

Review Article

Correcting Africans' Misconceptions about America in *Americanah*

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Abstract: This paper seeks to address the Africans' misconceptions about the American life as presented in Chiamamnda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah*. It examines Adichie's depiction of negative social issues in America which were concealed from Africans by the American mass media, the influential Nigerian parents, and the incomplete report of the previous travelers and immigrants to America. Adichie attempts to convey an inclusive presentation of the American life through her diasporic characters and their struggle against the Americans' racial prejudice, low level of education, lack of employment, and financial struggle. The paper illustrates how Adichie sheds light upon the importance of remodeling the untrue presentation of America to prevent the Africans' agony and disappointment when immigrating to America. To achieve this, the paper examines the Nigerian immigrants experience with the Americans' racial prejudice, low level of education, lack of employment, and financial struggle as distinctive aspects of the American life.

Keywords: Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah*, Americans' racial prejudice.

When Ifemelu came to American, she learned that she is black. Ifemelu explains her epiphany and relates it to the fact that race is not a prevailing matter in Nigeria, and that it only occurs in America. Ifemelu says, "I came from a country where race was not an issue; I did not think of myself as black and I only became black when I came to America" (*Americanah* 612). Ifemelu, then, realizes that America forces categorizations that influence the individual's social status, "admit it—you say "I'm not black" only because you know black is at the bottom of America's race ladder." (*Americanah* 471). America classifies people and associates status to their social background. For this reason, Ifemelu raises a wondering to the black community to dismantle the Americans' classifications of race, "[w]hat if being black had all the privileges of being white? Would you still say "Don't call me black, I'm from Trinidad"?" (*Americanah* 471). People of color in America go through different battles; they first deal with being labelled based on their race, and then they are placed at a non-satisfactory position in the society. Adichie indicates that racial prejudice is an implicit social problem in America where people are classified according to their obvious color.

To emphasize the danger of racism in *Americanah*, Ifemelu symbolizes it with a disease that

has various conditions, ranging from mild to severe; she says, "maybe it's time to just scrap the word "racist." Find something new, like Racial Disorder Syndrome. And we could have different categories for sufferers of this syndrome: mild, medium, and acute" (*Americanah* 661). Ifemelu finds that Americans avoid using the word racist, because it makes them in the position of the offender, while replacing the word racism with a disorder syndrome makes them victims of something that is uncontrollable. Through presenting Ifemelu's experience as an immigrant in America, Adichie examines social aspects of the American society that forms a paradox of Ifemelu's expectations. Through Ifemelu's observations of the American society, she discards her preconceived image of America and absorbs a realistic one. These social misconceptions include Ifemelu's experience with American's racial prejudice to whiteness, the low level of education, unemployment, and financial struggle.

Adichie perceives colorblindness as an approach to silence race in America. The Americans' tendency to avoid discussing the problem of race is due to America's history with slavery and racial segregation which makes them uncomfortable. As a result, Americans theorize colorblindness (Mueller 222). Ifemelu's friend expresses how the Americans profess

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racial colorblindness, “this is America. You’re supposed to pretend that you don’t notice certain things.” (*Americanah* 271). This means that skin color is recognized in America, yet Americans try to escape solving racial issues by pretending that they are not prejudiced, when in reality, “[s]hutting our eyes to the complexities of race does not make them disappear” (Apfelbaum et. al 208). Ifemelu also illustrates the Americans’ discomfort when she states that racial issues are the focus of her blog, “[saying] I write an anonymous blog called Raceteenth or Various Observations About American Blacks (Those Formerly Known as Negroes) by a Non-American Black” would make them uncomfortable” (*Americanah* 15).

Adichie deconstructs the superiority of White Anglo-Saxon Protestants to those of color. Their sense of superiority is clear to Ifemelu when a black woman says, “[s]tupid woman, she thinks she’s white” (*Americanah* 439). This comment reflects white Americans’ prejudice against blacks in America even among the black community, which makes other races and minorities desirous to belong to them. Likewise, Ifemelu proposes in her blog, “whiteness is the thing to aspire to . . . many minorities have a conflicted longing for WASP whiteness” (*Americanah* 439). This racial segregation results in underestimating the ability of minority groups to prosper in America. For instance, an American deliveryman knows that Ifemelu is just a household worker and not the owner of the house, “I did not fit as the owner of that stately house because of the way I looked” (*Americanah* 725). Ifemelu also provides an example of felony charges and how they vary based on the felon’s racial background; “If both are caught for drug possession, say, the white guy is more likely to be sent to treatment and the black guy is more likely to be sent to jail.” (*Americanah* 725). Such unjust treatment is a result of giving WASP a high rank in the American social ladder.

Racial prejudice is also found in the Nigerians struggle against accents prejudice to the American accent. Linguistic discrimination occurs when a person receives unfair treatment due to their use of language. Hence, it is a social phenomenon in the American society that divides people into rankings and results in forming judgments about wealth, education, or social status (Workplace Fairness). This indicates that linguistic discrimination is linked to the existence of racism in a given society. According to Jonathan Pool, “if the language of one language group is treated worse, then the members of that group are treated better in some nonlinguistic way” (17).

Adichie provides evidence for Uju and Ifemelu’s encounter with linguistic discrimination in America, which leads her to risk losing her identity. Uju makes a strong effort to speak English with an American accent to conceal any differences between her as a Nigerian and Americans and to foster her sense

of belonging to the American community. She also compels her son to stop using the Nigerian language, Igbo. When Ifemelu asks Uju for an explanation, Uju says, “[t]his is America. It’s different.” (*Americanah* 235). Thus, Uju chooses conformity to the American linguistic prejudice and risks her Nigerian identity.

Language prejudice in America influences Ifemelu as it makes her distinguish what it means to have an American accent in America. In the international office desk at the university, the American woman at the front desk speaks to Ifemelu very slowly that Ifemelu thought she “had to have some sort of illness that made her speak so slowly” (*Americanah* 197). However, she later finds that the American woman “was speaking like that because of her, her foreign accent, and she felt for a moment like a small child, lazy-limbed and drooling” (*Americanah* 198). Only that Ifemelu realizes that speaking with an American accent denotes a social class and high cognitive level, so she starts imitating an American accent, “she began to practice an American accent” (*Americanah* 198). An American man notices Ifemelu’s good American accent, and she thanks him for his remark. However, she soon feels regretful for her response of gratefulness. Ifemelu rethinks the sense of achievement that comes with sounding like Americans; she says, “thanking him, for crafting his words “[y]ou sound American” into a garland that she hung around her own neck. Why was it a compliment, an accomplishment, to sound American?” (*Americanah* 376). Ifemelu symbolizes the American’s comments on her use of American English as something that she wraps around her neck, suggests its possible discomfort. By this act, Ifemelu maintains her identity since it is associated with the use of her native.

Schwartz and Unger define biculturalism as one’s comfort and proficiency with one’s original culture and the culture of the country one has settled (26). In Ifemelu’s case, Amonyeze considers her reaction an adaptive culturalism as she responds to discrimination through taking pride of her African culture and dropping the American accent and preferring to use a Nigerian English accent unapologetically represents the tilt of her bicultural identity, as she uses a culture that is adaptable to her heritage. Thus, Ifemelu understands the psychological effects and culture loss that she holds and values her Nigerian identity (3).

Adichie raises the issue of racial prejudice in America through the Americans’ habit of imposing their beauty standard on all individuals. Uju and Ifemelu experience racial discrimination that alienates them and makes them feel unaccepted in the new culture. Adichie presents how the Americans reject the African’s hairstyle as a type of beauty. Uju gets a job interview and she is advised not to have braids to prevent looking unprofessional, “[i]f you have braids,

they will think you are unprofessional” (*Americanah* 255). Ifemelu, too, shares her dissatisfaction with the word “nude” (the color of medium beige skin tone) to describe all skin tones; “When you use the “nude” color of . . . Band-Aids, do you already know that it will not match your skin?” (*Americanah* 726).

Ifemelu immigrated to America in the hope for greater educational opportunities. She is reminded by Obinze of the possibility to pursue a different college major in America, “you don’t even like geology. You can study something else in America” (*Americanah* 182). Ifemelu is also encouraged by her mother to aspire for a better education in America, when she says “[Ifemelu] can study well there” (*Americanah* 134). However, several evidences suggest the clash between her preconceived image of education and its opposing reality. This educational misconception is demonstrated in Ifemelu’s experience with the Americans’ low level of education, the habit of generalization of Africa, the lack of geographical knowledge, and the lack of language skills in America.

Ifemelu visualized the American school environment to value notetaking and reading books. While she was in Nigeria and imagining her school life in America, “[s]he saw herself . . . in a school with students holding notebooks miraculously free of wear and crease” (*Americanah* 215). Ifemelu expected American students to master and appreciate notetaking that they keep their notebooks in good condition. However, she finds later that good notetaking is not a prevailing aspect among American students, as she describes their incomprehensible notes that are difficult to read, “[they] made feverish notes which, reading them later, sometimes confused her” (*Americanah* 243). Adichie attributes the Americans’ devalue of notetaking and textbooks to the schools’ neglect for the importance of reading books, “[w]e watch films in class . . . They talk about films here as if films are as important as books” (*Americanah* 293). Ifemelu irrationalizes how Americans consider watching films to be more beneficial than reading books, which illustrates the American schools’ disregard for excelling the students’ performance by assigning books.

The simplicity of the American educational standards changes Ifemelu’s high expectation of American schools. Ifemelu recognizes that schools in America do not challenge students to perform and study well as a result of its simple standards, “[school in America] was easy” (*Americanah* 287). For example, students can retake their tests to improve their grades, “professors [are] willing to give makeup tests” (*Americanah* 287). This puzzles Ifemelu as she questions the reliability of the American teaching technique, “we watch films and then we write a response paper and almost everybody gets an A” (*Americanah* 293). Dike’s school also lacks formal academia in teaching where students are not advised to

take education seriously. Ifemelu explains how “his teacher sometimes gave out homework coupons; if you got a homework coupon, then you could skip one day of homework. Circles, homework coupons” (*Americanah* 203). As a result, Adichie proposes that making such simplification in the teaching process reduces education quality, “American children learned nothing in elementary school” (*Americanah* 203).

Ifemelu’s disillusionment with the American education system is demonstrated through the phenomenon of class participation in American schools. Ifemelu observes that American students participate merely to speak and fill the silence, regardless of the significance of their commentary; “It had to be that Americans were taught, from elementary school, to always say something in class, no matter what” (*Americanah* 242). Therefore, Ifemelu assesses the knowledge of American students through their insignificant class participation, and she finds that they only know how to involve themselves in class discussion while lacking knowledge of the assigned topic “all flush with knowledge, not of the subject of the classes, but of how to be in the classes” (*Americanah* 199). Adichie also suggests the attribution of language use in assessing the students’ educational level. In addition, she finds that students claim to be knowledgeable about a subject by using words that express their uncertainty rather than unknowing, “[American students] never said “I don’t know.” They said, instead, “I’m not sure,” which did not give any information but still suggested the possibility of knowledge” (*Americanah* 287). Another exemplification of the American students’ lack of knowledge is their use of the phrase “I know”, Ifemelu describes it as “that peculiar American expression that professed agreement rather than knowledge,” (*Americanah* 14).

From her first day of school, Ifemelu finds that Americans create common grammatical and lexical errors. Ifemelu reports the student’s poor grammatical skills, which are not expected to be made by native speakers of English, “[y]ou shouldn’t of done that. There is three things. I had a apple. A couple days” (*Americanah* 288). She considers such errors to result from the students’ lack of knowledge of the correct rules of the English language, “[t]hese Americans cannot speak English” (*Americanah* 288). The Americans’ lack of language proficiency makes them overuse certain adjectives such as “excited” and “wonderful”; “they used the word “wonderful” too often” (*Americanah* 363). Their overuse of these adjectives often makes them describe a situation without minding the word’s connotation, which is associated with their low language learning, as “collocational knowledge generally does increase with the level of proficiency” (Takač and Lukač 386). Ifemelu reports the existence of this problem even among academics and politicians, “professor excited

about a new book. . . a politician on TV excited about a law” (*Americanah* 288).

Adichie tackles the American’s narrow perception of diversity and the variations of cultures. According to Colette Cavaleros and L. J Van Vuuren, lack of diversity awareness is part of people’s cognitive process, and it determines their behavior of and beliefs about others. (51). The understanding of issues of diversity includes “the many different ways in which people in organizations differ” (Day 24). Ifemelu observes the Americans’ limited understanding of diversity in relation to the concept of culture through their tendency to associate cultural richness with people of color. Ifemelu draws a comparison between people of color and Norwegians to point that Americans ascribe cultural richness to color, “culture” the unfamiliar colorful reserve of colorful people, a word that always had to be qualified with “rich.” She would not think Norway had a “rich culture” (*Americanah* 217).

Lack of diverse beliefs is another indication for the Americans’ narrow understanding of the concept of diversity. This is evident when an American tells Ifemelu that racial topics are only of little importance in the current time due to the existence of other social issues such as classism. “Race is totally overhyped these days, black people need to get over themselves, it’s all about class now, the haves and the have-nots” (*Americanah* 15). Adichie indicates how Americans evaluate the world’s issue from their own perspectives, and not by feeling those who struggle. Moreover, the Americans’ lack of diverse beliefs is also found in their limited understanding of African issues. Americans only perceive Africa to be a land where English is not spoken by its majority, and AIDS and poverty are spread. For example, Ifemelu reports the Americans’ commentaries, “[y]ou speak such good English. How bad is AIDS in your country? It’s so sad that people live on less than a dollar a day in Africa” (*Americanah* 298). This suggested their limited and shallow perception of Africa, as they lack an understanding of diverse beliefs.

Ifemelu recognizes the Americans’ tendency to generalize by referring to all people of color as Africans. Generalizing the behavior of one person and making it a representative case of its community is presented to be a form of ignorance of the ones who generalize. Ifemelu uses humor to reflect the absurdity of generalizing African attitudes of not tipping, “If you go to eat in a restaurant, please tip generously. Otherwise the next black person who comes in will get awful service” (*Americanah* 324). Ifemelu also highlights the Americans’ generalization of the Africans’ lack of interest in discussing racial topics, “he was sure the Non-American Black was a Caribbean because Africans don’t care about race” (*Americanah* 667). Generalizing certain qualities about Africans is another aspect of the American society “always use the

word “STRONG” because that is what black women are supposed to be in America.” (*Americanah* 472).

Adichie addresses the problem of generalizing all people of color in America as Africans, despite their geographical and cultural background. From the Americans’ perspective, Africa is referred to as the country of colored people, even those who are not Africans. “[In] America, you become black. Stop arguing. Stop saying I’m Jamaican or I’m Ghanaian. America doesn’t care.” (*Americanah* 471). The Americans’ indifference to grasp geographical and cultural diversity implies a sense of ignorance of the world. Ifemelu deprecates conforming to the Americans’ incomprehension of Africa as a continent, as she asks her friend, “Why do you say Africa instead of just saying the country you mean?” (*Americanah* 39). To explain the Americans’ mindset, Ifemelu’s friend demonstrates, “[y]ou don’t know America. You say Senegal and American people, they say, Where is that?” (*Americanah* 39). Therefore, the Americans’ disregard for people’s origins is derived from their low knowledge level of the world’s geographical diversity.

Ifemelu came to America with the realization that job opportunities are widespread, and that hiring is of common occurrence. However, the idea that “job opportunities are rife in America” becomes a misleading perception of the American employment (*Americanah* 430). Ifemelu had done “all the things that were suggested in a book she had read about interviewing for American jobs, none of the employers call back, “there was no job” (*Americanah* 311). Thus, she finds that employment in America is elusive and complicated, as there are several obstacles that hinder the employment of an immigrant in America.

Marginalization proposes an ingrained idea of being perceived as “the other” whose dominant society controls their success by forcing their own terms on all individuals, including immigrants. Thus, marginalized people are placed in contrast to the dominant society, and their prosperity in the dominant society is always questionable (Martin 48). William Safran also believes that “[diasporas] are not – and perhaps cannot be – fully accepted by their host society and therefore feel partly alienated and insulated from it” (Safran 83). This indicates that the diasporas’ attempts to cope with the host society are unsuccessful, because the dominant society alienates the diasporas and discriminate them as inferior to the original community in the host land.

The first issue that causes Ifemelu’s job application to be rejected is the Americas’ racial discrimination. Ifemelu realizes that jobs in America are classified based on race, and the jobs that are available for people of color are not the same as for the whites, “[m]any whites with the same qualifications but Negro skin would not have the jobs they have” (*Americanah* 519). She comes to believe that racism is an ingrained

issue of American employment, “since the beginning of America, white people have been getting jobs because they are white” (*Americanah* 519). As a result, Ifemelu is challenged to drop her identity by changing her African hairstyle and straightening it, “[I]ose the braids and straighten your hair. Nobody says this kind of stuff but it matters” (*Americanah* 298). This makes Ifemelu blame her identity for blocking the process of being hired, so she questions her Nigerian accent, “[w]as it her foreign accent?” (*Americanah* 311).

Immigrants in America work hard in low-level jobs to get a steady paying. “[Ifemelu] applied to be a waitress, hostess, bartender, cashier, and then waited for job offers that never came” (*Americanah* 281). Uju’s financial struggle is clear to Ifemelu when she is left to sleep on a blanket on the floor at Uju’s place, “this was America at last, glorious America at last, and she had not expected to bed on the floor” (*Americanah* 228). Adichie indicates that there is a notable dilemma in the American employment system towards immigrants. Ifemelu’s education qualifies her for better job opportunities, however, she is obliged to hide her level of education to be accepted by American employers, as they tend to hire staff with little education, “delete the three years of university in Nigeria: American employers did not like lower-level employees to be too educated” (*Americanah* 206). Since low-level jobs such as “a waitress position in a little restaurant that didn’t pay a salary, only tips” give unsteady payment, immigrants are forced to work in more than one job (*Americanah* 325). Being confined to the lowest paying jobs makes it difficult for immigrants to improve financially, “you can see I am working three jobs and yet it’s not easy” (*Americanah* 230).

The difficult financial status of immigrants in America leads them to pursue illegal conducts in search for jobs. Using a fake identity card is one of the approaches they take to be employed; for example, Uju’s friend “agreed to let [Ifemelu] work[s] with her Social Security card” (*Americanah* 230). Adichie presents the problem of working with a fake identity to demonstrate the devastating social and economic conditions of immigrants in America. Aside from the risk of using a fake identity, Adichie aims to reflect the Americans’ indifference of Africans by considering them indistinguishable from each other, “[a]ll of us look alike to white people” (*Americanah* 178). The other illegal approach is accepting unreported employment where the employer breaks the law and evades paying taxes. Adichie presents how Nigerians like Ifemelu are at the mercy of Americans, by making their employment conditioned by working illegally, “[i]f she hires you, she’ll pay cash under the table” (*Americanah* 312). The difficult financial circumstances of immigrants in America is the driving force behind their hiring process. The same applies to Ifemelu when she opted for prostitution to pay the rent of her apartment to be economically dependent, “[s]he didn’t want to be the

roommate who had rent problems. She hated that Ginika had bought her groceries last week” (*Americanah* 226). “[Ifemelu] did not want to be [an escort]”, however, she is only led by America’s lack of employment opportunities for immigrants (*Americanah* 330).

Adichie’s diasporic characters are representations of the dismal circumstance of African immigrants in America. They traveled to America with a fixed mindset which maintains a perfect ideology of the American life. The author advocates the remodeling of idealizing America by reconsidering the factors that create such misconceptions. Monitoring the unrealistic exposure of America in mass media is presented as one of the first solutions that could prevent romanticizing the American life. Parents are also given a vital rule in the process of unlearning the Nigerians’ preconceived image of America; Adichie implies the parents’ negative intervention in forming their children’s high visualization of America. The writer also highlights the influence of previous travelers who have their share of perpetuating the false presumed image of America.

The real image of America is presented by Ifemelu, as she experiences the defects of the American society. Ifemelu comes to America with the realization that skin color is of disregard. However, the first thing she notices in America is the Americans’ racial prejudice and the inferior treatment to minorities such as the black community. The second misconception Ifemelu corrects about the American life is their low level of education and the American students’ indifference to learning about diversity and African culture. The Americans’ lack of concern for the African culture results in the negative habit of making generalizations of Africans and their disbelief of Africans’ individuality. Ifemelu also struggle against the Americans’ prejudice in employment, as she is refused several jobs because of her dark skin color or African hairstyle. Such surroundings lead Ifemelu to a near poverty financial status where she is forced to work illegally to pay her room rent.

Adichie presents how the Africans’ reaction towards the reality of America varies. While characters like Uju prefer to assimilate to the American life, Ifemelu and Obinze choose to maintain their Nigerian identity and promise to return to their homeland. First, Adichie shows Uju’s involuntarily displacement to America and its association with developing a sense of belonging to the host land. Uju does not plan to return to Nigeria because she perceives Nigeria as a place of corruption and danger. Consequently, Uju conform to the standard of the American society by imitating an American accent and straightening her hair to embrace her belonging to America. On the other hand, Ifemelu and Obinze refuse to alter their African origins and, consequently, develop a sense of pride of their culture. Adichie portrays how their sense of belonging to their homeland become apparent after they experience how is

it like to be an African immigrant in America. As a way of trying to find the cause of these false assumptions, Adichie refers to the influence of parents, previous travelers, and mass media as important factors that control the Africans' assumptions of America. Adichie uses Ifemelu to reflect how her parents, as well as the American media, have shaped her illusory views of America. Adichie also emphasizes the influence of previous travelers of America and their failure to present a real image of the American life to their families.

Adichie stresses on the impact of parents in painting a glorified image of America. Ifemelu's father portrays the American society as a place that offers distinct possibilities and helps people to prosper; he tells Ifemelu, "America creates opportunities for people to thrive. Nigeria can indeed learn a lot from them," (*Americanah* 438). Ifemelu's father influences his daughter's view of Nigeria by undervaluing its opportunities over America; therefore, he also promotes a negative stereotype of his own country. Furthermore, Ifemelu's father also forms a false assumption of America's job opportunities by describing it as an environment of distinctive opportunities, "[h]er father made a sound, of admiring respect. "America is an organized place, and job opportunities are rife there" (*Americanah* 430). Ifemelu's mother also influences her daughter's view of the American green card when she says, "in a few years, she could become an American citizen" (*Americanah* 438). Her mother's realization builds illusionary dreams about the simplicity of being an American citizen.

The author also shows how Ifemelu's perception of America is altered by the American mass media that molds the Africans' expectations of American houses. With the reputation of *The Cosby Show* as a television series that presents the life of an African American middle-class family living in America, Ifemelu believed in the positive presentation of the American houses she saw in television, "[s]he saw herself in a house from *The Cosby Show*" (*Americanah* 149). As a result, Ifemelu feels deceived by the American media as she is disappointed by the reality of her life. In real America, she sees the dark and old streets and treeless neighborhoods, which is a paradoxical image of *The Cosby Show*'s presentation of American's neighborhoods. Ifemelu describes Uju's neighborhood and says, "[t]he street below was poorly lit, bordered not by leafy trees but by closely parked cars, nothing like the pretty street on *The Cosby Show*" (*Americanah* 158). Ifemelu realizes that her preconceived image of American streets and houses is only created by the intervention of American television like *The Cosby Show*.

Mami addresses the problem of idealizing America in mass media and highlights its consequences

on Africans:

That cheap but alluring appeal of the movie industry for consumers sits conquest of African minds and markets in particular, confuses fact with fiction, falsifies historical dynamics and make the African youth gullible to effortless calls of individual success and economic freedom. The result is reification of life which translates subsequently in disappointment and failure (2).

Mami's remark on the media's perfect representation of America indicates its role in misleading Africans, blinding them from seeing the true American life. Similarly, Wei Tchen points that Americans promote a declarative statement in the media that says, "'we are modern individuals living in a pluralist society'" [which] embodies what Americans would like to say about themselves" (4).

American movies also become an unreliable source for the American society with their false representation of black women. The defect of lacking females' empowerment in American movies is commented on in *Americanah*, "[t]he industry is regressive. I mean, the portrayal of women? The films are more misogynistic than the society" (*Americanah* 580). Similarly, Adichie argues that American movies form stereotypes of white women by displaying them as smart and loving, while black women are tough and undesired. Ifemelu writes in one of her blog posts, "[i]n movies, dark black women get to be the fat nice mammy or the strong . . . while the white woman finds love. But they never get to be the hot woman, beautiful and desired and all" (*Americanah* 458). Adichie views the American media industry as defective and obscuring of the real life in America.

Marginalized blacks have experienced negative representation in global media as it perpetuates false claims about their undignified humanity. Nigerians are redefined in the media which constitutes "a major negative aspect being the myth creation of what its people are perceived to be contrary to what they really are" (Amonyeze 2). Van Den Berghe explains how, "the Negro was defined as subhuman, a disenfranchised part of the polity, as a special form of chattel, assessed as three fifths of a man by constitutional compromise between South and North" (78). These stereotypical images view African immigrants as a threat to the American life which results in resistance to cultural pluralism that divides the community to "us and them" (qtd in Amonyeze 2). Erica Scharrer and Srividya Ramasubramanian demand a positive exposure of media by enhancing non-stereotypical depictions. The media as a socializing tool should address the social issue of racial equality and promote diversity and multiculturalism. By controlling the negative presentation of Africans in the media, white individuals' perceptions of and interactions with

racial and ethnic minorities will not be influenced by false images (183).

Adichie demonstrates the impact of those who travel to America but never reveal its reality to their parents, friends, and community as they perpetuate the media's misconceptions of America. These characters show America as an ideal place, yet they hide the complications and struggles of living in America. Their purpose of illustrating a false image of America is to "to keep [others] hoping, which in turn kept them happy" (*Americanah* 43). For example, Ifemelu finds a job in America by forging using someone else's ID, yet she conceals this from her parents; "[s]he did not tell her parents how she got the job" (*Americanah* 438). Ifemelu also lies to her parents about the facilities offered at her university, as she claims that they provide jobs to their students, "[t]hey have placed many students in good jobs" (*Americanah* 431). Although Ifemelu is aware that "it was untrue, but it was what her father expected to hear" (*Americanah* 431). Previous travelers, like Ifemelu, assist in forming misconceptions about the American life that result in agony and disappointment.

This essay tackled the Africans' misconceptions about America by assessing the Americans' racial prejudice, low level of education, lack of employment, and financial struggle as negative characteristic of the American life through the theory of displacement, otherness, and belonging. The essay also provided evidence from Adichie's *Americanah* to prove that American mass media, the influential Nigerian parents, and the previous travelers to America are important factors that cause these misconceptions. For further research on *Americanah*, examining the diasporic characters after their voluntary and involuntary displacement and its influence on their identity formation will enrich the readers' understanding of Adichie's works as well as the experience of African immigrants.

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