

ISSN : 2454-2423

Glocal Colloquies

**An International Journal of
World Literatures and Cultures**

Vol. 3

April 2017

Marginalization and Hybridization in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah*

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Abstract: The paper reflects the problem of social marginalization, language hybridization and disenfranchisement Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah*. The novel gives an account of the two Nigerian lives, Ifemelu and Obinze, the immigrants who live and work abroad. Firstly, the paper examines the multidimensional disadvantages of marginalization in the novel *Americanah*. Secondly language and cultural hybridization that is adopting the words of English into Asian or African words, this blending can be viewed as a positive thing and also the negative thing. Thirdly the problem of disenfranchisement is inherent in the story resulting individual exclusion from the society. Finally, this essay intends to analyze the influence of social marginalization and disenfranchisement to protagonist aura of social class discrimination, race, colour, hair politics, ethnic origin, educational status and living standards or the personal choices of fashion.

Keywords: *Marginalization, Disenfranchisement, Third World Issues, Language Hybridity*

Introduction

History quotes many instances from the political and social movements that have resulted in radical changes. The miscegenation between people of Europe and Africa in the United States during the sixteenth century created a population of mixed race people. The practice of slavery, segregation, imperialism, apartheid, hostility, bigotry, and hatred has been the major issues and causes of discrimination. As Gilroy suggests that "it is possible to manufacture groups of people, so that they eventually become cogs within the

machine of a nation” (102). The inequation between the races; between countries; between gender and between individual has resulted in an already emerged conflicts, chaos and disorder with one another. It is the exploitation and the oppression of a minority population termed as ‘mixed race’ which led to the revolt during the 1920s in the form of Harlem Renaissance this cultural and intellectual movement brings out the importance of the identity crisis that prevailed for centuries in the United States. Jim Crow law states “All are equal but some are more equal than others” (50). This edict imitates that miscegenation of the races was illegal in public schools, public transports, restaurants, waiting rooms as well as in drinking fountains for whites and blacks. These laws increased the pace of racial discrimination.

A plethora of cultures is poignantly embedded in two different nationalities; the protagonist Ifemelu amalgamates herself between the double consciousness of being black in America as well as of being a non-American black in America. The essay uses nuances of transnational and multiculturalism. The essay calls for the attention of the Third World women Issues of poverty, inadequate access to education, limited medical facilities. Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s *Americanah* is a mindful ‘diasporic story’ it occupies a place of great significance inside the country as well as outside the country. Locations and dislocation of the cultures are assimilated to the greater sense of adjustments, adaptability, mobility and accessibility. Ifemelu the protagonist wants to feel the whole again and not just feel the constant pressure that American society has to impose, they often turn others beliefs into a version of America instead of appreciating and embracing the differences they give blow after the blow which makes exhausting after some time. Ifemelu is a woman who doesn't conceal what she inherently owns she is quite comfortable and secure in her own sense of attractiveness and confident with all the banalities of the everyday comments and gazes.

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie states the tropes that she wants to avoid is writing about the race. To her, the setting of this *Americanah* fiction is hardly of any matter as her primary considerations are of the character and of story, autobiographical elements are bit associated with this story Ifemelu spends thirteen years in the U.S. but Adichie spends only four years. The U.S. has been a major part of the war for many years now, there is an intense ongoing ideological war in the U.S., but

people are hardly acquainted with it and have no proof in American literature. Adichie was fascinated by many permutations of race, especially of blackness, the identity that was assigned to her in America she is still fascinated about that.

Increase in globalization is viewed by some as a panacea for development while for others it only directs for disaster. This paper discusses some of the key challenges faced by the people living in the marginalized countries of the Sub-Saharan region. The substantial part of their populations is at risk of being totally secluded. While market liberalization had some positive effects, but as the statistics suggest that access to better civic facilities are crucial even after being engaged with the world economy. The Sub-Saharan African economy is under the domain of imperialists. Several policies of market liberalization now only increase pauperization in the rural agricultural sectors; they are abstained from the state aid thus leading to a sharpened deterioration in relation to the country's economy.

Countries like Congo-Brazzaville (rich producers of the oil), Ivory Coast and Nigeria (the 6th biggest producer in OPEC and the main trade of the West African Economic and Monetary Union) once belonged to "medium income countries" are now Heavily Indebted Poor Countries. 70% of their populations are living below the poverty line threshold. Average life expectancy was 58 in 1950, 56 in 1992 and 51 in 2000. Countries like Kenya, the Ivory Coast, Zimbabwe and Zambia have a life expectancy below 50, indeed below 45. There is an increase in the unemployment in urban entrepreneurs, job freezes, little or no access to education for youth especially the victims are only girls, poverty is the main residing factor that has led to the exploitation child as a child labourers, child trafficking, girls working as sex slaves and criminality has deepened its roots along the way. According to Jean Nanga:

“The neoliberal structural adjustment imposed on the sub-Saharan African states from the 1980s onwards, aimed at dismantling the underdeveloped or dependent welfare states established in the first decades of independence, aroused popular opposition in a good number of sub-Saharan countries. The loss of legitimacy of the traditional neocolonial regimes allowed a relative “democratic opening” in the areas of freedom of

expression, a multiparty system and change of government by electoral means rather than military coups. Meanwhile, in South Africa, the regime of constitutional apartheid was ended.”

Americanah

Americanah a searing richly told story of a Nigerian couple Ifemelu and Obinze of love immigrant's struggle and of anticipation set out in today's globular world. Ifemelu, a middle-class student, in her early 20s got the chance to obtain a student visa and moves to the United States after a series of strikes at Universities of Nigeria. Ifemelu for the first time encounters the problems of social exclusion, disenfranchisement and of black-white segregation which burdens her life as an immigrant. After these hurdles, she becomes a successful blogger and speaker on the subject of race and racism. Obinze decides to meet and join Ifemelu in the United States, but unfortunately, his visa was denied, so he moves to England with his mother and remains there as an illegal immigrant. Years later he is exposed trying to marry a woman with a European Union passport and is evicted to Nigeria, Obinze marries another woman and has a child. When both Ifemelu and Obinze meet after 13 years in Nigeria, it must be difficult for them to revive their relationship. Will this more intricate true love blossom or not? Adichie uses expressions in Igbo, pointing out non-linear narrative structure strategies of glossing, syntactic fusion, untranslated words, oblique phrases and vernacular transcription. The novel foregrounds contextual realism along with complex variegated narratives.

Adichie Is an extraordinarily self-aware thinker and writer, possessing the ability to lambaste society without sneering or patronizing or polemicizing. For her, it seems no great feat to balance high-literary intentions with broad social critique. *Americanah* examines blackness in America, Nigeria and British, but it's also a steady-handed dissection of the universal human experience - a platitude made fresh by the accuracy of Adichie's observation *Americanah* is witheringly trenchant and hugely empathetic ... it never feels false. (Mike Peed - New York Times Book Review)

MacArthur fellow Adichie is a word by word virtuoso with a sure grasp of social conundrums in Nigeria, East Coast

America, and England; an omnivorous eye for resonant details; a gift for authentic characters; pyrotechnic wit; and deep humanitarianism. (Booklist)

Americanah is a courageous, world-class novel about independence integrity, community, and love and what it takes to become a “full human being”. (Donna Seaman)

Americanah is about everything that is tuned to America. Dreams of going to America become everyone’s escape from the country’s institutional problems as all standards are unfavourable. This novel is full of fragile lives, it moves from poverty to climbing to richness, but mainly of a complex-traumatized-classy-privileged-middle class and of love lost and rekindled. Female characters in this book are given more sympathy, their lives; loses and abuses are elevated to gain our sympathy but it’s not merely the use of feminism in this novel. *Americanah* makes way for fastidious inquisitive reading.

Marginalization

Marginalization is the social demerit and banishment from the mainstream of the society. It is a term used widely in Europe and was first used in France. The process of marginalization brings together the area of interest in postmodern and postcolonial philosophy and cultural studies. The contrast is made between the processes of globalization and cross-cultural issues like that of local and global, private and public, individuals of the west are from the developed country and that Africa is considered to be barbarians, refugees of war, downtrodden and driven by poverty. Adichie focuses on these problems of exclusions and disenfranchisement through her different range of characters struggling social integration crisis: either socially, financially, politically or from different educational *layers* in order to construct their own identity in the society. As a result of this professional exclusion, frequent intercultural conflicts and absence of weak supporting networks were prominent. The predominant society rules over the marginalized population and tries to incorporate the ideal ways of the American life within them in order to survive and prosper in America. Marginalized people become a group, united by one common factor: being seen as the ‘other.’ Double consciousness becomes an apparent reality and an identity construct for marginalized people. “Race doesn’t really exist for you because it has never been a barrier. Black folks don’t have that choice.” (Adichie’s *Americanah* p.429)

DuBois opines on this point in *The Souls of Black Folk*. He mentions, “It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others, of measuring one’s soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity.”

Frantz Fanon states “The feeling of inferiority of the colonized is the correlative to the European’s feeling of superiority. Let us have the courage to say outright: It is the racist who creates his inferior” (Fanon and Markmann 69).

In the words of Spivak: “Can the subaltern speak? What must the elite do to watch out for the continuing construction of the subaltern? The question of “woman” seems most problematic in this context. Clearly, if you are poor, black, and female you get it in three ways.” (294)

Disenfranchisement

Alienation or disenfranchisement refers to the social exclusion that can be associated with a person's social class, race, skin colour, educational status, living standards or personal choices in fashions. Individual exclusion

The marginal man ...is one whom fate has condemned to live in two societies and in two, not merely different but antagonistic cultures.... his mind is the crucible in which two different and refractory cultures may be said to melt and either wholly or in part, fuse.

Ifemelu ultimate victim of cultural hybridity is a lone sufferer wherein she experiences the psychological trauma of isolation and alienation for being devoid of her family members. After getting established in the United States of America as a blogger the protagonist Ifemelu still longs for Nigeria. Even she has reached the economic stability and her new work directs to speak up in the social events and has begun to get a fellowship at Princeton. Yet she decides to discontinue her progressing career. Finally after staying for thirteen years in USA Ifemelu decides to move back to Nigeria without any apparent reason? Her reason for returning is rather unknown.

there was cement in her soul, it had been there for a while, an early morning disease of fatigue, shapeless desire, brief imaginary glints of other lives she could be

living, that over the months melded into piercing homesickness. (Adichie *Americanah* Ch. 1)

Ifemelu waits to see changed Nigeria- and her love Obinze whom she has not spoken for over a decade. “Nigeria became 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. And, of course, there was also Obinze” (Adichie *Americanah* Ch. 1).

Deceived Identity

You could have just said Ngozi is your tribal name and Ifemelu is your jungle name and throw in one more as your spiritual name. They will believe all kinds of shit about Africa. (Ginika Ch. 13)

Double – consciousness inert the identities of the immigrants. In order to find work illegally in the United States Ifemelu has to use the duped identity - Ngozi Okonkwo. Sometimes Ifemelu forgets to use this name. As names are a very important part of one's identity construct especially when they have cultural meanings and its relativity, this quote covers the darker theme of social identity and of the self-identity. The crisis of identity initiated sociological circumstances leading to the psychological drift in an individual's proceeding towards an existential depression coming out as oppressed victims of the society. The heritage of struggle, the search for a voice, the retention of thoughts and action with an ethics of care and concern and the meaning of empowerment in their everyday life are the core themes of establishing an identity. As Sapphic Derrida's eulogy to the impending death of Ifemelu's unnamed run blog reads.

She partakes “used her irreverent, hectoring, funny and thought-provoking voice to create a space for real conversations about race.” (5)

Third World Issues

Extended wars are responsible for the emergence of “third world” countries. Poverty is the second reason why these countries are referred to as ‘third world’. “About 1.3 billion people in third world countries live on \$ 1.25 a day or even less, between 1990 and 2008 the number decreased by nearly half. Millions live in hunger and malnutrition either because they cannot afford to buy or because they cannot afford farming necessities to grow. No access to education, only the upper-class people have the right to education. It is hard for the poor/middle class and to women to get an education. Children are forced into professions like

mining and manufacturing. Inadequate medical facilities all these factors tend people to migrate from their native place to abroad.

But of course it makes sense because we are Third Worlders and Third Worlders are forward-looking, we like things to be new, because our best is still ahead, while in the west their best is already past and so they have to make a fetish of that past. (Obinze, p. 539)

Just like Ifemelu, Obinze also recognizes the contrasts between Nigeria and other African countries and the west, in this quote pointing out the differences in the architectural choices people search out for their houses. He associates these artistic choices to the country 's heritage and the present moment in its economic development, indicating that people of the Third World like their dwellings to be seen as new construction rather than the antique or old – fashioned creations because most of their riches in the country are new rather than being inherited.

Lombardi “ The acculturation experiences of West Indians and new – wave Africans have proven more difficult than those of non- black immigrants because of American social perceptions and understandings of blackness .“

In 1923 issue addressed to the ‘New Negro Woman,’ *Messenger* magazine editorial foretells the arrival:

In politics, business and labour, in the professions, church and education, in science, art and literature, the New Negro Woman, with her head erect and spirit undaunted, is resolutely marching forward, ever conscious of her historic and noble mission of doing her bit toward the liberation of her people in particular and the human race in general. (In Allen 51)

Dear Non-American Black, when you make the choice to come to America, you become black, 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. We all have our moments of initiation into the society of Former Negroes. (Adichie *Americanah* Ch. 21).

Ifemelu writes a blog called "Raceteenth, or Various observations about American Blacks (Those Formerly Known as Negroes) by a non-American Black" to share her illuminating thoughts on American Society. Ifemelu as a victim confirms to these prejudices of beauty standards, disenfranchisement, race, hair politics, language variation and overall issues such as how to outlive and become "more American". Adichie makes several notable points in this quote firstly the combining of African cultures with America, both by whites who are not concerned for blacks and the Africans who always feel the need for the mutable. The idea of "becoming" black indicates the fact that "blackness" is not present in Africa but the notion of race discrimination is psychologically ingrained in the minds of Americans who are actually present there in America. Ifemelu and Obinze are the archetypal characters that communicate with us.

Thus finally, the word "choice" implies to her decision of leaving America according to her USA is not the best place as it counts for the flaws.

Language Hybridity

In the linguistic setting Bakhtin (1981) puts forward the notion of linguistic hybridity. He affirms that linguistic hybridity mixes two social languages, and hybridity is the process of the authorial unmasking of another's speech, through a language that is 'double-accented' and 'double-styled.' It is the topic of discussion in this current study as the multicultural societies have evolved.

In a conversation Uju and Ifemelu discuss the guidelines for distinguishing between African countries:

She knows many Igbo people in Africa. She sells cloth.

Where is she?

In Africa.

Where? In Senegal?

Benin

Why do you say Africa instead of just saying the country you meanYou don't know America. You say Senegal and American people, they say, where is that? My friend from Burkina Faso, they ask her, your country in Latin America (Adichie 15)

Aunty Uju incorrectly pronounces her own name when she receives a call. Adichie continues this scene with an exchange between Ifemelu and Aunty Uju :

Is that how you pronounce your name now?

It's what they call me. (Adichie 105)

Aunty Uju simultaneously admits her otherness while offering the identity that the dominant society has imposed upon her. Ifemelu carefully notices the way Aunty Uju speaks when she is engrossed in conversation with White Americans.

“Dike, put it back, Aunty Uju said, with the 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. And with the accent emerged a new persona, apologetic and self – abasing” (Adichie 109)

DuBois opines that “from this must arise a painful self - consciousness, an almost morbid sense of personality and a moral hesitancy which is fatal to self-confidence.”

In chapter 14, Ifemelu meets Cristina Tomas on her first day of the college. Cristina Tomas condescends Ifemelu because of her Nigerian accent, and this becomes Ifemelu confrontation with a feeling of the other. Adichie indicates “Ifemelu shrank. In that strained, still second when her eyes met Cristina Tomas’s before she took the forms, she shrank. She shrank like a dried leaf And in the following weeks, as autumn’s coolness descended she began to practice an American accent” (Adichie 134-135).

In this scene, Ifemelu goes from being confident to a self-assured individual to an uncomfortable submissively inferior woman. It is a tedious task for a colonized country to demand its own identity by expressing it through an authorized language imposed by the supreme authority, which diminishes its native language to a secondary position. For example, the metaphors used in the Igbo language are symbols unknown to the British culture, while at the same time Nigerian English has its own syntax compared to Standard English. According to Bhabha: “It becomes crucial to distinguish between semblance and similitude of

the symbols across diverse cultural experiences – literature, art, music, ritual, life, death -- and the social specificity of each of these productions of meaning as they circulate as signs within specific contextual locations and social systems of value” (Bhabha 172).

Biafran war an issue still unexplained in Nigerian culture that caused numerous deaths, feeling of animosity and poverty in Nigeria. There is a distinguished gap between English the official language, as a medium for balanced thought and intellectuality. Igbo names carry symbolic value and the assessment of the notable events. The second position of the Igbo language in contemporary Nigerian relation is depicted in the following passage:

A Yoruba man will see a Yoruba person anywhere and speak Yoruba. But an Igbo man will speak English to an Igbo man. I am even surprised that you are speaking Igbo to me." "It's true," Obinze said. "It's sad; it's the legacy of being a defeated people. We lost the Biafran war and learned to be ashamed. (Adichie *Americanah* Ch.54)

The hybridization, evolution and the combination of cultural signs and practices from different culture lead to the integration and variations of cultural practices. To impute the language, the reader relies on the direct statement in the context of the narrative or has to google, Adichie recommends:

I've always had Igbo [in my writing]. And I've always had well-meaning advice, often about how American readers will be confused, or they won't get something. I don't set out to confuse, but I also think about myself as a reader. I grew up reading books from everywhere and I didn't necessarily understand every single thing - and I didn't need to. So, I think for me, what was more important, for the integrity of the novel, was that I capture the world I wanted to capture, rather than to try to mould that world into the idea of what the imagined reader would think. (Adichie "NBCC fiction Award")

Conclusion

Adichie's *Americanah* deliberately divides Africa and the West, through English literature by comprehending contemporary African discourses

and emphasizing them as an integral part of Western discourses. The main idea hybridization is to focus on how the literature of diasporic nations can effectively articulate their marginalized identities. The new narrative tries to reclaim their countries' past and subdue the Western delineation of the east as the other. *Americanah* is a precept of the inversion of classic paradigms of Western literature. As its title expresses the newness of *Americanah* as a story which becomes noticeable in the judgment of Ifemelu to return to Nigeria after spending thirteen years in the U.S. not because she has failed, but for the strong desire she had for returning back to Nigeria, her homeland, she decides to be identified as an 'Americanah' rather than as an 'American', as her friend said, "next time we see you, you will be a serious Americanah" (*Americanah* 100). *Americanah* depicts an identity based on past experiences of living in America. Ifemelu is prejudiced and perceived as of an oriental's attitudes. She faces insecurities and the challenges of overcoming them gradually.

Adichie breaks the stereotypical expectations of readers habituated to Eurocentric reading canons, by setting Africans as all of her important characters; the story starts and significantly ends in Nigeria paving a new perspective; Adichie's choice of comprehending Igbo vocabulary suggests a vigilant portrayal of local identity. *Americanah* is written from an outside point of view, the expression is unburdened by America's racial history. Adichie's outside observation beyond the theme of the race gives *Americanah* multi-dimensional, honest and refreshing reading perspective. *Americanah* overturns the hypocritical silences inherited by America's image-making and highlights the various other significant issues of the direct impact of U.S. Colonialism and imperialism.

Americanah cannot be considered to be African American literature, just because it is written by and shapes a Nigerian protagonist woman who has lived in America, but is not African American. Some African American recognizes Africans for their assistive aid and others try to mingle upon the basis of sharing some common grounds, full long-term integration in American culture is not possible. Ifemelu ashamed of her American accent decides and realizes that Nigeria is the place where she belongs and where her roots are. Adichie says in her TED Talk that "stories can break the dignity of a people, but stories can also repair that

broken dignity.” Adichie proves to be an outstanding narrator but beyond her commendation, as a writer, the themes pervade her works as important tools to grasp history and must have their space in literature. *Americanah* empowers a whole range of readers who as an author have terribly failed to represent themselves.

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