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Abstract: *In the previous representations of Africa, whether by indigenous or diasporic writers, Africa is depicted as culturally rich but lacking in civilization. Modern diasporic narratives like Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's novel* Americanah *uphold characters who have education, mobility, and economical security, yet remain susceptible to racialized alienation in foreign lands like America and England.* Americanah *by Adichie makes an intense investigation of this tension through her protagonist, Ifemelu, who in her attempts to adapt in the American social norms comes to realize the social dynamics of racial discrimination and cultural dissonance in the host country. My paper aims to interrogate how* Americanah *unveils the diasporic alienation and unbelonging of Ifemelu in a psychological and cultural irreversibility of displacement. Using close textual study and a theoretical framework informed by postcolonial theory and diaspora studies, my paper examines this irreversibility as both psychological and cultural element of the diasporic identity, showcasing Ifemelu's predicament as a systemic force of exclusion and displacement. The paper also argues that this irreversibility reflects a broader diasporic condition which is marked by the problematic notions of home, belonging, and identity.*

Keywords: Alienation, African diaspora, Race, Identity, irreversible.

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Unbelonging and Alienation: An Irreversible Predicament of Diasporic Identity in Adichie's *Americanah*

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Introduction

A diasporic identity refers to a type of collective awareness that has historically been formed through expressive politics, culture, intellect, and tradition. It uses representational and experiential resources drawn from the imaginations of both the old and new worlds. How young people in diasporas navigate and continuously negotiate their identities is influenced by narratives about diasporic Africans found on popular platforms including social media, television programs, songs, movies, charity messages, and international news media like CNN and BBC. The areas where diaspora is shaped and imagined, as well as the controversial ways in which it is studied and discussed, are always being made, unmade, and remade. Diaspora is therefore a process, a condition, a space, and a discourse.

Although there has been a change in recent research, the majority of study on diaspora groups concentrates on connections and links of migrants to their home country. The diaspora is a state of existence and a process of evolving, a sort of journey that includes the prospect of never arriving or returning, a navigation involving numerous belongings. The separation from the homeland frequently results in an intense search for and negotiation of identity among diaspora communities. Since it draws from the richness of the depth of Africa through intergenerational oral histories, experiences, and lived ways of life as well as the existing canvases of racialized global north metropoles, the diaspora is thus a shifting and ambiguous space that is lived in, negotiated, contested, and continuously evolving. Therefore, it involves a culture and awareness that can be both dispersed and concentrated. It is frequently defined by marginalization under the diaspora regimes and the invocation of language of belonging and self-validation (Mukhongo, et al. 4).

Americanah narrates the story of Ifemelu, a young Nigerian woman who visits Princeton and becomes a highly successful blogger before returning to Lagos. Adichie narrates the journey of Ifemelu with silent precision and emotional nuance, the hesitant, awkward pace of her attempts to adjust to American culture and the multifaceted attraction that ultimately leads to her returning to Nigeria. Her coming back is not a closure, not a circle that has been completed but a spiral that brings her to a new place, different and changed. During her sojourn in America, a foreign land, Ifemelu does not wholly assimilate; there is always a slight separation between her and the culture she is in, a muted refusal to

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integrate fully. This continuous sense of otherness marks her journey as a narrative different from other more direct migration stories: it is not a story of arrival or of return, but of constant displacement and of layered identity. With an ineffable sense of native culture rooted in her heart, Ifemelu's journey - to assimilate and belong to the host society – embodies the irreversible diasporic experience of alienation and unbelonging.

Postcolonial theory and diaspora studies become the theoretical framework for this research. Postcolonial theory which essentially interrogates the enduring effects of colonialism on culture, identity, and power, opens up the tropes like cultural hegemony and racial hierarchies (Ifemelu's confrontation of 'Blackness'), hybridity and mimicry (Ifemelu's struggle to fit in American norms), and the Western gaze (the performative negotiations of self by the diasporic subjects like Ifemelu). Diaspora theory emphasizes the terrains like cultural memory (Ifemelu's blogs as acts of reclamation), unbelonging (Ifemelu as a cultural outsider in the host society), and transnational identity (Ifemelu's emotional and existential state of 'being nowhere'). Using the theoretical framework based on the postcolonial theory and diaspora studies, my argument in this paper develops by analysing three interconnected thematic concerns present in this text: cultural hybridity, language, and race and racism.

Navigating Diasporic Experiences in *Americanah*

Adichie's novel *Americanah* centres on a number of characters, chief among them Ifemelu, the novel's protagonist. The story, which spans over fifteen years, focuses on these people's attempts to achieve the American dream, their dreams and objectives, and the disappointments and failures they face as African diasporic people in America. It delves into their struggles with the modernity experienced by African diaspora communities. While she was in Lagos, where she was born and brought up, Ifemelu got admission in a university and later obtained a scholarship to attend Wilson College in Philadelphia, a reputed institution in America. Within this pragmatic framework, *Americanah* can be viewed as a platform where Adichie explores and challenges the intricacies faced by the African diasporic communities, and the contemporary realities impacting these groups in America as well as the concept of the American dream through the lens of the lived experience of the Africans.

Ifemelu's identity quest in *Americanah* develops through a complex psychological and historical progression. A personalized cultural identity influenced by postcolonial realities and communal familiarity is rooted in her early upbringing in Nigeria. She must reevaluate her identity after moving to America, which causes a dramatic upheaval and places her in a strange racial and social environment. Her assimilation is never complete, even though she gradually adjusts and occasionally appears to be totally integrated. Her Nigerian identity subtly endures, eventually coming back to the fore and guiding her thoughts and ambitions back toward her native country.

Her return to Nigeria marks the culmination of this inward transformation, as she faces not just a different society but also a changed self. Her return home is complicated; it's a reconnection influenced by her diasporic life rather than a straightforward repair. Furthermore, Ifemelu's progress is more like a spiral than a circle: even while she physically returns to her initial position, her internal journey has changed her and rendered her incapable of going back to her initial location unaltered.

Her identity is constantly changing and dynamic throughout these stages. She maintains a critical, dispassionate viewpoint on her host culture despite moments of seeming integration, highlighting the complex relationship between migration and belonging. As a result, the story defies resolution; it is a reflection on identity as mobility, which is unstable fluid, and irreversibly plural.

Adichie has described Ifemelu's journey on multiple levels: her cumulative perspectives towards American culture, the way she speaks and makes alterations to her accents, her hair-style, and her performative gestures to get assimilated in what constitutes 'America'. Obinze has a deep-seated aspiration to visit America, while Ifemelu is half-willing to apply for a scholarship in America, being motivated less by a fervent wish to go there than by a desire to evade the inimical academic atmosphere in Nigeria, which is beset by frequent university strikes. She, however, begins to "dream" of the US only when the visa is confirmed (Adichie 99). She, however, finds herself less competent to deal with what lies ahead. Despite her aunt Uju's initial assistance, she feels herself ill-equipped and disoriented, like an outsider, in the host society. The narrator describes one incident when Ifemelu sits stiff-voiced in college, surrounded by students who are all easily folded in their chairs and brimming with information—not about the subjects but about how to behave in the classes (Adichie 134). Eventually, Ifemelu fosters a formidable impulse to know everything about the host country and so she plunges to imbibe the host country's culture. She, quite surprisingly, does this first with the help of literature. As Ifemelu started reading, American mythologies began to make sense to her and tribalisms of the country- racial and ideological, and regional- began to manifest. And this new insight comforted her (Adichie 136). But the reference to the term 'tribalisms' suggests that there remains a rift. She merely views the US culture through her ethnocentric prism, and although such view does change over the time, it does not mean that her cultural prism is non-important. This is one of the reasons as to why she never becomes adapted particularly when her case is compared with Ginika's, one who was Ifemelu's former classmate but immigrated to America long before Ifemelu. When Ifemelu met her at the apartment of Stephanie and watched her as she sipped a bottle of beer with her lips, her speech filled with the American accent waving off her lips, Ifemelu could only imagine that Ginika looked like her American friends (Adichie 124).

It is her accent that distinctly makes Ifemelu an outsider in the host society. When she attends the university orientation she is relegated to the level of a toddler due to her accent (Adichie 133). Consequently, she begins to practice an American accent, which represents a crucial step toward

adopting an American identity. She, however, ultimately abandons the accent she acquired as she realizes it is not an achievement, she can feel proud of; she feels that to sound American is neither a compliment nor an accomplishment. Although many individuals consider an American accent to be desirable, as suggested in this quote and various sections of the novel, it loses its significance for her. Thus, she relinquishes it, even though some people whom she encounters begin to treat her differently as if they are speaking to an idiot (Adichie 175). Ifemelu's choice to return to her own accent signifies that she is unwilling to renounce this aspect of her Nigerian heritage.

Crucially, Adichie's novel is intricate and layered enough to present multiple perspectives instead of depicting this option as the sole possibility. An American accent offers protection to people who migrate, and a woman who does the hair of Ifemelu recognizes this fact as she reflects on her son whose use of the American accent protects him against bullying by his peers in the class. Language serves as a fundamental tool for cultural advancement, shaping our identities and viewpoints, and it transcends mere communication (Flender 188). Thus, the most vivid illustration of Ifemelu's identity transformations arises from language. Her skill in switching between different dialects further highlights her relative advantage, as not all immigrants possess this ability effortlessly.

Ifemelu's acceptance of the American accent as a step toward belonging in the American culture and her subsequent refusal to continue with it can be read through the prism of postcolonial theory, which interrogates the subtle hierarchies effected by colonial and neocolonial regimes, particularly the Western norms, including language and accent, deemed as superior in the matters of intelligence and social worth.

Ifemelu's decision, when viewed through the prism of diaspora studies, is a more profound contradiction in the diasporic identity: the contradiction between the preservation of the feeling of origin and the integration into the host culture. The accent is no longer merely a feature of phonetics; it is a symbol of opposing forces, remembering and identifying with. The sense of irreversibility in Ifemelu's estrangement is emphasized by her inability to linguistically adapt; she is unable to become a complete part of her host society nor does she go back to her home country unchanged. Thus, Ifemelu's choice becomes a ground of liminality between rootedness and displacement.

Another major theme in Adichie's book is hair, particularly the hair of African women. Ifemelu describes hair as "the perfect metaphor for race in America" in her blog after confronting the racial prejudice in the United States (Adichie 297). She learns that how she styles her hair has a significant impact on how other people view her. She is under pressure to adhere to clearly established rules rather than being free to style her hair whatever she pleases. Ifemelu is taught the value of straight hair. For instance, before a job interview, she is advised to straighten her hair (Adichie 202). She understands she must appear professional at this interview and that the only way she can be considered professional is to look with straight hair, but in case it must be curly, then it must be the white type of

curly, loose curls or at most, spiral curls, but definitely not kinky (Adichie 204). She makes an effort to straighten her hair with a relaxer, but she returns to wearing her hair the way she likes because of the detrimental consequences this has on her health. Similar to the accent, she is aware of US-American norms and makes an effort to conform to them at first, but ultimately rejects them. She must, however, endure the repercussions of her departure from the norm, which in this instance take the form of remarks about her sexual and political beliefs. The appearance of Ifemelu becomes a loud announcement to her colleagues who react to her varying hairstyles with mischievous assumptions. They speculate publicly on whether her appearance has a political connotation, others associate her decisions with individuality, and even her sexual orientation, when she starts sporting a shorter hairstyle. These responses show that the Black hair, particularly when used in the diasporic setting, is often interpreted more as a sign instead of a choice of style. But Ifemelu opposes this symbolic representation of her appearance by others. In her blog, she makes it clear that her hair is not a manifesto- her hair is not about politics, art or spiritual orientation. To her it is just a question of style only. In this way, she undermines the tendency to excessive codification of the body of Black women by claiming her aesthetic sovereignty and denying the cultural pressure commonly put on her body.

Negotiating Colourism and Racial Prejudices in *Americanah*

African diasporic narratives depict immigrants crossing international borders and attempting to adapt to various racialized social norms, thereby confronting the new environment and the various ways that racism and race operate. This stage of the migration story is addressed in a number of ways in Adichie's *Americanah*. Adichie analyzes Ifemelu's first encounters with language, colour discrimination, and the stereotype that Americans are colourblind. Ifemelu's adoption of the American accents and hairstyles serves as an example of how cultural hybridity is based on a rupture rather than a seamless blending of cultural customs. Adichie emphasizes the way that host nations restrict migrants' ability to preserve and, more significantly, engage in a variety of cultural expressions that stem from colonial logics and customs. Ifemelu's humiliating language-related experiences are as much a reflection of the politics of language that migrants encounter as they are of the host nation's limited hospitality, which requires total assimilation and cultural repression. In the blog-post entitled "Why Dark-Skinned Black Women—Both American and Non-American—Love Barack Obama," Ifemelu will eventually speak about her growing awareness of how race and colourism function in the US and reveal that she has started understanding the racial dynamics of the community where she has moved to (Adichie 186). These scenes in the story bring to light a crucial theme in migration stories: the realization of one's new environment and the creation of a new subjectivity (Taylor 75).

Seeing the frustrations and disappointments of African diaspora populations in establishing space and identity in the host nation, Ifemelu’s words mirror the host society’s reality: "dear Non-

American Black, when you make the choice to come to America, you become Black. Stop arguing. Stop saying I'm Jamaica or I'm Ghanaian. American doesn't care." Ifemelu recognizes that she is Black in America, but she also recognizes that she is a non-American Black person. Ifemelu must deal with the implications of this awareness since, as an African immigrant, she is unable to fully comprehend certain concepts. Once again, this comment shows that many African diaspora populations in the United States still experience rejection and suffering instead of realizing the American dream. In addition to highlighting the sense of alienation and despair, these immigrants experience, the statement "America doesn't care" also reveals white Americans' callous, insensitive, and uncaring attitudes regarding the situation of these immigrants, especially because they are Black.

One way that Adichie exposes the West's wrong perceptions of Africa and Africans is through migration. When Ifemelu leaves her homeland for America, she discovers that being Black is entirely different from what she was subjected to at home in Nigeria. Ifemelu, who left Nigeria in search of better opportunities, is made aware of how unworthy she is because of her black skin, something that was never a major worry for her. As a result, identity becomes central to the book. The first is that Ifemelu's identify as Black is laced with a racist implication; the second is that, despite being Black, she is unable to relate to a number of incidents due to her African identity. This is where socio-cultural identity enters the picture since it is clear that Ifemelu's experiences as a Black person in America are distinctive as she is an African immigrant. Adichie adequately investigates this by using Ifemelu's blog, *Raceteenthor Various Observations About American Blacks (Those Formerly Known as Negros) by a Non-American Black*, which examines the various ways Black people relate their experiences. At this point, it is important to remember that the term "blackness" does not and cannot indicate a uniform experience. In actuality, the Black identity can only be described as a general phrase that includes other specific concepts like the Caribbean identity, the African-American identity, and the African in Diaspora identity.

Ifemelu's experiences in America as a Black are shaped by the fact that she is an African rather than an African-American. Since she has no historical connection to slavery, she finds it incomprehensible that the term "watermelon" will be considered racist. She also makes an effort to include the notion that blackness is an identity that America selects for its black citizens, not one that can be chosen there; the only distinction is in how it is perceived and experienced. She therefore begs other immigrants, whom she labels as "Non-American Black," to see what it means to be Black in a nation such as the United States (Ohawavworhua and Egbedi 251).

There is racial bias in Ifemelu's position as Kimberly's babysitter. With Kimberly and her white friend, Ifemelu truly understands that the West sees Africa as a region full of wars and starvation. Their friends all express how much they would love to save starving babies in Africa and how terrible hunger is there, and they all see Africa as a place where they can use charity to stroke their own Western self-

importance. Ifemelu encounters this when Kimberly and her husband Don host a dinner party where the majority of the attendees come to talk about their charitable work in Africa—Africa being a location that exists only to evoke compassion.

Ifemelu has never thought of herself as privileged in Nigeria. Only people like Kayode Da Silver, whose parents could afford to fly him to London every summer, were eligible for that title. But in America, she is viewed as such because, to Americans, Africans must simply be impoverished and hungry; Ifemelu does not fit this description. Such sentiments are refuted by Adichie's meticulous development of Ifemelu as a character. Ifemelu is middle class if she is not a wealthy Nigerian. She is more conscious of her African identity in America since it makes her more aware of how the West generally perceives Africans and their experiences, which she finds illogical and irrelevant.

Ifemelu is, in fact, often extremely lucky for a migrant. She is clever, well-educated, and from the middle class in Nigeria. She leaves Nigeria because of "the oppressive lethargy of choicelessness" (Adichie 276) that she feels there, not because of starvation, conflict, or persecution. Although she has a legitimate motive for leaving, it is undoubtedly not as urgent as many other migrants may face. Not only can she, now a citizen of the United States, travel back to Nigeria, but she can also return to the United States at any time. She is able to travel the world and move freely between nations, unlike other migrants.

Another character that can be utilized to examine socio-cultural identity is Obinze. When he relocates to England, it is through him that one learns how his African heritage shapes his identity and experiences there. Similar to America, England has a tendency to view Africans as an ethnic group of simple humans who flee from dreadful circumstances. Not because he was starving or fleeing from anything, but because human nature is always desperate for options, he moved to England. When Obinze attends a dinner at Emenike's house and one of the attendees, Alexa, discusses England as a shelter for "people who have survived frightful war," Obinze understands this (Adichie 317). According to Alexa, Europe was a safe refuge that could "save" the African victims from their never-ending misery. In contrast, people left their own countries to travel the world at some point in history because they were desperate for fresh options and experiences. They portrayed themselves as Africa's redeemers in their early accounts of the continent because they believed it needed to be saved. This position is replicated in this erroneous immigration mindset, as Europe continues to portray itself as Africa's saviour and condemns Africans for the same crimes they have committed. Adichie eliminates these ideas by systematically demonstrating how the need for options is only a basic part of human existence and how, at one point in time, Europeans themselves undertook great global migrations in order to satisfy their longing for fresh experiences.

Having experienced both the Nigerian and the American cultures, Ifemelu demonstrates that one can overcome cultural borders. She has experienced and brings forth her view of both the cultures,

a view which was never evident to a viewpoint more embedded in either one of the two cultures. Ifemelu returns to Nigeria, her homeland, after thirteen years, and though her return places her in a position to regard her culture closely, she does it as an outsider due to a long absence in her homeland and the transformation she has undergone in a foreign land. Meanwhile, she has developed a critical lens through which she observes both cultures- American and Nigerian. Adichie's novel addresses this ambivalence that Ifemelu treats both cultures with a critical outlook and also perceives something good in them.

In *Americanah*, the way Ifemelu critiques the American society serves as a remonstrative condemnation of both overt and subtle kinds of racism. She reveals the myth of colour-blindness, the symbolic policing of Black hair, and the racial microaggressions of our day-to-day interactions through her blog and lived experiences. How racial bias is carried out using coded language and aesthetic exclusion can be seen in the way the spa refuses her a make-over as her eyebrows are too curly. Based on the postcolonial theory, this critique implies how the legacy of colonization lingers in the cultural imagination of the West in which Whiteness is the unnamed standard and Blackness is perpetually marginalized. The story of Ifemelu helps to bust the myth of a post-racial society: even the most liberal areas practice covert racial oppressions by creating a chain of biases that are subtle and internalized. Ifemelu's voice, thus, becomes a counter-discursive mechanism, the voice that opposes the prevailing discourses and asserts the experiential reality of alienation and racial microaggression of the diasporic subjects.

It is evident that Ifemelu still has a strong emotional connection with her native country, even though her years in America have broadened her viewpoint and given her a cosmopolitan outlook. A symbolic step toward a united and stable Nigeria is taken when Ifemelu rekindles her romance with Obinze upon her homecoming. Adichie seems to imply that in order to make a constructive contribution to Nigeria's future, one must temporarily leave the nation in order to gain the requisite experience, education, and skills.

Conclusion

The present research focuses on Adichie's representation of identifies and estrangement in order to convey the confusion and identity crisis that Africans in the diaspora suffer, as well as their sense of alienation from the cultures they are already familiar with. As previously mentioned in this study, socio-cultural identity and alienation are two concepts that cannot be examined separately because they are both a part of the numerous experiences that an average African has when living abroad. The majority of the time, an African finds himself in this situation after traveling abroad in quest of better prospects and more favourable conditions. Ifemelu's struggle to adjust to a new culture is revealed in Adichie's *Americanah*, which results in an irreversible sense of alienation and detachment from her Nigerian

culture and her own identity. The demands from society to fit in with American standards and the ubiquitous racial dynamics she experiences worsen this identity dilemma. Her decision to take on an American accent and then to consciously stop it, which represents her conflict between assimilation and the desire to stick to her Nigerian identity, is a moving example of her estrangement. In the end, she resolves her identity issue by returning to Nigeria, where she asserts her identity reclaiming a sense of belonging.

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