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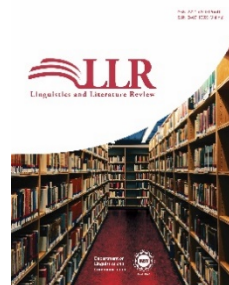
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- Author (s):** Sarah Shamshad, Asad Ali Hashmi
- Affiliation (s):** National College of Business Administration & Economics (NCBAE), Multan, Pakistan
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Investigating Hybridity in “*Americanah*” by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie

Sarah Shamshad*, and Asad Ali Hashmi

National College of Business Administration & Economics (NCBAE),
Multan, Pakistan

Abstract

Mixing of cultures is common in the contemporary world and this phenomenon causes cultural, racial, and linguistic hybridity. Hybridity affects human beings. Migrants confront abusive behavior due to cultural hybridity. Hence, the concept of cultural hybridity is explored in this article. This study analyzes the novel "*Americanah*" by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, through the lens of the ‘Theory of Hybridity’ presented by Homi. K. Bhabha. The analyzed novel is about an Afro-American, Ifemelu, who feels hesitant to adopt both cultures. The current study displays Ifemelu’s dilemma of choosing between her friends or lover in America. It is a descriptive and text-based study and makes an attempt to answer how cultural hybridity affects the protagonist’s life. The conclusion sums up that Ifemelu’s character suffers from identity crisis and marginalization due to cultural hybridity. The study verifies the negative effects of cultural hybridity that are the core assertion of the theory of Bhabha.

Keywords: hybridity, mimicry, third world, post-colonial, ambivalence, identity crisis, Homi Bhabha

Introduction

This research is centered upon the novel *Americanah* (2013) written by an Afro-American author Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie. Adichie is known as a reformist-feminist author (Arndt, 2002), who has shared women’s struggle and stories of discrimination on the basis of ‘individualistic and systematic, traditional and modern conventions’ by discussing and vocalizing ‘women’s voice’ through her narratives (Thielmann, 2005). According to Ohagwu et al. (2014), her writings depicted several themes, for instance the influences of Nigerian society, transatlantic slavery, colonialism, the

* Corresponding Author: sarahpostcolonial@gmail.com

Biafran war, racism, gender politics, and Nigerian political instability. (Adichie, [2015](#)).

The title of Adichie's book, "*Americanah*," comes from a Nigerian term for those who have adopted American culture (Kamal, [2014](#)). According to Tunca ([2011](#)), Chimamanda claimed that as a writer from Sub-Saharan Africa, you're supposed to aspire to Chinua Achebe, recognised as the "Father of Modern African Literature," because African literature is a marginalized/resistance literature in English.

Tlamková ([2016](#)) in her study stated that Chimamanda's works are a mouthpiece for marginalized and discriminated women and the Nigerian community which is doubly marginalized by the hands of colonizers. Hence, by highlighting the pedagogy of the oppressor she inculcated several thematic techniques to mainly express women's expression, voice as equal gender, and to eliminate otherness.

Gnanaselvi ([2019](#)), stated that the scripts that she has expounded revolve around the themes of African culture, the relationship of the colonizer and the colonized, female subjugation in Africa, marginalization of the African community, otherness, color and racism, politics, issues due to living in a hybrid society, gender violence, abuse, class, patriotism, and identity crisis.

Post-colonial as we define it does not mean ‘post-independence’ or ‘after colonialism’, for this would be to falsely ascribe an end to the colonial process. Post-colonialism, rather, begins from the very first moment of colonial contact. It is the discourse of compositionality that colonialism brings into being. In this sense, post-colonial writing has a very long history. (p.117)

Postcolonial literature deals with multiple issues such as hybridity, otherness/othering, the relationship of the colonizer and the colonized, female subjugation, exploitation, identity crisis, marginalization, and many other issues of suppression and oppression.

Hybridity according to Oxford English Dictionary (OED) is “A thing made by combining two different elements; a mixture.” The word hybrid originated in the 17th century to describe off-springs of two different phylum later, in the mid of 18th century the term was used to describe people or the offspring of two different races. Later post-colonialists lead this term as the result of the relationship between a colony, colonized, and the colonizer.

Their idea focused more on the immigrants and their issues, diaspora, globalization, multiculturalism, and Trans-culturalism. Additionally, post-colonialists focused more on the third space and threats of hybridity which opens the possibility for cultural hybridity which deals with cultural differences and imposed hierarchies.

This idea has been addressed extensively by Homi K Bhabha in his widely celebrated book *The Location of Culture* (1994). Bhabha (1994) defines the concept of hybridity in his book *The Location of Culture* as:

Hybridity is the sign of the productivity of colonial power, it's shifting forces and fixities; it is the name of the strategic reversal of the process of domination through disavowal, Hybridity is the revaluation of the assumption of colonial identity through the repetition of discriminatory identity effects. It displays the necessary deformation and displacement of all sites of discrimination and domination. (p. 112)

Bhabha's concept of hybridity deals with the relationship between the colonizer and the colonized. This relationship is like two sides of a coin that must be understood by understanding interdependence and an in-between space which carries the burden of the cultures. Bhabha believes in both of its sides but he has only addressed its negative aspect more prominently while highlighting the colonizer's pedagogy and imbalance of power structures.

“Colonial mimicry is the desire for a reformed, recognizable other, as a subject of a difference that is almost the same but not quite. Which is to say, that the discourse of mimicry is constructed around an ambivalence. . .” (Bhabha, 1997, pp. 85-87).

Furthermore, Bhabha's concept of hybridity described, “the ambivalence as the source of traditional discourses on authority” (Bhabha 1994, p. 114). He was of the view that this relationship is based upon ambivalence and mockery that resulted in mimicking the colonizers on their arousal to the colonized to be like them. This itself becomes a mockery for the colonizers and creates ambivalence for the colonized who have fallen between the two extremes one that he was always living with and the other they never followed and was all an extempore for them (Bhabha, 1997). Furthermore, he opines that these instances of cultural hybridity create a state of identity crisis in an individual (ibid).

This study revolves around the idea of finding out the problems of migrant “Ifemelu” the protagonist of “*Americanah*”. Kangira (2015) stated that Ifemelu is a female character in novel who is a Nigerian, moves to the United States, and faces the issues of hybrid culture and afro-politanism in America. This research investigates Ifemelu’s issues in an American society. The current research also aims to conduct a textual analysis to see the traces of a superior culture and its outcomes on immigrants while belonging to another community. This research further concluded that the struggle to be Americanized created a new hybrid culture which was a blend of both the native and the colonizer’s cultural practices. Hence, it could be traced in the text as ‘cultural hybridity’.

Ifemelu belonged to an Afro-American community but she was living with Native Americans who belonged to the white community. This portrays the problems of living in a mixed culture while highlighting the cultural differences in which she was alienated and a misfit in American society due to the two opposite cultures This effect of hybridity brings serious issues of mental trauma for her she had to leave her chastity just to cope with a society that never accepts her as an individual equal to other white individuals. This leads the major character to be the victim of an identity crisis Homi K.Bhabha’s concept of hybridity is used to explore the cultural hybridity of Ifemelu’s character in the novel *Americanah*.

Literature Review

Chimamanda Ngozi is acknowledged for her works depicting themes of gender roles, class, identity crises, and racial discrimination in postcolonial criticism. Her works determine the portrayal of a world of binaries and discrimination between cultures, religions, and races. Chimamanda seems to reveal the acrimony of racism existing in a dominated white society for Africans (Gnanaselvi & Yasmin, 2019). Emili Cavalcanti a student at the University of Southern California has stated that hundreds of people crowded the Wallis Annenberg Hall Forum to commemorate Adichie for her inspirational contributions for the worldwide discourses about gender, race, and identity. Lear Center Director Martin Kaplan’ greeted Adichie for her gift to tell stories which inspire and empower other females while introducing “*Americanah*” on television.

Adichie’s writing has spoken not only to her own journey but to countless others. Her body of work proves that great storytelling,

that is courageous and unflinchingly pursues the truth, which delves with specificity and complexity into places both uncomfortable and unexpected.

Gurira said. “That sort of storytelling is universally appealing and shatters seemingly insurmountable walls about whose stories get to be boldly told. That sort of storytelling forms bridges, bringing us all that much closer together on equal footing” (ibid).

Lodhi et al. (2018) in her dissertation stated that the writers who migrated from their native lands to the West due to political or educational reasons produced a different kind of literature which gave a new direction to post-colonial criticism. Writers who were born in their native lands and moved to the West for various reasons are Salman Rushdie, Chimamanda Ngozi, V. S. Naipaul, George Lamming, and Wole Soyinka. Their works contain hybrid elements. There are certain other younger writers like Zadie Smith, Hanif Kureishi, and Jhumpa Lahiri, who were born in the West to racially mixed families - or sometimes not, as in the case of Lahiri. These writers were born racially hybrid and this hybridization of cultures is evident in their writings (Lodhi et al., 2018).

Ifemelu the protagonist of the novel is the major character in *Americanah* who reaches America to study but eventually encounters multiple strokes of racial discrimination and remained stranded between two cultures. This division between superior and inferior culture created a ‘third space’ for her hybrid identity which was a combination of both cultures. McMann (2017) commented on the novel as:

Adichie’s novel opens with Ifemelu waiting at the Princeton train station. She is leaving the bucolic, Ivy League town for the much grittier, poorer, and ethnically diverse Trenton, a mere 20- minute train ride south. She must go to Trenton to get her hair braided because It was unreasonable to expect a braiding salon in Princeton—the few black locals she had seen were so light-skinned and lank-haired she could not imagine them wearing braids. (p. 3)

Adichie’s writing style is very realistic in her novels. Caroline Levine observed and highlighted the power of realism in the novel when Adichie presented Ifemelu’s observations about race which were rightfully blunt, not “watery or fuzzy, in order to fully grasp the painful realities of being black in America today” (p. 595).

Saleem Dhobi in his dissertation “Bhabha’s Concept of Hybridity in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s *Half of a Yellow Sun: A Postcolonial Critique*” stated that it is a novel that Chimamanda expounded upon with issues of cultural conflicts and showed the sufferings and struggles of a black Nigerian due to the Cultural Hybridity which eventually takes the character of a hybrid individual and develops identity crisis and other issues of neurosis and psychosis (Dhobi, [2013](#)).

McMann ([2017](#)) commented on the novel that Ifemelu is waiting at the Princeton railway station as Adichie's book begins. She is transferring from the idyllic, Ivy League town to the considerably gritty, impoverished, and ethnically diverse Trenton, which is just 20 minutes by train south. The few black residents she had seen were so light-skinned and lank-haired that she could not fathom them having braids, so she had to travel to Trenton in order to get her hair braided. (p. 3).

Patrycja Kozieł ([2015](#)) in his article “Narrative Strategy in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's novel *Americanah*: the Manifestation of Migrant Identity” has examined the characteristics of the narrative strategies used by Ngozi with special reference to lagbo language within which he has incorporated the concept of migrant identity. He went on to describe how speaking Lagbo in the context of living in the United States could be seen as expressing a different sense of self and a dynamic sense of kinship with Nigeria (Kozieł, [2015](#)).

Khan ([2019](#)) in his dissertation: *Construction of Diasporic Female Identities in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's Americanah* has embarked upon gender identity, defining what a woman is, and by questioning the gender dichotomy which exists in Nigerian society. She further, asserted that identity could be defined through the lens of ethnicity, gender, and ideology that in response constitutes a nationalistic identity of a community. Hence, Zeleza’s lens of the contemporary African diaspora is used to examine the identity of Ifemelu and her identity crises by exploring her life experiences in the western world.

Nwanyanwu ([2017](#)), in the work “Trans-culturalism, Otherness, Exile, and Identity, in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s *Americanah*”, figured out the consequences of Trans-culturalism and explored identity crisis, marginalization, otherness, stress, and trauma in the major and minor characters to build his conclusion.

In a likewise manner, Akingbe and Adeniyi (2017), in their dissertation reconfiguring others: Negotiating Identity in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah* stated that,

“Adichie as a transcultural writer is bound by the need to illustrate issues which verge on individuals’ intolerance for people outside their ethno cultural or socio-political backgrounds” and concluded the article as

Trans culturalism could only manifest in a globally differing society if the walls of ethnocentrism and racism insulating it collapse. Curiously, trans culturalism in *Americanah* ostensibly failed due to the obtrusive racial intolerance exhibited by the varied characters who appear to have determined to cling to the divisive racial sentiments identified in their attitude.

S. Aloysius Albert a Ph.D. doctor at Bharathiar University, Coimbatore, in his article “Race and Gender in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s *Americanah*” embarked upon the idea of racism and its effect on the Black lady and issues arising as a reaction of racial discrimination. He further concluded that the article

Political discourses and racial discrimination are prominent themes in African American novels. African American literature aims to portray black characters in a realistic way to be able to identify with them. *Americanah* is filled with social commentary about race and modern representations of black characters. (Albert, 2017)

Yerima (2017), a student at Nigeran University in her dissertation: “Regimentation or Hybridity? Imperial aesthetics, or beauty in the western sense, has been explored in the article "Western Beauty Practices by Black Women in Adichie's *Americanah*," which comes to the conclusion that a postcolonial woman's identity relies on her ability to express herself.

By analyzing the text through the concept of hybridity by Homi Bhabha, the current study traces the incidents of cultural hybridity with reference to the text in the life of major characters and the impact of hybrid identity on Ifemelu. This further encounters the Third Space which leads to ambivalence and later to a new hybrid identity. The current research is associated with the theme of hybridity to find out the applicability of this concept on the text for textual analysis.

Objectives of the Research

The research is organized to address the certain selected objectives:

- 1) To interrogate, in which way does cultural hybridity led to an identity crisis in the character of Ifemelu.
- 2) To elaborate how the concept of hybridity by Homi K. Bhabha is justified in the novel “*Americanah*”.

Research Questions

- 1) What is the effect of cultural Hybridity on Ifemelu the protagonist in the novel *Americanah*?

Statement of Problem

Cultural hybridity could be seen in many parts of the world. Many immigrants nowadays face abusive and racial behaviour because of the cultural hybridity which never allows an immigrant to assimilate in the native culture and they are targeted either because of their nationality or because of their religion. This concept of cultural hybridity is the base of the present study.

Significance of the Study

This study will to give a new outlook on comprehending the “*Americanah*” novel, especially cultural hybridity, and its effect on Ifemelu, the protagonist of the novel, and other characters of the novel. It would also contribute in the post-colonial Afro-American studies, which aims to investigate the cultural hybridity, identity crises, and marginalization in the selected text.

Theoretical Framework

To investigate the issue of cultural hybridity, the researcher has used the Theory of Hybridity pioneered by Bhabha (1994) in his book *The Location of Culture*. In recent times the word is morphed with several other words to gain new identities. For example, linguistic racial, and cultural hybridity. Racial hybridity was first recognized during the colonial period. While the instances of cultural hybridity were found much later as the after-effects of colonization. Significantly, hybridity is referred to as a considerable term in post-colonial theory, and it signifies the merging of two cultures which procedures a new cultural traditions between the invaders and the immigrant

residing in a particular area. In Homi. K.Bhabha's view of learning cultural practices, the cross-fertilization of cultures has two extreme sides which might get worse after the negative, ruthless, and repressive behaviors of the host community. Furthermore, he stated that the false notion about the colossal or unchanging aspects of colonizing or colonized culture could also be broken down to study the 'contact zone' where they both meet and forms a hybrid culture. For Homi. K.Bhabha, the term 'hybridity' explores cultural and political dispute between the oppressor and the oppressed within the circle of colonization. Bhabha described hybridity in his book *The Location of Culture* as,

Hybridization is a sign of colonial power, productivity, changing power, and immutability; it is the name of the procedure of reversing dominance through negative strategies. Hybridity is the treatment of colonial identity assumptions through repeated unfair identity effects. It shows the necessary distortion and dislocation of all places of prejudice and domination. (Bhabha, [1994](#), p. 112)

Bhabha rejected Fanon's notion that the black community mimics the white culture and described that this i mimicking of culture highlights the colonial hegemony. Moreover, he argued that the colonized and the colonizers are autonomous and there are numerous two-sided actions among them. Hybridity is an essential concept in postcolonial literature as Ella Shohat (1992) suggested,

“We should try to discriminate between the diverse modalities of hybridity, forced assimilation, internalized self-rejection, political co-optation, social conformism, cultural mimicry, and creative transcendence” (Shohat, p.110).

The researcher has selected "*Americanah*" by Chimamanda Ngozi, a novel about a Nigerian American girl, Ifemelu, who feels reluctant to adopt two cultures at a same time. This research shows the distorted position of Ifemelu's identity, about making a choice when it comes to her friends or her lover. Thus, the researcher investigated the impact of cultural hybridity on a person's life. The researcher also observed how Chimamanda has incorporated autobiographical elements in Ifemelu's life.

According to Homi K.Bhabha, no culture is pure and faces hybridity, Bhabha ([1994](#)) defined the concept of hybridity in his book *The Location of Culture* that

Hybridity is the name of the strategic reversal of the process of domination through disavowal, and it is the reevaluation of the assumption of colonial identity through the repetition of discriminatory identity effects. Hybridity is the sign of the productivity of colonial power.

Its shifting forces and fixities. It demonstrates the essential displacement and deformation of all locations of inequality and dominance.

Bhabha’s concept of hybridity deals with the concept of ‘Mimicry’ which is an act of copying trends of colonizers. Bhabha, in his book ‘The Location of Culture,’ explains that the colonizer forces colonized to copy them, and the colonizers feel superior to adopt the tradition or culture of its master. This in turn becomes a mockery of the colonizer (Bhabha, [1997](#), p. 85).

Disassembling binaries is another concept in Bhabha’s theory of cultural hybridity. Lodhi et al. ([2018](#)) in her dissertation explained the phenomenon of cultural encounters with other cultures which spread cultural hybridity. The near proximity of colonizer and colonized cultures leads to the event of a contemporary, rational society which is full of prejudices. As a result, both societies suffer from each other's torment which affect communities and more importantly individuals who belong to that certain community. The other idea in the theory given by Homi K.Bhabha is Colonial mimicry that “is the desire for a reformed, recognizable other, as a subject of difference that is almost the same, but not quite. This is to say, that the discourse of mimicry is constructed around an ambivalence (Bhabha, [1994](#), p. 86). Another crucial concept to define in the framework for establishing quotes from the Theory of Bhabha is "third space." It serves as the intersection of the two cultures, according to Bhabha. It is also known as "liminal" (Bhabha, 1997). The exchange of colonial, postcolonial, modernist, and postmodern eras, genres, and civilizations is epitomised by Bhabha's work. (*Edward Said*)

Meredith ([1998](#)), in the article “Bhabha’s Hybridity and the Third Space in Postcolonial Discourse” extracted Bhabha’s concept of third space as “the third space is a mode of articulation, a way of describing a productive, and not merely reflective, space that engenders new possibility. It is an ‘interruptive, interrogative, and enunciative’”. The third space is the point

where two cultures meet, this is not an area bound to thoughts but an area that keeps a practical value.

Bhabha has stressed "the colonizer's agency" and "the colonizer's fear," according to Huddart (2006), imitation is "an excessive reproduction of language, culture, manners, and ideas." This exaggeration claimed that imitation was "repetition with diversity" and hence had nothing to do with the enslavement of conquerors. According to Philipp Schorch, the third gap "turns the structure of meaning and reference into an uncertain process" (2013).

The term 'Cultural hybridity' is layered with many meanings since there are many connotations associated with the notion of culture and hybridity. Bhabha asserted that cultural hybridity questions cultural hierarchies:

Hybrid strategy or discourse opens up a space of negotiation where power is unequal, but its articulation may be equivocal. Such negotiation is neither assimilation nor collaboration. It makes possible the emergence of an 'interstitial' agency that refuses the binary representation. (Bhabha, 1994, p. 34)

Bhabha's philosophy of cultural hybridity resisted Edward Said's division of cultures between Orient and Occident. Homi Bhabha believes that modern culture is both a colony and a mixed culture. Hybridization defines the colonial psychology of culture and the pedagogy of the oppressor and the oppressed.

Research Methodology

To investigate different instances of cultural hybridity in Chimamanda's novel '*Americanah*', the researcher observed different aspects of cultural hybridity and core issues arising from an individual living in a mixed culture and ultimately becomes a hybrid product of these two-culture. Thus, the current research aims to conduct a textual analysis of the novel '*Americanah*' and investigates the dialogues, utterances, and most importantly the incidents of racial discrimination faced by the major and minor characters while living in a white dominant society.

The mode of the research is qualitative and descriptive in nature and the analyses is conducted on the basis of the textual references taken from the text which further develops the argument on these textual bases.

Analysis

In the novel *Americanah*, the generational differences and the definite views of generations form a clear characteristic of cultural hybridity. The first generation of immigrants aspires to adopt American ways of lifestyle, Ifemelu’s father had an interest in the English language and was overly obsessed with this dominating language and culture of Americans. Ifemelu was interested in writing and enjoying her life. Ifemelu’s interest relied on traveling to America for her university studies. People around her were all obsessed with the English language and American culture as they idealize America as ‘dream of the west’, for its liberty that is given to all its individuals. Ifemelu also got attracted for a scholarship to America and following the influence of the same idealized version of English and American people crafted by her father and lover, she migrated to America for her further studies. It might be because she herself belonged to a third-world country. During her stay in America, she was attracted by the free lifestyle of Americans, but at the same time, she also felt rejected by the racial discrimination of the Whites. Ifemelu and Obinze had an ambiguous relationship with their father’s native country Nigeria. They did not prefer to live in Nigeria but at the same time, they were rejected by the Britishers.

The theme of identity crises as presented by Zote (2020) is established in the opening lines of the novel. Ifemelu was out for relaxing her hair. Earlier she was following the hairstyle that was carried by white American girls. Paola Bica in her article stated that, Ifemelu visited America and lives in a multicultural and multiethnic society in search of emancipation but soon she realized that she was in a city that even does not accept black babies. She further found that,

Identity struggle is represented in the novel by means of different battles and circumstances the different characters have to face. Some battles are related to ideas and assumptions and others are related to something that might seem -for the exterior eye- simple or superficial as someone's appearance. (Bica, 2021, pp.17-29)

Identity crisis in the character of Ifemelu was seen in the following lines that is followed by living a life in two cultures by building a cultural hybridity which not only highlights the white supremacy but also the supremacy of English language.

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. (Adichie, [2013](#) p. 19)

The relation of relaxed hair is described and addressed by Noliwe Rooks in "Hair Raising: Beauty, Culture and African American Woman" ([1996](#)). She stated that the hairstyling of Ifemelu could be life-changing. It could either make her career in America or destroy her career and identity while living in America. Ifemelu had to lose her physical appearance at first in the form of adopting the straight hair style which was different from her curly hairs. She never wanted to have a haircut and this type of hairstyling but she had to do this to save herself from any racial discrimination or for her survival in America. Adichie asserts that "A name is a crucial factor that creates a sense of identity, of being oneself" (Adichie, [2013](#), p. 257). Ifemelu had to leave her native and birth name to live a life in America Bica (2021), asserted that,

Generally, in America, as it is depicted in *Americanah*, black people's identity is not important for the white ones. This is exemplified when Ifemelu gets another girl's ID in order to find a job in the USA and she complains the girl does not look alike, All of us look alike to white people. (Bica,[2021](#) pp.17-29)

Bica is of the view that Ifemelu had to sacrifice her identity in America to assimilate in the culture of white people. For this, she had adopt what she was not and she never wanted to be. Throughout her stay in America, the protagonist Ifemelu was depicted as she is constantly suffering and struggling for her lost identity.

Loss of identity is a prevalent theme in the characters of the novel. The novel carries two protagonists Ifemelu and her lover Obinze. Both were schoolfellows. Obinze idealized English language, loved English literature, and forced Ifemelu to read English books. Identity crisis are reflected in his character too from the very start of his early age. His dream was to go to Europe and he went to England after Ifemelu left for America. He also faced the same issues of identity crisis in England which were quite similar with

Ifemelu issues of identity crisis. Obinze traveled to England and he was forced to live there with someone else’s identity which as a result blurred his own native identity and in this process of hiding his native identity he lost his own identity. He had to struggle a lot during his visit to England and eventually he went to Nigeria back. Bica asserted that,

“In England, Obinze has to do the same thing in order to stay there, “That evening, as dusk fell, the sky muting to a pale violet, Obinze became Vincent” (Bica 21, p.17-29).

Obinze also got the pseudo name Vincent. Bica was of the view that identity crisis looms large in both the characters of the novel *Americanah*. Bica found that the linguists have proven that a foreign language no matter how perfect it is, does not carry the same emotional strength as is carried by the native language. This native language is another form of man’s identity, however Bica argued that both the characters tried their best to mimic the language and accent of the European language but they failed to do so. One of the strongest mediums of projecting culture into the generations and regions is language. When Ifemelu and Obinze both had to shift to the language of colonizers they had to leave their native accent and language, arguably they left a great part of their culture too. This also brought identity crisis to the characters of both Obinze and Ifemelu. Ifemelu’s identity crises reflected her life in the colonizer’s culture which costed the immigrants. Consequently, their own language and culture was affected due to this Americanized identity. Chinua Achebe stated the agony of leaving the mother language in form of a question.

“Is it right that a man should abandon his mother tongue for someone else’s? It looks like a dreadful betrayal and produces a guilty feeling” (Ashcroft et al., [1997](#), p. 285).

Furthermore, Bica stated that in the case of Ifemelu, choosing the option to stop faking her American language and accent highlights an inner fight of characters.. This analysis and assertion of Achebe reflect ambiguity and identity crisis of both Ifemelu and Obinze characters. Identity crisis is not only reflected in the character of Obinze and Ifemelu but also in the character of Ifemelu’s aunty Uju. Aunty Uju moves to America to spend her life after her own will and wishes but as she reaches there the whole situation turns out to be wholly different and she also suffers from issues of ‘otherness’ and ‘identity crisis’. However, she is among the characters who

adopted the American lifestyle without many complications and left their own culture in order to be Americanized. Bica stated that,

“In a similar case, Aunt Uju pretends to be somebody else when she is in the presence of the American -white- people” (Bica, 2021, pp. 17-29). Aunt Uju uses the same language and forces which Ifemelu followed to resist her black American identity. This is how all three major characters of Adichie’s fiction reflect identity crisis.

Curt and Ifemelu were in conversation with each other. This conversation depicted that Curt was her white boyfriend who helped her through her stay in America. Curt was the man who tried to be nice with Ifemelu but the pedagogy of colonizer looms large in their relationship of that’s why their relationship ended soon. As soon as their relationship ended she started having flashbacks of her previous lover from Africa. She made an immediate comparison of both and realized that her relationship with Curt was full of stress, coercion, dominance, and subjugation. This is depicted through her conversation with Curt which reflects the same dilemma of dominance and superiority of colonizer.

“I booked the Swedish massage for you,” Curt said.

“Thank you,” she said. Then, in a lower voice, she added, to make up for her peevishness, “You are such a sweetheart.”

“I don’t want to be a sweetheart. I want to be the fucking love of your life,” Curt said with a force that startled her”. (Americanah, p.225)

As Ifemelu replies to Curt in a very humble manner and with a low voice, the words in the above reference at the end convey a sense of their strong and strained relationship. Curt then responds to her in a furious manner and with language that lowers her esteem. Ifemelu is depicted as a strong female character who sheds her Afro-American identity to rise and achieve the dreams by rejecting all the hurdles and problems in her way. Hence, as a result she develops identity crises.

Curt booking her a massage is one among the benedictions that Ifemelu receives on her journey to change and transform herself as a culturally hybrid person. The line “I don’t want to be a sweetheart. I want to be the fucking love of your life” showed her attempt to get adjusted with her lover but she was unable to mimic Curt and his expectations from her. She was able to equal or mimic the love, but only to the point where it reached the heights of a sweetheart, which was undesired for all parties. This incident

made Ifemelu aware of her unsuitability for a white man's affection. Later, she messages Obinze with the information and an apology for her error. In the sentences that follow, her ambivalence is more properly portrayed.

Later that day she would send an e-mail to Obinze’s Hotmail address: Ceiling, I don’t even know how to start... Saying sorry for my silence sounds stupid even to me but I am so sorry and I feel so stupid. I will tell you everything that happened. I have missed you and I miss you (p. 226).

Her words “I have missed you and I miss you” denoted the failed attempt to mimic the love that Curt was demanding from her. The lines further illustrated that her heart towards Obinze. Her act of trying to adjust with Curt which is opposite to her desires state the of dilemma of her identity loss. Both the above stated arguments depict the destruction of her personal life in America due to her relationship that she wanted to establish with the colonizer’s community in form of Curt but failed to do so. So, her relationship with Curt is symbolic of rulings, coercion, dissatisfaction, loss of identity, and more importantly it depicts her struggles as a black African American woman.

Ifemelu worked as a servant in a home that was well furnished and owned by a rich lady. Kimberley was the white man who arrived at the bungalow and found Ifemelu there. He grins at her glance and they both reacted in a similar way. He took her as not the owner of the house and did not honor her the way a white man would have been honored by a steward. She started blogging about this racial behavior and said,

As far as he was concerned, I did not fit as the owner of that stately house because of the way I looked. In America’s public discourse, “Blacks” as a whole are often lumped with “Poor Whites.” Not Poor Blacks and Poor Whites. But Blacks and Poor Whites. (*Americanah*, p.168)

The idea of identity crisis is established in the lines when the protagonist fails to mimic the phenotype of colonizers, the whites and their prejudice is depicted through the character of Kimberley as his behavior with the protagonist was questionable and racial. The words “I did not fit as the owner of that stately house because of the way I looked” showed the deficiency to carry a white identity. Despite wearing clothes like whites and styling her hairs like the white women she was unable to be recognized by

the natives of Americans. She always remained as ‘other’. The last lines of the discourse of her blog post display ambivalence as not being able to be recognized by the native Whites of America. The product of the blog post divulges an identity crisis for all the blacks in general. Kelsey and Ifemelu’s conversation depicted the relationship between the colonizer and the colonized as Kelsey criticizes America for betterment but dislikes Ifemelu to comment about America or the Americans. Kelsey represents white people of America who disliked and criticize America but did not allow any African to comment against their native land. A sense of inferiority and superiority complex is depicted here in the following lines:

She recognized in Kelsey the nationalism of liberal Americans who copiously criticized America but did not like you to do so; they expected you to be silent and grateful, and always reminded you of how much better than wherever you had come from America was. (Americanah, p. 191)

Identity crisis looms large in the words like ‘silent’, Adichie has crafted this character as a struggling character and strong woman who was trying to adjust in America. Back there in Nigeria she was a very liberal and strong woman and she also carried the same traits in American but whatever she faced to be Americanized changed her inner self and she decided to go back to her hometown. ‘Silent’ here also depict a shackle on her liberty, freedom, and voice. Ambivalence is generated along the lines of the idea of liberty and silence. As Gayatri Spivak and Indian critic stated that “Subaltern cannot speak”, very much depict the situation of the protagonist which was not more than any commodity in the western culture. She wanted to speak, to raise her voice, and to choose like others but the native culture of America never allowed her to think rather they confined her in the walls which were usually built for a ‘cage bird’.

The lines of conversation between Curt and Ifemelu demonstrated ambivalence and identity crisis as the protagonist was talking about black women, “We don’t even tell our white partners the small things that piss us off and the things we wish they understood better, because we’re worried, they will say we’re overreacting, or we’re being too sensitive” (Americanah, p.288).

The dilemma of Ifemelu has been constructed through these lines again, the novelist has crafted her protagonist as a culturally hybrid person who is

affected at most of the stages of her life. Her struggles in the book seem to show that opposing both dominant and oppressed cultures while residing in a culture that once ruled the other nation is equally as equal to living in that culture. Homi K. Bhabha already addressed this idea when he claimed that coexisting with colonisers amounted to unintentionally and unconsciously undermining their culture. This is more upsetting for someone who is from a colonised country. In these lines, she describes how living a life of cultural hybridization has left her with regrets, fears, and anxiety about living in a foreign nation as a person of mixed cultures. The strained existence of a migrant is reflected in words like "pissed off," "overreacting," and "too sensitive." A migrant is always willing to continue defending their position, and the confronter begins to appreciate and discover depth and sincerity of love in their justifications. This has trait has been discussed by Ifemelu in her own conversation as,

“The thing about cross-cultural relationships is that you spend so much time explaining... and it pleased him to hear that, because it gave his relationship with her a depth, a lack of trifling novelty” (*Americanah*, p.443).

As Ifemelu was a liberal girl but to maintain her identity in America she incepts an affair with a white man and shared her experiences as a migrant who always has to keep on explaining and defending themselves in order to maintain a narrative ideology. Psychologically a person who always has to defend and explain one’s self loses his or her esteem and respect. This phenomenon reflects the ambiguity in her stance of explaining and defending herself. She explains in these lines the way cross-cultural relations are hazardous, especially for the one who are not from a superior culture and have a trans-generational legacy of being colonized. Living in a cross-cultural society is not only difficult but it is also impossible to stay in a country like America that has ruled Africans for a long time, a sense of absolute identity crisis has prevailed in the lines ahead that are taken from the conversation of Ifemelu and Curt.

The simplest solution to the problem of race in America? Romantic love. Not friendship. Not the kind of safe, shallow love where the objective is that both people remain comfortable. But real deep romantic love, the kind that twists you and wrings you out and makes you breathe through the nostrils of your beloved. And because that real deep romantic love is so rare, and because

American society is set up to make it even rarer between American Black and American White, the problem of race in America will never be solved. (*Americanah*, p.294)

The protagonist applies the hegemonic instability theory to live in America as she has stated in the lines above. She showed her ambiguity basically the need for romantic love with a White man and her dislike for the other person besides her real love. While this phenomenon leads to the identity crisis as she is not capable of exercising whatever she wanted, this is something that she felt about her own self-identity. She was not sure what to do and this became a reason for her identity crisis. The last line of the conversation between Ifemelu and Curt reflected the absolute dissatisfaction, anxiety, and disappointment that came due to the cultural hybridity of America. Thus, it confirms that Ifemelu struggled to maintain her identity being a black woman which was doubly colonized not only from her father and lover's perspective but also from a white American who never allowed her to be a part of his native culture.

Conclusion

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie as an Afro-American explored the history of Africa which started not precisely in slave trade but in Africa. Predominantly, by highlighting the historical legacy of racial discrimination, subjugation, and marginalization she presented the stereotypical representation of the Africans living in the Western societies. This has constructed a biased point of view about the Blacks by making them doubly colonized by the hands of the colonizers. Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie is not only the witness to this racial biasness but also of the cultural and racial differences among the African and Western people. For her, colorism is the result of Western supremacy and prejudice. Therefore, most of her characters are in a continuous struggle to search their identity in a westernized world. They are always caught between two conflicting and opposite cultures which is a 'third space' for migrants living in western society. "*Americanah*" deals with different kinds of hybridity which includes, racial, cultural, and linguistic hybridity. The protagonist of the novel_ Ifemelu suffers and struggles a lot to adopt the Western lifestyle. Consequently, America is known as a multicultural state in which many cultures inside the country spots racism. The immigrants like Ifemelu are exposed to the racism prevalent throughout America by the hands of the native people.

In the end she eventually says “Goodbye” to America and gets settled in her own native country where there is no one called black among the other “Blacks”. These racial experiences disturbed Ifemelu psychologically by making her more traumatized and a commodity in American society. She ponders that the only means to escape from all such behaviors is to hide her own personal (black) identity and become one of them (Americanized). Ultimately, to survive in a western society she lost her identity to achieve the goal to be Americanized belonging from a black community. These external situations forced her to be a racist as she started blogging against the White supremacy and dominating attitude and eventually, she made her mind to leave America. Her experiences demonstrated that racism was not at all one-sided. The sensation and depression of being hated by the host country gave birth to racism. The feeling of isolation in a foreign country, being unable to describe her own identity created a mental dilemma for Ifemelu which showed that living in two cultures pushed her into boundaries of ambiguity and identity crisis. Thus, mimicking the culture of Americans forced her to leave her own identity and become ambiguous not only in front of the Americans but also in front of herself too.

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