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Roots and Routes in Americanah by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie

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Abstract:

Americanah is a 2013 novel by the Nigerian author Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, for which Adichie won the 2013 U.S. National Book Critics Circle Award for fiction.[1] Americanah tells the story of a young Nigerian woman, Ifemelu, who immigrates to the United States to attend university. The novel traces Ifemelu's life in both countries, threaded by her love story with high school classmate Obinze. It was Adichie's third novel, published on May 14, 2013 by Alfred A. Knopf. A television miniseries, starring and produced by Lupita Nyong'o, was in development for HBO Max, but then was later dropped.[2] Americanah is about Ifemelu and Obinze who, as teenagers in a Lagos secondary school, fall in love. Nigeria at the time is under military dictatorship, and people are seeking to leave the country. Ifemelu moves to the United States to study, where she struggles for the first time with racism and the many varieties of racial distinctions: for the first time, Ifemelu discovers what it means to be a "Black Person".[3] Obinze had hoped to join her in the U.S. but he is denied a visa after 9/11. He goes to London; eventually becoming an undocumented immigrant after his visa expires. [4][5]

Years later, Obinze returns to Nigeria and becomes a wealthy man as a property developer in the newly democratic country. Ifemelu gains success in the United States, where she becomes known for her blog about race in America, entitled "Raceteenth or Various Observations About American Blacks (Those Formerly Known as Negroes) by a Non-American Black".[5] When Ifemelu returns to Nigeria, the two consider reviving a relationship in light of their diverging experiences and identities during their many years apart.

Keywords: americanah, chimamanda, immigrates, black, property, diverging, visa, lagos, school.

INTRODUCTION

Americanization

Americanization is one of the biggest themes in Americanah. In the context of the novel, America itself is a symbol of hope, wealth, social and economic mobility, and, ultimately, disappointment, as Ifemelu learns that the American Dream is a lie and that the advantages she enjoys there often come at a great price. Her Americanization is slow but distinct, and she gradually picks up the slang, adapts to her surroundings (for better or worse), and adopts American politics. Her views on gender and race change because of this, and her blog is devoted to exploring the issue of race as a non-American black in America. She's called Americanah

when she returns to Nigeria, having picked up a blunt, American way of speaking and of addressing problems. She resists this label, but it's obvious to the reader that Ifemelu's years in America have changed her.

According to Idowu Faith, "no valid statement can be made on Americanah without deconstructing the term "Americanah" which, more or less, reveals the thesis of the narrative as well as the preoccupation of Adichie in the text." In Nigerian parlance, the term "Americanah" is an identity term that is premised on a person's previous experience of living in America. In an interview, Adichie defines Americanah as describing those who have been to the US and return with American affectations, pretend not to understand their mother tongues any longer, and refuse to eat Nigerian food, making constant reference to their life in America.

From this understanding, it is clear that Ifemelu's decision to return home without worrying about being identified as an "Americanah", establishes the fact that Adichie is proposing and charting a path for a new kind of migration story whose quintessence is return migration.

DISCUSSION

Gender

Adichie's explorations of sexual education and the perception of sex among youngsters in Nigeria plays a fundamental role in the journey of Ifemelu exploring her sexuality as an adolescent in a puritan post-colonial society.

Migration

While many of the migratory experiences in the novel work within migration theory, Adichie simultaneously transcends the borders of international migration theories by introducing a new factor that both influences migration and projects a new perspective on return migration. According to Dustmann and Weiss (2007:237), lack of economic opportunity and escape from natural disaster/persecution are two main reasons individuals migrate throughout history. While identifying the need to flee "choicelessness" as the main reason for much of the migration in the twenty-first century Nigerian setting of the novel, Adichie uses literary dimensions to shake up the foundations of theory. Consequently, the direction of this type of migration, how it affects the bonds of love, how it changes personalities and cultural views, and how it reinterprets identity become the novelist's major theoretical engagements. In addition, Adichie is concerned with how migration debases and elevates, how it barter and fulfills and, most significantly, how it reinvents.

RESULTS

Critics praised the novel, especially noting its range across different societies and reflection of global tensions. Writing for The New York Times, Mike Peed said, "'Americanah' examines blackness in America, Nigeria and Britain, but it's also a steady-handed dissection of the universal human experience—a platitude made fresh by the accuracy of Adichie's observations." [5] Peed concluded, "'Americanah' is witheringly trenchant and hugely empathetic, both worldly and geographically precise, a novel that holds the discomfiting realities of our times fearlessly before us. It never feels false." [5] Reviewing the novel for The Washington Post, Emily Raboteau called Adichie "a hawk-eyed observer of manners and distinctions in class," and said Adichie brings a "ruthless honesty about the ugly and beautiful sides of both" the United States and Nigeria. [6] In the Chicago Tribune, Laura Pearson wrote, "Sprawling, ambitious and gorgeously written, 'Americanah' covers race, identity, relationships, community, politics, privilege, language, hair, ethnocentrism, migration, intimacy, estrangement, blogging, books and Barack Obama. It covers three continents, spans decades, leaps gracefully, from chapter to chapter, to different cities and other lives...[Adichie] weaves them assuredly into a

thoughtfully structured epic. The result is a timeless love story steeped in our times." [7] Tshilidzi Marwala links the *Americanah* to the rise of nationalism. In this regard, he thinks the story of *Americanah* evokes the image that the 21st century will be defined by the dialectical tension between the globalization, which is brought by technology, and the "othering" which is brought by the alienating characteristic of globalization. Accordingly, Marwala on reviewing *Americanah* states that "it seems that in the 21st century, the strangeness of othering, of enhancing difference rather than embracing our commonalities and the wedging of deep fissures in society continues unabated." [8]

Awards

The book was selected as one of the 10 Best Books of 2013 by the editors of the New York Times Book Review. [9] It won the 2013 National Book Critics Circle Award (Fiction), [1] and was shortlisted for the 2014 Baileys Women's Prize for Fiction [10] of the United Kingdom. The Chicago Tribune awarded Adichie its 2013 Heartland Award for Fiction, "recogniz[ing] *Americanah* as] a novel that engages with important ideas about race, and does so with style, wit and insight." [11]

In March 2017, *Americanah* was picked as the winner for the "One Book, One New York" program, [12] [13] part of a community reading initiative encouraging all city residents to read the same book. [14]

CONCLUSIONS

Sales

Americanah spent 78 weeks on NPR's Paperback Best-Seller list. [15] Days after The New York Times named *Americanah* to its best books of 2013 list, Beyoncé also signaled her admiration of Adichie, sampling Adichie's TED Talk "We should all be feminists" on the song "***Flawless"; sales of *Americanah* soared and as of December 23, 2013, the book climbed to the number 179 spot on Amazon.com's list of its 10,000 best-selling books. [16]

Adaptations

In 2014, it was announced that David Oyelowo and Lupita Nyong'o would star in a film adaptation of the novel, [17] to be produced by Brad Pitt and his production company Plan B. [18] In 2018, Nyong'o told The Hollywood Reporter that she was developing a television miniseries based on the book, which she would produce and star in. [19] It was announced on September 13, 2019, that HBO Max would air the miniseries in ten episodes, with actor and playwright Danai Gurira as writer and showrunner. [20] On October 15, 2020, it was reported that the miniseries would not move forward due to scheduling conflicts. [21]

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