

**NIGERIAN IMMIGRANTS EXPERIENCE IN CHIMAMANDA NGOZI ADICHIE' AMERICANAH**

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**Abstract**

*Human migration is not something new in human history; it is as old as human history itself. Right from ancient times, mankind has moved from one country to another in search of food and shelter. In modern era, the wave of human migration has increased due to some factors such as political instability, war, and starvation caused by natural disaster. This experience of dislocation has given rise to a new body of knowledge known as migration study. In literary discourse, migration study which studies immigrant experience has received wide attention in literary discourse of Caribbean, Indian and Latino literature. In Nigerian literature, immigrant experience has not received sufficient critical discussion. Consequently, this paper examines Nigerian immigrant experience, the sense of crisis, upheaval and up rootedness that Nigerian characters experience in America and Europe. This study will focus on two aspects of Nigerian immigrant experience namely: racial discrimination and economic exploitation. These two points will form the focus of our discussion on Nigerian immigrant experience in America and United Kingdom.*

**Key Words:** Migration, Immigrant, Disillusionment, Racial discrimination, Nigeria

## **Introduction**

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie is a Nigerian writer whose works have received a lot of critical attention from critics. Her third novel, *Americanah* published in 2013 won the following awards: winner of the 2013 National Book Critics Circle award for fiction, the New York Times' Ten Best Books of the year and the winner of the Chicago Tribune 2013 Heartland Prize for fiction. In an article entitled "Race-in –America is a Central Character in America", Subashini Navaratan explores the impact of cross border migration and how it transforms the life of the characters especially Ifemelu and Obinze. In another review, Tyrone Beason's "*Americanah: Africans Struggle to Become American*" gives a clear description of what African immigrants suffer in foreign countries especially in America. In Margaret Koskei's essay "Representation of Female African Immigrant Experience in the West: A Case Study of Chimamanda Adichie's *Americanah*", examines a number of issues using feminist typology to discuss racism and its effects on African female immigrants. In her work, Koskei notes the experience of male and female African immigrants and concludes that female immigrants adapt better than male immigrants in foreign countries. Wabende Nabututu in her seminal essay, "A Stylistic Approach to Chimamanda Adichie's Work: A Study of *Americanah*" studies the novel from a stylistic perspective. In her argument she contends that "Adichie's uniqueness is seen through the use of different aspects of style like extensive use of translated and untranslated Igbo" (5). In view of this state of scholarship of Adichie's *Americanah* one observes that the novel has been studied from different theoretical and critical perspectives such as problems associated with cross-border migration, racism, representation of female African Immigrant experience and stylistic approach. It is noted that this novel has not been studied from Nigerian immigrant experience. This is where this paper raises a new awareness and understanding of the novel based on Nigerian Immigrant experience, the kinds of things Nigerian immigrants encounter and suffers abroad. This issue forms the main argument of this paper, Nigerian immigrant experience.

## **EXPERIENCE OF RACISM**

**Racial discrimination** is a common phenomenon experienced by Nigerian immigrants abroad. Ifemelu writes a lifestyle blog titled *Raceteenth or Various Observations About American Blacks (Those Formerly Known as Negroes) by a Non-American Black* (4). The title of the blog, even though long for a blog and not very catchy, reflects some of the topics related to race that were dealt with in the story. The name foregrounds a conversation about racial history and reality of the United States and also about identity and the difference between African Americans ( i.e. American Blacks) and American Africans ( i.e Non-American Blacks). At the same time their existence also proves that race in America is indeed a socio-historical construct which effects are felt across many different racial and ethnic groups, and even across immigrant minorities. For instance Ifemelu states: "I came from a country where race was not an issue; I did not think of myself a black and I only became black when I came to America" (290). Ifemelu comes from Nigeria, where social class is a relevant operating category, but that is not the case with race. Nigerian history is marked by colonial struggles and tribal conflicts, but race is not an issue because the country has not experienced racial tensions in the same way other Africa countries, such as South Africa, have experienced racial discrimination and segregation. Ifemelu has to adjust to racial expectations after she discovers that race is coded in America. Her process of adapting to "being black" requires that she becomes acquainted with certain ways of noticing race that would have otherwise escaped her understanding. She shares her process of learning what it means to be black in the United States in a blog post titled " To My Fellow Non-AmericanBlacks: In America, You Are Black, Baby" that reads as follows:

Dear Non-American Black, when you make a choice to come to America, you become black. Stop arguing. Stop saying I'm Jamaican or I'm Ghanaian. America doesn't care. So what if you weren't "black" in your country? You're in America now. We all have our moments

of Initiation into the Society of Former Negroes. Mine was in a class in an undergrad when I asked to give a black perspective, only I was asked to give the black perspective, only I had no idea what it was. So I just made something up (220).

The post is written in a rather cynical and sarcastic tone, but overall it shows many stereotypes associated with blackness in America of which people who were not born or raised in the US are totally unaware. Ifemelu asserts that, “race is not biology; race is sociology. Race is not genotype; race is phenotype. Race matters because of racism. And racism is absurd because it is about how you look. Not about the blood you have. It’s about the shade of your skin and the shape of your nose and the kink of your hair” (337).

Racism as presented in *Americanah* manifests itself through institutional and cultural racism. It is further seen through stereotypes of Africa and Africans. Moreover the discriminatory attitudes of foreigners in the West towards African women may show through the language use. Ifemelu encounters racism from white American women in regard to her relationship with her white boyfriend Curt. These women get surprised when Curt introduces her to them as his girlfriend. Ifemelu says they looked at her in surprise, “a surprise that some of them shielded and some of them did not and in their expression was the question “why her?” (290), these white female characters display a discriminatory attitude towards Ifemelu implying that they are superior to black women. The idea is founded on the baseless notion that being a black woman she is undeserving of a white man and that is why Ifemelu says “their faces clouded with the look of people confronting a great tribal loss” (290). My only advice? Lose the braids and straighten your hair. Nobody says this kind of thing but it matters. We want you to get that job. (202). Ifemelu’s white boyfriend Curt discovers that she has replaced her braids in order to straighten her hair and he questions why, telling her that her braided hair was ‘gorgeous’ and that her own hair was “even more gorgeous, so full and cool” when natural. In addition Ifemelu maintains:

My full and cool hair would work if I were interviewing to be a backup singer in a jazz band, but I need to look professional for this interview, and professional means straight hair is best but if it’s going to be curly then it has to be the white kind of curly, loose curls or, or worst spiral curls but never kinky (204).

This hints at racism intertwined with stereotyping. The racist nature of the statement is portrayed when Ifemelu says it is only for the white kind of curly, loose curls or spiral curls that are accepted. Here white stands for inclusion while if one has kinky hair it means exclusion. Kinky hair is representative of African hair which considered coarse and difficult to manage. This also seen when Ifemelu visits a beauty spa to have her eyebrows shaped, the female attendant declines to serve her with the excuse that “we don’t do curly” (292) and only when her white boyfriend arrives to intervene does the attendant “transform into a solicitous coquette” apologizing that “it was a misunderstanding” (291). Here, the “curly” is used to mean black or African. Hair too in *Americanah* is a controversial topic since it is used as a form of discrimination. Nigerian women have been denied opportunities because of the colour of their hair. For example, Auntie Uju has to take her braids out when she has to attend a job interview because she has been told she will be considered unprofessional should she wear them for an interview. This puzzles Ifemelu as she questions whether there are no doctors in America with braided hair. However, Auntie Uju cautions Ifemelu against questioning this since one is in a country which is not their own and one has to do what they have to do if they want to succeed (119). In another incident, Ifemelu is forced to undo her braids and ends up scalding herself in the process of getting her hair relaxed in order to attend a job interview.

Institutionalized racism is experienced by Ifemelu during the career fair where she hopes to be recruited for a job. The contrary happens and her explanation for this is that the recruiters upon realization that she is non-American but African end up being non-committal. According to their main fear is that if they hired her they

would have to “descend into the dark tunnel of immigration” (201). This is clear indication that the female Nigerian immigrant is placed in a precarious situation if processing her documents is viewed as a complicated process not worth undertaking. In this case such bureaucracy systematically ensures blacks are cut off from receiving certain benefits. In addition to this, through her blog posts Ifemelu tackles the delicate issue of institutionalized racism.

... but racism is about power of a group and in America it's the white folks who have the power. How? Well, white folks don't get treated like shit in upper-class African communities and white folks don't get denied bank loans and mortgages precisely because they are white and black juries don't give white criminals worse sentences than black criminals(327).

In *Americanah*, the Nigerian immigrants are faced with negative stereotypes as a result of their colour. The white character stereotype Africans as reflected through Cristina Tomas, a receptionist at the International Students Office who serves foreign students in Ifemelu's University. When giving the directions she pauses at every word. Tomas is confirmed to the stereotype that foreign students do not understand English because she heard them speak with a foreign accent. This is illustrated when she tells Ifemelu:

I.Need.You.To.Fill.Out.A.Couple.Of.Forms.Do.You.Understand.How.To.  
Fill.These.Out (133).

Much as this incident is humorous, its ironical nature is presented through the fact that Ifemelu is extremely fluent in English. Cristina's mode of communication projects the notion that the Whiteman's language is of high status. It is believed that Africans cannot speak English and Africa is ravaged by disease and poverty.

Aunty Uju who is a doctor by profession faces discrimination from a white patient. While this patient was lying in the examination room waiting for the doctor, Aunty Uju walks into the room to carry out the examination and the patient asks if the doctor is coming and when Aunty Uju tells her that she is the doctor, the patient's face changed to “fired clay” (182). The same afternoon the patient called to transfer her file to another doctor's office. This kind of reaction is based on generalizations arising out of stereotypes that a black person is ill-trained to carry out proper treatment on a white person.

The projection of race as a complex issue is exposed through Kimberly who employs Ifemelu as her nanny. In her conversations she uses coated language so that instead of referring to black people by the colour of their skin she calls them ‘beautiful’ even if it is not so. By referring to every black person as beautiful she tries to avoid the term black which is likely to be misinterpreted as othering.

America as a country presents challenges in terms of Nigerian immigrants retaining their African culture and embracing the American culture. The only way to fit in is by adopting foreign ways (their way) resulting in the erosion of African culture. Ifemelu on arrival in America is perplexed by the observations she makes which are indicators of individuals straddling between two cultures. This is seen in language, names and lifestyle. Her Aunty Uju while in Nigeria was a true image of an Igbo woman but upon meeting her, she is shocked to discover that American experience has completely transformed her. She is shocked to hear her aunt identify herself over the phone by pronouncing her name as *yoo-joo* instead of *oo-joo*(9). Further still, life in America for Aunty Uju means juggling between a foreign identity and one's true personality. Aunty Uju switches from her usual self and feigns an American accent to reprimand her son Dike in the supermarket. This is done with the intention of impressing the white counter girl. Ifemelu describes the newly acquired accent as “...nasal, sliding accent she put on when she spoke to white Americans, in the presence of the white Americans, in the hearing of white Americans. *Pooh-reet-back*” (108).

Aunty Uju is confronted by racism in her residence at Warrington and in her profession as a doctor also tackles it in two ways. First, she relocates with her son Dike to a town named Willow. This move signifies an

environment which is conducive in that it described a friendly neighbourhood. This is suggestive of residents who are not racists. Secondly, in regard to her profession, she joins Africa Doctors for Africa as a volunteer and would take two weeks medical missions to places like Sudan. This is an indicator of a tie to Africa where her services are needed and appreciated.

Due to race being a factor that comes into play the characters find themselves holding low status jobs like being a nanny, just like Ifemelu, a waitress, a delivery boy, a toilet cleaner, just like Obinze did during his first arrival in England, or security guard. However a situation where racial prejudice is noticeable is when the dog of Ifemelu's American roommate Elena steals her bacon. Ifemelu then asks her friend to watch her dog better; Elena is aggravated and tells her "You better not kill my dog with voodoo" (152). Elena's outburst has a strong upsetting effect on Ifemelu, and she goes into her room where she explains that she:

Had wanted to slap her dissolute roommate not because a slobbering  
dog had eaten her bacon but because she was at war with the world,  
and woke up each day feeling bruised, imagining a horde of  
faceless people who were all against all (152).

As noticeable in the quote, the reader understands that Elena's outburst has made Ifemelu feel that she is at war with the world, and that everyone she meets is against her. These type of feelings indicate that Elena's behaviour has caused Ifemelu to feel differentiated from the rest of the world around her, like she is not part of them.

Dike, Auntu Uju's son is also another Nigerian character who also experiences profound racism in America. When Dike was a toddler, his mother brought him to America as she sought a better life for them. However, Dike's mother, Uju, does not want Dike to behave or believe that he is like the African-American children. Therefore, she puts him in a school where he is the only coloured child. Consequently, through attending this school Dike is for the first time confronted with the thought that he has a contrasting skin colour from his white class mates. This becomes evident to the reader as Dike expresses concern about the event that happened in school, where all the children, except him, were given sunscreen as they were outside playing. Ifemelu then asks Dike if he had wanted his teacher to give him sunscreen as well. Dike answers: "I guess so", he said with a shrug. I just want to be regular (215). Until now Dike has not been aware of the fact that he is 'different' from the other children in his school in terms of appearance. However, this realization has made him look upon himself differently. Thereby, in his teacher's separation of him and other children, Dike gains a new insight of the world around him, and consequently starts to think of himself as different, and even abnormal.

After this realization, Dike begins to question his role in the world, his self-image, and identity. This becomes visible during Dike's childhood where he asks constant questions about his father, who died when he was a baby. For example, Ifemelu and Auntu Uju have a conversation about Dike's desire to know more about his background, just after he has been accepted in his new school:

"he was asking about his name again,"... "You know, he never  
asked me this kind of thing before we moved here."... "This time  
he didn't ask why he has my name, he asked if he has my name  
because his father didn't love him" (200).

This quote provides the reader with an idea of why Dike asks questions about his Nigerian background, and how this has become more relevant to him after the placement at his new school. This double consciousness also generates confusion and frustration within Dike, eventually due to alienation of the self, Dike attempts suicide when he is 15 years old by swallowing a whole bottle of Tylenol, luckily enough, he does not succeed. Ifemelu said his suicide attempt was from depression (432). After this tragic event, Ifemelu invites him to come stay with her in Nigeria for a while, and that decision becomes Dike's salvation. Because, it is when returning to Nigeria, he first begins to make sense of himself. When he first lands in Nigeria, the first thing he bursts out is: "Oh my God, Coz, I've never seen so many black people in the same place" (476). This cry of happiness gives voice to

Dike's relief and fascination of finally finding a home where he is just one in the crowd, which he has not been during his upbringing in America. In being surrounded by people who share his skin-colour and native language, at the same time as he visits his father's old house, Dike finally gains a clear image of where he comes from and who he is.

Another instance is seen when the principal called Auntie Uju on a Monday that Dike hacked into the school's computer network on Saturday, meanwhile, She and Dike went to Hatford to visit Ozavisa and they were there the whole day and the boy didn't go near a computer, he is not even good with computers. "I don't even know to hack," Dike said "why would they do this sort of rubbish? Ifemelu asked. "You have to blame the black kid first, he said. (400).

America is a country where racism is at its peak. It also cannot accommodate a black president. The race of Obama becomes a dimensional race issue indicating the belongingness of the canvassing candidate for president. It raises the question of skin colour and its implication on Obama's status. The conversation between Nathan, Paula, Pee, Ifemelu and Blain shows this. "It doesn't matter what anybody thinks of Obama. The real question is whether white people are ready for a black president." Nathan said. "I am ready for a black president but I don't think the nation is" (377). Also, when Ifemelu blogs about the president, it embraced harsh comments which read:

How can a monkey be the president? Somebody do us a favour  
and put a bullet in this guy. Send him back to the African jungle.  
A black man will never be in the white house, dude, it's called  
the white house for a reason.(404).

Morgan, Curt's sister never agreed to the relationship between her brother Curt and Ifemelu as she objects to it and never dreamt of togetherness between them. Also the conversation between Ifemelu and Shan shows Shan disgust for black people.

Of course, there is the niche of white men in this country  
who will only date black women, but that's a kind of fetish  
and its nasty (367).

Racism in *Americanah* is presented in such a way that characters like the carpet cleaner shows outright disgust when he arrives in the house Ifemelu works as a babysitter for a rich white family. Meeting her first hand as she opens the door, she is not "what he expected to see in this grand stone house with the white pillars" and because of that he "stifled when he saw her. First surprise flitted over his features, then it is ossified to hostility. When she tells him she is not the owner, his "face sank into a grin. She, too, was the help. The universe was once again arranged as it should be" (195). Ifemelu's conclusion makes clear the assumptions the carpet cleaner has about the relation between gender and race, that is, that blacks are not supposed or expected to be above the poor whites.

Living in London, Obinze struggles to achieve the recognition necessary to be given proper social and political considerations; unable to gain access to visa, his statelessness and undocumented status deprives him not only of work and economic prosperity-they also place him in the margins of ethical visibility. Sitting outside of a tube station in London, Obinze reflects upon his status as people pass by him: "They walked so quickly, these people, as though they had an urgent destination, a purpose to their lives, while he did not. His eyes follow them, with a lost longing, and he would think: *You can work, you are legal, you are visible, and you don't know how fortunate you are*"(227). Obinze's time in London is characterized by his internal struggle with identity, and the external obstacles toward (legal and political) representation. He understands that his only means of surviving is through self-compromise: marrying a stranger, using a false identity, working thankless and menial jobs (such as cleaning toilets).

Skin bleaching procedures help Nigerian characters in the text to get rid of all the assumptions that come with the colour of their skin. For instance Bartholomew, Aunty Uju's Nigerian boyfriend, uses bleaching creams in the US, for Ifemelu notices that his face is a funny colour. He must be using the cheap ones with no sunscreen" (117). Bleaching his skin is, perhaps, another way of trying to forget his roots and accommodate to the United States' standards of acceptability.

### **ECONOMIC EXPLOITATION**

Economic exploitation can best be understood as the utilization of another person or group of persons for selfish purposes, it can also be seen as the act of employing the greatest possible advantage. Economic exploitation sprouts out from colonialization, between Africans, not only socially but also individually. It can also be seen from the economic aspect where characters try to make ends meet by illegally borrowing a National Insurance card. Economic exploitation can also be seen in the financial state, poor facilities and working conditions of Nigerian characters in the text. In *Americanah*, Nigerian characters are visualized exploiting and extorting from one another.

In *Americanah*, economic exploitation is a challenge faced by Nigerian immigrants and is a result of institutionalized racism. The American system is based on stringent laws on immigrants. Lack of proper documents brands one an illegal immigrant which leads to deportation like in the case of Obinze when he arranges to marry someone with papers, Cleotilde, with whom he is paired by brokers. On the day of the wedding, minutes before he can become a citizen, he is discovered, detained and summarily removed from the country.

A police clamped handcuffs around his wrists, he felt himself watching the scene from far away, watching himself walk to the police car outside and sink into the too-soft seat in the back. There had been so many times in the past when he feared that this would happen, so many moments that had become one single blur of panic and now it felt like dull echo of an aftermath. Cleotilde had flung herself on the ground and began to cry (322).

Most Nigerian immigrants in the text end up with jobs of low status in miserable environments. The three African braiders Halima, Aisha and Mariama best portray economic exploitation although most characters are faced by this challenge. They are deprived of proper facilities demonstrated by how they are settled in neighbourhood of low socio-economic conditions. In order for Ifemelu to have her hair braided she has to travel by taxi for miles from the plush white-owned suburbs of Princeton to Trenton which she describes as "...a part of the city that had graffiti, dank buildings and no white people... (9). Ifemelu is apprehensive of visiting the area and a description of the salon presents a picture that is a reflection of occupants who are struggling to make ends meet. According to her the salon is overcrowded and lacks air-conditioning and is likely to have a moldy newspapers stuffed between grime and rotten things(9). This shows the unhygienic state of Trenton and how America as an imperial power contributes to the social oppression of female immigrants by its non-inclusive nature. Furthermore, the tales of these women are heart-wrenching, for example Aisha's father passes on but she cannot travel home for the funeral because she lacks proper documentation. She also has a sick mother on the verge of dying whom she cannot visit. From these experiences, it shows how their status as immigrants is accompanied with challenges like economic and social pressure. The fact that the jobs of these three African braiders pay lowly confines them to the ghettos making their rise next to impossible. Much as they work on their feet all day long, they are unable to advance economically or financially. This situation is worsened by the fact that they are uneducated. This is in comparison to Ifemelu who despite the challenges she meets is able to negotiate her way out because she has achieved financial security as a result of her high level of education which has opened job opportunities.

Just like African braiders, Ifemelu as a Nigerian immigrant is exposed to economic pressures, which eventually makes her alienate her from herself and others. Initially as a new arrival in America, she is unable to get employment and with payment of rent overdue, she resorts to a sexual encounter with the tennis coach, a white man. The end result of this encounter is that she ends up in a state of depression because she feels she has not fulfilled her self-expectation as well as her boyfriend Obinze's expectations. This humiliating experience bears heavily on their relationship since Ifemelu cut off ties with Obinze, her roommates and everyone.

Bartholomew is egocentric and controlling in nature in that he tries to confine Aunt Uju's space by dictating that she should not send home any money. He exploits her financially, is fully dependent on her, shows no interest in her son and does not share any chores with her despite daily pressures of the immigrant life. In order to shake off the feeling of being emasculated as a result of the pressures of the American system on immigrants, Bartholomew exerts his authority by displaying traditional patriarchal domination, Aunt Uju puts a clear picture of this when she tells Ifemelu:

Both of us come home at the same time and do you know what Bartholomew does? He just sits in the sitting room and turns on the TV and asks me what we are eating for dinner...He wants me to give him my salary. Imagine! He says that is how he marriages are since he is the head of the family, that I should not send money home to brother without his permission, that we should make his car payments from my salary (252).

The exploitative nature is seen in Vincent Obi and the Angolan characters that are nameless. Obinze follows the advice from Nicholas on the urgency of getting an NI number and marrying a European Union citizen to acquire papers and so he is introduced to Vincent Obi by Iloba. Obi is his solution to avoid immigration restriction when he offers to trade his NI card to Obinze for temporary use on condition that Obinze avails forty percent of his earning; after some haggling they settle for thirty five percent. This is too hefty a fee considering Obinze is still in process of grappling challenges in Britain and needs to settle. To bear the name Vincent Obi becomes an experience clouded in fear and insecurity for Obinze. Besides keeping part of the bargain Obinze turned Obi has to leave up to blackmail and out of the blues increments. Vincent's callous nature is seen when after some time he calls and asks for a raise and threatens to expose Obinze to his employer by informing him that Obinze is an imposter. When Obinze ignores him by not responding on the assumption that it is a mere threat, he keeps true his word and causes Obinze to lose his job.

Obinze's woes begin to spiral as he has to start afresh his process of getting an identification. He meets the Angolans who are wheeler-dealers and here too he faces further extortion. The plan is that they are to arrange his marriage to Cleotilde a girl with a European Union passport. In the process of making these arrangements the Angolans keep asking for money citing financial constraints in enabling the marriage arrangements to be a success. Obinze is forced to borrow heavily from his cousin Nicholas and Emenike his old schoolmate. The male characters that have a longer stay in Britain thrive on exploitation of new arrivals to make money.

Another character is Emenike, is described as leading an affluent life in Britain. Though he rises up the ladder of success the narrator presents him as one who seems to live in the shadow of a British wife whom he extorts from. He tries to belong to the high breed of class of British society even if it means getting a wife who is older than him by at least eight years. She is described as "old enough to be his mother" (248). Emenike is seen hosting white folks, savoring white cuisine while using exotic cutlery as well as trotting the globe. For him all these pleasures are associated with marrying from the white race without putting into considerations factors like dignity.

## **CONCLUSION**



This paper sought to examine the challenges undergone by Nigerian immigrants in America and Britain. Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah* presents characters that undergo hardship and analyzed how these characters respond to them. The paper shows that these challenges are as a result of interconnected forms of race, class and gender oppression. This form of oppression is reflected in racism, stereotyping etc. For example, most characters encounter racism as a major challenge. The women characters overcome this challenge of race in various ways. Our protagonist Ifemelu, take the lead to respond to these challenge by subtle resistance like attacking racist attitudes through blog posts. She sets up a blog which she uses to attack white superiority. She critiques their mannerisms, hypocritical nature and is able to create a forum to share experiences getting the world view on racism. Auntie Uju relocates to Willow where the whites are friendly compared to Warrington whose residents displayed racial attitudes. Matters related to class too result in characters like the three hair braiders facing economic pressure.

From our analysis we are able to draw conclusions that Nigerian immigrants share a common experience in regard to issues like racism, stereotyping and economic pressure. Marginalization of Nigerian immigrants is seen when they search for jobs in America and it proves to be an elusive affair. The jobs they can afford to get are of low status below their academic qualification in Nigeria. They either work as taxi drivers with their master's degree, toilet cleaners with a Bachelor's degree from University of Nigeria, Nsukka in the case of Obinze, either working as nannies or waitresses in the case of Ifemelu in spite of her higher degrees. Migration abroad reduces Nigerian immigrants to second class citizens irrespective of the characters status in Nigeria before travelling abroad.

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