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## Ifemelu and Obinze's White Masks and Black Skins: Politics of Gender and Color in Adichie's *Americanah*

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### Abstract

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah* intricately explores the racial identities of its protagonists, Ifemelu and Obinze, shedding light on the complexities of their experiences as black individuals navigating different cultural contexts. Drawing on Frantz Fanon's concept of "white masks" and "black skin," this paper delves into the ways in which Ifemelu and Obinze navigate their racial identities in the novel. Indeed, Frantz Fanon's concept of "white masks" refers to the ways in which colonized individuals adopt the cultural norms and values of the colonizer, often at the expense of their own identities. Fanon argues that colonialism imposes a sense of inferiority on colonized peoples, leading them to internalize the beliefs and attitudes of the colonizer, thereby masking their true selves. Besides, the study portrays gender roles and power dynamics; hence, it explores how characters challenge or conform to societal expectations based on gender. The study also spotlights the implications of these dynamics on relationships, career aspirations, and personal agency. The politics of color are shown in the way black characters are confronting or internalizing racial stereotypes, discrimination, and privilege.

**Keywords:** Fanon- gender-color- black skin- white mask- blackness-interracial relationships.

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie was born in Enugu, Nigeria in 1977. She is a Nigerian writer, novelist, poet, essayist, and playwright of postcolonial feminist literature. Adichie's childhood was influenced by postcolonial rule in Nigeria, particularly the aftermath of the Nigerian Civil War. She grew up on the campus of the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, where her father was a professor and her mother was the first female Registrar. She studied medicine for a year at Nsukka and then left for the US at the age of 19 to continue her education on a different path. Her first novel, *Purple Hibiscus* (2003), won the Commonwealth Writers' Prize, and her second novel, *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2006), won the Orange Prize. Her 2013 famed novel *Americanah* won the US National Book Critics Circle Award and was named one of *The New York Times* Top Ten Best Books of 2013. *Americanah* was an exploration of a young Nigerian woman encountering racism in America. Adichie explores the character Ifemelu, who has been identified by the color of her skin at arrival to the United States. Adichie's *Americanah* is about Ifemelu and Obinze who, as teenagers in a Lagos secondary school, fall in love. Nigeria at the time is under military dictatorship, and people are seeking to leave the country. Ifemelu moves to the United States to study, where she struggles for the first time with racism and many other varieties of racial distinctions. For the first time, Ifemelu discovers what it means to be a black person.

To begin with, the novel portrays gender roles and power dynamics; hence, it explores how characters challenge or conform to societal expectations based on gender. Besides, it spotlights the implications of these dynamics on relationships, career aspirations, and personal agency. The politics of color are shown in the way black characters are confronting or internalizing racial stereotypes, discrimination, and privilege. The novel also highlights blackness role in shaping individual experiences and societal structures.

As a matter of fact, this paper hypothesizes that there are lucid shared intellectual elements between what Adichie represents about gender and color in her novel *Americanah*, and what Frantz Fanon discusses about gender and color in his most-famed book *Black Skin, White Masks*. Consequently, the paper hopefully aims to introduce a thorough reading of Adichie's novel in the light of Fanon's ideas and philosophy in his book *Black Skin, White Masks*.

Frantz Fanon (1925- 1961) was a Francophone Afro-Caribbean psychiatrist, political, and philosopher. He was born on the Caribbean island of Martinique,

which was then a French colony and is now a French single territorial collectivity. His renowned book, *Black Skin, White Masks* 1952, is written in the style of autoethnography, with Fanon sharing his own experiences. It applies a historical critique on the complex ways in which identity, particularly blackness, is constructed and produced. Fanon depicts white people as having a deep-seated fear of educated blacks. He contends that, no matter how assimilated to white norms a black person may become, whites will always exercise a sense of superiority against him.

To put this more accurately, Frantz Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks* examines the psychological impact of colonialism and racism on black individuals. While, *Americanah* by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie captures the experiences of Ifemelu, a young Nigerian woman who navigates race and identity in America and Nigeria. In *Black Skin, White Masks*, Fanon explores how black individuals are subjected to a white-dominated world, leading to a sense of cultural alienation and inferiority. Ifemelu's experiences in *Americanah* reflect similar themes, particularly in her observations of race and the complexities of living as a black woman in America. Ifemelu concludes her observations and says, "[t]he only reason you say that race was not an issue is because you wish it was not. We all wish it was not. But it's a lie. 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" (293).

In the meantime, one of the central concepts in Fanon's work is the internalization of racial inferiority by black individuals. He argues that "colonialism and racism lead to a fragmentation of the black psyche, shaping a sense of self that is defined by the dominant white culture" (81). Ifemelu's journey in *Americanah* parallels this idea, as she grapples with the impact of America's racial dynamics on her own sense of identity. Her observations on race and the expectations placed on black individuals in the United States echo Fanon's exploration of the ways in which the colonial experience shapes the consciousness of the colonized.

Fanon also delves into the experience of blackness as a source of internal conflict. He discusses how black individuals are conditioned to aspire to whiteness as the standard of beauty and social acceptance. In *Americanah*, Ifemelu's observations of race in America reflect this internal conflict, particularly as she navigates the complexities of beauty standards and cultural assimilation. The novel

depicts Ifemelu's journey of understanding and asserting her own identity as a black woman, which resonates with Fanon's exploration of the internal struggle caused by the idealization of whiteness in a culture dominated by standards of whiteness.

Furthermore, Fanon addresses the impact of language and communication on identity formation. He discusses how the colonization of language contributes to the suppression of indigenous cultures and the imposition of European cultural norms. Ifemelu's blog in *Americanah* serves as a platform where she explores the nuances of language and communication in relation to race and identity. Her observations align with Fanon's analysis of the role of language in perpetuating power dynamics and shaping the consciousness of the colonized. For example, Ifemelu "decide[s] to stop faking an American accent on a sunlit day in July, the same day she met Blaine. It was convincing, the accent. She had perfected, from careful watching of friends and newscasters [...] it was an act of will" (178). However, Ifemelu is not American, and by allowing herself to accept sounding American as an achievement, she accepts that being American is something to aspire to over being Nigerian. Elsewhere, "she had won, indeed, but her triumph was full of air. Her fleeting victory had left in its wake a vast, echoing space, because she had taken on, for too long, a pitch of voice and a way of being that was not hers"(180). Here, Ifemelu decides to stop faking an American accent after a telemarketer compliments her by telling her she sounds American. Ifemelu initially adopts an American accent because Cristina Tomas, the university registrar's receptionist, speaks to her as if she does not understand English well, causing Ifemelu to feel ashamed of her own accent. She acknowledges that American mannerisms and speech are not hers naturally; emphasizing that she still sees herself as Nigerian at heart. Therefore, the telemarketer's comment constitutes a vain glorious because she does not value Americanness over Nigerianness, nor does she see herself as an American.

In addition, Fanon discusses the role of love and intimacy in the context of racial dynamics. He examines how interracial relationships can become sites of conflict and resistance, reflecting broader power imbalances in society. Ifemelu's romantic relationships in *Americanah* highlight the complexities of racial dynamics in personal interactions, echoing Fanon's exploration of the ways in which love and intimacy intersect with color and identity. Ifemelu says, " [w]hen you are black in America and you fall in love with a white person, race doesn't matter when you're

alone together because it's just you and your love. But the minute you step outside, race matters" (293). Ifemelu argues that race inherently plays a role in interracial relationships. This quote appears in the novel not long after Ifemelu's breakup with Curt, and it reveals one of the subtler ways race and color affect their breakup. Curt is hypersensitive that he is dating a black woman, as evidenced in the way he tells the others that Ifemelu did not initially want to date a white man. Because racism is embedded into the fabric of the US, merely being in public makes their difference in race and color something in need of explanation. To put this more accurately, although Ifemelu feels happy with Curt, yet there is a feeling of inferiority about herself. It is noticed that although Curt widens Ifemelu's social circle, yet she is never comfortable in the presence of his white friends, who drive her into issues of "race and color and monochromatic identities she is unwilling to accept" (Ludwig 123).

In a similar vein, the themes and experiences explored in *Americanah* resonate with the central ideas in *Black Skin, White Masks*. Both works delve into the psychological and social impacts of colonialism, racism, and cultural domination on the experiences of black individuals. Through their respective narratives, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie and Frantz Fanon offer insightful examinations of the complexities of gender, color, and the enduring legacy of colonialism.

Significantly, in Adichie's *Americanah*, Obinze wears a metaphorical white mask as he navigates the complexities of color and identity in England. Despite being a black man, he finds himself adopting certain behaviors, mannerisms, and even friendships that align more closely with white culture. This white mask symbolizes his attempt to assimilate into a society where whiteness is often associated with privilege and acceptance. However, it also highlights the internal conflict he faces as he grapples with his own identity and the pressure to conform to societal norms. This dichotomy underscores the broader themes of race, belonging, and the pursuit of the American Dream in the novel. Indeed, Obinze undergoes a profound internal struggle as he navigates the complexities of race and color in both Nigeria and England. Central to his journey is the concept of wearing a white mask while being black, a metaphorical representation of his attempt to assimilate into English society. In what follows, it's clear how Obinze grapples with his identity and the societal pressures that compel him to don this metaphorical mask:

They would not understand why people like him, who were raised well fed and watered but mired in dissatisfaction, conditioned from birth to look towards somewhere else, eternally convinced that real lives happened in that somewhere else, were now resolved to do dangerous things [...] none of them starving [...] but merely hungry for choice and certainty. (280)

Obinze makes this observation at Georgina and Emenike's dinner party. As the dinner guests passionately talk about the importance of Britain remaining open to refugees, Obinze realizes that their image of an African illegal immigrant is someone fleeing desperate circumstances, someone who requires their benevolence. As the son of a university professor, Obinze has not been desperate until he immigrated to London, where his status as an illegal immigrant takes an emotional toll on him and makes it extremely difficult to earn money. The contradiction between how white British people imagine illegal African immigrants and Obinze's reality demonstrates how the image of a war-torn Africa allows the party guests to feel good about themselves as saviors. In light of this, Obinze believes that the people at the dinner party would not react well to his story because his suffering does not allow them to be heroes, but instead makes them complicit in the myth that the West is the only land of opportunity.

Obinze's journey begins in Nigeria, where he experiences the cultural and social dynamics of being black in a predominantly black society. However, his perception of race and color undergoes a significant shift when he moves to London. In England, he encounters a society deeply entrenched in racial hierarchies and biases, where whiteness is often associated with privilege and acceptance. Faced with the realities of systemic racism and discrimination, Obinze feels compelled to adopt certain behaviors and mannerisms that align more closely with white culture. One of the most poignant examples of Obinze wearing a white mask is his experience at the dinner party hosted by Kimberly, his wealthy white girlfriend. At the party, Obinze finds himself surrounded by affluent whites, who engage in conversations and activities that are foreign to him. In an effort to fit in and gain acceptance, Obinze adopts a facade of intellectual sophistication and cultural assimilation, suppressing aspects of his Nigerian identity. This act of cultural code-switching illustrates the extent to which Obinze feels the need to conform to white societal norms in order to be accepted.

However, beneath the surface of Obinze's assimilation lies a deep sense of internal conflict and disillusionment. Despite his outward attempts to blend in, he grapples with feelings of alienation and displacement, longing for a sense of belonging that transcends racial boundaries. This internal turmoil is paralleled by his longing for Ifemelu, his fellow Nigerian immigrant and childhood love, who represents a connection to his roots and a source of genuine acceptance. Consequently, Adichie's portrayal of Obinze's journey in *Americanah* offers a poignant exploration of the complexities of race, color, and assimilation. Through his experiences in both Nigeria and America, Obinze confronts the pressures to conform to societal norms and the profound implications of wearing a white mask while being black. In fact, Obinze's story serves as a powerful commentary on the enduring legacy of systemic racism and the enduring quest for authentic self-expression in a society rife with racial tensions.

Similarly, Ifemelu also struggles with the concept of wearing a metaphorical white mask while being black, particularly during her time in America. Ifemelu's experience parallels Obinze's in many ways, as she navigates the complexities of race, color, and assimilation in a society marked by racial hierarchies and biases. One of the key ways Ifemelu wears a white mask is through her blog, the "Non-American Black," where she adopts a persona of authority and expertise on race and cultural issues. By presenting herself as an authority figure on blackness and racial dynamics, Ifemelu gains recognition and success within the predominantly white American society. Ifemelu once declares, "Dear Non-American Black, when you make the choice to come to America, you become black. Stop arguing. Stop saying I'm Jamaican or I'm Ghanaian. America doesn't care. So, what if you weren't "black" in your country? You're in America now" (225). This sums up Ifemelu's realization that Americans do not differentiate between Black Americans and Black non-Americans. A major part of the quote details the ways this conflation means that Black non-Americans need to accept and work within the rules of this identification in order to cope with the racist structures in America. Mindi McMann explains this idea and writes, "being black becomes equated with a distinctly racist and hierarchical American experience for Ifemelu — an experience that is often foisted on her" (211). However, in doing so, she often suppresses aspects of her Nigerian identity and culture, conforming to the expectations of her audience and the broader societal norms. Parthiva Sinha postulates that "through Ifemelu's character, Adichie can investigate how Americans end up engendering

racial hierarchy and several divisions between ethnic groups, thus recognizing the conflict of developing an identity as a stranger in one's society"(906).To emphasize how deeply Ifemelu was affected by being judged physically predicated on appearance, color, culture, and even accent, Sinha writes, "her controversial blogs, one titled "To My Fellow Non-American Blacks" provided her with a platform to liberatingly express her views on "race" in a straightforward manner" (906).

Furthermore, Ifemelu's romantic relationships also reflect her struggle with identity and assimilation. Her relationship with Curt, a wealthy white American, highlights her desire for acceptance and validation within American society. Despite their cultural differences and the disparities in their lived experiences, Ifemelu finds herself drawn to Curt as a symbol of social status and belonging. In this context, Ifemelu wears a white mask by suppressing her own cultural identity and adopting behaviors that align with white gender societal norms.

Additionally, Ifemelu's experiences with micro aggressions and discrimination in America further underscore her internal conflict. Throughout the novel, she encounters various instances of racial prejudice and discrimination, which force her to navigate the complexities of racial identity and societal expectations. In response, Ifemelu often internalizes these experiences, leading her to question her own sense of self-worth and belonging in a society that marginalizes blackness. However, beneath the facade of assimilation and acceptance lies a profound sense of disconnection and longing for authenticity. Ifemelu's decision to return to Nigeria reflects her desire to reclaim her identity and reconnect with her roots, rejecting the pressure to conform to white societal norms. In doing so, she sheds the white mask she wore in America, embracing her blackness and reclaiming her ethnic agency and authenticity. Still, "she was at peace: to be home, to be writing her blog, to have discovered Lagos again. She had, finally, spun herself fully into being" (472). Thus, Ifemelu has finally created a life where she feels she can fully be herself, in the city where she feels most at home, profiting from her outspokenness on her blog. Importantly, at this point she realizes that Obinze will never divorce Kosi, which means this strong sense of self is independent from their relationship. She likes herself the way she is, with or without Obinze. Obviously, Ifemelu's journey in *Americanah* offers a nuanced exploration of the complexities of gender, color, and assimilation. Through her experiences in both Nigeria and America, she confronts the pressures to conform to



societal expectations and grapples with the implications of wearing a white mask while being black.

In a double irony, Ifemelu grapples with her identity and adopts a persona of assimilation in order to navigate the societal expectations and pressures she encounters in America. Ifemelu's journey begins in Nigeria, where she develops a strong sense of cultural identity and belonging within her predominantly black society. However, her move to America exposes her to a society deeply entrenched in racial- gender hierarchies, where whiteness is often equated with privilege and acceptance. While in America, someone once asks, "Can't we just be human beings? And Professor Hunk replied—that is exactly what white privilege is, that you can say that. Race doesn't really exist for you because it has never been a barrier. Black folks don't have that choice" (348). Faced with the pressures of assimilation, Ifemelu finds herself adopting certain behaviors and mannerisms that align more closely with white culture, suppressing aspects of her Nigerian identity in the process.

Equally, Ifemelu's romantic relationships highlight her desire for acceptance and validation within American society. Meanwhile, Ifemelu encounters various instances of microaggressions and racial discrimination, which force her to confront the complexities of racial identity and societal gender expectations. These experiences further reinforce the pressure to conform to white societal norms, leading Ifemelu to internalize feelings of inadequacy and self-doubt during her relationship with Curt. "There was something wrong with her. She did not know what it was but there was something wrong with her. A hunger, a restlessness. An incomplete knowledge of herself" (292). Ifemelu has these thoughts about herself around the time she and Curt break up. Drinking at a bar, after Curt gave up on her; she believes the bartender would be a better girlfriend for Curt. Although by this point there are plenty of signs that Curt may be too insecure and controlling for Ifemelu, because Curt is conventionally attractive and rich, Ifemelu partially believes that not being happy with him is a personal flaw. She does not yet trust or value her own desires or preferences as a human being; rather as she still believes in herself as an inferior black woman.

In short, Adichie's portrayal of Ifemelu's journey in *Americanah* offers a poignant examination of the paradox of assimilation and the complexities of color and gender politics. Through Ifemelu's experiences in both Nigeria and America,

the novel highlights the enduring legacy of systemic racism and the profound impact of gender and color pressures on individual identity.

Respectively, Frantz Fanon's ideas on gender, particularly from *Black Skin, White Masks*, could be applied to Adichie's *Americanah* in several ways. Fanon explored how colonialism impacted the psyche of the colonized, including their perceptions of gender and identity. In *Americanah*, Adichie concentrates on themes of race, identity, and belonging, particularly through the experiences of Ifemelu and Obinze. One application could be the examination of how societal expectations and stereotypes influence the characters' understanding of gender roles, both in Nigeria and the United States. Fanon's ideas about the internalization of colonial ideologies could be seen in how Ifemelu navigates her identity as a Nigerian woman in America, facing stereotypes and expectations based on her race and gender. For example, when a man in line behind her at the supermarket muttered:

Fat people don't need to be eating that shit, [...] She glanced at him, surprised, mildly offended, and thought it a perfect blog post, [...] She would file the post under the tag "race, gender and body size." But back home, as she stood and faced the mirror's truth, she realized [...] She was fat (11-12).

This is one of the many offensive situations that Ifemelu has experienced when buying food. Fueled with anger at this time-old stereotype of black people as obese and ugly-shaped, Ifemelu writes the experience in the blog. In this sense, Purow and Andayani comment that "the person Ifemelu has encountered is insulting with the background of gender and race in mind. It can be inferred from Ifemelu's projection that the inner anxiety of Ifemelu is body weight or shape" (6). Here, Ifemelu's internalization of the white negative ideology concerning her own body and gender is evident. While being in America, Ifemelu faces many stereotypes and expectations that based on her color and gender.

Additionally, Fanon's analysis of the relationship between colonialism and masculinity could be applied to Obinze's experiences. As he struggles to find his place in Nigerian society and later in the UK, the intersection of race, class, and gender shapes his identity and opportunities. Besides, applying Fanon's ideas to *Americanah* could deepen the analysis of how colonial legacies continue to influence perceptions of gender and identity in post-colonial societies.

In fact, Adichie's *Americanah* is a rich tapestry of narratives that intricately explore the complexities of gender within the broader context of race, identity, and

migration. Through the lens of the protagonist, Ifemelu, and other characters, Adichie paints a vivid picture of the predicament of gender, shedding light on societal expectations, stereotypes, and the struggle for self-definition.

One of the central themes in *Americanah* is the pervasive influence of gender norms and expectations on the lives of its characters. From Ifemelu's experiences as a young Nigerian woman navigating the intricacies of American society to the struggles of her friends and family back home, Adichie exposes the ways in which gender shapes individuals' opportunities, relationships, and self-perceptions. Ifemelu's journey serves as a microcosm of the broader challenges faced by women in both Nigerian and American societies. In Nigeria, she confronts traditional gender roles and expectations, grappling with the pressure to conform to societal norms while also aspiring for independence and autonomy. Her decision to leave Nigeria for America is partly driven by a desire to escape the limitations imposed on her as a woman in her home country.

However, Ifemelu soon realizes that America presents its own set of challenges for women, particularly women of color. She navigates issues of race and gender intersectionality, confronting stereotypes and discrimination in various aspects of her life, from her academic pursuits to her romantic ones. Adichie deftly captures the nuances of Ifemelu's experiences, illustrating how her identity as a black woman shapes her interactions with the world around her. Moreover, *Americanah* shows the complexities of female friendships and solidarity in the face of adversity. Ifemelu's relationships with her friends, including the fiercely independent Obinze and the outspoken Blaine, highlight the importance of community and support in navigating the complexities of gender and race. Adichie portrays female friendships as a source of strength and resilience, offering a counterbalance to the patriarchal structures that seek to marginalize women.

Throughout the novel, Adichie challenges traditional notions of femininity and masculinity, offering a nice portrayal of gender that transcends binary categories. Characters like Ifemelu and Obinze defy conventional gender roles, challenging societal expectations and forging their own paths in pursuit of self-fulfillment. Adichie's portrayal of gender is multifaceted and dynamic, reflecting the diverse experiences and identities of women across different cultural contexts. Adichie in her book, *We Should All Be Feminists*, postulates that "[t]he problem with gender is that it prescribes how we should be rather than recognizing how we

are. Imagine how much happier we would be, how much freer to be our true individual selves, if we didn't have the weight of gender expectations" (12). As a result, Adichie's *Americanah* offers a compelling exploration of the predicament of gender in contemporary society. Through Ifemelu's journey and the experiences of other characters, Adichie highlights the pervasive influence of gender norms and expectations, as well as the resilience and agency of women in the face of adversity.

Concomitantly, Fanon in *Black Skin, White Masks* offers a lens through which to analyze Adichie's *Americanah*, particularly in the context of race and color. Fanon focuses on how colonialism perpetuates hierarchies based on skin color, leading to internalized feelings of inferiority or superiority among colonized peoples. In *Americanah*, Adichie addresses issues of colorism within both Nigerian and American societies. The protagonist, Ifemelu, grapples with her own experiences as a dark-skinned woman navigating the complexities of beauty standards and racial identity. Similarly, Obinze, as a dark-skinned Nigerian man, faces societal perceptions and prejudices based on his skin color. Fanon's analysis of the psychological effects of colonization on individuals of different skin tones can be applied to characters in *Americanah*. For instance, Ifemelu's observations and reflections on the privileges associated with lighter skin in Nigeria, as well as the discrimination she faces in America, reflect the enduring impact of colonialism on perceptions of beauty and worth.

In addition, Fanon's concept of the "colonized mind" sheds light on how characters in *Americanah* internalize these societal norms and grapple with their own sense of identity. This is evident in Ifemelu's journey of self-discovery and her eventual embrace of her natural hair and dark skin, challenging conventional beauty standards and reclaiming her agency. In this sense, devaluation of racial pride did not occur overnight. Syed Gilani postulates "it came as a result of centuries old persecution and suppression of blacks in white societies due to the difference in their skin color and their natural hair. This made the African-Americans believe that the lighter skin tone and straightened hair would help them in their social and economic mobility" (6462). Implicitly, applying Fanon's ideas of colorism to *Americanah*, readers can gain a deeper understanding of how historical legacies continue to shape contemporary attitudes towards race, beauty, and identity in both Nigerian and American societies.

In a similar vein, Adichie's *Americanah* serves as a poignant exploration of the multifaceted predicament of color within the contexts of race, identity, and migration. Through the experiences of the protagonist, Ifemelu, and other characters, Adichie skillfully navigates the complexities of colorism, shedding light on its pervasive impact on individuals' lives and societal structures. Besides, Adichie's narrative confronts the entrenched beauty standards and hierarchies perpetuated by colorism, both in Nigeria and the United States. Ifemelu's journey serves as a lens through which to explore the intersections of race and beauty, as she grapples with societal expectations based on her skin shadism. From her experiences in Nigeria, where lighter skin is often equated with beauty and privilege, to her observations of racial dynamics in America, Adichie highlights the pervasive influence of colorism on individuals' self-esteem and sense of belonging. The challenge to prove themselves as fit candidates of the white society, African-American women adopted western beauty standards, such as; "the modification of black hair with kinky curls into more acceptable straightened hairstyle, and lightening of their skin color to raise the status of their social life, hence, imitating those of the whites" (Walker 63). In this respect, Fanon in his book *Black Skin, White Masks* comments on the construction of racial hierarchies and writes, "the black is not a man. He is a thing subjected to all the techniques and all the sophistries that characterize the colonial world" (28). This quote reflects Fanon's critique of the dehumanization of black people within colonial and racist societies. The construction of racial hierarchies relegates black individuals to the status of objects, denying them their humanity and agency.

Furthermore, *Americanah* pertains how color shapes characters' perceptions of themselves and others. Ifemelu's reflections on her own skin tone and hair texture underscore the internalized nature of colorism, as she navigates feelings of insecurity and inadequacy in both Nigerian and American societies. As Ifemelu states, it is simply "[n]ot 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" (339). Similarly, characters like Obinze and Ifemelu's friends confront their own internalized biases and prejudices, revealing the complexities of identity formation within racialized contexts. Adichie's narrative also examines the intersections of colorism with other forms of privilege and oppression. The previous account copes with what Fanon theorizes in his book *Black Skin, White Masks*. Fanon highlights the ways in which colorism and racism shape the experiences of black individuals, leading to

internalized feelings of inferiority and alienation. "I find myself suddenly oppressed by a strange feeling: that I am no longer master of my attitudes. I am no longer master of my emotions, my reflexes. I am ashamed. I blush. I blush for myself. For I am discovered. For I am seen through" (Fanon 121). This quote illustrates the internalized racism experienced by black individuals, where they feel ashamed and inferior due to the societal devaluation of their racial identity. Fanon explores the psychological impact of racism on the self-esteem and sense of identity of black people. Meanwhile, Ifemelu's observations of racial dynamics in America highlight the ways in which skin tone intersects with gender, class, and nationality to shape individuals' lived experiences. Equally, Appiah and Gutmann contend:

Racism was a central aspect of the modern period's ideology, since it was commonly assumed that people could be classified "into a small number of groups, called 'races,' in such a way that members of these groups shared certain fundamental, heritable, physical, moral, intellectual, and cultural characteristics with one another that they did not share with members of other race (54).

Noticeably, characters like Blaine, with his lighter skin and privileged background, navigate different societal expectations and opportunities compared to Ifemelu and other darker-skinned characters, underscoring the complex interplay of privilege and discrimination within racialized societies. Despite the pervasive influence of colorism, *Americanah* also showcases moments of resistance and empowerment. Ifemelu's decision to embrace her natural hair and dark skin serves as a powerful rejection of Eurocentric beauty standards and a reclaiming of her own identity. Additionally, characters like Aunt Uju and Dike challenge traditional notions of beauty and success, highlighting the resilience and agency of individuals who defy societal expectations. At first, Aunt Uju is compelled to go along with the beauty standards of the whites. She tells, "I have to take my braids out for my interviews and relax my hair. Kemi told me that I shouldn't wear braids to the interview. If you have braids, they will think you are unprofessional" (124). Aunt Uju's character in *Americanah* embodies a paradox of autonomy and conformity. Soltani and Salami argue "[d]espite her professional background as a therapist, she submits to the traditional role of a compliant partner by changing her appearance and giving up her financial independence to satisfy her lover's preferences - an act that Ifemelu views as degrading and self-compromising"(14). Here, women of

color are grappling with complex dynamics of personal agency and societal expectations. As a consequence, Adichie's *Americanah* offers a nuanced and compelling exploration of the predicament of color in contemporary society. Through its richly drawn characters and incisive commentary, Adichie invites readers to interrogate the ways in which colorism shapes individuals' lives and societal structures, while also highlighting moments of resistance and empowerment.

Since color is attached to the concept of blackness, Adichie's *Americanah* intricately explores the concept of blackness within the contexts of race, gender, and migration. Through the experiences of the protagonist, Ifemelu, and other characters, Adichie is concerned with the complexities of black identity, shedding light on its multifaceted dimensions and the societal forces that shape it. In other words, Adichie's narrative presents a diverse range of black identities, challenging monolithic representations and highlighting the complexity of the black experience. Ifemelu's reflections on her own identity as a Nigerian woman navigating racial dynamics in America underscore the intersectionality of blackness, as she grapples with the nuances of race, gender, and color. For instance, Ifemelu reflects:

Ifemelu suddenly felt irritated by the way Nigerians living in America walked around with this strut of racial arrogance. As though being black in America gave them a special kind of unassailable coolness. They had come to a country that oppressed them, and yet they held themselves like warriors, armed with a stolid self-assurance that she found unbearably cocky (433).

As shown above in the narrative sequence, this quote highlights the complexity of black identity within the diaspora, as characters navigate the tensions between solidarity and assimilation, pride and vulnerability.

Furthermore, *Americanah* explores the intersections of race and gender within black identity, shedding light on the unique challenges faced by black women. Ifemelu's observations on beauty standards and hair texture underscore the ways in which black women negotiate societal expectations based on both race and gender. Adichie writes; "Why do you always put chemicals in your hair? I don't understand." "Because I want to look professional." "What is unprofessional about natural hair? It's the hair that grows out of your head" (213). This dialogue between Ifemelu and her friend highlights the societal pressure for black women to

conform to white beauty standards in order to be perceived as professional or desirable, reflecting the intersectional nature of oppression faced by black women. In the meantime, Fanon, in his book *Black Skin, White Masks*, comments on the black's desire for assimilation and writes, "for not only must the black man be black; he must be black in relation to the white man. Some say they are black as a result of white men. Others, to be sure, say they are white when confronted by blacks, and black when confronted by whites" (104). Here, Fanon discusses the pressure for black individuals to conform to white standards of identity and behavior, leading to a fragmented sense of self. The desire for assimilation and acceptance by the dominant white society further exacerbates the internal conflict experienced by black people.

Despite the challenges of navigating blackness in a racially stratified society, *Americanah* also celebrates moments of resilience and empowerment within the black community. Characters like Auntie Uju and Dike challenge stereotypes and carve out their own paths to success, demonstrating the resilience and agency of individuals who defy societal expectations. "She imagined herself walking proudly, and the imagined was so vivid that she had to smile. It had been a long time since she felt proud of anything" (429). This extraction illustrates Ifemelu's journey towards self-acceptance and empowerment, highlighting the transformative power of embracing one's blackness and reclaiming one's identity. As a matter of fact, Adichie's *Americanah* offers a refined and compelling exploration of blackness in contemporary society. Adichie challenges monolithic representations of black identity and highlights the complexities of navigating color and gender within the black experience.

Likewise, Fanon in his book, *Black Skin, White Masks*, spotlights the notions of empowerment and the quest for liberation in the black community. Fanon contends, "I am black; I am in total fusion with the world, in sympathetic affinity with the earth, losing my id in the heart of the cosmos—and the white man, however intelligent he may be, is incapable of understanding Louis Armstrong or songs from the Congo" (63). As shown, Fanon like Adichie in *Americanah*, celebrates blackness as a source of strength and solidarity, rejecting the notion of inferiority imposed by white supremacy. He emphasizes the importance of embracing one's racial identity and culture as a means of resistance and liberation. Consequently, Frantz Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks* offers a profound analysis of the predicament of blackness, highlighting the pervasive impact of racism on the



psyche and identity of black individuals. His insights continue to resonate in discussions of race and identity today, shedding light on the ongoing struggle for racial justice and equality.

Relatedly, Adichie in her novel, *Americanah*, demonstrates the intricacies of gender problems within the contexts of race, color, and migration. Through the experiences of Ifemelu and other female characters, Adichie presents a cute exploration of the challenges and complexities faced by individuals navigating gender expectations and societal norms. Adichie's narrative confronts the pervasive influence of gender expectations and societal norms on characters' lives and relationships. Ifemelu's observations on gender dynamics within Nigerian society underscore the constraints placed on women, as they navigate traditional roles and expectations. Adichie in her book, *We Should All Be Feminists*, writes, "[a] woman at a certain age who is unmarried, our society teaches her to see it as a deep personal failure. And a man, after a certain age isn't married, we just think he hasn't come around to making his pick" (11). This quote highlights the pressure for women to conform to traditional gender roles and prioritize marriage as a marker of success and fulfillment which illustrates the pervasive influence of patriarchal norms. Interestingly, Ifemelu is subtly urged to settle down as an adult both when she is in the US and when she comes back to Lagos: whereas she initially is reticent to this social pressure, she nevertheless shapes a false imaginary in order not to be negatively judged by the Nigerian society for not being married. Scarsini argues "Despite her final submission to this social pressure, her experience proves how marriage is still at the basis of the social dimension of women, as subtly accused by Adichie in her feminist manifestos" (85).

Conversely, while Fanon primarily focuses on race, he also touches upon the intersection of gender and colonialism, highlighting the ways in which colonial structures influence gender dynamics. In his book, *Black Skin, White Masks*, Fanon postulates:

To a man, colonialism says: you shall not be merely entitled to be. This or that part of you shall be fixed, transformed, and instrumentalized. Here and now, colonialism says, and it goes on to insist, you will be something. Then colonialism approaches the man and says: I shall make you understand that to be a man is to be 'like us,' but even less. (86)

Here, Fanon shows how colonialism imposes rigid gender roles and societal expectations on black men, emasculating them by denying their autonomy and agency. Fanon critiques the colonial construction of masculinity, which devalues black masculinity and seeks to assimilate black men into white standards of manhood.

Furthermore, *Americanah* explores the intersections of gender with other axes of identity, such as race and color, shaping characters' experiences and opportunities. Ifemelu's reflections on her identity as a black woman navigating racial dynamics in America underscore the complexities of intersectionality, as she grapples with the interrelations of gendered racism and sexism. Adichie presumes that "in America, racism existed but it was a minor problem compared to sexism" (339). This extraction is highly suggestive of the ways in which gender intersects with race to shape characters' experiences of oppression and privilege, underscoring the need for an intersectional approach to understanding gender politics. Goksen Kara contends that Adichie's novel "not only offers a broad perspective on the complex relationship between blacks and whites, she also depicts the relationship among black people in various parts of the world. Race and gender are so interlinked in her novel that this situation ultimately pushes black women to the lowest status in society"(317). Noticeably, Adichie's commentary on sexism as more problematic than racism is very applicable to what Fanon theorizes about the fetishization of black women. Fanon elucidates "at the level of the woman, the logic of the monolithism of the colonized is implacable. A thousand times, I am told: 'Black women are so sensual!'" (219). Fanon, too, highlights the sexual objectification and fetishization of black women within colonial and racist societies. The stereotype of the hypersexualized black woman serves to dehumanize and exoticize black women that reinforce patriarchal power dynamics and undermining their agency.

In spite of the challenges of navigating gender expectations and societal norms, *Americanah* also celebrates moments of empowerment and agency within the female characters. Ifemelu's journey towards self-discovery and independence serves as a testament to the resilience and agency of women who defy societal expectations and forge their own paths. Adichie writes, "Ifemelu suddenly felt a new affection for her mother, an affectionate gratitude for the way her mother had accepted her need to leave, for the way she had not burdened her with guilt" (56). Actually, this passage illustrates Ifemelu's appreciation for her mother's support

and understanding which, in turn, highlight the importance of female solidarity and empowerment in navigating gender problems. As shown above in the narrative sequence, Adichie's *Americanah* offers a compelling exploration of gender problems in contemporary society. Adichie challenges traditional gender norms and celebrates moments of empowerment and agency within the female experience through her richly drawn character Ifemelu.

Additionally, Adichie's *Americanah* intricately explores the complex dynamics of gender politics within male-female relationships, shedding light on power dynamics, societal expectations, and the negotiation of agency. Through the experiences of the protagonist, Ifemelu, and other characters, Adichie presents a subtle portrayal of the challenges and tensions inherent in navigating gendered interactions. Significantly, Adichie's narrative confronts the pervasive influence of patriarchal structures on male-female relationships, highlighting the ways in which power dynamics shape interactions and outcomes. Ifemelu's observations on gender roles within Nigerian society underscore the unequal distribution of power and agency between men and women. Adichie narrates, "She knew she would be questioned, perhaps even reprimanded, if she questioned him about the woman" (345). This extraction highlights the expectation for women to defer to men's authority and accept unequal treatment within relationships, illustrating how patriarchal norms perpetuate gender inequality.

Despite the constraints imposed by patriarchal structures, *Americanah* also showcases moments of resistance and assertion of agency within female characters. Ifemelu's interactions with Obinze and other male characters illustrate her refusal to conform to traditional gender roles and her insistence on being treated as an equal partner. Adichie pinpoints, "his gaze rested on her face, as though she were an old and dear friend he had been longing to see" (423). Here, Ifemelu's assertion of agency and autonomy within her relationship with Obinze is obvious. Hence, she challenges traditional gender dynamics and asserts her right to be seen and valued as an individual.

To put this more accurately, it is important to analyze and explore the dynamics of male-female relationships within the context of gender politics. Margaret Koskei argues that "[t]hrough the use of multiple narratives Adichie juxtaposes the male and female experiences, enabling us get her view on gender relations when it comes to overcoming challenges in America and Europe; two

different continents" (22-23). Starting with Ifemelu and Curt relationship, the relationship between Curt and Ifemelu is characterized by complexity, cultural differences, and ultimately, a lack of genuine connection. "And because that real deep romantic love is so rare, and because American society is set up to make it even rarer between American Black and American White, the problem of race in America will never be solved" (299). This quote highlights Ifemelu's discomfort and alienation in America, where she feels acutely aware of her African identity. The cultural gap between her and Curt becomes evident, contributing to their inability to fully connect on a deeper level. In addition, Curt looks down upon Ifemelu as mere sexual object. "He stared at her as though she was an interesting object, not because she was a person but because he had read something about Nigeria in the Economist" (238). Here, the superficial nature of Curt's interest in Ifemelu is evident. He sees her through the lens of her nationality, viewing her as an exotic curiosity rather than a complex individual with her own thoughts and experiences. Elsewhere, Adichie narrates, "Curt had never been with a black woman; he told [Ifemelu] this after their first time, in his penthouse apartment [...] with a self-mocking toss of his head, as if this were something he should have done long ago but had somehow neglected" (200).

This extraction shows an objectification and exoticization of a black woman in America, something that has been seen since the early days of American slave history. B. DuBois claims that race is "a matter of culture and cultural history"(98). They were physical objects, both sexually and materially: a means of work, not human beings. To Curt, he is not just having sex with a woman when he had sex with Ifemelu — he is having sex with a *Black* woman. Haynes refers to the history of the sexual objectification of black women and writes, "cannibalistic dimensions of Atlantic slavery — consumption of people as commodities" (159). In a similar vein, Chandran argues that "[t]he relationship between Ifemelu and Curt can be interpreted as racist. Since white privilege is a privilege that is only available to white men, black women will only date white men. Those who are attracted to exotic cultures date black women, on the other hand"(79). Thus, interracial relationships are often viewed negatively due to stereotypes and prejudice.

Noticeably, African women were initially brought to the United States as commodities, meant to be bought, sold, and consumed as capitalist items. Therefore, George Yancey comments on the interracial relationships and proposes that "white individuals seek out interracial relationships more so than racial

minorities do" (337). As a result, it is not surprising that in *Americanah*, Adichie makes Curt Ifemelu's pursuer, rather than the other way around. More to the point, Landry elaborates, "The degradation of black bodies is foundational to the structure of US society. Whiteness and Blackness are relational and contingent because white advantage cannot be constructed and maintained without black disadvantage" (129).

In a similar vein, Fanon spotlights the intersection of color and gender and writes, "The black [woman] is a toy in the white man's hands. So, in order to break the vicious circle, [she] will have to make an effort upon [herself], and [she] will have to break the circle" (158). Fanon highlights the interconnectedness of color and gender oppression, emphasizing the need for black women to resist both forms of domination. Implicitly, Fanon calls for self-awareness and self-transformation as crucial steps towards liberation from the colonial constructs of patriarchy and racial identity.

Another feature that could mark Curt and Ifemelu's relationship is mismatched expectations. "He could not understand why she wanted to be unhappy, why she did not want to be with him, why she had been so disappointed when he said he wanted to break up" (99). As shown from the narrative sequence, the disconnection between Curt's expectations and Ifemelu's desires is obvious. While Curt may see their relationship as fulfilling and satisfactory, Ifemelu seeks something deeper and more meaningful, leading to their eventual breakup. Ifemelu experiences a sense of uncertainty in her relationship with Curt. She feels a loss or displacement of self following the breakup. This is due to the fact that she was hopeful to fulfill her aspirations of societal ascendance through her relationship with a white man in a white-dominant society. Oby Okolocha offers a possible explanation for this sense of physical displacement and mismatched expectations. Okolocha writes, "The circumstances leading to migration are diverse but many instances of migration are geared towards a desire for something better than what exists in the home nation" (144). After having sex with Rob, Ifemelu finds a way out of her unsatisfying relationship with Curt. On one side the end of their relationship was a possibility better than what she was living through. On the other side, the reality of immigration often quickly shines through, as Okolocha contends, "the young women find that the reality of America greatly differs from their expectations" (145).

Despite of the fact that there is a kind of disconnect between both of them due to the politics of gender and color, Ifemelu suffers an internal psychological conflict after their separation. "But she missed Curt. She missed him. How could she miss him? She did not want to miss him" (137). Here, the extraction encapsulates Ifemelu's internal conflict regarding her feelings towards Curt. Despite recognizing their lack of genuine connection, she still experiences moments of longing and uncertainty, reflecting the complexity of their relationship. More important, however, "It was not that they avoided race, she and Curt. They talked about it in the slippery way that admitted nothing and engaged nothing" (294). This suggests Curt's inability to connect with Ifemelu's race struggle in America. As Fanon rightly infers, "the white partner is unable to endorse, and be sentient of, the black migrant's permanent distress in a Western set-up wherein black humanity is contested" (41). Here, Sih and De Noumedem comment "[t]his means that since Curt has been schooled in the idea of white supremacy/charity toward Blacks, he cannot perceive and understand the plagues that Ifemelu endures daily in America: he is a white and his skin color has never been a source of societal acrimony"(59-60). Significantly, the relationship between Curt and Ifemelu in *Americanah* is characterized by cultural differences, politics of gender and color, superficiality, and a lack of genuine understanding. While initially drawn to each other, their relationship ultimately falls short of fulfilling Ifemelu's deeper emotional needs, leading to their eventual separation.

Conversely, the relationship between Ifemelu and Blaine is complex, marked by intellectual connection, shared values, and ultimately, the challenges of navigating cultural differences and individual growth. "With Blaine, she had felt for the first time that she was part of something bigger than herself, a movement, a cause, a collective struggle. He was her obinze, her boubacar" (197). This quote highlights the intellectual and ideological connection between Ifemelu and Blaine. They share a commitment to social justice and activism, forming a deep bond rooted in their shared values and beliefs. For instance, Barack Obama's presidential campaign became something for Blaine and Ifemelu to connect and bond over during a tumultuous time in their relationship. Susanna Dilliplane breaks down how Obama pulled people into his campaign using rhetorical strategies: "complex historical and contemporary dynamics of African American oratory, Black churches, race relations, and American politics" (132). These are some of the many reasons why his "A More Perfect Union" speech was significant. It does not matter

that Ifemelu is African black and Blaine is American black; they were both Black, and they were able to come behind the policies and campaign goals of a black presidential candidate together.

Moreover, Ifemelu is able, for the first time, to challenge the politics of color and gender. "She had never felt American until she met Blaine. It was as though she had been born again, the day she met him, had become herself, her better self" (181). Implicitly, Ifemelu's sense of identity transformation within her relationship with Blaine is apparent. While their connection is profound, Ifemelu grapples with feelings of alienation and cultural dissonance as she navigates her identity as a Nigerian woman in America. However, Ifemelu suffers a kind of self-struggle with authenticity and self-expression. "She wanted to tell him she was unhappy, but she had not yet figured out if it was his fault" (13). This passage is highly suggestive of Ifemelu's internal conflict and struggle to communicate her feelings to Blaine. Despite their shared values, their relationship is challenged by issues of gender politics, communication, and emotional intimacy which in turn highlight the complexities of romantic partnerships. "She was not sufficiently furious because she was African, not African American" (347). Here, Blaine is upset with Ifemelu's decision not to attend the protest for Mr. White. As Ifemelu observes, the issue here is that Blaine continually expects Ifemelu to have the same emotional attachment to the struggle of black Americans. However, Ifemelu is not a black American, and while she can observe and understand those feelings, they are not hers. Even though most Americans would consider them the same race, this conflation of their backgrounds causes conflict between them. Adichie narrates, "Blaine needed what she was unable to give and she needed what he was unable to give, and she grieved this, the loss of what could have been"(13).

As a result, Ifemelu decides to discover herself as a full human being. The politics of gender prevents her to express herself and her feelings as a woman. "[...] her relationship with him was like being content in a house but always sitting by the window and looking out" (13). This quote reflects Ifemelu's need for solitude and self-reflection as she grapples with her feelings towards Blaine and their relationship. It shows Ifemelu's dissatisfaction with her relationship with Blaine. The image of her "sitting by the window and looking out" underscores her yearning for something missing in her relationship and her life, which leads her to return to Nigeria and seek out her old love Obinze. Their dynamic prompts her to confront her own desires and aspirations, ultimately leading to her journey of self-

discovery and personal growth. While their bond is profound, it is ultimately tested by issues of communication, gender politics, authenticity, and self-expression, highlighting the complexities of romantic relationships in the face of color and gender challenges.

On the contrary, the relationship between Obinze and Ifemelu is a central theme, characterized by depth, connection, and the challenges of navigating love across continents. Obinze and Ifemelu's initial flirtation is so evident. This feeling of contentment that Ifemelu has with Obinze sets up the feeling Ifemelu misses throughout her time as an immigrant in America:

She rested her head against his and felt, for the first time, what she would often feel with him: a self-affection. He made her like herself. With him, she was at ease: her skin felt as though it was her right size. She told him how she very much wanted God to exist but feared He did not, how she worried that she should know what she wanted to do with her life but did not even know what she wanted to study at university. It seemed so natural, to talk to him about odd things. She had never done that before. The trust, so sudden and yet so complete, and the intimacy, frightened her. (65)

This passage highlights the profound connection between Obinze and Ifemelu. They complement each other's personalities and provide support and understanding, forming a strong emotional bond that transcends physical attraction. Implicitly, Ifemelu with Curt and Blaine did not feel herself, as if "she had slipped out of her skin" (205). She soon decides to follow the model of American individuality and self-preservation and return to Obinze, because with him, she is always "self-affectionate," with him, she is "at ease," and "her skin feel[s] as though it [is] her right size" (65). In this respect, Deni argues that "Adichie uses Ifemelu's narrative to repudiate the traditional societal gender roles embraced by males and females and invites her audience to step beyond the biased patriarchal boundaries" (18). Furthermore, Obinze is the only man who Ifemelu feels emotionally attracted to all through her life. Despite their separation, she is still emotionally highly connected to him." Her first love, her first lover, the only person with whom she had never felt the need to explain herself" (12). This extraction is very suggestive of Ifemelu's enduring love for Obinze, despite the physical distance between them. Their separation poses significant challenges, yet their



emotional connection remains unwavering, underscoring the depth of their relationship. Moreover, the moment of reconciliation and reconnection between Obinze and Ifemelu is another evidence of their solid relationship. "They kissed, and their hands touched, and then they did not know where the minutes went, and the past and present merged into a single chaotic present, and they were going to have a future together" (442). Here, this quote depicts the moment of reconciliation and reconnection between Obinze and Ifemelu after years of separation.

Despite the challenges they faced, their love triumphs, and they embrace the possibility of a shared future, reaffirming the strength of their bond. After her unsuccessful relationships that she experiences with both Curt and Blaine, Ifemelu is able to provide a thorough evaluation and appreciation to Obinze as her real match. "She was beginning to imagine a future with him, because she had started to realize that he was the kindest person she had ever met, and also the smartest, and also the most interesting" (461). Here, the aforementioned narrative is very expressive to Ifemelu's growing appreciation for Obinze's qualities and the support he provides. Their relationship empowers Ifemelu to envision a future filled with love and possibility which highlight the transformative power of their connection. Interestingly enough, the relationship between Obinze and Ifemelu is characterized by love, understanding, and resilience. Despite the challenges they face, their bond remains steadfast, serving as a source of strength and support as they navigate the complexities of love, identity, and belonging.

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah* intricately explores the racial identities of its protagonists, Ifemelu and Obinze, shedding light on the complexities of their experiences as black individuals navigating different cultural contexts. Drawing on Frantz Fanon's concept of "white masks" and "black skin," this paper investigates how Ifemelu and Obinze navigate their racial identities in the novel. Indeed, Frantz Fanon's concept of "white masks" refers to the ways in which colonized individuals adopt the cultural norms and values of the colonizer, often at the expense of their own identities. Fanon argues that colonialism imposes a sense of inferiority on colonized peoples, leading them to internalize the beliefs and attitudes of the colonizer, thereby masking their true selves. Conversely, "black skin" represents the racialized identity imposed upon black individuals, serving as a marker of difference and otherness within both colonial and racist societies.

As a matter of fact, Ifemelu's experiences in America highlight her adoption of "white masks" as she navigates the complexities of color and identity in a predominantly white society. Initially, Ifemelu struggles with feelings of insecurity and inadequacy which lead her to internalize the racist attitudes and beauty standards prevalent in American culture. Adichie writes, "She had bought into *Americanah*, into white standards of beauty" (218). Here, Ifemelu's internalization of the dominant white culture's norms and values is clear. However, Ifemelu's journey of self-discovery and empowerment involves shedding her "white masks" and reclaiming her black identity. Through her blog, Ifemelu confronts issues of color and racism head-on, challenging the pervasive influence of white supremacy on societal norms and individual consciousness. Adichie writes, "She became Black again" (472) which signals Ifemelu's rejection of assimilation and embrace of her true racial identity.

Likewise, Obinze's experiences in Nigeria and England also reflect the impact of racial identity on individual consciousness. In Nigeria, Obinze grapples with the constraints of patriarchy and classism, navigating societal expectations based on his black skin. Adichie contends, "In Lagos, he had lived in a world that allowed him to become, and he had become: the world of Lagos money" (30). The previous brief account highlights how Obinze's identity is shaped by his socioeconomic status within Nigerian society.

In England, Obinze encounters the realities of racial discrimination and othering, experiencing firsthand the ways in which his black skin marks him as different and inferior within a predominantly white society. Adichie proposes, "In England, Obinze had become Black. He sat in an office, black, and the people around him sat in the same office, white" (228). This illustrates the stark contrast between his racial identity in Nigeria and England. In short, Adichie skillfully explores the racial identities of Ifemelu and Obinze, drawing on Frantz Fanon's concept of "white masks" and "black skin" to illuminate their experiences. Through their journeys of self-discovery and empowerment, Ifemelu and Obinze navigate the complexities of gender and color, ultimately reclaiming their blackness and rejecting assimilation into dominant white culture. Adichie's portrayal of their racial identities serves as a powerful commentary on the enduring impact of colonialism and racism on individual consciousness and societal structures.

To conclude, both Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah* and Frantz Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks* explore the complex intersections of color, gender, and identity, albeit from different perspectives and contexts. Adichie's novel highlights the experiences of a Nigerian woman navigating race and identity in America, while Fanon's work is a seminal text in postcolonial theory, analyzing the psychological effects of colonialism on Black individuals. One of the shared themes between the two works is the concept of racial identity and its impact on personal relationships. In *Americanah*, Adichie explores how race influences Ifemelu's relationships, both romantically and socially, as she grapples with her Nigerian identity in America. Similarly, Fanon discusses the internalized racism experienced by Black individuals, affecting their self-perception and relationships with others.

Gender also plays a significant role in both texts. Adichie's portrayal of Ifemelu challenges stereotypes of African women and explores how gender intersects with color in shaping her experiences. Fanon, on the other hand, discusses the emasculation of black men and the hypersexualization of black women under colonialism which highlight the intersectionality of color and gender in the construction of identity. Moreover, both works critique the societal norms and structures that perpetuate racial and gender inequalities. Adichie exposes the superficiality of America's "post-racial" narrative and challenges the notion of a colorblind society, while Fanon deconstructs the racial hierarchies imposed by colonial powers and their lasting effects on the psyche of the colonized. Indeed, while Adichie's *Americanah* provides a contemporary narrative of color and identity in the diaspora, Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks* offers a foundational analysis of the psychological implications of colonialism. Together, they offer complementary perspectives on the complexities of color, gender, and identity in today's world.

Eventually, in both works, gender and color influence how the characters are perceived and treated by society. They face discrimination and prejudice based on intersecting factors of color and gender, which shape their self-perception and interactions with others. Additionally, both Fanon and Adichie critique the societal norms and structures that perpetuate these inequalities, calling attention to the need for intersectional analysis in understanding the complexities of identity and oppression. Overall, Fanon's exploration of the psychological effects of colonialism and Adichie's portrayal of the immigrant experience shed light on how

color and gender intersect to shape individual identities and experiences within broader social contexts.

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## افيميلو وأوبينزي وأقنعتهم البيضاء وبشرتهم السوداء: سياسات النوع واللون في رواية

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### المستخلص:

تسلط رواية امريكانا للكاتبة , تشيما ماندا نجوزي أداتشي, الضوء على الهويات العرقية المعقدة لأبطال الرواية إيفيميلو وأوبينزي، كما تسلط الضوء على تعقيدات تجاربهم كأفراد سود البشرة ينتقلون في سياقات ثقافية وأثنية مختلفة. وبتطبيق مفهوم فرانز فانون عن "الأقنعة البيضاء" و"البشرة السوداء"، تتعمق هذه الدراسة في الطرق التي ينتقل بها إيفيميلو وأوبينزي بهوياتهما العرقية الى ثقافات وبلاد مختلفة. في الواقع، يشير مفهوم فرانز فانون عن "الأقنعة البيضاء" إلى الطرق التي يتبنى بها الأفراد المستعمرون المعايير والقيم الثقافية للمستعمر، وغالبًا ما يكون ذلك على حساب هوياتهم الخاصة. يرى فانون أن الاستعمار يفرض شعورًا بالدونية على الشعوب المستعمرة، مما يؤدي بها إلى استيعاب معتقدات ومواقف المستعمر، وبالتالي إخفاء ذواتهم الحقيقية. إلى جانب ذلك، تصور الدراسة أدوار الجنسين (ذكر/ أنثى) وديناميكيات السلطة؛ ومن ثم فإن الدراسة تستكشف كيف تتحدى الشخصيات أو تتوافق مع التوقعات المجتمعية على أساس النوع. وتسلط أيضًا الدراسة الضوء على آثار هذه الديناميكيات والسياسات على العلاقات الشخصية/العاطفية وتحقيق الطموحات المهنية وعلاقة ذلك بمنظور الانسان لذاته. حيث تظهر سياسات اللون في الطريقة التي تواجه بها الشخصيات السوداء أو تستوعب الصور النمطية العنصرية والتمييز العرقي والظلم الاجتماعي. كما تسلط الدراسة الضوء على دور السواد في تشكيل التجارب الفردية والبنى المجتمعية.

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** فانون- النوع- اللون- البشرة السوداء- القناع الأبيض- السواد- العلاقات بين الأعراق.