

**REPRESENTATION OF FEMALE AFRICAN IMMIGRANT EXPERIENCE IN  
THE WEST: A CASE STUDY OF CHIMAMANDA ADICHIE'S *AMERICANAH***

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## DECLARATION

This proposal is my original work and has not been presented in any other university.

Signature.......... Date..... 31.10.2014 .....

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This proposal has been submitted for examination with our permission as the university supervisors.

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## **DEDICATION**

In memory of Teresia Njeri Koskei for giving the terms ‘Strength of a Woman’ meaning.

Also dedicated to Mitch and Francis; for that mighty push though it left me on the verge of tears, indeed spurred me on.

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## ABSTRACT

This research set out to interrogate the challenges faced by female African immigrants as reflected in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah*. The study also set out to compare and contrast the male and female experience of African immigrants in the West while analyzing the author's vision on African immigrants.

To achieve this, the research utilizes African feminism as a theoretical framework. Through a close reading of the text, the study reveals that the interconnectedness between race, gender and class issues pose a major challenge for female African immigrants as reflected through racism, stereotyping, economic pressure and male domination. The study further establishes that both men and women are faced with comparable experiences of the West however men choose to react to these circumstances differently. While women form a close – knit relationship, men on the other hand are antagonistic towards each other. Although Adichie projects the female experience as closely- knit and the male one as friction- filled, this in itself is not contradictory. Adichie seems to point out that the male response is as a result of pressures of immigrant status. There is an attempt by the author to present the male - female experience as complementary in nature.

The research also reveals that Adichie's vision on how female African immigrants respond to their experience in the West is crucial in order to achieve greater freedom and fulfillment from all forms of oppression. The study further establishes that Adichie envisions a world where African immigrants are not oppressed by the West on account of their colour but treated as equal beings in relation to the West.

I recommend future research on *Americanah* based on other theoretical approaches such as post colonialism and psychoanalysis that may bring a deeper understanding of the immigrant narrative in the West.



# CHAPTER ONE

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Background to the study

This research focuses on the literary representation of female African immigrants in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah*. It investigates how a number of female characters in the text reflect the female African immigrant experience in a Western social setting that is - America and Britain. It explores how social tensions like racial discrimination and stereotyping alongside economic hardship are presented through writing on immigrants.

The immigrant narrative too seems to preoccupy the writings of contemporary writers like Okey Ndibe and Chika Unigwe among others. Okey Ndibe's *Foreign Gods Inc* (2014) is a story about Ike a Nigerian immigrant cab driver based in New York who is not officially employed by the American system despite an American degree in Economics. The reason he has to undergo frustrating moments of joblessness is because he has a highly inflected Nigerian accent. *On Black Sisters Street* (2009) is Chika Unigwe's story of four female African immigrant characters Sisi, Efe, Ama and Joyce all of whom except Joyce a Sudanese willingly leave Nigeria for Antwerp in Belgium to work as prostitutes. This persuades me to argue that there is a message these writers are trying to communicate. Despite a number of writers tackling the immigrant narrative it has failed to receive adequate scholarly attention. This research hopes to make a significant contribution in scholarship by delving into the challenges faced by female

African immigrants as well as analyzing how the male and female characters experience their immigrant status. This paper argues that an analysis of literary accounts of African immigrants is important in understanding the immigrant experience

The question of African immigrants has been a subject of great debate both on a local level and global level. This is witnessed by several discussions in newspapers, journals and WebPages ranging from immigrant exit from Africa to foreign lands to their contribution to Africa from their new frontiers. Mukoma Wa Ngugi, a scholar, who teaches at Cornell University in the article “Don’t tell African Authors what they can and cannot write about” argues for the expansion of the African literary canon by incorporating a new canon of literature written by African immigrants. According to him the African canon is rigid for it accommodates early writers like his father Ngugi Wa Thiongo and Chinua Achebe while ignoring new themes like race, identity and tensions between Africans and African-Americans currently affecting first and second generation African immigrants. He continues to say, “These are real and urgent issues being reflected in literature coming from the Diaspora” (1).

Miriam Musonye in the Nairobi Journal (2007) joins the debate in her article titled ‘Glass not Diamonds: Ike Oguine’s *A Squatter’s Tale* and the American Dream’ by taking a different perspective where she addresses the issue of Africans migrating to North America and recognizes the fact that the question of African immigrants leaving their country is a pertinent issue. Musonye argues that while the American Dream lures immigrants it destroys them in the process. She further acknowledges that in Africa and

other parts of the Third World it is common to find multitudes seeking visas to America and Europe as she describes the long, windy and endless queues in the American embassy to get visas as testimony to her statement.

In the book *Africans in Global Migration: Searching for Promised Lands* John Arthur in his paper 'Contextualizing the Attitudes of African Americans toward U.S. Immigration Policies: Some Preliminary Findings' says:

Immigration has become a hotly contested and nationally polarizing issue...of central concern is the impact of large-scale immigration on poorly- educated, low waged, unskilled workers in America, particularly urban blacks such that it results in conflicts and minimal co-operation dominating the relationship between blacks and the new immigrants. As more and more immigrants enter the country (legally or illegally), competition over scarce jobs, housing and education intensifies. (175-176)

A major area of concern for Arthur is that the influx of African immigrants to the United States of America has resulted in tension between the new arrivals and American blacks due to stiff competition over jobs. African immigrants pose a threat to the locals since their arrival means a source for competition for limited job opportunities. According to Arthur therefore there is urgent need to address the contentious issue of Africans migrating to America.

Jennifer Muchiri in an article published in the Saturday Standard of September 21, 2013 entitled 'The Elusive Search for the American Dream' adds her voice to express how the

story of migrating from Africa is an old one. She says “This topic is hotly debated in conferences, on blogs, in newspapers and really all the time, anywhere where migration from Africa is raised”(1). Sharing in the same line of thought with Musonye, Muchiri describes the large number of visa applicants to America. Referring to the youth she adds that “their skewed understanding of the West is that it is a land of milk and honey” and she contrasts this by saying “unfortunately the American dream remains just that - a dream” (1). She concludes by stating that these young people even end up struggling to survive once they land in America.

The arguments by Musonye, Arthur and Muchiri show that the issue of immigrants is indeed critical considering that Nigerians, Ethiopians, Ghanaians, Sierra Leoneans, South Africans, Somali’s and Kenyans are the largest concentration of African immigrants in the United States of America. According to the United States Department of Homeland Security *2012 Yearbook of Immigration Statistics*, 120, 253 Nigerians obtained lawful permanent resident status in the US between 2003 and 2012 with 13,575 in 2012 alone. In the United Kingdom by 2009, 154,000 Nigerian immigrants resided there. These are large figures that we cannot take for granted.

Without question Mukoma Wa Ngugi, Miriam Musonye, John Arthur and Jennifer Muchiri’s arguments as well as the statistics furnished in the *2012 Yearbook of Immigration Statistics* show that the concept of immigrants is phenomenal. Since it affects many people it cannot be ignored and calls for the need to study it. By Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie writing about African immigrants it reflects the fact that

there is a close relationship on what she writes about and her society. Therefore the characters she uses may represent these people. Little scholarly work has been done on African immigrants and writers can help us understand immigrant experience through their works.

Donna Gabaccia (2010) in the article “A Nation of Immigrants: Do Words Matter?” gives the evolution of the terms emigrant and immigrant and their use. She says initially in the *Oxford English Dictionary* emigrant and immigrant appeared as terms for mobile persons. However later, people entering the US were labeled as emigrants but this later changed from one who enters to one who leaves. She adds that the term emigrant was replaced by immigrant to mean those who entered.

The Migration Policy Institute defines the term ‘immigrants’ to refer to people residing in the United States who are not US citizens at birth. This population includes naturalized citizens, lawful permanent residents (LPRS) certain legal immigrants (for example persons on student or work visas), those admitted under refugee or asylee status and persons illegally residing in the United States.

In order to have a clear distinction in the use of terms in this project our working definition for the term ‘immigrant’ is a person who resides in a foreign country either legally or illegally for the purpose of better opportunities or as a student. This study refers to immigrant experience in regard to the state whereby the characters who are immigrants

often feel a sense of unbelonging or alienation in the host country due to challenges like racism and socio-economic exclusion among other factors.

In the book *Africans in Global Migration: Searching for Promised Lands* John Arthur et al trace the migration of Africans in three 'waves'. According to them the first period started in mid-to-late 1950's up to 1970's. Those who migrated comprised of Africans who left the continent for the West upon being sponsored by their home governments to study in arts and sciences. This was after the end of colonization and there was need for well-educated civil servants and skilled workers to work in the private and public sectors. The second period of Africans to migrate was in the mid 1970's when African countries like Ghana and Nigeria experienced political turmoil and economic conflicts and this forced many Africans to flee their countries and most of these Africans ended up in the West. The last phase started at the millennium and is still unfolding. This group is mainly out to search for greener pastures in the West.

As the debate on African immigrants receives critical attention both as a global and local affair it seems to gain momentum with new generation writers. Although this was an area tackled by the early writers, contemporary writers seem to break free from early literature which centered on characters that left Africa briefly for further education and returned to their native lands to serve their country.

This reflects in early works of writers like Chinua Achebe in *No Longer at Ease* (1960) in which Obi Okonkwo travels to Britain to further his education and returns to work for

the Nigerian civil service. The new writings are based on characters yearning to leave Africa for Europe or America in the hope of better employment or greater educational opportunities. Others have had to flee their countries in search of refuge from oppressive regimes and civil wars. In most cases these works of fiction reflect a people who knowingly or unknowingly believe that developed countries have much more to offer.

Once in these locations they are confronted with insurmountable challenges but due to shame some quietly suffer the humiliation while others are able to negotiate their way out. This reflects in writings of Leila Aboulela-*Minaret* (2005), Brian Chikwava-*Harare North* (2009) and Dinaw Mengestu in *Children of the Revolution* (2008) which detail the challenges and life experiences of immigrant characters in foreign lands where some fade into oblivion after being swallowed by a state of hopelessness. Aboulela's protagonist Najwa and her family are forced by a revolution in Sudan to seek refuge in Britain. Chikwava's character suffers the same fate by running away from an unstable regime in Zimbabwe leading to a pathetic end as an illegal immigrant in Britain. Mengestu's narrative is one of alienation where a character feels a total sense of displacement in a foreign land. In Adichie's *Americanah* one notes the struggles of coping in a racist world.

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, a Nigerian born fiction writer who divides her time between the United States and Nigeria has shown great interest in the issue of immigrants. She has authored the novels *Purple Hibiscus* (2003) which won the Commonwealth Writers Prize, *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2006) winner of the Orange Prize and *Americanah* (2013) being her latest novel. She has also written a collection of short stories *The Thing around*

*Your Neck* (2009). *Purple Hibiscus* is a story set in Nigeria. It is about a young girl coming of age. The novel centers on the clash between tradition and Christianity. *Half of a Yellow Sun* is a narrative about Nigeria's nationhood; it deals with the Biafra civil war. *The Thing around Your Neck* is an anthology of short stories on the lives of Africans within the African continent and in America. Although some of the stories partly cover African immigrants in America the stories are mainly limited to African versus African relationships unlike in *Americanah* which provides a comprehensive description of Africans, African-Americans and White Americans interaction therefore bringing out a broad experience.

*Americanah* which was published in 2013 is the story about Ifemelu and Obinze high school friends whose lives take different turns when fate separates them to different worlds: America and Britain respectively. Through Ifemelu, Adichie projects the African woman by presenting the challenging moments encountered in an alien land either by being sidelined as an African or a woman for that matter. However, by resisting and overcoming these challenges, the subject promotes self-assertion. Obinze on the other hand encounters racism in which whites display their superiority making him an unwelcome visitor. When the law enforcers catch up with him as an illegal immigrant he opts to return home than exploit the services of a state lawyer to appeal his case. Destiny brings the two characters together when they relocate to Nigeria; ironically the success which Obinze sought in Britain is achieved to the optimum in their homeland. Here Chimamanda Adichie overturns tables by demystifying America as a place that need not be glorified, for what it has to offer can be found back home in Nigeria. The success



achieved back in Africa replaces the high sense of disillusionment experienced by Obinze in Britain.

I choose to study only *Americanah* out of Adichie's four texts for it is most appropriate for my research in that all the elements on immigrants like hybridity, ambivalence and the notion of return are aptly incorporated in it. My choice for *Americanah* is based on how Adichie gives an in depth and intriguing presentation of immigrant experience. By narrating the story in a parallel manner she addresses the challenges African women face as immigrants at the same time presenting the experience of male-female African immigrants. This research therefore interrogates the challenges faced by female African immigrants and examines the male-female experience of these immigrants with the hope that we gain insight on Adichie's vision for Africans. Considering that little scholarly work exists on challenges faced by female African immigrants including the male-female experience of these immigrants, this study hopes to fill the gap by examining *Americanah* to reveal the representation of these challenges through fiction. I analyze how the subject of immigrants as a contemporary concern both locally and globally is defined.

## **1.2 Statement of the Problem**

Many African writers have written on experiences of immigrants in the West for example Dinaw Mengestu (*Children of the Revolution*), Leila Aboulela (*Minaret*) and Brian Chikwava (*Harare North*) among others. However available data shows that there is limited scholarly work that captures these experiences. This research intends to portray the challenges faced by female African immigrants in the West as presented by

Chimamanda Adichie's *Americanah*. Little attention has been paid to the African immigrant experience through the portrayal of characters and the circumstances they are confronted with.

Critical attention has been paid to Adichie's work, however little interest is displayed on the similarities and differences between the male and female immigrant experience. Through an analysis of the male-female African immigrant experience of the West it will enable us establish the author's standpoint on gender relations. African immigrants face many challenges and writers being the voice of society could help us understand more about these challenges. Therefore the need to analyse Adichie's vision for African immigrants is critical in demonstrating how to negotiate ways of overcoming the challenges encountered. Considering that limited literary criticism exists on Adichie's discussion on the issue of African immigrants, this research hopes to contribute to this.

### **1.3 Objectives**

The objective of this study therefore is to:

- i. Interrogate the challenges faced by female African immigrants in the West as reflected in Chimamanda Adichie's *Americanah*.
- ii. Compare and contrast African male and female immigrant experience in *Americanah*
- iii. Analyze Chimamanda Adichie's vision on African immigrants.

## **1.4 Hypotheses**

The study is formulated on the following assumptions that:

- i. Female African immigrants in the West face various challenges that are worth our study as reflected in *Americanah*.
- ii. Experiences of male and female African immigrants in *Americanah* are diverse.
- iii. Chimamanda Adichie has a clearly spelt out vision on African immigrants.

## **1.5 Justification**

An area which contemporary society constantly struggles to come to terms with is that of female and male African immigrants. Critical analysis has been carried out in the fields of sociology and cultural studies with little reflecting in literary studies. This is despite the fact that writers have covered the topic on African immigrant experience. This study hopes to contribute to the debate on the experiences of male and female African immigrants. Considering that the writer's text is relatively new the study will be a significant contribution to scholarly debates on immigrants.

This study is informed by the fact that Adichie herself is a female African immigrant who deals with contemporary issues like the lives of African immigrants in the West and the challenges they encounter. Studying *Americanah* will help us understand how African immigrants handle challenges in foreign lands. In narrating her story she may explore new themes like the use of technology in fighting racism. This may offer solutions for the current generation of African immigrants. This research therefore impresses on Mukoma

wa Ngugi's argument that the African literary canon should be expanded to incorporate a new canon of literature written by African immigrants in order to embrace new themes.

Adichie's writing about male and female African immigrants experience in *Americanah* will provide an opportunity for future comparative analysis of her work as well as those of other African writers writing about immigrants such as Ike Oguine-*A Squatter's Tale* (2000), No Violet Bulawayo-*We Need New Names* (2013), and Bolaji Olatunde-*Straw Dogs* (2011) among others. Literature on African immigrant experiences has received little critical attention in contemporary criticism and so the study may increase our knowledge on the nature and experiences of the lives of Africans in the West.

The study of writings on female immigrants is of importance for they address key issues that concern women affairs like oppression through racism and economic exploitation. This study therefore gives attention to the gendered experience of immigrants which is limited in literary criticism.

### **1.6 Scope and Limitation**

This study focused on Chimamanda Adichie's *Americanah* and analyzed the challenges faced by female African immigrants in America and Britain as portrayed in the text. I evaluate the experiences of both male and female immigrants and how they respond to the challenges faced in America and Britain. The study interrogates the message that Adichie is communicating on the issue of African immigrants. The study limits itself to the available material on feminist literary theory basing on, among others, Filomina

Chioma Steady's African feminism and Ogundipe Leslie-Molara's concept of stiwanism.

The study also refers to other works that deal with immigrants and their experiences.

## 1.7 Literature Review

This study reviews literature on the author's work, critical works touching on immigrants and reviews on Chimamanda Adichie's *Americanah*. This lays the background out of which this novel has emerged and will also show how the works differ from my study. This is to identify a gap this study hopes to fill.

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's works especially *Purple Hibiscus* and *Half of a Yellow Sun* have been extensively analyzed. Just to name a few Ogaga Okuyade (2012) discusses *Purple Hibiscus* as a female Bildungsroman. Lee Erwin (2012) examines questions of class and subalternity in *Half of a Yellow Sun*. Olusola and Alabi (2013) explore language use in *Purple Hibiscus*. Adeniyio Osundabe investigates how language is employed in *Purple Hibiscus* and *Half of a Yellow Sun* and *The Thing around Your Neck*. However the same does not apply to *Americanah* because it is a recently published novel (2013). Studies carried out are mainly based on book reviews on given websites and newspaper articles. To aid the research further other literature reviews on writings about African immigrants were reviewed. For example Calixthe Beyala's Francophone immigrant literature as reviewed by Ayo Coly.

Misa Clark (2009) in "Questions of Identity among African Immigrants in America" explores not only how African immigrants in America identify themselves but also how others identify them. She goes on to discuss how they are divided between maintaining either an African or American identity and the pressure from family to maintain the former. Writing as an African immigrant she says "embracing a bicultural identity has

been personally enriching, ensuring me the best of both worlds” (267). It is in this light that this study considers double consciousness as an aspect of immigrant experience. By building on Clark’s study, our study will analyze characters that are forced by conditions in the West to adapt to both the African and American cultures.

John Arthur (2009) in “Immigrants and the American System of Justice” delves into the treatment of black African immigrants by the police and the judicial system. However, though his study is an analysis of the judicial system in America, he touches on the experiences of blacks by referring to the negative perception bestowed on them as a result of institutionalized prejudice. He sees this as a general concern and argues that “the discrimination encountered by blacks is the root cause of the alienation and marginalization that blacks have come to associate with social institutions in the country” (233). I employ this argument to examine how institutionalized racism prevents immigrants from acquiring intellectual jobs making them keep low status jobs involving physical labour. This in itself encourages alienation due to lack of upward mobility.

Ayo Abietou Coly (2005) has studied Francophone African immigrant literature with focus on Calixthe Beyala’s works on the notion of home. Coly argues that Beyala subverts the order when she creates characters that opt to remain in France rather than return home while most Francophone writers present a return home idea. Coly further says that Beyala projects strong women immigrants while the male characters are emasculated in the West except when they return to their homeland-Mali. While Coly deals with novels from Francophone countries with a focus on the notion of home and

character representation, I focus on the challenges and experiences of male and female immigrants in the West.

Arup Chandra (2013) in “Experiencing Liminality Trishanku State: Liminality in Colonial America in M.G.Vassanji’s novel *Amriika*” focuses on the experiences of Asian Africans in America. Chandra describes their experience in America-their sense of displacement and longing for home which leads to a ‘liminal’ or in-between space. Although Chandra analyses the experience of the Asian community while I focus on Africans, his paper is critical for my study in terms of how the experiences of African immigrants in America lead to an in-between space.

Ikhinde Ikheloa (2009) in a review entitled “Strange Passage to Harare North” interrogates Brian Chikwava’s use of contrived language when narrating the African immigrant experience in *Harare North*. He observes that “through the fog of artificial language, a picture emerges of Chikwava deconstructing the method of African immigrants’ shame and self-loathing” (1). Ikhinde is concerned with representation of immigrant experience through language and my interest is on themes.

Miriam Musonye (2007) in her paper “Glass not Diamonds: Ike Oguine’s *A Squatter’s Tale* and the American Dream” discusses the tragedy of African immigrants in America. Musonye explores the efforts of the Nigerians and by extension other Africans, to leave their motherland for a better life in America. Her essay is anchored on the American



dream which she notes was initially about pursuit for life for everyone but now it has become pursuit for material prosperity. She also observes as follows:

Throughout America's history this country has received different types of immigrants from Africa. The first generation was of slaves, who were forcibly carried away to captivity never to return home. The second generation was of intellectuals, who reluctantly went to America in pursuit of education. The third generation is the current economic exiles, who migrate to America willingly for a new form of enslavement. Although they feel alienated and homesick, they continue to stay, chasing after an elusive dream. (81)

Although Musonye deals with Ike Oguine's novel *A Squatter's Tale* to highlight the challenges of immigrants, her research is very applicable to this study. Her view on the economical enslavement of the immigrants sheds light to the novelist's deconstruction of America. My study too will focus on characters who are alienated and whose identity undergoes various crises. Furthermore, unlike other third generation migrants who face a 'new form of enslavement' in America and continue to stay, *Americanah* pulls a surprise. Despite the challenges undergone by the protagonist she emerges triumphant. Successful as she is in America she decides to return to Nigeria. This in itself is the gist of the narrative for it subverts the old order.

In "Lived Experiences of Male and Female Hybridity in Chimamanda Adichie's Diaspora" Kate Spring (2013) examines how hybridity affects characters in *The Thing Around Your Neck*. Further still from a gender perspective she analyses how men are

portrayed as happy hybrids while women are seen to be withdrawn. This study is insightful in relation to my study, for *Americanah* deals with the concept of hybridity. Chimamanda presents male and female characters that as a result of the challenges faced in the West are forced into a state of hybridity. Spring's study is insightful for it will add value in analyzing the effects of hybridity on men and women.

Linda Yohannes (2013) in "A Postcolonial Look at African Literature: A Case Study of Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's Works" focuses on Adichie's works from a postcolonial perspective. In analysing Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*, *Half of a Yellow Sun* and *The Thing around Your Neck* she discusses how the theory is concerned with making a positive turn in the human race through resistance to racism. Although my approach to this study is from a feminist perspective Linda's study will feed into mine when analyzing how women in *Americanah* resist the racist nature of the West.

Emmanuel Ngwira (2013) in his thesis entitled "Writing Marginality: History, Authorship and Gender in the Fiction of Zoe Wicomb and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie" examines authorial voice in relation to history including transnational migration of women. This he does by comparing Wicomb's *David's Story* and Chimamanda's *Half of a Yellow Sun*. Alongside these he compares Wicomb's *You Can't Get Lost in Cape Town* and Chimamanda's *Half of a Yellow Sun*. He concludes his study with a comprehensive analysis of Wicomb's *Playing in the Light* and Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* and *The One That Got Away* and *The Thing around Your Neck* by the two authors respectively. Here he traces the effects of transnational migration on women. Ngwira concludes that

migration is synonymous with loneliness. I build on this claim and go further to interrogate the male and female immigrant experience in the West.

In his review of *Americanah* S. Sabo (2013) provides an in-depth analysis of *Americanah* by giving a synopsis of the novel. His point of view is that Chimamanda's manner of discussing race issues through the blog features is brilliant. However, he critiques her description of London as being sketchy concluding that it indicates that she is not familiar with the city. In regard to plot, he states:

Adichie's brimming narrative gifts are sometimes let down by her propensity for overemphasis so that deftly handled scenes and characterizations are then summed up sometimes with a whole paragraph (1).

Sabo acknowledges that Adichie displays expertise when dealing with the narrative form though his opinion is that there is an artistic shortcoming in regard to plot and characterization. Sabo has highlighted important aspects of the study like the use of the embedded narrative as a technique to tackle race issues, the use of multiple narratives as an effective technique although he dismisses the abrupt lumping of the plots and characters as a weakness. What he calls summing up of characterizations and regards as a weakness in the novel is an area this study will touch on. I believe that Adichie lumps together characters so as to reflect the complex nature of the issue of immigrants. This study intends to analyse characters from the point of view of their diverse immigrant experience.

In a review of *Americanah*, Emily Rabateou (2013) refers to the challenges of being an immigrant. She mentions that the main challenge is that of going home. She further stresses that “Beyond race, the book is about the immigrants’ quest: self-intervention, which is the American subject. ‘*Americanah*’ is unique among the booming canon of immigrant literature of the last generation...” (1). This review is of utmost importance to this study for it helps build on the theme of racism as one of the challenges faced by African immigrants and how it impacts on the male and female characters in various ways.

In the essay “Of French Fries and Cookies: Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s Short Fiction” Tunca Daria (2010) says:

The dynamics at work in Adichie’s diasporic stories appear to be similar to those found in *Purple Hibiscus*, as in both cases the protagonists’ (lack of) disposition towards cultural interaction is presented as a major element in characterization. In both genres too, the absence of balance in some characters’ attitudes lies in their simultaneous disparagement of Ibo traditions and blinkered glorifications of certain Western standards. (295)

Tunca invariably identifies a feature that the study will highlight. The motif on character reflects too in *Americanah*. This will be explored to show that the pressure of being an immigrant influences characters to the extent that they are alienated from their culture in order to fit into the new culture.

In the article “Race-in-America Is a Central Character in ‘Americanah’” Subashini Navaratnam (2013) focuses on the protagonist and her development in the novel. Navaratnam analyses the main characters noting that at the end “they’ve been so shaken and turned inside out by the forces outside of themselves that they’ve shed and accrued different layers” (2). This in itself brings out how immigrants are transformed by their experiences in alien lands. Navaratnam then goes further to state:

Weaved into the dominant love story are the narratives of race, displacement, migration, border-crossing and borderlessness, liberalism, Nigerian middle class apathy, Nigerian middle class exploitation, colourism and its cousin, hairism and White-do-gooders.(2)

Despite identifying notable aspects of the novel like race, migration and displacement Navaratnam does not pursue this argument further. An important element in Adichie’s work that Navaratnam notes is race which is of interest to this study. This study will engage with the text to discuss how the issue of race and crossing borders poses a challenge in the lives of immigrants.

Tyrone Beason (2013) in “*Americanah*: Africans struggle to become American” observes that *Americanah* is enriching when it comes to immigrant experience in foreign lands. Beason notes that the narrative goes to great lengths in making immigrants come to terms with the challenging social, economic and political situations in alien lands. Beason says:

“Americanah” is both intellectually expansive and urgently intimate, a story about the crushing experience of finding your way in a new land- and the physical and emotional lengths one goes to feel whole again.(2)

Beason's statement is pertinent although not limiting to this study in that though identity is of concern to the study, the study goes deeper to project how characters apart from displaying the need for self-assertion also challenge oppressive as well discriminatory codes witnessed in America and Britain

Jennifer Muchiri (2013) in "The Elusive Search for the American Dream" on *Americanah* explores how America is glorified by both young people and their parents by describing the extremes the parents go to in raising funds to send their children to the West. She goes further to mention that despite all the trouble taken there is a high sense of disillusionment witnessed afterwards. She identifies the challenges witnessed by immigrants in America and highlights the enduring love of Ifemelu and Obinze. The great love had been separated with the two lovers headed for different countries. She says:

But *Americanah* is also a love story that transcends three continents- Africa, Europe and America-and the final reunion between Ifemelu and Obinze, after years of separation perhaps symbolically, points to the writer's contention that while the West may offer better opportunities, one's home country is ultimately better than foreign lands.(3)

Muchiri's review will help me deepen my understanding of the author's worldview. This is by comparing the immigrant experience of Ifemelu and Obinze in America and Britain respectively as portrayed by Adichie. Through the use of multiple narratives Adichie juxtaposes the male and female experiences, enabling us get her view on gender relations

when it comes to overcoming challenges in America and Europe; two different continents.

This literature review shows that research has been carried out on immigrants. From a broader perspective Clark (2009) focuses on identity, Arthur (2009) on the American judicial system and treatment of immigrants, Coly (2005) discusses Francophone immigrants and Chandra (2013) Asian African immigrants. On Chimamanda Adichie's other works some studies deal with hybridity-Yohannes (2013), theory-Spring (2013) and style - Ngwira (2013).

*Americanah* has been analyzed mostly in magazine articles and reviews. Some of these mentioned challenges faced by African immigrants without an in-depth analysis which I intend to do in this study. From the literature review it is clear there is an unfilled gap in relation to the author's contribution to literature on the experiences of African immigrants. This is a gap this study hopes to fill.

## 1.8 Theoretical Framework

This project aims to interrogate the challenges faced by African female immigrants in the West, examine ways in which the experiences of male and female African immigrants are similar or different and analyze the author's vision on African immigrants. To achieve these objectives the study employs feminist literary theory.

The choice for the feminist literary theory is motivated by the fact that this theory looks at ways of understanding gender relations. In quoting Tyson, Allen Breeze et al in "Literary Theory and Schools of Criticism" state that Feminist literary criticism addresses issues like how patriarchy oppresses women economically, socially and psychologically. They further add that feminist literary criticism addresses key issues like how the relationship between men and women is portrayed as well as how male and female roles are defined. It helps analyze female fictional characters and how they are stereotyped in society and how this is addressed. It examines too how a work of literature possibly projects sisterhood as a mode of resisting patriarchy. (1)

The history of feminism shows that it has evolved through what is regarded as the three 'waves' of feminism which are intertwined too with various strands like radical, liberal and Marxist feminism. Megan Seely in the book *Fight like a Girl: How to Be a Fearless Feminist* analyses the three waves of feminism. According to her the first wave of feminism occurred in the 1800's to early 1900's. Here women campaigned for and achieved the right for women to vote. During this wave too, women made an achievement when August 26<sup>th</sup> was declared Women's Equality day. Some of the female



figures associated with this period are Susan .B. Anthony, Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Sojourner Truth. Further still in discussing second wave feminism, Seely says this wave championed for issues that impact on women's lives including the right to be safe from violence at work, on the street, and in their homes, the right to equitable pay and career advancement and the right to accessible, affordable and representational health care.

This wave of feminism Seely adds was outstanding for it addressed the importance of ending discrimination from a personal level( at home) to a political level that is by emphasizing women's right to participate in political matters like voting and holding elective office. This resulted in the rise of consciousness-raising groups, speak-outs, marches, rallies, demonstrations, feminist publishing houses and publications, research and women studies in colleges and universities. (42) It centered on legal and social inequalities in regard to women and their role in society.

According to Naomi Zack in *Inclusive Feminism: A Third Wave Theory of Commonality* the collapse of second wave feminism took place in the 1980's to create other feminisms based on race, sexual preference or intellectual productivity. Protest was based on the argument that second wave feminism was a white women's movement in that only white women were acknowledged by its white female leaders and that non-white women especially black women were denied voice and presence. Black women were excluded from women clubs resulting in establishment of clubs for coloureds. This exclusion also extended to women's labour movements where white female workers in factories insisted on segregation by race. These white women felt they did not compare with black women

and did not share anything similar. Zack also adds that the white feminists did not consider gender divisions among blacks as being of any relevance. (4) Black women protested being excluded from feminism by stating that they had played a major role in the history of the struggle for women's rights as well as racial equality.(5)

A number of writers and critics emerged to describe how mainstream feminism had limitations in relation to black women .One of them is a leading African - American feminist bell hooks who in the book *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center* addresses the need to develop a theory that caters for the interests of black women. She says:

Since bourgeois white woman had defined feminism in such a way as to make it appear it had no real significance for black women they could then conclude that black women need not contribute to developing theory. We were to provide colourful life stories to document and validate the prevailing set of theoretical assumptions. (33)

hooks then advocates for a feminist movement that ends sexist oppression and one that directs black women's attention to systems of domination and interrelatedness of sex, race and class. This she goes on to add will "compel us to centralize the experiences and social predicaments of women who bear the brunt of sexist oppression as a way to understand the collective social status of women in the United States" (33). bell develops a feminist theory that advocates for feminist efforts to end sexist oppression. She explains that between women and men, sexism is most often expressed in the form of male domination which leads to discrimination, exploitation or oppression. (48) hooks further addresses the idea of sisterhood which according to her involves bonding among women

which should strive to expose, examine and eliminate sexist socialization within woman as it would strengthen and build woman. She also argues that in order to build sisterhood, women must criticize and repudiate class exploitation. (60) In addition to this, hook looks at racism as another barrier between women. Here she says white women in the past have been more racist than white men through the brutal manner in which they exercised their power over black women. On the relationship between men and women, bell states that the feminist movement has a place for men who actively struggle against sexism and they consider them as comrades.

The feminist theory focused on different strands of feminism although they may overlap each other. These are liberal, radical, Marxist and socialist feminism. Cecilia Ng et al in *Feminism and the Women's Movement in Malaysia: An Unsung (R) evolution* discuss the various strands of feminism. According to them liberal feminism argues that discrimination of women is as a result of laws, although the fact of the matter is that men and women are essentially equal. They advocate for change in these laws by campaigning for legal reform and equal rights. They also hold the belief that the state and society should protect individual rights and should allow everyone maximize their self-interest leading to their self-fulfillment. Radical feminism rose as a result of white middle-class college-educated women disillusioned by male dominance in organizations. The strand holds the position that “as a social class, women are oppressed by men” (5). These feminists believe patriarchy is expressed through unpaid domestic service of women in the home and that exploitation of women is reflected in marriage, rape and reproduction among others. Another belief they held was the concept of sisterhood that stressed that

any woman in the world regardless of class, race, ethnicity and nationality has more in common with another woman. For these feminists, patriarchy could be resisted by women creating a culture where they could re-shape their lives outside of patriarchal definitions. An example of resisting male dominance is seen in the emergence of lesbian feminism.

Marxist feminism, which is the next strand, views class relations and the capitalist system as the cause of women's insubordination. Marxist feminists focus their attention on the exploitative conditions of working-class women. Their argument is that gender inequality will be phased out once capitalism is overthrown and class society is disintegrated. Socialist feminism was formed with the intention to develop a theory that would merge radical and Marxist feminism. This was borne out of the argument that "class and gender as well as race/ethnic relations of power were critical in the understanding of society" (5). According to them no factor is regarded as more important than another that is whether race versus class or any other. The struggle, for them, should be against capitalism and male dominance in the home as well as against oppression in the workplace and society.

This study employs African feminism. In "African feminism: the African women's struggle for Identity" Ruvimbo Goredema says the origins of African feminism was to provide arguments which validate the experience of women of Africa and African origin against a mainstream feminism discourse. Goredema goes on to add that it is a social movement that aims to raise a global consciousness which sympathises with African

women's histories, present realities and future expectations. African feminism according to Ruvimbo concerns itself not only with the rights of women from Africa but is also inclusive of those living in the Diaspora, basing this on the argument that many of the contributors to literature have often lived "abroad". Ruvimbo states that although the debates, practices and implementation are most credibly pursued on the African continent, African feminism should not be limited to the geographical location of Africa.

According to Minna Salami a feminist blogger of Ms Afropolitan in the blogpost "A brief History of African Feminism", she traces the history of African feminism and says it set off in the early twentieth century. She states that the early proponents of African feminism are Adelaide Casely-Hayford a Sierra Leonean women rights activist who played an outstanding role in Pan –African and feminist goals, Charlotte Maxeke from South Africa who founded the Bantu Women's League in South Africa in 1918 and Huda Sharaawi an Egyptian who established the Egyptian feminist union in 1923.

In regard to theory and criticism, African Feminism Online Encyclopedia states that the theory of African feminisms emerged in the 1990's in response to its exclusion from second wave feminism. It says African feminism had further demands on feminism to include issues like culture, colonialism, ethnicity, imperialism and gender. It distinguishes that one main difference between African feminism and Western feminism is that African feminism is "not exclusionary, in terms of articulation and gender participation as western feminism appears to be" (2). It also adds that African feminism goes beyond the intersection of gender, race and class to include the consequences of

colonialism and global capitalism. The 1990's saw women writers and scholars conceptualize, contextualize and theorize African feminism.

These included among many others African feminists like Filomena Chioma Steady, Ogundipe Molar-Leslie, Obioma Nnaemeka, Catherine Achonolu, Mary Kolawale and Chikwenye Ogunyemi. Although these African feminists project different strands of African feminism all of them are interested in one agenda and that is to advocate for the rights of the African woman. For example, Chikwenya Okonjo Ogunyemi came up with the concept of womanism which she says incorporates racial, cultural as well as economic issues that women should engage in for transformation. She is of the opinion that these issues are not given priority in western feminism. Motherism is a concept embraced by Catherine Acholonu in the early 1990's. Here she centers her interest on motherhood. Obioma Nnaemeka in the late 1990's proposed nego-feminism which called for negotiation between men and women in the African culture.

Filomina Steady in *'African Feminism: A Worldwide Perspective* sums up the concept of African feminism when she states:

African feminism combines racial, sexual, class and cultural dimensions of oppression to produce a more inclusive brand of feminism through which women are viewed first and foremost as human, rather than sexual beings. It can be defined as that ideology which encompasses freedom from oppression based on political, economic, social and cultural manifestations and class biases. (4)

Steady's definition of African feminism reflects the appropriateness of studying Chimamanda Adichie's *Americanah* from a feminist perspective. It will enable us analyze how the text portrays oppression faced by African immigrants on account of their race and sex and how the author attempts to liberalize the woman from these forms of oppression by using African feminism as a tool. Steady further states that "African feminism has the potential of emphasizing the totality of human experience, portraying the strength and resilience of the human spirit and resounding with optimism for the total liberation of humanity" (5). This approach will further enable us see how female African immigrants encounter challenges in America and how through perseverance and resistance display a fighting spirit. She further advocates that men cannot be left out in the discussions by African feminists. Her argument is that African men and women are victims of racism and neo-colonialism, cultural imperialism as well as socio-economic oppression. In this case the issue of men cannot be separated in matters of African feminism but must be incorporated.

This is a critical point in relation to *Americanah* in that the male and female characters in the text encounter racism which makes their experience in the West challenging. They also encounter cultural imperialism when white characters who regard them as inferior try to impose their 'superior' nature on them. Both the male and female characters face socio-economic oppression and Steady's argument will guide this discussion later. Steady also highlights another important aspect in relation to the male and female relationship when she says:

For women, the male is not the “other” but the part of the human same. Each gender constitutes the critical half that makes the human whole. Neither sex is totally complete in itself to constitute a unit by itself. Each has and needs a complement despite the possession of unique features of its own. (9)

This excerpt which advocates for men and women to be a whole unit will act as a guiding tool in enabling us study male characters like Obinze and Boubacar who develop a harmonious relationship between men and women reflecting Steady’s perspective that the male and female relationship should be complementary in nature,

This theory, I believe is apt for the study of Chimamanda’s Adichie’s *Americanah* in that the text comments indirectly on how migration has affected African female immigrants in the West resulting in either alienation or loss of cultural identity through characters who ape Euro-American culture. For some like the protagonist, upon undergoing various challenges she realizes how her status as an immigrant in America affects her negatively. She therefore responds by creating her own space which gives her voice. The theory then gives voice to Adichie to write back to western feminists so as to correct the ill-representation of the African woman as ‘other’ in their eyes and in this case bring out the positive side of the African woman. Chimamanda Adichie’s *Americanah* challenges the American environment which limits the African woman. She subverts this order by seeking recognition first as a black person and as a woman. *Americanah* is about subverting the European culture which has placed itself at the centre. By scrutinizing the encounters of black people in America, Chimamanda Adichie addresses this.



In addition, this study also employs Ogundipe Molará–Leslie’s stiwanism. Molará-Leslie in *Recreating Ourselves: African Women and Critical Transformation* under the chapter “Stiwanism: Feminism in an African Context” theorizes African feminism through her concept of “stiwa” which is an acronym for Social Transformation including Women in Africa. In an interview with Desiree Lewis titled “Desiree Lewis talks to Molará-Leslie, a leading Feminist Theorist” Ogundipe mentions in the conversation that stiwanism is a strand of African feminism and explains by saying:

I have named myself a stiwanist to pinpoint my position with feminisms, which I define as a cluster of ideologies or as movements of gender equality or democracy...The reason for the acronym was to move us away from defining feminisms in relation to Euro-America or elsewhere...I was trying to take our discourses away from arguments about being or not being westernized and imitative.

From this excerpt we are able to get her argument that the term “stiwa” is in opposition to white Euro-American feminisms which she further adds has placed everyone under siege. She therefore suggests that “stiwa” includes African women in the contemporary social and political transformations of Africa. An important feature of stiwanism is that there is a need for harmony between men and women in order to bring about social transformation. It declares that for this transformation to take place both men and women need to participate. Molará-Leslie argues that white feminist movements would want to hold a superior position in the human hierarchy and see other human organizations as both less developed and evolved She advocates for the need for African feminists to reject this kind of discourse. She takes a stance when she says:

Some white racial supremacists want to claim that the white woman is inherently ahead of all the women of the world in all the areas of social being or social organization. This is certainly not the case. (4)

This argument will be our springboard which will enable us to address the question of African immigrants who are despised for their race and regarded as culturally backward - however these characters overturn this notion. Instead of shying off from the ridicule they celebrate their Africanness by showing that they have a culture, lifestyle and worldview that is different from that of Americans.

Molara-Leslie is of the opinion that African women should be able to see their situations and demand change without guidance from white women. She further adds that feminism regardless of the strand whether Marxist, liberal, reformist or any other should look into the status of woman in society and that these different feminisms be theorized around race, class, gender, nation and culture among others. She sees this feminism as liberatory since it gives all women a full potential. She says that this feminism is relevant for both men and women in Africa and the diaspora in order to humanize society. Molara-Leslie is critical of the global order which marginalizes Africans and makes things difficult for them both economically and socially. She further adds that women especially the middle class must overcome false consciousness, demystify their minds and take interest to understand their societies. This approach demonstrates how Adichie through female figures subverts and actively resists white dominance by articulating for recognition as an African woman.

The oppression of woman is another key area of interest to this study. This study approached the oppression of woman through Ogundipe Molar-Leslie's approach. Ogundipe Molar-Leslie in *Theorizing Black Feminism* under the topic 'The Woman's Condition in Africa: The Six Mountains on her' highlights a number of issues that oppress the African woman. She metaphorically refers to them as mountains on the African woman's back that the African woman needs to get rid of. She identifies these mountains in this order: The first mountain is oppression from outside (colonialism/neocolonialism), the second mountain is traditional structures for example gender hierarchy, third is the African woman's own backwardness (comprises poverty and ignorance), the fourth is man (his superiority), the fifth is her race: here she says race is important since the international economic order is divided along race and class lines and woman's last mountain is herself. (113) This perspective by Molar-Leslie is vital in tracing female characters who journey from Africa to the West with some of these mountains on their backs. We try to assess whether they are able to shake them off their backs or end up with a bigger hump resulting from pressures of migration.

African Feminism as a theory did guide us look into how migration has a profound effect on African immigrants. Through interrogating the challenges female African immigrants face, it enabled us understand Adichie's message on female immigrants and African immigrants as a whole.

## 1.9 Methodology

This study reviewed literature on immigrants with particular focus on female African immigrants. This enabled me create a context on the author and provide guidance on how to interpret *Americanah*. The research was conducted by carrying out a reading of the primary text to enable me get acquainted to the issues that were raised touching on female immigrants. I paid close attention to the female characters and how they respond to the challenges they face as immigrants in the West. I also compared the male and female experience of immigrants in America and Britain by dealing with characters like Obinze, Nicholas, Emenike and the Angolans and for the female characters Ifemelu, Auntie Uju, Ojiugo, and Aisha among others. The vision of the author was also analysed.

My methodology also included a review of secondary texts by reading critical works dealing with Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's works. I looked at works by literary critics like Tunca Daria, Kehinde Ayo and Emmanuel Ngwira who have carried out an analysis of Chimamanda's works. I also analysed literary works by writers like Leila Aboulela and Brian Chikwava who have used African immigrant characters to narrate the immigrant tale. I carried out library research and internet searches which enabled me to access journals and texts that enhanced a thorough understanding of the feminist theoretical framework. The use of the internet enabled me access *The Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie* website which availed critical works on the author and her works. Ebcohost and Project Muse sites also offered a wealth of information with a range of analysis on different works by the writer that acted as points of reference. Most of the interviews on

You Tube, on posted sites and in newspapers were reviewed in this study especially those related to Adichie's experience as an immigrant in America.

In my final analysis, I merged together the data from the primary texts with those from the secondary texts and analysed them in relation to the feminist theoretical framework with focus on African feminism which was relevant in analyzing oppression of women as depicted through the challenges they face in the West. Through stiwanism, a strand of African feminism, I focused on the male and female experience since it advocates for gender relations which should reflect in a male and female relationship that is complementary in nature.

## **1.10 Definition of Terms**

### **Racism**

Racism is prejudice or discrimination against other people because of their 'race' or what is thought to be their race (biology, ancestry or physical appearance). Racism is normally based on a stereotype that a people of a particular genetic background all behave in some unappealing way. (Reilly et.al.2003:15)

### **Stereotype**

A stereotype is a positive or negative set of beliefs held by an individual about the characteristics of a group of people. It varies in its accuracy, the extent to which it captures the degree to which the stereotyped group members possess these traits, and the extent to which the set of beliefs is shared by others...**Stereotyping** is the process by which an individual employs a stereotypical belief in the evaluation or behaviour toward a member of a stereotyped group. (Jones 1997:170)

### **Patriarchy**

It is a cultural or ideological system that privileges men and all things masculine, and a political system that places power in the hands of men and thus serves male interests at the expense of women.( Madsen 2000: xii )

## CHAPTER TWO

### EXPERIENCES OF FEMALE AFRICAN IMMIGRANTS IN *AMERICANAH*

**I admire women who live life on their own terms.**

**Not to make a point, but simply because it is the life they want to lead.**

**And often the world doesn't give them the room.**

– Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie (Academic OneFile, 17<sup>th</sup> March, 2014)

#### **2.0 Introduction**

This chapter focuses on female African immigrants characters only while excluding the male characters. The argument behind this is that unlike their male counterparts, the female immigrants face a unique experience which reflects in their being subjected to double patriarchy. Here women are oppressed twice over by patriarchy and an imperial society which boxes them within the triple issue of gender, race and class.

#### **2.1 Overview**

This chapter examines various challenges faced by female African immigrants in America and Britain as reflected in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah*. By analyzing the different experiences of these female African immigrants it exposes how their immigrant status affects them through gender, race, as well as economically and culturally. The study focuses on the protagonist Ifemelu alongside Aunty Uju as well as other supporting characters like Ojiugo and the African hairdressers in order to highlight the challenges they encounter and trace how they handle them. The response to these

challenges is either outright resistance or succumbing to the status quo. The study also shows how these women strive to create awareness amongst each other in order to liberate themselves from such oppressive structures. This chapter is guided by African feminism. Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie leans towards a feminist perspective by describing the complex nature of female African immigrants in America. Using the feminist approach which advocates for the need to free women from all forms of gender oppression enables us to understand her stance better.

## **2.2 Synopsis**

*Americanah* is the story of Ifemelumamma a Nigerian girl who migrates to America on a student visa for university education. Upon arrival she encounters an alien culture and is faced with a myriad of problems from financial constraints to racism, which result in a total sense of alienation. Along with other female immigrants we get to see their disadvantaged position as women. However resistance to foreign domination is portrayed through this female protagonist. The text subverts the notion that the African woman is voiceless and inferior as seen when Ifemelu gains voice and speaks for African women and Africa hence transforming the image of the African woman and African continent.

As characters migrate to developed countries it is out of the conviction that these lands have much to offer in terms of opportunities. Contrary to this, when they arrive in these countries the first challenge they encounter is racism. Racism which is not experienced among Africans in Africa is encountered in America, for the new arrivals it is a strange experience that becomes a form of oppression. Most of the African characters in



*Americanah* encounter racism in the West as will be proven in the discussion that follows. Ifemelu, the protagonist starts off our discussion.

As a student at Nsukka University, Ifemelu has her studies constantly interrupted as a result of chronic lecturers' strikes in a Nigerian government riddled with corruption. In order to solve the problem of missing out on her studies her aunty Uju based in America arranges for her to get a scholarship and she therefore leaves Nigeria for America with the hope of better education prospects. Her story is one of a female African immigrant who lands in America and struggles to fit in. However in the long run she is integrated into American culture by adopting certain aspects she deems necessary while at the same time retaining strong aspects of African culture.

From the onset Ifemelu encounters racism. Back in Nigeria Ifemelu was oblivious of her black colour and it is only upon arrival in America that she becomes aware of her blackness. She says:

I came from a country where race was not an issue. I did not think of myself as black and I only became black when I came to America.' (290)

This statement by Ifemelu shows that race is a significant factor in America. It highlights a series of episodes of a racist nature in the experiences of the female African immigrants. Reilly et al in their book *Racism* say that 'race is intended as a category to be used in distinguishing different human groups on the basis of physical appearance.' (15)

They add that skin colour as well as other facial features like hair, eyes and nose determines race. For Ifemelu colour in this case indicates a state of inclusion or exclusion. The idea of being seen as white is normal while black in most cases is shunned and likely to result in exclusion. This reflects in simple acts such as having one's eyebrows waxed. When Ifemelu visits a beauty spa to have her eyebrows shaped the female attendant declines to serve her with the excuse that "We don't do curly" (292) and only when her white boyfriend arrives to intervene does the attendant "transform into a solicitous coquette" apologizing that "it was a misunderstanding" (291). Here "curly" is used to mean black or African. Hair too in *Americanah* is a controversial topic since it is used as a form of discrimination. African women have been denied opportunities because of the colour or texture of their hair. For example, Aunty Uju has to take her braids out when she has to attend job interviews because she has been told she will be considered unprofessional should she wear them for the interview. This puzzles Ifemelu as she questions whether there are no doctors in America with braided hair. However Aunty Uju cautions Ifemelu against questioning this since one is in a country which is not their own and one has to do what they have to do if they want to succeed (119). In another incident, Ifemelu is forced to undo her braids and ends up scalding herself in the process of getting her hair relaxed in order to attend a job interview. This happens following advice from her friend Ruth who tells her before attending the job interview in Baltimore:

My only advice? Lose the braids and straighten your hair. Nobody says this kind of thing but it matters. We want you to get that job. (202)

Ifemelu's white boyfriend Curt discovers that she has replaced her braids in order to straighten her hair and he questions why, telling her that her braided hair was 'gorgeous' and that her own hair was "even more gorgeous, so full and cool" when natural. In defense of this move Ifemelu explains:

My full and cool hair would work if I were interviewing to be a backup singer in a jazz band, but I need to look professional for this interview, and professional means straight is best but if it's going to be curly then it has to be the white kind of curly, loose curls or, at worst spiral curls but never kinky.'(204)

This hints at racism intertwined with stereotyping. The racist nature of the statement is portrayed when Ifemelu says it is only the white kind of curly, loose curls or spiral curls that are accepted. Here white stands for inclusion while if one has kinky hair it means exclusion. Kinky hair is representative of African hair which is considered coarse and difficult to manage. The stereotype is based on the argument that one's hairdo has nothing to do with their performance and emphasis not to wear braids as a professional is mainly placed on Africans only. Ifemelu's experience is comparable to that of the persona in Una Marson's poem "Kinky Hair Blues" in which the lady laments to God for creating her black with kinky hair since it has led to her exclusion in a racist society. As a result of this society's attitude towards her black colour and kinky hair, out of desperation to fit she budes to pressure and straightens her kinky hair like in Ifemelu's case in *Americanah*. Although the persona loves her hair all kinky the white society dictates that natural is ugly. The idea is that adapting to whiteness is the option and anything white should be universally embraced. That is whiteness is superior and should be embraced by

humanity. This is best encapsulated in Frantz Fanon's *Black Skin White Masks* when he says:

Whiteness has become a symbol of justice, truth, virginity. It defines what it means to be modern and human. Blackness represents ugliness, sin, darkness and immorality. (xiii)

Racism as presented in *Americanah* manifests itself through institutional and cultural racism. It is further seen through stereotypes of Africa and Africans. Moreover the discriminatory attitude of foreigners in the West towards African women may show through language use.

Ifemelu encounters racism from white American women in regard to her relationship with her white boyfriend Curt. These white women get surprised when Curt introduces her to them as his girlfriend. Ifemelu says they looked at her in surprise, "a surprise that some of them shielded and some of them did not and in their expression was the question "why her?" (290) These white female characters display a discriminatory attitude towards Ifemelu implying that they are superior to black women. The idea is founded on a baseless notion that being a black woman she is undeserving of a white man and that is why Ifemelu says "their faces clouded with the look of people confronting a great tribal loss" (290). The same motif runs in *The Thing around Your Neck* in the short story by the same title. Here, Akunna describes her discomfort as a result of the racist glare she receives from white people in the street while in the company of her white boyfriend. Akunna says:

You knew by people's reactions that you two were abnormal- the way the nasty ones were too nasty and the nice ones too nice. The old white men and women who muttered and glared at him... (125)

This experience which is similar to Ifemelu's portrays how American woman see Africans as other by use of covert racism. bell hooks explains the history behind this kind of relationship between white women and black women when she says:

Historically, many black women experienced white women as the white supremacist group who mostly exercised power over them, often in a manner more brutal than that of racist white men. (48)

She goes on to say this kind of relationship makes the concept of sisterhood be elusive between black and white women, in that white women have made it impossible for the two groups to share common interests. bell's point of view strengthens my argument from the angle that there is a feeling of hostility and superiority from white woman towards Ifemelu when she is in the company of her white boyfriend Curt.

Institutionalized racism is experienced by Ifemelu during the school career fair where she hopes to be recruited for a job. The contrary happens and her explanation for this is that the recruiters upon realization that she is non-American but African end up being non-committal. According to her their main fear is that if they hired her they would have to "descend into the dark tunnel of immigration" (201). This is a clear indication that the female African immigrant is placed in a precarious situation if processing her documents is viewed as a complicated process not worth undertaking. In this case such bureaucracy systematically ensures blacks are cut off from receiving certain benefits.

In addition to this, through her blog posts Ifemelu tackles the delicate issue of institutionalized racism. One of her posts reads:

...but racism is about power of a group and in America it's the white folks who have the power. How? Well, white folks don't get treated like shit in upper-class African-American communities and white folks don't get denied bank loans and mortgages precisely because they are white and black juries don't give white criminals worse sentences than black criminals for the same crime and black police officers don't stop white folk for driving while white and black companies don't choose not to hire somebody because their name sounds white and black teachers don't tell white kids that they are not smart enough to be doctors...(327)

From this excerpt it is clear that government organs are portrayed as totally biased in favour of whites. The judiciary and police force if headed by a black person will regard a white person as untouchable because of the power they wield. Top institutions like the banking sector are prejudiced towards blacks since they give loans and mortgages to white people only, ensuring blacks remain at the bottom of the hierarchy. The bottom of the hierarchy is reserved for lowly jobs as described in another blog post that reads, "Lots of folk today don't mind a black nanny or a black limo driver. But they sure as hell mind a black boss" (35).

A similar picture is portrayed in the short story "An End to the Problems of Negro Women" by Claudia James. In this short story Claudia James presents disparities in the working conditions of white women and black women. By providing statistics she

explains that negro women as workers, as negroes and as women are the most oppressed. She adds that negro women are confined to the lowest paying jobs which are menial in nature. They work as domestic workers, that is, as cooks, waitresses and carry out other services in private homes. This subtle manner in which white folks segregate on colour basis is best encapsulated by bell hooks when she says:

As long as the United States is imperialist, capitalist, patriarchal society, no large female majority can enter the existing ranks of the powerful. Feminist movement is not advanced if women who can never be among those who rule and exercise domination and control are encouraged to focus on these forms of power and not see themselves as victims. The forms of power that these women should exercise are those that will enable to resist exploitation and oppression and free them to work at transforming society so that the political and economic structures exist that will benefit women and men equally. (95)

The American system displays white superiority-which is suggestive of a racist attitude-through the media which features images of white women while not giving space to black women. This discriminatory nature of American society is reflected in women's beauty magazines. Ifemelu is able to observe that these literature are racially skewed in that only white, Caucasian or Indian models dominate the pages showing how the colour white is superior while black is 'othered' indicating that it is inferior. The ideology behind this is that white culture is elevated at the expense of black. Cultural racism according to

Belgrade et al is expressed as “assumed superiority of language or dialect, values, beliefs, worldviews and cultural heritage” 104. This is well projected when Ifemelu says:

Look, this article tells you to pinch your cheeks for colour. This tells you about different hair products for *everyone*-and ‘everyone’ means blondes, brunettes and redheads. I am none of these. And this tells you about the best conditioners-for straight, wavy and curly. No kinky, see what they mean by curly? My hair would never do that. This tells you about matching your eye colour and eye shadow –blue, green and hazel eyes. But my eyes are black so I don’t know what shadow works for me. This says this lipstick is universal, but they mean universal if you are white because I would look like a golliwog if I tried that shade of pink. (295)

In *Americanah* the female African characters are faced by negative stereotypes as a result of their colour. In the book *Hate, Prejudice and Racism*, Kleg Milton, who is a scholar, says that “stereotypes are prejudicial because they involve generalizations” and goes on to add that “when tied to prejudicial attitudes, stereotypes create a number of behaviours ranging from avoidance to violence” 155. The white characters stereotype Africans as reflected through Cristina Tomas a receptionist at the International Students Office who serves foreign students in Ifemelu’s university. When giving them directions she pauses after every word. Tomas is conformed to the stereotype that foreign students do not understand English because she has heard them speak with a foreign accent. This is illustrated when she tells Ifemelu:



I.Need.You.To.Fill.Out.A.Couple.Of.Forms.Do.You.Understand.How.To.  
Fill.These.Out. (133)

Much as this incident is humorous its ironical nature is presented through the fact that Ifemelu is extremely fluent in English. Cristina's mode of communication projects the notion that the whiteman's language is of high status. Generally, American mentality of Africa and Africans is stereotyped in *Americanah*. It is believed Africans cannot speak English and Africa is ravaged by disease and poverty. Ifemelu shows this when she says during the African Students Association they mimicked what Americans told them. Examples of these statements made by whites are "You speak such good English. How bad is AIDS in your country? It's so sad that people live on less than a dollar a day in Africa" (133). The comments made by Americans reflect the experience Chimamanda Ngozi underwent the first time she attended university in America. While giving a talk titled "The Danger of a Single Story" in the TED show, Chimamanda describes how her roommates displayed surprise at how well she spoke English. The stereotypes on Africa also reflect in her anthology of short stories *The Thing around Your Neck*. In the story "The Thing around Your Neck" the narrator named Akunna describes her experience in a community college where she had enrolled and how the girls there asked her questions. She says:

They asked where you learnt to speak English and if you had real houses  
back in Africa and if you had seen a car before you came to America.  
They gawped at your hair. Does it stand up or fall down when you take out

the braids? They wanted to know. All of it stands up? How? Why? Do you use a comb? (116)

Akunna goes on to describe how her uncle told her to expect this kind of stereotype and shared his own experience of how when a few months after he moved into his house the neighbors said that the squirrels had started to disappear and they had heard that Africans ate all kind of wild animals. Though humorous this kind of stereotype is based on a false and damaging generalization.

Africa too is portrayed as a place of safaris, game parks and wild animals in both works and another common notion is that it's a continent in dire need of charity. Kelsey, a white American female character who has her hair braided by Mariama, stereotypes Africa by giving the impression that Africa cannot offer anything in terms of business enterprises; that one cannot own a salon business in Africa. Much as Mariama explains to her that her salon business was facing challenges in America she still tells her it was wonderful for her – that is Halima- to get to go to America and that it was now possible for Halima's kids to have a better life. Ironically as a matter of fact Halima's business is unstable in America just as it could happen in Africa. In addition to this, Kelsey questions Halima on whether in Nigeria women are allowed to vote insinuating that being an African country Nigeria is yet to acquire democratic maturity in relation to granting African women the right to vote.

Further still, when Emenike a Nigerian character hosts his white friends the talk centers on Africa and her backward state. They discuss how a charity based in Britain was trying

to stop the government from hiring so many African health workers. According to them there were simply no doctors and nurses left in the African continent following the influx to Britain. From their perspective the reason for this migration is that these medical personnel want to practice where there is regular electricity and regular pay. (273)

Mark, who is a white doctor argues against this by stating that though he is from a town named Grimsey in Britain he does not want to work in a district hospital there. He therefore suggests that the choices the African doctors and nurses make are natural but this is vehemently opposed by Alexa when she says that it isn't quite the same thing since "We are speaking of some of the world's poorest people" (273). This discussion on Africa is stereotyped for it is based on a generalization that Africa is underdeveloped and has little to offer that is why there are no medical practitioners left in the country. First the statement is untrue in that it is an overstatement to claim that all medical personnel have left Africa and secondly the reasons for their relocation may be for greener pastures and not lack of electricity.

This type of stereotyping is so deep that Laura, an African-American lady and sister to Kimberley, who is Ifemelu's employer, centers her talk on stereotypes of Africa and Africans. For example, she draws Ifemelu's attention to a picture in a magazine which depicts Africa as a place that is economically deprived. The magazine features a celebrity who is described by Laura as one who 'seems to be doing a good job' (162). This is in relation to her charity works. She is described as "a thin white woman, smiling at the camera, holding a dark-skinned African baby in her arms, and all around her, little dark-

skinned African children were spread out like a rugs” (162). This gives the impression of a continent ravaged by starvation. Further still, at a party at Kimberley’s, the guests who gather base their discussions on Africa. Ifemelu says that a couple spoke about their safari to Africa and how they were paying for the education of the tour guide’s first daughter. She also adds that two women spoke about their donations to a wonderful charity in Malawi that built wells, a wonderful orphanage in Botswana and a microfinance cooperative in Kenya (169). These guests appear as philanthropic white people who give back to society. However, a tinge of hypocrisy is hinted at when they hold their conversations on their contribution to charity and Ifemelu gazes at them wondering:

There was a certain luxury to charity that she could not identify with and did not have. To take “charity” for granted, to revel in this charity towards people one did not know – perhaps it came from having had yesterday and having today and expecting to have tomorrow. (169)

Based on stereotypes by whites that blacks are people in dire need of charity, Ifemelu dispels this by suggesting that whites led lavish lives and could afford to give out freely though it was not genuine but more of a show-off. Through Ifemelu, Adichie suggests that the white folks do not give out of love and sincerity but rather due to superfluous wealth and for publicity’s sake.

Aunty Uju who is a doctor by profession faces discrimination from a white patient. While this patient was lying in the examination room waiting for the doctor, Aunty Uju walks

into the room to carry out the examination and the patient asks if the doctor is coming and when Aunty tells her that she is the doctor, the patient's face changed to "fired clay" (182). The same afternoon the patient called to transfer her file to another doctor's office. This kind of reaction is based on generalizations arising out of stereotypes that a black person is ill-trained to carry out proper treatment on a white person.

The projection of race as a complex matter is exposed through Kimberley who employs Ifemelu as her nanny. In her conversations she uses coated language so that instead of referring to black people by the colour of their skin she calls them 'beautiful' even if it is not so. By referring to every black person as beautiful she tries to avoid the term black which is likely to be misinterpreted as 'othering'.

In *Americanah*, economic exploitation is a challenge faced by female immigrants and is a result of institutionalized racism. The American system is based on stringent laws on immigrants. Lack of proper documents brands one an illegal immigrant which leads to deportation. By avoiding the long arm of the law most immigrants end up with jobs of low status in miserable environments. The three African women braiders Halima, Aisha and Mariama best portray economic exploitation although most characters are faced by this challenge. They are deprived of proper facilities demonstrated by how they are settled in neighborhoods of low socio-economic condition. In order for Ifemelu to have her hair braided she has to travel by taxi for miles from the plush white-owned suburbs of Princeton to Trenton which she describes as "...a part of the city that had graffiti, dank buildings and no white people..." (9).

Ifemelu is apprehensive of visiting the area and a description of the salon presents a picture that is a reflection of occupants who are struggling to make ends meet. According to her the salon is overcrowded and lacks air-conditioning and is likely to have mouldy newspapers stuffed between grime and rotten things.(9) This shows the unhygienic state of Trenton and how America as an imperial power contributes to the social oppression of female immigrants by its non-inclusive nature. Furthermore the tales of these women are heart-wrenching, for example Aisha's father passes on but she cannot travel home for the funeral because she lacks proper documentation. She also has a sick mother on the verge of dying whom she cannot visit. From these women's experiences it shows how their status as immigrants is accompanied with challenges like economic and social pressures.

A notable aspect based on the experience of these three African braiders is that gender and class are intertwined. The fact that their jobs pay lowly confines them to the ghettos making their rise next to impossible. Much as they work effortlessly on their feet all day long they are unable to advance economically or financially. This situation is worsened by the fact that they are uneducated. This is in comparison to Ifemelu who despite the challenges she meets is able to negotiate her way out because she has achieved financial security as a result of her high level of education which has opened up job opportunities.

Just like the African braiders, Ifemelu as a female African immigrant is exposed to economic pressures, which eventually alienate her from herself and others. Initially as a new arrival in America she is unable to get employment and with payment of rent overdue, she resorts to a sexual encounter with a white man. The end result of this

encounter is that she ends up in a state of depression because she feels she has not fulfilled her self-expectation as well as her boyfriend Obinze's expectations. This humiliating experience bears heavily on their relationship since Ifemelu cuts off ties with Obinze, her roommates and the outside world. This form of alienation resulting from economic constraints reflects in Caroline Ramazanoglu's text *Feminism and the Contradictions of Oppression* in which she expresses the view that men violate women who are not economically independent. She says that "It should be expected male violence would be absent or limited only where women have effective economic and political power..." (66).

*On Black Sisters Street* by Chikwa Unigwe explores this type of oppression of women whereby men take advantage of female vulnerability upon realization that they lack political and economic independence. Unigwe explores the lives of four female immigrants Sisi, Efe, Ama and Joyce who out of economic constraints leave Nigeria and migrate to Belgium. Three of them except Joyce seek an opportunity to work as prostitutes. Joyce, a Sudanese, leaves Nigeria after her Nigerian husband is pressurized by his family to marry a girl from his ethnic group and so he decides to make arrangements for her to travel to Belgium to work as a nanny. However she gets to Antwerp and discovers that there was no job offer but that her husband's agent was but a conman forcing her into a life of prostitution. Though these girls' act of migrating to the West for a life of prostitution (except Joyce) is voluntary therefore not making them victims of circumstances, the driving force behind these moves is a result of lack of economic independence and political power.

The story of these female characters clearly shows that before they opted for prostitution they were violated by men who saw them as lacking economic independence. This is seen from the angle that back in Nigeria. Sisi's powerlessness is displayed when she cannot get a job since she is not connected to people in high places. It is only when one is well-connected that job opportunities open up. Efe on the other hand is driven into prostitution when a married man who impregnates her declines to recognize the child as his. Ama's frustrations are as a result of abuse from her step-father leading her to leave home.

America as a country presents challenges in terms of female African immigrants retaining their African culture and embracing American culture. The only way for immigrants to fit in is by adopting foreign ways (their way) resulting in the erosion of African culture. Ifemelu on arrival in America is perplexed by the observations she makes which are indicators of individuals straddling between two cultures. This is seen in language, names and lifestyle. Her aunty Uju while in Africa was a true image of an African woman but upon meeting her, Ifemelu is shocked to discover the American experience has completely transformed her. She is shocked to hear her aunt identify herself over the phone by pronouncing her name as *you-joo* instead of *oo-joo* (9). Further still, life in America for Aunty Uju means juggling between a foreign identity and one's true personality. Aunty Uju switches from her usual self and feigns an American accent to reprimand her son Dike in a supermarket. This is done with the intention of impressing the white counter girl. Ifemelu describes the newly acquired accent as "...nasal, sliding accent she put on when she spoke to white Americans, in the presence of white



Americans, in the hearing of white Americans. *Pooh-reet-back*” (108). Here Ifemelu notes “And with the accent emerged a new persona...” (108). The same reflects in a Guinean braider who tells Ifemelu “Ama like, Oh Gad, Az someh” (9). Translated to mean “Oh God, I was so mad.” This portrays America as a place that puts a lot of pressure on immigrants to adopt an American identity. In a bid to adapt, characters are forced to conform therefore alienating them. In *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed* Paul Freire analyses the effects of alienation on experiences of individuals and remarks:

At one point in their existential experience the oppressed feel an irresistible attraction towards the oppressor and their way of life...in their alienation the oppressed want at any cost to resemble their oppressors, to imitate them and follow them. (33)

Although the concept of hybridity (this is the state where a character is caught between their African culture and host culture) displayed by Aunty Uju is negative in that she discards positive aspects of African culture like language it is a pointer to the challenges posed on immigrants by host nations. Wa Thiongo Ngugi in *Homecoming* while discussing African national culture contends that no living culture is static. He says:

A profound change in a people’s economy, or in their dwelling place, through trade or migration, will make people organize themselves differently to meet the new set of circumstances. Their ideals and values, over a period, are likely to change. (5)

It is therefore evident that for the African woman in America the environment dictates the need to strike a balance between a foreign identity and one's personality. Although Aunt Uju leans heavily towards American culture, Ifemelu remains focused by retaining a strong sense of Africanness. A good example is seen when she drops her fake American accent and decides to speak in Nigerian West African English. All in all Ifemelu does not condemn American culture wholesomely; she is able to embrace the good found in American culture, retaining what is African.

One main form of women's oppression in *Americanah* is male dominance. The character best suited to present oppression of women in a male-dominated society is Aunt Uju. This is because we are able to trace the oppression she undergoes right from Nigeria to America. This form of oppression begins when Aunt Uju engages in a relationship with The General, a married man and father of four children. For her The General wields a lot of power and wealth which she enjoys basking in having lacked employment after graduating from university. The tendency to exploit women sexually by treating them as sex objects and possessions is displayed in The General's comments. He shamelessly tells Aunt Uju that she is brought up well since she is not like all the Lagos girls who sleep with him on the first night and the next morning give him a list of what they want him to buy. Aunt Uju proudly tells Ifemelu that she slept with The General on the first night but did not ask him for anything in cash or in kind.

The General shows his male prowess through this discussion but Aunt Uju seems to subscribe to the picture of the stereotyped African woman who is portrayed as docile and

submissive for she takes in this information unquestioningly. This shows how women are stripped of their self-worth when the General compares Auntie Uju with other women he has had sexual escapades with.

Auntie Uju too is not free of blame because she plays the submissive willing partner. This shows her vulnerability as she displays lack of confidence and independence by not challenging the General. However The General ensures that she is financially unstable so as to depend on him fully. This he does by providing her with a lavish lifestyle and hands out money to her only when she needs it for a certain purpose. Through ensuring that he does not invest in a sustainable project on Auntie Uju, The General enslaves her for she is totally dependent on him financially. However their relationship is a strenuous one for Auntie Uju gets emotionally drained as a result of The General trying to strike a balance by dividing his attention between his family and Auntie Uju and her son. This relationship ends tragically when The General dies in a plane crash putting a sudden end to Auntie Uju's luxurious lifestyle. She is left financially unstable, unable to fend for herself and her baby. Eventually, The General's relatives invade her house with the intention of attacking her and this forces her to flee from Nigeria to America.

What transpires above is encapsulated by Mirjana Morokvasic when she gives reasons as to why women migrate. She says:

...transgressing the limits of sometimes rigidly defined sex-role behavior (like having children out of wedlock, for instance...marital discord and physical violence, unhappy and broken marriages, impossibility of

divorce) so migration becomes a substitute; discrimination against specific groups of women and the insecure status of others... (70)

Aunty Uju's woes do not end in Africa after fleeing the insecure situation that confronts her and her son Dike she ends up meeting Bartholomew, a Nigerian man based in America. Bartholomew is egocentric and controlling in nature in that he tries to confine Aunty Uju's space by dictating that she should not send home any money. He exploits her financially, is fully dependent on her, shows no interest in her son and does not share any chores with her despite the daily pressures of immigrant life. In order to shake off the feeling of being emasculated as a result of the pressures of the American system on immigrants, Bartholomew exerts his authority by displaying traditional patriarchal domination which is common in Africa and which he seemingly exports to America. Aunty Uju presents a clear picture of this when she tells Ifemelu:

Both of us come home at the same time and do you know what Bartholomew does? He just sits in the sitting room and turns on the TV and asks me what we are eating for dinner...He wants me to give him my salary. Imagine! He says that is how marriages are since he is the head of the family, that I should not send money home to Brother without his permission, that we should make his car payments from my salary. (217)

In Britain, the author introduces us to Ojiugo a female character who is highly educated but gives this up to spend her time as a housewife. Although she is best suited to get a job since she qualifies because of her papers she does not take up the chance. Ojiugo forgoes

this opportunity so as to provide a chance for her unqualified spouse Nicholas to preserve his dignity as head of the family. This is therefore patriarchy where man takes the position of head of the household and woman takes up her role as a wife and mother. Ojiugo's security is vested in giving a positive picture of a housewife and mother at the expense of her career. This leads Obinze a cousin to her husband and a former schoolmate to reflect internally as stated:

It puzzled him that she did not mourn all the things she could have been. Was it a quality inherent in women, or did they just learn to shield their personal regrets, to suspend their lives, subsume themselves in childcare? (243).

The picture portrayed of Ojiugo fits Ogundipe Molar-Leslie's argument that women need to break the stranglehold of marriage. She says that "married women are afraid to shake the status quo, they are afraid and want security through...they cling to the respectability of being married" (214). Filomina Steady too is of the same opinion although from a different perspective whereby she suggests that one factor that makes the black woman's situation different is that she chooses motherhood and marriage over her own happiness and this eventually silences her. This is what Ojiugo does by giving up her career to tend for her family.

Following the discussion on the challenges faced by female African immigrants we will explore how these characters respond to the challenges they encounter in the West. The female African immigrants in *Americanah* that is Ifemelu, Auntie Uju, the three African

hair braiders (Halima, Aisha and Mariama) and Ojiugo respond to their experiences in different ways. Some of these women like Ifemelu and Auntie Uju succeed in overcoming these obstacles while others like Aisha remain stuck in this quagmire as seen in the analysis that follows. This in itself is reflective of life where not all individuals end up with the same experience - some end up happy; others are left with unfulfilled dreams.

The most challenging issue for all the immigrants is the fourth mountain which proves to be race and racism. This matter is tackled from different perspectives by most of the immigrants. In order to break silences on racial discrimination faced by black people Ifemelu sets up a blog. This becomes the most powerful tool in confronting racism since it acts as a form of resistance that rejects stereotyping of Africans. By posting blogs on white racist attitudes she makes a mockery of them through reversals in that the attention shifts from black to white. She subverts the order by 'othering' them not by stereotyping them as they do to Africans but in response to their racist attitude. The blog is used as a mode of communicating among black people urging them to resist stereotypes. It also acts as a platform for forming alliances that allow blacks to share their experience, which provides them with a sense of belonging and solidarity. The blog plays a therapeutic role in that the posts dissect and analyze experiences ranging from racism to hair issues. Ifemelu ends up gaining voice and speaks for people of African descent especially women.

Furthermore by Ifemelu undertaking a project in the world of technology (as a blogger), which turns out to be highly successful she deconstructs the stereotype of Africans and

for that matter an African woman being seen as inferior. She subverts the notion of white superiority and women as the weaker sex. This is in line with Molar-Leslie's stiwanism which declares that African Feminism is about demolition and reconstruction; that is the demolition of myths and reconstruction of new ideas. She goes on to add that it's about:

...exhorting women to take their rightful place in the political arena, dispelling myths about Africa and African women, exploding tired old notions of male superiority, interrogating false dichotomies, summoning the faithful to explore unexamined areas of women lives, admonishing women and men alike about the seductive tyranny of patriarchy and above all, insisting that belief translate into transformative activity.(4 )

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie through the protagonist meets Ogundipe's concept of stiwanism by demolishing myths and reconstructing new ideas as presented in certain instances. To start with by setting up the blog Ifemelu becomes a 'first' since we are informed that the idea of blogs were new. She also changes the conversation of African immigrants from being victims of racism through reversals portraying whites as racists. She lets the African woman speak for herself and not be spoken for by the white female. Through Ifemelu the African woman gains agency, this in itself is transformative. Also, we encounter Wambui, a Kenyan student who crusades for the rights of Africans. As Ifemelu's classmate she comes out strongly and speaks in a firm voice in defending topics related to Africa to the extent that she makes her Professor speak in "a small voice" and forces her argumentative white classmate "lower her tone" (138). She argues in class that the transatlantic slave trade may still have happened even if no Africans had

been sold by other Africans. The reason for this she boldly argues is that, “It was a European enterprise” (138). It was about Europeans looking for labour for their plantations. By actively participating in the lecture, Wambui liberates Africans by making them free of blame and rightfully shifting blame on the white world. She is described in as having a “formidable air; a person who went about setting everyone and everything right in the world” (138). This shows a character who is given agency to confront racial ideology.

In addition to this Chimamanda Adichie deconstructs the myth of African kinky hair and reconstructs new ideas. This Adichie does by using the character Wambui a fellow African student and classmate to Ifemelu to educate Ifemelu on taking pride in cropping natural hair. Wambui advises Ifemelu to cut her hair and go natural and tells her:

Relaxing hair is like being in a prison. You are caged in. Your hair rules you... You are always battling your hair to do what it wasn't meant to do. If you go natural and take good care of your hair, it won't fall like it's doing now. I can help you cut it right now. No need to think about it too much.  
(208)

After Wambui cuts Ifemelu's hair and Ifemelu refuses to go to work because she cannot stand her new look, Wambui is at hand to encourage her. She introduces her to *HappilykinkyNappy.com*, a website that deals with black people's natural hair like dreadlocks, Afros and twists among others and promotes the use of natural products that do not contain preservatives. Eventually Ifemelu gains confidence in her new look and later on when she sets up a blog she uses it to discuss natural hair as a way of making



scathing attacks at the white world. Through the blog she questions the American notion of beauty and the way it affects black people's self-worth. Here too, she frowns at straightening of hair and advocates for the need to wear Afros, braids and dreads. The fact that at the end she resorts to keeping natural hair acts as a marker of an African identity and as a way of disregarding racial indoctrination.

Ifemelu also responds to work-related racial discrimination as one way of protesting for not being registered for a job at the school fair due to her immigrant status. By excelling in her studies, she ends up getting a fellowship at Princetown and emerges successful both in her profession and blog.

In response to stereotyping by female White Americans like Cristina Thomas, Ifemelu collapses the stereotype that speaking with a foreign accent means one cannot speak English. Ifemelu describes her initial encounter with Cristina Thomas as one that made her shrink. She says:

... when her eyes met Cristina Thomas's before she took the forms, she shrank. She shrank like a dried leaf... she should not have cowered and shrunk, but she did. And in the following weeks, as autumn's coolness descended, she began to practice an American accent. (135)

After practicing an American accent and perfecting it, she started speaking with this fake American accent which resulted in her getting comments like 'You sound totally American.'(175) Ifemelu is filled with glee as she ponders that "she

had won; Cristina Tomas, pallid-faced Cristina Tomas under whose gaze she had shrunk like a small, defeated animal, would speak to her normally” (175). For Ifemelu, she felt a sense of triumph for proving Cristina wrong. However, her sense of victory is taken a notch higher when she decides to drop the fake American accent and speaks in her natural Nigerian English. This denotes the need to retain her identity. So by reverting to her natural Nigerian accent Ifemelu responds to the challenges of being stereotyped.

Aunty Uju who is confronted by racism in her residence at Warrington and in her profession as a doctor also tackles it in two ways. First, she relocates with her son Dike to a town named Willow. This move signifies an environment which is conducive in that it is described as a friendly neighborhood. This is suggestive of residents who are not racists. Secondly, in regard to her profession she joins Africa Doctors for Africa as a volunteer and would take two week medical missions to places like Sudan. This is an indicator of a tie to Africa where her services are needed and appreciated.

Women form solidarity by coming together and creating a close-knit relationship. Sisterhood therefore is used as a tool to create awareness among the female African immigrants with the hope of guarding against expected/foreseeable challenges. The African women are able to reach out to each other; a lot of encouragement, friendship and bonding take place. In her paper titled “African Feminism(s) A colonial question” Pinkie Mekgwe comments that “the notion of sisterhood is of such importance” and that it is also understood as “a marker of friendship”(9).

When Ifemelu settles in America as a newcomer, she is taught the ropes on how to get her way round in New York. Aunty Uju aids her by providing identification forms for a job. Ginika a friend and former schoolmate gives her money, shops for her when she is financially challenged and networks for her to get employment. We are also told that “Wambui had told everyone that Ifemelu was looking for a job” (139). Wambui, a student who holds the title of the president of the African Students Association invites her to their forum where she creates awareness on the need to own a strong African identity. The African Students Association portrays a high sense of unity as they educate each other on how to resist oppressive institutions and the necessary survival strategies to do so. The discussions range from how to speak with an American accent at the same time retaining one’s own language to showing pride in African cuisine.

At the salon Ifemelu displays the spirit of sisterhood by providing Aisha a shoulder to lean on by listening to her tribulations about her two boyfriends Emeke and Chijioke and the way neither is interested in marrying her. Ifemelu promises to help by talking to Chijioke. This concept of sisterhood is similar to bell hooks’ in which she says sisterhood is about working to transform female consciousness and that women should strengthen and affirm one another. By encouraging Aisha, Ifemelu is able to strengthen her. This concept of sisterhood reflects in Leila Aboulela’s *Minaret* where the protagonist Najwa, a female Sudanese immigrant encounters prejudice in London. Initially she exists as an invisible Muslim woman until the female Muslim community discovers her and bond with her integrating her fully into Islam where she discovers her true self.

The second mountain on woman's back which is man is overcome by Aunty Uju. Male superiority is shaken off as a mountain on Aunty Uju's back when she comes to a point in her life where she chooses to end her relationship with Bartholomew. Aunty Uju lives to Kiriku John's words as phrased in his book *Women's Liberation*. He says:

In order to liberate women from any type of oppression, there ought to be genuine communication between men and women. The latter must speak out what they find oppressive and determinately seek ways that will free them from the oppression of patriarchal structures. (13)

On a personal level, Aunty Uju transforms from being an African woman who is docile and submissive. She realizes her full potential and resists further exploitation by Bartholomew. She finds her voice and is able to tell Bartholomew off and ends the relationship. She protests openly tells Bartholomew of his extravagant habits and how she pays for his car. She then relocates from Warrington to Willow which signals freedom and fulfillment. This bears fruit when she gets into a new relationship with Kweku, a Ghanaian doctor, who Ifemelu describes as "a gentleman and a gentle man" (299).

For the African braiders, except for the hand of friendship extended by Ifemelu, no solutions are provided for their state of oppression. However their situation suggests that they are trapped in this state as a result of class difference. What makes the situation worse is the nature of their jobs that is based on self-employment. Ifemelu and Aunty Uju manage to negotiate their way out because their high level of education enables them acquire white collar jobs that pay well. There is a class difference between the braiders

and Ifemelu and Auntie Uju. While braiding Ifemelu's hair Aisha decides to ask her how she got her citizenship and Ifemelu answers that the company she works for sponsored her green card and Aisha responds with an 'Oh' Ifemelu then in her narration says it is as though Aisha "had just realized that Ifemelu belonged to a group whose green cards simply fell from the sky, People like her, could not of course, get theirs from an employer" (363-364).

Here Ifemelu suggests that the difference in the nature of their employment proves a challenge for Aisha. Ifemelu has a white collar job which affords her certain benefits unlike Aisha who is self-employed and struggles to make ends meet. Aisha is unable to match Ifemelu's status because of her little level of education which is projected through the conversations she holds with her clients. This therefore means education can play an important role in empowering women as reflected in the lives of some characters. This reflects in Kiriku John's book *Women's Liberation* where he discusses the role of education in shaping women's identity. He states that:

Education is the key to the freedom of women against perceived male stereotypes that concentrates power to men at the expense of women.

Women will need to set themselves free and invest in empowerment that has honour and dignity. (122)

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie depicts the struggles of diverse African women in America. All these women whether from Nigeria, Senegal, Mali, Ivory Coast or Kenya irrespective of their class have to face the oppressive nature of either patriarchy or neo-imperialism.

However through the protagonist who is transformed from one who experiences marginalization into one who overcomes it, it signals hope for the African woman. Chimamanda Ngozi subscribes to Filomena Steady's African feminism that says "has the potential of emphasizing the totality of human experience portraying the strength and resilience of the human spirit and resounding with optimism for the total liberation of humanity" (4).

In her article "The Female Writer and her Commitment" Ogunjipe Leslie-Molara advocates for the need for the female writer to write on issues that cover Africa as well as the global world. She says:

...female writers cannot usefully claim to be concerned with various social predicaments in their countries or Africa without situating their awareness and solutions within the larger global context of imperialism and neo-colonialism. (12)

Considering that Adichie creates characters that migrate from Africa to the West and face challenges as immigrants, she is able to create awareness on experiences of immigrants in a global context. The fact that her female characters end up not as victims but victors when faced by these challenges; she provides solutions on how to get out of these situations. Therefore, it is in order to conclude that Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie is a truly committed female African writer.

This chapter has analyzed the challenges faced by female characters as African immigrants in the West. It has demonstrated how racism alongside stereotyping, economic exploitation and male dominance are the major forms of oppression experienced by female African immigrants. However through the challenges encountered Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie creates space for agency. Through the protagonist, she subverts the stereotypes of Africans under Western eyes. She also demonstrates how women can create awareness amongst themselves in a bid to liberate each other from the oppressive nature of immigrant life. The next chapter examines how the male and female experience of African immigrants in the text may be different and their response to these experiences.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **GENDERED EXPERIENCE OF AFRICAN IMMIGRANTS IN THE WEST**

**Roles should be based on ability,**

**Not on the reproductive organs you were born with.**

-- Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie (Academic OneFile -14<sup>th</sup> March, 2014)

#### **3.0 Introduction**

This chapter takes the perspective of analyzing the male-female experience of African immigrants for the reason that most scholarly works have tended to give little attention to the similarities and differences between male and female African immigrants. I argue that this is a significant area for it will enable us look into how gender roles are affected by migration. Adichie presents us with a parallel story displaying the male and female experience of African immigrants in Britain and the America. By carrying out an analysis of Adichie's male and female characters it will enable us establish the authors view on gender relations as well as read into her vision on African immigrants.

#### **3.1 Overview**

The previous chapter has examined the challenges faced by female African immigrants in America and Britain. This chapter will focus on comparing and contrasting the experiences of male and female African immigrants in the two countries. We examine how the male characters deal with the immigrant experience and assess how different their experience is from the female. One main concern of African feminism as a



theoretical approach is that it takes into consideration not only issues relating to women but also men. By examining the male and female experience it will enable us see how Adichie's *Americanah* lends itself to an African feminism interpretation. *Americanah* presents us with male and female characters who suffer equally as a result of their race.

### **3.2 Synopsis**

In her novel *Americanah*, Adichie presents two parallel settings to tell her story. She uses both male and female characters to present the experiences of African immigrants in America and Britain. Ifemelu's story is told from America while Obinze her high school boyfriend narrates his immigrant experience from Britain. These settings much as they provide us with similarities on the experiences of African immigrants also delve into the contradictions faced.

Obinze applies for a visa to visit America with the hope of joining his old time girlfriend Ifemelu as had been their dream in school. However his application is turned down by the American embassy in Nigeria. His mother who is a university lecturer feeling his frustration offers to take him as her 'research assistant' on a job trip to Britain. Since the visa is valid for a period of six months only, it is her intention that Obinze's cousin Nicholas, who resides in Britain, will host him as he finds proper documentation to secure a legal status in the country. However as is common with most successful immigrants in the West his cousin Nicholas gives him a cold reception which leads to a troubled experience as an illegal immigrant in Britain six months later when his visa

expires. Through his story we are able to analyse other male immigrants' experiences enabling us to compare them with the female experience.

The male and female experience of African immigrant characters has a lot in common. However these experiences are equally different. The main similarity is in regard to race and class whereby both gender are discriminated against on account of their colour and restricted to low status jobs.

In *Americanah*, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie presents us with male African characters that are hostile, unwelcoming, aggressive and callous as well as exploitative. Obinze's first experience of Britain is his encounter with his cousin who is unwelcoming and unreceptive unlike Ifemelu who is warmly received by Auntie Uju when she lands at the airport. Auntie Uju picks Ifemelu from the airport and after some time loans her a friend's National Security card to ease her search for a job. When Ifemelu moves to Philadelphia to start her studies, Ginika her former schoolmate and friend receives her while identifying to her areas she needed to familiarize herself with for example, her new college.

On the other hand the best Nicholas can do for his cousin is advice him on how he can get his way round in England which totally contrasts with the way African women have received Ifemelu in America. He says:

If you come to London with a visa that does not allow you to work, the first thing to look for is not food or water, it is an NI number so you can

work. Take all the jobs you can. Spend nothing. Marry an EU citizen and get your papers. Then your life can begin (239)

That is the least he can offer and according to Obinze ‘Nicholas seemed to feel he had done his part, delivered words of wisdom and in the following months, he hardly spoke to Obinze at all. (239)

So Obinze starts to feel the suffocating and oppressive state of being trapped with the tag of illegal immigrant. He resorts to search for his friends from Nigeria who are currently based in Britain. This experience is made worse for he is surrounded by feelings of loneliness when he does not get support from these Nigerian friends - Nosa, Chidi and Wale. When he meets them on a beer date and queries them on how to acquire an NI card unlike the female characters that were swift in providing assistance in America, “they shook their heads vaguely” (247). This was to show that they had no clue on how he was to go about acquiring an NI card and therefore a clear indication that they were unable to offer any help. The only advice they could give was the need for him to keep his ear to the ground or move closer to Central London from Essex. Here these African men are depicted as brothers in name only but unwilling to aid one of their own. It also shows the shady deals illegal immigrants employ in order to become part of their host nation and in this case they fear disclosing any information.

This view is strengthened by John Arthur’s statement in the chapter entitled ‘Searching for Promised Lands: Conceptualization of African Diaspora in Migration’ which he says:

At the same time, several of the Africans in North America with undocumented status are cognizant of the risks of working and living in the United States or Canada without legal work authorization. For such immigrants, social circles and networks are limited to fellow immigrants or trusted friends and family members...There is little or no trust for outsiders. (6)

With this act of exclusion by his fellow countrymen, Obinze's illegal immigrant status forces him to look for a solution to avoid immigration restrictions. This he does when he seeks help from Illoba a man from his mother's hometown who connects him to Vincent Obi. Vincent offers to give him his NI card for temporary use at an exorbitant fee.

The female experience of America displays a relationship of total commitment with strong ties that bind them tightly. When Ifemelu arrives in America and is in dire need of a job, Wambui, the President of the African Students Association much as she did not know her but recognizing she was from Africa reaches out to all African students in the association by spreading word that Ifemelu was looking for a job. This nature of sisterhood does not reflect in men as they lack the spirit of brotherhood.

That the nature of brotherhood is non-existent is displayed through the aggressive and exploitative nature of Vincent Obi and the Angolan characters that are nameless. Obinze follows advice from Nicholas on the urgency of getting an NI number and marrying a European Union citizen to acquire papers and so he is introduced to Vincent Obi by Illoba. Obi is his solution to avoid immigration restriction when he offers to trade his NI

card to Obinze for temporary use on condition that Obinze avails forty percent of his earning; after some haggling they settle for thirty five percent. This is too hefty a fee considering Obinze is still in the process of grappling with challenges in Britain and needs to settle. To bear the name Vincent Obi becomes an experience clouded in fear and insecurity for Obinze. Besides keeping his part of the bargain Obinze turned Obi has to leave up to blackmail and out of the blues increments. Vincent's callous nature is seen when after some time he calls and asks for a raise and threatens to expose Obinze to his employer by informing him that Obinze is an imposter. When Obinze ignores him by not responding on the assumption that it is a mere threat, he keeps true his word and causes Obinze to lose his job.

Obinze's woes begin to spiral as he has to start afresh his process of getting identification. He meets the Angolans who are wheeler-dealers and here too he faces further extortion. The plan is that they are to arrange his marriage to Cleotilde a girl with a European Union passport. In the process of making these arrangements the Angolans keep asking for more money citing financial constraints in enabling the marriage arrangements be a success. Obinze is forced to borrow heavily from his cousin Nicholas and Emenike his old time schoolmate. Adichie portrays how the status of being an illegal immigrant is more precarious for the male when ironically all Obinze invests in prove to be a sham the moment he is arrested just before his marriage to Cleotilde at the Civic Center. Obinze loses his chance of holding a legal status and is deported to Nigeria.

Brian Chikwava in his novel *Harare North* uses the same motif to narrate the experiences of Zimbabwean immigrants in London. The male characters that have had a longer stay in Britain thrive on exploitation of new arrivals to make money. Aleck, an immigrant character, in *Harare North* is left a house (referred to as a squat) by the owners for free. He ends up accommodating four of his fellow Zimbabweans but charges these housemates thirty five pounds each under the pretext that he is collecting rent for the owners of the squat. The unfortunate bit is that his fellow countrymen struggle to put food on the table or even go to bed on an empty stomach yet he has no qualms about it. This is made worse by the fact that one of his housemates is an underage girl named Tsitsi whom he sexually exploits and she ends up as a mother at the age of seventeen. Due to the challenges that accompany immigrant life she is forced to loan her baby to fellow female immigrants so that they can pose as single mothers to enable them get a chance to apply for council houses.

Adichie also presents us with male characters that seem to have lost touch with themselves and their family due to experiences undergone as immigrants. Obinze's cousin Nicholas seems to have been transformed by his immigrant experience. His economic status reads success since he is the proud owner of a home in England with his son and daughter attending one of the best private schools in Essex. However, he lives an insecure life for he works on contract without the knowledge of whether his contract will be renewed. As a result of his insecure state, Nicholas places himself in an authoritative position in his family as proof of his manhood. This he does with the hope of his family reciprocating by showing respect and obedience. He categorizes his wife with his

children when addressing her as described by Obinze when he says he heard Nicholas say to her, “You people have scattered my study...leave my study all of you” (239) and Ojiugo is said to respond to almost everything he said with, “Yes, Nicholas” (239).

According to Ojiugo Nicholas changed at a period when he lived in fear for using fake papers as an immigrant to enable him get work. Also in order to retain his status as a successful man, Nicholas puts extra effort in his work at the expense of quality family time. Obinze says, “On weekends Nicholas walked around the house in a tense cloud of silence, nursing his worries. Only during Arsenal matches did he relax a little...After the game, his face would conceal again” (239). This complex problem faced by immigrants is best captured in Sree Latha Malyala in the paper “Jhumpha Lahiri’s Short Fiction: A Thematic Study” which states that:

People move to make their dreams real and to further their future prospects - gain financially and professionally. But while shifting to a foreign country they do not ask themselves if they will be able to adjust to the life and community there. In many cases financial security is achieved but the sense of alienation becomes deep. (2)

Initially when settling to immigrant life in the West, both male and female characters share the same work-related experience. Due to race being a factor that comes into play the characters find themselves holding low status jobs like being a nanny, waitress, a delivery boy, toilet cleaner or security guard. However men’s conception of themselves is challenged when there is upward mobility in the professions held by women. This brings

a different experience for both male and female immigrants. Representing the female characters Ifemelu sets up a blog which eventually ends up extremely successful. She makes good money and ends up buying a condo making her a home owner which signifies ultimate success for an immigrant. In the paper 'The Migrant's Quest Home' Tobian Banton says:

Home ownership is the ultimate act of validation for the immigrant...Homeownership for the migrant is an asset that signifies the accumulation of the American dream; the ultimate reward to the migrants journey abroad. (26)

After this she gets a job with a good pay as a research fellow at Princeton University earning her a secure and stable position as a female African immigrant. This equally reflects in Auntie Uju who practices as a doctor and ends up buying a home, once again a form of economic and social stability. This picture contrasts with that of most male characters that stagnate in their lowly positions at work, with jobs whose security is not guaranteed and therefore they do not achieve optimum satisfaction. An example is seen through Obinze who starts as a toilet cleaner, a cleaner in a warehouse and then a truck packer to delivery boy. Vincent Obi and the Angolans are characters that do not have any jobs but survive by engaging in shadowy deals. The Angolans remain nameless to the end probably as an indicator that many others of their kind existed.

It is obvious that the status of being an immigrant affects men negatively and women adapt faster leading to their success as seen in the lives of Auntie Uju and Ifemelu. This is



possibly attributed to the socio-cultural and patriarchal status of men in Africa which is destabilized once they migrate to the West. Coly Abietou Ayo in the paper “Male Wives Female Husbands: Immigration, Gender and Home in Calixthe Beyala’s *Le Petit de Belleville and Maman a un amant*” analyses how immigrant characters from Mali are affected by their status once they migrate to France. Coly then argues that the physical location and space are largely embedded in notions of home and being at home and goes on to say:

For instance, a black African immigrant in France might not be able to relocate his socioeconomic status and patriarchal privileges because the racial configuration in his new locale constitutes an impending factor...  
(327)

This situation could be similar to that of the male African immigrants in Britain. Since patriarchy is male dominated due to the fact that men held positions of authority either politically or economically among many other forms, they feel ousted from these positions once they land in Britain. Here the race factor robs them off their authoritative position which was exercised in Africa and accords them the same treatment as women on account of their black colour. Rapport and Dawson state that “one is at home when one inhabits a cognitive environment in which one find’s one’s identity best mediated – and homelessness when such a cognitive environment is eschewed.”(Quoted in Coly 328). The fact that men are displaced from their powerful position by their immigrant status interferes with their identity. The end result to this is their emasculated nature or

aggressive attitude as reflected in the lives of Emenike, Nicholas, Vincent Obi and the Angolans among others.

After undergoing challenging moments in the host nation, most women adapt faster to these experiences while the male experience contradicts this. Women display tenacity while men give up easily. This is demonstrated by Obinze and Ifemelu's experience. Ifemelu faces sexual mistreatment which leaves a deep scar on her however despite having sunk into her lowest moment she is able to pick herself up and move on. Out of this experience she emerges triumphant by making a success of herself. Obinze on the other hand works as a toilet cleaner and one day he arrives on duty to discover 'a mound of shit on the toilet lid, solid, tapering, centered as though it had been carefully arranged and the exact space measured' (237). This experience is enough to make him down his tools and is the beginning of him hopping from one job to another eventually resulting in his deportation.

Another character, Emenike, is described as leading an affluent life in Britain. Though he rises up the ladder of success the author presents him as one who seems to live in the shadow of his British wife. Adichie makes a mockery of how he is fully submerged in British culture through all means possible, he tries to belong to the high breed class of British society even if means getting a wife who is older than him by at least eight years. She is described as "old enough to be his mother" (248). This need to belong reflects in a report by Louis T. Achille to an Interracial Conference where he says, "Among certain people of color, the fact that they are marrying someone of the white race seems to have

overridden every other consideration. In this fact, they find access to complete equality with the illustrious race..." (52). (Quoted in Fanon Fanon's *Black Skin White Masks*) Emenike is seen hosting white folks, savoring white cuisine while using exotic cutlery as well as trotting the globe. For him all these pleasures are associated with marrying from the white race without putting into consideration other factors like his dignity.

In *Americanah*, women who undergo various challenges at the hands of domineering men end up evolving. At the end of their journey they display strength of character which results in their success. At the same time Adichie promotes gender relations by the use of the character Obinze. She demonstrates that men and women's roles ought to be complementary rather than oppositionary. Obinze, our male protagonist, gives us the male point of view of the narrative from Britain and redeems other male characters. As a guest to his cousin Nicholas and his wife Ojiugo, he shares in the domestic chores like cooking and watching over the children. Obinze and Ojiugo are able to hold dialogues where they share notes on their experiences and events of the day. Here the writer projects the complementary nature of the male and female relationship. Obinze is the opposite of Nicholas who treats his wife Ojiugo as he does his children. The cordial relationship between Obinze and Ojiugo is one expected of a husband and wife. Though Nicholas is withdrawn from his wife Adichie possibly suggests it is as a result of the challenges faced as an immigrant. This is seen when Adichie uses Ojiugo's voice to say, "...but you know he only got his papers two years ago and for so long he was living in fear, working under other people's names. That thing can do wonders to your head, *eziokwu*. It has not been easy at all for him" (240).

Another character who redeems men by promoting a complementary relationship between men and women is Boubacar. Boubacar is a Senegalese professor at Yale who plays a major role in contributing to Ifemelu's rise up the ladder of success. He encourages Ifemelu to apply for a fellowship at Princetown telling her the opportunity would be perfect for her. When Ifemelu expresses her doubt that she does not meet the required academic qualifications he urges her on saying:

They want people who are doing new things, pushing boundaries. You must apply, and please use me as reference. We need to get into these places, you know. It is the only way to change the conversation. (340)

Boubacar poses as a man who is willing to change the direction women take from an oppressive one to one of freedom. He also shows great concern for matters relating to Africa and Africans for he feels black people are sidelined and that is why he talks about changing the conversation.

This chapter focused on the experiences of African immigrants from a gender perspective. It has examined how the experiences of African male and female immigrants differ. The chapter has observed that much as the male and female perspectives are similar to a certain extent there are also glaring contrasts. However this difference is reflective of the challenging nature of migration; for the chapter concludes by merging the two experiences as they are reflective of a complementary male-female relationship. The next chapter will examine the author's vision in relation to African immigrants.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### ADICHIE'S VISION

**Africans must speak for themselves...especially women.**

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie (Business Daily -10<sup>th</sup> April, 2014)

This chapter examines the message Chimamanda Ngozi Adiche communicates on African immigrant women and African immigrants generally. By the use of different characters, male and female, Chimamanda reveals her philosophy which enables us infer her vision on Africa in relation to the West.

Njoki Mwihi in "A Critical analysis of Athold Fugard's Social Vision in Four Selected Plays" says:

Through his/her creative imagination a writer aims at persuading his/her reader to view not only a kind of reality, but more important from a certain angle and perspective, a certain vision...the writer's creative work both reflects reality and also aims at making the reader's take a certain attitude to the reality presented. (64)

Wa Thiongo Ngugi in *Homecoming* says that literature is not created from a vacuum but "is given impetus, shape, direction and even area of concern by social, political and economic forces in a particular society" (v). In this case it means when an author sets out to write a literary text it is with the intended hope that the audience may gain insight from

its reading. In “A Conversation with Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie” an interview with Parul Sehgal, Adichie herself confirms that she writes with a vision. This is in response to a question on why in writing *Americanah* she seems to break free from her usual style. She replies, “More seriously, my vision as a writer is dark. I am more drawn to melancholy, the sad, the nostalgic. And so I wanted to do something a little different” (1). So from these statements by analyzing the attitudes of African immigrant characters in the text it may give us a glimpse into the author’s intended vision and worldview. This may enable us grasp how Adichie goes into the deep and serious issues of African immigrants and the solutions provided out of these situations.

Adichie’s main message for immigrants is success sought in the West can be found back home. She shows how the problems of African immigrants start right from foreign embassies in Africa when one applies for a visa .A good example is when Obinze walks into the American embassy in Nigeria filled with hope of acquiring a visa and reuniting with Ifemelu in America. However he suffers the shock of a life time when he gets to the counter and is instantly dismissed by being told he does not qualify. Obinze describes this scenario when he says that ‘the man glanced at the forms and said, kindly, “Sorry, you don’t qualify. Next person!”’ (233). He continues to describe how he visited the embassy three more times and that each time without a glance at his documents he was told “Sorry, you don’t qualify” (233). This part of the narrative is similar to the experience Adichie’s brother Chuku went through in an American embassy in London. In an interview at the Aspen Institute, Chimamanda while talking about challenges of acquiring a visa to America describes how her brother went to renew his visa and did not qualify.

She says the interviewer pointed at his visa and said sharply ‘This interview is over!’ Chuku’s experience is based on reality which shows the frustrations African immigrant characters undergo as presented in texts may possibly be reflective of real life experiences.

This difficult experience faced by African immigrant characters is further worsened on arrival in America/Britain where one is confronted with an unwelcome atmosphere which gets rough when Adichie depicts how illegal immigrants flout rules as they battle to get proper documentation. For instance when Obinze misses to get an American visa, his mother falsely recommends him as her research assistant when she travels to Britain. She returns to Nigeria and leaves him behind with a piece of advice for him to work out his way to America to join Ifemelu. His six month visa expires and his troubled life in Britain begins. First he has to pay Vincent Obi for Obi to give him his papers. He then has to live under a false name indirectly losing part of his identity.

The same immigrants face trouble in relation to job opportunities which are laborious and low-paying. Obinze struggles to make a living in Britain living under constant fear and constantly looking over his shoulders due to the insecurity of fake papers and the imagination that the law is about to catch up with him. Eventually his two Angolan acquaintances organize for him a fake marriage for the sake of getting papers but minutes before the ceremony the law officers pounce on him. This leads to his arrest whereby he is handcuffed and led to the airport past the general public who stare at him with puzzled

eyes. Together with other illegal African immigrants he is locked in a cell in Dover- a formidable former prison and is eventually deported to Nigeria as a failure.

Obinze's fascination with the West was for the reason that it was a land of plenty and his intention was to get rich. Ironically his dream is shattered and he returns home with nothing to show for it but humiliation. However this narrative changes once he gets home and starts job-hunting after undergoing a state of depression. Through his female cousin Nneoma who connects him to people in high places he ends up as an extremely wealthy and successful businessman back home. Adichie possibly uses this return narrative to pass the message that Africans who seek prosperity abroad may as well toil in their home country where they may find that success.

Still in regard to African immigrants, Adichie has a philosophy that if African immigrants follow the proper immigration procedure the West may not be such a hostile place as experienced by most characters. Aunty Uju and Ifemelu are good examples of immigrants who used the proper procedure to get to America. It is clear they had legal documentation and so in this case although confronted by several challenges their stable and secure status enables them to search for jobs with ease though these jobs are not easily accessible on account of their colour. This is in contrast to Obi, Obinze and the two Angolans, among many other men, who are forced to work underground for fear of arrest either because they own papers by false pretences or on expired documents making their stay in the West illegal.



As mentioned in the previous chapter Ogundipe Leslie-Molara mentions the six mountains on the African woman's back that she needs to get rid of, so is Adichie's vision close to these mountains which weigh heavily on African immigrants' backs. Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie presents us with female African characters that face oppression right from the African context to the West. A good example is Auntie Uju who faces gender-related suffering and embarks on a journey to America where she ends up liberating herself from male superiority and pursues her career successfully. Auntie Uju gets into a relationship with Bartholomew a Nigerian man who exploits her physically as well as financially. Having persevered for some time Auntie Uju walks out of this relationship and is lucky enough to find love in Willow. She therefore overcomes the fourth mountain which is man and his superiority. By Auntie Uju finding satisfaction, Adichie shows us the possibility of woman getting rid of the sixth mountain- herself. Adichie takes it as her responsibility to change the consciousness of women to reject being discriminated upon on gender basis. It suggests her vision for the African woman is for her to free herself from the shackles of male-dominated oppression. Here the act of migrating seems to have a liberating effect on women.

Aisha the hairdresser's story is one of a woman who lives in awe of patriarchy. The mountain on her back is herself and man. Aisha is a Senegalese immigrant who due to the hardship of immigrant life keeps two Igbo boyfriends who decline to marry her with the excuse that their families insist on them marrying a girl from their community (Igbo). She pleads with Ifemelu to convince either to marry her. Ifemelu empathises with her situation since Aisha faces financial constraints, has a sick and dying mother whom she

cannot visit due to restrictions posed by immigration laws. Ifemelu then promises to speak to one of the boyfriends Chijioke. But as she leaves the salon she has one question in mind that is “just how she would persuade a man who didn’t seem keen to marry to do so” (365). Much as Ifemelu promises to call Aisha back with a report from Chijioke, we do not get to hear the end of the story. Ifemelu’s predicament is based on the fact that the mountain is on Aisha’s own back and this mountain is Aisha’s attitude. This is reflected in what Ogunjipe says:

Women are shackled by their own self- image, by centuries of interiorization of ideologies of patriarchy and gender hierarchy. Their own reactions to objective problems therefore are often self-defeating and self-crippling. Woman reacts with fear, dependency complexes and attitudes to please and cajole where more self- assertive actions are needed. (114)

Further still when questioned about some of her female characters in an interview with Aminatta Forna titled “New Writing and Nigeria” Adichie says:

It is important for me to write truths I can relate to. Because of that I am interested in writing about women who are weak, who are not independent, who make poor choices...this is the reality of their lives. (1)

This is in agreement with Ngugi’s declaration that literature is based on reality from society. Adichie shows that life offers different strokes for different individuals but as a writer her vision is that woman needs to control her own destiny.

Adichie has a critical vision for humanity in regard to race. She tries to educate humankind that race and racism is based on human perspective which they have the power to change since all people regardless of colour require equal treatment. By using Ifemelu, the protagonist to set up a blog that centers mainly on racial matters, Adichie attacks the West for employing political correctness as a ploy to avoid discussing the deep seethed issue of racism. Still in the same interview with Parul Sehgal Adichie says:

I think race as it has been constructed in America, makes it almost impossible for people of different races to have a real conversation about race, let alone understand how the other person feels. Story-telling helps. Strong telling can be an entry point. (1)

Adichie concludes that as she writes about race in fiction, it is her way of “exploring, questioning and experimenting” (1). By questioning, she is able to experiment in that people are able to respond to her fiction. However, this goes beyond fiction when in reality the white world responds as seen in one of the comments by Kathryn Schulz, a reviewer of her novel, who says:

Still, none of this triumphs my admiration for Chimamanda’s grasp of dynamics, and her precision and fearlessness in committing them to the page. I found myself laughing ruefully from recognizing myself and my country... (3)

Further still, in regard to racial discrimination Adichie’s philosophy is that Africans need to challenge oppressive structures like racism. Through setting up the blog she makes

scathing attacks on the white racist society by exposing their offensive and prejudiced attitudes. Here too, Adichie subverts the stereotyping of Africans by using Ifemelu as a woman and African who succeeds in the world of technology in the West. Her vision for African women is to rise above obstacles.

Adichie's vision is one that stresses the value of language as a form of African identity. She critiques Africans who mimic white ways like Nicholas who is described as one who "spoke to his children only English, careful English, as though the Igbo he [Obinze] shared with their mother would infect them, perhaps make them lose their precious British accents." When speaking during a debate titled "Chimamanda Ngozi: How will history depict the African Woman?" Chimamanda says "We need to find ways to value our language" (1). She goes on to add that she finds it 'silly' that some Africans are afraid to speak their language. Through portraying characters who display certain traits in relation to African culture she passes across her message. Ifemelu, Obinze, Ojiugo and to some extent Dike embrace an African identity whereas characters like Nicholas and Emenike are used to ridicule Africans who try to imitate western ways. Obinze and Ojiugo are proud to speak Igbo while in America. Initially when Ifemelu arrives in America she is hosted by Aunty Uju who vehemently opposes Ifemelu's manner of speaking in Igbo to her son Dike. She also ensures that her past is shrouded in secrecy such that Dike does not know who his father was and the kind of person he was. If anything she deceives him that she was a second wife to The General and not his mistress.

However by the end of her journey to America, Ifemelu convinces Aunty Uju to allow Dike travel back to Africa with her. Here he is able to trace his genealogy. This is comparable to Barack Obama's experience in his autobiography *Dreams from my Father* as he weeps at his father's grave loaded with the thought of the frustration he witnessed in Chicago of the gap existing in his roots and that "all of it was connected with this small plot of earth an ocean away..." (430). Dike too being an American citizen with his origins in Nigeria makes a trip to the very house his father once enjoyed an affair with his mother. He heads back to America as a teenager who has found satisfaction in the knowledge of his ancestry. On top of this he leaves Nigeria as one who though he cannot speak Igbo understands it perfectly. (424)

In *Americanah*, Adichie uses hair too to make a political statement. She advocates for African women to maintain natural hair as a symbol of their pride in their African identity. She discourages and at the same time rejects the idea of relaxed hair which according to her is an indicator of conforming to the white norms. This message is interpreted in Ifemelu's blog posts and through the use of the character Wambui, the president of the African Students Association. In one of the blog posts titled, 'A Michelle Obama Shout- Out Plus Hair as Race Metaphor' Ifemelu hits at the media for makeover shows which present black women with natural hair that is coarse, kinky or curly in the "before" picture as ugly and pretty in the "after" picture. But she makes fun that in the after picture someone has taken a hot piece of metal and singed the hair straight. She ridicules blacks who would rather run naked in the street than be seen in public in their natural hair. She goes on to make a statement that she has natural kinky hair which she

wears in cornrows, Afros or braids. She also says 'I don't want relaxers in my hair- there are already enough sources of cancer in my life as it is' (297). Wambui, also convinces her to crop her hair and tells her that relaxing one's hair is like being in a prison since it cages and rules a person and from there on Ifemelu keeps natural hair.

For Chimamanda, education is a vital tool in fighting male dominance and racism. She spreads the message that there is need for woman to set herself free from the shackles of patriarchy and classism by acquiring education. For her a lack of education may make some women unable to liberate themselves.

Adichie believes in strong ties to the homeland. Having been in America for thirteen years with a good job, a thriving blog, a home and American citizenship, Ifemelu voluntarily returns to Nigeria. Even though she has established a successful life in America, she has a deep desire for home. Speaking through Ifemelu's voice Adichie says:

Her blog was doing well, with thousands of unique visitors each month, and she was earning good speaking fees, and she had a fellowship at Princeton and a relationship with Blaine...yet there was cement in her soul. It had been there for a while...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 melted into a piercing homesickness...Nigeria became the place 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)

The statement above signals a critical vision that Chimamanda has for Africans and that is the need to return to their roots. In an interview with Carl Wilkinson titled “I Left Home to Find Home” she describes her strong sense of attachment to Nigeria when she says:

I feel a strong sense of connection. I can go back to my ancestral village and walk the same dusty path that my great grandfather probably walked and it gives me a strong sense of being rooted.

Yet in another talk she voices her feelings by saying “I am fearlessly proudly Nigerian, fearlessly proudly African. Nigeria is where my heart is.” This statement is indicative of her strong ties to the homeland.

Overall, Adichie has a great vision for women. She is filled with hope that women in society should be liberated from oppressive structures. She has a vision that they should make a move by leaving oppressive situations to find self-fulfillment. This is reflected in Auntie Uju who embarks on a journey which results in her freedom and independence following an unhappy and unsatisfying relationship with Bartholomew.

Adichie’s vision too for women is that she advocates for women to create support networks. Women should reach out to one another and share their problems as seen in most female characters through the spirit of sisterhood. Ginika is always available to provide Ifemelu a shoulder to lean on. Ifemelu reaches out to Aisha and at the end of it all stable relationships are formed.

Adichie also offers a vision for women to achieve empowerment by displaying a sense of hope. Ifemelu is able to heal from her sexual encounter that bruised her as a new arrival in America. She achieves personal fulfillment emerging triumphant despite having encountered challenges like racism and economic pressure. Adichie's message is that with determination and strong-will and putting behind obstacles encountered there is hope in future.

Another vision Adichie has for the African woman is the need to embrace a harmonious relationship between men and women as seen in Boubacar and Ifemelu, and Ojiugo and Obinze. This acts as a source of inspiration that if men and women come together, domination of women will be eradicated leading to the transformation of humanity.

This chapter will thus conclude that Chimamanda Adichie has a clearly spelt out vision for African immigrants in relation to the West. The chapter identified that racism is one of the main forms of oppression and that Adichie takes a stance that all humanity should be treated as equal beings. It also concludes that the author presents the oppressive male-female experience of African immigrants in the West to impress on African immigrants the need to realize that Africa equally has economic opportunities to offer just like the West. The chapter concludes that by the writer's use of the homecoming narrative, she advocates for a strong tie to the African heritage.



## CHAPTER FIVE

### CONCLUSION

This study sought to examine the challenges undergone by African female immigrants in America and Britain. Chapter Two of this study, focused on how Chimamanda presents female characters that undergo various challenges and analysed how these characters respond to them. The study shows that these challenges are as a result of interconnected forms of race, class and gender oppression. This form of oppression is reflected in racism, stereotyping and male dominance. For example most characters encounter racism as a major challenge. The women characters overcome this challenge of race in various ways. Our protagonist Ifemelu, takes lead to respond to these challenge by subtle resistance like attacking racist attitudes through blog posts. She sets up the blog which she uses to attack white superiority. She critiques their mannerisms, hypocritical nature and is able to create a forum to share experiences getting the worldview on racism. Aunty Uju relocates to Willow where the whites are friendly compared to Warrington whose residents displayed racist attitudes. Matters related to class too result in characters like the three hair braiders facing economic pressure.

The nature of whites stereotyping Africans is challenged by the African immigrant characters in forums like the African Students Association where they speak on the need to be proud of their African identity, for example on Ifemelu's first day in college she is invited to attend the African Students Association meeting where the students in attendance advice her to retain her culture much as she may be forced to pick some

American mannerisms. They also poke fun at some American mannerisms like touching in public which makes them burst out in laughter and they end up getting relief. Much as this is therapeutic, this use of reversals is to indicate that whites may regard Africans as primitive yet their behaviour is questionable.

Another challenge faced by women in the West, is that of patriarchy. We are presented with women like Auntie Uju in America and Ojiugo in Britain whose men are entrenched in a cultural practice that serve their own interest. This is seen in the manner in which both Bartholomew and Nicholas display selfish and authoritative behaviour. Auntie Uju is able to overcome this challenge by telling off her boyfriend Bartholomew. She reminds him that she caters for everything including paying for his car. Auntie Uju then packs her bags and relocates to Willow with her son Dike, to start a new beginning as an assertive and independent woman. However, the form of male domination which is experienced by Ojiugo is not overcome. This is because Ojiugo has accepted her status as a wife and mother for the sake of security as a married woman. Although we do not get to know whether Aisha the African hair braider achieves personal fulfillment by getting married to Chijioke, her encounter with Ifemelu proves to be not only an eye opener but also therapeutic. The reason for this being that Aisha is able to learn from Ifemelu that Chijioke who is Igbo like Ifemelu can marry a girl from a different cultural background. Chijioke, has always given Aisha the excuse that he cannot marry her since she is Senegalese this excuse is a clear indicator that Chijioke is not keen on marriage but has been exploiting Aisha sexually.

The third chapter explored the immigrant experience of male and female characters. Our focus was on whether men and women experience their immigrant status in a similar manner or if there are differences. From our analysis we are able to draw our conclusion that male and female immigrants share a common experience in regard to issues like racism, stereotyping and economic pressure. However there are also glaring differences in the male experience when contrasted to the female one. The female characters are portrayed as closely-knit; they bond by creating social networks to enable fellow female immigrants to navigate their way in the host country. However, the male African immigrant characters, on the other hand lack this form of kinship. Their attitude towards the new arrivals is shadowed by hostility coupled with extortion and blackmail.

Kiruku in discussing patriarchy in his book *Women's Liberation* says it is male-dominated to the extent that men may wield power everywhere and that “the power of patriarchy is reflected in its ability to absorb pressures of superficial change as a defence against deeper challenges” (14). Kiruku explains that a patriarchal mindset is slow and difficult to change since it is rooted in principles of control, competition, domination and hierarchy. Kiruku's point of view clearly explains the situation as it reflects in the combative male relationship of African immigrants. The male immigrants having wielded a lot of power as a result of patriarchal structures in their mother country (and may not feel powerful due to being destabilized by their immigrant status) would want to exert the same power on fellow male immigrants in the West.

It is worth noting that Adichie uses the return narrative to collapse stereotypes of Africa as an inhospitable continent and Africans as a people who have no attachment to Africa and prefer to settle in the West as immigrants whether legally or illegally for that matter. Chimamanda Ngozi debunks this myth by using characters that portray Africa as a place worth returning to and where one can achieve success.

Overall, at the end of this analysis we can conclude that Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie shows how her characters are marginalized first as women and secondly as Africans and how they are able to negotiate in their own terms the state of being immigrants much as it is presented as a challenging notion. Through Wambui, the President of the African Students Association, she learns the art of breaking silences in regard to discussions that attack Africans and Africa. Marginalization of female immigrants is seen when they search for jobs in America and it proves to be an elusive affair. The jobs they can afford to get are of low status either working as nannies or waitresses. However through sheer hard work they manage to get into successful careers as seen in the lives of Auntie Uju and Ifemelu. When Ifemelu finally gets a steady and well-paying in a white-owned firm, one day she decides to quit out of choice and leaves the white manager surprised. Through sheer hard work, the two women, that is Auntie Uju and Ifemelu end up hitting the ceiling and buying homes in America. Interestingly, Ifemelu sells hers to relocate to Africa which surprises most people.

The critical aspect in this analysis is that Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie is able to direct this narrative towards an African feminist perspective which Filomena Steady in *African*

*Feminism: A Worldwide Perspective* describes as African patterns of feminism that can be seen as “having developed within a context that views human life from a total, rather than dichotomous and exclusive, perspective” (8). This is seen by her ability to portray the challenges faced by both male and female immigrants and how they fight the same battles. However women still have to engage in a further battle not fought by men. This is by fighting man himself as represented by patriarchy as the enemy. This battle is won directly or indirectly. Some of the women like Auntie Uju get totally liberated, while Aisha gets relief by sharing her experience, furthermore she gets enlightened on matters affecting her relationship.

Adichie uses Obinze the male protagonist to portray a new perspective in gender relations in that Obinze collapses traditional stereotyped roles and promotes new gender roles. This is exhibited when Obinze is projected as a companion to women and one who is very supportive of women by being willing to listen to their problems. He performs household chores like cooking at Ojiugo’s home. We are able to trace that Obinze’s culinary skills are as a result of his mother’s influence .When Ifemelu visits his home his mother asks him to serve her a drink, bring the soup out of the freezer and join her in the kitchen. A description is provided on how mother and son proceeded to prepare lunch as Ifemelu relaxed and watched. Ifemelu then concludes Obinze’s mother ‘had taught her son the ability to be, even in the middle of a crowd, somehow comfortable with himself. (70).’ When Ifemelu commends her for the delicious soup as they eat, she retorts that her son Obinze prepared it. She then questions Ifemelu on whether she knows how to cook in which Ifemelu responds in the negative. Here Chimamanda reverses gender roles where

in traditional structures girls roles are housekeeping while boys avoid the kitchen and sit as they wait to be served. The opposite happens as Ifemelu relaxes and Obinze cooks then serves her. Chimamanda portrays that male and female roles should be complementary in nature which captures her belief that 'roles should be based on ability, not on the reproductive organs you were born with.' (More Lecture). This complementary relationship between men and women is advocated for by Steady's African feminism.

Ifemelu and Auntie Uju liberate African women and set a perfect example for them by shaking the metaphorical mountains of neo-imperialism, male superiority and domination, backwardness and race off their backs. They are transformed from immigrants who experience marginalization and discrimination into women who portray strength and resilience.

The hypotheses that female African immigrants face various challenges that are worth our study and that the male-female experiences of African immigrants are diverse have been tested. The research has also shown that Adichie leans towards an African feminist standpoint that advocates for a complementary male-female relationship and that she has a clearly spelt out vision on African immigrants. Feminism as a theoretical framework has served a critical role for it has proven these hypotheses right. I recommend that further research on *Americanah* through the use of other theoretical perspectives like post colonialism and psychoanalysis may enrich our understanding of the immigrant experience.

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