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From Mastery to Anti-Power: Exploring Freedom and Identity in Americana through Philip Pettit's Lens

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Abstract

This study examines Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americana* through the lens of Philip Pettit's republican theory of freedom, with particular emphasis on the concept of non-domination. Focusing on the transnational experiences of Ifemelu and Obinze, the analysis explores how race, migration, gender, and class generate structural and symbolic forms of domination that shape personal identity and agency. Drawing on Pettit's key concepts—negative and positive liberty, power and anti-power, adaptive preferences, and the master–slave paradigm—the paper demonstrates how freedom in the novel is persistently undermined by racialized and institutional vulnerabilities despite the formal presence of rights. At the same time, acts of resistance such as self-fashioning, discursive intervention, and strategic mobility are read as manifestations of anti-power that partially recover autonomy. The study argues that while Pettit's theory effectively accounts for structural domination, *Americana* extends republican freedom by foregrounding the cultural and psychological dimensions of power. Ultimately, the novel redefines freedom as a relational, intersectional, and existential achievement rather than a purely juridical condition.

Keywords:	Americana | Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie | Identity | non-domination | Master-slavery | Power and anti-power | Philip Pettit | Republican freedom

1. Introduction

Americana (2013) by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie is arguably the most important recent novel to resist the intersections of race, migration, gender, and belonging. At last, the novel at its heart is one concerning

Ifemelu and Obinze, the Nigerian protagonists whose transnational trajectory places in relief the intersections of personal identity with power relations. Adichie situates their struggles in broader mechanisms of race and class, showing how freedom is systematically eroded not only by explicit intervention but by cultural habits and symbolic domination. This makes Americana the ideal book on which to test political philosopher Philip Pettit's republican theory of freedom. Pettit's non-domination theory offers a theoretical vocabulary through which to explain how people experience being dominated trans-nationally, institutionally, and relationally, and how attempts at resisting such domination constitute identity.

Philip Pettit contends that freedom is not only not the same as the absence of interference (negative liberty) or self-realization (positive liberty), but rather as non-domination—a position from which one is not subject to arbitrary power ("Republican Freedom" 91). On this understanding, attention is given to the manner in which power relations extend into the sphere of private life, shaping not just external opportunity but also internal self-understanding. In Pettit's view, domination arises when people must live "at the mercy" of others even when interference never occurs (On the People's Terms 22). This domination creates what he terms "adaptive preferences" in that individuals redefine their beliefs and preferences so that they can accommodate around constraints in systems. So, Pettit's theory provides us with a helpful prism through which to read Americana, a novel that is passionately dedicated to an account of how race, immigration, and gender divisions make domination conditions possible that constitute the lived experience of characters within.

Ifemelu's emigration to America is a case of freedom paradox under domination. She immigrates with aspirations to self-realize, but discovers that racialized social formations constrain freedom. "You can't write an honest novel about race in this country. If you start to write honestly about race, someone will shut you down" [1] (p. 220). Her own struggle with the challenge of claiming her identity—to be Nigerian, to be Black in America, and to be a writer—is an admission of Pettit's concern about how domination pervades even self-formation. Likewise, Obinze's life underground in Britain taunts the vulnerability of those who live beyond the law. His story shows that even though no one explicitly interferes with his behavior, he is never actually free, because he is always standing in the way of the discretion of employers, landlords, and the state.

Pitting Pettit's republican theory against Adichie's Americana, this essay analyzes the negotiation, denial, and reclamation of freedom on transnational terrain. The essay employs six broad concepts—personal identities and freedom, negative and positive liberty, the new state, power versus anti-power, desire-belief, and master-slavery dynamics—to demonstrate how the novel attains the structural and cultural conditions of domination.

Last but not least, the essay asserts that while Pettit's attention to non-domination illuminates the political source of freedom in Americana, Adichie goes a little further by demonstrating how symbolic and cultural forces—like belonging, gender, and race—reshape what it means to be an individual who is free.

1.1. Theoretical Framework: Philip Pettit's Social Theory

Philip Pettit's republican theory of freedom redoes political philosophical argument from traditional liberty dualisms to being about the matter of domination. His books—namely On the People's Terms: A Republican Theory and Model of Democracy (2012) and The Birth of Ethics (2018)—suggest that individuals are free, not because they are simply unrestricted in what they do (negative freedom) or when they are maximally self-realized (positive freedom), but when they are subject to no other human's capricious will. Subsequent scholarship has confirmed the continued relevance of Pettit's theory, or rather, the account of global inequalities and the role served by social institutions in enabling or disabling personal liberty [2, 3].

The following six principles identify the content of his theory and will structure this analysis of Americana by Adichie.

1.1.2. Personal Identities and Freedom

To Pettit, freedom is not independent of personal identity: to be free is to be able to choose one's conception of self independently of arbitrary constraint. He offers the "eyeball test" metaphor—freedom is in being able to look other human beings straight in the eye without deference or fear (Just Freedom 84). This account puts recognition, dignity, and equal status at the forefront as conditions of identity

construction. Domination distorts personal identity by compelling persons into aligned groups or preventing real expression.

1.1.3. Negative and Positive Freedom

The traditional dichotomy of freedom—negative liberty (freedom from interference) and positive liberty (self-ruled)—are, according to Pettit, inadequate. Pettit faults Isaiah Berlin's dichotomy on the grounds that it is unable to capture the reality of power relations. Negative freedom is threatened when others enjoy untrammeled authority to interfere, while positive freedom can sanction paternalistic imposition of what is self-realization [2] (p. 17). Pettit's republican freedom, however, requires non-domination: only if shielded from arbitrary interference is one free.

1.1.4. The New State

A state is either the source or protector of non-domination. Pettit conceives of the "new state" as one that will monitor the interests of citizens via legislation, institutions, and rules that are not arbitrary but responsive and contestable (On the People's Terms 150). It shields citizens against private domination (e.g., employers, patriarchal power) and public domination (e.g., corrupt officials, discriminatory law).

1.1.5. Power and Anti-Power

Power, from Pettit's view, is the power to intrude at will in people's decisions, and anti-power has measures that constrain or oppose such domination. Constitutional constraints, democratic participation, movements of citizens, and even personal acts of resistance are anti-power [3] (p. 62). Importantly, Pettit points out that liberty does not entail the lack of power but the presence of anti-power for purposes of accountability.

1.1.6. Desire-Belief Formation

Domination is not only external alternatives but also internal directions. Pettit warns against adaptive preferences, as dominated agents reinterpret their beliefs and desires to conform to oppression (The Birth of Ethics 202). Adaptation excludes genuine agency: an agent may appear contented, but only because he has learned to accept what there is to accept. Liberty thus is not just a promise against outside interference but against the internalization of domination as well.

1.1.7. Master and Slavery

Finally, Pettit employs the master-slave model to illustrate the paradigm of domination. An interfering, paternalistic master is just as much a dominator, for the slave's liberty remains at the master's discretion (Just Freedom 51). Slavery illustrates the paradigm of the general state of being at the mercy of another—a state that is mimicked in racial stratification, gender subordination, and exploitative labor relations.

Together, then, these six principles are an integrative treatment of domination's operation in social, cultural, and political life. Transposed to Adichie's Americana, they illuminate Ifemelu and Obinze's lives as they move along racialized, gendered, and migratory matrices of power excluding them from non-domination, and the best proximate of resistance and identity restitution strategies to Pettit's republican freedom account.

1.2. Research Questions

RQ1. How does Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americana* represent freedom as non-domination through the lived experiences of Ifemelu and Obinze as shaped by race, migration, gender, and class?

RQ2. In what ways does Philip Pettit's republican theory of freedom illuminate—and where does it fall short in explaining—the cultural, symbolic, and psychological dimensions of domination depicted in *Americana*?

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative, theoretical, and interpretive research design grounded in literary-philosophical analysis. Rather than empirical data collection, the research is based on close textual analysis of Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americana* (2013), read through the conceptual framework of Philip Pettit's republican theory of freedom, particularly his notion of non-domination.

The design is analytical and theory-driven, integrating political philosophy with postcolonial literary studies to examine how freedom, identity, and power are narratively constructed within transnational and racialized contexts. Pettit's six core principles—personal identity and freedom, negative and positive liberty, the new state, power versus anti-power, desire–belief formation, and the master–slave paradigm—function as the primary analytic categories guiding interpretation.

The study proceeds through systematic thematic coding of key narrative episodes, character trajectories, and symbolic motifs related to domination, resistance, and self-formation. Passages from the novel are interpreted in relation to republican concepts of structural vulnerability, adaptive preferences, and anti-power practices. This enables a layered reading that captures both institutional structures of power and cultural-symbolic mechanisms of control.

To ensure analytical rigor, the interpretation is situated within recent republican theory scholarship and postcolonial critical discourse, allowing for a dialogic engagement between literary representation and political theory. Rather than testing Pettit's theory empirically, the design is concept-explicative and critical, using the novel as a site to examine the reach and limits of republican freedom in explaining racialized, gendered, and diasporic forms of domination.

This design is particularly suited to the study's aim of demonstrating that freedom in *Americana* is not merely a legal or political condition but a relational, cultural, and existential achievement negotiated within asymmetric power structures.

4. Discussion

One of the fundamental concepts in Philip Pettit's political theory is that freedom will not be separated from the project of personal identity. Humans are free only if they can stand before other humans as equals, "capable of looking one another in the eye without reason for fear or deference" (Just Freedom 84). This is the notion, as called the "eyeball test," that merges dignity, acknowledgment, and agency with the condition of non-domination. In Americana, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie frames this struggle between identity and freedom in the transnational existence of Ifemelu and Obinze and the manner domination compels them to move through fractured identities and how resistance allows them to regain dignity.

Ifemelu's personal identity is redefined by American cultural hierarchies. When she gets there, she is confronted with the reality that race, which was peripheral to her existence in Nigeria, has been imposed upon her as an identity: "You became black in America"[1] (p. 273). Pettit's fixation is emphasized within this statement about how hegemonic systems from the external world impose identities on others and compel them to adopt categories that they never assigned to themselves. Ifemelu's Nigerian identity, which had given her a sense of self, is deconstructed in America, where dominance over defining herself is limited by racial ascription. Her struggle is consistent with Pettit's contention that domination erodes personal identity by subjecting individuals to externally imposed identities.

Her narrative also illustrates how resistant acts can reassemble identity and approach republican freedom. In her "Raceteenth or Various Observations About American Blacks (Those Formerly Known as Negroes) by a Non-American Black," she creates a hegemony-proof space of discussion. In taking the position from which to name and interpret regimes of domination, Ifemelu is practicing what Pettit would term anti-power, a resistant kind that refuses others to control how she thinks about herself at their whim. Her decision to wear her hair naturally further symbolizes this reclamation of identity: "Relaxing your hair is like being in prison. You're caged in. Your hair rules you" [1] (p. 251).

In Pettit's terms, Ifemelu refuses to live "at the mercy" of a cultural norm that dictates what respectable femininity should look like. These acts of self-definition make up the republican state of non-domination, even in a society like this one still continuing to exercise racial classifications.

Obinze's journey also shows how domination builds up identity in situations of migration. As an illegal immigrant in London, he has to live with the constant threat of being found out and deported. He performs demeaning work for sundry fictitious names, suffering what Pettit calls the state of being at the mercy of another (On the People's Terms 22). Even not openly maneuvered, his legal invisibility ensures that his name is fragile and vulnerable to arbitrary power. His final deportation illustrates the instability of an existentially public or legally justifiable selfhood. But just as there are moments of resistance for Ifemelu, so too are there for Obinze: his return to Nigeria and refusal to lose all his dignity are the possibilities for refiguring individual identity beyond domination.

In Ifemelu and Obinze, Adichie brings Pettit's principle that freedom is indivisible from individuality to life. Domination warps selfness by imposing categories upon it, requiring evasions, and giving rise to fear, but struggle restores dignity and recognition. Americana thereby affirms Pettit's belief that freedom is not a political state of affairs but an existential one: freedom is the freedom to appear before others in the character of a self not definable in terms of arbitrary power.

Isaiah Berlin's traditional distinction between negative liberty (freedom from) and positive liberty (freedom as mastery of self) in the long run has conditioned political freedom discourse. But Philip Pettit argues that both of them are unsatisfactory: negative liberty is too weak, in the sense that a person can be unimpeded but at the whim of arbitrary power, and positive liberty is liable to paternalism in that it prescribes what is "authentic" self-fashioning (On the People's Terms 32).

Rather, Pettit defends republican freedom or liberty as non-domination as a condition of not being at the whim of other people's arbitrary will. Adichie's Americana compels the mapping of the lines of negative and positive freedom for migrants and racialized actors, instituting Pettit's republican alternative.

Ifemelu's life in the United States reveals the simultaneous presence of negative liberty and domination. She enjoys law-granted freedom to study, work, and speak, but they are truncated by ubiquitous racialized assumptions. For instance, while interviewing for a job, she is instructed to "look professional" and style her hair because it is not appropriate to wear natural hairstyles [1] (p. 251).

On the matter of formal liberty, there is no interference: no one is coercively compelling her to style her hair otherwise. But according to Pettit, she is not free because her options in the labor market are conditional upon her conformity to adventitious cultural norms. She tells it herself, and in so doing, illustrates the performance of assimilation as requiring "a carefully calibrated half-smile" and "a pitch-perfect accent" [1] (p. 214). These scenes illustrate that negative liberty is vacuous when systematized domination controls which options are available.

Positive liberty, subsequently then, as quest for self-realization, is also impossible. Ifemelu herself believes initially that emigration will give her independence and intellectual growth. But compulsion to conform—to straighten her hair, to masculinize her accent, to be "Black" in American terms—trumped her autonomy. She strongly declares, "There's nothing more difficult than coming back to a place you once called home and finding it changed" [1] (p. 535). Her autonomy is destroyed by the dictates of cultural translation, suggesting that positive freedom will not last when exterior social structures foist identities on individuals.

Obinze's existence in London highlights Pettit's apprehension that domination destroys negative and positive liberty. As an illegal alien, he is deprived of rightful work, forced into acceptance of black-market work on exploitative terms instead. He sometimes scrubs toilets for London's elite hiding his true identity: "He felt himself shrinking, becoming invisible" [1] (p. 341).

On paper, no one bars him from going about his business unrestrained (negative liberty), and he still clings to dreams of ultimate victory (positive liberty). But in reality, he is entirely in the hands of employers, landlords, and immigration authorities. His detention and deportation serve to reinforce Pettit's contention that if there is no security against domination, neither negative nor positive liberty can provide actual freedom.

What is spread in the diasporic existence of Ifemelu and Obinze is precisely Pettit's republican conception of freedom. Both of the subjects are not free even when alone because they are structurally open to being disturbed at random at any moment. Ifemelu's speech freedom is curtailed by racialized discourses, and Obinze's liberty to be present in Britain is always exposed to being out of sight. Their narratives support Pettit's thesis that liberty requires something beyond the absence of interference or attempts at self-actualization: it requires protection against mastery at a structural level. In Americana, both Britain and America lack such protection, and the characters are forced to tango with risky modalities of liberty that testify to the inadequacy of negative and positive freedom.

For Philip Pettit, the state is a paradoxical institution: it can either be an instrument of domination or a guarantor of freedom. For him, citizens can only be free and secure in their liberty if they are ruled by a non-arbitrary, contestable, and responsive state to their concerns (On the People's Terms 150). This is the vision of what Pettit calls the "new state"—a state consciously built to ensure that citizens are not dominated by public officials or private parties.

In Americana, Adichie offers a two-sided indictment of the United States and Nigeria, showing the failures of both states to ensure effectively the protection of non-domination for citizens and immigrants. America, to Ifemelu, is a republic practicing freedom but not providing republican liberty. She sees America as a nation in which the law formally grants rights but racial superiority lingers on in institutional exclusion. To illustrate, if Ifemelu wants to be employed, her competence as a legal right is dis-legitimized by discrimination on the part of employers against the appearance and tone of her hair and voice [1] (p. 251). These controls are not imposed by the state in a direct manner, yet Pettit would argue that the fact that the state cannot avoid such domination is what makes individuals unfree.

Furthermore, the immigration regime is used as an instrument of direct domination. Ifemelu's undocumented immigration status upon initial entry contributes to her vulnerability to economic exploitation and compromise, showing how institutions of the state tend to produce more instances of arbitrary power than to foreclose them.

Nigeria, on the other hand, is evidence of what Pettit refers to as the persistence of clientelist or corrupt states in which the machinery of state does not serve the common good but instead sustains domination. Back home, Ifemelu resided in a society where power was exercised in the pattern of patronage networks and corruption. Obinze's rise to wealth as a prosperous tycoon is such an instance: his wealth lies not in merit but in proximity to elites who appropriate state institutions for personal benefit [1] (p. 456). Using the words of Pettit, Nigeria does not provide people with non-domination but binds them to dependency where they are at the whim of powerful benefactors.

Adichie's narrative suggests that America or Nigeria is not Pettit's "new state" in the guise that both allow arbitrary domination to persist, either as structural racism, exploitative immigration policy, or institutional corruption. In one of the novel's key reflections, Ifemelu points out that life in each nation is a constant negotiation with forces beyond one's control: "In Nigeria, you could do anything, be anything, but the system kept reminding you that you were small.

In America, you were free but only within certain limits" [1] (p. 499). This ambivalence is a declaration of the republican complaint: freedom is not secured at all if the state leaves room for domination to take place, whether by doing nothing or active connivance.

Through its contrast of Nigeria with the United States, Americana portrays Pettit's universal challenge: constructing states that truly defend against domination. Adichie implies that republican liberty does not merely require formal law but also cultural transformation because if racial hierarchies and clientelist regimes are not destroyed, the state cannot become guardian of true liberty.

Philip Pettit distinguishes power as the capacity to intervene at one's will in others' lives and anti-power, the way in which persons and groups thwart or restrict such domination (On the People's Terms 22). Power is not always physical or legal; it can be structural, cultural, or symbolic, insidiously functioning through social convention, economic dependency, and racial ordering. Anti-power, by contrast, is comprised of legal protection, collective action, and individual strategies that constrain domination. Adichie's Americana deploys both components of Pettit's model and describes how Ifemelu and Obinze behave, resist, and even reproduce power structures in transnational contexts.

Racial and cultural norms are pervasive forms of power in Ifemelu's American existence. Social norms dictate her options and presentation of self even if there is no official regulation. The insistence that she keep her hair straight or use a "neutral" accent is the quintessential case of Pettit's theory of arbitrary interference: she is not legally bound, but social and professional access hinges on accommodation [1] (p.251). Her own encounters with microaggressions and plain racism also illustrate power leveraged through recognition in public space.

Pettit desires to emphasize that domination exists not just when one is actually constrained, but even if one is under the threat of arbitrary treatment at all times (Just Freedom 51). America then is a conditionally free society for Ifemelu: she is free to move, but always on terms determined by racial power.

Anti-power is achieved in Ifemelu's acts of resistance both in public and in private. Her blog, "Raceteenth," is a site of discourse wherein she names and resists indiscriminate Black American dominance: "You can't write honestly about race if you don't acknowledge the rules" [1] (p. 220). By way of

this public site of unmasking social hierarchies and hegemonic narratives and resisting them, Ifemelu exercises Pettit's definition of anti-power: she checks the indiscriminate power of society norms by way of communal visibility and discourse. Personal conduct, such as adopting her native hair and demanding her native accent, also constitutes resistance at the level of the individual. Such conduct shows that self-fashioning can act as a counter-power to social domination, recovering dignity and autonomy in terms appropriate to republican liberty.

Obinze's experience in the United Kingdom also shows the power and counter-power dynamics. As an illegal immigrant, he is always threatened with deportation and arrest and therefore proves arbitrary boss power and legal institutions. His labor is exploitative, his mobility suppressed, and his identity endangered: "He felt himself shrinking, becoming invisible" [1] (p. 341). And yet, Obinze exercises acts of anti-power. He negotiates his labor relations strategically, behaves with a personal dignity, and eventually reclaims agency when he is in Nigeria. Pettit contends that anti-power is not necessarily overthrown institutions in their totality; even token instances of limiting arbitrariness do contribute to the extension of freedom (The Birth of Ethics 202).

Adichie's book thus proves that freedom and identity cannot be separated from the conflictual interaction of power and anti-power. Racialized anticipations, social hierarchies, and legal prohibition are forms of domination, and performances of resistance—through discourse, self-fashioning, and strategic negotiation—are forms of anti-power. For Pettit's vocabulary, these borrowings on republican freedom are apropos since they limit arbitrary interference and enable the conditions on which Ifemelu and Obinze might reacquire agency and dignity. Americana therefore affirms that freedom is not static or merely formal but occurs in the active tension between relations of power and those anti-power actions individuals undertake.

One of Philip Pettit's central assumptions with republican theory is that domination not only restricts external action but also internal attitude, on the basis of what individuals desire, believe, or think to be possible (The Birth of Ethics 202). Pettit cautions that in domination, people construct adaptive preferences, bending goals and beliefs to conform to systemic constraints and not striving for real self-realization. In Americana, Adichie illustrates the phenomenon in Ifemelu's and Obinze's lives and how institutional and social domination invades their inner lives, reshaping desires and beliefs in freedom-destroying manners.

Ifemelu's childhood in the United States illustrates adaptive preferences constructed through racial and cultural domination. She compromises on America's ideals first, straightening her hair and altering her accent, believing that these are necessary for professional success and conformity to society [1] (p.251). Her external conformity covers over the internal cost: perpetual conflict between her authentic Nigerian self and the self she must pretend to be so that she can live. Pettit would view this as an issue of internalized domination, in which the specter of unwanted social encroachment reorders desire, compelling Ifemelu to look for objectives guided by dominating culture and not by her own autonomous desires.

Similarly, Obinze's time as an illegal immigrant in London illustrates the way that domination constrains belief and ambition. With no labor to legally practice and social recognition, he tops his aspirations with what can be achieved under bounded conditions: degrading labor, invisibility, and concealment of identity. He finishes, "He felt himself shrinking, becoming invisible" [1] (p. 341).

Pettit would hold that this psychic shrinkage is the internalization of domination: Obinze's desires are no longer his own, but have been conditioned by arbitrary power from immigration officials, employers, and social prejudice. Resistance offers the potential for a recovery of authentic belief and desire. Ifemelu's decision to start her blog, embrace her natural hair, and critique American racial hierarchies represents a conscious reshaping of internal preferences in alignment with her true identity. She observes, "Relaxing your hair is like being in prison. You're caged in. Your hair rules you" [1] (p. 251).

By refusing imposed norms and claiming authority over voice and appearance, she rebukes adaptive preferences and reinstates agency. Obinze, upon his return to Nigeria, similarly regains the right to plan and fantasize unhindered by external arbitrary power.

Through such shifts in character, Americana vindicates Pettit's thesis that not only is freedom a formal stance of non-interference but also a state of inner self-direction. Domination shapes unobtrusively the tastes and beliefs to produce conformity and resignation even in the absence of interference. Counteractive measures—social as well as individual—are thus necessary for the reassertion of genuine preferences so that an individual can live according to his/her genuine self and not the expectations of other humans.

The master-slave paradigm is the flagship model of domination employed by Philip Pettit's republican theory. From the theory, it is argued that even when the master does not take action actively, the freedom of the slave is eroded because his or her choices, security, and understanding of self are susceptible to the whims of the master (Just Freedom 51).

Pettit believes that domination is structural in nature: it is wherever one has the power to arbitrarily affect another and hence creates structural dependency. In Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's Americana, this paradigm is obtained powerfully through racial, gendered, and economic stratifications, as characters move through structures of power that encumber their freedom and build their lives. Adichie broadens Pettit's theory by situating it in postcolonial and diasporic situations, illustrating how power social, cultural, and symbolic are contemporary "masters" of individuals' lives.

The master-slavery regime is perceived through United States racial hierarchies. American racial categories reorganize Ifemelu's self: "You became black in America" [1] (p. 273). In Nigeria, race is a second-order social marker, while in America it is a first-order sign of social status, access, and perception. Here, societal expectations act as a master, constraining Ifemelu's freedom to show up on her own terms. Pettit's model provides an explanation that her autonomy is eroded not only by overt discrimination but also by exposure to arbitrary social judgment, microaggressions, and implicit professional exclusions. Her navigation of hair politics—deciding whether to straighten her hair to conform to professional norms—symbolizes the tension between authentic selfhood and imposed societal expectations: “Relaxing your hair is like being in prison. You’re caged in. Your hair rules you” [1] (p. 251). The master-slavery trope identifies that even when superficially following cultural codes, Ifemelu's internal freedom remains circumscribed, revealing the degree of domination that transcends legal or physical restriction.

Economic and legal hierarchies also serve double duty in enforcing the master-slave relationship for Obinze. He has to make it as an illegal immigrant in London, and that can only be done if he leaves behind his identity and aspirations: "He felt himself shrinking, becoming invisible" [1] (p. 341).

The institutional arbitrary control over him is consistent with Pettit's definition of slavery: the threat of arbitrary interference but not its regular exercise is domination. Even where not openly coerced, Obinze's life is closed off by the structural vulnerabilities brought by controls over immigration, insecure labor markets, and social exclusion. Here the master is diffuse-instated in legal systems, employers' power, and social conventions—demonstrating Pettit's point that domination is feasible through institutions and not directly through a single agent.

Gendered hierarchies in Nigeria create a third level of master-slavery comparisons. Female characters such as Aunty Uju and Ifemelu's friends suffer from structural domination in domestic relationships and at the workplace. Uju's dependence on male counterparts for social and financial security serves to demonstrate Pettit's model: she is deprived of her freedom by unobvious interference rather than by structural vulnerability, in which she is a happy slave to the whimsical actions of men around her. Simultaneously, cultural forces laid on women the pressure to adhere to patriarchal norms—about marriage, appearance, and social behavior—are reinforcing dependency and constricting true freedom. Pettit's framework is then extended from literal slavery to encompass intersectional domination, where race, class, and gender converge to limit agency.

Adichie carries the master-slave framework even further with her account of symbolic and cultural masters. Racial stereotypes, global representations of Africa, and postcolonial hierarchies are such insidious but powerful forces that they impact external opportunity as well as internalized self-consciousness. Ifemelu's work in the blogosphere—writing openly about race in America—quaunts violating these symbolic masters. Naming and defying structural oppression, she has cultivated anti-power mechanisms defying domination, recuperating her voice and name [1] (p. 220). Obinze's return to Nigeria is the same retrieval in that he takes possession of his life within a realm where he can forge his way through structures more independently but still inadequately.

Through these nested accounts, Americana reinforces Pettit's contention that freedom is not so much a lack of interference as it is the elimination of domination in all of its varieties. The novel demonstrates how modern slavery is often scattered, intersectional, and symbolic and experienced through social, economic, legal, and cultural institutions. The disruptions of Ifemelu's and Obinze's lives pinpoint that full liberty entails structural transformation and acts of resistance, in line with Pettit's republican freedom but acknowledging the nuance of race, gender, and immigration realities in our time.

While Philip Pettit's republican account of conceiving freedom as non-domination is an attractive paradigm, its application in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's Americana uncovers the theory's strengths and

limits. Pettit focuses on structural and institutional safeguards against arbitrary interference, but Adichie's novel shows that domination functions through formal channels too, but also through cultural, symbolic, and interpersonal forces. This intersectional complexity makes it more difficult to obtain freedom and extends Pettit's methodology into race, gender, and postcolonial identity.

Part of the intricacy here comes with the relationship between symbolic and structural domination. Pettit focuses nearly entirely on formal institutions—states, laws, and employers—to be the defenders or desecrators of non-domination (On the People's Terms 150).

Americana demonstrates just how much despite these institutions, the subtle forces of symbolic power—assumptions of racial stereotypes, performance of expected assimilation, and conventions of gender norms—can circumvent freedom without direct interference. Ifemelu, for instance, navigates American workplaces with diplomatic recognition of the fact that natural hair or the Nigerian accent can limit choice: "You became black in America" [1] (p. 273). These symbolic powers are playing the role of unknown masters, constructing desires, beliefs, and identity-constituting, and suggest that Pettit's definition of domination will need to include the cultural and psychological dimensions of subordination.

The novel also puts intersectional domination in the spotlight, where race, gender, class, and immigration status all come together to precondition one for freedom. Obinze's illegal status in the U.K. illustrates the simultaneous impact of economic, social, and legal vulnerability: his bodily and economic survival is at the mercy of employers, immigration authorities, and public tolerance [1] (p.341). Similarly, female figures in Nigeria, such as Aunty Uju, are subject to patriarchal restraints and economic dependencies, illustrating that hegemony is never monodimensional but often multistratified and recursively self-authenticating. Adichie therefore develops Pettit's theory in illustrating that freedom cannot ever be accounted for with a knowledge of the intersecting axes of power. Adaptive preferences and internalized domination is another observation. Pettit describes domination extends beyond actions to beliefs and desires too (The Birth of Ethics 202).

Americana shows how long-term exposure to domination alters the inner world of characters. Ifemelu initially transforms her self-presentation, accent, and behavior to that imposed on Americans, and Obinze restrains his dreams to what will be attainable under restrictive legal and social circumstances. Adichie is emphasizing that freedom is not only about structural transformation but also about individual renegotiation of desire and belief, putting republican liberty's psychological dimension at center stage. Finally, Adichie's writing emphasizes back-and-forth dynamic tension between power and anti-power. Acts of resistance—her blog, her hair, Obinze's strategic agency in returning to Nigeria—are manifestations of Pettit's idea of anti-power and demonstrate that freedom is indeed achieved through ongoing negotiations with powers of domination (On the People's Terms 22).

But these acts take place within broader social contexts, therefore anti-power has to be understood as contingent, partial, and ongoing and not absolute. This is consistent with recent scholarship on the fluidity and vulnerability of freedom in transnational and postcolonial contexts [2, 3].

Lastly, Adichie's Americana enhances and reinforces Pettit's republican theory. While non-domination provides a compelling analytic to capture the structural and relational nature of freedom, the novel demonstrates that domination is intersectional, multidimensional, and culture-mediated. True freedom, therefore, requires not only institutional safeguards but also cultural affirmation, autonomous action, and an ability to withhold from symbolic and structural masters. Placing Pettit's theory within the living experience of race, gender, migration, and postcolonial identity, Americana confirms that freedom is simultaneously political, social, and existential achievement.

5. Conclusion

This study has examined *Americana* as a sustained literary exploration of freedom as non-domination through the theoretical framework of Philip Pettit's republicanism. By tracing the transnational trajectories of Ifemelu and Obinze, the analysis has shown that freedom in Adichie's novel is systematically constrained not through constant coercion, but through continuous exposure to racial, legal, economic, and cultural forms of arbitrary power. Their lived experiences demonstrate that vulnerability to domination, rather than overt interference, constitutes the primary condition of unfreedom in both diasporic and postcolonial contexts.

The findings further suggest that while Pettit's theory offers a powerful account of structural and institutional domination, *Americana* exposes additional layers of power that exceed the strictly political

domain. Racialized beauty standards, linguistic assimilation, gendered expectations, and symbolic hierarchies emerge as decisive forces in shaping identity and self-perception. Through these dimensions, the novel illustrates how domination penetrates the inner life of the subject by restructuring desire, belief, and aspiration, thereby confirming and extending Pettit's account of adaptive preferences.

At the same time, the novel resists a deterministic view of power by foregrounding sites of anti-power and agency. Ifemelu's critical blogging, her rejection of racialized aesthetic conformity, and Obinze's strategic negotiation of economic and legal constraint function as forms of resistance that reassert degrees of autonomy within restrictive environments. These moments of self-assertion do not erase domination, but they reveal freedom as a conditional, fragile, and actively maintained achievement rather than a guaranteed political right.

By placing republican freedom in dialogue with postcolonial, racial, and diasporic realities, this study argues that *Americana* simultaneously affirms and revises Pettit's theory. The novel confirms that liberty depends fundamentally on protection from arbitrary power, yet it also demonstrates that such protection cannot be secured through institutional arrangements alone.

Cultural meaning, symbolic recognition, and psychological self-determination emerge as equally indispensable conditions of non-domination.

Ultimately, *Americana* redefines freedom as a multidimensional condition produced through the ongoing struggle between domination and self-authorship. By embedding republican liberty within the lived realities of race, migration, and gender, Adichie reveals freedom to be not a stable political possession but a continuously contested ethical and existential project. This literary intervention thus deepens the philosophical understanding of non-domination by situating it within the affective, cultural, and ideological textures of contemporary global life.

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