

Contextualising Identity in Buchi Emecheta's *Kehinde* and Chimamanda Adichie's *Americanah*

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Abstract—Recent critical discourse on identity by most writers is geared towards identity negotiation. The reiterations of narratives on identity as a result of racism is suitable to refer to Jacques Derrida's term, the hauntological as McCorkle suggests, in which "the thing that represents the demise of something also signals its continuation in a different form" (as cited in McCorkle, 2016). Slavery and racism necessitates the quest for identity in most areas affected by such experience. Most Diasporan writers often examine identity, 'Otherness', displacement, exile and dislocation which has also become the recurring themes in their literary works. This article is a comparative study on the quest for identity in Buchi Emecheta's *Kehinde* (1994) and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah* (2013) and the inherent racism that pervades the entire London and American system. The literary works discuss the complex political and racial framework that has continued to support discrimination that most people of colour face. Thus they chronicle and deconstruct the inherent racism as a result of their quest for identity in a foreign land. Both authors write as a result of the recurring experience during their time which is obviously similar. The paper contends that Adichie's *Americanah* focuses on racial concerns on African immigrants while showcasing the protagonist's blog as an instrument of voice as regards the issue of identity. It further reiterates *Kehinde*'s efforts in succeeding in London against all odds. The article concludes that African immigrants affirm, and define their identity while reclaiming a space for themselves in the migrant culture.

Index Terms—contextualising identity, racism, diaspora, otherness, immigrants

I. INTRODUCTION

Buchi Emecheta's *Kehinde* explores the role and experiences of women in Nigerian society and the plight of most women in diaspora. The novel concentrates on the challenge of African women in diaspora who struggle against their identity, patriarchal family structures, gender inequality and contradictory social values in contemporary Africa. The novel further examines the challenges of women in diaspora and the struggle of asserting their identity in a racial environment. Emecheta is regarded as a 2nd generation African writer and also not very keen to accept feminism. She is an established academic and writer of fiction; she has won lots of award as a result of her literary output. Born in Lagos Nigeria on 21st July, 1944 but was orphaned at a tender age. She was educated at a missionary school and got married at the age of 16. She worked as a Librarian in London while studying Sociology at the University.

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie is one of Nigeria's leading female writers. Her awards include the Prestigious Orange Broadband Prize for fiction for her second novel *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2006), she is the winner of 2008 MacArthur Foundation Fellowship and the 2005 Commonwealth Writers Prize for *Purple Hibiscus*. Her novels include- *Purple Hibiscus* (2003), *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2007), *Americanah* (2013); a collection of Short Stories, *The Thing Around Your Neck*, *We should all be feminists* and *Dear Ijeawale or a feminist manifesto in fifteen suggestions* and *Zikora*. Her works have been translated into thirty languages and also appeared in various publications like The O. Henry Prize Stories (2003), The New Yorker, Granta, the Financial Times, Zoetrope and Farafina magazine (Adichie, 2013). Adichie is considered a diasporic as well as a "third generation" West African Writer and focuses her attention on African women and their challenges, resilience and wisdom; their love for the family, respect for their traditions and husbands and how some of them were able to resist forms of violence and subjugation. Adichie's female characters generally are complex and versatile.

Adichie's literary creativity makes her a popular figure in the world literary scene. She has to her credits, a lot of award and she is also passionate about being a feminist. Chinua Achebe states, 'Adichie came almost fully made' (Achebe, 2013, p.1), this statement is as a result of her use of history and her vivid detailed description of events. It is pertinent to note that Adichie's *Americanah* won the National Book Critics Circle Award for Fiction and The Chicago Tribune Heartland Prize for Fiction. *Americanah* was named one of *The New York Times* Ten Best Books of the Year.

Americanah by Chimamanda Adichie is published in 2013; the novel revolves around racism and how it affects the lives of black immigrants in a contemporary American society, especially on females. It offers a great insight into what it means to be a black female in America and the numerous challenges they face; for being black and for being female. Ifemelu is the protagonist of the novel and as such represents the female immigrant in America. Her problems as well as other female characters in the novel range from racism, identity crisis, relationships, romance and separation. In all these, they stand out as they find a way around them, it is never a smooth sailing ground for her and most female characters but in all, they were able to pull through these challenges.

Gladys Laoye in a comparative study of Buchi Emecheta and Alice Walker examines the growing feminist awareness and consciousness in the lives of their female characters. She is of the view that the image of the African American and African women is similar as there are traces of change on how they are portrayed. She believes that feminism played a prominent role to the change.

II. IDENTITY AND ITS CHALLENGES: AFRICAN WOMEN'S EXPERIENCE

Identity negotiation has become a prevalent issue for most blacks especially in an alien land. Identity defines a person and also determines a lot in his life. Identity is very necessary and becomes a huge problem when one experiences identity crisis. In *Americanah*, Adichie portrays the life process and transformation of Ifemelu who is a young international student from Nigeria in search of a better education in the United States of America. Her academic pursuit revolves around Philadelphia which later earned her an academic fellowship at Princeton University. Ifemelu as a black girl in Nigeria has never been conscious of her identity which is in relation to her skin colour but begins to understand the irony of American racial politics especially as regards to her skin colour which prompts her to start a blog where other people of colour exchange views about their predicament. Adichie also relates how Ifemelu ascends into a privileged class in America and ended up with a US citizenship, a fellowship at Princeton and finally owns a home.

Buchi Emecheta refuses to be addressed as a feminist and states, "I write about the little happenings of everyday life. Being a woman, and African born, I see things through an African woman's eyes. I chronicle the little happenings in the lives of the African women I know. I did not know that by doing so, I was going to be called a feminist. But if I am now a feminist then I am an African feminist with a small 'f'..." (Emecheta, 1995, p.553). On the other hand, Adichie addresses herself as a happy feminist and boldly talks about feminism. Her recent manifesto, 'We should all be feminists' clearly outlines her views on feminism.

However, she constantly rejects to be called a feminist as she states, "I will not be called a feminist here, because it is European-It is as simple as that, I just resent that" (Emecheta, 1997, p.22). Neil Irvin believes that the black woman is usually seen as a threat to the society which often results to racial conflict (Irvin, 2005). This reflects in most literary works and has appeared in *Black Skin, White Masks* by Frantz Fanon; and in *Madheart* by Leroi Jones in which the figure of the black woman is described in a degrading manner.

Buchi Emecheta's *Kehinde* (1994), examines the challenges of the Igbo female character as she goes through the stages of becoming a wife and mother which the society appreciate. This societal change is as a result of the woman's rejection of the identity imposed on her by the society, there is a self-realization of her identity which led to her reaction to patriarchal subjectivity. Her voice helped in realizing who she is and the outright rejection of some certain traditions imposed on her.

The protagonist in the novel (*Kehinde*) could be referred to as a modern woman as opposed to the cultural woman in most of Emecheta's novels. She is a hardworking woman who assists her husband in running the affairs of the family. Due to her successful career in banking, Albert (husband) decides to come back to Nigeria so that he may control his wife as most men in African do as opposed to what is obtainable in England where the law favours women. *Kehinde Okolo* is the second born twin (as her name points out) but her other half, Taiwo, was stillborn, and her mother also died at birth. She lived with her aunt for many years where she is told of her birth and the mysteries surrounding it. Her twin plays an important role in the novel, and *Kehinde* relies on her presence. She prefers London and wish she could remain but Albert insists he has a right as a husband, we see *Kehinde* having to make sacrifices, and decide to obey him and come back to Nigeria as a good wife in order to act like a good African woman. The novel examines the societal and cultural difference between London and Lagos, men and women, and even between people. Women were given more priority in London when compared to Nigeria as the novel posits. In the novel, we see how *Kehinde* stands firm and trust her decisions about taking a new step in her life.

This is also prevalent in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah* as most of her female characters face one form of racism or the other. Job requirements and application differs for Americans and immigrants from other countries especially, Africans whose colour of skin differs greatly from theirs. This bridges a gap between them which often results to a great difference on the jobs available to them and they are in constant battle trying to negotiate their identity. In *Americanah*, Adichie choose a different path when compared with *Purple Hibiscus* where she exposes us to different kinds of women: the weak and the strong. Though, we realized at the ending part of the novel that the weak character is not really weak as she exhibited her real personality by ending her husband's life which most critics condemned. All her female characters in *Americanah* seem so strong willed and ready to overcome any challenge that comes their way. The protagonist, Ifemelu refuses to be subjected in any way, she encounters lots of challenges as a result of her identity which she finds difficult to deal with but she is never submerged by them. Ifemelu is an interesting character and different from every contemporary female protagonist of our time as she learnt the act of overcoming any obstacle that comes her way.

Adichie exposes the different problems in a contemporary Nigerian setting which ranges from unemployment, poor educational system, poverty, corruption and the abuse of power. All these contributed to why most African citizens leave the shores of the country. Ifemelu relocates in order to get a better education. This relocation is an eye opener as she is shocked by the wide gap between the western world and the high rate of racism that exists which has a negative effect on her identity.

Similarly, Kehinde battles with her identity both in London and Nigeria; she is faced with the challenges of accepting the identity imposed on her by the society. She is expected to accept her co-wife as the society demands. She met lots of traditions that compel her to do things against her wish. She is not expected to call her husband by his first name but has to learn to refer to him as “our husband or Joshua’s father” (Emecheta, 1994). Emecheta states, ‘Ifeyinwa opened her eyes in horror. Sh..sh..sh, not so loud! Don’t call your husband by his name here-o. We hear you do it ever there in the land of white people. There people don’t have respect for anybody..., we don’t do it here. Please Kehinde, don’t-o’ (Emecheta, 1994, p. 70).

She is also forbidden to accept anything that comes her way as the custom demands. At the third night before Albert and Kehinde could talk after her arrival from London, Kehinde asks why he got married and Albert explains: That child Ogochukwu was born under a lucky star. Awoli told me about him before he was born. As soon as I accepted his mother and allowed her to become my wife, I got this well paying job. Awoli told me that the child will bring so much luck to all of us that we won’t know what come over us’ (Emecheta, 1994, p.85). Much emphasis was laid on the interpretation of a mere mortal who claims to see the future of everyone to the detriment of their marriage. Kehinde is not convinced about his reasons but finds it so difficult to believe how Awoli could convince her husband to get married to another woman who they claim will bring her luck. One could ask if the luck she brought to her husband with her well paying job isn’t enough, it could be concluded that Albert needed a second wife to keep him company while she is away ; not for the sake of the luck by the child.

As a woman, her identity limits and humiliates her even in her home. She is compelled to pay fine as instructed by other women each time she falters which she finds unbearable but couldn’t help it because it is the custom and tradition of the people which must be obeyed. The tradition subjects her identity to series of ill treatment in order to project her as a submissive wife. Her life takes a sudden turn as she is compelled to assume the responsibility of “the senior wife of a successful Nigerian man” (Emecheta, 1994). Kehinde is forbidden to interact with Albert while the society expects her to become a submissive wife as expected of a Nigerian woman. As the custom demands, she is expected to kneel down while collecting her first housekeeping money in over eighteen years”. Kehinde’s rejection of such a barbaric tradition results to Albert’s sisters punishing her as Emecheta states, “Albert sisters levied a fine of one cock” which “took half the housekeeping” money from her (Emecheta, 1994). Everyone encourages her to respect the traditions which she finds unbearable and was forced to return back to England which helped in discovering her identity.

In the same view, Ifemelu’s arrival and quest to belong to the western world and adjustment seems difficult; finding a job became an issue for her. They expect her to accept anything the society offers but she knows her identity and ready to protect it. She loves her African nature more when compared to Wallace Thurman’s protagonist, Emma Lou in his novel, *The Blacker the Berry...* where she rejects the colour of her skin and finds other means of changing it which exposes her to more problems. If she had accepted her colour, others will not be able to humiliate and nicknamed her ‘Blacker n Me’. Ifemelu refuses to accept such even when her hair stylist insists that using relaxer is necessary for all Africans due to the texture of their hair. Aisha who works in a beauty salon tries her best to convince her to change the texture of her hair by using relaxer but she insists that she prefers it that way. Adichie explains:

Finally, Aisha finished with her customer and asked what colour Ifemelu wanted for her hair attachment. ‘Colour four’. ‘Not good colour’, Aisha said promptly. ‘That’s what I use’. ‘It looks dirty. You don’t want colour one?’ ‘Colour one is too black, it looks fake’... she touched Ifemelu’s hair. ‘Why you don’t have relaxer?’ ‘I like my hair the way God made it’. ‘But how you comb it? Hard to comb’ Aisha said. Ifemelu brought her own comb. She gently combed her hair, dense, soft and tightly coiled, until it framed her head like a halo. ‘It’s not hard to comb if you moisturize it properly’... (Adichie, 2013, p.24).

All efforts by Aisha to make sure that Ifemelu start using relaxer proves abortive as she convinces her on why African women should appreciate their natural hair, the way God has made them. She gave her instances and also shows her how to comb the hair which she feels is difficult. For her, her hair is part of her identity. Changing it to look straight will be fake and accepting other people’s identity which, for her is inappropriate.

Inadvertently, Kehinde is forced by the tradition of her society to accept everything that comes her way and not to ask questions which she wasn’t comfortable with. When Kehinde, Albert, Rike and Mama Kaduna (Albert sister) set to go and visit Joshua and Bimpe at school, Kehinde almost died of shame at the behaviour of Mama Kaduna. ‘I say I am coming with you, what is wrong with you? Do you think I came all the way from Kaduna just to welcome you? ...When we, the relatives of the head of the family are here, we take the place of honour by our Albert. ... So, go to the back and let us move on.’ (Emecheta, 1994, p. 88).

III. EDUCATION AND WOMEN’S IDENTITY

Education has become a liberating tool for women and most third generation African women writers constantly portray it in their work. Women have also helped their fellow women to negotiate their identity and define who they are. They constantly assist those in need in order to overcome their challenges as portrayed in the novels for this paper. In Emecheta’s *Kehinde*, the protagonist-Kehinde gets tired of everything and decides to write a letter to Moraimmo in London explaining all her experiences and the need to assist her financially to enable her come back to London. She has lost her dignity in the face of tradition and custom. She further informs Moriammo that she has attended several interviews but no job yet and that she would have come back to London but have no money. She affirms, “I would have

come back long ago, but now; I have no money for the fare back” (Emecheta, 1994, p.90). In reply to Kehinde’s letter, Moriammo sends Kehinde her fare back to London. This gesture gladdens Kehinde’s heart and she decides to leave for London which is the beginning of her action and the realization of her identity which should not be determined by her society and tradition. She is forced by situations to speak and take action in order to liberate herself; if she had kept mute as the society demands, she will end up a miserable woman. While at the Airport, Ifeyinwa informs Kehinde that Albert has a third wife in the North. ‘I’ve heard that Albert got a sweetheart in the North. I think Rike suspects’ (Emecheta, 1994).

Similarly, Ifemelu is presented as a stable character that is strong willed despite the challenges on her way. She is determined to be a successful lady in a foreign country and tries so hard in her studies. Life is not easy as being painted by those who comes back to Nigeria. Her parents expects that she will be sending money monthly and she is afraid to tell them the hardship she faces, especially, the difficulty in getting a job to sustain herself. Her neighbours’ is on her neck when their rent is due, no job to settle her bills. She complains that: ‘Each time she went to a job interview, or made a phone call about a job, she told herself that this would, finally, be her day; this time, the waitress, hostess, babysitter position would be hers, but even as she wished herself well, there was already a gathering gloom in a far corner of her mind’ (Adichie, 2013, p.169).

Ifemelu finds herself in a dilemma as a result of her inability to find a good job which compels her to make a terrible mistake of her life. She went for an interview where it is obvious that the job offer is having sex with her employer, he made it clear when he states ‘Look, you’re not a kid’, he said. ‘I work so hard I can’t sleep. I can’t relax. I don’t do drugs, so I figured I need help to relax. You can give me a massage, help me relax, you know...She did not know exactly what he meant, but whatever it was, she regretted that she had come. She stood up. ‘Can I think about this and give you a call?’ ‘Of course’ (Adichie, 2013, p.169).

Ifemelu regrets her action of coming for the interview, she is able to decipher the man’s intention which makes it difficult for her to comprehend why this man should be asking her for such a difficult task at this point in her life when her bills are piling up and needs money so desperately. In essence, Ifemelu is regarded as a sex object that could satisfy his sexual urge and discarded afterwards. The tennis coach reminded her that most women do that to earn a living and gave her the reason why she could be considered for the offer. The girl who occupies the position of satisfying his sexual urge has relocated and as such, he needs a replacement. This signifies that it is a regular routine for him to use women as object of pleasure.

In order not to be ejected from her apartment and in her quest to pay her rent when she is aware that her flat mates are already gossiping about her shortfall, she decides to take the indecent job offer. The attitude of her roommates contributes to why she made up her mind to take the offer. Adichie states: ‘Later Allison knocked on her door. ‘Ifemelu? Just wanted to remind you, your rent cheque isn’t on the table. We’re already really late...she could hear Jackie’s raised voice from downstairs. ‘What are we supposed to do? We’re not her fucking parents’ (Adichie, 2013, p.174). This statement hurts her so much, she calls Aunty Uju in order to speak to Dike which refreshed her and she calls the tennis coach in Ardmore and asks:

When can I start working?’ she asked. ‘Want to come over right now?’ ‘Okay’, she said... ‘Come on up’, he said, and led the way to his bedroom, bare but for a bed and a large painting of a tomato soup can on the wall...come over here, he said. ‘I need to be warm’. Now, even after she had washed her hands, holding the crisp, slender hundred-dollar bill he had given her, her fingers still felt sticky; they no longer belonged to her. ‘Can you do twice a week? I’ll cover your train fare’... (Adichie, 2013, p.180).

Taking this job offer is the worst decision of her life; she could have found other means of surviving. The trauma she passes through after the incident is much more than the money paid to her, she refuses to talk to anyone and bears the consequence alone. Adichie affirms, ‘She woke up torpid each morning, slowed by sadness, frightened by the endless stretch of day that lay ahead...She cared about nothing. She wanted to care, but she no longer knew how; it had slipped from her memory the ability to care... Her days were stilled by silence and snow’ (Adichie, 2013, p.184).

Ifemelu’s quest to pay her house rent turned into a misadventure, a nightmare as she had a sexual affair with the white tennis coach. This leads her to depression as she hardly talks to anyone, not even her mother or Obinze. It must be acknowledged that Ifemelu’s feeling of rootlessness and alienation contributes to her problems. Her experience is traumatic which jolts her to the reality of what living in America entails. As a result of the traumatic experience after the incidence, she decides to make use of the opportunity in her school and to study hard so as to make the best result. A good result will be able to get her good job offers.

Neil Irvin states that, ‘The stereotypes are centuries old and have their origins in European typecasting of both the poor and the black, for sex is the main theme associated with poverty and with blackness. Even where race is not an issue, the presence of the poor introduces the subject of sex’ (Irvin, 2005, p. 206). More recently, Susan Brownmiller (2013) has noted that “women who are particularly vulnerable to sexual violence by token of their ethnicity or race—Jews in Europe, Negroes in the United States—are viewed as especially provocative by potential assailants”(Brownmiller, 2013, p.1).

In an interview, Emecheta states that Kehinde signifies how Nigerian women “coped with the changes from one culture to the other and survived...Kehinde came here (London), went back, and then returned after a long stay. It shows the spirit of Black women toward survival” (as cited in Nadaswaran, 2012). In their relationships, Kehinde,

Taiwo, Ifeyinwa and Moriammo reflect Nigerian women's solidarity towards each other as they have a "healthy love for (themselves), (their) sisters, and (their) community which allows (them) to continue (their) struggle and work" (Emecheta, 1995). Kehinde constantly connects with other women in order to overcome her challenges as a woman in a patriarchal setting. Through the assistance of Ifenyiwa (her sister), Taiwo (her spirit twin) and Moriammo; she is able to conquer and define her identity. Taiwo's wisdom helps Kehinde to define her identity and discover who she is while Ifenyiwa and Moriammo offer her assistance at a critical point in her life. This shows that endangered women are helped by their fellow women as seen above; Kehinde could not make the decisions alone but relied on other women in her life.

For Emecheta, a woman can only be liberated with education which will help in exposing her true identity. Education as a liberating factor for women shows the similarity between Emecheta and Adichie as they both portray it in their novel. Most women endure all the problems they face in the society as a result of the traditions but can't take an action like Kehinde because they depend on their husband solely for their survival. They get hooked as they can't survive outside their husband's home. Education is a form of liberation as seen in the character of Kehinde.

Kehinde's decision to get a university degree in London helps her to discover her identity and a major breakthrough from harsh societal laws. Her degree surprises her daughter because she never believed that her mother can accomplish that in a very short time. Bimpe states, "Congratulations! I can't believe that in such a short time, a little over three years, you could get a degree! I know you said you were determined to be a university graduate" (Emecheta, 1995, p.10). Emecheta showcases through the character of Kehinde that Nigerian women are strong-willed and determined which helps them to rise above their challenges. Emecheta opines that Nigerian women like Kehinde reflect "the black woman survivor just like her ancestors survived slavery...these women try to make the best of a bad situation" (Emecheta, 1994).

Uju in Adichie's novel metamorphoses from being a concubine to achieving her dream of becoming a medical doctor in America. Adichie obviously want a change in the life of her character and makes a way for an adjustment in her life. The death of The General is an eye opener for Aunt Uju, it made her realize she has no place in the man's home and as such, was driven out of her house which was bought in his name.

The General's death is significant and also important in this novel as it helps Aunt Uju to realize who she is and stop living in fantasy. She lives a fake life; the General provides all she needs which turned her into one of his property. Her worst nightmare occurs when his relatives came knocking on her door and threatening to take everything he bought for her and calls her a common harlot. This is humiliating as it portrays the image of the African woman as that of a harlot. Aunt Uju needs this kind of embarrassment to realise how she has stooped so low. She regrets her affair with him when she heard the bang on the gate as Adichie states:

There was banging on the gate. Two men and three women, relatives of The General, had bullied Adamu to open the gate, and now stood at the front door, shouting. 'Uju! Pack your things and get out now! Give us the car keys!' One of the women was skeletal, agitated and red-eyed, and as she shouted- 'Common harlot! God forbid that you will touch our brother's property! Prostitute! You will never live in peace in this Lagos!'... Only then did Aunt Uju begin to sob again. 'I have nothing. Everything is in his name. Where will I take my son to now?' (Adichie, 2013, p. 106).

Aunt Uju is speechless and also confused about what is happening to her, she regrets why she did not insist he buys the property in her name. It goes to show that she is a second class citizen as far as The General is concerned. It is obvious that Aunt Uju surrounded herself with friends who are like her; friends who could not tell her the truth of the fake life she is living. They told her to pack the generator as if she could not work, earn and buy something bigger than what The General buys for her. All they could do is to arrange vehicle to pack out all the property but unfortunately, she couldn't take possession of the house which is bought using The General's name. This scenario is an eye opener to Ifemelu and a big lesson as well, she could remember the final moments and how the flamboyant life of Aunt Uju vanished within a twinkle of an eye.

Adichie allows Aunt Uju to know how it feels like to be a concubine so that she could appreciate who she is. As suggested, she travels to United States of America with her son, Dike. Life becomes very difficult for her as she finds it very hard to pass her examination to practice as a medical doctor. Despite the challenges, she didn't give up; she keeps on re-writing the examination and working three jobs to make ends meet. It never cross her mind to look for any man to depend on or even remember to repeat her way of life in Nigeria. She became focused and was able to make it. Adichie states:

FINALLY, Aunt Uju's result came. Ifemelu brought in the envelope from the mailbox, so slight, so ordinary; United States Medical Licensing Examination printed on it in even script, and held it in her hand for a long time, willing it to be good news. She raised it up as soon as Aunt Uju walked indoors. Aunt Uju gasped. 'Is it thick? Is it thick?' she asked. 'What? Gini?' Ifemelu asked. 'Is it thick?' Aunt Uju asked again, letting her handbag slip to the floor and moving forward, her hand outstretched, her face savage with hope (Adichie, 2013, p. 141).

Passing her medical examination is like a ticket to good jobs for her, she will quit working three jobs as one in a hospital will be enough to pay their bills. There is a shift in her character from the beginning of the novel; she is not the woman who sits at home with different house maids for different purpose. She can no longer afford that luxury and that

is her identity- to stop living a fake life and assuming a fake identity. She is not married to The General but performs all wifely duties which is not who she is. Apparently, Adichie made this shift in her character as a warning to other women. The identity of the African woman is being presented as a dignified one which prompts women to live up to expectation.

Yet another dimension on this issue of identity in African Americans is that they have this problem of identity crisis considering the fact that white people have already defined their existence. According to Neal, 'it is trying for any African American to derive satisfaction or pride from their name because Americans 'designate people of African descent as Negro-the name that marked them as slaves-or black, which describes them physically but deprives them of cultural identity' (Neal, 2001, p. 53).. The statement above serves as reminders of the negative and humiliating effect of slavery and diaspora. He further states, 'What happened to Black identity under the American impact were twin processes: its dis-Africanization, on one side, and its racialization on the other' (Neal, 2001, p. 53). This inability to identify a true home comes with negative consequences. Nancy Jesser states, 'Because slavery, colonization, and racism penetrated every moment in U.S. history, there is a sense in which all homes are...to paraphrase Baby Suggs, haunted by a 'Negro's grief' (Jesser, 1999, p.326).

On the other hand, one could rightly point that Adichie has a way of twisting her characters; she allows them to make mistakes which helps them to become better individual in the society. She exposes them to their real identity which often helps them in making the right decision. After the incidence, Ifemelu chooses the kind of advert she responds to and avoid those ones that may require her to sell her body. She is able to get other small jobs that help in taking care of her bill. Ginika, her friend played a prominent role in her life when she was passing through the most difficult aspect of her life, she arranges her interview with Kimberley and also told her new employer of the challenges she is facing. Ginika has lived in the United States of America but still finds life difficult as Adichie states: 'Ginika was busy, working long hours at her internship and studying for her law school exams, but she called often to check up on Ifemelu's job searching, and always with that upbeat voice as though to urge Ifemelu towards hope' (Adichie, 2013, p. 171).

Consequently, Obinze's mother is another interesting female character who develops herself through research. Through her position, she included Obinze as her research assistant so that he could make good use of it due to the hardship and difficulty in getting a job in Nigeria, she feels that the best for him is to travel abroad where there are lots of job opportunities. As she came back from school, she told Obinze:

I'm going to put your name on my British visa application as my research assistant', she said quietly. 'That should get you a six-month visa. You can stay with Nicholas in London. See what you can do with your life. Maybe you can get to America from there. I know that your mind is no longer here'... It went against everything she had taught him, yet he knew that truth had indeed, in their circumstance, become a luxury. She lied for him (Adichie, 2013, p. 74).

The situation in Nigeria makes her to lie about her son being her research assistant; he is surprised that his mum could do such a thing because it goes against all the principles she has taught him in life. She is known as an outstanding person in her department and avoids anything that may compromise her integrity. But here she is, doing what is considered fraudulent which eventually backfired. Obinze is able to travel to London; life became so difficult and he is deported when his visa expires. In this novel, Adichie has a way of making her characters to derail from the norms of the society with its consequences but it in turn make them a better citizen as they tend to learn from their mistakes.

As a result of Ifemelu's experiences, she decides to start a blog that will enable her to share her experiences with others and also, get insights of what an average black man/woman feels about the challenges they face daily. The responses she gets from her reader's, surprises her as she finds out that she is not alone as regards the issue of racism and identity. Adichie affirms, 'The blog had unveiled itself and shed its milk teeth; by turns, it surprised her, pleased her, left her behind. Its readers increased, by the thousands from all over the world, so quickly that she resisted checking the stats, reluctant to know how many new people had clicked to read her that day, because it frightened her. And it exhilarated her' (Adichie, 2013, p. 349). She is not only getting a wider audience but at the same time, making a living out of it. She puts the details of her PayPal account on her blog and receives lots of donations from people.

It is obvious that Ifemelu has passed the stage of being intimidated, humiliated and dehumanized as a result of her inability to pay her bills. She has reached the stage of selecting the job she prefers. The Coach will never call her line for her services as she is now wiser and a better individual and will not stoop so low to degrade herself with such humiliating job. She has discovered who she is and can define her identity despite the challenges of negotiating her identity in a foreign land.

Ifemelu's decision to return to Nigeria signifies a new form of identity which Adichie portrays in this novel. Most Africans/Nigerians who relocates to United States of America find it very difficult to come back finally to their countries. Ifemelu epitomises a new African diaspora who against all odds, find comfort in her country and also has the choice of relocating back which is very difficult for others in her position. Through this act, Ifemelu disrupts the expectations of the average American reader who presumes that all Africans who relocate to America and become successful will not be able to go back to their native land.

S.A McCoy posits, 'We might envision that the 'new' African Diaspora re-imagines racialised solidarity and a renewed commitment to a racialised identity while, at the same time, crafting new narratives that often hinge upon

becoming economically, politically and socially empowered' (McCoy, 2017, p. 290). No doubt, Ifemelu embraces the new racial identity which places her at the privileged class in America. Kimberely's sister, Laura agrees to the idea of the privileged class when she informs Ifemelu that her child's new paediatrician is good and that she read on the internet that Nigerians are the most educated. In essence, she regards Ifemelu as one of the privileged class in America as a result of education. Education helps women to regain and reconstruct their identity from being oppressed to becoming liberated as portrayed in the novels for this study.

IV. CONCLUSION

African literature is enriched by the voices of women expressing their concerns through writing. This paper has examined how the identity of the female characters in the novel poses a problem and how they contextualize their identity in order to ascertain their place in the society. Their voice played a very important role in ascertaining their identity. The paper argues that the novel is a vital means through which most African women examine the peculiarities surrounding their identity. Exploring the experiences of the female characters in the novel, they struggled to negotiate their identity in a foreign land and succeeded in portraying it in a positive stance. This article presents them as no longer dehumanized, segregated, rejected and relegated to the background as a result of their identity but rather find a voice that has been magnified and their actions distinct in the society. The study acknowledges that there are still women who are not totally liberated and goes through some forms of oppression. Their voice in essence is not that of a rejected, subjugated and dehumanized people but rather a voice of emancipation as their action portrays in the novel. It shows that women of African descent are breaking the long established silence and liberating themselves through literary works; it appears that male chauvinism makes no distinction as education and economic empowerment of these women helps in magnifying their identity and giving them a distinct voice. Emecheta in *Kehinde* states that the protagonist signifies how Nigerian women 'coped with the changes from one culture to the other and survived...Kehinde came here (London), went back, and then returned after a long stay. It shows the spirit of Black women towards survival' (as cited in Nadaswaran, 2012). Adiche and Emecheta project the identity of their female characters in a positive light thereby acknowledging the challenges therein as portrayed in this paper.

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