

# Navigating Decentralized Realities: Identity, Belonging, and Transcultural Experiences in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah*

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## Abstract

There have been major changes in African contemporary literature. It depicts the decentralized realities that Africans experience in the increasingly interconnected world going beyond singular narratives. The devolution of ethnic cultures and the rise of a generation struggling with fragmented identities are reflected in the emergence of new African voices both within and outside of the continent. One of the best examples of this trend is the novel *Americanah* by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie. Adichie crafts a story that skillfully combines disparate cultural elements—Nigerian and American—while providing a nuanced examination of self-identity and the feeling of being other through the journey of Ifemelu and Obinze. This article centers on Adichie's use of the idea of decentralized realities to illustrate the challenges faced by African migrants who have to reassess who they are in the face of societies that frequently marginalize their cultures. *Americanah* draws attention to the intricacy of cross-cultural encounters as well as the ongoing discussions and conflicts surrounding identity and belonging. In a world where borders—both physical and cultural—are always changing, the characters grapple with the idea of where they truly belong. The article explores how Adichie illustrates the psychological and emotional costs of navigating a world that does not always acknowledge their multiple identities by looking at their individual journeys. In the end, Adichie's *Americanah* explores the complex realities of the diaspora in a profound way as a representative work of contemporary African literature. The book promotes empathy and a greater comprehension of the complexity of individuals torn between cultures by making the reader confront preconceived ideas about identity and belonging.

**Keywords:** Decentralized realities, Oppression, Diaspora, Identity, *Americanah*

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## Introduction

In *Americanah*, two Nigerians named Ifemelu and Obinze—who immigrate to the US and the UK respectively—have entwined lives. Through their struggles with identity and belonging, the novel chronicles their experiences navigating unfamiliar cultures. Adichie skillfully captures their psychological and emotional struggles with racism cultural displacement and self-discovery in communities that frequently marginalize their origins. *Americanah* offers a complex and insightful analysis of the transcultural experience and the idea of decentralized realities by examining themes of love race and the difficulties of residing in two different worlds via the characters personal journeys.

*Americanah* has attracted a lot of scholarly interest with many academics delving into its complex themes of transculturalism, identity and migration. The conversation around the novel has been greatly influenced by a number of important works. Madhu Krishnan (2016) explores how *Americanah* negotiates the tricky terrain of transnational identity in her article *The Transnational Identity Politics of Americanah*. Krishnan posits that Adichie employs the blog of her protagonist Ifemelu to scrutinize American ideas surrounding race and identity, accentuating the distinctions between the experiences of African immigrants and African Americans. A similar discussion of transculturalism as a major theme in the book can be found in Sarah Ilott's (2015) article *Transculturalism and the Quest for Identity in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's Americanah*. Ilott draws attention to how Adichie's characters represent dynamic and fluid processes of blending cultures by embodying hybrid identities. Furthermore John McLeod (2017) examines how the characters in the book live in this liminal space, navigating their identities amid the collision of American and Nigerian cultures in *Cultural Hybridity and Third Space: Rethinking Americanah by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie*. McLeod's analysis clarifies how identity in a globalized world is shattered and fluid.

Additionally, a great deal of research has been done on the theme of racial identity and otherness in *Americanah*. Grace Kyungwon Hong (2018) explores how the novel addresses racial dynamics and the intersectionality of race gender and class in her article *Race and Ethnicity in Adichie's Americanah: An Intersectional Approach*. According to Hong, Adichie's story questions the majority white discourse and provides a complex analysis of black identity and otherness in American society. In *The Pain of Exile in Americanah*, a 2015 article by Maria Helena Lima, the psychological and emotional effects of migration are further studied through an examination of the characters feelings of displacement and yearning for a sense of belonging. Lima's emphasis on the psychological costs of navigating a society that does not always acknowledge their multiple identities resonates with the novels themes of exile and emigration.

Finally, Emenyonu (2017) addresses the wider effects of globalization on the identities and sense of belonging of the characters in *Globalization and the Politics*

of *Belonging in Adichie's Americanah*. Giving readers a thorough grasp of the novels engagement with current global issues Emenyonu draws attention to how Adichie's narrative interacts with global networks and Nigeria's interconnectedness within a global community. Through their examination of *Americanah's* exploration of identity transculturalism and the psychological effects of migration, these academic works help us understand the story more fully. This article looks at how Adichie depicts emigration and exile in *Americanah* and how these experiences give the characters a sense of decentralized realities. The disruption of conventional ideas of home and identity is referred to in this context as decentralized realities as the emigrants find themselves torn between cultures irrevocably altered by their experiences and compelled to deal with a fractured sense of belonging. Ifemelu's journey serves as an example of this idea as she moves back and forth between Nigeria and the West she encounters racial prejudice cultural adaptation and a need to belong. These experiences ultimately cause her sense of self to be disrupted and force her to reconstruct her identity in a dispersed and disorganized manner.

Furthermore, this study looks at the discourse of 'otherness' and examines the process of discourse construction through the lens of transculturalism. The term 'transculturation' was initially coined in 1940 by Cuban scholar and anthropologist Fernando Ortiz, becoming a significant notion in literary discussions. Ortiz defines transculturation as "the highly varied phenomena that have come about in Cuba as a result of the extremely complex transmutations of culture" (Ortiz 1995: 98). As a substituted term for 'acculturation,' which describes "the process of transition from one culture to another, and its manifold social repercussions" (Ortiz 1995: 98), transculturation emphasizes hybridity and cultural mestizaje (mixture). It recognizes the blending of cultural elements and the creation of new cultural expressions arising from this blending. Ortiz underscores the importance of appreciating these hybrid cultural forms as integral to the identities and experiences of individuals and communities. Ortiz notes the transculturation involving a steady stream of African Negroes from various coastal regions of Africa, along with other immigrant cultures such as Indians, Jews, Portuguese, Anglo-Saxons, French, North Americans, and individuals from Macao and Canton, all exerting and receiving cultural influences (Ortiz 1995: 98).

This dynamic process of cultural blending and mutual influence is crucial for understanding the experiences of Nigerian emigrants in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah*. In this regard, the present essay explores how these emigrants unravel 'decentralized realities,' which – as mentioned before – refers to the disruption of traditional notions of home and identity caused by emigration and exile. To understand these experiences, the essay draws on two significant theoretical frameworks: transculturation, as described by Ortiz, and the concept of the Third Space. Together, these frameworks illuminate the complex, hybrid identities and cultural negotiations faced by emigrants in the globalized world.

Transculturation, as theorized by Fernando Ortiz, emphasizes the ongoing and dynamic process of cultural transformation when different cultures collide. In *Americanah*, transculturation is particularly relevant as it recognizes the agency of individuals and communities in shaping new cultural expressions as they navigate between their Nigerian heritage and the cultures they encounter in their new homeland, the United States. This process of cultural blending and transformation, a key theme in postcolonial literature, contributes to the sense of ‘decentralized realities’ that the characters experience.

Homi Bhabha’s concept of the Third Space, another framework sheds further light on the complexity of identity in a globalized world. The Third Space refers to the in-between space that results from the interaction of cultures. In the context of *Americanah*, this concept can be applied to the experiences of the characters as they stand between their Nigerian identity and the cultural norms they encounter abroad. The Third Space underscores the fragmented and unfixed nature of identity in a world of migration, which is consistent with the concept of decentralized realities. In this sense, Bhabha argues that all cultural statements and systems are created in a contradictory and ambivalent space, known as the Third Space, which reveals the untenability of claims to cultural purity or originality. This space allows for the appropriation, translation, and reinterpretation of cultural meanings and symbols, demonstrating their lack of fixed or unified essence (Bhabha 2001: 21). In this regard, it is an in-between space that emerges from the interactions and collisions of cultures, challenging fixed notions of identity and offering possibilities for new forms of cultural expression and subjectivity.

Building on the foundations laid by Ortiz and Bhabha, the present paper applies transculturalism to understand the complexity of the novel. By examining the experiences of Nigerian emigrants grappling with emigration, exile, and ‘otherness,’ the analysis contributes to ongoing discussions within postcolonial studies. The analysis explores how cultural encounters and the lingering effects of colonial discourses shape and transform the lives and identities of these characters.

Adichie’s novel serves as a compelling critique of the prevailing conditions in the postcolonial era. As West notes, “racist thinking discourages moral thinking” (Adichie 2013: 46). Migration, as depicted in the narrative, is a consequence of the ruptures and entanglements characteristic of the postcolonial context, which Achille Mbembe describes as “discontinuities” and “entanglement.” The character Obinze recognizes this as the oppressive feeling of being trapped in a state of indecision (Mbembe 2001: 317), burdened by the consequences of postcolonial dysfunction. Through the narrative, Adichie confronts the oppressive nature of systems that deny individuals the power to shape their own destiny.

An undocumented immigrant trying to make his way in a strange but seductive Western society is depicted in the novel as someone who has experienced a profound life in exile. Welsch’s transculturality theory states that the idea of homeland must

change to take into account people's decisions about their many affiliations. This calls into question the conventional definition of home which is confined to a single physical place. A sense of fractured identity and a continuous balancing act between their Nigerian heritage and the cultures they encounter in exile are contributed to by characters such as Ifemelu by the changing meaning of homeland.

It is becoming the case that more and more individuals choose their belonging themselves. People can find their true homeland far from that in which they were born. Ubi bene, ibi patria, in classical Latin. Or, in the words of Horkheimer and Adorno: "Homeland is a state of having escaped" [...]. Hence "homeland" is not an naturally inherent or immutable categorisation but rather a cultural and human choice. (Welsch 2003: 40)

The novel explores the complexities of this condition and follows the concept of transculturalism, as elucidated by Jeff Lewis. The narrative offers a rich portrayal of the challenges, emotions, and conflicts faced by individuals who find themselves in this liminal space between cultures and societies.

The novel explores the complexities of exile and migration, highlighting how these experiences create a sense of decentralized realities' for the characters. This concept aligns with Jeff Lewis' definition of transculturality, which emphasizes the "problematics of contemporary culture" and the "dissonance, tension, and instability" that arise from the encounter of different cultures (Lewis 2002: 13). As characters like Ifemelu bounce back and forth between Nigerian and Western cultures, they must grapple with the "fluidity and complexity" of cultural exchange (13). This constant negotiation confuses their sense of self and challenges traditional notions of a unique cultural identity. In this sense, Jeff Lewis explains that:

By its emphasis on the problematic of contemporary culture, most particularly in terms of relationships, meaning-making and power formation [...] transculturalism is as interested in dissonance, tension and instability as it is with the stabilizing effects of social conjunction, communication, and organization. It seeks to illuminate the various gradients of culture and the ways in which social groups "create" and "distribute" their meanings [...]. Transculturalism seeks to illuminate the ways in which social groups interact and experience tension. It is interested in the destabilizing effects of non-meaning or atrophy. (58)

Lewis's theory of 'tension or atrophy' in transculturalism offers an insightful perspective for analyzing *Americanah*. This conflict results from the difficulty of juggling various cultural expectations and norms. Within the narrative, this conflict adds to the characters' perception of decentralized realities where migration upends their conventional notions of self and identity.

Taking Lewis' observations further, it becomes clear that the novel *Americanah* is a profound exploration of transcultural dynamics. Adichie skillfully weaves together the experiences of her characters, who embody diverse cultural backgrounds and navigate the complexities of migration. Through their stories, the characters' journeys highlight the transformative power of migration and emphasize the potential for cultural exchange, empathy, and mutual understanding.

In *Philosophy and the City*, edited by Meagher, it is argued that discussions about race in America often focus on the 'problems' black people pose for whites, rather than what these views reveal about American society. This perspective highlights a paralyzing framework where liberals support public funds to alleviate guilt without principled criticism, while conservatives blame black people for their own problems, rendering black social misery invisible (Meagher 2018: 190).

Gaining an understanding of *Americanah*'s contributions to the scholarly discourse on otherness, identity and ethnicity requires adopting this perspective. The novel emphasizes Nigeria's interconnectedness within a global community transforming the conversation on borders. In order to subvert the prevailing white discourse, Adichie's narrative explores the history of racism, black identity and otherness in American society. *Americanah* contributes to the literature on racism in America by shedding light on Nigeria's intricate relationship to the international context and its impact on transnational networks. It promotes critical thinking regarding the ways in which cultural norms and power relationships influence the lives of marginalized people.

Adichie explores emigration and exile in *Americanah* illustrating the decentralized realities her characters face by directly interacting with the theoretical ideas of transculturation and the Third Space. Understanding how traditional ideas of home and identity are shattered for characters like Ifemelu and Obinze requires an understanding of decentralized realities. The disjointed and complex identities that arise when people move between various cultural contexts are referred to as 'decentralized realities'. These characters are constantly restructuring their identities in reaction to encountering various cultural norms and practices rather than merely transferring from one culture to another.

Fernando Ortiz's definition of transculturation offers a framework for looking at this merging and changing of cultures. Ortiz's focus on cultural mestizaje and hybridity draws attention to the ways in which Adichie's characters—like Ifemelu—integrate aspects of their Nigerian background with the characteristics of their new environments in the United States. A condition of decentralized realities is produced by this continuous process of cultural negotiation in which identities are dynamic and always changing as a result of interactions with various cultural influences. Furthermore, comprehending the intricacy of these decentralized realities requires an understanding of Homi Bhabha's Third Space. Ifemelu's experiences in *Americanah* serve as an example of this Third Space as she continually navigates her Nigerian identity in the framework of American cultural norms. Since decentralized realities

are fluid and dynamic, this negotiation is not simple rather it is an ongoing process of resistance and adaptation.

### **Decentralized Realities: How Migration Disrupts Identity in *Americanah***

For characters such as Obinze, migration frequently results in a sense of decentralized realities as portrayed in *Americanah*. This idea describes how encountering a new culture can obstruct one's traditional sense of place and identity. Obinze's encounter with otherness serves as an illustration of this idea. He relocates to a foreign country the United States where his ethnicity makes him stand out. The unfortunate marriage serves as a stark reminder of the difficulties in bridging boundaries based on ethnicity. It undermines his sense of identity and belonging that his plan to obtain legal status has been disrupted. Obinze feels foreign and cut off from both his Nigerian background and the prospect of belonging in America because of his difficulty adjusting to a new society and the disappointment of an unsuccessful marriage plan. This is how the experience shows how migration with its innate otherness upends conventional ideas of self and belonging and gives characters like Obinze a sense of decentralized realities. Regarding Obinze's experience, the book provides a sophisticated comprehension of the complexities and traumas associated with navigating identity and belonging in a foreign country:

A policeman clamped handcuffs around his wrists. He felt himself watching the scene from far away, watching himself walk to the police car outside, and sank into the too-soft seat in the back.  
(Adichie 2013: 320)

An important incident that solidifies Obinze's belief in decentralized realities is his run-in with the law in Britain as a result of an expired visa (320). The impediment that migration and exile pose to conventional ideas of home and identity is discussed in this concept. Any sense of belonging in his new environment is dashed by the legal ramifications which also highlight his precarious existence as an undocumented immigrant. The authorities' enforcement of the lines separating citizen and outsider exacerbates this feeling of 'otherness' and Obinze's sense of self is further shattered as he struggles with the reality of his marginalization from mainstream society. This incident brings to light the intricate web of problems related to migration especially the vulnerability of individuals like Obinze and the legal constraints that surround it. Adichie emphasizes the way that migration obstructs conventional ideas of identity and belonging by detailing the severe repercussions of his undocumented status giving her characters a sense of decentralized realities.

Obinze's experience of cultural and legal exclusion during his marginalization in the United States serves to further solidify his perception of being an 'other' in his new society. This bears resonance with the idea of 'otherness' as it is developed in postcolonial literature which studies the lives of peoples who were previously

colonized. Adichie's portrayal emphasizes the complex nature of 'otherness' which includes obstacles to cultural assimilation and acceptance in addition to legal restrictions. Moreover, as a common theme in postcolonial studies the novel contextualizes memory and history as sources of trauma. These earlier experiences which are frequently based in colonial legacies have a significant impact on emigrants' lives like Obinze's forming their identities and affecting how they navigate environments that are associated with otherness. Adichie portrays via Obinze's hardships the universal difficulties people encounter when trying to redefine who they are and establish a sense of identity in an unfamiliar and sometimes hostile environment. *Americanah* illuminates the hardships faced by immigrants and the mental anguish they endure through this portrayal. She challenges the reader to consider the structural obstacles encountered by people navigating 'otherness' and the pressing need to rethink identity in the face of trauma and uprooting. Adichie's portrayal of the horrific experiences of immigrants deepens the story and encourages readers to consider the inequities in immigration laws (322–322).

Ifemelu writes a letter to Obinze expressing his admiration for America, citing the country's opportunity to embrace the American dream and sense of freedom as its main draws (492). The dominant hegemonic power that presents the Other as subpar but rebellious is the focal point of otherness in *Americanah*. One instance of this resistance is when Obinze meets a fellow prisoner who is opposed to being deported (325). By analyzing the characters' ongoing identity changes over time and space, the novel's main task is to help readers comprehend and accept diversity. It brings up significant issues regarding managing multiple identities in a world that is increasingly interconnected (323 325 and 492).

In *Americanah*, people of black descent and migrants stand as subalterns outside established power structures in terms of race, social status, and economic opportunity, often longing for choice and security in the Western world (318). Moreover,

The foregoing scenario is about African Other [...] resenting fellow Africans and attributing negative stereotypes to them. This is also reminiscent of embedded attitude of African Americans towards African immigrants. They unconsciously look down on Africans as Other, and not "Us", despite their pitiable occupation of the lower rung of the American race ladder. (Akingbe 2017: 51-52)

Adichie shows how these decentralized identities are developed by her characters through the interactions between Nigerian and Western cultures. When it comes to cultural dissonance and hybridity for example, Ifemelu uses her blog about race in America as a platform to discuss and negotiate these experiences. Her observations and criticisms highlight how the convergence of various cultural realities compels her to continuously reevaluate and redefine who she is. As a result, characters lived experiences—which require them to balance the competing demands of multiple



cultural affiliations—are portrayed as decentralized realities. Ifemelu, in a blog post titled “Understanding America for the Non-American Black: American Tribalism,” grapples with the notion of Blackness as the Other, recognizing the ongoing subjugation of Black people in America and the fluctuating status they occupy depending on context and time (Adichie 2013: 216). This experience of otherness is closely tied to existence on the margins, in liminal spaces, and on the periphery.

In the American context, Ginika, Ifemelu’s friend of mixed race, comes to a profound realization about the complexities of her color and identity. In this regard, Ginika states “I didn’t know I was supposed to have issues until I came to America. Honestly, if anybody wants to raise biracial kids, do it in Nigeria” (146). This revelation points to the subjective nature of identity, which depends on external perceptions rather than being controlled by autonomous individuals.

Ifemelu is forced to disguise or avoid her true identity throughout the story. However in order to find work in England Obinze has to give up his own identity and adopt the persona of Vincent, putting someone else’s name on a health insurance card. Along with taking on the name Ngozi Okonkwo, Ifemelu also gets an ID card from Auntie Uju that allows her to look for employment. Ifemelu experiences trauma from taking on a new identity which makes her share her worries with her friend Ginika—who has learned to rebel against the system—because of this experience. These instances highlight the complex dynamics surrounding identity where people are compelled to change reject or negotiate various aspects of who they are in response to social structures and expectations. The book sheds light on people’s difficulties and complexity: “You could have just said Ngozi is your tribal name and Ifemelu is your jungle name and throw in one more as your spiritual name. They’ll believe all kinds of shit about Africa (154).” Herein, Ifemelu experiences a deep sense of affirmation and restoration, for she feels that her identity is finally recognized and appreciated. This small victory is proof that her migration journey and the struggles she has endured have been worth it. It signifies a turning point where the challenges and sacrifices of migration lead to a positive outcome, giving Ifemelu a glimmer of hope and validation in her life.

The progression of historical reality can be seen as a “negotiation of alterity” (Beville 2011: 13). Migrants embark on a transcultural journey, moving between the opposing dynamics of the marginalized periphery and the influential city center, where they must contend with new forms of marginalization. In the American context, different cultural groups such as Nigerians, Japanese and Chinese engage in intercultural exchange and question each other’s perspectives and practices.

Unlike Auntie Uju, Ginika had come to America with the flexibility and fluidity of youth, the cultural cues had seeped into her skin, and now she went bowling, and knew what Toby Maguire was about, and found double-dipping gross. (Adichie 2013: 147)

The concept of decentralized realities in which the experience of migration destabilizes conventional ideas of home and identity is illustrated by Ifemelu's journey to America. Getting US citizenship can be viewed as a safety net but it does not ensure a feeling of community as Ifemelu's father highlights (28). America represents a prosperous future full of opportunities for younger generations like Obinze (88). The reality is far more nuanced when you get there though. It also draws attention to the distinctions between Nigerian and American social norms exposing Ifemelu's cultural presumptions in navigating social situations. American customs of financial self-reliance conflict with her host's expectation that she will pay for meals which may be customary in Nigeria. Additionally she faces challenges to her conception of appropriate behavior which forces her to reevaluate who she is and where she fits into this new cultural setting. This difference in cultural customs highlights the more general issue of cultural adaptation and the requirement to negotiate strange social environments. Ifemelu's experiences provide insight into the difficulty of cultural appropriation and the process of conquering it. "when the waitress brought the bill, Allison carefully began to untangle how many drinks each person had ordered ... to make sure nobody paid for anybody else" (52). *Americanah* uses the hairdressing salon run by Mariama as a powerful symbol of a heterotopia, a space that challenges traditional social norms. Herein, people from different African nations and racial backgrounds come together, fostering a sense of community and shared experience. However, this space also highlights the complexity of dealing with different identities in the diaspora.

Discussions, debates and confrontations regarding race and identity transpire in the salon which turns into a microcosm. It promotes contemplation on the consequences of cultural appropriation racial insensitivity and the dynamics of power by acting as a space where many viewpoints and experiences collide. The way in which the salon is portrayed as a heterotopia encourages the reader to consider the complex relationships between power identity and cross-cultural exchange in modern society: "you couldn't have this business back in your country, right? Isn't it wonderful that you get to come to the US and now your kids have a better life?" (221). Mariama's salon becomes a central place where Ifemelu embarks on a journey of self-discovery and identity formation together with her African colleagues: Mariama, Halima from Mali and Aisha from Senegal. In this dynamic environment, the quest for integration into American society becomes a central theme. Finding themselves in the midst of the transcultural experience, the language of these immigrants reflects their desire to fit into their new cultural environment.

### **Code-Switching Selves: Language, Identity, and the Search for Home**

The African characters in *Americanah* maneuver through a multifaceted linguistic terrain that exposes the conflicts innate to their experience as immigrants. Their interactions frequently reveal a desire for acceptance and a sense of belonging which

is mirrored in the language they use in an effort to assimilate into their new culture. Their aspiration for integration is indicated by their wish to accept and adhere to prevailing American cultural norms. Still there is a cost to this pursuit of approval. Their sense of identity and belonging is shattered as they struggle to find a place in the American environment while preserving their African identity. These characters experience decentralized realities as a result of this ongoing negotiation which upends the conventional notion of home and identity.

The salon as the following quote demonstrates becomes a microcosm of the greater story, shedding light on the complexities of assimilation identity and the changing nature of the immigrant experience through its diverse cast of characters:

The conversations were loud and swift, in French or Wolof or Malinke, and when they spoke English to customers, it was broken, curious, as though they had not quite eased into the language itself before taking on a slangy Americanism. The words came out half-completed. (20)

Ifemelu had a transformative encounter with a Guinean braider in Philadelphia, who expressed her frustration by saying, ‘Amma like, Oh Gad, Az someh’ instead of ‘I’m like, oh God, I was so mad’ (20). Ifemelu felt that giving up her identity to speak with an American accent was necessary. She made the decision to give up pretending and rediscover her authentic voice (204). She came to see that the adopted accent had hollowed her out because it showed a different side of herself from who she truly was (205). Her relationship with Yale professor Mr. Blaine, an African American who comes from a long line of black Americans coincided with this crucial time (207). Ifemelu broadens her perspective on the world and her social and personal horizons as a result of their relationship (210).

Ifemelu’s encounter with the Guinean weaver sets off a chain reaction that leads her on a path of self-realization and identity restoration. The interaction brings to light the linguistic and cultural challenges immigrants have when adjusting to various accents and modes of expression. Ifemelu’s relationship with Mr. Blaine turns into a transformative force in her life, helping her to go beyond cultural barriers and widen her perspectives. The coincidence that their meeting occurs on the day she regains her voice emphasizes how intimate relationships and personal development are intertwined. Ifemelu broadens her knowledge and viewpoint on a global basis in addition to gaining a deeper understanding of African American experiences through her partnership with Mr. Blaine. Ifemelu goes through a life-changing experience in her romantic relationship with Curt, a white man which goes beyond racial and social boundaries and forces her to reevaluate her identity.

Ifemelu watched Mariama in the mirror, thinking of her own new American selves. It was with Curt that she had first looked in the mirror and, with a flush of accomplishment seen someone else. (223)

Ifemelu's friendship with Curt provides her with comfort and a sense of community much like Ginika's support does when she is feeling down and uncertain. Ifemelu and Ginika have both effectively integrated into American society which enables them to get past the difficulties and complexities of their experiences as immigrants. Their integration into American culture gives them a feeling of security and acceptance.

Her laugh was so vibrant, shoulders shaking, chest heaving, it was the laugh of a woman who, when she laughed, really laughed. Sometimes when they were alone and she laughed, he would say teasingly "That's what got me". (223)

Ifemelu discovers that she has been able to overcome the constraints of her race and culture as she and Curt complete their relationship. Not only is their physical intimacy stimulating but it also marks a pivotal point in Ifemelu's development as a person and her understanding of her culture. She now views her own sexuality in a different cultural light as a result of this experience.

Ifemelu looked at Curt's pale skin, the rust-coloured moles on his back, the fine sprinkle of golden chest hair, and thought how strongly at this moment she disagreed with Wambui. (228)

Ifemelu's relationship with Curt in *Americanah* adds another layer to the complexity of 'decentralized realities.' While Wambui's hesitancy about interracial relationships highlights the cultural boundaries within the African community (a source of belonging for Ifemelu), her connection with Curt offers a sense of liberation and freedom that seemingly transcends these boundaries. However, this newfound sense of liberation also shakes her understanding of herself and her belonging:

I just can't get up and go to Paris. I have a Nigerian passport. I need to apply for a visa, with bank statements and health insurance and all sorts of proof that I won't stay and become a burden to Europe. (229)

Ifemelu experiences a profound change and gains a new self-image through her relationship with Curt. He gives her contentment and lightness and enables her to shed her old identity and take on a new one. Her social circle expands and she finds herself in upscale settings, such as the dining room of an ornate hotel, surrounded by well-dressed people, most of whom are white (236). Ifemelu integrates into the isolated social circle of Curt's American friends in Maryland. Ifemelu's gratitude is measured primarily in terms of economic security and her standing in Curt's social circle. This passive dynamic between the two raises the question of whether Ifemelu is self-determined and whether she is treated as a confidant or an object. During a visit to the mall in White Marsh, Ifemelu also unexpectedly sees Kayode, Obinze's friend, who tells her about it:

I was working in Pittsburgh but I just moved to Silver Spring to start a new job. Kayode further informed Ifemelu about her

secondary school boy friend, Obinze: “we got in touch when he moved to England last year. (258)

The unexpected meeting with Kayode awakens a mixture of emotions in Ifemelu and revives a world she had hoped to leave behind. She feels upset and blames Kayode for bringing back memories of her past relationship with Obinze: “The feelings were raging inside her. And she thought Kayode was guilty because he knew about Obinze, because he had brought Obinze back” (259). As far as England or American cities are concerned, the novel portrays exile as a deeply traumatic experience. Obinze is depicted in England getting involved with three Angolans to arrange a fraudulent marriage in order to obtain legal documents, a process that brings its own share of emotional turmoil as his gaze follows their actions:

They walked so quickly, these people, as though they had an urgent destination, a purpose to their lives while he did not. His eyes would follow them, with a lost longing, and he would think: You can work, you are legal, and you don’t know how fortunate you are. (263)

The only way for African migrants to obtain legal documents in Europe is through arranged marriages with European citizens. In Obinze’s case, the Angolans arrange his marriage to Cleotilde, who has a Portuguese passport, in order to secure his legal status in England. When he meets Cleotilde, Obinze tells her that they will divorce as soon as he receives his papers: “In a year I’ll have my papers and we’ll do the divorce” (264). Obinze pays the Angolans a large sum of two thousand pounds in cash, but they only give Cleotilde five hundred pounds after deducting her share (266). According to Nicholas’s advice to Obinze, marriage to an EU citizen in England is crucial in order to obtain legal status and start a new life (276).

Obinze who is traveling with Ojiugo and her kids sees a vibrant celebration that highlights the variety of cultural interactions and connections that occur in a transcultural setting. The intricacy and opportunities that result from cross-cultural interactions in the immigrant experience are emphasized by this portrayal of cultural blending.

[...] in an echo-filled rented hall, Indian and Nigerian children running around, while Ojiugo whispered to him about some of the children who was clever at Maths but could not spell, who was Nne’s biggest rival. (280)

In London, Nigerian men form relationships that bring together different African diaspora communities. Amara, a Nigerian woman living in exile in London, talks about her concerns about these intercultural marriages:

These West Indian women are taking our men and our men are stupid enough to follow them. Next thing, they will have a baby and they don’t want the men to marry them o, they just want child support. (279–280)

The novel *Americanah* captures the vibrant voices of transcultural experiences, particularly those of African immigrants seeking to redefine their identities in America. In a welcoming address to new students from Ghana and Nigeria, Mwombeki, addresses them with words of encouragement and shared understanding:

Try and make friends with our African American brothers and sisters in a spirit of Pan-Africanism. But make sure you remain friends with fellow Africans, as this will help you to keep your perspective. ... You will also find that you might make friends more easily with other internationals, Koreans, Indians, Brazilians, whatever, than with Americans, both black and white. (165)

As Mwombeki incisively notes friendships can arise because international students particularly those from Africa frequently have a deeper understanding of ‘otherness’ and the experience of exile. Mwombeki highlights that the difficult process of obtaining an American visa can be interpreted as a shared trauma that provides a significant foundation for establishing relationships. Additionally, African Student Association (ASA) events in the United States act as a hub for students from various African countries, offering a special chance to socialize engage in cross-cultural dialogue and commemorate common experiences:

The meetings were held in the basement of Wharton Hall, a harshly lit, windowless room, paper plates, pizza cartons and soda bottles piled on a metal table, folding chairs arranged in a limp semicircle. Nigerians, Ugandans, Kenyans, Ghanaians, South Africans, Tanzanians, Zimbabweans, one Congolese and one Guinean sat around eating, talking, fuelling spirits and their different accents formed meshes of solacing sounds. They mimicked what Americans told them ... (163)

The experiences of characters like Obinze and Ifemelu in *Americanah* illustrate the concept of ‘decentralized realities’ Obinze, fleeing misery in Nigeria, considers a sham marriage in England just to obtain legal papers. This illustrates the desperation and precarious existence that some immigrants face. America, on the other hand, represents a land of opportunity, a stark contrast to the perceived restrictions in their home countries. Ifemelu’s conversation with Aisha further emphasizes this point. To be accepted in the immigrant community, a longer stay in America seems to be essential. Her response, “fifteen years, even though it was five,” illustrates the pressure to conform to a certain narrative of belonging, even if it means exaggerating the truth. This constant negotiation between her hopes in America and the realities of her situation disrupts her sense of belonging to a particular place and contributes to a sense of “decentralized realities”

African texts that are circulated internationally deal with topics that are easily assimilated into large global concerns like femi-

nism, and transnational migrations and their repercussion in the politics of multiculturalism. Works that deal with national issues like development, social dislocation, problems of democratic institutions and so on. (317)

Dike's physical otherness makes him the target of bullying and a label of aggressiveness at school. *Americanah* explores the ubiquitous experience of 'otherness' for black characters such as Ifemelu and Dike. Analogously Ifemelu's encounter with the white middle manager on the plane emphasizes the racial prejudice she faces in America (15). Aunt Uju's frustration with the principal (201) highlights how these assumptions destroy Dyke's sense of belonging and force him to navigate a world in which his appearance marks him as other. The idea that being black in American society is inherently a form of 'otherness' is furthered by his comment regarding the adoption rates of Black people. In addition to testing their sense of self, these encounters add to the impression that they are living in an environment where their identity is continuously in doubt. The characters' traditional sense of home and belonging is uprooted by their ongoing struggle with their racial identity and the reality of racial prejudice in America which adds to their sense of decentralized realities.

These examples from *Americanah* highlight the ubiquitous impact of race and appearance. The book makes readers think critically about how society stigmatizes and classifies people according to their outward appearance particularly when those appearances deviate from the norm. Dike's experiences shed light on the difficulties faced by Black people who are stereotyped and subjected to unjust assumptions based only on their appearance.

*Americanah* does a good job of illustrating the various emigration viewpoints and reasons for departing the country. A unique perspective shaped by their individual experiences and global awareness is provided by every African character in the book. Ginika's explanation is brought up by Ifemelu's employer Kimberly when she asks why she left Nigeria: "Ginika said you left Nigeria because college professors are always on strike there?" (173). This statement focuses on one facet of the sociopolitical environment that affected the emigration choice. At times of extreme hopelessness Aunt Uju vents her annoyance by blaming Nigeria's political elite for her problems: "Why do I have to take this rubbish? I blame Buhari and Babangida and Abacha, because they destroyed Nigeria" (253). Her statement reveals the disillusionment and disappointment with the state of their home country.

Meanwhile, in England, Emenike's friend Alexa, who is acquainted with Emenike's wife Georgina, reflects on the detrimental consequences of migration for Africa's healthcare system. Alexa laments the significant loss of doctors and nurses from the continent, emphasizing the tragic impact on Africa: "there are simply no doctors and nurses left on that continent. It is an absolute tragedy! African doctors should stay in Africa" (314). This perspective sheds light on the brain drain phenomenon, whereby the migration of highly skilled professionals exacerbates the shortage of essential

services in their home countries.

The pursuit of the American dream in *Americanah* comes at a significant cost, contributing to a sense of “decentralized realities” for characters like Obinze. Ojiugo’s account of Nicholas’ struggles in the UK (277) highlights the sacrifices immigrants make in terms of identity. The pressure to conform and assimilate often necessitates adopting a “self-protective facade of inauthenticity,” as you mention. This fracturing of the self, where one’s true identity feels hidden or suppressed, disturbs the traditional understanding of “home” and belonging. Navigating a foreign environment can force individuals to compartmentalize their sense of self, creating a fragmented reality where they struggle to reconcile their immigrant identity with their cultural heritage. Ojiugo’s story exemplifies the profound emotional toll this takes, highlighting the internal conflicts and unease that often accompany the immigrant experience.

## Conclusion

Adichie explores the complexities of cultural assimilation, the struggle for true self-expression in a globalized society and the relationship between tradition and modernity via the experiences of her characters. The characters are forced to deal with a sense of decentralized realities as a result of these experiences which challenge conventional ideas of home and belonging. Struggling to reconcile their immigrant experiences with their heritage, they manage fragmented identities while residing in two different cultures. Adichie tackles a number of difficult subjects in her book such as exile, migration, identity, loss, what it is like to be an ‘other’ and the dynamics of racial relations. These topics are presented as divisive, unsettling and capable of isolating and suffocating individuals. Adichie expertly conveys the resonance of trans-cultural voices through her story while examining the nuanced aspects of Nigeria’s changing transcultural identity in the post-colonial period.

The traumas and confusion experienced by people who have been uprooted from their home country and must cope with the loss of their cultural and personal identity are aptly portrayed by Adichie. Moreover, the story highlights the significant influence of cultural norms and biases that frequently condemn people to the position of the Other, making them marginalized and silenced by dominant discourses. Adichie’s *Americanah* ultimately encourages us to address the difficulties encountered by immigrants and cultivates compassion for the plight of those residing in decentralized realities. The book is a potent reminder of the human cost of uprooting oneself and of the never-ending quest for identity in a world where things are constantly changing and moving. It arouses critical thought about the difficulties of migration, the lingering effects of colonialism and the significance of creating a more accepting and inclusive environment for those who are looking for a new place to live.



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