



“The diasporic plight of Afro-American protagonist as represented in the novel *Americanah* by Adichie”

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Abstract

“Race doesn't really exist for you because it has never been a barrier. Black folks don't have that choice.”

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, *Americanah*

This paper aims to expand the plight of Afro –American woman in the award-winning novel *Americanah* by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie. It identifies the three dimensions namely national, racial, cultural with subtle tensions in between. This article proposes to consider the ongoing racist stigmatization of black sexuality in the Western societies. It represents the black woman and their problems. It is crucial to view the female racialized sexual identity and insights regarding the theories of intersectionality prevailing in the Western world., Through the detailed exploration of the protagonist Ifemelu’s sexual identity, ‘*Americanah*’ broadens the concept of identity crisis for black women. Ultimately, the novel insinuates that the protagonist becoming a victim of racist stigmatization and confronted, so that the voices of female can emerge.

Key Words: racial, cultural, discrimination, heterosexual, Afro-American, protagonist

Introduction

The paper elaborates the detailed exploration of Ifemelu’s sexual identity—that is her gender as well as her sexuality. Adichie’s *Americanah* broadens the concept of Afro-American identity construction for black heterosexual women. The novel suggests that becoming a full subject is possible when racialized sexual experiences are consciously lived and confronted. This article considers Ifemelu’s sexual abuse, her relationships with a white and an Afro-American man in the United States, and her relationship with Obinze after she returns to Lagos, respectively. Overall, these crucial developments not only further Ifemelu’s consciousness of herself as Afro-American nationally, racially, and culturally—with tensions between the three, but also function as key experiences to her sexual identity formation.

Adichie’s fictional work is best-known for creatively tackling issues of racism. The most recent example being *Americanah*, which won the National Book Critics Circle Award. In this novel, Nigerian student Ifemelu migrates to the US to attend university and finds a job, leaving her high school boyfriend Obinze behind.

“She had always liked this image of herself as too much trouble, as different, and she sometimes thought of it as a carapace that kept her safe.”

Being confronted with the American concept of blackness and racism for the first time in her life and unable to find work, Ifemelu initially struggles to make both the ends meet. Her financial situation leads her to experience sexual abuse at the hands of an employer. She has broken off contact with Obinze. Shortly after, Ifemelu finds work as a baby-sitter and begins to date a white American, Curt. Following their breakup, Ifemelu starts a blog about her observations on race in America which remains her main source of income during her stay in the US and throughout her relationship with Blaine, an Afro-American. After thirteen years abroad, Ifemelu closes her successful blog and returns to Lagos, where she is reunited with Obinze

“ always sitting by the window and looking out”

“He was already looking at their relationship through the lens of the past tense. It puzzled her, the ability of romantic love to mutate, how quickly a loved one could become a stranger. Where did the love go? Perhaps real love was familial, somehow, linked to blood, since love for children did not die as romantic love did.”

In her latest book, *Dear Ijeawele, Or a Feminist Manifesto in Fifteen Suggestions*,¹ Nigerian author Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie comments on her reasons for advocating publicly for feminism and gender equality:

“writer had accused me of being ‘angry,’ as though ‘being angry’ were something to be ashamed of.

Of course I am angry. I am angry about racism. I am angry about sexism. I am angrier about sexism than I am about racism.”

Though it raised feminist questions and critiqued sexism, She represents an identity of national, racial, cultural discrimination. Adichie’s statement about the ignorance towards sexism she noticed in her own surroundings as an example, and considering the ongoing stigmatization of black sexuality in the Western societies.. Especially, a female psyche is projected to form a racialized sexual identity as well.

Americanah skillfully portrays the inner struggle and internal conflicts between her Africanness and the challenges of life in the Western cultures.

Thus, the novel can be considered an epitome of Afro - American fiction. As the novel is critically acclaimed and widely analyzed, This paper considers it moreover a text that perfectly lends itself to the expansion of identity formation. Protagonist Ifemelu’s experiences with racism, her self-image as an immigrant, and her relationships with the American men are crucially influenced by her gender and the conceptions of black sexuality in the Western world, which is marked by hyper-sexualization and notions of the exotic ‘Other’. However, more importantly, this novel *Americanah* highlights not only female sexism but also male sexuality and gender identity.

She conceives mobility as not being bound to one location , more specifically, an ability to move between Africa and the West. Ifemelu emphasizes that the literal mobility , can also encompass movement between or within different African cities. While this mobility is crucial to the concept of Afro- Americanism, it is, however, more productive for Ifemelu’s to think of mobility in the Afro- Americanism context as an openness that expresses the “widening arc of African self-perception, one that goes beyond the conventional postcolonial notions” . It is exactly this openness that readers observe also in Ifemelu’s worldly and spiritual quest for belonging.

Through this, we can understand that truth is immortal; it is our inner seeking thrusts us forward. If one agrees with this assertion, Ifemelu's movements are all intimately connected to her racial identity. As discussed later, Ifemelu projects herself differently in different relationships. She tries to empower herself to explore her desires.

Conclusion

This article which we present is the discussion of Ifemelu's diasporic plight of Afro-American as a protagonist under the exploration of her sexual identity. This is highlighted clearly in our analysis that she toils hard to find her voice to be heard among the crowd which is Ifemelu's ultimate goal, which she reaches towards the making her succeed in her mission.

People believe that Afro-Americans are meant to undergo sufferings and to oppress them is the only means of colonial attitude. When they refuse to take an identity as a victim, it is bewildering. Our protagonist escapes racial and sexual victimization when she breaks her silence, leaves self-loathing behind, and stops blaming herself for a traumatic experience that happened due to systemic oppression. She thus defeats victimization in her voice and simultaneously defines herself as a woman of post-colonial era. *Americanah* effectively culminates traditional migration narratives, moving from oppression to freedom.

“Understanding America for the Non-American Black: One great gift for the Zipped-up Negro is The White Friend Who Gets It.”

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