

**RACISM IN BUCHI EMECHETA'S *SECOND-CLASS CITIZEN* AND
CHIMAMANDA NGOZI ADICHIE'S *AMERICANAH***

By

**Gift Chiefoe ASHIBUOGWU (Miss)
ART2100181**

**DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH AND LITERATURE,
FACULTY OF ARTS,
UNIVERSITY OF BENIN,
BENIN CITY**

NOVEMBER, 2025

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**AN ESSAY SUBMITTED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH AND
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CERTIFICATION

This is to certify that this project titled: **Racism in Buchi Emecheta's *Second-class Citizen* and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah*** was carried out by **Chiefoe Gift ASHIBUOGWU** of the Department of English and Literature, Faculty of Arts, University of Benin, Benin city, Edo state, with Matriculation Number **ART2100181** under my supervision

MRS. D. L. EFOBI
(Project Supervisor)

DATE

DEDICATION

This Project is dedicated to God almighty for his guidance and grace throughout this project and my studies. And also to my parent Mr and Mrs Paul Ashibuogwu.

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ABSTRACT

This study examines how Buchi Emecheta's *Second-Class Citizen* and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah* portray the struggles of African people living abroad. It focuses on how the authors use narrative voices, settings, and characterization to highlight themes of racial discrimination, identity crises, and immigrant experiences. Two theories were applied in this research: Critical Race Theory and Postcolonial Theory. During the course of this research, the researcher was able to examine racism from different scholars' perspectives using the two books as case studies. This research reveals that racism is not just practiced by individuals, but is also embedded in government structures and has evolved over time.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Purpose of Study

This study examines *Second-Class Citizen* by Buchi Emecheta and *Americanah* by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie in order to explore how both authors represent racial discrimination, identity crises and the immigrant experience, which are themes related to racism.

1.2 Scope of Study.

Although both authors have written extensively on postcolonial and gender issues, this study focuses solely on *Second-Class Citizen* and *Americanah*. The research will be limited to analyzing how racism is portrayed in these two novels through character experiences, context and narrative structure. Other works by these authors will not be included to maintain the depth of analysis within the selected texts. The lens of this research will be particularly through the experiences of the female protagonists, Adah and Ifemelu. These texts were selected because they share similar focus on the subject of racial discrimination, identity crises and immigrant experiences.

1.3 Methodology

This research adopts a qualitative text-based approach, which focuses on thematic analysis. The primary data are the two novels: *Second-Class Citizen* and *Americanah*. The study analyzes the portrayal of racism through close reading, focusing on character development, plot, language use, and socio-cultural context. It will draw on Postcolonial Theory and Critical Race Theory as theoretical frameworks to interpret the texts and evaluate the authors' commentary on race, migration, and identity.

1.4 Theoretical Framework

This study adopts Postcolonial Theory and Critical Race Theory (CRT) as its analytical frameworks.

Postcolonial Theory, popularized by scholars like Edward Said, and Gayatri Spivak, explores how colonial histories continue to influence identities, cultures, and power dynamics in formerly colonized societies. It investigates issues such as migration, hybridity, and identity conflict, all of which are central to *Second-Class Citizen* and *Americanah*.

Postcolonial Theory became part of the critical toolbox in the 1970s, and many practitioners credit Edward Said's book *Orientalism* as being the founding work.

Critical Race Theory (CRT), developed by legal scholars like Derrick Bell and Kimberlé Crenshaw, asserts that racism is embedded in social systems and institutions, not just individual acts. CRT emphasizes systemic inequalities, intersectionality, and lived experiences of marginalized people.

According to Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic CRT movement is a collection of activists and scholars engaged in studying and transforming the relationship among race, racism, and power. The movement considers many of the same issues that conventional civil rights and ethnic studies discourses take up but places them in a broader perspective that includes economics, history, setting, group and self-interest, and emotions and the unconscious. Unlike traditional civil rights discourse, which stresses incrementalism and step-by-step progress, critical race theory questions the very foundations of the liberal order, including equality theory, legal reasoning, Enlightenment rationalism, and neutral principles of constitutional law. -Delgado & Stefancic 18

Bell describes CRT as “a body of legal scholarship...ideologically committed to the struggle against racism, particularly as institutionalized in and by law” - Bell 898.

Critical Race Theory emerged in the United States during the late 1970s and was formally organized in 1989 at the first annual Workshop on Critical Race Theory. Pioneered by legal scholars such as Derrick Bell, Kimberlé Crenshaw, Richard Delgado, Jean Stefancic, and Mari Matsuda, CRT developed as a response to the limitations of traditional civil rights discourse and critical legal studies in addressing the persistence of

racial inequality despite formal legal equality. As Crenshaw articulates, CRT represents "a practice, a way of seeing how the fiction of race has been transformed into concrete racial inequities" (quoted in Crenshaw).

These frameworks are highly relevant to this research, as both novels depict African immigrants navigating Western societies where racism affects their social, emotional, and economic realities. While Postcolonial Theory helps unpack identity, displacement, and the colonial legacy, CRT provides tools to understand structural racism and its everyday manifestations.

Despite their strengths, some critics argue that these theories may overlook local or cultural specificity. However, in this study, both will be applied in complementary ways to examine how racism is presented in the characters' lived experiences and choices.

1.5 Review of Related Literature / Justification of Study.

The topic of Racism based on Buchi Emecheta's *Second Class Citizen* and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah*, has been a subject of growing scholarly interest.

Most people have examined the themes of Race, Identity and Immigration.

Anthony Addaia-Amoah Kwarteng explores how race and class intersect to shape the protagonist's sense of identity in both novels. His study highlights the fluidity between race and class and argues that both are crucial in understanding the character's self-

perception and social positioning. Kwarteng made use of Fanon's *Black skin, White Masks* as his theoretical framework.

Rose Michaelin M. Anyanwu explores *Second-class Citizen* from a black feminist perspective. Anyanwu research discusses the origins and principles of Black Feminist literary criticism, which emerged from clubs formed by black women in 18th-century America. It aims to recover the history of black women through literary tradition, analyzing works by black women writers and texts. Black Feminist criticism emphasizes the diversity of women's experiences, focusing on issues like race, gender, class, and motherhood.

Ahmad Sharjeel and Hashmi Z article, focuses on the complexities of cultural identity and racial politics as experienced by the protagonist, Ifemelu, in the diaspora. They discuss how Americanah critiques both Western racial constructs and the protagonist's negotiation of her Nigerian identity. The focus of their study is on Racial discrimination, Identity crises and Psychological effects of navigating different cultural spaces. The diasporic framework is used to highlight the tension in cultural retention and how it shapes Ifemelu's identity.

Liliana Kurnik, in her Master's thesis, not only writes on the subject of Racism but also focuses on the subject of Nigerian Women's Migration. The study gives a clear illustration of how Nigerians emigrate to other countries in search for a better future. Not only does the study give a vivid insight on the migration process of the main characters in

the books, the study also attempts to present the history of Nigeria and Nigerian Literature, placing more emphasis on the position of women.

Similarly, to Liliana's study, Villanova Isabella's article examines the lives of the two women and how they face challenges and resist the societal expectations placed upon them. What makes this article different is the inclusion of Writing. The article argues that writing is a powerful tool used by the characters, allowing them to express themselves, challenge unfair systems and assert their identities.

Olayiwola Olanrewaju on the other hand focuses on Social realism in *Second-class Citizen* and *Americanah*. The study argues that Racial relations is a form of Social realism in African Migrant Fiction. Olayiwola's study investigates how racial relations affect African migrants physically, socially and psychologically, providing more understanding of the consequences of Social realism.

Furthermore, Hussein Zaboon's research on *Americanah* provides a critical exploration of Afropolitan's Selfhood in the book *Americanah*. The study portrays the experiences of Nigerian immigrants, Ifemelu and Obinze, living in the U.S and U.K. The research highlights how Adichie's novel challenges traditional notions of identity and belonging, showcasing the complexities of being an African immigrant in a globalized world. Hussein's research contributes to the ongoing debate on Afropolitanism and its implications for understanding African identity and belonging. His study resonates with the current research because it makes use of Post-colonial theory as its framework.

The topic of Racism in *Second-Class Citizen* and *Americanah*, has received scholarship reviews that align with the present research.

However, no researcher has made use of the two theories used in the analyses of these two books. The use of Critical Race Theory and Post-Colonial theory as theoretical frameworks makes it easier and possible for readers to understand the concept of Racial discrimination, Identity crises and Immigrant experiences. This therefore makes the current research work unique from other researches already conducted on the topic of Racism using *Second-Class Citizen* and *Americanah* as case studies. The present research will not only give a better understanding of what these theories are about but will also help future researchers come up with possible solutions to Racism, though almost impossible, laws can be made that'll be able to ban Racism and accord respect to the Black populace in White countries.

In conclusion, while several scholarly works have explored themes of race, identity, and migration in *Second-Class Citizen* and *Americanah*, none have critically examined these texts using a combined lens of Critical Race Theory and Postcolonial Theory. This unique theoretical integration not only sets my study apart from existing literature but also offers a more refined and layered understanding of the systemic and historical dimensions of racism, identity crises and immigrant experiences as portrayed in both novels. It provides a valuable framework for future researchers who may wish to engage with African diasporic literature through multi-theoretical approaches, enriching the

academic discourse on race, migration, and postcolonial identity in contemporary African fiction.

1.6 Thesis Statement

Buchi Emecheta's *Second-Class Citizen* and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah* use narrative voice, characterization, and setting to reveal the multifaceted nature of racism as a component of discrimination, identity crises and immigration.

CHAPTER TWO

RACIAL DISCRIMINATION IN *SECOND-CLASS CITIZEN* AND *AMERICANAH*

2.1 Introduction

The phenomenon of racial discrimination represents one of the most pervasive and enduring forms of social injustice in contemporary global society. For African migrants navigating Western metropolitan spaces, racism operates not merely as isolated incidents of prejudice but as a systematic, institutionalized mechanism that shapes every dimension of their lived experience, from housing and employment to education, healthcare, and social relationships. This chapter undertakes a comprehensive analysis of Racial discrimination as depicted in Buchi Emecheta's *Second-Class Citizen* and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah*.

The selection of these two novels for comparative analysis is particularly significant. Emecheta's *Second-Class Citizen* chronicles the experiences of Adah, a Nigerian woman who migrates to 1960s London with her husband Francis, only to confront the brutal realities of British racism during a period of mass Commonwealth migration.

Conversely, Adichie's *Americanah* traces the journey of Ifemelu, a young Nigerian woman who relocates to twenty-first-century America for education, where she discovers her "Blackness" for the first time and must navigate the intricate racial hierarchies of contemporary American society. Together, these narratives span nearly five decades of

African diasporic experience, offering invaluable insights into both the continuities and transformations of racial discrimination across time and space.

First, it will demonstrate that racism is not an aberration or the product of individual prejudice but rather a normalized, structural feature of Western societies that serves specific material and psychic interests for dominant groups. Second, it will examine how colonial histories continue to shape contemporary racial formations and experiences of discrimination in postcolonial contexts.

Finally, it will analyze the specific manifestations of racial discrimination in housing, employment, education, social interactions, and cultural practices as represented in both novels.

2.2 Institutional Racism: Housing, Employment, and Social Services

2.2.1 Housing Discrimination in Second-Class Citizen

Buchi Emecheta's *Second-Class Citizen* provides a searing indictment of institutional racism in 1960s British housing markets. Upon arrival in London, Adah immediately confronts systemic housing discrimination that relegates Black immigrants to the most degraded accommodations.

Emecheta writes:

“He opened the door into what looked to Adah like a tunnel. But it was a hall; a hall with flowered walls! It was narrow and it seemed at first as if there were no

windows. They climbed stairs upon stairs until they seemed to be approaching the roof of the house. Then Francis opened one door and showed them into a room, or half-room. It was very small with a single bed at one end and a new settee... the space between the settee and the bed was just enough for a Formica-topped table, the type she had had in the kitchen in Lagos.” -Emecheta 41.

The novel depicts how landlords systematically refuse to rent to Black tenants, displaying signs reading "No Coloureds, No Irish, No Dogs", a historical reality that has been documented in scholarly accounts of postwar British racism. This triumvirate grouping reveals the intersecting prejudices against racial, ethnic, and national minorities, while the inclusion of "dogs" explicitly dehumanizes people of color.

Through institutional racism, we understand that Adah's housing struggles represent not isolated instances of individual prejudice but rather "differential access to the goods, services, and opportunities of society by race" embedded in structural practices. Landlords' refusal to rent to Black tenants was not illegal at the time; indeed, such discrimination was a lawful practice until the Race Relations Act of 1965, this illustrates that the law itself can establish and maintain racial hierarchies.

The housing that Adah and Francis eventually secure exemplifies what postcolonial scholars identify as the material consequences of racialized Othering. They are confined to a single room in a decrepit house in a poor neighborhood, paying exorbitant rents for substandard conditions.

Emecheta describes the dilapidation in vivid detail: “broken windows, peeling wallpaper, inadequate heating, and shared toilet facilities in deplorable condition.”

From a postcolonial perspective, this housing discrimination represents the continuation of colonial spatial arrangements in the metropolitan center. Just as colonial powers segregated indigenous populations into reserves, townships, and degraded quarters in colonized territories, British society reproduces these spatial hierarchies by confining Black immigrants to slum accommodations. The very architecture of racial discrimination in housing serves to reinforce notions of Black inferiority and white superiority, making racial hierarchy visible in the physical landscape of the city.

The intersectionality framework reveals additional dimensions of Adah's vulnerability. As a pregnant woman and mother with young children, Adah faces compounded difficulties in securing adequate housing. Landlords view Black families with children as particularly undesirable tenants, reflecting racist stereotypes about Black fertility and family structures. Francis who has already adapted to the lifestyle of being a Second-class citizen tells her:

“Well, I know you will not like it, but this is the best I can do. You see, accommodation is very short in London, especially for black people with children.” -Emecheta 41.

Moreover, her economic dependence on Francis, who controls their finances, further limits her ability to escape degraded housing conditions, demonstrating how race, gender, and class intersect to create unique vulnerabilities.

2.2.2 Employment Discrimination and Economic Marginalization

Both novels powerfully demonstrate how racism operates to exclude or marginalize African immigrants in labor markets, relegating them to precarious, low-wage, and often exploitative employment regardless of their qualifications.

In *Second-Class Citizen*, Adah possesses excellent educational credentials and professional experience as a librarian in Lagos. However, upon arrival in London, her Nigerian qualifications are systematically devalued and dismissed. She faces what contemporary scholars identify as "credential racism". Despite her expertise, Adah can only secure menial positions far below her skill level. Eventually, she obtains work in a library, but she is passed over for promotions and advancement that white colleagues with inferior qualifications receive.

Emecheta depicts how employers deploy various mechanisms to maintain racial hierarchies in the workplace. White supervisors scrutinize Adah's work with excessive suspicion, hold her to higher standards than white employees, and attribute any errors to racial inadequacy rather than human fallibility.

Employment discrimination reflects colonial labor structures transposed to the metropole. During colonialism, indigenous populations were constructed as suited only for manual labor, domestic service, and other forms of subordinate work, while intellectual and administrative positions were reserved for Europeans. This racialized division of labor persists in postcolonial contexts, as Adah discovers that British employers view Nigerian workers as inherently unsuited for positions of responsibility or authority.

The situation Francis faces is equally instructive. Despite being a university student ostensibly training for a profession, Francis refuses to work, living parasitically on Adah's labor. This domestic arrangement reflects patriarchal privilege, but it also demonstrates how racism emasculates Black men, denying them access to respectable employment and stable family provision. Francis's eventual failures in education and employment reveal how systemic racism undermines Black men's ability to fulfill normative masculine roles, creating frustrations that he redirects as violence against Adah.

Americanah presents a contemporary American variant of employment discrimination that operates through more subtle mechanisms than the overt exclusions Adah faces. When Ifemelu first arrives in America, her student visa prohibits legal employment, forcing her into the underground economy where undocumented immigrants and international students without work authorization are ruthlessly exploited. In a particularly harrowing episode, Ifemelu visits a man's apartment for what she believes is

legitimate work, only to be sexually coerced, a scene that illustrates the specific vulnerabilities that racism, immigration status, and gender create for Black women.

Even after Ifemelu obtains work authorization and eventually secures professional employment, she confronts various forms of workplace racism. Adichie depicts microaggressions that constantly remind Ifemelu of her Otherness, instances of White colleagues touching her hair without permission, expressing surprise at her articulateness, making assumptions about her poverty or victimization, and deploying stereotypes about African sexuality and exoticism. These microaggressions, while individually dismissible as innocent or well-intentioned, accumulate to create what CRT scholars term "racial battle fatigue", the psychological, physiological, and emotional strain that results from constantly navigating racist environments.

Adichie's depiction of Ifemelu's blog,

"Raceteenth or Various Observations About American Blacks (Those Formerly Known as Negroes) by a Non-American Black," -Adichie 11

provides sophisticated analysis of how race functions in American labor markets. Through Ifemelu's satirical blog posts, Adichie articulates how racism creates differential access to employment networks, how "whiteness" operates as invisible cultural capital, and how Black employees must perform emotional labor to make white colleagues comfortable.

2.2.3 Healthcare, Education, and Social Services

Both novels demonstrate how institutional racism pervades access to healthcare, education, and social services, essential public goods that should be available to all residents regardless of race.

In *Second-Class Citizen*, Adah's interactions with the British healthcare system and social services reveal pervasive racist attitudes among service providers. When Adah seeks medical care during pregnancy and childbirth, healthcare workers treat her with contempt, make derogatory comments about her fertility, and provide substandard care.

An instance that portrays a vivid setting of substandard health care was when a Chinese doctor came to check on Vicky, Adah's Son.

“The doctor sat down on the chair Adah gave him. His sharp Chinese eyes roamed round the room... he got up from his chair, scratching all the time, and then asked a funny question. ‘Have you any bugs here? You know, bed-bugs?...’
-Emecheta 151.

Social workers who visit her home after reports of domestic violence adopt condescending, judgmental attitudes, viewing Adah through racist stereotypes about African family dysfunction rather than as a victim deserving support and protection.

The education system similarly fails Adah's children. Teachers hold low expectations for Black students, discipline them more harshly than white students for similar behaviors,

and fail to challenge them academically. This reflects what CRT scholars identify as the school-to-prison pipeline, the systematic undermining of Black students' educational opportunities through racist disciplinary practices, low expectations, and inadequate resources.

Americanah expands on these themes in the American context. Ifemelu observes how Black students at her university face constant suspicion, how campus security stops and questions Black people more frequently than whites, and how the curriculum centers white perspectives while marginalizing African and African American knowledge. Through various blog posts and observations, Adichie's protagonist analyzes how American institutions, universities, hospitals, police departments, courts, systematically disadvantage people of color while maintaining facades of colorblind neutrality.

2.3 Everyday Racism: Microaggressions and Social Interactions

In *Second-Class Citizen*, Adah endures countless microaggressions. White neighbors refuse to greet her, cross the street to avoid walking near her, clutch their handbags more tightly when she approaches, and make comments about her appearance and smell based on racist stereotypes. Bus conductors and shop clerks treat her with contempt, speaking to her rudely and serving her last after all white customers have been attended to. These interactions, individually minor, accumulate to create the constant awareness that she is unwelcome, inferior, and threatening in white spaces.

Emecheta gives a vivid explanation of this using Adah's experiences:

“Whenever she went into big clothes stores, she would automatically go to the counters carrying soiled and discarded items, afraid of what the shop assistants might say. Even if she had enough money for the best, she would start looking at the sub-standard ones and then work her way up. They believed that one had to start with the inferior and stay there, because being black meant being inferior” - Emecheta 77.

Adah experiences exhaustion, hypervigilance, stress-related physical symptoms, and periods of depression and anger, all documented consequences of racial battle fatigue. The constant need to anticipate and manage white people's reactions, to code-switch between behaviors deemed acceptably "respectable" and authentically Nigerian, and to suppress anger at injustices creates an immense psychological burden.

Americanah provides an even more detailed analysis of microaggressions through Ifemelu's observations and blog posts. Adichie depicts various scenarios such as, White people touching Ifemelu's hair without permission, treating her body as public property available for their curiosity, White colleagues expressing surprise at her intelligence and articulateness, revealing their low expectations for Black people, Social situations where white people make awkward, self-conscious references to her race, desperate to prove they are "not racist", White liberals performing exaggerated friendliness while maintaining actual social distance, Strangers assuming Ifemelu is African American and interpreting her through stereotypes of Black Americans, People expressing pity about

Africa based on monolithic negative stereotypes, refusing to recognize the continent's diversity and complexity.

Through Ifemelu's character, Adichie provides sophisticated analysis of how microaggressions function. In one blog post, Ifemelu distinguishes between "American Black" and "Non-American Black" experiences, noting that non-American Blacks only "become" Black upon arrival in America, discovering race as a defining social category.

“There’s a ladder of racial hierarchy in America. White is always on top, specifically White Anglo-Saxon Protestant, otherwise known as WASP, and American Black is always on the bottom, and what’s in the middle depends on time and place. (Or as that marvelous rhyme goes: if you’re white, you’re all right; if you’re brown, stick around; if you’re black, get back!)” -Adichie 204.

Ifemelu is Nigerian, Igbo, and many other things in Nigeria, but these identities matter less in America than her Blackness.

2.4 The Politics of Respectability and Assimilation Pressure

Both novels explore how racism creates intense pressure on Black immigrants to prove their respectability, worthiness, and similarity to white norms, in what scholars term "respectability politics" and the burden of representation.

In *Second-Class Citizen*, Adah meticulously manages her appearance, behavior, and speech to counter racist stereotypes. She dresses conservatively, speaks "proper" English,

maintains her home spotlessly clean, and works harder than her white colleagues, all in hopes of being recognized as worthy of respect. This performance of respectability reflects what postcolonial scholars identify as "mimicry", the colonized subject's attempt to become like the colonizer while recognizing the impossibility of ever being fully accepted.

However, Emecheta reveals the futility of respectability politics. No matter how impeccably Adah presents herself, white neighbors, colleagues, and service providers continue to view her through racist stereotypes. Her achievements are attributed to luck or affirmative action rather than merit; her modest dress is interpreted as primitiveness rather than propriety; her articulate speech surprises people who expected broken English. The novel demonstrates CRT's principle that racism is structural rather than individual, it cannot be overcome through individual behavior modification because it is built into institutional practices and cultural assumptions.

Americanah provides even more sophisticated analysis of assimilation pressure through the metaphor of hair. The novel's opening scene, where Ifemelu travels to Trenton to have her hair braided by African women, introduces a theme that recurs throughout, The politics of Black hair in America and what it signifies about assimilation, authenticity, and resistance.

The novel's opening scene shows that the Whites are not the only ones that unconsciously or consciously tend to act racist, but even the Blacks. While in the Hair Saloon, the lady that is to plait her hair, asks interrogates her choice hairstyle:

“Why you don't have relaxer?”

“I like my hair the way God made it.”

“But how you comb it? Hard to comb,” Aisha said.

Ifemelu had brought her own comb. She gently combed her hair, dense, soft, and tightly coiled, until it framed her head like a halo. “It's not hard to comb if you moisturize it properly,” she said, slipping into the coaxing tone of the proselytizer that she used whenever she was trying to convince other black women about the merits of wearing their hair natural.” -Adichie 20.

Ifemelu initially straightens her hair to conform to white American standards of professionalism and beauty, a painful, expensive, damaging process that she resents but feels compelled to undergo.

During her search for a job, she is less qualified because of her appearance and to her surprise and dismay, her hair is one of her hindering factors, Ifemelu's friends gives her this advice:

“Ruth said, “My only advice? Lose the braids and straighten your hair. Nobody says this kind of stu but it matters. We want you to get that job.” -Adichie 225.

Ifemelu has no other choice but to adopt the American standard of looking professional, she not only loses her hair but her identity too.

“She did not recognize herself. She left the salon almost mournfully; while the hairdresser had at-ironed the ends, the smell of burning, of something organic dying which should not have died, had made her feel a sense of loss.” -Adichie 225.

Her relaxed hair represents assimilation, the pressure to erase markers of African identity to become acceptable in white-dominated professional spaces. When she eventually cuts off her chemically treated hair and returns to her natural texture, styling it in African braids and eventually a "big chop" natural style, she experiences both liberation and new forms of discrimination. Colleagues and romantic interests criticize her "unprofessional" hair; people on the street make insulting comments; she confronts the reality that natural Black hair is stigmatized in American society.

Through the hair narrative, Adichie illustrates several points of view which includes:

- i. First, the racism that requires Black people to alter their natural appearance to be deemed professional is structural, not individual, it is embedded in workplace dress codes, beauty standards, and cultural norms.

ii. Second, resistance to these norms carries professional and social costs.

iii. Third, the demand for Black people to assimilate represents a form of cultural genocide, the erasure of African identity markers and their replacement with Eurocentric standards.

2.5 Conclusion

In conclusion, it is very evident that Racial Discrimination did not end with Colonialism. It has further crept into our everyday lives as “Blacks” in Whites Society.

Not only is this found in societies, we get discriminated against even on Online spaces, the use of vulgar words against Blacks, Jobs restrictions amongst others, are proof that Racial Discrimination is not only structural but very normal in our society and world today.

CHAPTER THREE

IDENTITY CRISIS AND THE IMMIGRANT EXPERIENCE IN *SECOND-CLASS CITIZEN AND AMERICANAH*

3.1 Introduction

The journey from the postcolonial nation to the Western metropolis is rarely a simple geographical transition; it is a voyage into a complex psychological and social space where identity is contested, fragmented, and relentlessly scrutinized. Building upon the foundation of overt racial discrimination, this chapter delves into the profound internal struggles that accompany the immigrant condition as depicted in Buchi Emecheta's *Second-Class Citizen* and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah*. While both novels chronicle the lives of Nigerian women navigating life in the West—Adah in 1960s London and Ifemelu in contemporary America and Britain, they offer complementary explorations of the resulting identity crisis.

This chapter argues that Emecheta's protagonist, Adah, experiences an identity crisis precipitated by a systemic denial of her personhood, reducing her to a "second-class citizen" in a hostile environment.

The search results provide useful insights into the themes of identity crisis and immigrant experiences in Buchi Emecheta's *Second Class Citizen* and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah*.

In *Second Class Citizen*, Emecheta traces the life of Adah Obi, a Nigerian woman grappling with entrenched patriarchal norms in her home country and acute racial discrimination in 1960s London. Adah's journey epitomizes the search for selfhood amidst forces undermining her identity. Her struggle reflects a profound identity crisis rooted in her intersectional experience as a black African woman living in a hostile environment. Her attempt to transcend the limitations imposed by both sexist and racist structures illustrates the tension between cultural preservation and adaptation essential to identity formation in diaspora.

Similarly, *Americanah* chronicles the diasporic trajectory of Ifemelu, who confronts identity challenges from the moment she migrates to the United States. Ifemelu's immigrant experience is marked by the stress of racialization and the persistent negotiation between cultural heritage and assimilation into American culture. Her identity crisis is intensified by everyday encounters that underscore her blackness as a social limitation. For instance, Ifemelu notices the subtle but insidious attitudes of white Americans, who exhibit disbelief that a black woman could own a luxurious house, revealing a racialized hierarchy of social acceptance. This social scorn undermines her self-esteem, complicating her ability to forge a coherent identity in exile. Ifemelu's blog, where she narrates her immigrant experiences, becomes a space to assert agency and critically engage with her diasporic identity. Adichie paints a poignant picture of the immigrant experience as a constant performance of self-reinvention, cultural negotiation, and resistance to imposed otherness.

Both novels reveal immigrant experiences characterized by estrangement, cultural dislocation, and resilience.

In *Second Class Citizen*, Adah embodies resistance to the host society's attempt to marginalize her and her family. Her refusal to foster out her children despite community pressures highlights her assertion of agency within the diasporic space. Similarly, *Americanah's* Ifemelu and Obinze experience profound diasporic dislocation, with Ifemelu confronting a complex racial social order in America and Obinze facing undocumented immigrant status in England. These experiences underline the multifaceted challenges immigrants encounter, including identity fragmentation, social invisibility, and the constant need to navigate divergent cultural norms.

3.2 Adah's Dream and the Erosion of Identity in *Second-Class Citizen*

Adah Obi's journey to London is initially fueled by the "English dream", a vision of a land of opportunity, knowledge, and refinement cultivated in colonial Nigeria. However, upon arrival, this dream quickly shatters, and her sense of self begins to fracture under the combined pressures of racism, and poverty. Emecheta portrays Adah's identity crisis not as an introspective luxury but as a direct consequence of her material conditions and social erasure. She is not just an immigrant; she is a black woman, a mother, and a wife in a racist society, and each of these facets of her identity is a site of struggle.

Adah's initial self-perception is that of an ambitious, literate, and capable woman. Yet, in England, she is systematically stripped of this identity. Her professional aspirations are

dashed as her qualifications are deemed inferior. More crucially, her very humanity is denied. This is powerfully symbolized by the treatment of her body and her home. When a health visitor comes to inspect her apartment, the inspection is not just of the building's condition but of Adah's very worth as a mother and a human being. Emecheta writes,

“She was being assessed, like a car or a house, to see if she was suitable for her children... She was a second-class citizen.” -Emecheta 78.

Here, the "unhomely" feeling, a key concept in post-colonial theory describing the dislocation of home and world, becomes literal. The private space of the home is invaded, and the self is objectified, leading to a profound internal disorientation.

Her identity crisis is further compounded by her relationship with her husband, Francis. In Nigeria, Adah understood the rules of their patriarchal bargain. In England, however, Francis's inadequacy and abuse are magnified, and his failure to act as the traditional patriarch in the public sphere forces Adah into a role for which she is socially condemned yet upon which her family's survival depends. She becomes the primary breadwinner, challenging both Nigerian and British gender norms and leaving her isolated in a no-man's-land of identity. She is not a traditional Igbo wife, nor is she an independent British woman. Caught in this liminal space, her crisis manifests as a feeling of profound invisibility and a loss of agency, culminating in the heartbreaking moment she is forcibly institutionalized and her children taken away. The system, and her own husband, pathologize her resilience as madness. Adah's crisis, therefore, is one of existential

negation; her identity disintegrates because the world around her refuses to validate its existence.

In *Second Class Citizen*, the protagonist identity conflict is visible from her early life in Nigeria to her move to the United Kingdom. In Nigeria she already faces gender-based marginalisation—her identity as a girl is regarded as ‘insignificant’:

“She was not even quite sure that she was exactly eight, because ... she was a girl who had arrived when everyone was expecting and predicting a boy. She was so insignificant.” -Emecheta 7.

Her gender identity is thus in conflict with her cultural context. When she and her family migrate to England, the conflict deepens: her educational achievements and professional job in Nigeria no longer prevent her being regarded as a “second-class citizen”. Francis tells her,

“You must know, my dear young lady, ... you may be earning a million pounds a day ... but the day you land in England, you are a second-class citizen.” - Emecheta pp.42-43

The phrase becomes a metaphor for the racial and class identity she now must contend with. She is forced to navigate a society where she is defined by what others impose. One analysis writes that the novel “recovers her lost identity ... caused by the traditional

stereotyping of African women, social alienation of being a Black and dislocation due to migration in a white man's country.”

In this way, Adah's self-image repeatedly clashes with external categories: she is educated, ambitious, yet treated as inferior. Her identity conflict drives her quest for autonomy and recognition.

3.3 Ifemelu's View and the Construction of *Americanah*

Ifemelu's experience in Adichie's *Americanah* presents a different, though equally telling, facet of the immigrant identity crisis. Ifemelu's journey to America occurs in a later, more globally connected era, and her crisis is characterized not by a silent erosion of self, but by a hyper-awareness of its construction. Her identity becomes a project to be managed, a performance to be mastered. From the moment she is advised to straighten her hair for job interviews, Ifemelu is initiated into the American racial hierarchy and understands that to survive and succeed, she must learn to navigate her Blackness.

This navigation leads to a conscious splitting of the self. Ifemelu develops an acute, analytical voice that observes her own experiences from a distance. This is most evident in her successful blog, “Raceteenth or Various Observations About American Blacks (Those Formerly Known as Negroes) by a Non-American Black.” The blog itself is a testament to her identity crisis, it is a tool for her to process, categorize, and articulate the nuances of her racialized existence. She writes about the intricacies of language, stating,

“You can’t write an honest blog about race in America without using the word ‘racist.’ And you can’t use the word ‘racist’ without people getting all nervous” - Adichie 322.

Ifemelu’s crisis is intellectualized; she becomes an ethnographer of her own life, studying the codes of American society and her place within it.

This performance extends to her personal relationships. With Curt, the wealthy white man, she plays the role of the exotic, non-threatening girlfriend, a role that eventually feels suffocating. With Blaine, the African American professor, she enters the world of politically conscious Blackness, yet feels the pressure to conform to a specific ideological purity. In both relationships, a part of her authentic self is submerged. She reflects on this performative aspect, noting how she had to learn to be Black in America:

“I came from a country where race was not an issue; I did not think of myself as black and I only became black when I came to America” -Adichie 359.

This statement encapsulates her crisis: her Nigerian identity, which was whole and unremarked upon, is forcibly reconfigured into a racialized identity that is constantly under scrutiny. Her eventual decision to return to Nigeria is, in part, an attempt to escape this exhausting performance and reclaim a self that feels more integrated and less observed.

3.4 The Myth of Return and the Impossibility of Reintegration

A critical component of the immigrant identity crisis in both novels is the concept of the "myth of return", the idealized dream of going back to the homeland. For both Adah and Ifemelu, Nigeria represents a potential sanctuary where their fractured selves can be made whole again. However, both authors complicate this myth, showing that the experience of migration irrevocably alters the individual, making a full return impossible.

For Adah, the dream of return is a source of fleeting comfort, a mental escape from the grim reality of her life in London. However, her transformation in England—her increased independence, her exposure to different social norms, and her traumatic experiences, has fundamentally changed her. While the novel ends with her resolving to divorce Francis and claim her autonomy, it is ambiguous whether Nigeria can truly welcome this new, defiant Adah. The patriarchal structures she fled are still in place, suggesting that her return would initiate a new, albeit different, struggle for her identity.

Ifemelu's return is the central action of the final part of *Americanah*. She actively chooses to leave America and her successful blog behind, seeking to escape the

"non-stop performance" of her American life. -Adichie 519.

Yet, upon arriving in Lagos, she experiences a reverse culture shock. She is now an "Americanah," a label that marks her as different, as having been altered by her time

abroad. She must now learn to navigate the class-conscious, complex social codes of a Lagos that has changed in her absence. Her reunion with Obinze, her first love, is not a simple return to her old self but a negotiation between the woman she was, the woman America made her, and the woman she wants to become. Adichie suggests that while the homeland can offer a space for a more authentic reconciliation of identity, the immigrant is forever marked by their journey, and their sense of self will always be a hybrid, a product of multiple worlds.

3.5 Conclusion

In *Second-Class Citizen* and *Americanah*, Buchi Emecheta and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie masterfully chart the turbulent psychological terrain of the immigrant experience. Adah's identity crisis is one of visceral survival, a slow disintegration under the weight of systemic oppression that denies her humanity. Ifemelu's crisis is one of conscious performance, a hyper-articulate dissection of a racialized self in a society obsessed with categorization. While their methods and contexts differ, both protagonists endure the profound "unhomely" condition of being perpetually out of place. Their stories reveal that immigration is a crucible that forges a new, often painful, consciousness. The journey abroad is, in essence, a journey into a fractured self, and the struggle for identity becomes the central, defining narrative of immigrant life. The quest is not to recover a lost purity of self, but to assemble a new, resilient identity from the fragments left behind and the pieces acquired along the way.

CHAPTER FOUR

CONCLUSION

4.1 Summary of Study

Through the experiences faced by the two protagonists in Buchi Emecheta's *Second-class Citizen* and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah*, the themes of Racial Discrimination, Identity crises and Immigrant experience have been demonstrated.

Their experiences expose the brutal and psychological legacies of racism and colonialism that has become part and parcel of every Black being.

Chapter Two, gives a detailed analysis of racial discrimination faced by both Protagonists, Adah and Ifemelu.

They experience racism in different ways, in their housing, employment and access to social services. This chapter explains that racism is structural and it is something that's practiced everywhere, as long as you're a black in a white's country. Making use of references from the two texts, racial discrimination is extensively analyzed.

Chapter Three gives a structured analysis of Identity Crises and Immigrant experiences faced by Adah and Ifemelu in the U.K and U.S respectively. It shows how Racism affects their self esteem and even way of life.

This chapter draws evidence from the two texts citing examples of instances where Ifemelu straightens her hair to fit in and Adah learns how to speak in a polished manner thus caging her “igbotic” nature.

4.2 Findings

During the course of this research work, the researcher discovered that scholarly works have already been carried out on the two books used as case studies in the current research work. Through previous works, the researcher has been exposed to various perspectives of the subject of the research.

4.3 Contribution to Knowledge

Scholars have written a lot about race, identity, and migration in *Second-Class Citizen* and *Americanah*. But this study does something new.

It combines Critical Race Theory and Postcolonial Theory to show how racism, identity, and immigrant experiences are rooted in centuries of colonialism and modern racism.

Unlike other analyses, this approach reveals how Western power structures gang up to dehumanize Black immigrants.

It also explains their emotional toll.

4.4 Recommendation

For future researchers, this is a useful tool for digging deeper into African diaspora stories using these theories and for imagining a world where these identities are sources of strength, not struggle.

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