

**THE SEARCH FOR IDENTITY IN AFRICAN NOVELS: A STUDY OF  
CHIMAMANDA ADICHIE'S *AMERICANAH* AND ODILI  
UJUBUONU'S *PRIDE OF THE SPIDER CLAN***

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**Abstract**

The problem of identify has been one of the major concerns of mankind in every society and a major theme in literature. The state of identity crisis is seen as one affecting the psychological conditions of a person or group, a situation of internal contradictions within the individual which could lead to different forms of disequilibrium. This study explores “the search for identity in Chimamanda Adichie’s *Americanah* and Ujubuonu’s *Pride of the Spider Clan*. The theoretical framework for this study is Sigmund Freud’s Psychoanalysis which is concerned with the mind in distress. The duality with the nostalgia of the main characters obviously for different reasons originates from their contact with the different worlds they found themselves in. The ultimate disillusionment in exposure of identity crisis is inevitable in every society as portrayed in the works under study. It was discovered that the foreign environment the characters found themselves and racial problems are the major causes of their search for identity.

**Keywords:** Identity, Psychoanalysis, African Literature, Diaspora

**Introduction**

An issue that often comes up in literature is the search for identity, especially among Africans who find themselves in foreign countries with a different culture and worldviews. These Africans usually feel lost, humiliated or not fully accepted in their foreign environment. In most cases these Africans are trained in systems dominated by European culture. But as A.N. Nwachukwu in *Africans and Identity* says; “the African’s concern is not with an inner voyage of discovery of a self, his concern is his public role, not his private self. The African asks always, not “Who am I?” but, “Who are we?” His problem is not his own but his people’s” (69).

In a paper presented at the “Travel and Uniting Conference of the University of Wolverhampton, W.B. Smith writes that: “People often ask the question of what defines someone’s identity. Is it the colour of his skin? His language? His birthplace? It could be a combination of all these factors/ (56). He says that although the term identity has a long history, deriving from the Latin root “idem”, implying sameness and continuity, it was not until the twentieth century that the term came into popular usage (57). The psycho-historian Eric Erikson in his Construct of *Ego Identity* says: “identity is a process located in the core of the individual; and yet also in the core of his or her communal culture, hence making a connection between community and individual” (156). He has developed the term “identity crisis” during the Second World War in reference to patients who has lost a sense of personal sameness and historical continuity (basically confused by the identity they have assumed and the one the war was forcing on them) and subsequently generalizes it to a whole stage of life (as part of his epigenetic life-stage model of the eight life stages of man). Here, Berger in *Invitation to Sociology* says: “Youth is identified as a universal crisis period of potential identity (157).

Basically, the problem of identity always pops up as a result of migration. Patrick Henry in *Migration and Literary Identity* says that “migration may have collapsed the barrier between time and space but it has also raised the question of who a person really is” (112). Thus, the migrating author in Diaspora, says Patrick, has been rejected and alienated by that singular action of migration, both at home and abroad. They have been seen as too foreign, not even deserving of being called Africans by their home contemporaries while they are still seen as foreigners in the land of residence (113). Quoting Dike Omeje, a performance poet, Patrick writes: “We have been denied of citizenship and identity by our contemporaries at home; the same way we are being denied by those abroad’ (115). Hence, most of these writers create characters in the same state similar to their own. Further, Patrick says that a progressive examination of African literature reveals that after the arrival of the Europeans on African shores in the sixteenth century, slave trade boomed and literature became one of the ways of retaining whatever identity the slaves may have. As literature is still in its oral form, the slaves share their stories as they move from one location to the other. A slave’s fear is that he may never return to tell where he was taken and the telling of his story to the people he meets on his way is to mark his path to the unknown and make his transition to the spirit world safer as orality remains the main vehicle to commune with the spirit world (118).

Providing a paradigm of the concern in the slave narratives in Olaudah Equianor or Gustavas Vassar (his slave name). In his book, he tells the tale of collusion by African chieftains with the white slave traders from his kidnapping in his home village to his eventual sale and journey across the ocean. He has every

reason to be against his own people but still his book is titled *The Narrative of Olaudah Equiano or Gustavusvassar*, the African. Ending the title of the book with “The African”, “Equino asserts his right to belong to a people he has left behind long ago but whom he believes he still shares a common heritage with. The critic, S.E.Ogude in *Towards the Colonisation of African Literature* as quoted by Chinweizu says that the book is littered with borrowing, both from other contemporary African writers such as UkawasawGronniosaw and from Daniel Defoe” (75). Ogude claims: “in many respects Equiano is ignorant of the African continent as Defoe’s captain Singleton and Robinson Crusoe and both Defoe and Equaino build their image of Africa in hearsay, pseudo-history and pure fiction” (76). He claims to be an African but wrote like an European. He was, therefore, the proverbial “bat” in Igbo folklore. Thus, the encounter with migration has moulded characters who are neither Africans nor Europeans culturally.

Also noteworthy is colonialism. Ngozi Chuma-Udeh in *Trends and Issues in Nigerian Literature* writes that when the tumult of independence was at its peak, the myth about white superiority begins to wane in the mind of the average Nigerian citizen. The ex-soldiers who has gone to the world war and has returned to educate other Nigerians at home on the fallibility of the white man. Hence, Africans begin to travel to Europe for the acquisition of knowledge. Thus, these Africans having imbibed without adulteration the western culture strive to be like the Europeans. This striving is an unrealistic fantasy and an effort in futility basically with their black skin. They have lost grip of the cultural values of their people and have become black white men and have also found themselves in a most contractor situation (107). So, it is pertinent to note that the identity question is only answered by the person concerned, it is an assertion of self, the way the respondent perceives himself and not what or how he is perceived. Hence, Richard Henikins states in *Social identity* that “identity is our understanding of who we are and of who other people are and reciprocally other people’s understanding of themselves and others” (86).

Furthermore, Cornel Ujowundu in “*A Guide in Studies in the Novel*” opines; “The position of the individual in search of his identity within his society may be dangerous for him because he may run the risk of being grossly misunderstood by the majority who may then see him as an alien and bent on dragging the society into his alien world. Due to his position, he becomes rejected (47).

He went further to place characters in three categories:

- those whose identity crisis arose from dual cultural experience (Adichie’s characters in *Americanah* belong here);
- *identity crisis as a result of the reluctance of the individual to live up to certain expectations* (Ujowundu’s pride of the Spider Clan belong here);

- identity crisis deriving from the individual's certainty that the way of life of his community is wrong, even if the majority accepts it without question (47).

The individual in search of identity as can be seen is therefore an outsider, a bat, one whose moral and ideological perceptions belong nowhere and out of tune with the wishes of the larger society.

The question of identity is important in the lives of people. People in foreign countries have the problem of integration based on their background and the search for the necessities of life. They are usually discriminated against, marginalized and often oppressed because of their nationality. In the works under study, Odili Ujubonu's *Pride of the Spider Clan* and Chimamanda Adichie's *Americanah*, the Africans in Diaspora have problems of identity due to the environment they found themselves. So the researcher intends to identify the problems they encounter as a result of the foreign environment. The study also investigates the struggles of these foreign nationals to make ends meet in the new environment.

### Conceptual Review

**Identity:** James Marcia in his research on *Identity Statutes of Adolescents* defines identity as a self-made lively organization of an individual's beliefs, history, drives and abilities (7).

American Psychological Association dictionary of Psychology sees identity as an individual's sense of self, defined by a set of physical and psychological characteristics that are not wholly shared with any other person and a range of social and interpersonal affiliations. Cambridge advanced Dictionary defines it as a state of mind in which someone recognizes his character traits that lead to finding out who they are and what you define yourself as being.

Erikson Erik in *Identity Crisis in Autobiographic Perspective* defines identity as a subjective sense as well as an observable quality of personal sameness and continuity, paired with some belief in the sameness and continuity of shared world image (730).

**Identity Crisis:** Erikson in his Stages of Psycho-social Development defines identity crises as the failure of the individual to achieve ego-identity during adolescence (2). He also defines identity crisis as a state when the inner core of an individual changes as a result of failure in his relationship with his environment (3).

**Self:** *Cambridge Advanced Learners Dictionary* define self as the set of someone's characteristics such as personality and ability, which are not physical and make that person different from other people. *Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary* on the other hand defines it as a person's personality or character that makes him different from other people.

**Search:** *Cambridge Advanced Learners Dictionary* defines search as: to try to find the answer to a problem. *Oxford advanced Learners Dictionary* defines it as an attempt to find somebody or something by looking carefully for them/it.

### **Psychoanalysis**

Psychoanalytic criticism is the application of specific psychological principles to the study of literature. This kind of criticism approaches the analysis of literary works from the working and psychological dispossession of the human minds. The term, psychoanalysis was founded by the Austrian psychologist Sigmund Freud in the late nineteenth century. Psychoanalytic theory, offers a distinctive way of thinking about the human mind and of responding to psychological distress. It looks closely at the unconscious drive that motivates people to act in certain ways. In essence, it is worthy to note that psychoanalysis begins with the concept of the unconscious. Freud's idea of the 'unconscious' on which all his theories are based upon is a major breakthrough towards understanding the complex human psyche which was previously ignored by other theorists. Freud believed that the unconscious is a part of our biological nature and it operates naturally. He also observes that our actions are determined by our mental reasoning and behaviour. Freud suggests that most behaviour are caused by thoughts, ideas and wishes that are in a person's brain but are not easily accessible by the conscious part of the mind. And when these thoughts and ideas are threatened, they are pushed out of consciousness because awareness of them produces anxiety. Psychoanalysis is based on the exploration of the unconscious mental processes as manifested in dreams and disturbed relationship with others. It aims to unearth repressed anxieties and overcome the effects of bad experiences in early childhood, typically using the technique of free association. The unconscious mind is a reservoir of feelings, thoughts, urges and memories that are outside of our conscious awareness. Most of the contents of the unconscious are unacceptable or unpleasant, such as feelings of pain, anxiety or conflict. The psychoanalytic unconscious acts as the repository for experience, thoughts and feelings that are unacceptable and are repressed by the conscious mind.

Psychoanalytic theory is the theory of personality organization and the dynamics of personality development that guides psychoanalysis. It proposes that personality characteristics are mostly, a reflection of the contents of the unconscious part of the mind. Freud in his psychosexual theory combines a description of personality with sexual development of the individual. He

remarks that personality-traits evolve through a series of stages that occur during childhood and adolescence and these stages are called psychosexual stage because they focus on mental (psyche) ideas about sex. Freud observes that sexual activities that were mostly disapproved of were repressed in to the unconscious and therefore were most likely to influence personality. In establishing the relationship between unconscious and personality, Freud divides the individual personality into three categories: the, id, the ego and the supergo, they interact with each other but have their unique characteristics. We shall therefore, relate this theory with the psychological status and problems of the characters in texts studied in this paper.

### **The Search for Identity in Odili Ujubuonu's *Pride of the Spider Clan***

Odili Ujubuonu's re-affirms the Igbo and African culture in his work entitled the *Pride of the Spider Clan*. It is a clear attempt on the issue of seeking to know one's identity and working hard towards fulfilling one's identity. A trilogy, *Pride of the Spider Clan* concludes the story started in *Pregnancy of the Gods* and continued in *Treasure in the Winds*.

*Pride of the Spider clan* starts when Isikamdi, son of Nweke, comes back from the bush as a palmwine taper and Eze Kambite calls him to tell him about the problem befalling their family and to also tell him that he is the one to assume the throne as the king of Ezechukwu compound. Eze Kambite tells him that the problem befalling them is as a result of the loss of an "Ofo" that binds the family as their ancestors.

The novel is about the identities of Isikamdi and Odidika. Isikamdi, the son of Nweke Ezechukwu, an Arochukwu man and Akanji, his mother is prophesied to ascend the throne of the Mbaozo people who belong to the Aro stalk. However, for that to happen, an "ofo" is to be found and handed over to him by Odidika who is to assume the role of priesthood. The ofo is one made of a tree in Arochukwu. At the first time when this installation is to be made, an albino is to be sacrificed at such a coronation. The albino's escape from being sacrificed brings about the loss of the "ofo", and it has gone from hand to hand as different Aro men try to retrieve it. The family of Ezechukwu has suffered greatly because of the role they should be playing in the lives of the people and are bordering at the brink of extinction.

It is at this time that Ujubuonu presents us with the two characters; Isikamdi and Odidika on whose shoulders the quest will finally be fulfilled. Odidika, who is to mediate in handing over the staff of office and Isikamdi, who is to be the custodian of the staff now arrives at the scene but are to pass through difficulties as they seek to fulfill their calling. Unknown to them and others their paths keep crisscrossing and being endangered and somewhat controlled remotely by forces unknown to them.

The first time Isikamdi is introduced to us, he is being summoned by his uncle Eze Kambite, Fate has made it that Kambite is not just an uncle, but more of a father as Isikamdi's biological father died as soon as he was born. They are of the Aro people but for some unexplained experiences in the past, the family of Ezechukwu has been passing through tragic experiences which are about to wipe out the family. So, a solution has to be found to prevent this from happening. All those who become aware of the fact that there is a special role meant for Isikamdi seem to die off. That is what happened to Ukabia as well as Nweke, Isikamdi's father. Kambite passes this information to Isikamdi as we can see in the prologue, helping him to see the depth of what faces them as a family and to prepare him for the role he is to play. He begins his discussion with Isikamdi by reminding him of the tragedy that has befallen their family before his very eyes, such as the fact that he has lost his own father, just like Isikamdi has lost his, when he barely knows him. Then, the death of his wives except for one and how he tries in vain to beget a son that would continue their family name.

Then he comes to the crux of the matter, having prepared Isikamdi's mind to the weight of what is facing him; it is time to give him the full doze of the pill. Yet, it is to be Isikamdi's personal choice to locate himself in the length of time. Kambite says to Isikamdi:

You will die and I shall follow suit. But your wife would be pregnant and your child would live..... Your name shall be and your honour shall transcend the boundaries of Umuaro, Should you accomplish successfully what is expected of you, then Ezechukwu would attain a different position in Mbaozo. But, above all things, you have a choice to either refuse to know and let things be the way they are or hear me out and participate fully in its change. (22)

Kambite give him time to think over the matter and be personally convinced that he wants to do what is required. Though Kambite gives a week, Isikamdi returns to him to be finally commissioned for his role just after two days. His comments seem to mean that he is ready to face his own death but he wants to get it done with immediately. Kambite helps him adjust his view of the situation; to look at it, not as death, but as rebirth, Isikamdi exposes his discomfort thus:

I am troubled because I do not know whether to say yes or no? A man does not open his eyes and stick his finger into a burning coal. If I choose to climb an *iroko tree* barehanded, I am the author of my fate. Should I

decide to enter the bush and catch a leopard? It is also my risk. (50)

Eze Kambite insists that he spends the complete four days and a week, before they discuss the matter any further. As he leaves the presence of Kambite, he seems to be drained of all strength. Odili Ujubuonu now goes into letting us into the events that have been the life of the Ezechukwu family since the days of Nweke's brother, who has seen Odidika and is convinced that he is Udo Okeke's child. As he puts two and two together of what he knows about the death of Ekemma and her burial, he has no doubt that the young boy is really the son of the couple. Ukabia discusses why he is sure that Odidika is the prophesied grandchild of Okeke Okike who would return the lost *ofò* to the family.

However, Ukabia still has an aspect of the puzzle not yet clear him. He hears much about the lost *ofò* and the return of it. But does his own family, the Ezechukwu family, have any history of a lost *ofò*? As the discussion he was having with Nweke progresses, his son announces that some visitors have come to visit him. Before the evening when he should have continued the issue with Nweke, he dies. Nweke knows he is likely the next to go. So, he makes haste to give his own younger brother, Kambite, everything he is aware of.

On his own part, Odidika has lost his father shortly before his birth. Her mother, Ekemma, becomes pregnant of him. The people are yet to be aware. So, when the pregnancy starts manifesting, people mistakes her for being of easy virtue and accuses Adiababili, in whom she has taken solace, as being the one responsible. The persecution that follows her leads to her death during the birth of the child. Adiababili has already exiled himself out of anger for as a result of the false accusation. He and Mbandu whose wife Egondu is Ekemma's sister, are the only ones there and they bury her inside her house. Egondu then takes over the baby and brings him up as their own child. Meanwhile, Egondu who is pregnant has lost her child that would have been of the same age as Ekemma's; so it is not easy for people to see Odidika as not being hers.

Tragedy follows Odidika's life. The jealousy of the Isiani has led to the attempts on the lives of the parents which finally culminate in the death of Udo Okike and then his wife, Ekemma. As for Odidika, he thrives in the house of Mbandu and a mysterious leopard dies in his hand which turns out to be a man, who would cause problems for him. Mbandu decides to exile him to a place he will be safe. Mbandu has gone to a diviner to hear his advice.

Why are you worried, Mbandu? Am wants the boy to return to Mbaozo. He must learn the ways of his people and tread the path charged for him.... Have



you forgotten that you were told that hiccups shall attend his life – challenging hiccups, Mbandu? This is just one of them. (45)

It is very worrisome that of all places, he is exiled to Mbaonu to spend some time with Ikedike Obidi, who is married to Odidika's aunt. Meanwhile, Nweke has passed the information which he got from Ikabia to his only brother, Kambite, and has encouraged him to see to it that the young boy Isikamdi is well taken care of and helped to fulfil the role meant for him.

The novelist tells us that Odidika is placed in the care of Mbandu and his wife at the death of his parents. Mbandu is thought to be an *osu*, an outcast or one who is dedicated to a deity and they live in Mbaosu. Hence, Odidika grows to think he is an *osu* also. As he grows, he one day shoots at a leopard that has been giving his family worries, not knowing that it is a neighbour who has metamorphosed as a wild beast. When he goes close to see the game, he is shocked to see the man dying in his own pool of blood. Mbandu acts quickly to preserve Odidika's life by sending him on a self-exile. Meanwhile, Eze Kambite gets to know about Odidika and the special role he probably has got to play and starts to show special interest in his welfare. Once, he has saved Odidika's life when he was tied up in an evil forest to die because of his interest in young maiden in Mbaozo. Kambite seems to possess special powers that make him aware of the circumstances of the two young men, Odidika and Isikamdi, so that he would be right on time to save them from harm.

When Isikamdi becomes mature enough, Eze Kambite has him initiated into the cult of the masquerades. In time, he hands over to him the palace of his father so that he could now assume the family's priesthood as the administrative and religious head of the Ezechukwu family. This marks an important step in his march towards resolving the issue of his identity and the identity of his people. The seriousness of Isikamdi's search is heightened by the fact that his journey is kept confidential even to very important members of his family, including his mother and his wife, who is already pregnant. To them, Isikamdi is embarking on a very important but long trip to Olu. His mother is very furious about this but she could not do anything about this. Isikamdi has by now grown to appreciate his uncle's unselfish interest in him and is ready to do any of his bidding. He is prepared for the journey by two traditional medicine men with Eze Kambite present under the watchful eyes of the moon. He traverses the length and breadth of Igbo land in search of the elusive *ofò* so as to preserve his family line. As he meets with people, he takes note of their difference towards him and hopes that his own son would not be subjected to such perennial pity. His heart yearned to find his place among his people. Ujubuonu puts it this way when he presents us with Isikamdi's meeting with Akarachi:

Isikamdi, once again, watch the familiar reaction of people to his paternity. He hoped that after this trip, his

own son would never become such an object of perennial pity. (256)

Unfortunately, as Isikamdi moves further in his search, the *ofo* keeps being elusive and all those from whom he is to get information are dead or missing. Finally, it is to Okeke Okike, a carver from Ukpok, Odidika's father, that he is directed as the husband of one of the women that may have a link to the *ofo*.

As Isikamdi continues in his tracks in search of the lost *ofo*, *Pride of the Spider Clan* takes into the early life of Odidika as his foster father reveals his paternity to him. Odidika feels very relieved at the information that his excitement is too obvious to his wife. Adamma, Ujubuonu uses this to show how one feels when he finds answers to troubling questions about oneself. When Adamma asks him, "What is the problem, Ijenna's father?" he answers: "Something too sudden to believe, too credible to doubt and too well-confirmed to ask further questions" (269). He emphasizes his point with a proverbial expression, referring to his father who has made the revelations: "He cut an iroko tree with his bare hands".

Odidika does not want to let things rest before making plans to fix himself in his place among his people:

About where we will stay in Akanru....I have been shown my ancestral home. I will begin to make arrangements to start building our home. I shall be busy from now until we move over.... The earlier I finish, the earlier I will give my mother a befitting funeral. (271)

The importance of Isikamdi's and Odidika's search is made clear in the fact that one is pulled together always by family ties, Odidika's success and prominence pales into insignificance in comparison with his place among his people. He is ready to forgo everything and return to his own. It is Isikamdi who voices this need out loud when he asked about his father-in-law and is told that he has gone to settle a dispute back home. Isikamdi then exclaimed: "Family always pulling someone" (278). Then his grandmother makes the analogy from where the book got its name:

That is what we are. Threads carefully knitted to hold everyone together for peace. Places where the threads are in shreds the people suffer pointless pain, competition and wickedness (278).

And it is this pointless competition and wickedness that has thrown the Ezechukwu family into frantic fight for survival because of the evil of the Isiani. It is at this discussion between Egongu and Isikamdi that she reveals about how the *ofo* got into the hands of faces that they could not remember. Isikamdi's search has begun to seem fruitless, like seeking a black goat in a

very dark night. All that is now clear to him is that the *ofo* most likely would be in the form of a flute. His search now takes him to Abanta where he meets OkaforEkwe and it is at this juncture that the essence of Isikamdi's search is made clear, helping us to see how important it is to the identity of the people of Aro. As Ekwe tells him of the movement of the flute cum *ofo*, how Ibinukpabi has had a hand in all that has been happening, Isikamdi asks a pointed question: "What is the role of the flute in all this?" (205). In answer, Ekwe says;

I told you that the original flute is not just a musical instrument but an *ofo*. It will be the spiritual source of authority for us to rule and make all these dreams manifest. But it must get to the rightful owners who are the only ones to do so. (205)

Ekwe even goes on to show how determined one can be in seeking to place oneself in the stream of time and realize one's destiny. He says, to Isikamdi, when he wonders why the older man feels very satisfied even though he is yet to take hold of the *ofo*.

The tempest may roar, the sea devils will storm but the waters must kiss the shoreline many times daily. It is part of nature's unalterable laws.... We have done what men should do. To build we must give and not take. We must give our time, our sweat and all that we know (206).

The story reverts to Odidika's travails in his hometown now where he now tries very hard to fill his place. He has returned from the Kirike where he has built a flourishing gin business with Dukubo, a native, as his partner. There, another Aro man has watched him carefully and worked hard to protect him. Still, problems would always find him and he soon falls out of favour with the spirit maid of the water goddess and has to run for his life. Now, his mother's funeral has been a success and it is about time for his enthronement as the chief priest of the people. Still, Isikamdi is still away in his efforts to locate the *ofo* even though EzeKambite and the others back home have lived through the surprises of Odidika's paternity which also has a bearing on Ijenna's bearing, the wife of Isikamdi. Then, Dukubo, Odidika's friend and business partner, arrive bringing home a wrong flute. This pained Odidika so much for he is now seeing the search almost being futile.

As he discusses with Dukubo who volunteers to run back to Fiberesima to inform him about the fake flute he has given to them, Odidika insists that he waits for his investiture as the Isiani. Meanwhile, Dukubo presents him with a spear as a gift from Fiberesima, with instruction that he replaces the tip. This

makes Odidika wonder why Fiberesima would give him a gift that is faulty, even though it is beautiful.

As he examines the gift with particular attention to the faulty area, the search is realized. He pulled out the metal tip, letting something drop from a hollow inside the spear straight to the space between his legs. He looked down, quickly picking up the item and checking it carefully. "It was the sacred flute". And he screams in joy: "Fiberesima is a wizard" (398).

### **Search for Identity in Chimamanda Adichie's *Americanah***

*Americanah* is a new kind of migration story, one that reflects a political shift and a literary one. An incredibly rich tapestry of Nigerian and American life and the ways a handful of vivid characters try to live in both worlds simultaneously.

Kathlyn Schulz speaking on Adichie's *Americanah* says in 2013 New York Magazine:

Adichie has scaled up, *Americanah* traverses three genres (romance, comedy of manners, novel of ideas), three nations (Nigeria, Great Britain, the United States), and within each, a swath of the social spectrum as broad and as difficult to nail as the hand spans in a Rachmaninoff concerto. It is about identity, nationality, race, difference, loneliness, aspiration and love, not as distinct entities but in the complex combinational relations they possess in real life.

*Americanah* explores the tainted and struggling situation that African emigrants in America are locked in. Adichie in *Americanah* explores and analyses the circumstantial identity search these emigrants are involved in, having found themselves in an alien world quite different from the one they have always known. As stated earlier, identity crisis in this novel is engineered by migration. Migration in effect brings about dual cultural experiences by the characters which lead to alienation for most of them.

Adichie presents her characters as people in dilemmatic situation. Should they exert their identities as Africans in America or should they keep their Africanness aside and imbibe and assimilate the American culture in themselves for the spur of the moment and when they reunite with their roots, they can pick up their set-aside culture? The former seems impossible because Adichie presented an America or, rather, realistically painted an America where, in order to survive, you must belong and belonging not as an African but an African American. This state of unresolved dilemma results in identity

crisis and the pangs of alienation experienced by the characters. Notably, these characters are well on their way to becoming Americans. They choose instead to become Americans: an identity predicated on experiences rather than nationality, trajectory rather than place. Significantly, the peak of identity crisis is reached when these emigrants eventually return to where they emigrated from. Having become new beings, can their African identities begin at this phase but their Americanness will always raise heads. The duel between these two cultures and its resultant effects on characters is what Adichie presents in *Americanah*.

The novel opens in Princetown, a town so pristine it actually sounds that way. The story begins nearly twenty years earlier, in Nigeria, when the teenager Ifemelu and a boy named Obinze fall in love. They are bright, motivated and earnest – which is to say, everything the Nigerian state is not. Surrounded by corruption and dysfunction, they eventually respond, as many members of their real life generation did by leaving. Ifemelu goes to the United States, Obinze rejected by America's post-11 gatekeepers heads to England, on a tourist visa. He, of course, overstays. Eventually, he is discovered and sent back to Nigeria where he begins an ascent that culminates in a fancy house, a wife and daughter, and a distant, vicious alienated boredom. Meanwhile in America, Ifemelu finds herself surviving through work so humiliating that she cuts off all communication with Obinze and effectively with herself. Gradually, though her life swings upward as well, she launches a blog about race in America, earns readers and speaking fees, buys a condo, and begins dating a handsome conscientious Yale professor. Yet, by the time we meet her in that salon at the beginning of the novel, she has decided to trade all this for a one-way ticket back to Nigeria. Having left Nigeria because of the political disillusionment, Ifemelu arrives America. In America, she is besieged by racism and denial. She discovers the most potent of all invincible strings – the nuclear force of our social physics – race. Adichie's analysis of that force is specific, damning, clarifying and comprehensible. She is merciless about white liberal attitudes towards race, with their prevailing mix of awkward self-consciousness, contented ignorance, self-satisfaction and submerged fear. It is pertinent to quote Jearnnette Macaulay at this point. He says:

Because of racial discrimination, these people within the confines of territories which had been allotted to them by the government have not been able to lose the dominant aspects of their culture which later on, fused with the dominant aspects on the foreign culture to form a synthesis. This synthesis may be an unconscious evolution as comes out in forms of jazz or the calypso.  
(81)

Some of the observations of racial discriminations are recorded in Ifemelu's blog. A middle-aged man suggested writing about adoption to Ifemelu on her blog. He says: "ever write about adoption" Nobody wants black babies in this country and I don't mean biracial, I mean black. Even the black families don't want them" (4).

Ifemelu was particularly caustic about everyone's anxious racial jostling; black immigrants towards African Americans, Caribbean immigrants towards Nigerians, Senegalese towards Nigerians, Nigerians who went abroad towards those who stayed behind and so on. These acts of racism led to many immigrants to sell their African identities to become full bred Americans and the "long stay" in America should earn them this "Americannese". while discussing with Aisha at the salon, Adichie voiced ifemelu's thoughts: "to earn the prize of been taken serious among Nigerians in America, among Africans in America, indeed among immigrants in America, she needed more years, six years, she began to say when it was just three and a half. Eight years she said when it was five. Now that it was thirteen years, lying seemed unnecessary but she lied anyway. "fifteen years", she said. (16)

Just for survival, many Africans discard their names (i.e. their identity) and take up new identities, especially Nigerians. Ifemelu notes this in page 8. She has once been somebody else. This dialogue ensues between Auntie Uju and Ifemelu:

"I talked to one of my friends, I don't know if you remember her –NgoziOkonkwo" she's now an American citizen and she has gone back to Nigeria for a while, to start a business. I begged her and she agreed to let you work with her social security card. "How" I'll use her name?" ifemelu asked. "Of course you'll use her name". (106)

Adichie's exploration of the conflict of identity crisis is subtle, with the full complement of satire and caricature. She realizes this in the form of a drive attack on both the Nigerians who are sufficiently enchanted with especially the American culture, ethos and mannerisms to the extent of proposing a substitution of their own. She does not just lament what America can do to the Nigerian in terms of engendering a blatant disregard for things Nigerian. She also regrets what Nigerians can do to themselves by way of seeking a cultural acceptance by Americans. It is in this respect that the AbiolaIrele, taking a cue from Hegal's dialectics sees alienation as a "willed movement out of the self

and a purposive quest for new horizons of life and experience” (601). Back in Nigeria before Ifemelu leaves for America, Adichie exposes what America could do to some Nigerians. She does this through a discussion of Ifemelu and her friends. Ginika plans on traveling to America and this conversation ensues in her apartment: “Ginika just make sure you can still talk to us when you come back,” Priye said.

“she’ll come back and be a serious Americanah like Bisi,” Ranyinudo said. And at the thought of Bisi, a girl in the form below who had come back from a short trip to America with old affectations, pretending she no longer understood Yoruba, adding a slurry “r” to every English word she spoke. (65)

Obinze on his part has spent part of his childhood in America. He seems to have developed a phobia for African things and an undying love for American things. Adichie says; “He was fluent in the knowledge of foreign things, especially of American things. He often said ‘go to Manhattan and see how things are’”. (67) He even knew details about American presidents from hundred years ago.

Adichie never leaves Obinze’s mother out. Ifemelu observes in her thoughts. “what sort of mother in her right mind will ask her son’s girlfriend to visit? It was ‘odd’. Even the expression ‘come to lunch’ was something people said in books” (68) Adichie’s use of the word “odd” means that it is bizarre seeing such from an African woman. It was typically American but it came from an Igbo woman. When asked why he is really into America and their ways, Obinze responds, ‘I read American books America is the future’ (70). Obinze has lost hope in Africa. He believes America is the way forward. Ifemelu goes further in her observation of Obinze’s mother, being mesmerized by her ways: “Obinze’s mother, her beautiful face, her air of sophistication, her wearing a white apron in the kitchen was not like any other mother Ifemelu knew” (70). The clutch of America on immigrants, especially Nigerians, seems so strong because one cannot stop wondering why Ifemelu herself would succumb to this clutch and spell of Americanness. She has once said to Obinze. “I go very often to the village with my mother, at least five times a year”. (61). While she was leaving for America, Ranyinudo said: “the next time we see you; you will be a serious Americanah” (100). One would be forced to disgrace Ranyinudo because of Ifemelu’s strong ties with roots but her actions afterwards would make Ranyinudo’s statement unarguable. Just after three years of stay in America, Ifemelu makes a call to a telemarketer and the man says. “You sound totally American” (175), even after saying she is a Nigerian. Ifemelu’s thoughts after she hung up confirm her fears because of her changing nature. Only after she hung up that she begins to feel the stain of a burgeoning shame spread all over her, for thanking him, for crafting his words “you sound American” into a garland that she hung around her own neck why was it a compliment, an

accomplishment to sound American (175)? On another occasion, an Ethiopian taxi driver tells Ifemelu that she does not look African at all and when Ifemelu asks why, he says; “Because your blouse is too tight. I thought you were from Trinidad or one of those places. You have to be very careful or America will corrupt you” (206). Ifemelu has completely forgotten what Nigeria is like. During a call with her mother, Adichie says, “when her mother said there had been no light for two weeks, it seemed suddenly foreign to her, and home itself a distant place. She could no longer remember what it feels spending an evening in candlelight” (159). On another occasion, she forgets that there is a kiosk near her house (200). Adichie goes on and on attacking Nigerians who are enchanted with American culture and ethos, Ifemelu calls Auntie Uju in America and his dialogue ensues:

“yes, this is Uju, “she pronounced it you-joo instead of oo-joo.  
“is that how you pronounce your name now?”  
“it ‘s what they call me.”  
“well, that isn’t your name”. (104)

Auntie Uju has resorted to calling herself you-joo instead of oo-joo because Americans called her that. Her inability to insist on using the right pronunciation of her name suggests that American clutch and grip is too strong. At a grocery store, auntie tells Dike her son to put something he has picked up. Adichie describes it thus: “Dike put it back,’ with the nasal sliding accent, ‘poo-reet-back. ‘and with the accent emerged a new persona, apologetic and self abasing” (108). In the car, auntie Uju reprimands her son better by pulling his car. When Dike presses his palm to his ear in pain, Uju said to Ifemelu; “This is how children like misbehaving in this country. Jane tells me that her daughter threatens to call the police when she beats her. Imagine. I don’t blame the girl, she has come to America and learned about calling the police” (109). Jane’s daughter would not do that in Nigeria because Africans believe in the cliché, “spare the rod and spoil the child,” even the police. Nigerian parents even go corporal just to correct a child. Auntie Uju’s reprimanding of Dike in the car away from glaring eyes shows that if she had done it in the open, Americans around could report her to social services. Even at that, Uju was bent on making Dike a complete American. When Ifemelu speaks Igbo to Dike, Auntie Uju’s response is, “please don’t speak Igbo to him. Two languages will confuse him” (109). Ifemelu responds that they all spoke two languages while growing up and Uju replies: “this is America. It’s different” (109). Uju has become someone else. Her identity as a Nigerian is in question. Ifemelu gives in and concludes that America has subdued her (110). When Ifemelu first arrives America, a friend explains to her, “This is America. You are supposed to pretend you don’t notice certain things. “This is because of the curious behaviour of a cashier in a clothing store who, in asking which of the two sales people helped her, attempts to distinguish between the two of them on every imaginable basis except the obvious one-skin colour.



Worthy of note, Adichie satirically talks about these new identities and its state. This new Americanness is half-baked and it is visible in their accents. Nigerians try so hard to fit in by copying the accents of the Americans. Bartholomew, a man Auntie hopes to settle down with is one of such characters. Ifemelu observes:

He spoke with an American accent filled with holes, mangling words until they were impossible to understand. She sensed from his demeanor a deprived rural upbringing that he tried to compensate for with this American affectation, his gonnas and wannas (115).

On another occasion, in a restaurant, Ifemelu notes the accents of the waiters who were African: “When they speak English to customers, it was broken, curious as though they had not quite eased into the language itself, before taking in a slangy Americanism. Words come out half complete” (9)

Africans in America are at crossroads in identity. They are not Africans anymore and neither are they fully fledged Americans because each is half backed in them. They are half Africans which is partly their doing and half Americans yearning and trying to be full-fledged but their half Africaness will always gnaw and rear heads displaying whom they really are which they have kept in denial. They are caught between two cultures and their identities are in chaos. In a nutshell, they are bats.

It saddens Ifemelu that her Auntie’s situation has reduced to settling merely for what is familiar. Adichie goes on and on taking a clean sweep and exposing what immigration to America could do to the identity of Nigerians. She presents us with more characters in the state of identity crisis. In London, Emenike, a friend of Obinze, has completely turned British. He has married a white woman Georgina, not out of love but just to be accepted in the British society. He now speaks and acts like the British. Hear him: “But the Americans love ‘us’. Brits, they love the accent and the queen and the double-dealer “(272).

The emphasis on “us” implies that Emenike, a Nigerian, considers himself British. When Ifemelu starts dating Biane, an American, she tells her parents that she is leaving Baltimore to New Haven to live with him, but hear what Adichie has to say, “telling her father that she was moving in with a man to whom she was not married, was something she could do only because she lived in America. Rules had shifted, fallen into the crooks of distance and foreignness” (314). Adichie in her artistic grandeur created Dike as a character in a pathetic situation began right from birth-an African born in America. He knew nothing about Africa, his roots, though nobody would blame him, he is

completely American but part of the blame would go to his mother who denied him from speaking two languages. Once with Ifemelu, Dike asks her “what are you doing that? Eating a banana with peanuts?”

“that’s what we do in Nigeria. Do you want to try it?”

“No, I don’t think I like Nigeria coz” (113).

America has made Dike hate his origins. After a meeting with some friends, Ifemelu thought of Dike and wonders what he is and what he would be considered as: “American African or African American. He would have to choose what he was or what he would be chosen for him” (147).

Dike becomes internally conflicted. He is an American by birth and African by roots and origin but how could he reconcile the two identities. He has written about his situation in an essay and his mother voiced out her feelings to Ifemelu: “How can he say he does not know what he is? Since when is he conflicted and even that his name is difficult”. And Ifemelu responds: “I think he wrote that because that’s the kind of thing they teach him here. Everybody is conflicted, identity this, identity that” (217). This internal conflict in Dike must have made him think of this place and existence on earth, thereby making him to attempt suicide. He yearns to end it all because he believes that he does not belong anywhere. He has no place in America. His skin colour speaks against him in America and on a visit to Africa; he feels his disposition and behaviour are against him.

Ifemelu blames Uju for Dike’s attempt on his life and his feeling towards himself! “Do you remember when Dike was telling you something and he said, we black folks, and you told him you are not black?” I didn’t want him to start behaving like those people and thinking that everything that happens to him is because he’s black”. “You told him what he wasn’t but you didn’t tell him what he was. You never reassured him” (379).

Even on a visit to Nigeria, everything seems strange to Dike. He is surprised to see so many black people like himself. When the power goes off after he arrived, the buzzing whirling sounds of Ifemelu’s UPS startles him. He says: “Oh my God, is that like a fire alarm” (423). He complained about the heat, about mosquitoes biting him (425). He knows nothing about his roots but Adichie has created in him unquenching regret, a yearning, a hunger to have been part of this root. He is like an alien in his own world. He wanted to be a part of this world. He says: “I wish I could speak Igbo” (424).

Worthy of note is Adichie’s creation of a Nigerian character that remains unchanged. Ginika is such a character. Her long stay in America does not change whom she is, an African. Upon Ifemelu’s arrival, Ginika has gone to pick her up. Ginika says: “we are entering university and that’s where Wellon

Campus is, shay you know?" according to Ifemelu, "Ginika has lapsed into Nigerian English, a dated, overcooked version, eager to prove how unchanged she was. She has, with a strenuous effort, kept in touch through the years. Ifemelu does not have the heart to tell her that nobody said "shay" anymore. Adichie's creating Ginika shows that there are still allegiant Africans in America that have refused to give in to the American spell of identity change.

It seems being Obinze's lover is part of Ifemelu identity. Hence, when she gets involved with a tennis coach during her search for a job, she feels she has lost the identity. She, thereby, cuts all ties with Obinze. Armah's reunification motif is not an understatement because these Africans yearn to visit home. In a discussion with Obinze, Emenikesays, "I miss Naija. It's been long but I just haven't had the time to travel back home" (265).

Blaine and Ifemelu are perfect together in their relationship but Ifemelu wants more. The hunger to return home and back to Obinze cannot go unnoticed.

Adichie noted:

Nigerian became where she was supposed to be, the only place she could sink her roots in without constant urge to beg them out and shake off the soil and of course there was Obinze. Her first love, the only person with whom she had never felt the need to explain herself (6).

When Elaine asks her why she is leaving, she simply answers, "I have to" (7). Adichie further explains that phrase;

She had not had a bold epiphany and there was no cause. It was simply that layer after layer of discontent had settled in her and formed a mass that now propelled her. She did not tell him because it would hurt him to know she had felt that way for a while, that her relationship with him was like being content in a house but always sitting by the window and looking out (7).

Ifemelu eventually returns to Nigeria and her identity crisis begins. Adichie describes, "Lagos assaulted her" (365). Everything felt strange to her and her thoughts, "she felt the dizzying sensation of falling, falling into the new person she had become, falling into the strange familiar. Had it always been like this or had it changed so much in her absence" (385).

Ifemelu no longer remembers anything, even bus stops and the side streets but significantly, she drops her accent as Ranyinudo observed. She is completely an Americanah. Adichie describes further; “She was no longer sure what she was now in Lagos and what was new in herself (387). In Ranyinudo’s house, the weather irritated her and she asks; “what sort of humidity is this? I can’t breathe” (390). On a visit to aunty Onenu’s house with Ranyinudo, she describes the house as ugly but in her thoughts: “she had once found houses like that beautiful but here she was now disliking it with the haughty confidence of a person who recognized kibschi” (393).

Ifemelu and Doris, another American returnee, find themselves hating and criticizing some Nigerian expressions which have been in vogue even before they left. Doris tells Ifemelu: “don’t you hate it how people say I’m pressed or I want to ease myself when they want to go to the bathroom (405).

Consequently, Ifemelu finds herself possessing two personalities, each personality in conflict with the other. She knows her deeds and actions are making her become an American. Her personality and psyche love American things but she does not want to accept that. She is scared of whom she is becoming. She is scared of her fading and diminishing Nigerianness. She fights so hard to make the African part of her to win the conflict and that is why she tries so hard to drop the American accent. In a meeting of American returnees, she finds herself in a pretentious state. While discussing with Fred, a fellow returnee, she defends things about Nigeria, even though they are in denial.

Thus when Ranyinudo says, “you are no longer behaving like an Americanah (393), she is pleased with herself. Also, in a discussion with Obinze, she uses the word asshole (435), an American word. When Obinze says it’s an American word, in surprise she replies, “is it?” (435) America has become part of her.

On another perspective, when Ifemelu gets reunited with Obinze, she feels that lost identity of hers has been resorted but Obinze finds himself in a dilemma. His, is the highest point of identity crisis. Their long period of separation and denial overwhelms them. Obinze could not control himself anymore.

Who exactly is he? How could he reconcile these two conflicting situations, being Kosi’s husband and Ifemelu’s lover? Who is he exactly or who does he want himself to be? The feeling of identity crisis is overwhelming. He describes Kosi as “that second skin that had never quite fitted him snugly” (456).

In Obinze’s thoughts as the author describes, “he blamed Ifemelu for making him a person who was not entirely in control of what he was feeling” (461). He begins to think about divorcing Kosi. He blames himself for marrying Kosi in the first place because of Ifemelu’s appearance and like the writer voiced out,

“since Ifemelu came back he found himself seeking stores of men who had left their marriages and willing the stories to end well. The children more contented with separated parents than married unhappy parents” (467). Ifemelu is like part of his being and identity and an overwhelming spell which he has long been in search of and has eventually found but is in confusion on what to do with this newly found identity. When Obinze tells Okwudiba about his intention to leave Kosi, Okwudiba feels his behaviour is also foreign. According to him:

Most of us did not marry the woman we truly loved.  
We married the woman that was around when we were ready to marry. So forget this thing. No need of this kind of white people’s behavior. We don’t behave like that please. (472)

In conclusion, Onyerionwu says this of Adichie;

Adichie’s engagement of Nigerian Diasporic realities and experiences has been privileged by her fairly extensive stay in the USA spanning more than one decade, one senses a significant biographic link between Adichie and the fiction of the Diasporic inclination, especially as many as marry of her characters are young female characters in their prime, for whom emigration to America has meant the decisive turning point of their lives. (239)

### **Conclusion**

This work has examined the notion of search for identity in the novel, with reference to Chimamanda Adichie’s *Americanah* and Odili Ujubuonu’s *Pride of the Spider Clan*. Adichie and Naipaul’s artistic response to the experiences of the migrated individuals has benefited from their own considerable experiences. Adichie being an immigrant in the United States explains her narrative passion, physical and psychological proximity with the characters and what happens to them. Adichie’s investigation of many aspects of the diasporic experience provides different perspectives and images of America ranging from the depressingly negative to the endearingly positive. But her crucial pan-African advice for any immigrant is that he or she should take as much of the positive offerings and opportunities that America so generously presents. But, in doing that, he or she should give back to it as little as possible, especially where it concerns his or her cultural dignity.

As feminist writers continue to search critically into the quality of women’s lives in view of the human rights enshrined in the United Nations Agenda, and raise questions about the shortcomings of entrenched negative social values, their works are compelling and appropriate, especially at this time when the needs and experiences of women have become a global concern.

In *Americanah*, the author portrays the life of a Nigerian who had been overseas and tried to imbibe the western culture more than the white man. She exposes how self-conceited such ones become in their attempt to even speak like the white man, dress like the white man, even acculturate themselves in the white man's lifestyle.

They become what the Igbo man would call *usu, the bat*, which, according to folktale, does not belong to terrestrial animals or to birds. Odili Ujubuonu on his part in *Pride of the Spider Clan* depicts the Aro people as having lost their pride of place and have to pass through many difficulties, including deaths, as they must have to find the symbol of authority which would place them in their rightful position. The search for their identity narrows down to two persons, Isikamdi and Odidika, who spared no efforts in fulfilling their responsibilities. Ujubuonu uses the various Aro men by whom the two principal actors come across to show how determined one can be in search for one's identity and pride of place.

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