

Venerating Nativity and Celebrating Identity – An Examination of Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah*

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Nigeria enjoys the credit of constantly producing critically well-acclaimed writers in the contemporary scenario. The list includes prolific writers like Wole Soyinka, Chinua Achebe, Amos Tutola, Ben Okri, Gabriel Okara, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie. With subordinate treatment of women, Nigeria Feminist Movement has given an impetus to women's writings prominating the discussion of women's problems serious. Modern Nigerian feminists including notable figures like Flora Nwapa, Buchi Emecheta, Zulu Sofola, Umelo Rosoha, Ifeoma Okōye, Elechi Amadi, Zaynab Alkali are ardently committed to channelize their creative power for the empowerment of women to achieve gender-free and 'color blind' noble society.

Grace E. Okereke rightly observes, "The Woman writer then proceeded to employ her brain to tell of woman's worth to throw into sharp relief woman's potential and capabilities geared towards raising the consciousness of her gender for the transformation of her society" (219). Society has been regrettably socialized to view the woman as inherently inferior to the man and as a person designed to take the supporting role and remain in the background. Adichie is of the view, "the problem with gender is that it prescribes who we should be rather than who we are" (Interview). She rebukes why Africans should support a cultural model that is unjust and oppressive to all of its citizens, and why African women folk should honour cultural model relegating women to the background.

Adichie in her renowned novel *Americanah* makes it a comfortable site to create "Nativity Consciousness" through the Nigerian protagonist Ifemelu, which helps one achieve complete sense of belongingness and meaning in life. Burdened by the bitter experiences while having to ape the living style of Americans as an immigrant in America, Ifemelu begins to realize restlessness in her physical, psychological and intellectual spaces. She feels she is losing herself

having nothing of her own native renderings. She is convinced that she can keep her self alive only by warding off the foreign influences of the host land. She is not able to digest the act of becoming a 'real' American at the expense of all her original bearings. Ifemelu is impelled to realize, "Nigeria became where she was supposed to be, the only place she could sink her roots in without constant urge to tug them out and shake off the soil" (6). She bids farewell to all her operations including the privileged fellowship at Princeton with the strong desire to get reunited with Nigeria to meet her self.

Ifemelu feels highly elevated that she has got back her own self. She is confident of achieving anything in her own land where she feels genuinely rooted in. As a Features Editor for a Nigerian women's magazine called Zoe, Ifemelu accomplishes her mission of addressing Nigerian women's welfare through innovative and enduring plans. She eggs her up to face challenges ready to honour and execute feminist ideals. She practices new grammar of life to reform the Nigerian outlook of life free from lethargic westernized life style with the idea of achieving more original recreation of 'Nigerianness'. The protagonist wishes her writing to become instrumental to the progressive change in the society she loves in. She becomes more optimistic as she is completely free of the burden of racial prejudice. Racial prejudice which becomes the internal and external cause of her victimization in America is now erased. For her, return to Nigeria is a spiritual venture to be able to breathe the air of freedom, free of the ruptures of racial disparity that smothered her thoughts of life. Boosted up with the unsurmounted energy Ifemelu is committed to transform the image of the western-accustomed life style of Nigerian women and challenge the stereotype of values forced only on women. Her progressive measures of great success in Nigeria are considered a kind of victory over her struggle for identity.

Ifemelu is comfortable with her identity as she has the freedom to write about what she wants and humourously critique daily life in Lagos, Nigeria. Her sense of belongingness is comfortably gratified in her native land. She has strongly voiced her suggestions of need for change in every aspect of life, burying deep the imitations of the West and upholding indigenous values. Ifemelu in action of reforming mental profile of the society condemns Nigerians' craving for wealth and power which makes the country economically weak suppressing the poor.

Adiche throws her fire of contempt on the materialistic culture of Lagos and unhealthy romantic relationships banked on money and power, instead of love and sacrifice. Her criticism has the mission of bailing out Nigeria from the continuously persisting influence of American as well as European ideals. She wishes Nigeria to relive the ancestral values and relieve herself from western stereotypes.

In the novel the protagonist Ifemelu defends herself that she is not influenced by the materialistic life of Americans as she always venerates native self and dignity of life. She offends native woman's irrational confined perceptions about life, attributing all the fortunes and misfortunes to the God's will. Her rebellious response brings to the fore Atwood's observation, "Anger and desire for change depend on the assumption that change will be for the better, that is in fact possible to achieve not only individual but social freedom" (274).

Ifemelu with her keen power of observation and self-criticism seeks transformation and progress among the native women folk. She is very candid that she disregards the corruptive operations at the very core of political and social setup. She recalls her harrowing life in America which gives her constructive drive to transform her native society into noble one that in her search for job, she met series of failures without understanding the cause of her inability to win even a low profile job. She seemed to be drifting spiritually by her suppressing environment heating insults, "she was at war with the world and woke up each day feeling bruised, imagining a horde of faceless people who were all against her" (152). The devastating economic condition pushed her to prefer some debasing job, "She felt like a small ball, adrift and alone" (154). Depression burdened her soul with an utter hopelessness. However, relationship with an affluent white man Curt changed the course of her life with a job recommended by him, "yet a soberness wrapped itself around her.... she felt in the midst of gratitude, a small resentment" (202).

Ifemelu suffered emotional crisis when she happened to cut her hair for the sake of getting job. Hair is the most significant cultural code of African women's identity. The company of black woman Ifemelu with a white man attracted only hostile indifferent looks of the white people. The marginalization of the blacks was plenty in the American magazines which tried to idealize white superiority. This proved the social exclusion of the blacks with their struggle for

survival. “The impact of racism and sexism are clear with Black women devalued by white standards of beauty” (Childs 544). The natural and innate African in her started dictating her to end the artificial and pretended life of American ways. Growing her natural Afro hair facing institutional racism consequently led to her resignation. She had already documented the racial issues faced by the blacks in America in her blog. She was determined to unlearn the American way of speaking English, “since she realized that she had taken on, for too long a pitch of voice and a way of being that was not hers” (174). Ifemelu hosted her choice of leaving America and getting away from emotional enslavement. She chose to ward off things that threatened to change her originality.

In an urge to burying the pseudo identity, she rethinks the way of attaining the spiritual freedom by reclaiming her Africanness lost over the years of her stay in America. She feels ashamed of betraying many things for her materialistically successful survival in America. Now she realizes that one can relish life fulfillment only when one lives one’s own life in one’s own space, “the freedom to live a life which realizes to the full its available human possibilities, and to live that life by participating joyfully in one’s own place” (Atwood 274). Her longing to discover her original identity gets deepened through the varied immigrant experiences, “melded into a piercing home sickness” (6). She emerges into a new free woman to be capable of contributing for a productive change by deposing the evils of her own Nigerian society.

Adichie’s commitment against the collective hypocrisy of the Nigerians is evident in the novel through the self-empowered character Ifemelu. The sense of free will and independence has guided the protagonist to serve her mission of empowering Nigerian women. She exerts her inner energy to transform the Nigerian society into a well-balanced one. She preaches ideals of one’s tradition and culture to erase the feeling of inferiority of one’s indigenous culture, and the degradation of self-contentment and dignity of one’s own country. She has made everyone to realize the need to return to one’s roots. Moreover, the protagonist creates a power in the women folk to refuse to be silent in the face of injustice and discrimination.

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