

**SYMBOLISM, RACISM AND LANGUAGE IN CHIMAMANDA  
ADICHIE'S *AMERICANAH***

**BY**

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**DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH AND LITERATURE,  
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BENIN CITY.**

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**AN ESSAY SUBMITTED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH AND  
LITERATURE, FACULTY OF ARTS, UNIVERSITY OF BENIN, BENIN  
CITY, IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT FOR THE REQUIREMENTS OF  
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LITERATURE.**

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## CERTIFICATION

This is to certify that this project titled: **SYMBOLISM, RACISM AND LANGUAGE IN CHIMAMANDA ADICHIE'S *AMERICANAH***, was undertaken by Precious Ifeakachukwu NDIDIKA with Matriculation number **ART1700473**

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**Head of Department**

## **DEDICATION**

I am dedicating this work to the God Almighty for his infinite mercies all through my academic journey and to my parent Mr. and Mrs. Ndidika who made this journey extremely easy.

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## ABSTRACT

In this essay, we will examine symbolism, racism and language used by Nigerian writer and activist Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie in her novel *Americanah* with special reference to some points used in the essay for better understanding. Using the concept of racism, which is the belief that groups of humans possess different behavioral traits corresponding to inherited attributes and can be divided based on the superiority of one race over another. It may also mean prejudice, discrimination, or antagonism directed against other people because they are of a different race or ethnicity. Using racism for my analysis helps this essay provides example of several symbols, types of racism and the language of the novel to show different level of struggle for self identification of blacks in the United States of America. This essay shows the struggles of discrimination in education, socialisation, identity and even in colors. The project is guided by a thesis Statement for better understanding of each chapters and it ends with a summary and conclusion to better provide a panacea for racism.

## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **INTRODUCTION**

#### **1.1 PURPOSE OF STUDY**

This purpose of this study examines symbolism, racism and the use of language in Chimamanda Adichie's *Americanah* to show the struggles of black people in America. The characters in the book were victims of discrimination and abuse. This work presents the prevalent problem of racism faced by black people in America.

#### **1.2 SCOPE OF STUDY**

The scope of this study is to examine symbolism, racism and the use of language in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah*. In this study attention will be focused on symbolism, racism and the language used in the novel *Americanah*.

#### **1.3 METHODOLOGY**

The approach to the essay involves a critical study of the primary text, *Americanah*. Through critical reading we identify instances of symbolism, racism and the use of language. We look at the types adopted in the text by the author. From the study, we arrive at the conclusion that the author uses symbolism and

language to expatiate more on racism. Internet sources, library books and academic journals are employed as secondary sources to support or refute the arguments raised in the course of the study. The method of research is, therefore, qualitative.

#### **1.4 THEORETICAL BACKGROUND**

This project adopts the concept of racism. Racism is the belief that groups of humans possess different behavioral traits corresponding to inherited attributes and can be divided based on the superiority of one race over another. It may also mean prejudice, discrimination, or antagonism directed against other people because they are of a different race or ethnicity. Modern variants of racism are often based in social perceptions of biological differences between peoples. These views can take the form of social actions, practices or beliefs, or political systems in which different races are ranked as inherently superior or inferior to each other, based on presumed shared inheritable traits, abilities, or qualities.

In terms of political systems (e.g., apartheid) that support the expression of prejudice or aversion in discriminatory practices or laws, racist ideology may include associated social aspects such as nativism, xenophobia, otherness, segregation, hierarchical ranking, and supremacism.

Also, Racism and racial discrimination are often used to describe discrimination on an ethnic or cultural basis, independent of whether these differences are described as racial. According to a United Nations convention on racial discrimination,

There is no distinction between the terms "racial" and "ethnic" discrimination. The UN Convention further concludes that superiority based on racial differentiation is scientifically false, morally condemnable, socially unjust and dangerous. The convention also declared that there is no justification for racial discrimination, anywhere, in theory or in practice.[5]

Racism is a relatively modern concept, arising in the European age of imperialism, the subsequent growth of capitalism, and especially the Atlantic slave trade, better source needed of which it was a major driving force. It was also a major force behind racial segregation especially in the United States in the nineteenth and early twentieth century's and South Africa under apartheid; 19th and 20th century racism in Western culture is particularly well documented and constitutes a reference point in studies and discourses about racism. Racism has

played a role in genocides such as the Holocaust, the Armenian genocide, and the genocide of Serbs, as well as colonial projects including the European colonization of the Americas, Africa, and Asia as well as the Soviet deportations of indigenous minorities. Indigenous peoples have been—and are—often subject to racist attitudes.

In the 19th century, many scientists subscribed to the belief that the human population can be divided into races. The term racism is a noun describing the state of being racist, i.e., subscribing to the belief that the human population can or should be classified into races with differential abilities and dispositions, which in turn may motivate a political ideology in which rights and privileges are differentially distributed based on racial categories. The term "racist" may be an adjective or a noun, the latter describing a person who holds those beliefs. The origin of the root word "race" is not clear. Linguists generally agree that it came to the English language from Middle French, but there is no such agreement on how it generally came into Latin-based languages. A recent proposal is that it derives from the Arabic *ra's*, which means "head, beginning, origin" or the Hebrew *Rosh*, which has a similar meaning. Early race theorists generally held the view that some races were inferior to others and they consequently believed that the differential treatment of races was fully justified. These early theories guided pseudo-scientific research assumptions; the collective endeavors to adequately define and form hypotheses about racial differences are generally

termed scientific racism, though this term is a misnomer, due to the lack of any actual science backing the claims.

An entry in the Oxford English Dictionary (2008) defines racialism as an earlier term than racism, but now largely superseded by it", and cites the term "racialism" in a 1902 quote. The revised Oxford English Dictionary cites the shorter term "racism" in a quote from the year 1903. It was defined by the Oxford English Dictionary (2nd edition 1989) as:

The theory that distinctive human characteristics and abilities are determined by race"; the same dictionary termed racism a synonym of racialism: "belief in the superiority of a particular race". racism by then implied racial discrimination, racial supremacism, and a harmful intent.

The UN does not define "racism"; however, it does define "racial discrimination". According to the 1965 UN International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination,

The term "racial discrimination" shall mean any distinction, exclusion, restriction, or

preference based on race, colour, descent, or national or ethnic origin that has the purpose or effect of nullifying or impairing the recognition, enjoyment or exercise, on an equal footing, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural or any other field of public life. [25]

Applying this critical theory to the novel under study, *Americanah* we find characters that are marginalized, oppressed as a result of skin color as difference in America as the author situates them using narrative techniques. The subordination of these characters in their fictional domains, attracts this theory to enable us explicate the narrative techniques which forms the focus of this study.

## **1.5 REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

Adichie's *Americanah* is a very notable work of literature that definitely did not go unnoticed as it was criticized using different subject matters which include Racial Discrimination, Feminism, Biculturalism, Immigration, Transnationalism, Love etc. Of the above subject matters, Reviews based on Racism will be noted.

“Americanah can be seen as a fiction of reputation management, renegotiates image rights of immigrants and minorities on a humanistic template engendering social compact of respect and mutual understanding” Amonyeze (2017). This review focuses on Adichie’s attempt to try and bridge the gap between immigrants and the already residing race in terms of respect and equality highlighting that there is really no difference apart from skin colour between the Victims and discriminators.

Another notable review is done by Begum (2019) who concludes that Adichie “examines the racial inequalities that plague the collective consciousness of Blacks in her novel Americanah using Postcolonial reading of the text which brings to the fore the fluidity of identity”. This criticism highlights Adichie’s use of the characters in her novel to show the fluidity of an individual’s identity which can occur as a result of racial inequalities. Ifemelu, Emenike are characters she used to show how fluid a person’s identity can get in order to fit in a society and feel wanted regardless of one’s true happiness.

Adichie’s Americanah is also reviewed from the Trans-national point of view. “Transnational individuals undergo a unique identity transformation in the liminal spaces between cultures and nations and are uniquely positioned to interpret and explain the important and complex interactions between people”

Oosterink (2019). Oosterink analyzes the novel sociologically as she highlights the crises that immigrants especially face when they are in America as they are in a difficult position where they have to maneuver their ways into adapting and most times forgetting their own cultural and national identity in an attempt to fit into the society.

“In Adichie’s *Americanah*, the concept of the transcultural is linked with post-colonial issues of economic mismanagement, power disjunction as well as feelings of trauma and helplessness among the Nigerian and African emigrants in the United States and England in search of opportunities” Nwanyanwu (2017). Nwanyanwu is Nigerian critiquer who analyzes the novel from a political and economic point which concludes that the concept of transculturalism is linked with the search for greener pastures by emigrants in America and England. This critic believes that the post-colonial issues that African countries still suffer like economic mismanagement, political disjunction etc is what leads to the emigration of Africans from their homeland in search of better living conditions abroad and on getting there have to face the issue of transculturalism, having to change their cultural identities in order to earn income and blend with the society.

Amonyenze (2017) also analyzes *Americanah* from the Bi-cultural point “Adichie’s redemptive narrative stresses the bicultural fix of economic exiles, affirming vision of a new cultural space for Africans at home and in the Disapora”. Amonyenze believes that *Americanah* helps to clearly show Africans

at home of the of struggles of those in the Diaspora proving that it really is not that different and if one wishes to move to the other location, there are challenges everywhere.

According to Day Elizabeth, from The Guardian, 2013, gives her opinion about the novel *Americanah* and she says that:

Adichie is particularly good at expressing the contradictory ebb and flow of America's painful attempts to reconcile itself with its recent past when segregation still persisted in the south. She does so with a wryness and insight that never imposes itself on the flow of the story but which challenges the reader's assumptions with each carefully crafted sentence. Adichie captures the tone of internet chatter with precision which adds an extra dimension to the plot, allowing the readers to see how Ifemelu sees herself and how she wishes to present herself to the outside world.

There are many other reviews on her work of literature that look at other aspects of life an individual faces everyday of his/her life apart from Racism but with the aim of not digressing, only notable reviews concerned with Racial Discrimination were discussed above to further buttress the point of this essay of the existence of Racial discrimination in the society at large through symbols and language.

#### **1.6 THESIS STATEMENT**

Through the use of symbolism, racism and language Chimamanda Adichie's *Americanah* shows that racial discrimination towards the public creates imbalance between the black and white community and disunity in the general public.

## CHAPTER TWO

### THE SYMBOLS OF RACISM IN AMERICANAH

#### 2.0 Introduction

The term symbolism was extremely common in the literature of mystic groups for whom the climate of romanticism was propitious: they spoke of symbols in connection with the so called universal analogy. Symbolism is the representation of objects, moods, and ideas through the medium of symbols. A symbol can also mean an object which refers to another but which demands attention also in its own rights, as a presentation. In the novel *Americanah*, the author Ngozi Adichie presents us with some symbols of split identity, feminism and love using Ifemelu and Obinze

#### 2.1. The Symbol of Split Identity

Split Personality is seen in *Americanah* using Ifemelu and Emenike. Although it is not as drastic as Starr Carter had to endure; Ifemelu had to blend in with the society and made some physical changes on her looks and the way she sounds so she could fit in. She made this decision after she was thought to not have been able to speak proper English because of her Nigerian Accent. Although Ifemelu didn't receive any violent form of Racial discrimination unlike Starr Carter, she still got some psychological and emotional torments for being a Black.

“But when Ifemelu returned with the letter, Cristina Tomas said, “I. Need. You. To. Fill. Out. A. Couple. Of. Forms. Do. You. Understand. How. To. Fill. These. Out?” and she realized that Cristina Tomas was speaking like that because of her, her foreign accent, and she felt for a moment like a small child, lazy-limbed and drooling. “I speak English,” she said. “I bet you do,” Cristina Tomas said. “I just don’t know how well” Ifemelu shrank. In that strained, still second when her eyes met Cristina Tomas’s before she took the forms, she shrank. She shrank like a dried leaf. She had spoken English all her life.... And in the following weeks, as autumn’s coolness descended, she began to practice an American accent.” (Adichie 101)

The excerpt above shows the emotional and psychological bullying Ifemelu goes through while registering for school as she is automatically assumed of not having a good knowledge of the English Language because of her accent and colour as an African, this in turn reduces her self-esteem as a person and she decides to practice the American accent. It is quite Ironic as she is dealt this blow in a University, an integral part of the educational sector where acts like this should be thought as a wrongful one, not tolerated and should exemplify equality and its at the very heart of the University that she experiences Racism.

Emenike on the other hand had pretended to appear jovial and trivialize a racist incident of which he was a victim just so he wouldn't appear too emotional or scary to his white friends;

“Emenike had told Obinze this story before and he was struck now by how differently Emenike told it. He did not mention the rage he had felt standing on that street and looking at the cab. He was shaking, he had told Obinze, his hands trembling for a long time, a little frightened by his own feelings.” (Adichie 201)

In the above data, Emenike was telling his white wife and her white friends about Racial discrimination done towards him in the most free-minded and jovial manner as opposed to how he had told his friend and fellow Nigerian, Obinze in an enraged manner. Emenike couldn't express his true feelings about how hurt he truly felt so he won't be labelled as too angry and overreacting. In summary, total self expression is not allowed as there a gauge for emotional expressions as a coloured person in general.

## **2.2. The Symbol of Emotional and Mental Torture**

Ifemelu also portrays this sort of reaction due to frustration from blacks notbeing addressed for their true self by Kimberly, her boss. Although Ifemelu does not lash out like Starr, she retorts

“Isn’t she just Stunning?” “No,she isn’t”. Ifemelu paused. “You know, you can just say ‘black’. Not every black person is beautiful.” (Adichie 146-147)

Ifemelu here is sick of Blacks being addressed as something positive even though they are not for fear of being labelled a racist.

Obinze, Ifemelu’s lover also had his own share of Racial discrimination back in England;

“The next job was a temporary replacement with a company that delivered kitchens, week after week of sitting beside white drivers who called him “laborer,” of endless construction sites full of noises and helmets, of carrying wood planks up long stairs, unaided and unsung. In the silence with which they drove, and the tone with which they said “laborer!” Obinze sensed the drivers’ dislike. Once, when he tripped and landed on his knee, a fall so heavy that he limped back to the truck, the driver told the others at the warehouse, “His knee is bad because he’s a knee-grow!” They laughed. Their hostility rankled, but only slightly; what mattered to him was that he earned four pounds an hour” (Adichie 184)

The extract above shows a more direct form of Racism that Obinze experiences in England, this isn’t sugarcoated or camouflaged in any way as Obinze could sense it even though he tried to ignore it and focus on his wages, from the very onset he was obviously disliked by his fellow laborer who still

decides to refer to him as ‘laborer’ and make mockery of his race using racist puns.

Racial Discrimination is not only limited to adults as even children of colour get discriminated and Adichie uses Ifemelu’s nephew Dike to expose this;

“So how was camp?” “Good.” A pause. “My group leader, Haley? She gave sunscreen to everyone but she wouldn’t give me any. She said I didn’t need it.”...“It’s okay,” he said. “It was kind of funny. My friend Danny was laughing about it.” “Why did your friend think it was funny?” “Because it was!” “You wanted her to give you the sunscreen, too, right?” “I guess so,” he said with a shrug. “I just want to be regular.” (Adichie 137-138)

Dike here tells his aunt how his group leader, a child like him felt it was okay to not give him sunscreen because he is black and is assumed to not need it and was been laughed at by a person he considered his friend , Danny, this only proves how deeply the ideology of race has eaten into the American System, for a child to differentiate between people and give unequal treatment according the colour of the skin is really appalling and sad.

“Look at him, just because he looks different, when he does what other little boys do, it becomes aggressive.” (Adichie 201)

Here, Aunt Uju tries to defend Dike whose principal recommended he goes to a special ed class for a very trivial and easily waveable incident. Aunt Uju believes the Principal recommends this because Dike has a different skin colour than his peers.

### **2.3. Limitations to Being Successful**

Being Coloured comes with some stereotypes as to expectations and limitations to how much success an individual can garner and even when a Black Individual struggles to achieve Success, he/she is still looked down upon by even less richer White people. This stereotypical act is a realistic experience Adichie herself experienced while studying in America and shown in *Americanah* as an occurrence that happened to Ifemelu during her babysitting hours;

“She looked at him, a taunt in her eyes, prolonging a moment loaded with assumptions: he thought she was a homeowner, and she was not what he had expected to see in this grand stone house with the white pillars. “Yes,” she said finally, suddenly tired. “Mrs. Turner told me you were coming.” It was like a conjurer’s trick, the swift disappearance of his hostility. His face sank into a grin. She, too, was the help. The universe was once again arranged as it should be.”

(Adichie 124)

In the italicized data above, it proves that “Sometimes in America, Race Is Class” with the story of his dramatic change, and end with: It didn’t matter to him how much money Ifemelu had. As far as he was concerned she did not fit as the owner of that stately house because of the way she looked. In America’s public discourse, “Blacks” as a whole are often lumped with “Poor Whites.” Not Poor Blacks and Poor Whites. But Blacks and Poor Whites.” (Adichie 125)

Ifemelu was not the only example of a prejudiced person of colour in the novel, her aunt Uju also had her own share of Prejudiced Racism;

“Sometimes she told the same story twice. How she had gone to the public library the other day, had forgotten to bring out the unreturned book from her handbag, and the guard told her, “You people never do anything right.” How she walked into an examining room and a patient asked “Is the doctor coming?” and when she said she was the doctor the patient’s face changed to fired clay. “Do you know, that afternoon she called to transfer her file to another doctor’s office! Can you imagine? (Adichie 136)

Here, Aunty Uju complains to Ifemelu about some instances of racial discrimination she experiences at her place of work and during normal routine. She is thought to not be good enough to be a doctor because she is Black.

#### **2.4. Discomfort for Well-Meaning Whites**

It should be noticed right from the beginning of this chapter about how Whites who discriminate are referred to as Racist whites, this is because not all whites are actually Racists as there are well-meaning Whites who believe in the equality of all Races. Racial Discrimination doesn't only affect the Blacks who are the recipients of Racism, it also affects the Whites- the well-meaning Whites. The well-meaning Whites become uncomfortable in some situations and sometimes can't express their feelings the way they want to for fear of being labelled racist by their black friends and acquaintances. They have to be cautious about the words they say and how they act so they don't offend the Blacks, for example, the Whites can't say the word "Nigga" or "Negro" because it is derogatory to the Blacks as it is a term the Africans were called during the Slavery period. As it is, A white can't say the word "Nigga" or the N-word in a song they happen to like sang by a black.

A symbol of discomfort of a well-meaning liberal white is portrayed using the Character of Kimberly in Adichie's *Americanah*. Kimberly is Ifemelu's first boss and a nice liberal white woman who is well aware of the Racial injustice going-on and she tries a little to hard to show that that she isn't a racist. She is a privileged and wealthy white woman who likes to help out in Africa and does a

lot of Charitable work however the portrayal of Character is not always viewed positively

“Isn’t she just Stunning?” “No, she isn’t”. Ifemelu paused. “You know, you can just say ‘black’. Not every black person is beautiful.” (Adichie 201)

Her interactions with Ifemelu are interesting because of how active she tends to be in solving African American problems, but at the same time there appears to be a sense of awkwardness between them. The excerpt above proves Adichie’s perspective on how some Americans react, when they encounter or converse with a Black person. Some wealthy white Americans tend to ignore social problems because they don’t want to address the white elephant in the room, which is race. Ifemelu’s contradiction to Kimberly’s compliment is a strong message to society that people should be more honest with one another especially with racial problems instead of creating a facade that conceal’s one’s true feelings. Ifemelu is clearly offended by Kimberly’s constant appreciation of “black” beauty, even though some may say Kimberly was just trying to make Ifemelu more comfortable with her new job. Adichie (2013).

## **2.5. Conclusion**

In conclusion, this chapter points out the adverse effects that Racialism causes in the lives of all individuals involved using symbols. It affects the body,

mind and soul of the Colored individuals mostly negative than positive but that is not to say that the Non-Colored or Whites do not also get affected by this situation. This point as already stated above proves that Racialism just makes Life difficult for everybody around.

## CHAPTER THREE

### RACISM

#### 3.0 Introduction

The study of this Chapter proves that the treatment given to an individual has the ability to spread and spread until it consumes the entire society as a whole. This notion is clearly stated in Adichie's novel *Americanah* whose very name is inspired by the notion of 'what affects an individual affects a community'.

#### 3.1 Racism

Racism as presented in *Americanah* manifests itself through institutional and cultural racism. It is further seen through stereotypes of Africa and Africans. Moreover the discriminatory attitude of foreigners in the West towards African women may show through language use. Ifemelu encounters racism from white American women in regard to her relationship with her white boyfriend Curt. These white women get surprised when Curt introduces her to them as his girlfriend. Ifemelu says they looked at her in surprise, "a surprise that some of them shielded and some of them did not and in their expression was the question "why her?" (290), these white female characters display a discriminatory attitude towards Ifemelu implying that they are superior to black women. The idea is founded on a baseless notion that being a black woman she is undeserving of a white man and that is why Ifemelu says "their faces clouded with the look of

people confronting a great tribal loss” (290). My only advice? Lose the braids and straighten your hair. Nobody says this kind of thing but it matters. We want you to get that job. (202) Ifemelu’s white boyfriend Curt discovers that she has replaced her braids in order to straighten her hair and he questions why, telling her that her braided hair was ‘gorgeous’ and that her own hair was “even more gorgeous, so full and cool” when natural. In addition, Ifemelu maintains:

My full and cool hair would work if I were interviewing to be a backup singer in a jazz band, but I need to look professional for this interview, and professional means straight hair is best but if it’s going to be curly then it has to be the white kind of curly, loose curls or, at worst spiral curls but never kinky.’(204)

This hints at racism intertwined with stereotyping. The racist nature of the statement is portrayed when Ifemelu says it is only the white kind of curly, loose curls or spiral curls that are accepted. Here white stands for inclusion while if one has kinky hair it means exclusion. Kinky hair is representative of African hair which is considered coarse and difficult to manage. The stereotype is based on the argument that one’s hairdo has nothing to do with their performance and emphasis

not to wear braids as a professional is mainly placed on Africans only. Ifemelu's experience is comparable to that of the person in Una Marson's poem "Kinky Hair Blues" in which the lady laments to God for creating her black with kinky hair since it has led to her exclusion in a racist society. As a result of this society's attitude towards her black colour and kinky hair, out of desperation to fit she budes to pressure and straightens her kinky hair like in Ifemelu's case in *Americanah*. Although the persona loves her hair all kinky the white society dictates that natural is ugly. The idea is that adapting to whiteness is the option and anything white should be universally embraced. That is whiteness is superior and should be embraced by humanity. This is best encapsulated in Frantz Fanon's *Black Skin White Masks* when hesays: Whiteness has become a symbol of justice, truth, virginity. It defines what it means to be modern and human. Blackness represents ugliness, sin, darkness and immorality. Racism as presented in *Americanah* manifests itself through institutional and cultural racism. It is further seen through stereotypes of Africa and Africans. Moreover the discriminatory attitude of foreigners in the West towards African women may show through their different views about academic system.

### **3.2. Racial Discrimination in the Academic System**

In Adichie's *Americanah*, Racial discrimination (racism) is expressed and viewed from a societal point because the society as a whole play a strong role in

promoting Racism on people of colour. The educational sector for one is portrayed as a racist faction.

“So is southern Africa your discipline?” she asked. “No. Comparative politics. You can’t do just Africa in political science graduate programs in this country. You can compare Africa to Poland or Israel but focusing on Africa itself? They don’t let you do that.” His use of “they” suggested an “us,” which would be the both of them. (Adichie 133).

The above is an excerpt taken from when Ifemelu meets Blaine, one of her boyfriends in the book. Blaine is African-American and an assistant Professor at Yale, he tells her that Africa isn’t allowed to be taught as a discipline in the University but can be taught when it is compared to other countries because it is not allowed. This can be analyzed as just simply saying that African history is seen as a worthy enough discipline to be taught in the American University but it can be considered if only it is in comparison to European or North American countries.

Kimberly’s reaction to every black person is also a representation of some part of the White community who are not Racist and whose reaction to every black person is admiration and not genuine criticism of the person so as not to be labeled a Racist. This shows that sometimes a person’s modesty, which can be mistaken for kindness, can be seen as a negative aspect of society because it

causes negligence in racial problems. This is evident when people decided not to say the word black in the novel because of their fear of being discriminatory, but at the same time this abstinence is a form of discreet discrimination. And in some other situations they don't even know when their companion is receiving racist treatments because they truly cannot understand it. As in the case of Curt who was Ifemelu's boyfriend at the time but could never truly understand some racist actions against her ;

“When they walked into a restaurant with linen-covered tables, and the host looked at them and asked Curt, “Table for one?” Curt hastily told her the host did not mean it “like that.” And she wanted to ask him, “How else could the host have meant it?” When the strawberry-haired owner of the bed-and-breakfast in Montreal refused to acknowledge her as they checked in, a steadfast refusal, smiling and looking only at Curt, she wanted to tell Curt how slighted she felt, worse because she was unsure whether the woman disliked black people or liked Curt. But she did not, because he would tell her she was overreacting or tired or both. There were, simply, times that he saw and times that he was unable to see.”(Adichie 215)

From the above data, Ifemelu speaks on times she has experienced some sort of Racial Discrimination but didn't get the kind of reaction she had hoped for from Curt as he either tries to make excuses for the discriminator or overlooks it

and this made her feel kind of insecure and further created a gap in their relationship as they went on. Its no surprise that with Racial Discrimination comes a strain in Relationships between Individuals from the opposite ends, it leads to misunderstandings and sometimes lack of communication due to fear and avoidance of seeming too expressive and nagging on the side of the Coloured or Receipients of the Discrimination.

### **3.3 Abandonment of Colored Orphaned Children**

Racial Discrimination is also reflected by the society on orphaned children as White capable families do not adopt black children due to their color forgetting that a child is just a child and there is no difference between a black, latino or white child. Adichie portrays this using one of Ifemelu's experience while having a conversation with a White Man in a bus to describe the situation .

“He wanted to know what she meant by “lifestyle blog,” and she told him, expecting him to become reserved, or to end the conversation by saying something defensively bland like “The only race that matters is the human race.” But he said, “Ever write about adoption? Nobody wants black babies in this country, and I don’t mean biracial, I mean black. Even the black families don’t want them.” He told her that he and his wife had adopted a black child and their neighbors looked at them as though they had chosen to become martyrs for a dubious cause”.(Adichie 9).

The above data shows the man's response to Ifemelu's Niche for her blog and instead of being Racist like Ifemelu expected, he shed light on an aspect she didn't really know of about how blacks babies are discriminated even by black families in terms of Adoption. This in itself is a form of Intra-racial discrimination amongst the Blacks.

Ironically, even the African-Americans discriminate amongst themselves using the Paper-bag test. The Paper-bag test or the Brown Paper Bag Test is a term in African-American oral history used to describe a colorist discriminatory practice within the African-American community in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, in which an individual's skin tone is compared to the colour of a brown paper bag. The test was allegedly used to determine what privileges an Individual could have; only those with a skin colour that matched or was lighter than a brown paper bag were allowed admission or membership privileges. The practice of the brown paper bag test may have originated in New Orleans, Louisiana, where there was a substantial third class of free people of color dating from the French colonial era (Wikipedia). Parties held in Universities had party called the bag party where a brown bag is attached to the door and any one darker than the brown paper bag was not allowed in. Gates (1996).

The paper bag test was used by Churches, African-American fraternities, Social clubs and sororities throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. It was believed

that lighter skin was proof of European ancestry therefore meaning more privileges than the darker skin counterpart. Black single mothers love the children they have with the White Man more than those had with the black man. Kerr (2006). This theory, Adichie backs up in the novel as Ifemelu writes in her blog;

“Many American blacks proudly say they have some “Indian.” Which means Thank God We Are Not Full-Blooded Negroes. Which means they are not too dark..... American black men like their black women to have some exotic quota, like half-Chinese or splash of Cherokee. They like their women light. But beware what American blacks consider “light.” Some of these “light” people, in countries of Non-American Blacks, would simply be called white.(Oh, and dark American black men resent light men, for having it too easy with the ladies.)”(Adichie 158).

The excerpt above just emphasizes on Intra-racial Discrimination and this eventually leads to disunity amongst the black as this is an unconscious side effect of the frustration of being oppressed and not being able to fight the true oppressors. Conflict and tension present between both groups is as a result of direct and psychological dominance from the White race, wherein powerless groups unable to effectively challenge the forces that oppress them, attack themselves or people like themselves. Okonofua (2013).

“..... So light skin is valued in the community of American blacks. But everyone pretends this is no longer so. They say the days of the paper-bag test are gone and let’s move forward. But today most of the American blacks who are successful as entertainers and as public figures, are light. Especially women. Many successful American black men have white wives. Those who deign to have black wives have light (otherwise known as high yellow) wives...”(Adichie 158)

Generally, Racism has eaten so deep in the Society that it is a norm in the daily life of an individual, Adichie portrays this using an experience Emenike goes through in England;

“He told the story of the taxi that he had hailed one night, on Upper Street; from afar the cab light was on but as the cab approached him, the light went off, and he assumed the driver was not on duty. After the cab passed him by, he looked back idly and saw that the cab light was back on and that, a little way up the street, it stopped for two white women.”(Adichie 201)

The except above is an example of racial discrimination done casually and randomly towards Emenike on a day like every other.

Whether Black or somewhere in-between and by in-between, I mean other Nationalities that aren't American or English-Speaking, A colored individual still experiences Racial Discrimination, Adichie explains thus:

“Hispanic means the frequent companions of American blacks in poverty rankings, Hispanic means a slight step above American blacks in the American race ladder, Hispanic means the chocolate-skinned woman from Peru, Hispanic means the indigenous people of Mexico. Hispanic means the biracial-looking folks from the Dominican Republic. Hispanic means the paler folks from Puerto Rico. Hispanic also means the blond, blue-eyed guy from Argentina. All you need to be is Spanish-speaking but not from Spain and voilà, you're a race called Hispanic.” (Adichie 80)

As a Hispanic, one is still bound to encounter racist acts done towards them randomly on a daily basis though on a notably minimal level in comparison to Black Individuals.

African-Americans are seen to be at the bottom of the ladder in the Race Hierachy but it sadly doesn't end there as somewhere beneath the African-Americans are the Non-American Blacks, it doesn't matter the Nationality they are referred to as One – Blacks.

“The forced construction and legitimation of a single Black Identity and the lumping together of people of color into that category without regard to their socio-historical and cultural milieus was meant to produce lasting fissures among elements in that category”. Okonofua (2013).

The above quoted statement tries to prove that the idea of fusing all dark colored individuals in America into one group: Black is one done by the Racist Whites so that the Blacks forget their indigenous backgrounds and their true identity which thereby psychologically cripples their ability to fight any form of oppression as they have have forgotten who they really and will settle for anything less so as to fit in.

“Dear Non-American Black, when you make the choice to come to America, you become black..... So what if you weren't “black” in your country? You're in America now. We all have our moments of initiation into the Society of Former Negroes.....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.” (Adichie 163)

In America, when a crime is reported, blacks pray its not a black individual who committed the crime else the whole black community suffers for it as a whole and even worse for those who fit the description as they will always be suspected for any wrong doing around them(Adichie 163)

The above excerpt is advice and guidelines on how to behave and get by while in America as an immigrant or Non-American Black in Americanah.

### **3.4 Conclusion**

In conclusion, the focus of this chapter of the essay is on the concept of little drops of water forms an ocean, this simply means that the racist act of a racist white which is not corrected, becomes accepted and later a norm in the society and eventually a way of life. Looking at the Cab incident with Emenike to the discrimination on African Studies, this act started with an individual racist act that goes unpunished, and so others in the society follow suit as it does not get acknowledged as a crime by the Authorities put in place to ensure peace and equality in the society.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **AMERICANAH AND USE OF LANGUAGE**

#### **4.0. Introduction**

This chapter gives brief explanations on the language used in Adichie's *Americanah*. Every human knows at least one language, spoken or written words in human language are finite, but sentences are not. It is this creative aspect of human language that sets it apart from animal languages, which are essentially response to stimuli. Language is one of the most obvious tools or characteristic that distinguishes human mankind from other type of animals. It is in line that, Barber posits that "a human language is a signaling system. As its materials, it uses vocal sounds. Basically, a language is something which is spoken: the written language is secondary and derivative. In the history of each individual, speech is learned before writing ...."

#### **4.1 Language of Culture**

Language is another important factor regarding cultural identity in the novel. *Americanah* highlights the different functions served by the language of the empire and of the colony in Nigerian and, particularly, Igbo culture. Igbo, the idiom of Ifemelu's ethnic group, is mostly spoken among family members. When young Igbo are directed towards a more cosmopolitan lifestyle and move away from their ancestors' villages, they lose contact with their oral tradition (Ifejika).

During Ifemelu's adolescence, the influence of Western countries in the lives of young Nigerians is clear. The ones who travel frequently to Europe and the United States are objects of interest and admiration of their friends:

[Ginika]'ll come back and be a serious Americanah like Bisi," Ranyinudo said. They roared with laughter, at that word "Americanah," wreathed in glee, the fourth syllable extended, and at the thought of Bisi a girl in the form below them, who had come back from a short trip to America with odd affectations, pretending she no longer understood Yoruba, adding a slurred r to every English word she spoke. "But, Ginika, seriously, I would give anything to be you right now," Priye said. (Adichie Americanah Ch.5)

In addition, all of them have access to, and can opt for, a bilingual education. Nigeria has an education policy that, in practice, permits the use of a mother language – mainly Igbo, Yoruba and Hausa – along with English

(Igboanusi 721). Therefore, many Igbo families can speak English and Igbo in one sentence. Both as first languages.

There is a contrast between English, the official language, as the medium for rational thought and intellectuality, while Igbo has the function of expressing emotions and it is a language full of metaphors. Igbo names carry meaning and history, while “storytelling and proverbs are very important to the traditional Igbo way of life, and have always helped to sustain the language” (Ifejika).

However, there is still a feeling of animosity in Nigeria after the deaths and poverty of numerous Igbo people caused by the Biafran War, an issue still unsolved in Nigerian culture. The secondary place of Igbo language in contemporary Nigerian relations is evident in the following passage:

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

It is difficult for a colonized country to reclaim its own identity by expressing it through the official language imposed by the empire, which reduces its native language to a secondary role. For instance, the metaphors used in Igbo

language are symbols unfamiliar to British culture, while at the same time Nigerian English has its own syntax compared to Standard English.

According to Bhabha:

It becomes crucial to distinguish between the semblance and similitude of the symbols across diverse cultural experiences -- literature, art, music, ritual, life, death -- and the social specificity of each of these productions of meaning as they circulate as signs within specific contextual locations and social systems of value. (Bhabha 172)

The hybridity, integration and mingling of cultural signs and practices from different cultures leads to the assimilation and adaptation of cultural practices, which is positive as well as oppressive. In *Americanah*, Adichie uses Igbo language constantly in the speech of her characters. There are no Western versions of their names and the readers must absorb the Igbo sentences in their original usage. Also, not all sentences and expressions in Igbo are translated. To understand the language, the reader depends on hints in the context of the narrative or has to Google, as Adichie suggests:

I have always had Igbo [in my writing]. And I've always had wellmeaning advice, often about how American readers will be confused, or they won't get something. I don't set out to confuse, but I also think about myself as a reader. I grew up reading books from everywhere and I didn't necessarily understand every single

thing — and I didn't need to. So, I think for me, what was more important, for the integrity of the novel, was that I capture the world I wanted to capture, rather than to try to mold that world into the idea of what the imagined reader would think. (Adichie "NBCC Fiction Award")

The author has been advised to change the setting of her novels and create narratives more agreeable to Western readers. As a response, Adichie advises that: "Google is fantastic. If people are interested, they can look something up. I remember thinking, 'I don't care if I'm published by a very tiny press and only ten people read it, but it will be the book I want to write.' And that's been my attitude from the beginning" (Adichie "NBCC Fiction Award"). In this way, Adichie takes a stand by including in her novel how she experiences Nigeria as an Igbo, creating a fuller representation of aspects of Nigerian culture.

#### **4.2. Language of Discrimination**

It is evident from *Americanah* that the characters all live separately as the Western people do not like to be associated with the Africans. They do everything possible to stay far from the Blacks because they see the blacks as people of low quality.

The language of discrimination is predominant in the text, the Blacks never go to the best schools in American, their lives doesn't matter and they constantly face segregation. Even when Ifemelu get herself a white boyfriend

“Curt” the White ladies around show hate and signs of superiority like, why should he condense so low as to dating a black girl from Africa.

As earlier stated, being coloured comes with some stereotypes as to expectations and limitations to how much success an individual can garner and even when a Black Individual struggles to achieve Success, he/she is still looked down upon by even less richer White people. This stereotypical act is a realistic experience Adichie herself experienced while studying in America and shown in *Americanah* as an occurrence that happened to Ifemelu during her babysitting hours;

“She looked at him, a taunt in her eyes, prolonging a moment loaded with assumptions: he thought she was a homeowner, and she was not what he had expected to see in this grand stone house with the white pillars. “Yes,” she said finally, suddenly tired. “Mrs. Turner told me you were coming.” It was like a conjurer’s trick, the swift disappearance of his hostility. His face sank into a grin. She, too, was the help. The universe was once again arranged as it should be.” (Adichie 124)

In the italicized data above, it proves that “Sometimes in America, Race Is Class” with the story of his dramatic change, and end with: It didn’t matter to him how much money Ifemelu had. As far as he was concerned she did not fit as the owner of that stately house because of the way she looked. In America’s

public discourse, “Blacks” as a whole are often lumped with “Poor Whites.” Not Poor Blacks and Poor Whites. But Blacks and Poor Whites.” (Adichie 125)

Ifemelu was not the only example of a prejudiced person of colour in the novel, her aunt Uju also had her own share of Prejudiced Racism;

“Sometimes she told the same story twice. How she had gone to the public library the other day, had forgotten to bring out the unreturned book from her handbag, and the guard told her, “You people never do anything right.” How she walked into an examining room and a patient asked “Is the doctor coming?” and when she said she was the doctor the patient’s face changed to fired clay. “Do you know, that afternoon she called to transfer her file to another doctor’s office! Can you imagine? (Adichie 136)

Here her language becomes pain and separation, Aunt Uju complains to Ifemelu about some instances of racial discrimination she experiences at her place of work and during normal routine. She is thought to not be good enough to be a doctor because she is Black.

#### **4.3. Conclusion**

From the aforementioned reviews about Adichie’s *Americanah*, it very obvious that the identity Adichie wants to create is that of discrimination based on colour.

Americans have disregarded the uniqueness of the black colour and relegates it to the status of inferiority complex.

Therefore, Adichie has demonstrated a high level of love for her African race. Her choice of language identifies her as though living in the States but she is not of the States by all standards.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### CONCLUSION

#### 5.0 Conclusion

Racism's ugly head and all it comes with is existent in all its vigour going about in confidence as it destroys any positivity and growth in the lives of any party it comes in contact with. This destruction comes in any and all forms; it could be Economically, Physically, Emotionally, Mentally, Academically and any other means that affects the general human life. These have been proven in this essay using the stated novels as concerned.

Drawing from the analyses done in the previous chapters, it is safe to declare that Racialism is not a figment of the Black race's imagination.

Racism affects everyone in the society more negatively than positively. Everyone suffers; the innocents, the ignorant, the victims and even the racists themselves. The last may be surprising to read but indeed the racists do suffer psychologically without even knowing they are suffering. To briefly explain this, the racists, believing they are the already superior race, do not make efforts to become better versions of themselves, they don't strive to be better because they practically get the good things of life without much efforts due to "White Privilege".

Standard of living is low and Cost of living is relatively high for the members of the Black community as a result of no good-earning jobs, robberies and gang wars happening recurrently which makes for a dangerous way of living for every member of the Black community either African-American or Black immigrants.

The issue of Split Personalities is a situation indeed that goes on till this very day. The Blacks have to devise a means to blend in and be a person according to the environment they find themselves in else they are tagged for being dangerous and scary when being their true selves.

Individual Racism is occurrence in the society between peers in a biracial setting. Black individuals are still victims of racist comments and mockery from their White peers. Blacks still get humiliated and abused both verbally and physically by their White peers because of the difference in the color of their skin.

In accordance with profering solutions to racism, hate speeches and membership of racist organization be criminalized and due punishment be mete out and followed to the letter. Members of Racist organizations be duely punished regardless of positions the culprit holds in the society.

Legislations against Racism should be made to foster equality and unity amongst individuals in the society. Job Opportunities should not be limited to race or request one's race or ethnicity during Job applications.

Educational sectors should prioritize every race and ethnicity without making one inferior to the other. Students of different races and groups be given the Freedom of true expression that is really practiced and not just something stated. They should be allowed to study and practice whatever they decide to without of consideration of their races.

Finally and most importantly, Love. Loving your neighbor as yourself goes a longway and is the ultimate solution to the Issue of Racialism. When there is Love, we tend to treat a person deservingly, give them a chance to show you who they really are and not judge them based on some age-long and backward stereotype.

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