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Critique of American Multiculturalism in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah*

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By

Marshal Acharya

Roll No.: 64

Symbol No.: 2815027

T.U. Regd. No.: 9-2-663-33-2015

Central Department of English

Kirtipur, Kathmandu

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Letter of Approval

This thesis entitled “Critique of American Multiculturalism in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s *Americanah*” submitted to the Central Department of English, Tribhuvan University, by Marshal Acharya has been approved by the undersigned members of the Research Committee.

Members of the Research Committee

Asst. Prof. Laxman Bhatta

Internal Supervisor

Shiva Raj Panta, Ph.D.

External Examiner

Prof. Dhruba Bahadur Karki, Ph.D.

Head of Central Department of English

Date: _____

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Marshal Acharya

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Abstract

*This thesis examines the limitations and contradictions of American multiculturalism as portrayed in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah* by interrogating the gap between the ideals of multiculturalism and its practical implications. The analysis examines how *Americanah* challenges the superficial nature of multiculturalism, which often emphasizes performative displays of diversity rather than addressing deeper issues of equity. It delves into themes such as the commodification of culture, the silencing of immigrant perspectives, and the racialized dynamics of identity and belonging. Central to this exploration are Ifemelu's experiences in America, her reflections on race, and her critiques of societal norms, which highlight how multiculturalism frequently upholds existing hierarchies, pretending to promote inclusivity. The theoretical framework for this analysis is rooted in Charles Taylor's *The Politics of Recognition*, Derrick Bell's Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Afef Benessaïeh's *Multiculturalism*. Taylor's concept of recognition provides a foundation for examining how multicultural practices in *Americanah* either uphold or fail to provide genuine cultural recognition. Meanwhile, CRT focuses on systemic racism and helps show how multiculturalism can uphold racial inequalities while pretending to promote inclusion. Benessaïeh's concept of multiculturalism describes multiculturalism as too static and superficial which enshrines difference without enabling transformative cultural encounters or the fluid blending of identities. This study highlights the shallow nature of American multicultural practices, challenging their effectiveness in addressing systemic inequalities. It encourages a critical re-evaluation of multicultural ideals and*

emphasizes the need for authentic recognition and structural transformation to build a genuinely inclusive society.

Keywords: multiculturalism, politics of recognition, systemic racism, cultural exclusion, recognition, alienation

This thesis examines the limitations and contradictions of American Multiculturalism as portrayed in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah*. First published in 2013, *Americanah* involves readers in a diverse exploration of identity, race, and belonging in a globalized society. The novel follows Ifemelu, a young Nigerian woman who migrates to America in quest of education and opportunities, and Obinze, her childhood love, who travels to the United Kingdom as an undocumented immigrant. Through their shared experiences, Adichie illustrates the complexities of cultural displacement and the effort to negotiate societal expectations in distant countries. With reference to *Americanah*, this research investigates how external views and cultural differences impact identity, particularly in Western societies. The novel invites readers to question the illusions of multiculturalism and the sacrifices required to fit into foreign societies. The research further explores the delusions surrounding diversity, the sacrifices associated with integration, and the continuation of institutional racism.

While reading *Americanah*, I was struck by how the novel reveals the false idea of multicultural harmony in Western societies, showing how systemic racism and cultural alienation persist under the surface of inclusivity. It explores how racial and cultural identities are shaped and controlled, often pressuring individuals to conform and lose their authenticity. Through Ifemelu's experiences in America, the novel raises important questions about the cost of fitting in, the superficial celebration of diversity, and the isolation faced by migrants. This brings up important questions

about a society that appears to value diversity but instead forces people to adjust through racism and cultural exclusion. Research is needed to explore these issues, as it shows the risks of a world that focuses on surface-level acceptance while pushing aside those who don't fit in or struggle to belong.

My research examines how Adichie's *Americanah* American multiculturalism. It explores how the novel challenges the idea of multicultural harmony in Western societies, showing the effects of racism, cultural exclusion, and the pressure to fit in, which often get in the way of real diversity and inclusion. The study also looks at the challenges of staying true to yourself in places that care more about appearances than real understanding. Researching the issue based on the critique of American multiculturalism is significant because it uncovers the gap between the idealized vision of multicultural society and the reality present in the contemporary world especially in America, where every minor people like black has to go through the disparity and discrimination just to enjoy the basic human right. The objective of the study is to explore: How does *Americanah* challenge the notion of multiculturalism focusing on its portrayal of the struggles faced by immigrants in upholding their authenticity and identity? The study also examines how the novel exposes the shallow celebration of diversity, emphasizing the need for a deeper and more authentic form of inclusivity. Furthermore, it analyzes the depiction of identity and cultural alienation in the novel, exploring its broader relevance to understanding issues of race, identity, and belonging in the context of a globalized world.

The discourse surrounding multiculturalism in the United States has been a subject of extensive scholarly inquiry, inviting critical examination and reflection. Within this nuanced dialogue, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah* emerges as a compelling literary work that studies the complexities and contradictions inherent in

the American multicultural experience. Through this research paper, I intend to thoroughly focus on critiquing the American multiculturalism.

This novel has sparked considerable scholarly interest, drawing the attention of literary critics and academics. Many academicians, critics and writers have attempted to make a descriptive and comparative study of this novel from other different perspectives. While studying *Americanah* from different perspectives, Badri Prasad Acharya and Prabal Koirala have analysed the novel as a transnational fiction focusing on the transnational ethos which shows how transnational identity is formulated in a liminal space. They write, “*Americanah* narrates the story of immigrants who try to reformulate their identity in the Western countries. Ifemelu is represented as the transnational subject who moves from her native country to America. As a transnational subject, Ifemelu is able to identify herself as an American along with the internalization of the fact that she is Nigerian by birth”(76). Through the lens of transnational ethos, *Americanah* shows how migrants like Ifemelu navigate and reconstruct selfhood by blending the experiences, cultural codes, and understandings of multiple nations. She becomes a transnational subject who embodies both displacement and belonging, not just geographically but psychologically and culturally.

Similarly, Richa Jha has explored this novel from the perspective of identity crisis. She writes:

Identity crisis in the immigrant land is one of the dominating themes in the novel *Americanah*. Ifemelu, the central character of the novel, undergoes identity crisis when she moved from Nigeria to America to pursue her degree. Ifemelu was forced to fake her identity to find a job, and thus begins her identity crisis. The highly racist societal perspective to identify all Africans

alike and the growing desperate need for survival creates identity displacements in characters like Ifemelu. Necessity for money drives Ifemelu to do menial job, quasi-prostitution job, offered by a tennis coach. (146)

This contention is that the novel provides a profound exploration of the complexities individuals face when navigate cultures and grappling with the transformation of self in the process. Ifemelu's migration from Nigeria to the United States exposes her to the intricacies of race, immigration, and cultural nuances, prompting a re-evaluation of her identity as a Nigerian woman in America.

Similarly, the novel has been studied from the metaphorical perspective, emphasizing on hair. Dina Yerima writes:

The significance attached to hair results in the woman who is not of Western descent feeling self-conscious and defensive until she gives in to relax her hair or wear wigs and hair weaves, which results in the placement of Western aesthetics at the top in the aspect of hair. Otherwise, she decides to take a stand and leave her hair natural and ignore people's opinions the way Ifemelu does and ends up defending her hair to lot of her acquaintances who incidentally are Black like herself but have come to see Western hair or its imitation as the norm. But, even at that, the value and meaning read into this stance gets to her from time to time. Hence, hair is important as it sparks up conversations on race, tolerance, acceptance, and coloniality. (646)

For Yerina, the novel shows how women who aren't of Western descent often feel compelled to change their natural hair to fit Western beauty standards, like using relaxers or wearing wigs. If they choose to keep their hair natural, like the character Ifemelu, they may face criticism, even from other Black people who have accepted

Western hair as normal. This shows that hair can spark important conversations about race, acceptance, and the lasting impact of colonialism.

Apart from studying this novel from the perspective of immigrant's suffering and identity crisis, scholars have also analysed this novel as the failure of American Dream. Chibuzo and Chigbu claim, "The experience of some of the characters, especially Auntie Uju, her son, Dike and Ifemelu show that American Dream is an illusion of the mind" (50). It underscores the failure of the American Dream through the lens of its characters, particularly Ifemelu. While the United States is often depicted as the land of opportunity and success, Ifemelu's journey exposes the harsh realities and systemic challenges that challenge the idyllic promise of the American Dream.

Apart from this, the novel has been analysed from the perspective of women choices towards her body. Nonye Chinyere asserts:

Adichie, through another female character, Uju, reveals how women are reclaiming their bodies. Uju gets pregnant and decides to keep her pregnancy. Her family members respect her decision and accept it. Her decision to keep the baby is indicative of her right over her body. In some earlier texts, when unmarried girls find themselves in such situations, hurried arrangements are made between both families for the relationship to transform into a marriage. (60)

Ahumibe illustrates the theme of women asserting autonomy over their bodies, challenging traditional expectations and societal pressures by making independent choices about their pregnancies which gives a new perspective to see the women's choices in the society.

Meanwhile, Kathryn Schulz argues that *Americanah* is a novel about identity, nationality, difference, loneliness, aspiration, and love not as distinct entities but in the complex combinational relation they possess in their real life. He asserts:

A great global novel, Ifemelu was well on her way to becoming an – American – which promises dangled before and coveted by, so much of the world for so long. She chooses instead to, become an *Americanah*; an identity predicated on experience rather than nationality, trajectory rather than the place. It is an open question whether identified like that will change the world for the better, but I, Adichie they have already done for literature. (14)

Schulz explores the issue of race and nationality. However, Ifemelu choice to be an *Americanah* signifies a deliberate divergence from a singular national identity. By adopting this term, Ifemelu highlights the complexities of her experience, emphasizing that her identity is shaped more by her diverse range of experiences and personal trajectory than by a fixed nationality.

Additionally, the novel has been explored through the complex societal issues. Alex Clark mentions that Adichie’s novel is extremely thoughtful, subtly exploration of structural inequality of different kinds of oppression, of gender roles, of the ideas of home, subtle but not afraid to pull its punches. Clark provides a thoughtful critique of systemic inequality, exploring issues such as racism, gender dynamics, and cultural alienation with both subtlety and courage. It questions societal expectations surrounding identity and belonging, revealing the constraints created by oppressive structures.

While Akingbe and Emmanuel address “the configuration of Other in *Americanah* is in two forms: the geographical ostracism of blacks or the poor from white Americans, and the resentment of Other by another Other” (50). Their

contention show how Black people are often separated from white society, and how those who are marginalized can also feel tension or resentment towards others within their own communities, like between African-Americans and African immigrants.

Furthermore, *Americanah* is explored through the lens of otherness where characters have to see themselves from the perspective of others. While doing so, Rose A. Sackeyfio writes:

Ifemelu echoes the same sentiments as a form of double-ness, because African immigrants must grapple with a new awareness of the racialized context of their identity, mostly in uncomfortable ways. This dilemma represents a new dimension of the Duboisian framework wherein the African immigrant now views herself or himself through the eyes of others and through a foreign lens that demonizes blackness. In her blog, Ifemelu candidly speaks about African immigrant's avoidance of the stigma of blackness that places African Americans at bottom of the social hierarchy in America. The racial stereotypes, distorted images and low expectations of African Americans are confusing to Non-American Blacks. (224)

It illustrates that African immigrants in America face identity crisis as they become aware of how their race is viewed negatively in society. They experience a kind of dual perspective, seeing themselves through the eyes of others in a way that highlights the prejudice against black people. This awareness often leads them to distance themselves from African Americans, who are seen as being at the bottom of the social ladder due to negative stereotypes and low expectations.

Likewise, Maddie Schultz talks about the language of blackness in her journal where she writes, "Dike's story does not extend beyond his time with Ifemelu in Africa. His experiences there and discussions his mother would have silenced,

however, allow for a more positive hybridity: his time in Africa reveals his interests and allows him to wrest agency back from those who would define him” (187). This shows that Dike's visit to Africa helps him understand and accept both parts of his identity, which had been limited by his upbringing and environment in America. This experience allows him to regain control over how he defines himself and appreciate his African heritage, addressing the struggle of balancing different aspects of his identity.

According to Mike Peed, “*Americanah* examines blackness in America, Nigeria, and Britain but it is also a steady-handed dissection of universal human experiences, a platitude made fresh by Adichie's observation”(BR14). Peed argues that Adichie’s novel demonstrates the white values and norms in the western world whereby black people are rated second class human by their discourse.

The novel has also been analysed in terms of its intercultural representation especially use of language and the difficulties associated with learning a new language. Sutrinson et al. address, “Ifemelu's perspective on language mirrors the idea of prescriptivism, which holds that there are specific ways that individuals should speak and write. Anything else is seen as contaminating or ruining the language. They fight for the right usage of English while trying to live up to their socio-political and ideological objectives” (423). It shows how language can be used to control people and maintain social order. It highlights the pressure to speak "proper" English, especially for immigrants like Ifemelu, and how this pressure can make them feel like they need to change who they are. It also critiques these strict language rules, pointing out that they often exclude and marginalize those who don't conform.

In this way, *Americanah* has been analyzed extensively by scholars across a broad spectrum of themes and perspectives. These include its role as a work of

transnational fiction, its exploration of identity crises, metaphorical dimensions, and its critique of the failure of the American Dream. Furthermore, the novel has been examined through lenses that foreground women's autonomy, delve into complex societal issues, interrogate the language of blackness, and illuminate intercultural representation. Scholars have also employed the concept of 'otherness' to unpack the experiences of the characters and the dynamics of cultural displacement. Each of these studies has enriched the discourse surrounding *Americanah* and highlighted its multidimensional narrative scope.

However, within this rich body of scholarship, there appears to be a critical gap concerning the novel's engagement with the concept of American multiculturalism. While some analyses touch upon related aspects such as intercultural representation and identity formation, nobody has rigorously critiqued the broader framework of multiculturalism as it is portrayed in the text. So, I will analyze the text by employing *The Politics of Recognition* by Charles Taylor and Critical Race Theory (CRT) by Derrick Bell and a group of legal scholars.

The following research questions have been developed to address the proposed research issue: How does the novel critique the superficiality of multiculturalism and its emphasis on performative diversity over genuine inclusion and equity? In what ways does *Americanah* highlight the commodification of culture and the marginalization of immigrant voices within a multicultural framework? How do Benassaieh's idea of multiculturalism counter American multiculturalism? How do Charles Taylor's concept of cultural recognition and the principles of Critical Race Theory help to analyze the racial dynamics, power structures, and systemic inequities portrayed in the novel? These research questions aim to explore how *Americanah* critiques the ideals and practices of American multiculturalism, examines the gaps

between theoretical notions of inclusion and their real-world implications, and sheds light on the intersections of race, identity, and privilege in multicultural societies. Through these inquiries, the research investigates the limitations of American multiculturalism and highlights the need for genuine recognition and systemic change.

American multiculturalism is the idea that people from different cultures, backgrounds, and traditions can live together while maintaining their unique identities. Multiculturalism encourages diversity, allowing different cultures to be recognized, respected, and valued. It shapes how Americans approach immigration, education, politics, and society by promoting inclusion and equal opportunities for all, regardless of race, ethnicity, or heritage. Many scholars have put their views forward regarding the multiculturalism.

Caleb Rosado writes, “Multiculturalism is a system of beliefs and behaviors that recognizes and respects the presence of all diverse groups in an organization or society, acknowledges and values their socio-cultural differences, and encourages and enables their continued contribution within an inclusive cultural context which empowers all within the organization or society” (2). Hence, multiculturalism is about accepting and respecting people from different cultures. It means recognizing that everyone has their own traditions and ways of life, and encouraging them to share and contribute in a community or organization. The goal is to create an environment where everyone feels valued and included, no matter their background. For multiculturalism to work well, it’s important to treat everyone fairly, show respect for differences, and celebrate diversity. Furthermore, Caleb states:

Multiculturalism also encourages and enables the contribution of the various groups to society or an organization. Women and persons of color, for example, often experience discouragement because what they bring to the

“table” for discussion is often regarded as of little value or worth. Yet what people bring needs to be valued, for who knows from where the next great idea may come—from a youth, from an elderly person, from an African American, from a single parent, from a lesbian, from a high school dropout, from a business executive, etc.?” (4)

In this case, multiculturalism makes sure that everyone, no matter their background, can share their ideas and be heard. Sometimes, women and people of color feel their ideas aren't valued. But everyone's thoughts should be respected because great ideas can come from anyone—whether they're young, old, African American, a single parent, LGBTQ+, or anyone else. You never know who might have the next great idea.

David Bennett in his book writes: “The discourse of multiculturalism represents, in part, the emergence of new voices that have generally been excluded from the histories that have defined our national identity” (188). This shows that multiculturalism gives a voice to groups that were previously left out of history. It helps create a more inclusive national identity by recognizing the contributions of different cultures.

Multiculturalism is a diverse issue which includes various social aspects. It has often been associated with the political democracy. While describing it as a political democracy, Bennet writes:

Multicultural political democracy means that this country was not built by and for only one group – Western Europeans; that our country does not have only one language – English; or only one religion – Christianity; or only one economic philosophy – corporate capitalism. Multicultural democracy means that the leadership within our society should reflect the richness, colors and

diversity expressed in the lives of all of our people. Multicultural democracy demands new types of power-sharing and the re-allocation of resources necessary to great economic and social development for those who have been systematically excluded and denied. (190)

Thus, multicultural political democracy means that a country was built by and for people of diverse backgrounds, not just one group. It recognizes multiple languages, races, religions, and economic ideas.

This study is based on critical qualitative approach. This paper purposes to examine the American multiculturalism by employing The Politics of Recognition by Charles Taylor and Critical Race Theory (CRT) by Derrick Bell and a group of legal scholars, as its primary methodological framework.

Charles Taylor's Politics of Recognition provides a credible framework for analyzing the critique of American multiculturalism in *Americanah* by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie. Taylor argues that identity is shaped by recognition, and misrecognition can harm individuals and groups by limiting their agency and self-worth. Taylor addresses in his writing:

The thesis is that our identity is partly shaped by recognition or its absence, often by the misrecognition of others, and so a person or group of people can suffer real damage, real distortion, if the people or society around them mirror back to them a confining or demeaning or contemptible picture of themselves. Non recognition or misrecognition can inflict harm, can be a form of oppression, imprisoning someone in a false, distorted, and reduced mode of being. (25)

This shows that our identity is shaped by how others see us. If people recognize us positively, we develop a strong sense of self. But if they ignore or misrepresent us, it

can cause real harm, making us feel trapped in a false or limited identity. This misrecognition acts as a form of oppression, restricting our true potential.

Taylor further writes, “An analogous point has been made in relation to blacks: that white society has for generations projected a demeaning image of them, which some of them have been unable to resist adopting. Their own self-depreciation, on this view, becomes one of the most potent instruments of their own oppression” (26). This idea highlights that when a dominant group repeatedly imposes negative stereotypes on a marginalized group, these harmful images can become internalized, leading individuals to see themselves through the lens of oppression. In the case of Black identity, generations of racial prejudice, systemic discrimination, and cultural misrepresentation have reinforced notions of inferiority, limiting opportunities for self-expression and self-worth.

Imposing negative attitude can inflict damage emotionally and mentally, on those who face it. Taylor further elaborates, “The projection of an inferior or demeaning image on another can actually distort and oppress, to the extent that the image is internalized. Not only contemporary feminism but also race relations and discussions of multiculturalism are undergirded by the premise that the withholding of recognition can be a form of oppression.”(36)

When a group is consistently portrayed negatively, it can lead to internalizing these false images, limiting self-worth and perpetuating oppression. Feminism, race relations, and multiculturalism all recognize that denying proper recognition is a form of oppression, as it harms individuals' sense of identity and reinforces inequality. With this argument, Taylor addresses the issue of multiculturalism. Taylor describes:

This brings us to the issue of multiculturalism as it is often debated today, which has a lot to do with the imposition of some cultures on others, and with

the assumed superiority that powers this imposition. Western liberal societies are thought to be supremely guilty in this regard, partly because of their colonial past, and partly because of their marginalization of segments of their populations that stem from other cultures. (63)

This point addresses the ongoing debate about multiculturalism, which often centers on how some cultures are imposed on others, with an underlying assumption of superiority. Western liberal societies are often criticized for this, due to their colonial histories and the way they have marginalized groups from different cultural backgrounds. These societies have a legacy of imposing their values while sidelining the voices and identities of others, contributing to systemic inequality and cultural dominance.

Second lens to analyze the issue of American multiculturalism is Critical Race Theory. Examine the issue of American multiculturalism through the lens of CRT, make it credible as founders of this theory are from historically marginalized groups, their racial backgrounds reflect a diversity of perspectives that have enriched CRT as a framework for examining racism and inequality. Many of the key theorists of Critical Race Theory (CRT) have experienced racism firsthand, which shaped their perspectives and scholarship.

Critical Race Theory (CRT) was founded by a group of scholars in the late 1970s and 1980s, primarily as a response to what they saw as the limitations of traditional civil rights approaches. “Critical Race Theory embraces a movement of left scholars, most of them scholars of color; situated in law schools, whose work challenges the ways in which race and racial power are constructed and represented in American legal culture and, more generally, in American society as a whole” (13). Thus, it significantly addresses the condition of marginalized people like Afro-

American legally and socially, in the context of American multiculturalism. As

Derrick Bell and his theory suggests that it has two common interests:

One is to understand how a regime of white supremacy and its subordination of people color have been created and maintained in America, and , in particular, to examine the relationship between that social structure and professed ideals such as “the rule of law” and “equal protection”. The second is a desire not merely to understand the vexed bond between law and racial power but to change it. (13)

Given credit to this statement, it suggests us that there is a racial inequality prevalent in the American society and the theory emphasizes the need to dismantle the systems that perpetuate racial inequality and work toward real social transformation. The theory states that, “From its inception, mainstream legal thinking in the U.S has been characterized by a curiously constricted understanding of race and power..... came to embrace the ideal of “color-blindness” as the dominant moral compass of social enlightenment about race” (15). This theory critiques how U.S. legal thinking views racism as just individual acts of discrimination, ignoring its deeper, systemic nature. It highlights how the "color-blindness" ideal, which ignores race to promote fairness, fails to address racial inequality. This thinking of legal bodies strongly questions valuation of American multiculturalism as a whole.

Critical Race Theory further states: “Racial justice was embraced in the American mainstream in terms that excluded radical or fundamental challenges to status quo institutional practices in American society by treating the exercise of racial power as rare and aberrational rather than as systematic and ingrained” (14). Hence, it critiques how racial justice has been framed and understood in mainstream American discourse. It argues that, instead of addressing racial power as a systemic and deeply

rooted issue, American society often treats it as something that is rare or exceptional—something that occurs in isolated instances, rather than being a regular feature of the structure of society. This perspective highlights a key limitation of how racial justice has been approached.

Third lens that has been used to analyze the American multiculturalism is the concept of multiculturalism presented by Afef Benessaïeh in her essay *Multiculturalism, Interculturality and Transculturality*. She claims, “Multiculturalism describes diversity as the amalgamation of separate communities and tends to favour the stereotypical view of cultures as immutable or irrevocably different” (18). This line critiques multiculturalism for treating different cultures as separate and unchanging. It argues that multiculturalism often presents diversity as just a mix of distinct groups living side by side, rather than encouraging real connection or change. By doing this, it creates and reinforces stereotypes, assuming that cultures cannot evolve or influence one another. Instead of promoting understanding, this approach can deepen divisions and overlook power imbalances. It further challenges a surface-level view of diversity that fails to support true equality or interaction.

She further states, “Multiculturalism is regularly criticized for encouraging groups and communities to maintain and cultivate differences instead of relating or adapting to neighbours and host cultures” (17). Thus, multiculturalism is often criticized because it tends to focus on preserving cultural differences rather than encouraging interaction, integration, or mutual adaptation between different communities and the larger society. Critics argue that by supporting each group to maintain its unique customs and identities in isolation, multiculturalism can unintentionally create divisions and prevent people from building shared values or understanding across cultures. Instead of promoting unity or a sense of national

belonging, it may lead to parallel communities that coexist but do not truly connect or engage with one another.

Multiculturalism, as it is often understood in the U.S., tends to celebrate diversity and cultural differences but does not necessarily challenge the underlying power structures that perpetuate racial inequality, focusing on surface-level diversity without tackling the deep-seated racial and institutional dynamics that keep people of different racial backgrounds from having equal opportunities and rights.

With this legal ideology, the law is shown to be thoroughly involved in constructing the rules of the game, in selecting the eligible players, and in choosing the field on which the game must be played. Drawing on these premises, CRT uncovers how law was a constitute element of race itself: in other words, how law constructed race. In this context, CRT is an effective theory to examine the effectiveness of multiculturalism.

Furthermore, it is stated that as the Nigerian scholar Claude Ake has argued that, “Globalization enacts a ‘hierarchization of the world’ and the ‘crystallization of a domination’. While that domination may be essentially legitimized by racial power” (30). Reference with this statement, we can say that globalization has become one of the tools which legitimizes domination through racial power where certain racial or cultural groups are still privileged while others are marginalized. In the name of inclusion, multiculturalism often fails to challenge the fundamental racial hierarchies that exist within American institutions and society.

CRT describes, “The task of CRT is to remind its readers how deeply issues of racial ideology and power continue to matter in American life. It understands that racial power is produced by and experienced within numerous vectors of social life” (32). Thus, it underscores how racial power continues to shape American life and

social structures, an issue that is often overlooked or under-addressed in mainstream American multiculturalism.

Adichie's *Americanah* takes a closer look at American multiculturalism, pointing out the gap between the idea of celebrating diversity and the reality of ongoing inequality. Through the story of Ifemelu, the main character, the book shows how multiculturalism in the U.S. often focuses on surface-level recognition of cultural differences instead of addressing deeper issues like racism and unfair treatment. Ifemelu's thoughts and blog posts about race reveal how these efforts sometimes feel more like token gestures than real inclusion. By sharing Ifemelu's experiences, Adichie highlights the problems in how America approaches diversity and questions whether it truly creates a sense of belonging for everyone

Economic background has been one of the factors of critiquing American multiculturalism. The novel reveals how American society not only reduces complex identities to racial labels but also prioritizes wealth and status. Adichie narrates in the novel about Obinze about applying for U.S.A visa as, "Even the American embassy was different. He had been refused a visa years ago, when he was newly graduated and drunk with American ambitions, but with his new bank statements, he easily got a visa" (27). This line follows after when Obinze didn't get visa after graduation just because of his economic background despite being eligible to apply for visa. The protagonist's experience underscores complex intersection of wealth and identity within American multiculturalism.

Referencing with this issue, Richard and Nee writes: "Immigrants who enjoy more extensive social and economic opportunities are more likely to assimilate to the mainstream and reduce their attachment to racial or ethnic groups as a means to improve their own life chances and those of their children" (856). This shows how

having strong economic background often overshadows high ambitions. Obinze's initial visa denial, despite merit, contrasts sharply with his later success due to financial credentials, revealing a system that prioritizes wealth over diversity. Adichie highlights how this reliance on economic status undermines the ideals of equality and inclusivity, exposing the inherent inequities within American multiculturalism. This reflects a critique of the idealized narrative of American inclusivity, where opportunities appear available to all, but in practice, they are disproportionately accessible to those with economic privilege.

In addition, linguistic imperialism is also acting as one of the tools for challenging the multiculturalism. According to Phillipson, "linguistic imperialism is the notion that certain languages dominate internationally on others. It is the way nation-states privileged one language, and often sought actively to eradicate others, forcing their speakers to shift to the dominant language" (780). Fluency in languages like English or French is associated with education, prestige, and modernity, reinforcing the idea that they are more "civilized" than local languages. Mrs. Akin Cole, a rich famously old woman from a famously old family said to Obinze, "You must send her to the French school. They are very good, very rigorous. Of course they teach in French but it can only be good for the child to learn another civilized language, since she already learns English at home"(28). This perspective reinforces the idea that these Western languages are superior, marginalizing local languages and cultures. This view implicitly devalues indigenous languages and cultures, reinforcing a hierarchy where Western norms are idealized. The use of the term "civilized" underscores the enduring influence of colonial ideologies, which rank cultures and languages based on their association with Western power structures. By encouraging

the child to learn French, the speaker implies that linguistic diversity is only valuable when it aligns with culturally dominant, Eurocentric norms.

Not only the institutions or schools of western societies are to be blamed for overpowering the education system of local languages but also the people from the marginalized groups are equally responsible for this, who have the mentality of accepting European language as superior. Mrs. Akin-Cole further narrated to Obinze, “If you decide to disadvantage your child by sending her to one of these schools with half-baked Nigerian teachers, then you only have yourself to blame” (29). This statement reflects the internalization of colonial ideologies, where Nigerian people, shaped by a history of cultural domination, perpetuate the belief that local education and teachers are inferior. By aligning with Western standards and devaluing their own systems, they contribute to linguistic and cultural hegemony. Adichie uses this moment to highlight how such attitudes undermine local agency, self-confidence, and the development of robust indigenous systems, ultimately critiquing the shallow inclusivity of multiculturalism that often privileges Western standards over local realities.

Similarly, the issue of objectifying women as commodities highlights a critical flaw in American multiculturalism, which often fails to address systemic inequalities despite its emphasis on diversity. Adichie critiques the objectification of women, portraying how they are often commodified as tools for male sexual satisfaction. This is evident in the way women’s bodies are valued primarily for their ability to fulfill male desires, reducing their worth to physical attributes rather than individuality or agency. A white tennis coach in America said to Ifemelu, “Now what I need is help to relax. If you want the job you have it. I’d pay you a hundred dollars a day, with the possibility of a raise, and you’d work as needed, no set schedule”(143). This

particular conversation is taken place in the text when Ifemelu goes to a tennis coach for a job. This statement reveals the dynamics of power, privilege, and exploitation in interpersonal relationships. The phrase “help to relax” further implies a commodification of the employee’s labour, perhaps even extending beyond professional expectations. This incident had further led her to the depression. She thought of killing herself.

Similarly, when Obinze had once been at Chief’s house when a man brought his girlfriend to visit, and when she left the room to go to the toilet, Obinze heard Chief tell the man, “ I like that girl. Give her to me and I will give you a nice plot of land in Ikeja” (30). This illustrates the commodification of women as objects of trade, highlighting the intersection of power, gender, and materialism. In multiculturalism, it shows the failure to address deep inequalities, as these actions and attitudes are often ignored in a system that focuses more on appearances than on real change.

Felix and Asika argue, “These women are reduced to sexual objects for the benefit of others, their worth measured solely by their ability to satisfy others sexual desires or fulfill labour needs. The abuse they endure is multifaceted owing to their gender and migration status” (2). Similar projection of women body can be found in *Americanah*, especially from the marginalized groups like African-American are taken as the commodity, the body of them is taken as an object. Ginika put a comment on Ifemelu, while being in America, “You have the kind of body they like here. You’re thin with big breasts” (124). It exemplifies the objectification of women’s bodies by reducing their value to physical attributes that align with societal or cultural preferences. By stating that Ifemelu has “the kind of body they like here,” the speaker commodifies her appearance, framing her body as an object designed for external approval rather than a reflection of her individuality or agency. By focusing on

physical traits that conform to Western beauty ideals, the line reveals how multicultural societies often enforce dominant, restrictive standards of attractiveness. Rather than truly celebrating cultural diversity, such practices objectify individuals, especially women, and uphold existing power structures instead of promoting equality.

Another issue shown in the novel is ignorance of African identity, which critiques American multiculturalism. Ignorance of American people about Nigerians in *Americanah* reflects a narrow and often misguided understanding of African identity. Racheal Thomas in her research argues, “While Africans regard Westerners as intelligent, sophisticated, and innovative, Westerners often view Africans solely through a lens of poverty, seeing them as inhabitants of a continent lacking independent thought” (1). They often reduce Nigerians to simplistic caricatures, viewing them through a lens shaped by media portrayals and cultural misconceptions. Ginika says Ifemelu when she returned from a job interview, “You could have just said Ngozi is your tribal name and Ifemelu is your jungle name and throw in one more as your spiritual name. They’ll believe all kinds of shit about Africa” (131). This indicates the deep-seated ignorance many Americans have about Africa, reflecting how they often view the continent through stereotypes rather than understanding its complexities. The casual suggestion that Americans would believe such fabricated ideas about African names underscores their limited knowledge and tendency to exoticize African cultures. This ignorance reinforces a superficial form of multiculturalism, where diversity is celebrated only as long as it aligns with preconceived notions or fits into a simplistic, often patronizing narrative.

Devaluation the education of African institution in American offices is another issue prevalent in a novel which criticizes the ethos of multiculturalism. Lower-level

employees are often discouraged from pursuing education or self-improvement. When Ifemelu was looking for the job, Mwombeki suggested, “Mwombeki looked over Ifemelu’s resume and asked her to delete the three years of University in Nigeria: American employers did not like lower-level employees to be too educated” (139). By keeping employees in menial roles, they ensure a dependent and easily controllable labor force. It points to how individuals from non-Western backgrounds may feel pressured to conceal or downplay their cultural and academic achievements to fit into dominant norms. In a multicultural society that claims to value diversity, the devaluation of Ifemelu's Nigerian university education challenges the very principle of equality that multiculturalism stands for. This contradiction undermines the true spirit of multiculturalism, which should equally recognize and respect all forms of knowledge, regardless of origin.

Alongside these social differences, existence of deep rooted tribalism in America has increasingly influenced the country’s approach to multiculturalism, often in ways that creates tension and division. While addressing the fact of tribalism, Ifemelu quotes in her blog as:

In America, tribalism is alive and well. There are four kinds-class, ideology, region and and race. First, class. Pretty easy. Rich folk and poor folk. Second, ideology. Liberals and conservatives. Each side believes the other is evil. Third, region. The North and South. Finally, race. White is always on top and American Black is always on the bottom, and what’s in the middle depends on time and place. (184)

While talking about these kinds of tribalism, they always have some differences against each other. Society has been highly divided on the basis of rich and poor. Liberals and conservatives differ primarily in their political philosophies, values, and

approaches to social, economic, and cultural issues. These differences often manifest in their views on government, social policies, and individual rights. Ifemelu further writes, “Inter-marriage is discouraged and on the rare occasion that it happens, is considered remarkable” (184). The discouragement of intermarriage and the perception of such unions as “remarkable” highlights a significant contradiction within the framework of American multiculturalism.

Similarly, the differences between the South and the North in the United States have historically stemmed from contrasting economic, social, and cultural foundations. The Northern economy was industrial and diversified, relying on manufacturing, trade, and small-scale farming, while the South’s agrarian economy depended heavily on plantation agriculture and slave labour. Ifemelu further elaborates, “The two sides fought a civil war and tough stains from that war remain. The North looks down on the South while the South resents the North” (184). Race difference has been a major issue in America. Ifemelu writes in her blog, “There is a ladder of racial hierarchy. White Anglo-Saxon Protestant are on top. Or as that marvellous rhyme goes: if you’re white, you’re all right; if you’re brown, stick around; if you’re black, get back!” (184). This shows that divisions like class, beliefs, region, and race weaken the idea of American multiculturalism. Instead of bringing people together, these divisions keep unfair systems in place, especially with race, where white people are favoured, and Black Americans are treated unfairly. It shows that multiculturalism doesn’t fully fix these problems or create real fairness. These differences of tribalism has often led the country to re-evaluate and question their position of multiculturalism.

Similarly, differences in diversity in America has given the room for criticism. Ifemelu writes in her blog about her experience in America as, “If a white person is

saying a neighbourhood is diverse, they mean nine percent black people. If a black person says diverse neighbourhood, they are thinking forty percent black” (351). It shows how multiculturalism is often used to make the dominant group feel better and change how they see things, while ignoring the opinions and experiences of minorities. In this case, the line shows that diversity is not an objective ideal, but rather a word that has been used to keep up the image of acceptance without addressing deeper structural inequality.

Some Americans look down on racial minorities due to historical, cultural, and systemic factors that have caused inequality and discrimination. The legacy of slavery, colonization, and segregation established racial hierarchies that framed minorities as inferior or “other.” Ifemelu addresses in her blog as, “American racial minorities-blacks, Hispanics, Asians, and Jews-all get shit from white folks, different kinds of shit, but shit still. However, all the others think they’re better than blacks because, well, they’re not black” (205). Racial hierarchies in America often create divisions among minority groups, driven by systemic racism and the pressures of assimilation into a white-dominated society. These hierarchies encourage competition rather than solidarity, as groups seek to distance themselves from those perceived to be at the bottom, particularly Black Americans. While multiculturalism is supposed to celebrate diversity and bring people together, the reality is that all racial minorities face discrimination from white society, just in different ways. The line also points out how other racial groups often see themselves as better than Black people, which keeps racial divisions alive instead of encouraging unity.

With the growing number of immigrants to America, the problem of racism gets deeper and deeper. Black people in America continue to face systemic challenges and discrimination rooted in their race. Despite the progress achieved through civil

rights activism, structural racism remains pervasive in various aspects of life.

Addressing this issue, Ifemelu writes in her blog as:

To My Fellow Non-American Blacks: In America, You are Black, Baby: Dear Non-American Black, when you make the choice to come to America, you become black. Stop arguing. Stop saying I'm Jamaican or I'm Ghanaian. America doesn't care. So what if you weren't "black" in your country? And admit it-you say "I'm not black" only because you know black is at the bottom of America's race ladder....you're black baby. (220)

The line "stop saying I'm Jamaican or I'm Ghanaian" shows that America puts all Black people into one category, "Black," erasing their cultural and national differences. It shows how immigrants may resist being called "Black" because they didn't identify that way in their home countries. The line "so what if you weren't 'black' in your country?" points out how race is something society imposes, not something people choose. The phrase "you're black, baby" shows how this label is forced on people in America, whether they like it or not. This issue highlights the systemic problems of racial categorization, identity erasure, and the limitations of American multiculturalism. By reducing diverse cultural and national identities into rigid racial labels like "Black," society erases the unique histories and experiences of individuals.

Additionally, black people always feel insecure about their presence in the public places especially in the heavily white area. Ifemelu states in her blog, "You must nod back when a black person nods at you in a heavily white area. It is called the black nod. It is a way for black people to say "you are not alone, I am here too" (220). It serves as an acknowledgment of shared experiences and a reminder of belonging in environments where they may feel isolated. Black women in America aren't liked if

they speak their mind. They can't talk or argue freely like back in their country. She adds, "Because in America, strong-minded black women are SCARY" (220). This shows how American perceive black woman.

Moreover, in many societies, racial bias often leads to the unfair assumption that Black people are likely suspects in criminal situations. Esther and Mary write, "Racism depicts how people are configured, classified and segregated because of their colour, which leads to disparity where some members of the society are referred to as the "in-group members" while the other party are called the "out-group members" (158). This kind of colour biasness lead to the unfair treatment even from the judicial and legal body like police. Ifemelu writes in her blog, "When a crime is reported, pray that it was not committed by a black person, and if it turns out to have been committed by a black person, stay well away from the crime area for weeks, or you might be stopped for fitting the profile" (221). It reflects the fear that any crime committed by a Black person will lead to collective suspicion of the entire community, forcing them to alter their behaviour to avoid being targeted. "And if you are a man, be hyper-mellow, never get too excited, or somebody will worry that you're about pull a gun" (220). These sorts of pre-assumptions often mislead people to feel them inferior. It criticizes the idea of equal protection and rule of law as mentioned in the Critical Race Theory.

Black people often face unfair treatment in public places, where their opinions are ignored or seen as unacceptable. When they try to speak up, they are often judged or labeled as aggressive, making it harder for them to share their views. Ifemelu writes:

If a black cashier gives poor service to the non-black in front of you, compliment that person's shoes or something, to make up for the bad service,

because you're just as guilty for cashier's crimes. If you go to the restaurant, please tip generously. Otherwise the next black person get awful service.....

Black people aren't supposed to be angry about racism. (221)

This kind of discrimination forces many to stay silent, even when they want to stand up for themselves. These unfair attitudes create a world where Black people feel unwelcome and unable to express themselves freely. They are often held responsible for the behaviour of others within their community, forcing them to go out of their way to avoid reinforcing negative biases. Whether through extra kindness or generosity, they are expected to mitigate the effects of prejudice, even in situations they did not create.

Even black people are often denied the right to speak out about racism, as society frequently dismisses their experiences or labels them as overly sensitive or confrontational. When they try to address unfair treatment, their complaints are often ignored or downplayed, reinforcing the idea that their struggles are unimportant. Ifemelu writes in her blog, "If you are telling a non-black about something racist happened to you, make sure you are not bitter. Don't complain. Be forgiving. If possible make it funny. Black people are not supposed to be angry about racism" (221). To make it worst, don't tell white conservative about your experience of racism. She further elaborates, "Because the conservative will tell you that YOU are the real racist and your mouth will hang open in confusion" (221). Speaking out can even lead to backlash, as they may be accused of playing the "race card" or making others uncomfortable.

Recognising oneself as a black has happened to Ifemelu only after coming to America. Ifemelu narrates, "I didn't think of myself as black and only I became black when I came to America" (290). The speaker's identity was likely shaped by their

nationality, ethnicity, or community rather than a racial label like "Black." However, upon arriving in America, they were immediately categorized as "Black," highlighting how American society prioritizes race as the primary marker of identity. Ojukwu and Ebenezer highlight, "Multiculturalism in America has rather evoked memories of racism, ethnocentrism and other negative images which are employed for the purposes of making African-Americans suffer from a sense of alienation" (113). It shows that instead of offering a true sense of belonging and equality, American multiculturalism has failed to make people feel recognised rather it has alienated people from mainstream.

On the other hand, hair has become prominent race metaphor in America which shows the status of multiculturalism. Tola Olupona addresses, "Today, many Black individuals, particularly Black women and children, continue to be denied access to education and employment opportunities due to their hair" (3). This statement criticizes the ethos of multiculturalism which claims to provide equal opportunity without any biasness. Regarding the same scenario, Ifemelu writes in her blog, "Some black women, AB and NAB, would rather run naked in the street than come out in public with their natural hair. Because, you see, it's not professional, sophisticated, whatever, it's just not damn normal" (297). This statement highlights how societal norms in America, place unfair pressure on Black women to conform to white-centric standards of beauty and professionalism, such as hiding their natural hair. Adichie uses this critique to expose how these standards not only undermine individuality but also force Black women to navigate a world that demands they suppress their natural identity to be accepted.

Colourism and internalized racism within the Black community highlight the lingering effects of systemic oppression and colonial ideals. A divide often exists

between Black Americans and African immigrants, where Black Americans may harbor prejudices against Afro-Americans due to their closer ties to African heritage and darker skin tones. Ifemelu states in her blog, “Many American blacks proudly say they have some “Indian.” Which means Thank God We Are Not Full-Blooded Negros. Which means they are not too dark” (213). This internalized racism, shaped by systemic oppression and societal hierarchies, leads some African Americans to devalue full Black identity by claiming Indigenous ancestry as a marker of distinction. The pride in “not being fully Black” reflects the lingering effects of colorism and the historical privileging of lighter skin within and outside Black communities. “You ever wonder why he likes you looking all jungle like that” (212)? This is the comment made on Ifemelu by a black man when she was holding the hand of Curt, a white man. Ifemelu’s natural features as “jungle,” the speaker dehumanizes her and reduces her relationship with Curt to exoticism, being a black man himself.

The inclusion of women in film production remains a critical issue in the representation of black women in global entertainment industry. Despite strides toward diversity and representation, women continue to face systemic barriers in accessing key roles both on and off the screen. Female characters are often confined to supporting or stereotypical roles, while leadership positions such as directors, writers, and producers remain disproportionately occupied by men. Ifemelu states in her blog, “In American pop culture, beautiful dark women are invisible. In movies, dark black women get to be the fat nice mammy or the strong sassy women. They get to dish out wisdom and attitude while the white woman finds love” (214). Dark-skinned Black women are frequently made invisible or restricted to rigid and typical roles in films and television. Beauty standards based on Eurocentrism disadvantage women with darker skin tones, preventing them from being represented as desirable

or as leading characters in complex stories. This lack of representation not only limits the perspectives and stories shared in film but also questions the presentation of black women in mainstream film. These sorts of misrepresentations keep the people in delusion. When one's identity is shaped by the others, it has the high chance of being represented in a confining or demeaning way as mentioned by Charles Taylor in *The Politics of Recognition*.

Likewise, treating the people of colour in the holy place like Church shows dark side of multiculturalism. Aunt Uju tells Ifemelu while visiting the church, "You know that if he does not dress properly, they will find something to say about us. If they are shabby, it's not a problem but if we are, it is another thing" (215). It shows how society unfairly focuses on the behavior and appearance of marginalized groups, holding them to stricter standards than others. For Black individuals, failing to meet these expectations is often seen as a reflection of their entire community, whereas similar actions by other groups are frequently overlooked or ignored.

Even the academic world often reflects systemic biases, including those against Black individuals and other marginalized groups. Ifemelu describes in her blog, "If both are caught for the drug possession, say, white guy is more likely to be sent to treatment and the black guy is more likely to be sent to jail" (346). Racial bias often leads to unequal treatment of students based on their race, particularly in disciplinary actions. She further adds "Black folks don't have choice" (346). They don't have any choices rather than accepting the harassment even in social club, department store, bank, driving Mercedes until cop pulls over and even in their offices where white get paid more despite having the same qualification. Ifemelu narrates in her blog, "Since the beginning of America, white people have been getting jobs because they are white. Many whites with the same qualifications but Negro skin

would not have the jobs they have” (361). Such treatment contributes to a broader pattern of inequality, reinforcing disadvantages for marginalized groups which ultimately lead towards the failure of multiculturalism.

In conclusion, this thesis has explored the idea of American multiculturalism and the problems that come with it. While multiculturalism aims to promote diversity and inclusion, in reality, it often falls short of these goals. Instead of creating true equality, it can sometimes hide ongoing issues of discrimination and inequality. By looking at different examples and cultural experiences, this study has shown how multiculturalism can be used to celebrate diversity on the surface while ignoring deeper problems, such as unfair treatment and lack of real opportunities for some groups. It also highlights how cultural identities are sometimes treated like products to be displayed or consumed, rather than respected and understood. This creates a situation where diversity is celebrated only in appearance, without addressing the challenges faced by many communities. To truly embrace multiculturalism, there is a need to go beyond words and actions that only seem inclusive. Instead, we must focus on understanding and fixing the systems that create inequality, so that all cultures and communities can thrive equally and fairly. This study hopes to encourage further discussions and efforts toward building a society that values and supports all people in meaningful ways.

This research explores and identifies the limitations and contradictions of American multiculturalism and its real-world implications. The portrayal of multiculturalism in *Americanah* is not confined to the fictional experiences of its characters but reflects broader societal realities. The novel exposes how multiculturalism, rather than fostering genuine inclusion, often prioritizes superficial displays of diversity while failing to address systemic inequalities. For example, it

critiques how immigrants are celebrated for their "exotic" identities but are also expected to assimilate into dominant cultural norms, thereby erasing parts of their authentic selves. Furthermore, the novel critiques the unequal power structures within multicultural practices, highlighting how certain cultural traits are celebrated while others are overlooked or devalued. This raises a critical question whether multiculturalism genuinely fosters inclusion or not.

Apart from critiquing multiculturalism, *Americanah* explores a range of other significant issues that provide fertile ground for further research. One such area is the role of silence and non-verbal communication in navigating cultural misunderstandings, which remains an underexplored aspect of cross-cultural interactions. Similarly, comparative studies could be conducted to examine how multiculturalism is represented across different nations, highlighting similarities and differences in its application and impact. Furthermore, the role of media and popular culture in shaping multicultural narratives also presents a significant area for investigation. Thus, further research could be done on this aspect of the novel.

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