

A Critical Discourse on Self Discovery in Alice Walker's *Now Is the Time to Open Your Heart* and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah*

Ijeoma Ann Ngwaba

Federal University Oye-Ekiti, Ekiti State, Nigeria

Olutola Akinwumi

Federal University Oye-Ekiti, Ekiti State, Nigeria

Segun Larayetan

Federal University Oye-Ekiti, Ekiti State, Nigeria

Chiemela Imelda Ibeku

Federal University Oye-Ekiti, Ekiti State, Nigeria

Abstract—Alice Walker and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie are renowned female writers from different backgrounds, countries and as such, different ideologies. They share a lot in common as their novels revolve around women, their struggles, challenges and experiences in life. Alice Walker concentrates on African-American women while Adichie focuses on the experiences of Africans, especially women who left the shores of Africa to the western world, their struggles, challenges encountered for being black and being a woman which Bell Hooks regards as “double tragedy”. This study is a comparative analysis of the self discovery in their novels: *Now is the time to open your Heart* by Alice Walker and *Americanah* by Chimamanda Adichie. It examines how the female protagonists: Kate and Ifemelu re-discover themselves and carve out a niche for themselves despite the challenges they face in their various journey in life. This study attempts to disabuse the minds of those who believe that women should be regarded as objects to be played with; rather they are subjects as could be ascertained from the lives of the characters, especially, the protagonists. Effort will be made to examine their pitiable experience which ranges from racism, segregation, humiliation and exploitation. Womanist and Post-colonial theories have been employed in this study to ostensibly facilitate a link between the experiences of Africans in Diaspora and the American system of government.

Index Terms—feminism, racism, segregation, diasporas and women, self-discovery

I. BACKGROUND

Alice Walker and Chimamanda Adichie are renowned female writers but with different backgrounds and as such, treat female issues as well as their socio-economic problems differently. They both believe in portraying the identity of the woman as characters that are able to re-discover their God-given talents as well as put them into good use. Alice Walker is an African American novelist, poet, activist and also writes short story. She published *The Color Purple* in 1982 and it won the National Book Award and the Pulitzer Prize for fiction. She has many literary works to her credit which includes: *The third life of Grange Copeland* (1970), *Meridian* (1976), *The temple of my familiar* (1989), *Possessing the secret of joy* (1992). She has also won numerous awards as a result of her writings like the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction (1983), National Book award (1983). Her novel *Now is the time to open your heart* was published in 2004; the novel chronicles the life and challenges of an average African American woman during the era it was published. Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie has distinguished herself as one of the flourishing new generation Nigerian female writers. She has won many prestigious awards and some of her novels have been translated into other languages like French. Adichie focuses her attention on women and what they go through in life, their love for the family and how some of the female characters like Ifeoma, Beatrice were able to resist all forms of violence or subjugation by men and the society at large.

Americanah by Adichie was published in 2013. Commenting on her literary work especially her debut novel, *Purple Hibiscus*, Achebe (2013) writes “...Adichie came almost fully made” (p. 1). Achebe’s opinion is informed by her skilful interlacing of history and detailed description of events. The novel also won the The Chicago Tribune Heartland Prize for Fiction and National Book Critics Circle Award for Fiction; it is among The New York Times Ten Best Books of the Year (2014). *Americanah* tells the story of racism and how it manifests greatly in the lives of blacks especially immigrants in an American society, which affects mostly females. It exposes the dangers inherent in the lives of black female in America and the numerous challenges they face.

Most critics on Adichie's *Americanah* and Walker's *Now is the time to open your heart* concentrate more on racism, love, experiences of black women in America, oppression and the presence of internet (blogging). Critics have not given adequate attention on how these female characters re-discover themselves, thereby making waves in their various profession and environment which this paper centres on.

II. METHODOLOGY

Alice's Walker's *Now is the time to open your heart* and Chimamanda Adichie's *Americanah* were purposively selected to portray the reflections of the re-discovery of the self of the woman. Both authors examine the different challenges of black women in America; how they go through their struggles as well as their emergence as champions from it. A critical examination of the novels shows that despite their age or generational difference, women problems have been the same as portrayed by them. The novels were chosen as a result of their thematic affinity which revolves around self-rediscovery. The texts were subjected to critical and comparative analyses; secondary materials were consulted to enhance the analytical interpretation of the texts. Most materials were gotten from the library and the internet.

III. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This paper adopts post-colonial theory for Adichie's *Americanah* and Womanism for Alice Walker's *Now is the time to open your heart* as its theoretical point of reference. Postcolonial theory is a critical approach that deals with literary works written in countries that were once colonized or are now, colonies of other countries. It examines the ways in which writers from colonized countries try to write their experiences as well as celebrate their cultural heritage and identities. They do this in order to reject the idea of being inferior to their colonizers. The major proponents of postcolonial theory are Homi Bhabha, Edward W. Said and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. Adichie's *Americanah* fits into this theory because she is a Nigerian and the novel is set in Nigeria and America. She also examines the problems of colonized nations in it.

Womanism is an offshoot of feminism; most black women reject feminism as a result of its western orientation. Womanism evolved out of Black feminist movement. Alice Walker and other womanists believe that black women experience a more intense kind of oppression than white women. Womanism is a theory adopted by African and African Diaspora women to create female characters that exhibit positive traits. They tend to formulate ideologies to suit their concepts, to avoid being described as radical feminists. She coined the words while writing her book titled, *In search of our mother's garden: Womanist prose* (1983). Most black women all over the world accept the concept which addresses their issues and shares some idea with feminism but not in support of radicalism for women's liberation. It advocates for justice, equality and fairness for all people; it is woman-centred and not antagonist towards men. Womanism is referred to as a social theory that concentrates on black women and also for all people. Alice Walker in her novel portrays female characters who believe in the union of marriage between men and women and not radical in any way. The next section examines the characters journey to self discovery as portrayed in the novel.

IV. THE JOURNEY OF SELF DISCOVERY

Alice Walker's *Now is the time to open heart* is the story of a woman's spiritual adventure that becomes a passage through which she discovers herself. The novel chronicles the life of Kate Talkingtree, the protagonist of the novel who has always been a wanderer. She is a well published author, but with failed marriages. She decides to leave her lover when she turned fifty-seven and decides to go on a new journey to discover herself. The journey begins at Colorado River and flows into the future. Kate Talkingtree is described as a true womanist who fights for her sanity and is able to reclaim her personality. Her fellow women assisted her in her self-rediscovery journey which showcases how women assist themselves. The novel concentrates on the challenges and struggles of African American women and how they eventually devise means of overcoming them.

The American society has been an ethnically diverse one and as such, the issue of racism may not have been eradicated till date. African Americans face more racial discrimination when compared to other groups. The legacy of slavery weighs so heavily on them after years of its abolishment. Marger (2008) believes that "As a collectivity, blacks in the past four decades have made significant strides in income, occupation and education. However, they continue to lag behind whites in all measures of socio-economic status" (p. 208). The African American women have faced sexist oppression in addition to racist oppression when compared to their male counterparts. They are forced to play a complementary and unequal role in their families and society. Feminism has failed to voice or protect the interest of black women. Being both black and female, these women, as Warhol and Herndl (1991) affirm are "doubly marginalized" (p. 741). As Showalter (1997) points out "the black woman is "the other woman and silenced partner" (p. 214). The female characters in both novels for this study are marginalized and treated as an object to be used for pleasure and discarded afterwards.

Walker in this novel gives her female characters an expansive space and an ample opportunity to reconstruct their experiences through re-memory. She believes that women could be a source of strength to each other. Her female characters are physically, emotionally and psychologically abused by the oppressive environment. Their plight could be

considered as a triple tragedy as they face rejections from their immediate family members, fellow blacks and whites who are racist.

The title of Adichie's novel is very significant; it is a ridiculous way of describing those who travelled to America and returns to Nigeria with American accents and other material possessions like good cars, clothes and money. They often make those at home believe they are successful as a result of their exposure in Western countries. They tend to hide their ugly experiences of being in a foreign land and also being black. This novel exposes the bitter experiences of these 'Americanahs' with the sole purpose of telling those who have not travelled that it is not always a bed of roses. The female characters in *Americanah* seem so strong willed and ready to overcome challenges they encountered. Ngwaba (2022) affirms, "The protagonist, Ifemelu refuses to be subjected in any way, she faces many challenges that weigh her down most times but she is never submerged by them. She is an interesting character and different from every contemporary female protagonist of our time as she learned the act of overcoming her challenges (p. 3).

As a result of the numerous problem in Nigeria which revolves around bad governance, poverty, oppression of citizens, neglect of schools and unemployment; there tends to a decline in the overall well-beings of the citizens. Higher institutions in Nigeria are always on strike as a result of non-payment of salaries and poor educational facilities. She is privileged to travel because there are many students whose parents cannot afford the luxury of sending their children to study abroad. This relocation exposes the wide gap between the western world and those in less developed countries as well as the high rate of racism that exists. The protagonist, Ifemelu struggles with her life in America and goes to the extent of sleeping with a tennis coach in order to pay her rent. This she regrets when she rediscovers herself and the potentials embedded in her enables her to start a blogging site, ted-talks and eventually owing a home in America. At this point of self-rediscovery, she finds legible means of making money and sustaining her lifestyle rather than engaging in sex as a means of paying her bills.

In Alice Walker's novel, Dhaveswarapu (2015) notes that "Kate is a black artist who empowers herself to resist injustice, she is courageous which helps her to embark on a journey to reclaim her body and spirit. She rejects materialism, institutionalized religion and barbarous civilization that cannot redeem the plight of the marginalized" (p. 4). He further states that "She believes she is responsible for her life and as such, matured enough to handle the denigration of her spirit. She acknowledges that self-knowledge and self-love are essential to the growth and the discovery of one's self and embraces them. She loves herself and imparts love to the people in her life" (Dhaveswarapu, 2015, p. 4). Kate's first marriage was filled with domestic violence and constantly raped by her husband. She was a mere "servic, a servant" (Walker, 2004, p. 28). Her divorce seems like freedom but the hurt lingers on after the end of her marriage. Kate is fully aware of the struggle between blacks and whites and the need to put an end to it. She is concerned with the growth and spiritual development for all blacks and so, becomes an activist in the Black Freedom Movement.

She posits,

We're considered second and third class citizens of a country whose government never wanted us. Except as slaves. We understand by now the world will be blown to bits, doubtless by this same government, before people of colour get their fair share. We can't afford health insurance, nor will it even be applicable, the way things are going. Nobody wants to be Black. (Walker, 2004, pp. 56-57)

Moreover, her therapeutic journey gives her a clear insight into her abusive marriage and releases her from bad memories of the abuse. She finds peace on the journey of self-rediscovery which Walker (2004) confirms when she states, "a peace-fleeting-she had not felt in years" (p. 31). Christian (1985) agrees to this when she states, "Black women's struggle emanates from a deepening of self-knowledge and love" (p. 82). Kate was able to overcome her tribulations and obstacles in life by moving away from men who abuse her physically and emotionally.

She undergoes a nature therapy with the help of a shaman called Armando who assists in her journey of re-discovering herself. She is able to re-discover her body and spirit while at the Colorado river as well as her stay at the Amazon forest. In the process, she meets other women with similar issues who were also in a journey of self rediscovery: Lalika, Missy, Rick and Hugh who came for the same purpose. They help to revitalize her; they help her open her heart and she in turn helps them to discover their true personalities. Bates affirms, "Kate develops deeper compassion for humankind by listening to her peer travellers and their heartrending tales of life conflicts... She advances to a higher level of sensitivity, helping others to make the necessary transitions and becoming a healer in her own right" (Walker, 2004, p. 164).

Similarly, Ifemelu's arrival and adjustment to the western world seems difficult; finding a job became an issue for her. The employers expect her to accept anything the society offers her but she knows her identity and was ready to protect it (Ngwaba, 2022, p. 8). Ifemelu differs greatly from Wallace Thurman's protagonist, Emma Lou in his novel, *The Blacker the Berry*... in the sense that she values her African origin and appreciates her skin colour which Emma Lou fails to acknowledge and appreciate thereby allowing others to humiliate her. The narrator 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". (Adichie, 2013, p. 24)

Ifemelu is deeply rooted in her culture and guards her identity so well. She refuses to be convinced by Aisha to use

hair relaxers in order to make it soft and silky. She rather encourages her to appreciate how God has created her thereby accepting her unique personality and identity. Owing to the fact that her early stages in America were full of challenges, Ifemelu, made some mistakes before discovering her hidden talents. The interview she attends which requires her having sex with her employer breaks her as the man 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. I had somebody doing it before, but she's just moved to Pittsburgh...Helped her with a lot of her college debt. 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 desperately needs a job at this point but the conditions attached to it, is humiliating as she regrets why she attended the interview. She is at crossroads as a result of her rent which is due and other bills she needs to pay which worsens her situation. Moreover, her inability to pay her rent infuriates her room mates which lead to side comments about not being her parents. "Later Allison knocked on her door. "Ifemelu? Just wanted to remind you, your rent check isn't on the table. We're already running 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 forces her to accept Jackie's offer. Dike has been a part of her life and she constantly speaks with him to lighten his mood. Dike's voice helps her to calm down before speaking to the man and asks,

When can I start working?" she asked. "Want to come over right now?" "Okay", she said. She shaved her underarms, dug out the lipstick she had not worn since she left Lagos...what would happen with the tennis coach? He had said "massage", but his manner, his tone, had dripped suggestion...when she arrived at his house, his manner was brusque... "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", he said, stretching and dismissive; he wanted her to leave. She said nothing. (Adichie, 2013, p. 180)

Ifemelu's heart is filled with regrets for accepting the offer from the Tennis coach; she is traumatized after the incident and withdraws from everyone. She feels irritated with herself and constantly blames the choice she made. She tries to find a consolation and calls Aunt Uju but she is interested in the money she earned and exclaims that one hundred dollars is good money for a day's job. Ifemelu wants to tell her what she did to get that amount but she is not interested in her gist and she hangs up. The incidence made her dejected and alone in a foreign land. As such, "She woke up torpid each morning, slowed by sadness, frightened by the endless stretch of day that lay ahead...She was swallowed, lost in a viscous haze, shrouded in a soup of nothingness...She cared about nothin...she no longer went to class..." (Adichie, 2013, p. 184).

Furthermore, nature plays a vital role in the self discovery of the women. It helps them to discover their innate abilities and be able to use them to their self development. Kate and her fellow women realizes that their meeting at the Colorado River and her stay at Amazon forest allows them to experience the warmth of nature and further reminds them that they are responsible for their lives. The importance of nature in their spiritual journey and discovery is emphasized as being essential to their journey of self-rediscovery. Kate opines, "On this planet, Grandmother Earth, there is no higher authority. That our inseparability is why the planet will be steered to safety by Grandmother/Grandmothers or it will not be steered to safety at all. Grand Mothers. We must acknowledge and reclaim our true size. Dignity is important. Self-respect. We cannot lead by pretending to be powerless. We're not" (Walker, 2004, p. 185). It is obvious that Walker realizes the significance of nature in physical healing and encourages women embrace it.

Kate enters into what one could describe as a journey of the past as a result of the medicine given to her by the Shaman. In her dream, she sees an ancestor of hers who tells her about his many previous births, plagued by racism. He affirms, "our job is to remind you of ways you do not want to be...sometimes I think this message is the hardest to get across because it flies in the face of our need to have revenge. There is also the question of loyalty to the dead. We feel we need to avenge, to make right. To heal by a settling score. Healing cannot be done by settling a score (Walker, 2004, p. 191). As a result of this, she was able to sleep and realizes that one can heal herself. The connection with her ancestral spirit helps in reclaiming her spirit and realizes the greatness of the historical past of the blacks.

Kate's expedition at the Colorado and the Amazon forest acts as a way of bonding with her fellow women. Walker through this aspect agrees with Hooks (1993) who affirms that black women "must learn to live and work in solidarity. We must learn the true meaning of Sisterhood" (Hooks, 1993, p. 43). Bates (2004) opines, "Kate's greatest needs are to regenerate her spirit, explore other avenues to greater enlightenment, find renewed inspiration in the rescue of the globe from different human behaviour, and come to terms with her true lives purpose" (Bates, 2004, p. 164).

Kate undergoes self-rediscovery before discerning the paradoxes and dilemmas in the lives of others. Her welcoming spirit allows her to change her name from Nelson to Talkingtree so as to destroy any link with her ex-husband and she dreams of "being high on a hillside in the sun" (Walker, 2004, p. 7). Obviously, she has problems that need a change despite being a widely published author. She keeps her house clean and organizes it as a way of forgetting her past and moving on to the present. She has gone through pain which also reflects in her body as she ages. Kate's immediate surroundings and material goods are not the only hindrances; institutionalized religion and racism plays a vital role further in demeaning her. Kate stops attending the organized Buddhist meditation sessions. She has high regards for her

teacher but doubts his capability to assist the poor. She reflects, “Easy enough for him to dismiss the brown and yellow and poor white people all over the globe who worried constantly where their next meal was coming from” (Walker, 2004, p. 5).

Consequently, it is mandatory for the women while on their trip to Amazon River to drink “a frothy liquid that tastes like soapsuds” as preparation before swallowing a sacred medicinal plant Yage, known as “Grandmother” (Walker, 2004, p. 5). The herb helps in their spiritual transformation and healing. It also allows them to connect with their inner selves, their fears; which enable them to discover their hidden talents and strengths. This treatment aids them to heal themselves and become whole. Walker uses the word “river” as a metaphor for life. At the end of their spiritual cleansing, the female characters encounter celibates and lovers, shamans and snakes, memories of domestic violence. She remembers “Armando’s voice as he sang ‘Icaros’, healing songs that had come down to him through countless generations...Now is the time to open your heart” (Walker, 2004, p. 210).

In like manner, Aunt Uju is another interesting female character in Adichie’s novel; she falls in love with a married man. Her life has been clouded by the presence of The General as she fondly calls him, who provides for all her needs. She is a qualified medical doctor and one wonders why she could do such. Adichie (2013) states: “During the week, Aunt Uju hurried home to shower and wait for The General and on weekends, she lounged in her night-dress, reading or cooking or watching television, because The General was in Abuja with his wife and children. She avoided the sun and used creams in elegant bottles, so that her complexion, already naturally light, became lighter, brighter, and took on a sheen” (Adichie, 2013, p. 92).

Adichie deliberately did this in order for her to make adjustments in her life. The death of The General is an avenue for a change in her life and to realize that she has no place in the man’s home and as such, was driven out of her house which he bought with his name. One can say that The General is aware that Aunt Uju is a woman of easy virtue and could easily switch places when she gets another man who is wealthier than him and as such, not comfortable to buy the house in her name. The birth of his son Dike couldn’t make him to change the house name which serves as a great lesson to all single ladies of easy virtue. Adichie (2013) affirms,

It was a Saturday afternoon, Obinze and Ifemelu were in the TV room, Inyang was upstairs with Dike, Aunt Uju was in the kitchen with Chikodili when the phone rang. Ifemelu picked it up. The voice on the other end, The General’s ADC, crackled through a bad connection, but was still clear enough to give her details: the crash happened a few miles outside Jos, the bodies were charred, there were already rumours that the Head of State had engineered it to get rid of officers who he feared were planning a coup. Ifemelu held the phone too tightly, stunned... as Ifemelu repeated the ADC words. “You are lying”, Aunt Uju said, “It is a lie”. (Adichie, 2013, p. 106)

The General’s death opens an avenue for re-discovering her innate abilities. She is humiliated and driven out of the house by his relatives. This singular act makes her to realize how she has stooped so low when she has the degree to work and take good care of herself. She eventually regrets the 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!” (Adichie, 2013, p. 106)

Aunt Uju realizes the implication of the General’s death and regrets her actions of being a concubine who is not worthy to own a home bought by him. This signifies how The General regards her. Women, especially African women, hate to be treated as such. She is not sure of whom she could call to come to her aid, Ifemelu suggests she calls Uche and Adesuwa who she feels will find a solution to her problems which she did instantly. Uche advises her to take the generator and sell it because it will give her a good sum of money. She also tells her to use the money realized from the sale and relocate to America.

This scenario brings lots of regrets in her life. Her flamboyant lifestyle vanishes within a twinkle of an eye. She remembers, “Obinze carrying things out to the van, Dike stumbling around and chortling. The rooms upstairs had grown unbearably hot; the air conditioners had stopped working, as though they had decided, in unison, to pay tribute to the end” (Adichie, 2013, p. 107).

Adichie deliberately allows Aunt Uju to feel the consequences of her actions through the treatment she receives from the General’s relatives. One could rightly point out that she re-discovers herself after the death of The General. Her exposure in America and the struggles of passing her medical exams to practice as a medical doctor shows her resilience. Despite the challenges, she refuses to give up; she works in three different establishments in order to make ends meet. Aunt Uju’s self-rediscovery became an avenue through which Ifemelu relocates to America. Through Uju’s selfless efforts, she passed her medical examination after so many attempts to become a practicing doctor. Ifemelu is the one that received the mail and hands it over to her,

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. ...She took the envelope and shouted, "I made it!" and opened it to make sure, peering at the thin sheet of paper. "If you fail, they send you a thick envelope so that you can re-register". "Aunty Uju! I knew it! Congratulations! Ifemelu said. (Adichie, 2013, p. 141)

Passing her medical examination is a dream come true which enables her to take charge of her responsibilities as a good mother to Dike. This signals a shift in her character when compared at the beginning of the novel when she was a concubine to a wealthy man who pays all her bills. Apparently, Adichie made this shift in her character as a warning to other women and to help her to re-discover her personality and true worth. The identity of the African woman is dignified and women are expected to live up to expectation.

Likewise, Missy is another prominent character in Walker's novel who undergoes some traumatic experiences. However, Kate helps her to unburden her heart and seek for a new life. She is a victim of child sexual abuse at the hands of her grandfather and finds solace in drugs. Lalika is also a minor character who is assisted by Kate to re-discover herself and opens up her hearts for a new journey of herself. She is also a victim of sexual abuse. She is imprisoned for killing the man responsible for her rape and that of her friend. She is also sexually abused in prison by white men. Her life is flooded with repeated cases of rape and violence and it is very difficult for her to forget her abusive past. Obviously, Kate and the Shaman help to heal her scars and she becomes self-reliant which opens up a new dimension in her life like Kate and Missy. Through the healing process, the women were able to reclaim their bodies and re-discover themselves. The unity of women has been one of the major issues raised by most female writers as a way of assisting others. Walker values the unity of women when she states, "One's struggle against oppression is meaningless...unless it is connected to the oppression of others" (Walker, 2004, p. 97).

It can be deduced that the female characters in the novel loves men. However, they are abused and violated by men. Consequently, they look for ways to re-discover themselves. Kate encourages women to erase traditions, patriarchal forces that destroy or devalue female sexuality and their entire being. Through this journey of self discovery, the women are able to learn the value of forgiveness which helps them to realize the greatness of their being. They all achieve wholeness as a result of their unity and bonding. They help each other to heal without apportioning blames.

Walker and Adichie have a lot in common as reflected in their novels; they both concentrate on women and the challenges therein. In their novels, both acknowledge that women go through difficulties in their lives and as such devise means of survival. They appreciate the institution called marriage and have great respect for it as most of their female characters were married. Moreover, these women are usually abused by men due to their feminine nature. Ifemelu sleeps with a man while trying to pay her rent, an action she regrets. This made her to work even harder and becomes a wealthy woman in America. She finally relocates to Nigeria to show the importance of her roots and identity. Aunty Uju depends on her man for her up-keeps; his death becomes an eye opener. She relocates to USA where she finally becomes a medical doctor despite the numerous times she fails the medical examination. Obinze's mother is an accomplished lecturer who finds a way for her son, Obinze to relocate to London illegally which backfired and led to his deportation.

Walker's characters are similar to Adichie's. Kate left her abusive marriage and embarks on a journey to re-discover herself where she met other female characters: Lalika and Missy who were both sexually abused. Through their spiritual journey, they were able to reclaim their true happiness. Ifemelu after sleeping with the coach worked even harder and is able to become successful and relocates to Nigeria while Aunty Uju is able to pass her medical examinations and stop depending on men for survival which is a form of self discovery. One interesting fact about the authors is that they both acknowledge and believe that the unity of women gives them the opportunity to help one another which, in essence, seems to be a prerequisite to rediscovering themselves. Adichie and Walker emphasize that education is a major key to the liberation and self-rediscovery of women as seen in all their female characters portrayed in their respective novels.

V. CONCLUSION

This paper examined the discovery of self of the female characters in Walker's *Now is the time to open your heart* and Adichie's *Americanah*. In Adichie's and Walker's narratives, the diverse and unique struggles portrayed by the protagonists reveal the significance of the overall quest for their re-discovery of who women really are and not what the patriarchal society has made them to be. The representations of self-discovery in each of the novel are diverse and display the peculiarities of each country. In each of the instances of self-rediscovery portrayed in the novel, the female characters are in constant battle with men and the society at large but are able to achieve their goal of discovering themselves. Beyond the struggles of the female characters, the study dwells on the assumptions that they are animated by their search for self-discovery which they eventually realized. The paper reveals that the desire for change has found eloquent articulation in the works of these female writers which is as a result of the need to place women at the centre rather than at the periphery. Attempt has been made to examine the image of the woman which is greatly influenced by sexist ideology and promoted by patriarchal culture in African American society which forces them to seek for their true identity and discover who they are. It identifies the unity of women which helps in overcoming their challenges as found in the novels. The study also shows that African American women through their writing continue to find their voice which enables them to reject all forms of oppression imposed on them by the roles assigned to the female character which is a way of portraying their true nature in reality. This paper does not in any way encourage women to abandon their families in order to discover themselves but to have a peaceful relationship, while utilizing their voices

and not being subjected in any way.

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Ijeoma Ann Ngwaba (nee Ibeku) is a native of Nsirimo Umuahia in Abia State, Nigeria. She is a graduate of English and Literary Studies (B.A) from Abia State University, Uturu in 2004 with a second class upper division. She also graduated from University of Port Harcourt, Rivers State in 2009 with an M.A (Hons) in Arts (Ph.D grade); and recently completed her Doctoral program at University of Ibadan, Nigeria in 2021.

She lectures at Federal University Oye-Ekiti, Ekiti State, Nigeria. Her works are extensively published in journals and others have been cited in reputable theses and books. Her research interest covers African and African-American literature, Migration literature, literary theory and criticism, Film and Media studies, Oral literature, gender-related discourses and comparative literary studies.

Dr Ngwaba is a member of North East Modern Language Association (NeMLA), African Literature Association (ALA) and English Scholars Association of Nigeria (ESAN). She won the 2020 North East Modern Language Association Postcolonial essay award.

Olutola Olafisayo Akinwumi was born in Ile-Ife, Osun State, Nigeria on 19th July where she obtained her B.A (2002), M.A (2010), MPhil (2015) degrees in literature-in-English from Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Osun State, Nigeria and currently on her PhD in same institution in Literature-in-English. She is a seasoned educationalist that once taught in secondary schools, college of education and polytechnic before joining Federal University Oye-Ekiti, Ekiti State, Nigeria.

Raphael Segun Larayetan is a citizen of Igbo Bunu in Kogi State of Nigeria. Born on 27th of August, he had B.A English Studies from the University of Port Harcourt, 1997, Master in Industrial and Labour Relations from Delta State University, Abraka, 2010, Master in Literature in English, University of Lagos, 2016, and is currently a Doctoral student at Federal University, Oye-Ekiti, (2023 in view) all in Nigeria.

He had over 14 years successful career with Nestle Foods where he rose to the level of a Branch Manager in charge of South West, North East and South, Nigeria, before he voluntarily resigned to actualise his love for academics, and he has been in the academic

from 2021 till date as a lecturer at Federal University Oye-Ekiti. He lectures African Literature with specialty in Poetry, Drama, Popular Culture, *Avant-Garde* and Fiction.

He has published articles on Understanding Literature, Literacy for Revolution and Awakening African Consciousness among others. Mr. Larayetan is a member of Readers Association of Nigeria (RAN), Fellow, Institute of Marketing (NIMN). He has won few academic awards such as: Inter-universities Poetry written competition, Team Spirit Lecturer, 2021/2022 Session.

Chiemela Imelda Ibeku was born on 11th October, in Umuahia, Abia State Nigeria. She is a graduate of Abia State University Uturu, Nigeria where she obtained a bachelor's degree in Foreign Languages and Translation Studies (French) in 2006 and University of Ibadan where she obtained a Master's degree in French studies (2011) and currently a PhD student in French studies at the University of Ibadan.

She worked with ISON BPO International limited as a customer care representative and later as a supervisor. She is currently an Adjunct Assistant lecturer in the department of Linguistics and Languages, Federal University Oye-Ekiti, Ekiti State, Nigeria. Her research interests include gender studies, migration studies, identity issues, comparative literature and African political systems and governance. She has published articles on Misogyny, Africa's Plight and migration issues respectively.

Mrs. Chiemela is a member of North East Modern Language Association (NEMLA), Nigeria Institute of Management (NIM) and had won different awards on best performing Team Lead.