha, and so on, who are Africans, do not represent a typical social hierarchy but are a common group in which all individuals are equal and treated with respect and dignity. Turner (1969) defines liminal individuals as "neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremony" (p. 95). He describes social structure and communities as two major models for human relatedness, society being a structured, differentiated, and often hierarchical system of politico-legal-economic positions with many types of evaluation separating men in terms of "more" or "less." The second model, "communities," according to Turner has a number of cultural manifestations some of which consist of immorality, marginality, and inferiority. Liminality accordingly represents the midpoint of transition in a status sequence between two positions (Turner, 1974, pp. 233-237b). Ifemelu's transition from Nigerian immigrant to American citizen is liminal because she remains an outsider facing disillusionment.

Turner (1974) highlights liminality as a phase in social life in which the confrontation between activity which has no "structure" and its "structured results" produces in men their highest pitch of self-consciousness. While in the liminal state, human beings are stripped of anything that might differentiate them from their fellow human beings; they are in-between the social structure not just as a passage phase but in a state of continuous transition. There appears to be an overlap of the boundaries of liminality regarding the experiences of the initiate and his obligatory acceptance of his inferiority status. In the novel, Emenike idealizes the White culture and completely accepts this subservience status: marrying a

White English woman and assuming British manners. On the contrary, Ifemelu as a liminal character flits through the American social scene refusing to be pinned down to a label even when she becomes an American citizen. It is her sense of self, reposing records of peculiar cultural experiences, which makes her attitude structurally different from people like Aisha and other African saloon staff.

Charles La Shure (2005) contradicts Turner's liminality by illustrating how his immigration to Korea and initial shuttling between Korea, Japan, and Mongolia put him in a transitional state until a more stationary habit integrated him into the Korean social structure and he lost his liminality. What La Shure utterly neglects to acknowledge is how his membership of the White power elite class probably accelerated his entry into Korean society. A good example of this White desirability is the way Noel, Obinze's British friend, quickly settled into Nigerian society when Obinze invited him to Nigeria for business. Noel is warmly accepted by Nigerians who do not demand proof of his humanity before admittance into Nigerian society. Noel enjoys the ambience of Nigeria and its women so much that he refuses to return home in contrast to Ifemelu. Adichie's humanistic pedagogy questions not only social behavior but the logic of racial myth and fear mongering. This attitude is playing out real time in the 2016 American presidential election where race and immigration have become major talking points for Republicans and Democrats. In the novel, Whiteness is presented as a cultural process through which a privileged group organizes its values, attitudes, and worldviews into invisible racial structures serving its purposes. Aunty Uju refers to this White culture when she complains of her inability to find appropriate makeup for her skin in Boston, Massachusetts. This domineering culture has also conventionally labeled Dike, Ifemelu's cousin, as aggressive and violent once he gets to the age percentage of marking.

Ifemelu is initially proudly accepting of the colonist culture, glowing when American sales reps complement her accent as sounding American and also quickly availing her of services she had earlier been rejected on the phone due to her African accent. Eventually Ifemelu discovers that these complimentary, remarks are condescending and decides to shed her American accent. She reclaims her original voice and reins her inclination to be accepted by the privileged social group. Ifemelu's renaissance enables her distinguish the grained mark the dominant White American culture stamps on various ethnicities in the United States. Having recognized the political role of race in her new environment as a signifier, nonphenomenal but conventional, Ifemelu confronts her assimilation process into American society squarely with the reassured mentality of her Nigerian identity. Ifemelu highlights immigrants' bicultural fix with the incident in a shopping mall where her cousin, Aunty Uju, chides her son, Dike, for picking a product from the shelf without her permission.

> Dike, put it back, Aunty Uju said with the nasal, sliding accent she put on when she spoke to White Americans, in the presence of White Americans . . . and with the accent emerged a new persona, apologetic and self-abasing. (Adichie, 2013, p. 130)

Adichie also portrays Emenike, another Nigerian immigrant in the United Kingdom, as a solicitous fob immersed in an invented life. He is a cultural exile lost to the knowledge of what it really means to be a true Nigerian with a sense of place. Ifemelu contemplates Dike's future in America as a paradox wherein he faces a choice of what he is or rather what he is would be decided for him by the White gatekeepers of society.

Writing a New Reputation

Academics and educators recognize the power of books as mirrors of self-worth and self-esteem that affirm readers' identities. "The power to narrate, or to block other narratives from forming and emerging, is very important to culture and imperialism, and constitutes one of the main connections between them" (Said, 1993, p. xiii). Intertwining Adichie's personal race experience with Whiteness, *Americanah* explores Ifemelu's economic journey through America into awareness of what it means to be Black. The novel is radical in articulating a new social identity for Nigerians and other Blacks. Fanon's three phases of the emergence of Modern African literature lists firstly, the Apprenticeship stage of derivativeness and imitation of European texts with the second phase consisting of Protest and idyllic nostalgia and finally a Revolutionary phase of fighting literature (Fanon, 2007, pp. 251-278). Adichie's cultural thermometer fits Fanon's third categorization due to Ifemelu's acceptance of her heritage with its baggage of kinky hair, dark skin, exotic accents, and so on. It connects Adichie's narrative philosophy to other works written by Black writers whose cultural task is to re-imagine the West as a new multicultural space for African immigrants. Bhabha (1994) declares that the prejudicial way of viewing the human world as composed of separate and unequal cultures rather than as an integral world perpetuates the myth of imaginary people and places. Mura (1996) lists six ways of viewing identity, firstly as a social and historical construction; a formation of political and economic and cultural exigencies; as fiction; and as a choice. Identity may appear unitary but is always fragmentary; it is deciding to acknowledge or not acknowledge political and economic and cultural exigencies. Adichie presents racism as a colonial ideology to be challenged by the hybrid value of the bicultural immigrant. Ifemelu's Nigerian identity serves as a launching platform, a reassuring cover to help her locate people who understand her cultural background and what she is passing through while relating to people from other cultures like Kurt and Blaine, the African American with whom she shares cultural histories of colonization and slavery. Adichie uses her creative writing gift and intimate knowledge of Nigeria to

share the stories of its people and culture through Nigerian characters comfortable in their own skins, seeking to create fresh memories and secure a new place in history. Chua and Rubenfeld's (2014) *New York Times* article about Nigeria's prominent ascent of America's higher education ladder and success as the sixth most successful race group in America has been much trumpeted by the Nigerian media as a hallmark of this golden era. Both writers additionally observed that over a fourth of Nigerian Americans have graduate or professional degrees, as compared with only about 11% of White Americans: a sign of positive progress in recent times.

Dash (1974) details that one feature of Third World writers which distinguishes them as a literary fraternity is the fundamental dialogue with history in which they are involved. Sofield (1999) contemplates the possibility of negotiating the conflicting cultures the immigrant finds himself into a solid and positive sense of identity. She alludes to Achebe's quest for identity in *Things Fall Apart*, which she describes as an act of atonement with the past, the ritual return and homage of a prodigal son and a narrative strategy connecting with Adichie's *Americanah*. Just as Achebe used his education to strengthen his cultural heritage, Adichie's Ifemelu fictionally uses her American education to form an authentic bicultural identity of her own. This nostalgia for home, manifesting in her desire for Nigerian food and ambience, is also evinced in Dike's excitement when he visits Nigeria to find many people of his own color at the same place. Dash's call for postcolonial literature to act as a vehicle for progression seems to be what Chimamanda Adichie as a fourth generational African writer is responding to, as persisting on negative effects of colonialism reduces a sense of self and capacity to create what Dash calls a "counterculture of the imagination." Sofield concludes that the counterculture of imagination when harnessed properly by the writer can serve as a vehicle of transformation to reinvent identity without observing the restrictions imposed by history and society.

Adichie's determination to tell her story through positive models derives from the need to avoid the usual hijacked narrative that presents undocumented immigrants as soulless bodies from inferior cultures to be merely tolerated and educated. For long, the image rights of Blacks have been subjected to the needs of the White social group as Western critics have neglected the distance between themselves and African culture, only reading African literature in function of their own cultural context. In response to this misnormer, Adichie frames her characters as voluntary immigrants with a sense of dignity and ambition, not just economic refugees lacking class and strength. She portrays Obinze and Ifemelu as immigrants moving from a socioeccentric African society to egocentric Western societies where values of individualism and unchecked ambition for success, reign supreme. Adichie chides the Euro-American stereotype meter which generalizes Africans instead of acknowledging their various nationalities. Aisha, the Gambian and Wambui, the Kenyan president of the African Students Union at Princeton, serve as illustration of the peculiar differences among Africans while Adichie mocks Nigerians like Emenike whose insatiable appetite for all things foreign, including accents and social manners, reflect the yearning for an unattainable station.

Adichie's novel exposes America as a country where one does what needs to be done to succeed including adopting American accents, identity theft, and prostitution. Ifemelu's escort service episode with the naked American tennis coach brings her down to earth and leaves her contemplating suicide. On the other hand, an amenable immigrant like Aunty Uju quickly adjusts to American society and its detritus vowing not to depart America for any reason. And Ifemelu thought

> watching her how the old Aunty Uju would never have worn her hair in such scruffy braids. She would never have tolerated the ingrown hair that grew like raisins on her chin or the worn trousers that gathered bulkily between her legs. America had subdued her. (p. 130)

Aunty Uju's struggle to pass her medical exams and become successful has made her impersonal while Ginika also complains regularly to Ifemelu of a friendless life in a strange America. The major dilemma faced by these Black immigrants is social integration as they have an identity deemed to be socially inferior. Ifemelu as a liminal immigrant experiences downward mobility because her previous university education in Nigeria lacks value in her new society.

Faced with a new social status as an immigrant, Ifemelu comes to terms with her new environmental realities, like a lonely life varnished by work, hope, panic, and so on. Economic despondence initially forces her to long for Nigeria after numerous failed job searches and interviews carried out with warm reception but resulting in cold rejection. Ifemelu cuts off communication with Obinze, a symbol of her cultural conscience, when her economic reality leads her to an encounter with prostitution. In contrast to a new world that is cold and suspicious, Adichie paints Obinze as a nostalgic symbol of Ifemelu's original culture: empathetic, caring, and supportive. This is primarily why Ifemelu feels ashamed to inform Obinze about her encounter with the American tennis coach. Obinze is presented as a positive model of Nigeria: conscientious and dignified even when the harsh conditions of British society force him to identity theft. As he remarks in the novel, "Third Worlders are forward looking, like things to be new because their best is still ahead, while in the west they make a fetish of the past" (Adichie, 2013, p. 488). Obinze carries his head high yet conscious of tarnishing his reputation with minor criminal acts at the deportation camp, unlike the actions of other deportees. As a final act of humiliation, he is deported in chains to the condemnatory stares of fellow airline passengers gawking at him like a common criminal. However, Obinze remains

confident of a brighter future in Nigeria. It is important to observe at this point that if Ifemelu had been accepted seamlessly by the American society, she could have settled down more easily and coped with the stress of new society just as Obinze initially adapted to British life due to his rapport with Noel, a White gatekeeping symbol.

Conclusion

In Adichie's novel, home is presented as a blurred space, an indeterminate location where one's dreams ought to come to fruition. Even when immigrants like Ifemelu and Obinze face bouts of insecurity, small reassuring acts like kindness from strangers and minor stuff, like their native names embossed on their credit cards, offer them hopes of possible citizenship. Wei Tchen (1993) surmises that oppressed people need to move away from the psychological prison they have been consigned to and implement new strategies to advance themselves. Adichie's motivation to write *Americanah* derives from the circumstances of Africa's identity history and place in global race politics. Armed with her colonial experience of the denigration of the Black man's history, Adichie's journey of self-discovery portents patriotic qualities that propagate cultural pride. Her novel illustrates how Black immigrants are kept in a perpetual liminal state by the ultra-right structures of Whiteness and forbidden from main stream American society. Adichie explores how depression and the experience of disenchantment invariably lead the immigrant to nostalgia for old country. She stresses an understanding of world citizenry as a concept of shared values and not inherited identities. If more Nigerian writers were as active as Adichie, the global conversation on race will definitely be more robust and dynamic.

Conclusively, Adichie's novel calls for unbiased evaluation of immigrants not as a predetermined named social group but on a basis of individuality, strength of character, and capacity to advance themselves in their careers. This assessment should not be based on ethnicity and standards which are not really integrational but culturally genocidal. Immigrants like Ifemelu and Obinze who use other people's social security ID are not sociopaths abusing the social structure for their selfish benefits but characters merely seeking to survive within the ambit a hostile society offers them. Adichie's primary objective is to engender the social compact of respect and understanding and articulate minorities' strategies toward the racial phenomenon of power in the process of social evolution. The failure of the White community to interact with people of other colors on a deeper level invariably leads to misunderstanding and suspicion. Speaking with people about their cultures is vital to understand them as fellow human beings contributing to the diverse flora of humanity. Integration brings stability.

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