

Narrating Trans-Cultural Identities in Chimamanda Adichie's *Americanah*

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Abstract

Identity discourses are becoming more focal and prevalent in postcolonial women's writings. However, these discourses tend to focus more on the female predicament and images as victims of male dominance. This paper seeks to draw attention to the transcultural realities of women. It examines Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah* with the attempt to examine the realities of Nigerian women in the diaspora. Adichie focuses on issues of self-identity, gender, and race with ways women confront, respond to and navigate the complexities of their socio-cultural world, defined by the realities of migration and globalisation. Adichie's fiction revisits the complexities of migration, racism and gender from a transcultural and global perspective. As a way of challenging male dominance, women consciously position themselves as professionals and assert themselves as cosmopolitans to negotiate transcultural selves.

Keywords: *Americanah*, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, Transcultural, Migration, Racism

Introduction

The discourse of identity has remained fundamental in the lives and experiences of women. In fact, writings by women reflect the quest for identity. Judith Gardiner states succinctly that much modern, cultural and literary criticism revolves around the issue of identity. (Gardiner 347). Elaine Showalter, further notes that, since 1920, a search for identity has been a major theme in women's literature (Showalter 34). This explains why studies on the changing perspectives in the reflections of constructions of identities are emerging and imminent. Also, in recent researches are works on the discourse of women identities in relation to the concepts of colonialism, racism, class, nationalism and gender.

Michael Hogg and Dominic Abrams define Identity as "people's concepts of who they are, of what sort of people they are, and how they relate to others." (Michael Hogg and Abrams 2). Related to this research is Deng's view of what identity is. For (Deng 1), "Identity is ...the way individuals and groups define themselves and are defined by others on the basis of race, ethnicity, religion, language, and culture." From the foregoing, identity simply refers to a social category, a group of people identified by a name and differentiated

by membership rules and (claimed) characteristics, traits, or attributes. In the second definition of personal identity, an identity is a distinguishing quality (or characteristics) that a person takes great pride in and considers to be socially significant but largely immutable.

The images of women in literature have been examined by writers and literary critics from both “social” and “personal” positions. The intention of Nigerian women writers in re-defining womanhood has heightened the ideological concerns of female writers in female portraiture. Mabel Ekwierhoma states that female writers “aim at articulating their views of contentment and discontent and correcting the misrepresentations of females in texts by men and women.” (Ekwierhoma 21). In this vein, identity representations of the female has remained a part of the preoccupation of female writers. She further notes that “female writers deem text creation a most crucial and important activity” (Ekwierhoma 21). In this vanguard, woman writers have committed themselves and artistry to portray female characters that represent the reality of women. Attempts by female writers as they seek to re-address female marginalisation are central and focal to their commitment. The powers female writers possess in reflecting their identities and images have been succinctly affirmed by Ogundipe-Leslie whose particular inference rests on the assertion that no one can tell of the female experience except the females themselves. (Ogundipe-Leslie 10). This is carried out by either representing their personal or other experiences through heroines.

Gardiner corroborates by accentuating the aim of female writers as one that focuses on a female hero as part of a longer process involving her own self-identification and empathic engagement with her character. (Gardiner 187)

In Nigeria, a number of writers have reflected and narrated the diasporic experiences of black females in their works. Buchi Emecheta as a pioneer and a foremost writer of this trend employs her personal experiences to expose the situation of the black female migrant in the diaspora. Akachi Ezeigbo, Sefi Atta, Chimamanda Adichie, Chika Unigwe and Lola Shoneyin have engaged in the discourse of migration as well. They address postcolonial and global issues which reiterate fundamental issues like sex trafficking, race, multiculturalism, class and culture with their impacts on Africans in the diaspora. Central to this research is interrogating how migration empowers and shapes the identities of women, an exploration on the way and manner writers conjectures the diaspora either as a place where identities are subverted or asserted. The implication of this lies in the view that the African women’s experiences exceed local spaces and boundaries. Accordingly, cross border relations and transnational affiliations, usually result in a change of identity.

Adichie's vision of trans-cultural consciousness on the identities of women in the global space, that is, both the local and international settings are reinforced in *Americanah*. These novel challenges the dictates of patriarchal and racial dominance through migration, whilst questioning race as a means of subjugating African women in the west. Formation of identities persists in the novel as it captures formed identities in the global era. We commence with a review of the *Americanah*.

Americanah tells the story of childhood friends, Ifemelu and Obinze and their emigration to the United States of America and to England, respectively. It narrates the issues they confront as young emigrants and their eventual return to Nigeria. Written in a non-linear plot, *Americanah* begins with Ifemelu en route Princeton to Trenton to braid her hair, in preparation to return to Nigeria after thirteen years in the United States. *Americanah* presents events in Nigeria, the United States of America and England as they relate to Ifemelu's interactions with race and gender. The novel narrates Ifemelu's relationship with Obinze, Curt and Blaine which feature prominently in her growth, identity formation and self-actualisation. These three men chart the course of her life significantly as they shape her worldview and perspective on her self-identity. Ifemelu's identity is also shaped by her interactions with Aunty Uju, her aunt who is also a medical doctor, Ifemelu's mother and Obinze's mother who is a university professor. *Americanah* depicts the growth and coming of age of Ifemelu. We meet her as a young girl but as the narrative unfolds, she is transformed to an assertive, determined and independent woman. Adichie's emphasis on female emancipation is re-echoed in *Americanah* as she remodels women to adapt to the global and changing realities of multiculturalism and globalisation.

Transcultural Consciousness in *Americanah*

Adichie demonstrates how global and multicultural realities are major determinants for redefining female identities. The author highlights the experiences of women migrants in the 2000s, the millennial era, an era characterised by globalisation. It also represents a time when professionals in Nigeria fluxed to the West for greener pastures and education. For instance, Ifemelu decides to school in America as a result of successive strikes in the Nigerian university system. Kimberly's remark on Nigeria when Ifemelu is at her place for a babysitting job is instructive:

“Ginika said you left Nigeria because college professors are always on strike there?” Kimberely asked.

“Yes” of course was Ifemelu’s response.” (69)

This reiterates the author’s realist vision in projecting concrete situations and reasons that account for migrations. The author’s frankness and vision in addressing trans-cultural experiences of females and their struggles with racism and patriarchal domination in a global era account for her radical ideology of creating strong, educated, assertive and career-oriented women. This ideology is geared towards sustaining female independence from socio-cultural restrictions. The quest to migrate which eventually transpires to trans-cultural positions, reorders the values and identities of women. Richard Slimbach (2005:2) opines that the attempt to define shared interests and similar values beyond cultural and national borders is the core of trans-culturalism. Hence, the exhibition of belonging and integration into the West while also taking cognizance of their roots define the realities of females in *Americanah*.

Adichie’s novel continues the reflection of black women’s experiences and the tension that occur in trans-cultural mobilities. Her characters challenge and at the same time adapt to cultural differences. This is reinforced by globalisation and the tension that emanates in lieu of migration.

The reality of adapting to cross-cultural relations has resulted to a new cultural identity for migrants. So, Ifemelu and other migrants must have to redefine and negotiate their identities to fit into the new socio-cultural and global space. In this way, Adichie presents her women as cosmopolitans who are challenged with globalisation and the realities of race and gender. Hence, contemporary writers who have emerged in the wake of globalisation have been referred to as ‘culturally mobile writers’ as interests on cultural relations pervade their works. Conscious of their environment, Adichie’s women articulate trans-cultural tendencies. In the event of matters of race, Adichie’s vision is to project characters who are able to navigate and negotiate their cultural roots and the American culture concurrently.

Americanah probes racism and the part it plays in altering the identities of women. Fractured and altered identities are explored in the novel as integral in interrogating migrant identities.



For instance, Ifemelu explains:

“I came from a country where race was not an issue, I did not think of myself as black and I only became black when I came to America. When you are black in America and you fall in love with a white person, race doesn’t matter when you are alone together because it’s just you and your love. But the minute you step outside, race matters.” (359)

While this represents the author’s perspective on racism, it asserts her vision of a new and emergent cultural space for her characters to exist in a multicultural, global and racist society. The portrayal of Curt’s and Blaine’s characters is a prominent achievement of this novel. Their portrayals point to new directions in the depiction of romantic relationships between whites and blacks. Ifemelu exhibits cosmopolitan traits as she finds herself involved in inter-racial romantic relations. When Ifemelu is set for her job interview after engaging in a series of demeaning jobs, she is advised to do all she can to get the job. As it would enable her get a work visa and start her green card process. (202).

Ifemelu is advised by her friend, Ruth, on what she has to do to pass the interview:

“When she told Ruth about the interview in Baltimore, Ruth said, “My only advice? Lose the braids and straighten your hair. Nobody says this kind of stuff but it matters. We want you to get the job.” When she eventually straightens her hair, Auntie Uju tells her, “But look how pretty it is, woo, girl, you’ve got the white-girl swing.” (302)

The above explores the disposition of blacks on ambivalence and in-betweenness. It is instructive to note that while Ruth and Uju demonstrate loss and ambivalence, they epitomise the position of most Africans in defining their identities. Auntie Uju is also not left out as she willingly straightens her hair:

Later, she said, “I have to take my braids out for my interviews and relax my hair. Kemi told me that I shouldn’t wear braids to the interview. If you have braids, they will think you are unprofessional.”

“So, there are no Doctors with braided hair in America?” Ifemelu asked. “I have told you what they told me. You are in a country that is not your own. You do what you have to do if you want to succeed.” (119)

Kemi’s and Ruth’s suggestions on the one hand and Auntie Uju’s and Ifemelu’s accents on the other, confirm ways that fulfil the quest for self-fulfilment and integration into

the social space. Furthermore, Kemi and Ruth serve as motivators for survival in a multicultural society.

The author's succinct use of symbolisms is to re-emphasise the value placed on the African culture. Hence, the symbolism of hair stands prominent in *Americanah*. It is representative of Ifemelu's sense of beauty, identity, and self. Basically, Ifemelu's hair defines her sense of identity. Subsequently, losing her braids and applying toxic chemicals to straighten it indicates a negotiation of her cultural roots and identity which is apt in the process of assimilation and integration. Furthermore, Ifemelu not recognising herself demonstrates the conflict in identity. This strategy is to emphasise loss and alienation and eventual emergence of a hybrid culture.

The symbol of hair constantly runs through the novel as the writer takes us through the interconnectivity of hair and cultural identity. Ifemelu is informed that her natural kinky hair must be replaced with straight hair in order to achieve a professional look and to be accepted. They are African citizens who must oblige the western culture while maintaining the African culture.

The motif of hair as it foregrounds the notion of identity is further emphasised by the African hair dressers in Trenton. The women in the saloon are professional hair braiders who are nationals of Togo, Mali, Senegal and other West African countries. The women are attached to their cultures even in the West and they take up means of livelihood in connection with their roots. The saloon serves as a site where interactions on matters of race, alienation and negotiation of identities are enacted. In the salon, solidarity and friendships develop and lessons on survival strategies are shared between Africans. Their views on racial experiences in the United States of America also evoke thoughts of the mundane and the ordinary people in the United States.

The salon is significant in that it serves as a space for trans-cultural interactions. As women from Senegal, Togo and so on, engage in their businesses in the space that is familiar to them, it acts as a space where other women of African descent who are their clientele, re-enact their allegiance to their roots.

Ifemelu often transits from one identity to the other as she negotiates and strives to integrate into the United States. For instance, while on her job search, she is pressurised to take on a new identity in order to get a job permit. In an attempt to assist Ifemelu, Auntie Uju had to come up with a suggestion:



I don't know if you remember Ngozi Okonkwo? She's now an American citizen and she has gone back to Nigeria for a while, to start a business. I begged her and agreed to let you work with her social security card."

"How? I'll use her name?" Ifemelu asked. "Of course, you'll use her name" Auntie Uju said, eye brows raised. (106)

This also is the experience of other migrants such as Obinze. They have to play pranks to get their job permits. However, in the instance when "Ifemelu forgot that she was someone else" (130) she forgets her pseudo name.

Ifemelu initially forgot she was someone else. A tired-faced woman opened the door to a strong stink of urine in a South Philadelphia apartment. "that's my dad," the woman said,

"Can I see your ID?" the woman asked, and then glancing at the licence, added, "How do you pronounce your name again?"

"Ifemelu"

"What?"

Ifemelu almost choked. "Ngozi. You *hum* the *N*."

"Really." The woman, with her air of unending exhaustion, seemed too tired to question the two different pronunciations. ...She repeated "I'm Ngozi Okonkwo" in front of the mirror before her next interview, at Seaview restaurant. (131)

Ifemelu experiences ambivalence and rethinks her identity. (Okonkwo 130) re-echoes John A. Arthur's assertion that "to survive in America new arrivals must learn the expectations of American culture if they are to survive and adapt to life in their country." Also, in relating to Oguine's *A Squatter's Tale*, (Okonkwo 135) notes that:

Oguine emphatically captures the complex of disorienting tensions that emanate as the (African) immigrant, in this instance the Nigerian, dislocated from his familiar homeland and now straddling borders, attempts to negotiate personal, social, economic, cultural and psychological quandaries, to reject subalternity and ultimately assume a viable even if integrative subjectivity and identity in America. But then he must navigate those competing impulses and imperatives without compromising his sense of self, goals, priorities, home, family. (131)

Furthermore, (Benmayor and Skotness 9), note that contemporary global migration challenges norms of cultural homogeneity, essentialism, and stereotypes. The author attempts to synthesise and, at the same time, juxtapose the complexities females must navigate to

evolve strategies in order to attain a balance by asserting their identities while confronting racial and multicultural challenges. This is enhanced through the bonds migrants form in terms of friendship and solidarity to articulate their shared values in sustaining culture.

Emphasising the diverse and multi-cultural peculiarity of America, and yet, shared interests, Adichie presents characters who share the same worldviews with Ifemelu. This acts as a relief to Ifemelu who just arrives America and is a nanny to Dike, her cousin. Aunt Uju's observations as she says of Jane and Marlon, "They are like us; he has a good job and he has ambition and they spank their children," consolidates shared bonds and cultural values between Ifemelu, Jane and her husband, Marlon, who are migrants from Grenada. Also, Ifemelu and Jane's similar experiences of reading Enid Blyton's books and having Anglophile teachers and fathers who worshipped the BBC World Service, (111) show an affiliation to western ways in their childhood days that enhance their shared values.

"Things must still be very strange for you," Jane said.

Ifemelu nodded. "Yes."

"You know, this is my tenth year here and I feel as if I'm still settling in," Jane said. (111)

Jane's situation accents to fixations and ambivalence that characterise migrants. Ifemelu's response is typical and peculiar of individuals living in a multicultural set up. However, unlike Jane who finds it difficult to 'settle in' in her tenth year, Ifemelu's twelfth year when we meet her preparing for her return, is characterised by her transformed trans-cultural identities negotiating and adapting to her environment.

Even when Ifemelu is confronted with 'the unfamiliar' she still has to readjust herself to suit the American space. For instance, even in her eating habit, we are made to understand that Ifemelu "enjoyed the unfamiliar." Even when she seemed unfulfilled, "she was disoriented by the baldness of fruits, as though nature had forgotten to sprinkle some seasoning on the oranges and the bananas, but she liked to look at them, and touch them; because bananas were so big, so evenly yellow, she forgave them their tastelessness. Once Dike said, "Why are you doing that? Eating bananas with peanuts?"

"That's what we do in Nigeria. Do you want to try?"

"No," he said firmly. "I don't think I like Nigeria, Coz"

Here, a contrast is placed between Nigerian foods and the fruits she has to cope with. The fruits she sees in America are tasteless, alluding to the unsavoury experiences she has to encounter and navigate. She, however, has to still enjoy them. As the new global culture continues to destroy traditional conceptions of essentialism, Stuart Hall finds that racial identities are no longer regarded in a stable or fixed manner. (Hall:175). Hence, while making attempts to assimilate to her adapted culture, the western culture, she struggles to retain and stick to her roots. Apparently, Ifemelu encounters many occasions where she faces identity struggles and fixations.

Race and sexuality with emphasis on inter-racial relationships for survival are captured in the novel. Adichie explores the prospect of harmony and tolerance between races through Ifemelu's relationship with Curt, an American, and Blaine, an African American. The relationships Ifemelu enact with Curt and Blaine suggest the need for racial, transnational and trans-cultural reality, a portrayal of inter-racial relationships, and highpoint of globalisation. Furthermore, Auntie Uju, after her negative experiences in an exploitative relationship, gets her life back by settling with/marrying a Ghanaian who treats her well. Adichie's characters negate the notion that happiness resides in relationships with same racial or ethnic groups. Aisha the Senegalese hair dresser, must also depend on her prospective marriage to Chijioke, a Nigerian who has got his green card so she can settle in America.

Female identities are confronted by race in *Americanah*. The peculiar realities of a multicultural society become imperative in the discourse of race, especially as it affects females, hence, the aptness of Ifemelu's blog. The blog is the medium through which Adichie's alter ego, Ifemelu, expresses her views on race in America. The blog, titled *Raceteenth or Various Observations About American Blacks (Those formerly known as Negroes) by a Non-American Black*, also serve as a medium where honest and intrepid comments on race and its effects on individuals are tackled. The posts give an account of Ifemelu's perception on race and her experiences as a black woman in the United States. It is also a resistance platform for making statements that reject racism and racist tendencies in the United States. Through her heroine, Ifemelu, and other female characters, Adichie unveils the limits placed on black women by gender and race. For instance, her opinion on the situation and reality of black women in America reflected in her blog post reads:

Dear Non-American Black, when you make a choice to come to America, you become black. Stop arguing. Stop saying I'm Jamaican or I'm Ghanaian. America doesn't care. So what if



you weren't "black" in your country? You're in America now. In describing black women you admire, always use the word "STRONG" because that is what black women are supposed to be in America. If you are a woman, please don't speak your mind as you are used to doing in your country. Because in America, strong-minded black women are SCARY. (220)

The above, demonstrates the intersection between racism and gender and its effect on the black woman. We infer the negative impact and the restrictions they place on female assertion and actualisation.

While Ifemelu speaks her mind through her blog, it is instructive as it offers diverse views and criticism on racism, also countering the notion of silencing the women as they are expected to be seen and not to be heard. The above excerpt unveils the negation on the discourse of globalisation which is to unify and also accommodate racial and even gender diversities. Hence, the emphasis on Afropolitanism, a unique term coined by Taye Selasi to describe the experiences and identities of African migrants, essentialises the position of migrants.

Taye Selasi's concept of Afropolitanism reiterates cultural diversities and the changing disposition of Africans in the West and global sphere. It emphasises self-definition and the perception Africans have of themselves in the global space. (Selasi 2). refers to "Afropolitans" as cosmopolitans of African origin. She asserts further that, this new populace has come of age in the twenty-first century, changing what it means to be African. Their "funny blend of London dress, New York lingo, African ethics, and academic triumphs "have made them famous." (4).

Hence, it is concerned on the local and global disposition of Africans. Selasi's observations explicate the realities of Adichie's characters, most importantly, the female characters who conform to trans-cultural relationships and behaviour suggesting the spirit of Afropolitanism. The sense of belonging to the western world is often marked by alienation, disillusion, loss and loneliness as a result of frustrations and ridicule which often is the reality of these women (migrants). Adichie challenges this notion of Afropolitanism by her characters' struggles and sometimes disillusions even when they devise the means to adapt to the west. Ifemelu's decision to stop faking an American accent enunciates Afropolitan ideals; Taye Selasi's vision of Afropolitanism becomes imperative in addressing the unique experiences of migrants.

Ifemelu's contact with Americans such as Curt, Blaine, Kimberly and Laura, interfere with her roots and carve out a social space to rethink her identity. Ifemelu's contact with Kimberly dismisses some stereotypical and erroneous beliefs of the disposition of Americans on Africans/perception of Africans by Americans:

“Hello, I'm Ifemelu.” “What a beautiful name,” Kimberly said. “Does it mean anything? I love multi-cultural names because they have such wonderful meanings, from wonderful rich cultures.” Kimberly was smiling the kindly smile of some people who thought “culture” the unfamiliar colourful reserve of colourful people, a word that always had to be qualified with “rich”. She would not think Norway had a “rich culture.” (147)

Subsequently, Kimberly and Ifemelu form bonds of friendship, a development which Laura frowns at. Laura's views seem to be different and her racial sentiments are geared to deliberately hurt Ifemelu:

She doesn't have a CPR certification, Kim.” Laura said. She turned to Ifemelu. “Are you willing to take the course? It's very important if you are going to have children in your care.”
“I'm willing to.”
“Ginika said you left Nigeria because college professors are always on strike there? Kimberly asked.
“Yes.” Laura nodded knowingly. “Horrible, what's going on in African countries.” (147)

On the other hand, Curt plays a prominent role in Ifemelu's stay in America and she views racism and inter-racial relationships from that perspective. Curt often disapproves of Ifemelu's attraction and compliance to western ways. For instance, Curt's disapproval of Ifemelu straightening her hair as he observes, “is so wrong” (204) is instructive in Adichie's attempt to bring to the fore the fact that Ifemelu not recognising herself not only asserts the dominance but also reveals the loss of identity and assimilation of the dominant culture in the adopted country. This, however, emphasises that for self-assertion and belonging, Ifemelu has to adapt to a ‘western look’. Hence, Ifemelu has to constantly negotiate her identity in (the process of) belonging.

Furthermore, Ifemelu, after twelve years in America, through a retrospection of her life in the mirror restates self-awareness and transformation. “Ifemelu watched Mariama in the mirror, thinking of her own new American selves. It was with Curt that she had first looked in the mirror and, with a flush of accomplishment, seen someone else.” (19). The motif and symbol of the mirror in the salon becomes germane as it aids Ifemelu’s retrospection of her life ‘then’ and ‘now’. As she reflects on memories on her new self, Ifemelu creates a new self, a hybrid as Homi Bhabha enunciates.

In *Americanah*, the author captures moments of identity crisis and the alteration of a sense of self in the heroine and other characters. For instance, when Curt dropped Ifemelu off at a spa to get her eyebrows shaped, the Asian woman behind the counter in the spa responds, “We don’t do curly.” This account exposes one of the major incidents that reveal Ifemelu’s direct confrontation with racism. However, Curt’s intervention puts Ifemelu in a sympathetic position and the often liberalist approach by whites who often intervene for blacks. After Ifemelu’s encounter with the stylist, we are informed that Ifemelu calls Kurt and asks Curt to turn around and come back for her because the salon did not do curly. In rage:

Curt walked in, his blue eyes bluer, and said he wanted to talk to the manager right away. “You are going to...do my girlfriend’s eyebrows or I’ll shut down this... place. You don’t deserve to have a license coquette.

“I’m so sorry it was a misunderstanding,” she said. As they drove back, Curt asked, “How is the hair of your eyebrows curly anyway? And how is that hard to... wax?”

“Maybe they’ve never done a black woman’s eyebrows and so they think it’s different, because our hair is different. (292)

Adichie’s feminist consciousness as exemplified through Ifemelu, is one which shows women of colour and the white woman as major opponents, hence, buttressing the importance of a branch of feminism that is peculiar to the African woman’s experience. Ifemelu’s attempts to fix her eye lashes reiterate cosmopolitan tendencies.

Alienation and ambivalence are prominent in the course of Ifemelu’s stay in the US. For instance, we understand that “for weeks, Ifemelu stumbled around, trying to remember who she was before Curt” (300). Hence, Ifemelu navigates and reflects on what she was before her contact with Curt and symbolic of the white culture, the American culture.

Womanhood is altered by the trans-cultural experiences of protagonist. Adichie’s vision of women in *Americanah* is to establish their interaction with global forces, while the complexities they enact, emphasise the ways of being African in a globalised world.

Inclusion of multiple identities underscores both localised identities and global identities. Defined and disposed to strict familial roles of motherhood and wifeness, womanhood is not defined by marriage or familial status. Emphasising that with or without marriage a woman can actualise herself, Ifemelu is strong and independent. Adichie's redefined womanhood shifts from contextualising women within the confines of motherhood, wifeness, or domestic roles. The implication is that womanhood cannot be restricted within such confines alone.

The concept of marriage and its impact on female identities in the course of migration as examined through Adichie's vision and definition of womanhood negates the notion that a woman's happiness is defined within the confines of marriage alone. The quest for happiness, self-actualisation and significance by women in *Americanah* is less situated within the familial and domestic sphere. Unlike her literary predecessors who projected strong women even while struggling vigorously through domestic and familial responsibilities, Adichie insists on the often-restrictive status, contest with patriarchy and demands of marriage. For instance, Ojuigo who had her dreams of becoming a literary critic is compelled to be a housewife. The author insists on women first accepting themselves as individuals before being defined as wife or mother. Marriages/domestic responsibilities, the home front and how it is perceived by females is portrayed in relation to their identities in *Americanah*. Through this, Adichie's vision of marriage is brought to bear through her alter ego, Ifemelu. Through these notions of marriage, Adichie questions the ideal essence of marriage and the traditional African values it upholds.

Adichie redefines the societal expectations of women and self-dependence. Ifemelu's romantic relationship with Curt reveals the possibility of inter-racial relationships on the one hand and the eminent discrimination of blacks by whites on the other hand. The notion that black women do not deserve white men is revealed when Curt introduces Ifemelu to family and friends. However, Curt's liking for Ifemelu is set to debunk stereotypes that exist in relationships between whites and blacks. Notably, Curt is seen resisting attempts by whites to demean Ifemelu. On the other hand, Blaine; an African American Professor, often perceives Ifemelu as an individual and not on the basis of race. In a way, both share same ideologies most times although they also often disagree on matters. The novel presents women who are professionals and well educated, however some fall short of self-realisation.

Apparently, Blaine's relationship with Ifemelu exposes how African-Americans perceive Africans. Blaine's disagreement on Ifemelu's views on her blog only attests to the fact that Afro-American experience does not parallel the African experience. Blaine's sister,



Shan, is domineering. Shan reveals the intricacies of the authoritative attitude of African-American women and their perceived superiority over black women. When in Shan's book presentation, Grace admonishes Ifemelu to blog about racist views, Shan responds:

You know why Ifemelu can write that blog, by the way?" Shan said.

"Because she's African. She's writing from the outside. She doesn't really feel all the stuff she's writing about. It's all quaint and curious to her. So she can write it and get all these accolades and get invited to give talks. If she were African American, she'd just be labelled angry and shunned."

I think that's fair enough," Ifemelu said, disliking Shan, and herself, too, for bending to Shan's spell. It was true that race was not embroidered in the fabric of her history; it had not been etched on her soul. Still, she wished Shan had said this to her when they were alone, instead of saying it now, so jubilantly, in front of her friends, and leaving Ifemelu with an embittered knot, like bereavement, in her chest. (131)

Apparently, Shan's thoughts are factual, one which some African-Americans share too. It reaffirms the different experiences of Africans and African-Americans which shape their world view. Apparently, Ifemelu as well as Black Africans have had their own share of racism. It is from that perspective Ifemelu presents her ideas in the blog.

She told her parents about Blaine, that she was leaving Baltimore and moving to New Haven to live with him. She could have lied, invented a new job, or simply said she wanted to move. "His name is Blaine," she said. "He is an American." ... "An American Negro?" her father asked, sounding baffled. Ifemelu burst out laughing. "Daddy, nobody says Negro anymore" "But why a Negro? Is there a substantive scarcity of Nigerians there?" she ignored him, still laughing, and asked him to give her mother the phone. Ignoring him, even telling him that she was moving in with a man to whom she was not married, was something she could do only because she lived in America. Rules had shifted, fallen into the cracks of distance and foreignness. (314)

In this excerpt, Adichie exposes the repulsion of certain western values and how it is embraced and accepted by Ifemelu and even her mother. This consolidates conformations and transformations in ideals and world views as a result of globalisation.

Conclusion

Adichie's protagonists express the realities of women in their interaction with the trans-cultural and global space. As such, she evolves ways through which her heroines challenge and adapt to changing situations and their newly formed identities. Apparently, Adichie presents a bleak future on curbing racism and the subjugation of the female in the global space, thereby, reinforcing a unique portrayal of females who experience tension between personal and social life as they challenge expectations from the society. The transcultural realities of women in the global space essentially culminate to characters negotiating identities and eventually adapting to the west.

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