

Disillusionment and Self Re-invention in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah*

James, Otoburu Okpiliya

Department of English and Literary Studies,
University of Calabar, Calabar-Nigeria
okpiliyaj@gmail.com

Omagu, Steve Ushie

Department of General Studies,
Kwararara University, Wukari

Abstract

The Nigerian immigrant like other migrants “straddles between two stools” (Rushdie: 1982) and therefore lives in limbo and restiveness. This essay explores tapestries of displaced Nigerian migrants going through culture shock, racial indignities, social conundrum, disenchantment and self transformation. The essay holds that in spite of the harrowing experiences of adjusting and readjusting, the Nigerian diaspora is a complex combinatorial quest that is sweet and sour, that subjects and uplifts, debases and elevates. In this binary co-mingling of migrant experiences of Nigerian and Euro-American spaces, the essay argues that despite the unrest in Nigeria as a post colony, there will be continuous dispersals. However, return migration is necessary because home is a compelling force.

Keywords: Migration, Culture Shock, Ethnocentrism, Stereotypes, Survival, Return Migration, Home.

Introduction

Nigerians keep getting increasingly bugged with the grandiose idea of going abroad for myriads of reasons. The reasons for dispersal may include: academic pursuit due to the poor educational system in the country; poor infrastructure and poor medical care which have also been paramount to some of these mobilities. Other reasons might be hinged on the impoverished socio-economic situation as well as political instability in the country. However, a growing wave of dispersal of Nigerians has been motivated to migrate on what Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie in *Americanah* (2013) regards as “lethargic choicelessness”. This idea interrogates the continuum of perpetual oscillation between home and abroad, borne out of listlessness and insatiability premised on the notion that, “the grass is greener on the other side”.

In other words, apart from migration due to poverty, armed conflict, political turmoil and economic hardship, Nigerians now migrate abroad for the sheer purpose of curiosity just

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to relive dreams drawn from pop culture and storybooks. Hence, in such situations, some migrations have been successful while a significant number have been aborted. However, some of these unsuccessful migrants would want to return home involuntarily. In her fiction, Adichie captures the voluntary return of some successful migrants, thereby opposing certain theories of migration. Locally, in Nigeria, it is commonly accepted that Europe, America, Australia and Asia are safe havens. Thus, various organizations and agencies in Nigeria thrive by promoting the majestic notion that these countries have better opportunities to offer Nigerians than their home country. Families, institutions, popular culture and the mass media advertently or inadvertently act as catalysts and stokers to the "going- abroad- syndrome". In view of the present diasporic predicament, Adichie commits herself to making a statement towards this growing trend because "it is very difficult for the writer really to free himself [herself] from the currents and the fluctuations of his [her] time" (George Lukacs, 305). The Migration of Nigerians is on the increase, especially as the country battles with myriads of socio-political and economic problems. The issue is so severe that some religious houses are at the forefront of this migratory trend, as they prophesy visas to their congregation amidst other bounteous earthly rewards.

A close reading of Adichie's *Americanah* shows that, on the one hand, she compares home and diaspora in terms of the several inadequacies in the home countries and, on the other hand she opines that, in pursuit of the proverbial greener pastures, the potential migrant should be aware of the dual nature of the diaspora-the highs and the lows. Though Adichie is not against migration, she is a conscience clock that reminds the reader that there are several attitudes which might disillusion a potential migrant from staying abroad.

The Nigeria Diaspora has increased rapidly and is still increasing because everyone is on the move. Several discourses on diaspora studies consider migration as the most important population phenomenon, setting aside fertility and mortality. Stephen Castle and Mark Miller aver that we live in an "Age of Migration", a period that "has accelerated, globalised, feminized, diversified (foreign cultures) and become increasingly politicized" (10-12). According to the 2010 United Nations Population Division statistics, there are 214 million migrants in the world; if all these migrants were put in a country of their own, it would be the fifth largest in the world (ed. in Russel King 4). Actually, the diaspora is very synonymous with migration; it has evolved from a capital "D" (a dispersion that was attributed to the Hellenic and Jewish people) and today, the term is varied and extended in its application and interpretation from political, cultural and economic fields. It is generally considered as a forced or voluntary spread of persons or people from one geographical location to another with the migrants still having linkages with the countries of origin. In this paper, the diaspora would be x-rayed according to the position of Nilofar Akhtar who states that the:

Diaspora is a physical, emotional and psychological state of (a) strutting between two geographical and cultural states (b) it is also a struggle between regression and progression, dislocation and relatio.

Therefore, this essay interrogates the fictive experiences of Nigerian immigrants in the United States of America and Britain as they undergo the pressures of migration in Adichie's *Americanah*; and as they struggle to conquer the realities of their new settlements. Also, the paper strives towards capturing the "mobility paradoxes" of characters abroad through calibrated graphic and sensory pictures of their experiences. Finally, the essay's discursive lens is also focused on the romantic notion of returning home after straddling un/successfully between two divergent climes and cultures.

Disillusionment: "How the Pressures of Immigrant Life Can Make You Act Crazy"

Adichie has always been fascinated with the experiences of the African diaspora. This thematic pre-occupation is resonated in all her works, but *Americanah* gives a more expansive portrait of emigrant experiences than her other works such as, *Purple Hibiscus* (2003) and *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2007), *A Thing Around the Neck* (2009) respectively. Accordingly, Pius Adesanmi and Chris Dunton agree that, Adichie belongs to a generation of Nigerian writers concerned with "nomadism, exile, displacement and deracination" (16). Some of the experiences captured in the novel, *Americanah* are drawn from her personal experiences during migration. The novel therefore weaves various classes of middle and lower middle class Nigerians in diverse tapestries of the diaspora. In *Americanah*, Adichie is very particular about the plights of Nigerians who journey abroad for academic and economic purposes; she creates characters that are corollary of the hardships, diversity, struggles, alienation, disillusionment, and return migration. Also, Adichie bemoans the challenges the Nigerian immigrant faces even before leaving Nigeria to foreign shores; she further stresses that the, international and national portrayals of Nigeria by foreigners and even by Nigerians themselves have not be favourable and these have a springboard in most cases to their global lack of acceptability. For instance, in an interview with *The Telegraph Newspaper*, the President of Nigeria General Muhammadu Buhari is of the opinion that:

Some Nigerians' claim is that life is too difficult back home, but they have also made it difficult for Europeans and Americans to accept them because of Nigerians in prisons all over the world accused of drug trafficking and human trafficking... I don't think Nigerians have anybody to blame. They can remain at home, where their services are required to rebuild the country... we have an image problem and we are on our way to salvage that.

Such utterances further jeopardize opportunities of Nigerian migrants and tend to cement Nigerians' purported reputation for criminality. Other crimes that Nigerians have been allegedly involved in are sham or arranged marriages and human and drug trafficking. As handled in this section, these images of the "craziness" are inappropriate behaviours exhibited by Nigerians in their countries of sojourn.. Adichie portrays these perceived negatives of Nigerians from the initial pages of *Americanah*. For instance, the protagonist,

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Ifemelu, observes that, "To hear "Nigeria" and "good" in the same sentence was a luxury" (*Americanah* 13). This is further stressed by the South African customer Ifemelu meets with at the salon; she is quick to state, "In my country, South Africa, Nigerians are known for stealing credit cards and doing drugs and all kinds of crazy stuff" (187) and Halima, the Malian hairdresser adds, "...Nigerians very corrupt. Worst corrupt country in Africa. Me I watch the film but no, I don't go to Nigeria" (187). Surprisingly, these acrimonious remarks about Nigeria and Nigerians elicit no reply from Ifemelu. The question which arises is that, is it that these speakers are beneath Ifemelu's deep thoughts and as such are not worthy of logical reasoning on the issue? Or, is it that Ifemelu has developed thick skin to such bigotry? Can one also argue that, by being unpatriotically silent, Ifemelu accedes to the comments and prefers to be anybody else but a Nigerian? Sometimes Nigerians are caught in this web of bludgeoning scenarios that any reaction is relative to each Nigerian.

From the foregoing, it is amply clear that potential migrants are already stereotyped due to the historicities of their country men even before their supposed transplantation abroad. In addition, even when these allegations of criminalities are false or real; intended migrants are made to face more stringent immigration checks and harsher visa restrictions than most Africans. Another form of craziness of migrants' experiences characterized by Adichie is the disillusionment which older migrants present to the newly immigrated Nigerian. For instance, the prolonged university strike action propels Ifemelu's migration from Nigeria to the United States of America for further studies. The facticity of older migrants' experiences is instantly in conflict with his idealism. Even upon arrival at the airport, Ifemelu juxtaposes Auntie Uju's current and previous disposition. Ifemelu observes that:

There was something different about her [Auntie Uju]. Ifemelu had noticed it right away at the airport, her roughly braided hair, her ears bereft of earrings, her quick casual hugs, as if it has been weeks rather than years since they had last seen (104).

Auntie Uju's disheveled appearance, her cold reception, sparse apartment, her three jobs and the fact of things being difficult immediately dampen Ifemelu's mood about these aspects of this United States. This is further heightened by Auntie Uju's loss of her identity, as supported by the alteration in the pronunciation of her name. She notices that, "She pronounced it *you-joo* instead of *oo-joo* (104). However, not so long after Uju's loss of identity, Ifemelu would come to use a pseudonym in a bid to work and cater to her needs, an action that she has formerly derided. Even "Obinze became Vincent" (250) because he needs a job. Adichie observes that this action has become a normalcy with Nigerians in their diasporic experiences as they struggle in pursuit of the American dream. All these drawbacks and subdued dispositions that older migrants advertently or inadvertently display to new migrants, tend to distort or straighten the realities of their new environment. This apparent lack on the part of older immigrants tends to pique the new migrant into wanting to work harder.

Unlike the physical ways Ifemelu encounters her migrant realities, Obinze faces his experience on a rather psychological level in England as he stays with his cousin Nicholas. His cousin Nicholas, who was back in Nigeria, was jovial and adventurous; but because of the struggles of living abroad, his ebullient and winsome dispositions are now insipid and dour. He harries Obinze around the house because England has preconditioned him into believing that: *"You come to England with a visa that does not allow you to work... the first thing to look for is not food or water. It is an NI number so you can work. Take all the jobs you can. Spend nothing. Marry an EU citizen and get your papers. Then your life can begin"* (239). This observation reflects a key thematic preoccupation with the struggle for economic independence. Several wage, employment and all round socio-economic differentials are reasons for some of the movement and subsequent craziness displayed by the characters. It is no denying that, impoverished political and economic conditions in Nigeria have been catalytic to many Nigerians leaving their home country, hence, Adichie creates a troupe of characters who struggle through various experiences of disillusionment to strive towards socio-economic stability.

Adichie takes the characters' survivalist desire to a higher level as she exhibits the spectrum of their absurdities, illegalities and illogicality as she tries to harness, examine and rationalize the social construct of Nigerian migrants. For instance, Ifemelu almost loses Obinze, her self-value and worth in the brief liaison with the Tennis Coach. Her involvement with the Tennis Coach showcases that, money is power and few can resist its trappings, especially hard-pressed Nigerian migrants. Also, she learns that migrants can get easily disillusioned with the lack of it, and pertinently, migrants can easily lose their morality in the pursuit of economic independence. Ifemelu, like most Nigerians abroad, *"wakes up every day worrying about money (135), she has needs, textbooks, tuition, rent and general upkeep; she is new in the country with none to help her, and, no job in order to avoid a disgraceful return back home she decides to visit a man who wants a "massage" and "needs to relax". The man is white and rich; he has strange sexual preferences that devalues sex and women. He objectifies and dehumanizes Ifemelu and this fills her with gloom, depression and wild imaginations that are foreign to her. After allowing "his active finger between her legs" (154) she later muses:*

...about killing the tennis coach. She would hit him on the head over and over with an axe. She would plunge a knife into his muscled chest... she would leave the knife sunk in his chest and then search his drawers for his bundle of one-hundred-dollar bills, so she could pay her rent and her tuition (155).

Sandra Lee Bartky opines in *"On Psychological Oppression"* that, *"Sexual objectification occurs when a person is identified by their sexual body part or sexual function. In essence, an individual loses their identity, and is recognized solely by the physical characteristics of their body. The purpose is to bring enjoyment to others or serve as sexual object for others (26). Nevertheless, before travelling abroad the thought of sexual commodification/objectification, murder and stealing are alien to Ifemelu, so, these alien*

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ideas of stealing and killing are borne out of societal pressures. Here, Adichie acknowledges objectification and consequent dehumanization of migrants most especially women due to their financial vulnerability. Hence, Ifemelu is presented here as an epitome of a growing body of immigrant women that eventually become personal entertainment and pleasure machines to rich people within and across racial circles.

Consequently, the Tennis Coach becomes the subject and Ifemelu the object; the subject proposes what he wants sexually and the object assents to whatever perverse options proposed by the subject because of financial gratification. This act is partly responsible for Ifemelu's depression and subsequent shift in sexual relationship. As depicted from Ifemelu's sexual relationships after the incident with the Tennis Coach, her next sexual relationship is with Curt who is also white, rich and "had never been with a black woman" (195). In this experimental relationship with Curt, Ifemelu is merely an object of ornamentation, purely an adornment to the colourful world of Curt. She describes their relationship as, "their life together had happened to her" (299). This tells of Ifemelu's passivity and apathy, especially when she expresses the fact of her parents not welcoming the idea of her dating a white man. Her relationship is even a curiosity to herself; she further expresses this sexual curiosity with Rob, a white male neighbor, a mistake that results in her break-up with Curt.

In all, Ifemelu never gets a sense of fulfilment in her sexual adventures with white people. At a point she detects that "There was something wrong with her. She did not know what it was but there was something wrong with her. A hunger, a restlessness. An incomplete knowledge of herself" (289). Though, the aftereffect of Ifemelu's sexual experience with the Tennis Coach, Curt and Rob are depression and poor self-imaging that makes her feel dominated by all the men in her life (except in the case of Obinze); this act causes her estrangement towards her parents when they pay her a visit in the United States. Faced with the increasingly restive ambience of her break-up, Ifemelu is aloof and consequently exhibits characteristics that burden her with guilt. She says:

She watched them with a sneer, and for this she felt guilty: she had guided their memories so preciously and yet, finally seeing them, she watched them with a sneer.... On the day they left for Nigeria, she collapsed onto her bed, crying uncontrollably, and thinking: what is wrong with me? She was relieved that her parents had gone, and she felt guilty for feeling relief (302).

Around this basic scaffold of a love story is constructed the ideological interpellation of memory and relationship across racial line and between parents and children as seen in Ifemelu's attitude towards her parents. We see transformations of some dominant discursive realities, as Adichie processes and packages the confrontations and reactions of migrants in various shades of relationships. In exploring these labyrinths, Adichie unmasks certain eccentricities of migrant relationships. First, we see this in the attitudes of Aunt Uju's cold reception of Ifemelu at the airport. This baffles the young Ifemelu, but Ifemelu in turn receives her parents poorly. The argument here is on the dissimilarity of the financial status of the two characters at the different point of their visitation. In Aunt

Uju's case, she works three jobs, she is in a financial and emotional quagmire, she has a failed examination to reseat and Dike to carter for. Above all, she is classified as an "Aunty". But in Ifemelu's case, money is not much of a problem, she has no children, no other challenging responsibilities, and the relatives she welcomes are her "parents". Adichie's characters display a wide range of migrant situations that precedent disillusionment; foregrounding it within a microcosm of the family structure before engaging in a wider viewpoint. Also, this seminal idea of relational peculiarity as projected by Adichie opines that potential Nigerian migrants visiting their relatives and loved ones living abroad should expect the unexpected.

This same argument tends to underscore the character of Obinze who also witnesses this poor reception explored above. His diasporic experience is different from Ifemelu's. First, Obinze's childhood dream of going to the US is challenged by the twin tower event of 9/11; then, his prolonged stay in his mother's house makes him feel redundant; and worst still, he feels he has lost Ifemelu. In spite of the economic quagmire in Nigeria, Obinze is never portrayed to explore the same design of going abroad like other characters in the novel. He states, "[I] had never simply wanted to go abroad as many others did... it had always been America, only America. A longing nurtured and nursed over many years" (232). This childhood obsession is fine tuned by the effective manipulations of the mass media. Though some socio-economic activities further cement Obinze's fixation of going abroad one is bamboozled by the effective use of advertisement to cajole Nigerians to see the seamy side of their country and to "check out". Through Obinze's viewpoint, the reader gets acquainted with some fundamental and evolving reasons for migration. This reason for Obinze's migration is rather unprecedented and he makes mockery of it thus:

Alexa, and the other guests, and perhaps even Georgina, all understood the fleeing from war, from the kind of poverty that crushed human souls, but they would not understand the need to escape from the oppressive lethargy of choicelessness. They would not understand why people like him, who were raised well-fed and watered but mirrored in dissatisfaction, condition from birth to look towards somewhere else, eternally convinced that real lives happened in that somewhere else, were now resolved to do dangerous things, illegal things, so as to leave, none of them starving, or raped, or from burned villages, but merely hungry for choice and certainty. (276)

Obinze's migration is a curious one. Poignantly, many migrations stem from socio-political and economic instabilities in the home country, but his is calibrated on the wariness and curiosity to explore a land he always dreams of, a place he is *eternally convinced* has all the answers to life's problems. Some Nigerians like Obinze leave home for various inconsequential reasons and this set of immigrants sometimes return willingly or forcefully to either formulate several return schemes or rather than staying back in Nigeria to carve a niche for themselves. Afterwards, when Obinze becomes one of the *nouveau* millionaires in Nigeria, he has learned the hard way to outgrow his youthful predilection for all things

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American. Here, Adichie reflects on the national image, especially on the the fixation that going abroad is a quick and easy route to wealth and stability. In this regard, Idowu-Faith observes that, "Obinze's need to flee choicelessness defines *Americanah* as a new kind of migration story and set the text in motion against recognized migration theories" (3).

Another fascination with Obinze's diasporic situation is hinged on his certitude to honourably return back to Nigeria despite the realities of being branded a failure. Obinze learns that his purported reason for wandering is irrelevant and he makes it clear. First, at the airport with a dignity that defies his situation, he vehemently declares, "I am willing to go back to Nigeria" (279). Even the lawyer is perplexed that a Nigerian is willing to be deported without a fight. Secondly, even when Obinze is given options of having a lawyer provided for him by his countrymen, he declines and when his cellmate at Dover advises on how to avoid being repatriated thus, "if you take off your shirt and your shoes, they will not board you" (283) Obinze blatantly refuses this simple act of resistance.

The youthful Obinze is a direct opposite of his mother and her ideological standpoint. Their principles usually conflict, especially when it pertains to going abroad. Obinze's mother is of the generation that believes in the positive change of Nigeria in spite of the squalid situation of the country, hence his return and eventual success is a justification of her ideology. Also, her death can also be seen as a dying generation of patriotic Nigerians who still believe in their motherland. She is an epitome of Feminism, Pan-Africanism and Conservatism. She is a character that represents a dwindling coterie of intellectuals and other professionals that are tersely against brain drain. In several ways, she tries to inculcate her philosophy on everyone she comes across but she gets bewildered by how Nigerians keep struggling to leave their country.

Other images of migrant craziness is based on the interpersonal relationship that exists amongst migrants. Adichie projects several shades of betrayal and trust, enmity between friends and cultural change to crystallize the idea of disillusionment and self in Nigerian migrant experiences. Some of the key characters portray strange attitudes towards their compatriots. For instance, Nicholas speaks to his children "in careful English, as though the Igbo he shared with their mother would infect them, perhaps make them lose their precious British accents"(239). Aunty Uju also points out to Ifemelu when she speaks Igbo with Dike; "Please don't speak Igbo to him. Two languages will confuse him"(109). Through these characters Adichie projects the social realities of US and UK that strive towards Americanize and anglicize migrants. The Children and generations born in the diasporas are flogged for not having the correct English accents; "Speak English at home, Blunkett tells immigrants"(258), and adults have a "White People Are Watching Us voice" (342). Language in these contexts is not merely for communication but it is used as state apparatuses for domination. This mentality by state machineries of government imposes cultural strain on the immigrants resulting in immigrant subterfuge and hybridity. By some of these impositions, children seem to express stubborn streak by reporting their parents to state institutions of power like social workers (112).

Also noteworthy is Emenike's and Obinze's relationship; they are secondary school friend, the latter squatting the former in the Nigeria but in their migrant situation, the reader is

completely baffled about Emenike's estrangement and rejection of Obinze. Though, Emenike helps Obinze momentarily, his superior behaviour accounts for their altered and uncomplimentary relationship that is eventually severed after Obinze's repatriation. From the montage of characterization, it can be deduced that female friendship amongst migrants is more fruitful than male friendship. The male characters tend to compete and most times are unhelpful to the plight of their countrymen, meanwhile, Adichie's women foster stronger sisterly bond to enable them survive the challenges diaspora. For instance, this is seen in the relationships between Emenike and Obinze; and Ginika and Ifemelu respectively.

Immigrants often hunger to learn and know about their new surroundings. They sometimes shade skins of their original behaviours and hybridise in the process. These hybrid personalities give vent to the title of the novel, *Americanah*, which is a mocking epithet of been-tos. Immigrants try to blend in their new environment thereby resorting to sacrificing their cultural identities. They pick and drop cultural identities as they transverse the space of home and abroad. Adichie projects nuances of migrants' sensibilities in their every day interaction, abjection and intractable survival of the pressures of migrant situation. Also, she is of the opinion that, migrants need to believe in their ability to succeed in spite of the crazy dispositions by friends, cultural and systemic mechanizations of the government and people of their sojourn lands. Adichie also portrays a polyphony of socio-cultural constructs that are tantamount to cause subsequent disillusionment; but instead of dissuading Nigerian migrants to abandon their different aspirations, she appeals that these characters' multimodal interactions and projections are palimpsests that unearth and educate Nigerians on how to cope in their new environment.

Disillusionment: "this is so raw and true"

Salman Rushdie in, *Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticism 1981-1991* weaves the interplay of the writer as an immigrant coupled with issues of identity crisis, cultural sensibilities and peripheral existence. He vividly captures this thus:

Our identity is at once plural and partial. Sometimes we feel we straddle two cultures; at other times, that we fall between two stools... but however ambiguous and shifting this ground may be it is not an infertile territory for a writer to occupy. If literature is in part the business of finding new angles at which to enter reality, then once again our distance, our long geographical perspective, may provide us with such angles (18).

Seemingly, what Rushdie projects is the problems the writer encounters as he oscillates between two distinct geographical, cultural and social spaces of home and diaspora and how these contexts stimulate and harness the writer's craftsmanship into birthing a unique content and form. Notably, Adichie fuses technology and art by using the blog as a peculiar persona in projecting her wealth of experience as she straddles between these

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cultures. When asked by “International Authors’ Stage” why she chose to make Ifemelu a blogger, Adichie answered: “I want this novel to also be social commentary, but I wanted to say it in ways that are different from what one is supposed to say in literary fiction”(2). Adichie breaks with the conventionality of a formal commentary of the society by using a unique technique of a blog to convey some topical issues.

Ifemelu interacts with black and white circles giving her the impetus to identify and deconstruct diverse issues about her new environment. Therefore, Adichie uses Ifemelu and other characters (especially the blog) to interrogate migrant relationship on a binary schema of haves/have-nots, self/other; superior/inferior, colonizer/colonized respectively. Initially, Ifemelu is unaware of the import of her skin colour; but as she becomes more aware that skin colour is at the centre of a lot of activities even love; she gets disillusioned and vehemently moans:

I came from a country where race was not an issue; I did not think of myself as black and I only became black when I came to America. When you are black in America and you fall in love with a white person, race doesn’t matter when you’re alone together because it’s just you and your love... we say race doesn’t matter because that’s what we’re supposed to say, to keep our nice liberal friends comfortable. It is true. I speak from experience (290-291).

Thirteen (13) years is a long time to objectively x-ray a society and Ifemelu speaks from experience about how racial discrimination permeates every sphere of the American society even in a natural experience like love. Racism even puts a stranglehold on relationships; it dictates and manipulates everything including love. Adichie portrays parental/relatives interferences in relationships. Ifemelu in her relationships with Curt and Blaine encounter several challenges because she is different; even with Blaine, an African American, she feels unfulfilled because at the core of their relationship she is merely an exotic variety. Shan, Blaine’s sister resents her and affirms her having “exotic credential, that whole Authentic African thing (320); because of this stereotype, normal male and female relationship becomes impossible because of colour. Through the character of Ifemelu, Adichie posits a global remedy to racism thus:

The simplest solutions to the problem of race in America? Romantic Love. Not friendship. Not the kind of safe, shallow love where the objective is that both people remain comfortable. But real deep romantic love, the kind that twists you and wrings you out and makes you breathe through the nostrils of your beloved. And because that real deep romantic love is rare, and because American society is set to make it even rarer between American Black and American White, the problem of race in America will never be solved (296).

In the course of Ifemelu’s blog, the reader is aware of a plethora of “raw truth” such as; white people have the power in America (327) and these privileges make other races to aspire to be white (205). All Africans look alike to white folk; (120); “Nigerians are the most

educated immigrant group in this country” (167), but have poor paying menial jobs because their certificates and credentials are not to be trusted. Therefore, some of the major characters like Obinze, Ifemelu and Auntie Uju all engage in menial jobs in order to survive the hardship of their new societies. In totality, Onukaogu and Onyerionwu reflect on the diverse images of diaspora in Adichie’s oeuvres thus:

Her crucial Pan-African advice for the Nigerian concerning the diaspora is that he or she should take as much of the positive offerings and opportunities that America so generously presents; but in doing that, he or she should give back to it as little as possible, especially where it concerns his or her cultural dignity. Instructively, she does not discourage aspirations towards the diaspora but she wants the potential emigrant to be enlightened about the constitution of the diaspora, especially the United States of America, and both its high and sour points (261).

The authors stress the importance of diaspora and how susceptible the Nigerian migrants can be. In spite of the several advantages the West can offer, diaspora can also be a matrix of oppression, exploitation, estrangement, nostalgia, disillusionment and above all that diaspora is not totally the answer to all life’s problems.

Migrant Self Reinvention, the Concept of Home and Returning

The discourse of disillusionment negotiates the demystification of self-reinvention, home and return migration. Self-reinvention as a concept handled here is explained under the umbrella of “new image” and the representation of “new forms”. Walter Akana observes that self-reinvention carries with it implied sense of “renewal, self-actualization, reinvigoration, rejuvenation and rebirth”. Akana also believes it is impossible to truly reinvent one’s self because “self-reinvention is not about authenticity-it is about wearing a mask” but in actuality it is an appealing personal development that revives or makes anew. Mike Bulajewski in his essay, “Technological Determinism and the Myth of Self-Reinvention” describes self-reinvention as the rise of “consumerism... and the American dream”. Though some have denied the authenticity of the process of self-reinvention as being short termed and externally oriented thereby creating identity as a response to change conditions. On the whole, positive change is good at all levels- personal, corporate and institutional.

The concept of reinvention is a meteoric trajectory by Adichie, it seeks to detoxify the negative trappings that surround Nigerians in the global community by first looking inwards at the several flaws inherent in the nation. Nigerians fair less than most in the international scene because of the image the country has been ascribed with. Therefore, this paper deconstructs characters’ self-reinvention vis-à-vis national transformation. Hence, Ifemelu, Obinze and other characters’ self-reinvention is analogous to Nigeria’s self-reinvention. The novel genre from time immemorial has been immensely realistic and

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helpful in creating and recreating individuals and groups; consequently, Ian Watt in *The Rise of the Novel* observes that:

Modern realism, of course, begins from the position that truth can be discovered by the individual through his sense. The novel is the form of literature which most fully reflects this individualist and innovating reorientation... of individual experience which is unique and therefore new. The novel is thus the logical literary vehicle of a culture which, in the last few centuries, has set an unprecedented value on originality, on the novel; and it is therefore well named (12-14).

Adichie is a deft and an impeccable writer who has won several international awards, and is regarded highly in great literary coteries as a prolific writer of her generation. Inarguably, *Americanah* as a social commentary makes the novelist a social critic. Also, Adichie presents herself as an ambassador of the Nigeria's self-reinvention plan; she is a positive addition to a large number of Nigerians in the diaspora and home striving in diverse ways to uplift and reposition the image of Nigeria in a "profoundly acceptable" manner. Adichie paints pictures of returning home and self-reinvention of the major characters thereby empowering Nigerian émigré to work and shun any form of criminalities that have been stereotypical to Nigerian history.

A key way to self-reinvention is the sampling of new experiences. These Nigerian immigrants encounter usual situations and challenges and they reacted differently to their new environment, the people and culture. Pertinently, Ifemelu takes to writing a blog, narrative platform that day not only cultivate financial gratification but also self-purgation she experiments with the blog by telling her story and the story of her race. In this form, she seemingly improves herself and other peoples' awareness of themselves and their society. Indeed, addressing the use of the blog in *Americanah*, Serena Guarracino opines:

Blog writing, or blogging, features prominently in the novel as such a space, both embedded in but also outside creative writing, and as a place where social realities of race can be discussed without trappings of characters and action... Actually, as the novel progresses its social commentary moves back and forth, from the blog to the novel and vice versa, contaminating fiction with the drive for elaboration expressed by blogging but also infusing blog entries of the emotional entanglement of creative writing (2).

What Adichie presents is an unusual structure with unconventionalities that make a conspicuous writer as well as intricate and delicate form. Many readers have come to describe Ifemelu as a doppelganger of Adichie in light of their scholastic pursuit; both are graduates of Princeton and are opinion makers shaping public opinion via their writings. Therefore, the use of blog as a meta-narrative device is a creative technique in postcolonial discourse representing multiple levels of consciousness. It tends to strengthen Ifemelu as well as the image of Nigeria. Castels describes blogging as an avenue where "everybody and everything finds a way of existence in this intertwined,

multimodal, interactive communication text” (136). Therefore the intercourse between technology and storytelling tends to generate the following premise: that blogging or blog as part of internet is used in a positive way by Adichie via the persona of Ifemelu in reinventing and maintaining the national image of Nigeria/ns. Also that, Ifemelu and Adichie use the blog as a productive therapy in stressing that Nigerians can, and do use the internet creatively to contribute positively and not cheat; to launder and not break the national image of Nigeria. Also, to fervently disabuse the minds of foreigners towards Nigerians especially in the area of internet scam. The blog becomes a palimpsest of “multimodalness” making Ifemelu’s blog self-reinventing too; she recreates herself and values through the blog. Even in Nigeria, Ifemelu realizes that by continuing the blog is to upgrade and maintain the longevity of reinvention of self and country.

The blog also doubles as a conscience clock creating opportunities for some of the auguries Ifemelu seeks in reassuring herself to return back; therefore highlighting that, in the journey towards reinventing self one faces challenges. Ifemelu weighs the pros and cons of her situation: she wants to return home but friends and family members are against the idea and her prolong stay in America makes her feel like:

... there was cement in her soul. It had been there for a while, an early morning diseases of fatigue, a bleakness and a borderlessness. It brought with it amorphous longings, desires, brief imaginary glints of other lives she could be living, that over the months melded into a piercing homesickness... Nigeria became where she was supposed to be, the only place her roots in without the constant urge to shake off the soil. And of course, there was also Obinze. Her first love, her first lover, the only person with whom she had never felt the need to explain herself (6).

Paradoxically, Ifemelu’s longing to return home defies the logic of some theories of migration which opine that, “reasons motivating migration are almost always related to the reasons that initially encourage the migration”(Idowu-Faith,8). Significantly, the character above is sad, rootless and alienated; but she has a good and exciting job, and a condominium, reasons to keep her satisfied as a Nigerian and American citizen in the USA. She is nostalgic; in a limpid relationship and she wishes to return home even at the risk of losing this idyllic American dream come true.

Ifemelu is an adventurous free spirit, but her time with Blaine stifles her: her blog is sometimes doctored by him, she has no other friend than his, she becomes subsumed in his personality and this chokes and mummifies her. She comes up with a plan to return to her uncluttered life by returning to Nigeria: she sells her condo, resigns from her job, closes her blog, breaks up her relationship, she informs her friends and family of her returning to Nigeria, picks a date for her return, gets positive minded towards returning, scours the web for jobs in Nigeria, learns more about Nigeria, surrounds herself with

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images of home and braids her hair. Ifemelu commits herself to a physical and psychological turnaround in order to be happy.

Lastly, she spurns the societal ethos of her American society especially towards body weight, "she was fat"(6). In fact, Adichie demystify the concept of body size and hair in particular to create a reconsideration of what is regarded as "uncultured" in migrants' ethnic identity. Hairism most especially becomes a metaphor for race, a symbol of identity and religion. Ifemelu has grown up in the shadows of her mother's hair, hence, when she sees the signification of hair in America, it is rather intricate and perplexing to her. Khedekar, Amol Digambar scrutinizes the African braid shop as a convergent point where people embodying a different strata in the racial ladder" (2). In fact, several insights of home and abroad are deliberated by immigrants as they make their hair or wait to make their hair. Through their conversations the reader becomes aware that success in job interviews is sometimes predicated on the hair style the interviewees wear, as braids and dreadlocks are rather discouraged. Meanwhile, on her return to Nigeria, Ifemelu makes braids, seemingly the last act in shading off her American trappings.

Nigeria becomes a place for rejuvenation and growth for Ifemelu, a place she cannot pretend to be something or someone else. She has earlier decided to stop faking an American accent (174), another strive towards unamericanizing herself as well as declassifying herself as a true Americanah unlike the returnees she meets at the Nigeropolitan Club with their voices burred with foreign accents. Adichie also demonstrates the idea of self reinvention in the handling of the character of Obinze. Idowu-Faith sees Obinze's return as a "triumph over choicelessness"(17). It is paramount to note that in Obinze and Ifemelu's first meeting after her return to Nigeria, Obinze tells Ifemelu:

I realized I could buy America, and it lost its shine. When all I had was my passion for America, they didn't give me a visa, but with my new bank account, getting a visa was very easy. I've visited a few times. I was looking into buying a property in Miami" ... it is wonderful but it is not heaven" (433-434).

Obinze demonstrates his conquering his obsession of America as an indication of maturity and a realization that what he seeks abroad can be achieved back home. In fact, Adichie dismantles a popular Nigeria saying, "Wetin dey for Sokoto, e dey for shokoto" (a Nigerian pidginization that observes that "what is pursued far off or what is farfetched, unattainable; unreachable can still be realized within ones geographical location). His disgrace in a foreign land transforms into favour in his fatherland. Adichie uses this character to strongly call attention to the memory of returning and rebuilding home. Rosemary Marangoly George in *The Politics of Home: Postcolonial Relocations and Twentieth-Century Fiction* describes the home thus:

Homes are manifest on geographical, psychological and material levels. They are places that are recognized as such by those within and those without. They are places of violence and nurturing. [...] Home is a place to escape to and a place to

escape from. Its importance lies in the fact that it is not equally available to all. Home is a desired place that is fought for and established as the exclusive domain of a few. It is not a neutral place (9).

Against the backdrop of this definition above, there remains only one place that is home to the protagonists, and some of the Nigerian migrants in the novel- and the place is Nigeria. The migrants possess the commonality that George is asking for which are race, class, cultural ideology and religion. The major characters are tied together by their love for themselves and love for their home country especially in the case of Ifemelu and Obinze. It is proper to restate at this juncture that an immigrant is constantly in pulls and pressure and suffers a marginalized existence as they carry with them the cultural baggage of their homeland which transcends their imagination and [becomes reality] (Rushdie, *Imaginary Homeland*). Rushdie further portrays migrant disconnection, nostalgia and eventual return thus, "Exiles or immigrants or expatriates are haunted by some sense of loss, some urge to reclaim to look back, even at the risk of being mutated into pillar of salt". Therefore, immigrants fluctuate between two stools, cultures, views, events, actions and experiences create double or multiple visions where the world becomes an open platform where different interpretations are possible. *Americanah* as a postcolonial text becomes an intervention, a welcome relief in the lamentation of immigrant denigration. It therefore proposes a strong reconsideration of the need to return to the homeland as alternative especially when the stranglehold of racism, unbelonginess, marginalization, oppression, exploitation, and general disillusionment stymied the migrant purposeful stay abroad.

Diaspora as presented here is plural as it creates opportunities as well as challenges for societies, communities and individuals. While there is a truism that economic and political factors are major drivers to diasporic experiences; adults as well as children nevertheless are affected by migration. Children who migrate with their parents face the same challenges or maybe more than their parents. They also encounter marginalization and discrimination, parents' social insecurity, social and cultural dislocation (Unicef-irc.org).

A character that Adichie uses to discuss the plight of children in global diasporic experiences is Dike. The young boy is mere a toddler when he is transplanted to America, yet his experiences are harrowing. Dike tries to commit suicide by taking "overdose of pills"(365) because his skin colour is different. Ifemelu stresses, "His depression is because of his experience, Aunty!" (380). Dike like most migrant children, becomes increasingly aware of his societal in/differences. As he gets older, he realizes that by being denied sunscreen means he is different and that black means abnegation. His rootlessness and lack of identity is traumatic: he does not know Nigeria, he does not have a father, his mother lies about his father's identity, and above all, America rejects him. In fact his case is like the stereotypic tragic mulatto. Dike's existence is catastrophic because he does not belong; he is rootless in America and Nigeria. So, when Ifemelu recommends a visit to Nigeria, Nigeria becomes therapeutic to his deep rooted problems of depression and lack of identity. His visit to Nigeria and his general experiences draw contrapuntal reading of self- reinvention and the concept of home.

Apart from Nigeria becoming a healing balm, it also becomes a place Dike can be “regular”, carefree and a place good for raising children (some characters-Jane from Granada and Auntie Uju attest to the difficulties of raising children in America). For Dike, Nigeria might not display the glamour of America but he realizes that apart from the fact that he has never seen so many black people in the same place, (420), but frankly, he “kind of like it here” (425). Additionally, he gets to know his people, see the house he was born in, and gets to know the truth about his father. Furthermore, he wishes he could speak Igbo as he makes new friends. These are some accoutrement of the small redemptions of Nigeria as home. Therefore, Dike’s self reinvention and attendant growth stresses that there is no start that is as fresh as one in a new country.

Conclusion

The wandering instinct of man is inherent to human nature; hence, Adichie in *Americanah* writes about opportunities and pitfalls of life in the diaspora. This paper has portrayed disillusionment that stems from the assumption that Nigerians who emigrate are often wealthier and contented than those that are home. Nonetheless, the paper tries to enlighten the potential migrant on the socio-cultural and political sensibilities that going abroad might guarantee stability but it can also isolate outsiders; therefore, the migrants’ belief of the diaspora as a fabled land of milk and honey where they can easily realize the American dream requires hard work, in addition to accepting otherness or second class citizenship. Also, the paper looks at how the novel attempts at making major redeeming change or improvement towards the global perception of Nigerians as immigrants in Europe and America. It is a truism that many Nigerians still suffer from what Cyprian Ekwensi described in *Burning Grass* as “Sokugo Disease” otherwise known as the wandering disease. Just like in the case of Obinze who realizes that staying in Nigeria is important and more profitable than chasing his childhood obsession of travelling and staying abroad. Pertinently, this essay encourages migrants who after becoming conscious of their squalid situations in foreign shores make bold steps of returning home to Nigeria in spite of the fears and the several challenges that are back home.

Finally, home and self are given vent in this paper because they represent and celebrate self reinvention, freedom, commonality and warm fellowship. Some characters blame the reason for their transplantation abroad on the corrupt and socio-political degeneration of Nigerian leaders. Hence, Adichie uses *Americanah* as a vehicle of protest to address topical issues like migration, poor leadership and a strong appeal to writers to portray Nigeria not only as a squalid place with deplorable living conditions but also as a homogenous entity with its share of problems struggling to change for the better.

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