

**FOLKLORE AND IDENTITY IN CHIMAMANDA NGOZI ADICHIE'S *PURPLE  
HIBISCUS* AND *AMERICANAH***



**Oluwanifemi Blessing OLUSOLA (Miss)**

**ART2000239**

**DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH AND LITERATURE**

**FACULTY OF ARTS**

**UNIVERSITY OF BENIN  
BENIN CITY**

**JANUARY, 2025**

**FOLKLORE AND IDENTITY IN CHIMAMANDA NGOZI ADICHIE'S *PURPLE  
HIBISCUS AND AMERICANAH***

**BY**

**Oluwanifemi Blessing OLUSOLA (Miss)**

**ART2000239**

**AN ESSAY SUBMITTED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH AND LITERATURE,  
FACULTY OF ARTS, UNIVERSITY OF BENIN, BENIN-CITY.**

**IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE AWARD OF  
BACHELOR OF ARTS (B.A. HONS) DEGREE IN ENGLISH AND LITERATURE.**

**JANUARY, 2025.**

**CERTIFICATION**

I certify that this study was carried out by **Oluwanifemi Blessing OLUSOLA (Miss)** with Matriculation Number **ART2000239** in the Department of English and Literature, Faculty of Arts, University of Benin, Benin City.

---

**DR. ESTHER JAMGBADI**  
*(Project Supervisor)*

---

**DATE**

**DEDICATION**

This essay is dedicated to God Almighty for His support, protection, and provision. And to my Parents, Siblings and academic Counselors for all their support.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My profound gratitude goes to God Almighty, the giver of life and knowledge for His abundant grace, mercy and favour and for giving me the strength and perseverance to carry on till this difficult time.

My gratitude also goes to my supervisor, Dr. Esther Jamgbadi, who despite her busy, tight schedules read through this project work, made corrections and offered useful suggestions on the contents and finally approved it. May God bless you ma.

I want to sincerely appreciate my beloved parents, Mr. and Mrs. Olusola, for their unwavering support and constant presence in my life. Their encouragement has been invaluable, and I know they eagerly await the successful completion of my studies and the attainment of my certificate. May you both live long to enjoy the rewards of your hard work.

I also want to thank my siblings, Abigail Gbolagoke, Joshua Olusola, Gbemisola Oyelere, and Oreoluwa Olusola for their encouragement, prayers and extreme support. They have been my back bone in academics and Spiritual stability. I love you so much.

My Profound gratitude goes to all my lecturers in the English Language and Literature Department, University of Benin (UNITED), who have contributed to my journey thus far. Thank you all for the knowledge that was impacted.

Finally, I express my gratitude to my lovely friends, Aigbe Goodluck, Sylvester Igbinore, Dr Egbah Ikponwosa, Chukwudobe Michael, Agbakpan Desmond, Nwani Victoria, Osunbor Joy, Okeke Chinelo, Ilesanmi Olamide and Perpetual. Thank you all for standing by me when I needed you the most. May God reward you all.

Blessing Oluwanifemi OLUSOLA (Miss)





4.6 Conclusion - - - - - 33

**CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION**

5.1 Conclusion - - - - - 53

**Works Cited - - - - - 35**

## ABSTRACT

This paper examines the interplay of folklore and identity in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* and *Americanah*, exploring how cultural narratives, traditions, and societal norms shape personal and collective identity. The study adopts a qualitative research method, employing content analysis of the texts to evaluate how folklore serves as a vehicle for cultural preservation and self-definition. Adichie intricately weaves elements of folklore, including proverbs, customs, and oral traditions, into her narratives, illustrating the tensions between tradition and modernity, home and diaspora, as well as individual and collective identity.

In *Purple Hibiscus*, the influence of colonialism on religious and cultural identity is brought to the fore, depicting characters struggling with imposed Western ideologies and indigenous traditions. Religious fundamentalism, family dynamics, and Igbo proverbs contribute to the construction of identity and highlight the complexities of cultural inheritance. Conversely, *Americanah* presents a transnational perspective, portraying the challenges of migration, racial identity, and cultural displacement. Ifemelu's journey in America underscores the fluidity of identity as she navigates different cultural spaces, while Obinze's experience in the UK reflects the intersection of class, race, and personal aspirations.

Through an in-depth analysis of folklore and identity, this study underscores the role of storytelling in shaping perceptions of self and community. It concludes that folklore remains a powerful tool for cultural continuity, helping individuals negotiate their place within both local and global contexts. The findings advocate for a greater appreciation of indigenous knowledge systems in literary discourse, reinforcing the significance of cultural heritage in contemporary African narratives.

## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 Purpose of Study

The goal of this research is to look at how Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* and *Americanah* use folklore and identity as central themes. The research will look at how Adichie uses folklore as a narrative technique to represent cultural heritage and communal values, as well as how identity is produced, negotiated, and changed in the books' sociopolitical and diasporic contexts. It also tries to study the role of folklore in developing individual and societal identities, with a focus on issues such as tradition, migration, and self-realisation.

#### 1.2 Scope of Study

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie is regarded as one of the foremost modern African authors, known for her acclaimed books like *Half of a Yellow Sun*, *The Thing Around Your Neck*, *Purple Hibiscus* and *Americanah*. This research will be confined to a textual examination of two of her novels: *Purple Hibiscus* and *Americanah*. These two works have been chosen for their in-depth examinations of folklore and identity, which are essential for comprehending Adichie's narrative technique and thematic preoccupations. The events, characters, and cultural components illustrated in these novels are essential for understanding how folklore impacts identity development and negotiation within family, cultural, and diasporic frameworks.

### **1.3 Methodology**

The used research approach is qualitative, focusing on the analysis of original texts, *Purple Hibiscus* and *Americanah*, through consultations with primary sources, including the author's books, published pieces in academic journals, and recorded materials from libraries and reputable online sites. This method allows for a more profound analysis of the texts, including the examination of how Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie uses folklore and identity as essential topics in her works.

### **1.4 Author's Background and Works**

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie was born on September 15, 1977, in Enugu, Nigeria, and was raised in Nsukka, a university town, where her father served as a professor and her mother was the inaugural female registrar at the University of Nigeria. She is the fifth of six children in her family and spent her early years immersed in books and stories, inspired by her Igbo background and the cultural and academic milieu surrounding her. Adichie completed secondary school at the University of Nigeria Secondary School in Nsukka before briefly pursuing medicine at the University of Nigeria. She later came to the United States to study communication and political science at Drexel University in Philadelphia, eventually transferring to Eastern Connecticut State University, where she got her bachelor's degree. Adichie also holds master's degrees in creative writing from Johns Hopkins University and in African Studies from Yale University.

## Works

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie has risen as a literary superstar, winning accolades for her compelling study of African identity, history, and gender in her writings. Her notable writings include:

***Purple Hibiscus (2003)***: Adichie's debut novel, this coming-of-age story is set in post-colonial Nigeria and revolves around a young girl named Kambili, her tyrannical father, and the fight for personal independence amidst political instability.

***Half of a Yellow Sun (2006)***: A historical novel set during the Nigerian Civil War (Biafran War), it intricately recounts the lives of three protagonists as they traverse the social and political turbulence of the time.

***The Thing Around Your Neck (2009)***: This is a collection of 12 short stories that explore the topics of cultural dislocation, the immigrant experience, and the junction of African and Western identities.

***Americanah (2013)***: An internationally regarded novel that depicts the experiences of Ifemelu, a Nigerian woman navigating questions of race, identity, and immigration while living in the United States and eventually returning to Nigeria.

***We Should All Be Feminists (2014)***: Adapted from her TEDx lecture, this essay explores the necessity of gender equality and the need to confront cultural norms and expectations.

***Dear Ijeawele, or A Feminist Manifesto in Fifteen Suggestions (2017)***: Written as a letter to a friend, this essay includes advice on parenting feminist children and pushing for gender equality.

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's books have earned her several awards, including the Orange Prize for Fiction, the National Book Critics Circle Award, and recognition as one of TIME magazine's 100 most influential people in the world. Her writing continues to resonate globally, tackling universal themes through the prism of African and diasporic experiences (thriftbooks.com).

#### **1.4.1 Summary of Both Texts**

##### **Purple Hibiscus**

*Purple Hibiscus* is a coming-of-age story about Kambili Achike, a young girl growing up in a repressive, religious, and authoritarian home in postcolonial Nigeria. The novel is told from Kambili's point of view, describing her interactions with her father, Eugene Achike, a rich and authoritarian man who enforces strict discipline and religious zeal on his family. Despite his seeming piety and wealth, Eugene is violent, domineering, and harsh to his wife, Beatrice, and their two children, Kambili and Jaja. The story takes place against the backdrop of Nigeria's political upheaval, emphasising the contrast between the authoritarian household and the freedom of thought and speech found at the home of Kambili's aunt, Ifeoma. Kambili learns a new way of perceiving the world from her aunt, one that fosters inquiry, independence, and identity development. The tale follows Kambili's changing sense of self as she navigates parental expectations, social constraints, and personal goals.

The contrast of Nigerian folklore with Western' religious ideas is a prominent theme in the work. Eugene's Catholicism and rejection of Nigerian traditions (such as Igbo behaviours) are key factors in the family's troubles. The folklore inherent in the narrative—particularly the connection to nature, local traditions, and oral stories given by Kambili's aunt—serves as a counterweight to the family's disempowerment. As Kambili grows to accept her identity, the story represents a greater conflict between tradition and colonial influence.

### *Americanah*

*Americanah* follows Ifemelu, a young Nigerian lady moving to the US for further study. The story delves into her struggles with race, identity, and belonging in America, as well as the conflict between her Nigerian roots and her new life as an immigrant. Ifemelu launches a blog called "The Non-American Black," where she explores race in America as someone who has lived in both Nigeria and the United States. Ifemelu uses her blog and personal experiences to explore the difficulties of race, culture, and the journey of self-discovery. The work delves into the several types of identification that Ifemelu struggles with: her identity as a Nigerian, a Black woman in America, and a woman who must navigate the demands of both communities. It critically explores the labels and preconceptions that are applied to immigrants and individuals of African origin in the United States, as well as the often painful process of assimilating into a new society. Ifemelu's connection with Obinze, her first love from Nigeria, is particularly important in exploring identity and the complications of returning home after being affected by experiences abroad.

At its core, *Americanah* explores the issue of self-realisation in the midst of cultural exile. The story explores how location, race, and experiences affect identity as Ifemelu reflects on her life in Nigeria, her time in America, and her eventual return to her native country. Folklore plays a less prominent role in *Americanah* than it does in *Purple Hibiscus*, but it is there in the characters' relationships to their Nigerian heritage, language, and traditions. Ifemelu's ability to reconcile her American and Nigerian identities exemplifies the greater diaspora experience and the complicated interaction of personal identity and cultural heritage.

### **1.5 Theoretical Framework**

The idea of folklore has changed greatly throughout time, with researchers across disciplines adding to its theoretical understanding. This study builds upon important ideas of folklore to provide a platform for evaluating how folklore influences identification in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* and *Americanah*. Folklore, previously seen as the activities of rural and "primitive" communities, has undergone a reinterpretation in scholarly discourse. Key contributors to this process include Alan Dundes, Richard Dorson, and Archer Taylor, whose works give crucial insights into the study of folklore.

Alan Dundes described folklore as customs and expressions that evolve within any group having a common component, whether social, professional, or cultural. He maintained that folklore is not restricted to rural or illiterate populations but extends to all cultural groupings with common traditions. This approach is crucial for understanding how folklore acts as a marker of group identity in both *Purple Hibiscus* and *Americanah*, as characters juggle communal and

individual identities. Richard Dorson stressed the classification of folk items such as songs, proverbs, and myths as a technique of understanding their roles in cultural contexts. He argued for examining folklore within its modern surroundings rather than just as remains of the past. This method is crucial for evaluating the significance of folktales, myths, and oral traditions in Adichie's books, particularly in how they define the identities of her characters.

Archer Taylor described folklore as material passed down through tradition, stressing the oral and performative features of its transmission. This approach underscores the ways in which storytelling and oral traditions in *Purple Hibiscus* and *Americanah* function as conduits for cultural memory and identity preservation. Ruth Finnegan's perspective reflects a critical contemporary viewpoint in the study of folklore. She criticises prior evolutionary ideas that considered folklore as "primitive" or a relic of historical customs. In her fundamental book, *Oral Literature in Africa*, Ruth Finnegan argues that folklore should be regarded as a dynamic and creative process, founded in both collective cultural memory and individual originality. Finnegan also underlines the confluence of folklore with social and cultural settings, stating that oral literature and folk expressions are not static but develop with their communities. This approach is especially pertinent to Adichie's books, since they investigate how folklore adapts to shifting cultural landscapes, notably in the contexts of postcolonial Nigeria and the diaspora.

Finnegan underlines the significance of individual action in the formation and transmission of folklore. This is seen in *Purple Hibiscus*, where storytelling is a tool of resistance against repressive hierarchies, and in *Americanah*, where characters like Ifemelu negotiate

cultural identities through shared histories. Finnegan's work stresses that folklore serves as a reservoir of cultural values, beliefs, and behaviours. Adichie's use of folktales, proverbs, and cultural rites in both works highlights this theme, indicating how folklore strengthens links to heritage even during cultural upheaval. Ruth Finnegan's theory provides a vital framework for studying how folklore acts as both a collective cultural memory and a dynamic instrument for identity building in Adichie's books. It correlates with the study's focus on Finnegan's emphasis on the adaptive nature of folklore, which permits a nuanced examination of how Adichie's characters utilise folklore to negotiate their identities, whether inside traditional Nigerian contexts or in the diaspora.

Adichie's novels represent the struggle between cultural preservation and adaptation, an issue important to Finnegan's theory. The characters' use of folklore as a way of overcoming cultural differences agrees with Finnegan's idea that folklore is a live, dynamic activity. Finnegan attacks colonial notions that denigrate folklore as "primitive." Similarly, Adichie reclaims African myths in her novels, showing folklore as a source of strength and resilience. In conclusion, merging theories from Dundes, Dorson, Taylor, and Finnegan allows for a full analysis of folklore and its influence on identity. Finnegan's focus on innovation, cultural continuity, and the social context of folklore is particularly significant for examining how Adichie employs folklore to traverse themes of identity, belonging, and cultural heritage in *Purple Hibiscus* and *Americanah*.

## 1.6 Review of Related Scholarship

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* and *Americanah* have garnered significant scholarly attention, particularly in their exploration of folklore and identity. Critics have examined the novels from various perspectives, delving into themes of cultural heritage, identity formation, and the intersection of tradition and modernity.

Peiman Amanolahi Baharvand analyses how European colonisers leveraged cultural hegemony to justify their exploitation of colonised nations. Through the rhetoric of the "white man's burden," (44) colonisers positioned themselves as the bearers of civilization, portraying Eastern societies as primitive and in need of enlightenment. Edward Said's postcolonial critique of Orientalism further explains how authors and propagandists created distorted images of colonised peoples, persuading them that abandoning their indigenous culture and embracing Western civilisation was the only path to dignity and progress. Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* reflects these dynamics by exploring the role of British missionaries in Nigeria, who labelled Igbo traditions and religious practices as pagan and primitive. By demanding the renunciation of native culture and language, missionaries enforced cultural domination, encouraging indigenous people to convert to Christianity as the only means of salvation. This theme is central to Adichie's portrayal of Eugene Achike, who embodies the internalisation of colonial values, rejecting his Igbo heritage in favour of Western ideals. Baharvand argues that Adichie's work captures the devastating effects of this cultural brainwashing, showing how Western hegemony erodes traditional identities and creates fractures within families and communities.

Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* has been widely reviewed for its nuanced portrayal of religious and cultural dualities. "The novel demonstrates the influence of colonialism on African identities, particularly in the imposition of Western religious values at the expense of indigenous traditions," notes Nwahunanya Chinyere (68). This perspective highlights the conflict between Eugene's rigid Catholicism and the traditional Igbo spirituality represented by Aunty Ifeoma. Similarly, Eze Chidi explores how Kambili's journey toward self-awareness mirrors a broader cultural negotiation, arguing that "Adichie's narrative underscores the importance of reclaiming indigenous cultural values for identity formation." (208)

In *Americanah*, Adichie tackles the complexities of identity in a globalised world. Begum Rokeya observes that the novel "examines the racial inequalities that plague the collective consciousness of Blacks in her novel *Americanah* using a postcolonial lens to reveal the fluidity of identity."(228) This perspective underscores how characters like Ifemelu and Obinze adapt their identities in response to their diasporic experiences. Ifemelu's blog becomes a tool for articulating the realities of race and belonging in America, a point further elaborated by Oosterink Maïke, who asserts that "transnational individuals undergo unique identity transformations as they navigate the liminal spaces between cultures and nations."(10)

Adichie's use of symbolism in both novels has also drawn critical attention. Nwanyanwu Augustine discusses how *Purple Hibiscus* employs the hibiscus flower to symbolise freedom and resistance, juxtaposing the oppressive environment of Eugene's household with the liberating influence of Aunty Ifeoma's home. In *Americanah*, hair functions as a potent symbol of identity

and resistance. Emecheta Ngozi observes, “Ifemelu’s decision to embrace her natural hair represents a rejection of Eurocentric beauty standards and an affirmation of African identity.” (859)

Imagery plays a central role in Adichie’s storytelling, vividly contrasting the Nigerian and American landscapes. Okoye Nkechi notes, “Adichie’s descriptive language draws sharp distinctions between the bustling vibrancy of Nigerian markets and the sterility of American suburbs, reflecting the cultural and emotional displacement experienced by her characters.” (35) This imagery serves not only to highlight cultural differences but also to reinforce themes of belonging and alienation.

Fanon Frantz’s *Black Skin, White Masks* is used to frame the psychological dimensions of cultural domination depicted in *Purple Hibiscus*. The text explores Eugene’s alienation from his roots as emblematic of the colonial subjugation that distorts identity and creates internalised oppression. Adichie uses characters like Kambili and Jaja to reflect the consequences of these dynamics, where cultural dissonance manifests in personal and familial crises.

Peters Audrey D, in "Fatherhood and Fatherland in Chimamanda Adichie’s *Purple Hibiscus*," underscores how Eugene’s authoritarian fatherhood mirrors colonial paternalism, which prioritises control over emotional connection.

Furthermore, Adichie’s thematic preoccupations have been analysed in the context of cultural heritage and belonging. According to Amonyeze Chinenye, “Adichie’s redemptive

narrative affirms a vision of a new cultural space for Africans at home and in the Diaspora, stressing the bicultural fix of economic exiles.” (2) This perspective highlights the novels’ ability to bridge the gap between African and Western cultural identities, offering a vision of coexistence and mutual respect.

Both novels have also been critiqued for their engagement with transnationalism and the postcolonial experience. Nwosu Adaobi argues that *Americanah* addresses “the economic and political disjunctions that drive migration, portraying transculturalism as both a challenge and an opportunity for self-reinvention.” This is mirrored in *Purple Hibiscus*, where Kambili’s exposure to Auntie Ifeoma’s liberal environment enables her to question and ultimately reject the oppressive structures of her father’s household.

Further, Bhabha Homi K’s concept of cultural hybridity offers a lens through which to examine the identities in Adichie’s works. Bhabha posits that cultural identity is not fixed but emerges in the "in-between" spaces of cultural exchange and negotiation. This theory is evident in *Americanah*, where Ifemelu and Obinze grapple with their identities within the transnational spaces of Nigeria, America, and the UK. Folklore, in this context, acts as both a stabilising force and a means of adaptation.

In summary, the critical reception of Adichie’s *Purple Hibiscus* and *Americanah* underscores their significance as narratives that interrogate the intersections of folklore, identity, and cultural heritage. By weaving traditional African elements into contemporary themes, Adichie

not only preserves cultural memory but also engages readers in a broader conversation about the complexities of identity in a globalised world. It is important to note that a consolidated body of related scholarship focusing on the thematic interplay between folklore and identity in both *Purple Hibiscus* and *Americanah* remains limited. Consequently, this review analyses existing critical interpretations of each text separately, drawing from scholarly discussions on the individual works. While *Purple Hibiscus* predominantly critiques the cultural impositions of colonialism and examines the role of folklore in preserving African traditions, *Americanah* offers a nuanced exploration of diasporic identity and the negotiation of cultural belonging in transnational spaces. This separation allows for a more precise exploration of the distinct thematic contributions of each novel, while highlighting their shared relevance to the discourse on folklore and identity.

### **1.7 Thesis Statement**

This research demonstrates the role of folklore in shaping identity in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* and *Americanah*; shows how cultural narratives and traditions impact both personal and collective identities and their implications for comprehending selfhood within African and diasporic contexts.

## CHAPTER TWO

### ELEMENTS OF FOLKLORE IN CHIMAMANDA NGOZI ADICHIE'S *PURPLE*

#### *HIBISCUS AND AMERICANAH*

##### 2.1 Introduction

Folklore serves as an important tool for preserving cultural past, expressing social values, and building identity. In Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's novels *Purple Hibiscus* and *Americanah*, folklore is delicately weaved into the storylines, demonstrating the relationship between tradition, modernisation, and identity building. Adichie's engaging writings capture the heart of Nigerian culture while also tackling wider issues like migration, racism, and personal growth. This chapter focuses on the folkloric elements included in these two pieces. It looks at how Adichie uses old proverbs, oral storytelling, myths, and cultural symbols to enrich her stories and ground her characters' identities in their socio-cultural environments. By assessing the thematic relevance and narrative goals of these folkloric components, the chapter hopes to highlight their importance in addressing universal issues such as identity, belonging, and the tensions between the past and the present. Traditional beliefs, proverbs, oral histories, and cultural practices are among the topics explored, all of which are essential for understanding the complicated fabric of folklore and identity in Adichie's works.

## 2.2 Proverbs in *Purple Hibiscus* and *Americanah*

### Proverbs in *Purple Hibiscus*

1. “...Ifukwa gi! You are like a fly blindly following a corpse into the grave!...” (78)

**Significance:** This proverb warns against stubbornness and blind loyalty, particularly when it leads to destruction. It is often used to caution individuals who refuse to heed advice and continue on a dangerous or unwise path. In *Purple Hibiscus*, it reflects how characters like Kambili and Jaja navigate their father’s oppressive rule, and how resistance or compliance can lead to different consequences.

2. “When a house is on fire, you run out before the roof collapses on your head.” (219)

**Significance:** This proverb emphasizes self-preservation and the need to escape dangerous or unsustainable situations before they become fatal. In *Purple Hibiscus*, it can symbolize the necessity of leaving a toxic environment, such as Kambili and Jaja’s decision to distance themselves from their abusive father. More broadly, it signifies survival instincts in times of crisis.

3. “Our people say that after aku flies, it will still fall to the toad.” (226)

**Significance:** This proverb speaks to fate, inevitability, and consequences. It suggests that no matter how high one rises, they will ultimately face the realities of their actions. This could relate to themes in *Purple Hibiscus*, where characters seek success or freedom but are ultimately shaped by their origins and past experiences.

4. “It is like telling a crawling baby who tries to walk, and then falls back on his buttocks, to stay there.” (305)

**Significance:** This proverb conveys the importance of perseverance and growth. It criticizes those who discourage progress and suggests that failure is a natural part of learning and developing.

### **Proverbs in *Americanah***

1. “...*Ama m atu inu.*” (65)

Translation: A frog does not run in the afternoon for nothing.”

Significance: This proverb suggests that there is usually a reason behind actions, even those that seem insignificant or spontaneous. It implies that one should be cautious, as seemingly trivial actions might be driven by hidden motives or needs.

2. “...*Akota ife ka ubi, e lee oba...*” (65)

Translation: If something bigger than the farm is dug up, the barn is sold.”

Significance: This proverb conveys the idea that when a problem or situation exceeds one’s capacity to handle it, they may need to sacrifice something important or make significant adjustments to cope. It highlights the need for pragmatism and flexibility when dealing with challenges.

3. “...*Acho afii adi ako n’akpa dibia...*” (65)

Translation: The medicine man’s bag has all kinds of things.”

Significance: This proverb reflects the idea that a skilled individual (like a medicine man or expert) is well-prepared for various challenges, possessing the knowledge or tools to address

different situations. It emphasizes the value of versatility and expertise in problem-solving.

4. “...*£gbuo dike nogu uno, e luo na ogu agu, e lote ya..*” (65)

Translation: If you kill a warrior in a local fight, you’ll remember him when fighting enemies..”

Significance: This proverb suggests the importance of taking care of one’s own people and highlights that every individual plays a crucial role, particularly when faced with larger external responsibilities. In times of external conflict or when confronting larger issues, the strength, support, and contributions of the people within one’s own sphere become vital.

### **Observations**

Adichie uses these proverbs to root her narratives in Igbo culture and tradition, provide moral and philosophical commentary on the characters’ dilemmas, and bridge traditional and contemporary experiences, emphasising how folklore and oral traditions shape identity.

### **2.3 Taboos and Customs in *Purple Hibiscus* and *Americanah***

In both *Purple Hibiscus* and *Americanah*, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie explores the taboos and conventions that form the characters' lives and identities. These rituals represent the junction of tradition and modernity, emphasizing the cultural challenges that individuals confront when negotiating indigenous behaviors and Western norms. Adichie utilises these conventions and taboos to examine bigger topics like society expectations, personal freedom, and the implications of defying or following tradition.

### **Taboos and Customs in *Purple Hibiscus*.**

In *Purple Hibiscus*, the heroine, Kambili Achike, is raised in a strict Catholic family led by her father, Eugene. His understanding of Christian teaching causes him to reject traditional Igbo rituals, causing conflict within the family and influencing Kambili's identity formation. The narrative depicts Eugene's severe imposition of religious views, which is directly opposed to the customs and rituals of their Igbo ancestry, causing psychological and emotional distress for his children.

#### **1. Rejection of traditional Igbo practices**

“...I cannot participate in a pagan funeral, but we can discuss with the  
parish priest and arrange a Catholic funeral...” (195)

Eugene's conviction about Catholicism leads him to criticize Igbo rituals, particularly those related to ancestral worship. He considers these activities heathen and evil and refuses to participate in significant cultural rites such as ancestor prayers or celebrations. This rejection of Igbo norms, however, results in a profound sense of alienation from the cultural roots that may have anchored Kambili and her brother Jaja. Their emotional and psychological distress can be attributed to living in a home that rejects their ethnic identity's conventions in favour of Western religious practices.

## 2. Family Authority and Gender Roles.

“...Nwunye m, will you not come with us?”

Mama shook her head. “You know Eugene likes me to stay  
around...” (88)

Eugene's dictatorial control over his wife, Beatrice, and children is a long-standing Achike family taboo. Eugene maintains a rigid hierarchical order inside the home, emphasising respect and obedience. This habit, which is based in both colonial and patriarchal influences, restricts the agency of family members, particularly women. The norm of unquestioning loyalty to a father figure, reinforced by physical aggression, fosters a poisonous environment in which quiet and suppression are expected. Kambili, in particular, is encouraged to be quiet and obedient, reflecting the taboo of challenging patriarchal authority.

## 3. Religious Practices and Cultural Identity

“Eugene, let the children come out with us!” Aunty Ifeoma  
sounded irritated; her voice was slightly raised. “Is it not  
Christmas that we are celebrating, eh? The children have never  
really spent time with one another. *Imakwa*, my little one,  
Chima, does not even know Kambili’s name...” (85)

In *Purple Hibiscus*, there is also a taboo against mixing religious beliefs with cultural identity. While Eugene believes that Catholicism is the only real faith, his sister, Aunt Ifeoma, takes a more holistic approach to religion and society. In contrast, Ifeoma's home creates an

environment in which traditional Igbo beliefs coexist with Catholicism, allowing her children to freely practice cultural practices, such as participating in annual Igbo ceremonies. This cultural permissiveness contrasts sharply with Eugene's authoritarian posture, and his rejection of such traditions exemplifies the dichotomy between adhering to rigorous, exterior religious procedures and preserving cultural history.

### **Taboos and Customs of *Americanah***

In *Americanah*, the focus turns from rituals and taboos to Ifemelu's cultural experiences as she migrates to America and reflects on her Nigerian origin. The story looks at how Ifemelu navigates questions of race, identity, and belonging while coping with the conventions and taboos of both her Nigerian background and the American culture she joins.

#### **1. Social Class and Marriage. Taboos**

In Nigeria, socioeconomic status heavily influences relationships and marriage expectations. Ifemelu and Obinze's friendship is initially inspired by their shared experiences and goals, but social class factors soon place constraints on their partnership.

“...I worry that she will end up like many women in Lagos who define their lives by men they can never truly have, crippled by their culture of dependence, with desperation in their eyes and designer handbags on their wrists...” (457)

The taboo against inter-class marriages, particularly among people from diverse socioeconomic origins, becomes a source of dispute. This is notably visible in Obinze's mother's

attitude toward Ifemelu, who questions her appropriateness as a mate for her son because of her perceived lesser social position. This reflects Nigerian society's strong social hierarchies and the belief that marriage should be a union between people of equal social status.

## **2. Race and Identity in America.**

Ifemelu challenges a key taboo in *Americanah*: the difficult question of race in America. Ifemelu, a Nigerian immigrant, first struggles with America's cultural and racial barriers. The norms surrounding race in America, particularly the binary categorization of blacks and whites, are unfamiliar to her, and she frequently feels alienated by these racial notions.

“...Dear Non-American Black, when you make the choice to come to America, you become black. Stop arguing. Stop saying I’m Jamaican or I’m Ghanaian. America doesn’t care. So what if you weren’t “black” in your country? You’re in America now...”

(236)

As Ifemelu becomes increasingly aware of race-related taboos in the United States, such as the assumption that African immigrants adhere to clichés about Black identity, she begins to question her own definition of race. She starts a blog to express her feelings and question these taboos, providing a platform for her to reflect on her changing identity and criticize the intricacies of race relations in America.

### 3. Gender Expectations in Nigerian and American Contexts.

In both Nigeria and America, there are important norms and taboos that govern how women are supposed to act.

“...A girl in Nigeria will never wear that kind of dress,” Bartholomew said. “Look at that. This country has no moral compass...” (123)

In Nigeria, conventional gender norms frequently limit women's liberty, particularly in areas of marriage and profession.

“...He’s not bad. He has a good job/’ She paused. “I’m not getting any younger. I want Dike to have a brother or a sister...”(125)

Ifemelu's aunt, for example, wants her to marry a guy of comparable or greater socioeconomic status, following traditional conventions that govern women's duties in the family and community. In contrast, Ifemelu's experience in America calls into question these long-held assumptions. Ifemelu is exposed to a distinct set of gender norms in the United States, where she has greater freedom to make her own decisions, such as staying single or putting her profession ahead of marriage. This move highlights the contrast between Nigerian society's stringent gender expectations and the more flexible, yet still difficult, gender roles in America.

### 4. Cultural expectations and the meaning of "home"

“...Malt! I’m going to drink all the malt in Nigeria. I used to buy it from a Hispanic supermarket in Baltimore, but it was not the same thing...” (419)

*Americanah* revolves around the concept of "home" and the practices that define it. Ifemelu comes to Nigeria after years in America and tries to reconcile her changed identity with Nigerian society's expectations. Ifemelu's internal turmoil stems from the taboo of abandoning one's own nation as well as societal pressure to comply with conventional beliefs. She finds herself in a situation in which she no longer truly belongs in Nigeria, but she also feels disconnected from American society. This contradiction is important to the narrative, as Ifemelu navigates both nations' norms, seeking a sense of belonging that transcends physical and cultural bounds.

## **2.4 Conclusion**

In Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* and *Americanah*, the usage of taboos, rituals, and Igbo proverbs establishes a substantial cultural framework that influences the narratives and supports the core themes of identity, belonging, and resilience. Adichie used folklore to describe the immense tapestry of Igbo culture, demonstrating its wisdom, morals, and societal structures. The taboos and customs shown in these works reflect the cultural standards that govern behaviour and interpersonal relationships in Igbo society. In *Purple Hibiscus*, authoritarian figures like Papa Eugene rigidly enforce taboos such as disobedience and rebellion, which contrast with traditions like respect for elders, communal feasts, and ancient ceremonies. Similarly, *Americanah* portrays how traditions endure and evolve in expatriate communities, frequently clashing with Western individualism. These cultural components demonstrate how

traditional customs influence individuals' identities, attitudes, and conflicts, both locally and globally.

The Igbo proverbs interwoven into the narratives act as a repository of ancestral wisdom, exhibiting Igbo philosophy and moral counsel. Characters in *Purple Hibiscus* commonly use proverbs to instruct or condemn behaviour and express opinions on topics such as unity, respect, and perseverance. In *Americanah*, proverbs are utilised to bridge cultural barriers and anchor Ifemelu's identity, especially in the face of displacement and racial challenges in the United States. Adichie's skilled use of folkloric themes enhances her story while also emphasising the significance of cultural heritage in shaping individuals' and group identities. By combining Igbo proverbs, taboos, and rituals into her works, she paints a realistic picture of the challenges of navigating traditional and modern worlds. Finally, Adichie's books defend the preservation of cultural identity while advocating for its evolution in a globalised world, providing readers with a deeper understanding of the Igbo legacy and its continued significance.

## CHAPTER THREE

### ASPECTS OF IDENTITY

#### 3.1 Introduction

In Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* and *Americanah*, identity shapes the stories and character development via major focus. Adichie explores how people negotiate their sense of self among the influences of family, society, and the global setting by means of the investigation of religion, culture, and country. These characteristics are intertwined with the characters' travels, mirroring the greater conversation on personal and collective identity throughout postcolonial African literature. Through the investigation of religion, culture, and nationality, Adichie depicts identity as a fluid and diverse notion. Her characters depict the hardships and perseverance of individuals attempting to identify themselves in a world where tradition and modernity sometimes conflict. This thematic focus not only underscores the obstacles to self-discovery but also highlights the lasting importance of African ancestry in identity creation.

#### 3.2 Religion

Religion plays a significant part in the development of identity in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* and *Americanah*, functioning as both a personal and social marker. Through her characters and tales, Adichie exposes the tension between conventional beliefs and imported faiths, exploring how these tensions form identity and impact relationships. In *Purple Hibiscus*, religion is strongly embedded in the life of the Achike family. Eugene Achike

symbolizes the dogmatic and often harsh aspects of Christianity, considering Catholicism the ultimate truth while rejecting the ancient Igbo mysticism taught by his father, Papa Nnukwu. This rejection illustrates the postcolonial change in religious identity, as indigenous beliefs are suppressed in favour of Western faiths established after colonialism. The need to adhere to Catholic teaching produces conflict within the family, especially for Kambili and Jaja, whose sense of self is stifled under their father's authoritarian interpretation of faith.

“...Nne, we have finished praying. We do not say Mass in the name of grace like your father does....” (127)

Kambili's eventual exposure to various ideas, such as the freedom of religion in Auntie Ifeoma's family, begins her path toward reinventing her identity beyond the bounds of her father's stringent religious norms.

In contrast, *Americanah* discusses religion in a more complex and global perspective, reflecting its effect on African immigrants navigating life in distant places. Ifemelu's experiences demonstrate how religion can act as both a connection to one's heritage and a source of estrangement.

“...I am saved,” she said. “Mrs Ojo ministered to me this afternoon during the children's break and I received Christ. Old things have passed away and all things have become new. Praise God. On Sunday we will start going to Revival Saints. It is a Bible-believing church and a living church, not like St Dominic's...” (44)

While religion does not take center stage in Ifemelu's life, her observations of others, such as the ardent devotion of Nigerian immigrants in America, demonstrate its significance in bringing consolation and a sense of belonging in a strange setting. For Obinze, the concept of morality related to religious ideals is revisited throughout his tribulations as an illegal immigrant in England, where he experiences the confrontation between personal ethics and survival requirements. In both works, Adichie uses religion to reflect larger socioeconomic concerns. In *Purple Hibiscus*, the representation of religious identity highlights the influence of colonialism on indigenous cultures and the complications of negotiating faith in a postcolonial Nigeria. In *Americanah*, religion combines with issues of immigration and cultural displacement, stressing its significance in defining the identities of Africans in the diaspora.

Adichie's examination of religion in these novels highlights its dual nature: as a force for unification and moral foundation and as a source of separation and control. The characters' experiences represent the continual struggle of religious identity in a modern environment where traditional beliefs and contemporary influences coexist and frequently conflict.

### **3.3 Culture**

In *Purple Hibiscus* and *Americanah*, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie employs cultural identification as a primary topic to depict the problems of people negotiating the intersections of traditional beliefs, modernity, and global influences. Through her detailed representation of Igbo culture and the experiences of her characters, Adichie analyses the impact of cultural displacement, assimilation, and preservation on individual and community identity. In *Purple*

*Hibiscus*, cultural identity is heavily established in Igbo customs and the legacy of colonial history. Eugene Achike's rejection of Igbo cultural traditions, such as his hatred for his father, Papa Nnukwu's traditional spirituality, demonstrates the influence of colonialism on eradicating indigenous rituals. Eugene's acceptance of Western principles and Catholicism leads to a detachment from his cultural heritage, which he imposes on his family. In contrast, Auntie Ifeoma and her children symbolise a mix between tradition and modernity, embracing their Igbo ancestry while simultaneously opposing repressive systems.

“...He did things the right way, the way the white people did, not  
what our people do now!...” (76)

This difference emphasises the difficulty between conserving traditional identities and conforming to current ideals. Kambili and Jaja's journey portrays their attempt to balance these contradictory pressures, ultimately guiding them toward a more real sense of self.

“...Your Papa-Nnukwu is not a pagan, Kambili, he is a traditionalist,”  
Aunty Ifeoma said....(89)

In *Americanah*, cultural identity is studied through the prism of immigration and the experiences of African diasporic groups. Ifemelu's relocation to America exposes her to a new cultural scene, causing her to ponder her Nigerian identity.

“...You must nod back when a black person nods at you in a heavily white area. It is called the black nod. It is a way for black people to say “You are not alone, I am here too...” (232)

Her blog, *The Non-American Black*, provides a forum to discuss the cultural demands put on immigrants and the prejudices experienced by Africans in the West. Ifemelu’s findings demonstrate how cultural identity is both flexible and disputed, formed by the need to negotiate a foreign society while keeping a connection to one’s roots. Adichie also addresses cultural hybridity via Obinze’s experiences in England, where he battles the constraints of assimilation and the desire for home. The cuisine, language, and rituals that tie him to Nigeria become symbols of cultural identification in a strange environment, underlining the struggle between belonging and alienation. Similarly, Ifemelu’s return to Nigeria is marked by a reconsideration of her cultural identity as she navigates the changes in her birthplace and the detachment that comes from her time abroad.

In both works, Adichie explores cultural identification to demonstrate the endurance of African traditions under external influences and the hardships of cultural exile. *Purple Hibiscus* concentrates on the internal complexities of a family managing the legacy of colonialism, while *Americanah* broadens the perspective to encompass the worldwide relationships of African immigrants. Through these vignettes, Adichie highlights the importance of cultural identification in shaping the lives and perspectives of her characters, offering a deep reflection on the complexity of modern African identity.

### 3.4 Nationality

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie addresses the issue of nationality in *Purple Hibiscus* and *Americanah*, delving into how national identity impacts her characters' experiences, perceptions, and sense of belonging. Both works investigate the meaning of being Nigerian and the conflict between pride in one's nation and the disappointment that results from its socio-political issues. In *Purple Hibiscus*, national identity is inextricably related to Nigeria's political instability and its influence on everyday life.

“...The next day, more guests came during dinner. And even more the day after. They all told Papa to be careful. Stop going to work in your official car. Don't go to public places. Remember the bomb blast at the airport when a civil rights lawyer was travelling. Remember the one at the stadium during the prodemocracy meeting. Lock your doors. Remember the man shot in his bedroom by men wearing black masks...”(207-208)

The backdrop of military tyranny, corruption, and persecution affects the Achike family and symbolises the difficulties facing the Nigerian public. Eugene Achike, while critical of the country's governmental failures, symbolises a colonial-influenced national identity that prioritises Western values above indigenous customs. His rejection of indigenous beliefs and his emphasis on orthodox Catholicism indicate the lasting consequences of colonialism on Nigeria's post-independence identity.

In contrast, Aunty Ifeoma reflects a more balanced stance on national identity. She challenges the shortcomings of the Nigerian administration while maintaining links to the country's cultural origins and calling for progressive change. Her ability to handle the reality of Nigeria without losing confidence in its future illustrates a subtle and positive facet of national identity. For Kambili and Jaja, their perception of Nigeria's national identity grows as they see the contrasts between their father's authoritarian worldview and their aunt's liberal, community-orientated outlook. In *Americanah*, nationality takes center stage via the stories of Nigerian immigrants traversing alien surroundings.

“...EACH HEAT WAVE reminded Ifemelu of her first, the summer she arrived. It was summer in America, she knew this, but all her life she had thought of “overseas” as a cold place of wool coats and snow, and because America was “overseas”, and her illusions so strong they could mild not be fended off by reason, she bought the thickest sweater she could find in Tejuosho market for her trip...” (110-111)

Ifemelu's move to America introduces her to the notion of nationality as a defining marker in a globalised society. She highlights how Nigerians are typically placed under the broad and monolithic category of "African," eliminating the intricacies of distinct national identities. Ifemelu's blog, *The Non-American Black*, examines this generalisation and investigates the

problems of reconciling one's Nigerian origin with the preconceptions and expectations of being Black in America.

Obinze's experience in England further underscores the challenges of national identification for Nigerian immigrants. His unauthorised status and encounters with a system that considers him as an alien underline the precariousness of national belonging in a foreign country. Obinze's love for Nigeria, despite its imperfections, demonstrates the ongoing connection many immigrants have to their motherland.

Both works also discuss the pride and disillusionment associated with being Nigerian. Ifemelu's return to Nigeria in *Americanah* is distinguished by her effort to reconcile her diasporic experiences with the reality of life back home. Her opinions regarding the country's growth and continuous issues represent the duality of national identity, a blend of love, frustration, and optimism.

Adichie's investigation of nationality in these books illustrates the varied character of identity as influenced by one's origin, its culture, and its role in the global environment. *Purple Hibiscus* concentrates on the internal battles within Nigeria, whereas *Americanah* broadens the scope to encompass the diasporic experience, revealing how national identification is both an anchor and a cause of tension for her characters. Through these narratives, Adichie presents nationality as a dynamic and evolving component of identity, highly impacted by personal experiences and external views.

### 3.5 Conclusion

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* and *Americanah* give a comprehensive investigation of identity through the lenses of religion, culture, and ethnicity. Adichie explains how these qualities are crucial to building individual and societal identities, frequently functioning as sources of both connection and conflict. In terms of religion, the books illustrate its contradictory function in bringing consolation and promoting divisiveness. *Purple Hibiscus* powerfully illustrates the rigorous, dogmatic attitude of Eugene Achike, which contrasts with Aunty Ifeoma's more open and inclusive spirituality. This disagreement demonstrates how religious identification may either enrich or hinder personal growth and relationships. Similarly, *Americanah* quietly analyses how religion intersects with diaspora experiences, as faith may serve as both a haven and a cause of friction.

Cultural identity emerges as a prominent issue in both works, notably in the interplay between traditional Igbo rituals and Western influences. Adichie blends Igbo proverbs, folklore, and customs throughout the storylines, conserving a cultural legacy that is frequently neglected in global debate. The struggle between embracing traditional values and adjusting to modernity underlines the fluid nature of cultural identity, as demonstrated in the characters' navigation of personal and societal expectations. Nationality is represented as a dynamic and often difficult part of identity. In *Purple Hibiscus*, the socio-political realities of Nigeria impact the characters' feelings of belonging and their vision of the nation's future. *Americanah*, on the other hand, broadens this perspective to encompass the diaspora experience, looking into how Nigerian

immigrants manage their national identity in distant nations. Ifemelu and Obinze's adventures illustrate the complexity of pride, disillusionment, and desire involved with being Nigerian in a globalised society.

Adichie's investigation of identity in religion, culture, and nationality underlines the interconnection of these factors. Together, they form the characters' conceptions of themselves and their interactions with others. By showing identity as a fluid and developing construct, Adichie asks readers to think about their own beliefs, customs, and feelings of belonging in a quickly changing world. Her works highlight the durability and adaptation of individuals and communities while simultaneously challenging the forces that threaten to fracture or weaken these identities. Ultimately, *Purple Hibiscus* and *Americanah* embrace the depth and complexity of identity in its various manifestations.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### LITERARY DEVICES AND THEMATIC PREOCCUPATIONS

#### 4.1 Introduction

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* and *Americanah* are acclaimed masterpieces of modern African literature that dive deeply into themes of identity, cultural legacy, and belonging, heightened by Adichie's brilliant use of literary tropes. Through her vivid storytelling, Adichie intertwines the personal and political, weaving scenarios that explore the complicated ties between tradition and modernity, individuality and community, and country and diaspora. The literary elements she employs, such as symbolism and imagery, serve as strong tools to depict the challenges and successes of her characters as they negotiate the diverse terrain of identity construction and negotiation. Through her skilled use of literary methods and her concentration on identity and cultural history, Adichie weaves novels that are both intensely personal and profoundly universal. Her paintings urge readers to think about their own identities, their links to cultural heritage, and the developing landscape of belonging in an interconnected world.

#### 4.2 Symbolism (e.g., Hibiscus Flower, Hair)

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* and *Americanah* utilise symbolism as a potent literary method to develop the storylines and convey the complicated themes of identity, independence, and cultural heritage. Through important symbols, Adichie addresses the emotional

and cultural problems of her characters, allowing readers a comprehensive picture of their experiences.

### **Symbolism in *Purple Hibiscus***

#### **1. The *Purple Hibiscus* Flower**

*Significance:* The iconic *Purple Hibiscus* is a symbol of freedom, resistance, and individualism. Unlike the red hibiscus in Aunty Ifeoma's garden, which depicts ordinary life, the *Purple Hibiscus* is unusual and unorthodox, expressing the hopes of Kambili and Jaja to break away from the harsh influence of their father, Eugene.

*Thematic Connection:* The flower reflects the blossoming of Kambili and Jaja's individuality as they learn to establish their independence and reject the confining expectations set by familial and social conventions.

#### **2. Red Hibiscus and Aunty Ifeoma's Garden**

*Significance:* The red hibiscus reflects the harsh, traditional existence enforced by Papa Eugene. Its vibrancy in Aunty Ifeoma's garden juxtaposes the stuffy environment of Eugene's house, illustrating the idea of clashing philosophies.

*Thematic Connection:* The flowers in Ifeoma's garden indicate hope and perseverance, allowing Kambili and Jaja a vision of a life unshackled from Eugene's tyranny and inspiring their ultimate metamorphosis.

### 3. Papa Eugene's Figurines

*Significance:* The figurines depict the frail and repressive framework of Eugene's rule. They are painstakingly cared for by Kambili's mother, Beatrice, illustrating her attempts to preserve peace and order in the family despite Eugene's autocratic control.

*Thematic Connection:* Their final destruction signals a turning point in the story, symbolising the disintegration of Eugene's control and Beatrice's ultimate act of resistance.

#### **Palm Wine**

*Significance:* Palm wine with *Purple Hibiscus* serves as a symbol of history and community. His absence in Papa Eugene's life highlights his rejection of indigenous customs in favor of his rigorous, Western-influenced Catholicism.

*Thematic Connection:* This sign symbolises the contrast between modernity and tradition, a frequent topic in the story as people try to balance their cultural roots with external influences.

### **Symbolism in *Americanah***

#### **1. Ifemelu's Natural Hair**

*Significance:* Ifemelu's natural hair becomes a powerful emblem of identity and resistance. Her choice to quit straightening her hair and embrace its natural curls shows her rejection of mainstream beauty standards and the racial stereotypes that devalue Black identity.

*Thematic Connection:* The symbolism of hair links into the greater issue of self-acceptance and cultural pride, as Ifemelu learns to proclaim her identity fearlessly in a culture that often marginalises it.

## **2. Hair Straightening**

*Significance:* The act of straightening hair symbolises uniformity and the repression of cultural individuality. Ifemelu's choice to straighten her hair when hunting for employment in America demonstrates the pressure to adapt to a mostly white culture.

*Thematic Connection:* This serves as a criticism of the sacrifices immigrants typically make to manage racial and cultural expectations, highlighting issues of identity negotiation and racial politics.

## **3. Obinze's Wedding Band *Significance:***

Obinze's wedding band symbolises the restrictions of society's expectations and personal sacrifices. His marriage, which lacks deep emotional connection, demonstrates the concessions individuals often make to comply with society's demands.

*Thematic Connection:* This symbology highlights issues of identity negotiation and the yearning for honesty in intimate relationships.

## **4. Aunty Uju's House in America**

*Significance:* The home serves as a metaphor of change and adaptation. Its humble, occasionally chaotic state represents the hardships and compromises Aunty Uju endures as she navigates life in America, away from her affluent existence in Nigeria. *Thematic Connection:* The home underlines issues of displacement, survival, and the difficulty between keeping cultural origins and adjusting to a new environment.

## **5. *Americanah* Blog Entries**

*Significance:* Ifemelu's blog entries serve as a representation of voice and agency. Through her blog, she examines race relations, immigrant experiences, and cultural identity, establishing her position as an African immigrant in America.

*Thematic Connection:* The blog postings underline the idea of storytelling as a way of identity creation and cultural critique, bringing insights into the problems and achievements of traversing international environments.

Adichie's use of symbolism in both *Purple Hibiscus* and *Americanah* enhances the storylines, allowing the tangible things and components to mirror the inner lives and conflicts of her characters. These symbols delicately tie together themes of identity, freedom, and belonging, making them vital to comprehending the profundity of Adichie's books.

### **4.3 Imagery (e.g., Nigerian vs. American Landscapes)**

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie employs vivid and evocative imagery in *Purple Hibiscus* and *Americanah* to immerse readers in the emotional and cultural landscapes of her characters. By painting rich visual and sensory details, she brings to life the contrasts between different environments, emotions, and cultural contexts, enhancing the themes of identity, belonging, and transformation.

## **Imagery in *Purple Hibiscus***

### **1. Religious and Oppressive Atmosphere in Eugene's Home**

*Description:* Adichie uses stark and cold imagery to depict the rigid and authoritarian atmosphere of Eugene's home. The silence is described as "heavy with expectation," and the environment feels sterile, mirroring the suffocating control Eugene exerts over his family.

*Thematic Connection:* This imagery underscores themes of oppression, control, and the stifling effects of authoritarian rule on individuality and freedom.

### **2. Nigeria: A Land of Contrasts**

*Description:* Adichie paints a vibrant picture of Nigeria, from the chaotic streets of Enugu filled with "honking cars and the acrid smell of exhaust fumes" to the serene and dusty roads of Nsukka lined with palm trees and bursts of hibiscus flowers.

*Thematic Connection:* These contrasting depictions reflect the duality of life in Nigeria—its beauty and vibrancy alongside its struggles with disorder and systemic challenges. The imagery resonates with the characters' emotional states, particularly Kambili's journey from repression to freedom.

### **3. Aunty Ifeoma's Nsukka**

*Description:* The idyllic imagery of Nsukka, with its lush gardens, birdsong, and open skies, contrasts sharply with the sterile, oppressive atmosphere of Eugene's home in Enugu. The warm, inviting environment reflects Aunty Ifeoma's free-spirited nature and serves as a sanctuary for Kambili and Jaja.

*Thematic Connection:* This imagery symbolises hope, resilience, and the possibility of alternative ways of living outside authority.

#### **4. Aunty Ifeoma's Vibrant and Open Household**

*Description:* The contrasting imagery of Aunty Ifeoma's home is filled with laughter, open windows, and the scent of cooking, creating a lively and nurturing atmosphere. The descriptions of her garden, with its vibrant *Purple Hibiscus* flowers, offer a sharp contrast to Eugene's rigid household.

*Thematic Connection:* This imagery highlights themes of freedom, resilience, and alternative ways of living that celebrate individuality and communal warmth.

#### **5. Natural and Cultural Landscapes**

*Description:* Adichie describes Nigeria's landscapes with rich detail, from the bustling markets to the quiet, dusty village roads. The red earth, swaying palm trees, and bright, sunlit days immerse the reader in the sensory experience of Nigeria.

*Thematic Connection:* These vivid descriptions emphasise the cultural richness and identity tied to the Nigerian setting, celebrating its beauty even amid challenges.

### **Imagery in *Americanah***

#### **1. Nigeria: Sensory Overload**

*Description:* Adichie captures Nigeria's bustling energy with imagery rich in sensory detail. Lagos streets are described as "alive with the hum of activity, the chatter of vendors, and the

aroma of suya and roasted plantains." The environment is chaotic yet deeply familiar and comforting to Ifemelu and Obinze.

*Thematic Connection:* This vibrant depiction of Nigeria embodies cultural richness and a deep sense of belonging, even amid the nation's socioeconomic challenges.

## **2. America: Sterility and Alienation**

*Description:* Adichie contrasts Nigeria's vibrancy with America's cold, sterile environments. American suburbs are depicted with "rows of identical houses, their driveways lined with cars," and cities are described as "clean, orderly, but devoid of the human chaos that makes life rich."

*Thematic Connection:* This imagery reflects Ifemelu's initial alienation and disconnection in America. The orderly, yet impersonal landscapes emphasise her struggles with cultural displacement and identity negotiation.

## **3. Contrasting Landscapes: Nigeria vs. America**

*Description:* Adichie contrasts the bustling, colourful streets of Lagos with the cold, clinical suburbs of America. In Nigeria, the air is described as "thick with humidity and the smells of diesel and roasted plantains," while America is portrayed with "snow-blanketed streets" and sterile, uniform neighbourhoods.

*Thematic Connection:* This contrast in imagery reflects the dislocation and identity challenges faced by Ifemelu and other immigrants, highlighting the cultural divide between home and abroad.

#### **4. Hair Salons as Cultural Spaces**

*Description:* The imagery of the African hair salon in America is rich with details, from the chatter of women to the smell of hair products and the rhythmic sound of braiding. It serves as a microcosm of African culture in the diaspora.

*Thematic Connection:* The detailed depiction of this space underscores themes of cultural preservation and belonging, as it becomes a haven for Ifemelu and others to reconnect with their roots.

#### **5. Racial and Social Experiences**

*Description:* Adichie uses powerful imagery to convey the alienation and microaggressions Ifemelu experiences in America. The stares, the hesitation in interactions, and the coldness of the societal environment are vividly portrayed, immersing readers in her struggles.

*Thematic Connection:* This imagery amplifies the themes of racism, identity negotiation, and the emotional toll of being an immigrant in a predominantly white society.

#### **6. Obinze's Immigration Journey**

*Description:* The bleak and suffocating imagery of Obinze's life as an undocumented immigrant in England is striking. The cramped living conditions, the fear of deportation, and the constant feeling of being watched are all vividly described.

*Thematic Connection:* These details emphasise themes of displacement, survival, and the dehumanising effects of immigration policies.

Through her use of imagery, Adichie creates a compelling sense of place and emotion, drawing readers into the lives of her characters. This literary device reinforces the themes of cultural identity, belonging, and the challenges of navigating different social and personal landscapes.

#### **4.4 Theme: Identity Formation and Negotiation**

In Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* and *Americanah*, the issue of identity formation and negotiation is important to the tales. Both works address the multiple processes by which individuals traverse personal, cultural, and societal forces to define who they are. Through engaging people and their experiences, Adichie delves into the complexity of self-discovery, adaptation, and the challenges that occur in reconciling several identities.

#### **Identity Formation and Negotiation in *Purple Hibiscus***

##### **1. Kambili's Journey to Self-Discovery**

*Context:* Kambili's identity is originally created by her father, Eugene, whose authoritarian control limits her voice and sense of self.

*Narrative Device:* Adichie utilises Kambili's internal monologue and her metamorphosis throughout her time at Aunty Ifeoma's house to demonstrate her progressive enlightenment.

*Thematic Connection:* The subject of identity development is obvious in Kambili's movement from obedience and terror to self-awareness and perseverance, representing the struggles of breaking free from repressive systems.

## **2. Jaja's Defiance as Identity Assertion**

*Context:* Jaja's unwillingness to attend communion and his subsequent revolt against Eugene's authority indicate his assertion of an individual identity.

*Narrative Device:* Symbolism, such as the *Purple Hibiscus* flower, highlights Jaja's maturation and newfound bravery to question familial and cultural norms.

*Thematic Connection:* Adichie underlines the importance of resistance in identity negotiation, indicating that change frequently means addressing deeply rooted conventions.

## **3. Religious Identity and Conflict**

*Context:* The contrast between Eugene's rigid Catholicism and Auntie Ifeoma's more liberal approach exposes Kambili and Jaja to various methods of experiencing faith.

*Narrative Device:* Contrasting images and speech illustrate the conflict between rigid and flexible views of religion.

*Thematic Connection:* This dispute becomes a vital aspect in the siblings' path towards creating their own spiritual and personal identities.

## **Identity Formation and Negotiation in *Americanah***

### **1. Ifemelu's Cultural Identity in America**

*Context:* Ifemelu's migration to America exposes her to confront issues of race and cultural dislocation, undermining her sense of self.

*Narrative Device:* Adichie exploits Ifemelu's blog writings as a narrative instrument to examine her beliefs on race, identity, and belonging. *Thematic Connection:* Ifemelu's effort to adapt to

American society while keeping her Nigerian identity highlights the intricacies of identity negotiation in the immigrant experience.

## **2. Hair as a Symbol of Identity**

*Context:* Ifemelu's choice to quit straightening her hair and accept her natural texture becomes a strong gesture of reclaiming her identity.

**Narrative Device:** Symbolism and extensive descriptions of hair care practices stress the value of physical appearance in cultural and racial identity.

*Thematic Connection:* Through Ifemelu's hair journey, Adichie highlights the tension between society's expectations and personal authenticity in the process of identity development.

## **3. Obinze's Struggle with Identity in England**

*Context:* Obinze's experiences as an undocumented immigrant in England illustrate the problems of retaining dignity and self-worth in the face of institutional prejudice and isolation.

*Narrative Device:* Adichie employs evocative imagery and Obinze's insights to depict his inner struggle and desire for home.

*Thematic Connection:* Obinze's story highlights the impact of external influences in defining one's identity and the fortitude necessary to handle such challenges.

## **4. Dual Identity and Cultural Negotiation**

*Context:* Ifemelu's return to Nigeria after years in America presents her with the issue of integrating her American experiences with her Nigerian heritage.

*Narrative Device:* Dialogue and contrasting pictures of Nigerian and American life illustrate the complications of dual identity.

*Thematic Connection:* Adichie presents the process of managing two identities as both rewarding and alienating, expressing the subtleties of transnational experiences.

#### **4.5 Theme: Cultural Heritage and Belonging**

In *Purple Hibiscus* and *Americanah*, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie deftly weaves the idea of cultural heritage and belonging to examine how people manage their identities and links to their ancestors despite shifting personal and societal environments. Adichie combines literary elements such as symbolism, imagery, and characterization to show the conflict between cultural legacies and the need to belong in diverse circumstances.

#### **Cultural Heritage and Belonging in *Purple Hibiscus***

1. Symbolism: The *Purple Hibiscus* Context: The *Purple Hibiscus*, cultivated in Aunty Ifeoma's garden, signifies independence, tenacity, and the prospect of establishing a new identity. Narrative Device: The flower serves as a metaphor for Kambili and Jaja's path towards self-expression and independence while contending with the harsh customs enforced by their father. Thematic Connection: The *Purple Hibiscus* symbolises the balance between appreciating cultural heritage and establishing one's own place in the world.
2. Conflict Between Traditional and Western Influences Context: The friction between Papa Eugene's strong dedication to Catholicism and Aunty Ifeoma's more liberal attitude symbolises the greater clash between traditional Nigerian norms and Western

ideology. Narrative Device: Adichie contrasts characters' lifestyles and ideals to illustrate the struggle to retain traditional heritage while adapting to modernity. Thematic Connection: This struggle illustrates the challenge of belonging within a rigorous framework while keeping true to one's cultural heritage.

3. Rituals and Practices as Anchors of Heritage Context: Family dinners, Catholic ceremonies, and Igbo traditions serve as touchpoints for characters to connect with their ancestry. Narrative Device: Vivid descriptions of group prayers and food preparation convey a feeling of shared culture. Thematic Connection: These rituals show the relevance of cultural legacy in sustaining a sense of belonging, even amidst internal family tensions.
4. The Impact of Colonial Legacy on Belonging Context: Papa Eugene's rejection of traditional Igbo customs in favour of Westernised Catholicism symbolises the colonial legacy's rupture of cultural identity. Narrative Device: Adichie utilises Eugene's persona as a critique of cultural alienation induced by colonial influence. Thematic Connection: The tale reveals the difficulty of harmonising inherited cultural heritage with enforced colonial ideas.

### **Cultural Heritage and Belonging in *Americanah***

1. Hair as a Cultural Symbol of Context: Ifemelu's path of embracing her natural hair signifies her recovery of cultural identity in the face of assimilation pressures in America. Narrative Device: Adichie employs hair as a reoccurring metaphor to express pride in African origin and resistance to cultural oblivion. Thematic Connection: The act of wearing natural hair becomes a statement of connection to one's roots, rejecting society's expectations of conformity.

2. **Dual Belonging and Cultural Hybridity Context:** Ifemelu's and Obinze's experiences emphasise the duality of belonging in Nigeria and abroad. They battle with the friction between their Nigerian ancestry and the new cultural standards they face. **Narrative Device:** Contrasting pictures of Nigerian and American life highlight the separation and longing they experience in both places. **Thematic Connection:** The novels address the complexity of cultural hybridity, where belonging is negotiated across many cultures.
3. **Food as a Connection to Cultural Heritage Context:** In *Americanah*, Adichie utilises food as a technique of conjuring memories of home and sustaining cultural bonds. **Narrative Device:** Sensory imagery of Nigerian cuisine, like jollof rice and egusi soup, emphasises the characters' links to their heritage. **Thematic Connection:** The act of making and consuming traditional cuisine becomes a means of sustaining cultural identity during dislocation.
4. **Language as a Marker of Belonging Context:** Ifemelu's observations on transitioning between Nigerian English and American English demonstrate how language impacts sentiments of belonging. **Narrative Device:** Adichie's use of conversation and internal monologue conveys the intricacies of language adaptation. **Thematic Connection:** Language acts as both a bridge and a barrier to belonging, depending on the situation.
5. **Immigration and Cultural Displacement Context:** The immigrant experience in *Americanah* is represented as a voyage of cultural displacement, where individuals must manage social biases and personal issues regarding their heritage. **Narrative Device:** Adichie utilises Ifemelu's blog writings as a narrative instrument to give comments on the problems of belonging as an

immigrant. Thematic Connection: The books illustrate the tenacity necessary to keep cultural heritage while seeking acceptance in a distant nation.

### **Commonalities in both novels**

1. Belonging as a Dynamic Process Observation: Belonging is depicted not as a permanent condition but as a continuous debate between individual identity and group heritage. Significance: Adichie's characters highlight the fluid nature of belonging, determined by external contexts and human decisions.
2. Heritage as a Source of Strength Observation: Cultural heritage works as an anchor for personalities, offering a feeling of stability and identity in uncertain times. Significance: Adichie highlights the relevance of heritage in negotiating the complications of modern existence.

Through the topic of cultural heritage and belonging, Adichie constructs novels that connect worldwide while being profoundly entrenched in Nigerian situations. Her characters' experiences reflect the human struggle for identity and acceptance among altering cultural environments.

### **4.6 Conclusion**

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* and *Americanah* brilliantly employ literary tropes and thematic preoccupations to investigate the connection between folklore and identity. Through symbolism, imagery, and themes of identity creation and cultural heritage, Adichie

conveys the complexity of negotiating personal and communal identities amid a heterogeneous and globalised society.

In *Purple Hibiscus*, the hibiscus blossom emerges as a compelling symbol of freedom and resistance, embodying the characters' battles to regain their uniqueness amid repressive familial and societal institutions. Similarly, in *Americanah*, hair becomes a potent metaphor for cultural pride and the question of identity in the diaspora. Both emblems root the novels in the language of self-expression and opposition against cultural oblivion.

Imagery is another element that Adichie uses to highlight stark contrasts between Nigerian and American environments. The lush, chaotic brightness of Nigeria contrasting with the controlled yet alienating environs of America shows the issues of cultural displacement and the craving for belonging. This interaction of settings not only enhances the story but also increases the reader's awareness of the protagonists' interior issues.

Thematically, identity development and negotiation are important to both works. Adichie digs on the fluidity of identity, revealing how individuals change and remake themselves in response to evolving societal and personal circumstances. In *Purple Hibiscus*, Kambili and Jaja's journeys represent an effort to balance inherited traditions with a yearning for autonomy, while in *Americanah*, Ifemelu's adventures overseas emphasise the tenacity necessary to sustain a sense of self in the face of cultural and racial difficulties.

Cultural heritage and belonging, another prevalent subject, are portrayed via the characters' struggles to stay linked to their backgrounds while accepting new circumstances.

Rituals, language, and cuisine become symbols of identity and continuity, reminding readers of the continuing relevance of cultural links in building a sense of belonging. Adichie's sophisticated picture of cultural hybridity and dual belonging delivers a poignant commentary on the immigrant experience and the universal desire for identity.

Ultimately, Adichie's writings serve as a testament to the power of folklore and identity in creating individual and community narratives. By combining rich cultural components with universal themes, she crafts stories that touch profoundly, prompting readers to think on their own views of identity, belonging, and legacy. In doing so, *Purple Hibiscus* and *Americanah* emphasise the significance of narration as a method of preserving and comprehending the intricacies of human experience.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### CONCLUSION

#### 5.1 Conclusion

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* and *Americanah* are rich narratives that intricately weave elements of folklore and identity, offering a profound exploration of cultural heritage, personal transformation, and the complexity of belonging. By combining traditional Igbo proverbs, taboos, customs, and rituals with contemporary themes of migration, racial identity, and transnationalism, Adichie bridges the gap between the past and present, creating works that resonate universally while remaining deeply rooted in African traditions.

The elements of folklore in both novels, such as proverbs, oral traditions, and cultural practices, highlight the enduring significance of heritage in shaping identity. In *Purple Hibiscus*, these folkloric elements reflect the tension between traditional values and the oppressive modernity imposed by colonial legacies, as seen through Eugene's rigid authoritarianism. In *Americanah*, folklore becomes a touchstone for characters like Ifemelu and Obinze, helping them navigate their diasporic identities and maintain a connection to their roots despite cultural dislocation.

Aspects of identity in religion, culture, and nationality are central to Adichie's storytelling. *Purple Hibiscus* delves into the interplay between Catholicism and Igbo traditions, portraying how religious and cultural dualities shape the characters' lives. Similarly, *Americanah* examines

the challenges of negotiating cultural identity in a globalized world, exploring how migration redefines one's sense of belonging. Adichie's nuanced portrayal of cultural hybridity and national identity underscores the transformative impact of displacement and the resilience required to preserve one's cultural essence.

Literary devices and thematic preoccupations further deepen the narratives, adding layers of meaning and emotional resonance. Symbolism, such as the hibiscus flower in *Purple Hibiscus* and hair in *Americanah*, encapsulates themes of freedom, resistance, and self-expression. Imagery, particularly the vivid contrasts between Nigerian and American landscapes, enhances the emotional weight of the characters' journeys, while the themes of identity formation and cultural heritage illuminate the universal struggle for self-discovery and belonging.

Together, *Purple Hibiscus* and *Americanah* are testimonies to the enduring relevance of folklore and identity in literature. Adichie's ability to merge traditional African cultural elements with contemporary themes creates narratives that are both culturally specific and universally relatable. Her works challenge readers to reflect on their own cultural identities and the forces that shape them, encouraging a deeper appreciation of the richness and diversity of human experience. By bridging the local and the global, Adichie reaffirms the power of storytelling as a tool for understanding, preserving, and celebrating identity in all its forms.

### Works Cited

Amonyeze, Chinedu. "Adichie's Redemptive Narrative." *African Literature Review*, 2017.

Baharvand, Peiman Amanolahi. "The Role of British Missionaries in the Rejection of Igbo Religion and Culture in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*." *Journal of Novel Applied Sciences*, vol. 5, no. 2, 2016, pp. 43–51.

Begum, Rokeya. "Postcolonial Analysis of *Americanah*." *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science Studies*, 2019.

Bhabha, Homi K. *The Location of Culture*. London: Routledge, 1994.

Dorson, Richard. *Folklore and Folklife: An Introduction*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1972.

Dundes, Alan. *The Study of Folklore*. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1965.

Emecheta, Ngozi. "Hair as Symbol in Adichie's *Americanah*." *African Studies Journal*, 2018.

Eze, Chidi. "Identity Negotiation in *Purple Hibiscus*." *Postcolonial African Literature*, 2014.

Fanon, Frantz. *Black Skin, White Masks*. 2008.

Finnegan, Ruth. *Oral Literature in Africa*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970.

Nwahunanya, Chinyere. "Colonial Legacies in *Purple Hibiscus*." *Postcolonial Text*, 2011.

Nwanyanwu, Augustine. "Economic Mismanagement and Transculturalism in *Americanah*." *African Literary Studies*, 2017.

Nwosu, Adaobi. "Migration and Self-Reinvention in *Americanah*." *Transnational Studies Quarterly*, 2020.

Okoye, Nkechi. "Imagery in Adichie's Novels." *Nigerian Literary Journal*, 2015.

Oosterink, Maike. "Transnational Identity in *Americanah*." *Sociological Perspectives*, 2019.

Peters, Audrey D. "Fatherhood and Fatherland in Chimamanda Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*." 2010.

Taylor, Archer. *English Riddles from Oral Tradition*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1948.

[https://www.thriftbooks.com/a/chimamanda-ngozi-adichie/197905/?srslid=AfmBOooRK3PUH5BMMMWr\\_lhUd7IxtkaWXm88uQylxgchrEwr9RT\\_HFii](https://www.thriftbooks.com/a/chimamanda-ngozi-adichie/197905/?srslid=AfmBOooRK3PUH5BMMMWr_lhUd7IxtkaWXm88uQylxgchrEwr9RT_HFii)