

# Challenging Gender Discourse and the Maternal in Society: An Analysis of Female Agency in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah* within the Framework of Irigaray's Theory

Hasti Soltani<sup>1</sup>, Ali Salami\*<sup>2</sup>, Mohsen Hanif<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Ph.D. Candidate, Department of Language and English Literature, Karaj Branch, Islamic Azad University, Karaj, Iran

<sup>2</sup>Associate Professor, Department of English, Faculty of Foreign Language and Literature, University of Tehran, Tehran, Iran

<sup>3</sup>Associate Professor, Faculty of Literature and Humanities, Kharazmi University, Tehran, Iran

Received: 06/08/2023

Revised: 17/10/2023

Accepted: 01/11/2023

## Abstract

This study examines the theory of Luce Irigaray on the abolition of gender differences and the notion of motherhood in order to emphasize the alleged superiority of men. It also analyzes Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's novel *Americanah*. Irigaray argues that women's identity has historically been defined by their maternal role, claiming that men's identity is shaped by discourse, culture, and subjectivity, while women are characterized by nature, marginalization, and objectification. Contrary to Irigaray's assertion, the female protagonists in *Americanah* are portrayed as being as closely associated with culture and discourse as their male counterparts, rather than nature and neglect. Moreover, it focuses on Germaine Greer's theories specifically on the genuine freedom of ladies requires an otherworldly liberation that goes before physical flexibility. As it has shown throughout this article this freedom includes a dismissal of the profoundly imbued social and social standards that oversee female behavior. The novel foregrounds the voices of women whose expressions are suppressed by social norms. Each female character in the narrative takes on a significant cultural role and challenges Irigaray's perspective. This study addresses gender inequalities and questions the perpetuation of misogynistic gender narratives that uphold the dominant social order and favor dominant groups.

**Keywords:** Cultural forces; Gender differences; Maternal concept; Nature; Social position

## 1. Introduction

*Americanah* describes Ifemelu's experiences. Ifemelu finds herself in a beauty parlor run by Africans where she chats with the women and reflects

\* Corresponding Author's E-mail address: [salami.a@ut.ac.ir](mailto:salami.a@ut.ac.ir)



on her past. Meanwhile, Obinze, a wealthy Nigerian living in Nigeria, contacts Ifemelu via email, prompting them both to reminisce about their shared past. The narrative is interposed with entries from Ifemelu's blog, which deals with racist issues in America.

Ifemelu has a close relationship with her Aunt Uju, who was in a relationship with a wealthy married man. Ifemelu's romantic journey begins in her school days with Obinze and leads to a deep and meaningful relationship. Their lives are also entangled with Obinze's mother, an academic, and the unfolding story of Aunt Uju, who, after becoming pregnant and subsequently widowed, relocates to America with her son Dike. Amidst educational disruptions caused by protests at her college, Ifemelu seizes the opportunity to go to America. After arriving there, she lives with Dike and Aunt Uju, who seems unable to cope with her new life. Despite all the challenges, including an unsuccessful job search with a fake ID from Uju, Ifemelu gradually acclimatizes to American culture with the help of her friend Ginika. Ifemelu's journey is marked by various personal and professional encounters, including an unpleasant experience with a tennis coach that leads to a temporary break in communication with Obinze. Eventually, she finds employment as a babysitter with Kimberly, a wealthy woman with whom she develops a friendship. After Aunt Uju moves to Massachusetts, Ifemelu enters into a relationship with Kimberly's wealthy and attractive cousin Curt. In this new phase of her life, Ifemelu achieves professional success and establishes her life in America.

Obinze moves to the UK, where he spends time both there and in America. Meanwhile, Ifemelu's relationship with Curt deteriorates when she becomes involved with a professor, marking the beginning of her infidelity. At the same time, Ifemelu's involvement in social and political discourse on the internet gains her a great deal of attention and popularity. However, the toll of repeated mental health problems forces Ifemelu to give up her life in America and return to Nigeria. Upon her return, she finds Obinze married and seemingly content. Nevertheless, Ifemelu integrates herself into a community that supports people who are readjusting to life in Nigeria after living abroad. She also initiates her own blog, where she shares her insights and experiences. As Ifemelu and Obinze reconnect, the complex circumstances of their past and present are revealed. Despite the challenges and moral implications of their decisions, Obinze decides to end his marriage and commit to a future with Ifemelu. This decision underscores the enduring connection and unresolved feelings between the two against the backdrop of their individual journeys

of self-discovery and the complicated dynamics of their personal and cultural identities.

## 2. Literature Review

“Feminism in Chimamanda’s *Americanah*: Guidance/Counselling and Education Management on the Intersection Between Feminism and African Tradition” (2023) by Okafor, Chukwudi, Otiji, Onyia, and Ujunwa, discusses that in most families, the female characters are not permitted to cry their voices and follow their dreams indeed they are silenced by their families and the society that they are living in. Chimamanda has utilized her strict work of *Americanah* to uncover this negative philosophy against females.

This investigation has found certainty within the careers of instruction administration and direction counselors as major partners that will offer assistance to reject this negative thought.

In “On the Impact of Migration, ‘Blackness’, and Gender on a Young Woman’s Identity Construction in the United States - *Americanah* (2021) by Anghel, the intricacies of identity formation are dissected through the lens of fleeting encounters, centering on the components that shape the persona of an African American lady within the Joined together States.

This examination draws intensely on Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s *Americanah*. The novel serves as the premise for the examination of character elements and identity improvement. Francisco’s 2020 study, “Race, Hair Politics, Love, and Diasporic Identities in *Americanah*,” looks at dark women’s lives as they cross with different social bunches such as race, sexual introduction, lesson, nationality, and sexuality. Central to this think about is the investigation of adore through Ifemelu’s sentimental connections, arguing that true love requires the recognition of difference and emancipation from the inadequacies caused by patriarchal, white supremacist ideologies. The work also draws on the theories of Homi K. Bhabha to further illuminate the African characters’ experiences of displacement and repatriation.

In “Nigerian Female Characters: Should they all be feminists? And in *Americanah* (2013) by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie”, Allouene and Allag (2020) examine Ifemelu’s journey of self-discovery after her return to Nigeria. This analysis links Ifemelu’s narrative with Adichie’s own insights from “We Should All Be Feminists” (2012) and concludes that the essence of feminism, despite its multiple interpretations and

challenges, aims to empower women. Adichie challenges society's gender biases by creating a protagonist who embodies the ideals of feminism.

Otero's 2021 work, "An Immigrant Black Woman in America: An Intersectional Analysis of Adichie's *Americanah*," explores the historical and evolving dynamic between African American history and identity, presenting *Americanah* as an Afropolitan novel that embodies the essence of Afropolitanism. The study also examines the evolution of race as a social construct and its interplay with gender and social status.

In "Transgressive Space and Body in Chimamanda Adichie's *Americanah* and Trevor Noah's *Born a Crime*," Temitayo (2021) looks at the interplay of character, race, and space, highlighting the pervasive influence of racialized perceptions on black individuals in the spaces they inhabit. The analysis suggests that black people are often stigmatized because of their skin color, leading to a sense of deviance from societal norms. Finally, Nyawira (2020), under the title "Immigration and Women's Self-Identity in Selected Novels of Adichie, Bulawayo, and Baingana", examines the changing self-identity of African female characters after immigration to the United States. The study highlights the stark contrasts in self-perception before and after migration, the adaptive strategies employed, and the resulting dual social affiliations with both American society and their home countries, emphasizing the complex factors that influence the acceptance or rejection of identity among African diasporic women in the United States.

### 3. Framework of the Study

In this essay, the researchers look at the theories of Luce Irigaray and Germaine Greer as the basic intellectual framework. The discourse analysis focuses on *Americanah* and aims to shed light on the liberation of women who are metaphorically portrayed as eunuchs in the narrative. Contrary to the traditional notion of eunuch-like passivity and marginalization in both the familial and social spheres, the female characters in *Americanah* actively reject such identities and assert their agency and autonomy. Their path to liberation is particularly consistent with Irigaray's feminist perspectives. Irigaray's analysis sheds light on entrenched male dominance and the central role of motherhood in defining female identity in historical narratives. Irigaray's critique extends to the portrayal of female characters as close to nature and passive, in stark contrast to male characters who are centered on discourse, culture, and subjectivity. She claims that the physical embodiment of women is often used to emphasize their social invisibility or absence. However, *Americanah* challenges this dichotomy by showing female

characters who are just as enmeshed in the realms of culture and discourse as their male counterparts, thus questioning the binary opposition between masculine/cultural and feminine/natural.

Central to Irigaray's hypothesis of female freedom is the utilization of an unmistakable talk and dialect that disturbs the phallogocentric arrangement, especially through mimetic techniques and mother-daughter energy. Be that as it may, this paper contends that the female characters in *Americanah* discover their freedom within the structure of the phallogocentric talk itself. By appropriating the same language and discursive practices as the male characters, they overcome their marginalized status. This approach not only challenges Irigaray's assertion but also represents the new contribution of this essay, which proposes a nuanced path to female empowerment that works within and against dominant gender discourses.

Luce Irigaray's seminal work "Speculum of the Other Woman", published in 1974, marks a key moment in her exploration of the linguistic differences between the sexes and in particular criticizes the phallogocentric foundations of Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis. In this work, Irigaray addresses the systemic marginalization of women in both theoretical and practical psychology, highlighting the universal categorization of women into the role of "mother," regardless of their maternal status. This critique also extends to the broader societal failure to associate women with culture and subjectivity. Irigaray argues that sexual difference is a critical, potentially redemptive issue of our time, provided it is explored in depth, as outlined in her concept of the "ethics of sexual difference" She challenges the psychoanalytic framework for erasing women as complete subjects from the social fabric, and argues for a genuine discourse on sexual differentiation that empowers women to articulate their experiences and identities as subjects, disrupting their traditional positioning as "the other"

Germaine Greer, in her discussions of femininity and the social expectations placed on women, argues that the true liberation of women requires a spiritual emancipation that precedes physical freedom. This liberation involves a rejection of the deeply ingrained social and cultural norms that govern female behavior. Central to Greer's feminist theory is the concept of rebellion, which is closely linked to her notion of "the female eunuch" Greer argues that women's liberation is only possible if they consciously resist the rigid, often oppressive expectations placed on women by both family structures and wider societal norms. Through this rebellion, women can overcome the limitations imposed on their bodies and minds, challenge the status quo, and redefine the parameters of female

identity and agency. By defying the familial and social norms imposed on them, women metaphorically flee from the condition of being a “female eunuch” and thus reject the symbolic castration imposed on them. Therefore, it is essential for researchers to describe the ways in which the characters reject the idea of eunuchhood through their defiant activities.

Feminism falls inside the areas of scholastic endeavor in which sexual opinion has truly been influenced by androcentric societies. This belief in feminism comes about from the recognitions created by social imperative and forced tenets. The issue that this paper is set to address is the issue of presenting sex in considering female characters as human beings, not as the Other.

### ***3.1 Rejection of Sexual Difference***

At the heart of Luce Irigaray’s research is the danger inherent in women’s engagement with the symbolic order and the need to create conditions that favor a symbolic structure in which women can be the idea of eunuchhood through their defiant activities. Ellie Ragland-Sullivan interprets Jacques Lacan’s concept of the symbolic order as a “mediating capacity that demarcates the imaginary from the real, generates dissatisfaction, and enacts the crucial detachment from the jouissance of the other” (Ragland-Sullivan, 1992, p. 420). Despite the lack of explicit sexual differentiation, she criticizes the viewpoint of some feminist activists who see the Symbolic Order as inherently masculinist and equate it with the paternal metaphor or phallic authority.

The relationship between Ifemelu and Obinze is anchored in mutual love, respect, and vitality. Ifemelu’s decisive decision to continue her studies in the United States marks a profound separation and becomes a defining moment in her life. Adichie infuses their relationship with affection and gentleness, portraying Obinze as empathetic from the start. Their bond flourishes seamlessly until an extraordinary change in Ifemelu’s circumstances disrupts their emotional connection. Obinze offers Ifemelu a path to growth through his own experiences and assimilation issues, as he is in a unique position to understand her journey. Despite the adversities he faces as a person of color, especially in Nigeria, Obinze’s support and understanding remain constant, giving Ifemelu a sense of solidarity and understanding. Their energetic apropos reflect the perplexing levels of complicity and shared understanding predominant within the African diaspora.

As Frantz Fanon explains in “Black Skin, White Masks,” the dichotomy of the behavior of people of color toward whites and their own community stems from the aftermath of colonialism and white supremacy

(Fanon, 1991, p. 125). In Ifemelu's narrative, Obinze's connection is emphasized as he is the lone character who fully comprehends her challenges.

The novel opens with a scene in a braiding salon in Trenton, *Modern Shirt*, symbolizing Ifemelu's preliminary step sometime recently her return to Nigeria. Adichie unpretentiously employs the microcosm of hair braiding to interlace political and individual circles, namely race and gender. The non-American employees of the salon initially appear as characters with whom Ifemelu, and therefore the reader, can identify. As the story progresses, however, it becomes clear that the different identities of the characters preclude a simple identification with Ifemelu's experiences.

Given the context, it is unreasonable to expect a harmonious atmosphere, despite the common heritage and background of the two women. Ifemelu stands out as an exceptionally independent individual with a remarkably distinct character. Unlike many others, she does not conform to social expectations or norms. Instead, she relies on her self-confidence and ignores the opinions of others about her decisions. The interaction between Ifemelu and Aisha highlights the complexities of transnational relationships and illustrates the dynamics between "Nigerians in America, Africans in America, and, more broadly, migrants in America" (Adichie, 2013, p. 19). Ifemelu's attempts to navigate this context and negotiate her identity reveal her desire to fit into American society and develop a sense of belonging. When Aisha inquires about the duration of Ifemelu's stay in the United States, her response is indicative of this fundamental quest for assimilation and acceptance. When the heroine settles in America, the reader learns how she meets a bunch of individuals at college who are vital to the African Affiliation.

It is evident, at that point, that there's a solid bond between Africans within the joined together States, as specified prior. Be that as it may, this relationship is impacted by components of social course and sex, as Ifemelu comes up short of distinguishing with African people who go to college with Ifemelu and starts a web journal titled *Raceteenth or Different Perceptions Around American Blacks by a Non-American Dark*. This web journal, which draws in a noteworthy number of followers, highlights different posts that depict the interactions of African nonnatives within the Joined together States.

In a sense, it permits her to openly express her sentiments without stressing about what others might think of her; it is additionally a way to assist others in her circumstance by relating her experiences in a self-contradictory way. Moreover, this blog provides Adichie with

a great opportunity to specify the main focus of the novel. By consolidating Ifemelu's analysis of pietism and narrow-mindedness with her experiences as an outsider, she finds out how to define a sharp study of modern society.

In sum, the nuanced relationship between Ifemelu and Obinze provides a lens through which to examine the intricacies of African cultural compatibility while shedding light on the differing perceptions of race that are characterized by a mixture of ignorance, contempt, and fear. From Luce Irigaray's perspective, the prevailing scheme of representation in our society could be seen as a "mediating capacity" of a phallic imaginary that intersects with reality. Rosalind Minsky takes Irigaray's point of view that women fall into a state of social marginalization if they fail to articulate the female imaginary—the fantasies surrounding the female body—in such a way that women can emerge as autonomous subjects instead of remaining mere objects of representative projection. Currently, women often find themselves as "artificial types" in the symbolic order "Irigaray's vision includes the establishment of a bifurcated symbolic order characterized by differentiation and capable of implementing and following a double syntax, reconfiguring the symbolic landscape to allow for a more inclusive and equitable representation of gender.

Encouraging the use of punctuation in writing helps to understand the meaning and emotions behind the words.

When Ifemelu came to the United States, she was worried about finding a new job. She has a hard time finding a good job to pay all her bills. After many unsuccessful interviews, Ifemelu finally finds a job that will make her life much better as a woman and as a person of color. This is because she works for a white man who expects Ifemelu to act a certain way. As already mentioned, this key moment has a profound impact on Ifemelu's life and her identity as a woman. It marks the limit of her relationship with Obinze, as she grapples with the consequences of her actions and hesitates to face reality and tell him the truth. This point marks a change in Ifemelu's self-image, plunging her into a state of alienation, while Obinze proves to be a support and confidant. During her first months in the USA, Obinze's communication gives her comfort and a semblance of stability and allows her to look to the future with hope. However, Ifemelu's later withdrawal from Obinze, driven by guilt over her actions, shows that she does not want Obinze to suffer the consequences of her decisions. It is noteworthy that after years of adapting to an identity that diverges from her authentic self in the United States, Ifemelu rekindles her relationship with Obinze upon her return to Nigeria. At this point, she becomes a 'whole' woman, ready to face life's



challenges and reunited with her first love. The end of the novel represents the culmination of Ifemelu's search for a self-determined identity. In a journey marked by resilience and self-reflection, she finally realizes the irreplaceable importance of her roots and the deep sense of belonging that Obinze represents for her: a true sense of home.

### ***3.2 Critiques of Phallogentrism's Realm, Maturity, and White Privilege***

The sense of liberation Ifemelu experiences when she is introduced to Curt's family is tainted by her encounter with a prejudiced mindset that unexpectedly reinforces her sense of superiority in comparison to white women. This complex dynamic reflects a broader societal attitude, as Ringer has observed: People of color often perceive white women as part of a racial oppressor group that exerts control in ways that can be overtly more aggressive than their male counterparts (Hooks, 1981, p. 48). This perceived hierarchy contributes to Ifemelu's inner conflict and her sense of alienation within the relationship. The dissolution of her relationship with Curt causes Ifemelu to reflect on the role of race in her discomfort and latent dissatisfaction. Although they talk about race, they do so in a superficial and inconclusive manner, merely acknowledging the issue without truly addressing or resolving the underlying problems (Adichie, 2013, p. 360). This dynamic reflects the pervasive influence of white supremacy and racism in contemporary America, where subtle forms of discrimination manifest themselves in an attitude of superiority and entitlement. Furthermore, the narrative demonstrates the widespread ignorance about African nations that leads to pervasive and irrational stereotypes. The novel also explores the concept of symbolization and the importance of adopting a grammar that acknowledges the emotional, meaningful, and intentional aspects of communication. Jay's refusal to place her work within the context of feminism, instead taking her cue from Jacques Derrida, exemplifies a disruption of female lineage, a phenomenon Irigaray identifies as fundamental to patriarchal systems (Jay, 1993, p. 538).

In the context of Ifemelu and Curt's relationship, the narrative uncovers a latently racist framework characterized by stereotypical assumptions regarding cross-racial partnerships: the assumption that people of color enter into relationships with white partners because of perceived 'white privilege,' while white people engage with people of color out of an exotic fascination. This dynamic is rife with generalizations and reductive views of the complexity of interracial relationships. Adichie aptly sums up this tension: "If you're dark-skinned

in America and you fall in love with a white man, race doesn't matter when you're alone, because it's just about you and your love. But the moment you step outside, race becomes significant" (Adichie, 2013, p. 369).

This racial undercurrent goes beyond personal relationships and permeates everyday interactions. A telling example is when Ifemelu, who now lives in a large house with white pillars, orders a floor cleaner. The delivery man's obvious surprise that a person of color owns such a prestigious home underscores the pervasive racial stereotypes and prejudices that shape societal perceptions and interactions. These moments in the narrative serve to highlight the ingrained prejudices and the often unspoken but profound impact of race on an individual's life experiences, particularly in the context of American society.

In Kimberly and Don's household, where Ifemelu is employed to look after their child Taylor, an incident involving a carpet cleaner throws a spotlight on prevailing racial stereotypes. The cleaner's assumption about the ownership of the house, followed by his shock at the idea of a 'person of color' owning such a large property, reflects deep-seated prejudices. Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie addresses these stereotypes and the lack of historical and contextual understanding of the dominant white American society towards Africans in her TED Talk "The Danger of a Single Story" The narrative gives this female character the space to question and articulate the multiple dimensions of oppression she encounters. Her blog becomes a central element of both the novel and her personal journey, in which she chronicles her diverse experiences as an employee in this new land. It is important to recognize the challenges Ifemelu faces when broaching the topic of race with peers or colleagues, often risking being perceived as radical or prejudiced. In America, the discourse around 'race' is very complex, making it especially difficult for people of color to engage in open discussions about it. The blog therefore becomes Ifemelu's sanctuary, a platform where she can express her candid thoughts and experiences in the midst of a society full of prejudice but supposedly free of overt bigotry (Adichie, 2013, p. 390).

Regardless of the challenges posed by her gender or skin color, Ifemelu's blog serves as a conduit to reveal the myriad factors that define her identity and influence her daily life in the United States. Through this medium, she not only navigates her personal story, but also contributes to a broader discussion about race, identity, and belonging in a diasporic context. In her blog, Ifemelu articulates the intricacies of 'race' and gender in an environment where many deny the existence of racism and the blatant mistreatment of People of Color. This platform becomes a critical

space for her to dissect and discuss the multi-layered dimensions of the racial and gender dynamics that permeate her life in the United States. Adichie skillfully uses Ifemelu's engagement, particularly in her blog, to illustrate that "race" in the American context is a prevalent and pervasive force that shapes interactions, perceptions, and experiences. This narrative not only elevates the discourse on race and gender but also highlights Ifemelu's path to self-expression and engagement against the backdrop of a society grappling with its own historical and contemporary racial complexes.

### ***3.3 Ifemelu and A Mixed Society: The Symbolic and Education***

Blaine enters Ifemelu's life like a guardian angel, a Yale professor with a deep understanding of the privileges people of color face, and he tries to transform her from a passive observer into an activist. But as an African American, Blaine finds himself in a similarly unique position as Ifemelu. His education and socioeconomic status lead him to believe that he has a comprehensive understanding of the Third World, a presumption that unintentionally manifests as a subtle form of prejudice. Blaine criticizes Ifemelu for only writing about race without actively addressing racial injustices. He reveals that his frustration stems from not being a 'real' African and not being able to fully identify with her experiences as a working-class Nigerian born outside of America.

Ifemelu's various relationships also reflect the complex perceptions between African Americans and African immigrants, which are often characterized by an underlying bigotry cloaked in righteousness. The difficulty of forging strong bonds between Africans and African Americans in college, for example, points to deeper issues of family heritage, nationality, and cultural differences. This complicated dynamic between African and African American communities requires a nuanced understanding rooted in historical context. A significant factor in this complex relationship is the Middle Passage, which irrevocably altered the identity of countless Africans by severing their connection to their heritage and their understanding of their place in the world. As Anyidoho notes, the sheer number of Africans affected by the slave trade is overwhelming, with the most conservative estimates still substantial (Anyidoho, 1989, p. 6). Survivors of this atrocity include those who survived the crossing, those who were driven from their homes, and those who stayed behind. Anyidoho suggests in "The Pan African Ideal in Literatures of the Black World" that many Africans, both on the continent and in the diaspora, have deliberately repressed memories of the slave trade and its horrific consequences in order to protect their mental well-

being (Anyidoho, 1989, p. 9). Ifemelu embodies the quintessence of a ‘hybrid’ identity. Moving intricately between her Nigerian roots and her American experiences, she is a unique bridge between two different societies, both of which have played a role in shaping her character at different stages of her life. This dual identity places her in a liminal space that prevents her from being fully accepted by either culture. While she has skillfully assimilated into American society, as evidenced by her successful blog and comfortable lifestyle, she feels alienated from certain Nigerian customs and traditions rooted in her upbringing. This duality underscores the complex intertwining of African and American cultures within her, replete with the challenges, inner conflicts, and ambiguities that such a mix entails.

The narrative of people from the diaspora returning home, often in search of a sense of fulfillment they miss abroad, is a recurring theme. Ifemelu’s journey back to Nigeria, however, deviates from this pattern. Her return is not a retreat resulting from failure, but a deeper, unfulfilled search for identity and wholeness. Despite her considerable success in the United States, Ifemelu’s decision to return underscores a profound search for a sense of completeness and self-realization that remains unattained. As Kofi Anyidoho writes in “The Pan-African Ideal,” Ifemelu’s return is driven by a “journey for completeness and health through information about the true self” (Anyidoho, 1989, p. 32), underscoring her continued search for a coherent identity amidst the complexities of her hybrid cultural existence.

### **3.4 The Phallocentric Society**

Ranyinudo, who is portrayed as Ifemelu’s charismatic and voluptuous girlfriend, embodies another facet of detachment in *Americanah*. Ranyinudo, who is celebrated for her physical charms, leads a lifestyle that goes far beyond what her profession as a teacher and advertising employee would normally allow (Adichie, 2013, p. 386). Ifemelu criticizes her for engaging in a relationship with a married employer who generously subsidizes her lifestyle - a practice that is far from Ranyinudo’s financial means (Adichie, 2013, p. 389). This relationship dynamic, in which men are seen merely as benefactors, reflects a broader critique of the dependence of certain Lagos women on unattainable partners (Adichie, 2013, p. 396).

Despite being Ifemelu’s confidante and helping her reintegrate into Lagos, Ranyinudo’s dependence and pursuit of materialism through relationships elicits Ifemelu’s disapproval, which she attributes to a

general societal failing (Adichie, 2013, p. 422). Ranyinudo's relationship with Don, her benefactor, illustrates a reduction in her autonomy as she submits to his wishes at the expense of her self-respect (Adichie, 2013, p. 416). Her educational status and employment are in stark contrast to her lifestyle. This prompts Adichie to criticize women's continued financial dependence on men, even though they have the means to support themselves.

Aunty Ifeoma and Obinze's mother are portrayed in *Americanah* as resilient and autonomous figures who challenge the patriarchal norms of Igbo society. Aunty Ifeoma asserts her independence by deciding not to remarry after being widowed and raising her child alone. Obinze's mother is also portrayed as an impressive, principled, and self-confident woman whose presence and demeanor captivate Ifemelu when they first meet. She is described as strikingly beautiful and composed and radiates a certain superiority (Adichie, 2013, p. 68). This contrasts sharply with Ifemelu's own parents, making Ifemelu feel inadequate and insecure in comparison (Adichie, 2013, p. 70).

Obinze's mother's parenting approach, which is similar to Aunt Ifeoma's, is characterized by openness and liberality - a stark contrast to the restrictive dynamic Ifemelu experiences with her own mother. This liberating mother-child relationship exemplified by Ifemelu's mother offers Ifemelu an insight into an alternative familial bond, free from the constraints and expectations to which she is accustomed (Adichie, 2013, p. 69). In the face of gender discrimination in academic circles, Obinze's mother bravely confronts male colleagues involved in unethical practices, further cementing her influence over Ifemelu. Through her engagement with Ifemelu, Obinze's mother provides guidance and support, fostering a trusting relationship that helps Ifemelu become more empowered, especially in areas where her own mother's influence has been limited or counterproductive. In contrast, Ifemelu's mother embodies a more traditional viewpoint that discourages her from asserting herself and challenging norms, stifling Ifemelu's ability to express herself. In stark contrast, Aunt Uju, who evolves from a "village girl" into a complex and resilient character (Adichie, 2013, p. 74), represents another facet of female empowerment in Adichie's narrative. Through these different female representations, Adichie explores themes of personal growth, autonomy, and questioning societal norms, presenting a spectrum of femininity that both challenges and inspires.

Aunty Uju's character in *Americanah* embodies a paradox of autonomy and conformity. Despite her professional background as a therapist, she submits to the traditional role of a compliant partner by changing her

appearance and giving up her financial independence to satisfy her lover's preferences - an act that Ifemelu views as degrading and self-compromising (Adichie, 2013, p. 81). This narrative arc illustrates the complex dynamics of personal agency and societal expectations that women grapple with. Shan, who is introduced as Blaine's sister, is another strong character in Adichie's narrative who embodies both beauty and compelling storytelling (Adichie, 2013, p. 318). She confronts the over-sexualization of black women in America and uses her platform as a writer to advocate for feminist ideals and resist the objectification of black women's bodies, particularly by challenging the stereotypical portrayals of her publisher (Adichie, 2013, p. 319).

*Americanah* weaves together the experiences of Nigerian women facing racial discrimination and cultural assimilation issues in the West in complex ways, highlighting the unique struggles of African immigrants like Ifemelu. Adichie uses these narratives to explore the intersections of race and gender and how these identities shape the lived experiences of people of color in different social contexts. The novel highlights the realization of African immigrants that their racial identity becomes a defining aspect of their existence in Western societies - a stark contrast to their home country, where race is not the primary marker of identity. By grappling with the multiple dimensions of race and gender, *Americanah* presents a nuanced analysis of how these categories interact and influence the formation of an individual's identity. Adichie's exploration of these themes provides a comprehensive account of the social hierarchies and discrimination faced by people of color and enriches the discourse on race and gender relations.

#### **4. Conclusion**

Ifemelu embodies the paradox of independence and emotional dependence and thus paints a complex picture of the modern woman. Despite her financial and professional independence, she feels a deep sense of emotional emptiness in her loneliness and seeks fulfillment and companionship in relationships with men. These relationships with people like Obinze, Curt, and Blaine are not just romantic trysts, but crucial interactions that contribute significantly to her personal growth and understanding of social nuances.

Obinze brings deep emotional intelligence and empathy and enriches Ifemelu's life with a profound sense of connection and understanding. Curt's privilege as a white male in America introduces Ifemelu to facets of racial dynamics and privilege she was previously unaware of, while

Blaine's intellectual rigor and commitment to social justice open her up to new perspectives on activism and identity.

These interactions highlight the intersections of gender and race in shaping Ifemelu's journey to self-discovery and empowerment. Her development through these relationships underscores the ongoing struggle against phallogocentric norms and the pursuit of a more nuanced, liberating understanding of identity that transcends traditional gender roles and racial barriers. Through Ifemelu's narrative, the authors illuminate the multiple interactions between personal relationships and societal structures that influence individual development and the broader discourse on gender and race.

It is found within the paper that the perceptions of Ngozi Chimamanda Adichie's *Americanah* have much examination and agreement to the reality that the female sexual orientation is totally awkward with women's activist conception. While Adichie stresses unequivocally gender race renaissance and ladylike personality, it utilizes women's activist and sociological approaches in passing on its message.

Information obtained was analyzed with authentic and expressive strategies of information investigation. It is suggested among other things that androcentric culture ought to be revised and social rules ought to be made to strike an adjustment in its sexual orientation affectability indeed in remote lands.

**Funding:** This research received no external funding from any agency.

**Conflicts of Interest:** The authors declare no conflict of interest.

## References

- Adichie, C. N. (2013). *Americanah*. New York: Penguin Ransom House.
- Allouene, I., & Samah, A. (2020). Nigerian Female Characters: Should They All Be Feminists? In *Americanah* by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie. Larbi Ben M'hidi University-Oum El Bouaghi.
- Anghel, A. (2021). *On the impact of migration, 'Blackness' and gender on a young woman's identity construction in the United States - Americanah, by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie*. Faculté de philosophie, arts et lettres, Université catholique de Louvain.
- Anyidoho, K. (1989). *The Pan-African Ideal in Literatures of the Black World*. Ghana: Ghana Universities Press.
- Božić, K. (2020). *Feminist Pedagogy in the Works of Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie*. J.J. Strossmayer University of Osijek.
- Fanon, F. (1968). *Black Skin White Masks*. Grove Press.

- Francisco, D. E. de Souza. (2020). *Being Black: Race, Hair Politics, Love and Diasporic Identities in Americanah*. Florianópolis.
- Hooks, B. (1981). *Ain't I a Woman: Black Women and Feminism*. London: Pluto Press.
- Irigaray, L. (1985). *This Sex Which is Not One*, trans. by Catherine Porter with Carolyn Burke Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Jay, M. (1993). *Downcast Eyes: The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth-Century French Thought*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Nyawira, M. C. (2020). Immigration And Women's Self-Identity in *Selected Novels of Adichie*, Bulawayo and Baingana. Kenyatta University.
- Otero, S. L. C. (2021). An Immigrant Black Woman in America: An Intersectional Analysis of Adichie's *Americanah*. Universidade Da Coruña.
- Ragland-Sullivan, E. (1992). The Symbolic', in *Feminism and Psychoanalysis: A Critical Dictionary*, ed. by Elizabeth Wright. Oxford: Blackwell. pp. 420-423.
- Temitayo, A. O. (2021). Transgressive Space and Body in Chimamanda Adichie's *Americanah* and Trevor Noah's *Born a Crime*. University of South Africa.