

Black But Not American: The Racial Awakening and Alienation of Ifemelu in Adichie's *Americanah*

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ABSTRACT

Seeing something with different eyes is not the same. Every individual has their own way of pointing and gazing. The happy mode of space makes the place happier than ever, if the view of space is seen in the mode of sadness, then the attire will change to be sad, the phase of view changes for every matter. The article examines Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's novel *Americanah*, which focuses on the colour, that follows the race. The protagonist, a Nigerian immigrant in America, experiences racial discrimination. *Americanah* sheds light on the nuanced experiences of Black immigrants, whose struggles with race and vulnerability are often overshadowed by dominant narratives of racial identity. Through sharp and witty observations, it highlights the contradictions of liberal white Americans who claim to be colour blind, the performative nature of racial allyship, and how African Americans and African immigrants differently

experience race. This article argues that Ifemelu's racial awakening and subsequent alienation reveal the limitations of American multiculturalism and the persistence of racial hierarchy.

Keywords: Immigrant, Racial discrimination, Resolution, Alienation

Individuals' insights into their sufferings were orally shared, and in later days, those oral talks were written as a text and given to the public as a source to read and understand. As such, racism is a practice which is found all over the world. The people who exaggerate the difference between the people by colour and their ideals are called racism. When an individual oppresses and makes others suffer because of their colour, that person is a racist. If a group of people are oppressed in a certain community because of colour, it is mentioned as racism. Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie was born on September 15th, 1977, in Enugu, Nigeria. She was raised in Nsukka, where her father was a professor and her mother was the first female registrar at the University of Nigeria. Chimamanda moved to the U.S. for higher education and later started her career as a writer. Her notable works are *Purple Hibiscus*, *Hall of a Yellow Sun*, *The Thing Around Your Neck*, *Americanah*, and *Dear Ijeawele, or A Feminist Manifesto in Fifteen Suggestions*. Most of her works deal with family, religion, colonialism, Nigerian civil war, feminism, race, migration, and identity. In this article, the novel *Americanah* is focused on racial discrimination, migration, and identity through the experiences of the protagonist Ifemelu, a Nigerian immigrant in the U.S. Ifemelu undergoes a lot of racial awakening while being in the United States. By experiencing discrimination, she realizes that her entire society faces this.

This article examines the racial awakening of the character Ifemelu in *Americanah* and examines the fact that the United States, though filled with multicultural people, still has limitation in accepting the black people who tend to be immigrants of the society. Tina Steiner comments that "Ifemelu's experiences highlight the often-overlooked tensions between African immigrants and African Americans, revealing the

complexities of Black identity in the diaspora" (90). This suggests that Blackness is not a universal experience but is shaped by history, geography, and economic status.

Ifemelu comes as a young girl to the United States for her higher studies. At the beginning of the novel, she lives in Nigeria and has a boyfriend Oblinze. They plan to move to America together and have a pleasant life. But unfortunately, he ends up staying in Nigeria. Later, Ifemelu gets a chance to do her higher studies in the United States. She sees a different kind of vision of the people of America. She encounters racial awakening in all sorts of phases. "I only became black when I came to America" (Adichie 220). Even though her speaking language is criticized, though English was said as a general language in Nigeria, she faces microaggression in all slots. "She recognized in Kelsey the nationalism of liberal Americans who copiously criticized America but did not like hearing criticisms of America from someone like her" (Adichie 348). The atmosphere around forces her to believe that oppression with colour exists at a cost, even though it is conveyed that we are one. One more incident where she feels racial awakening is her place of study. It is mandated that she must straighten her hair to remain normal among them. Ifemelu realizes that racial awakening makes her to understand that race is not neutral in America, but a systemic practice where all immigrants face different challenges.

According to Idowu Faith, "For African immigrants, race is not something they bring with them; it is something they acquire in America, and it profoundly alters their self-perception" (22).

Ifemelu faced difference in Nigeria only because of her identity. But it is extremely different in the United States when she enters, as she finds the nature of people being judged by their colour. She is forced to see such alienation. The difference of opinion among the people of America is entirely different, where she feels that even being black is a struggle. Ifemelu doesn't face segregation like historic trauma, but a different kind of alienation awakens her. "The only reason you say that race was not an issue is because you wish it was not. We all wish it was not. But it's a lie." (Adichie 406). Ifemelu critiques the denial

of racism, particularly among white liberals who claim to be 'colorblind'. She gets another sort of alienation in her relationships, her interactions with her white boyfriend, and her relationship with African Americans, which makes her awaken the difference between the Black and White people outcast. "Ashley Dawson further explains that "Adichie's *Americanah* presents race not as a biological fact, but as a learned identity that immigrants like Ifemelu must navigate in a society structured by historical racial hierarchies" (135).

To establish what she feels about the race, she opens a blog and shares many of her experiences in her American life. When she opens the blog and starts talking about race, integrity, and immigration, she finds many people who are experiencing the same kind of discrimination. She exposes all the contradictions she faces in the society where she is meant to survive. "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" (Adichie 273).

After coming back to Nigeria, the people around her call Ifemelu *Americanah*, the term used by Nigerians to refer to people who live abroad and come back to Nigeria. At last, after seeing this, Ifemelu gets a great question about where she belongs. When she is in America, she is rejected in many places as black. When she gets back to Nigeria, to find herself there, they say she is an *Americanah*. Madhu Krishnan notes that "Ifemelu's blog entries reflect an acute awareness that racism in America is not simply about individual prejudice but an institutionalized system that governs daily interactions" (47). Ifemelu's journey in *Americanah* challenges the myth of the American Dream, which promises opportunity and equality but often delivers racialized exclusion and alienation. Her decision to return to Nigeria is not just a personal choice but a political one—it represents a rejection of the racial constraints imposed on her in America. However, her return also comes with its own challenges, as she is labeled *Americanah*, highlighting the complexities of migration and identity. Ifemelu's experiences in *Americanah* challenge the idealized notion of migration as a path to success. Her racial awakening in America forces her to confront

an identity she never considered, while her alienation as a non-American Black highlights the rigid racial structures that govern American society. From all this she is searching for herself. So, from her suggestion and view, she says that migration is not a thing to get a solution, it may also lead to alienation and self-redefinition. Ifemelu's story compels the readers to reflect on race not as a fixed identity but as a complex and evolving experience shaped by history, culture, and geography.

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