Racism Migration and Cultural Criticism in Americanah

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The present essay is an attempt to explore the theme of cultural criticism in the novel “Americanah” that is written by “Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie”(Adeyelure & Roux, 2023). The novel unveils the story of Ifemelu, a young African woman who immigrated to the United States to get an education at a university. The novel highlights the life of the protagonist in Nigeria and the United States. In her teenage years, she fell in love with Obinze, who was her schoolfellow. Nigeria during that period was under the influence of the military dictatorship; therefore, the citizens of the country were moving out of the country. She went to the United States to complete her studies and experienced racial discrimination for the first time. Adichie is a Nigerian writer who experiences various racial inequalities in her life; therefore, she picks up the theme of racism to criticize the cultures in the novel. This paper will discuss how racism has allowed the writer to criticize the cultures of America, Nigeria, and England.

Cultural Criticism of Nigeria

Adichie has criticized the culture of Nigeria by focusing on materialism, corruption, and racism in society (Patrizi, 2022). Before migration, Ifemelu was living in Nigeria, and the writer criticized the culture of the country. In Nigeria, thousands of citizens have adopted unfair means to get wealth and money. Dishonesty is highlighted in the Nigerian culture; the unfair means that were used by the people include fraud, bribes, and dating or marrying women of fortune and prestige. Further, the writer has explained through this novel that most Nigerian people are deprived of the necessities of life, but they idealize the lives and whiteness of the Americans. In the Nigerian culture, Ifemelu never considers herself black or inferior to others, but despite this truth, the people of this country want to lighten their skin colour; therefore, it is highlighted in the novel that the racial hierarchy is prevailing in the country.

Racism in the United States and England

Ifemelu moves to the US, the writer considers the issues of racism through the experiences of the protagonists in the country (Alao, 2024). She suffers the prejudices and hatred of the white community towards the coloured people. She realized that race and the colour of the skin are significant elements of life. For the first time, she identified herself as black and was forced to consider the political complexity of the country. Obinze moves to England, where the writer deals with racism in the country through his experiences. Adichie has provided many incidents in the novel that

can be taken as examples of racial inequalities in the country. Obinze was mocked by the people because of his race (Adichie). Further, an important example is Curt, who could not have a relationship with Ifemelu because of the racial differences among them. Next, an example from the text is Aunty Uju, who is rejected by the patients as a doctor because of racial disparities. The Writer also highlights that coloured people want white men to be the managers of their companies because it will bring more revenue to the company.

“Find one of your white friends in England. Tell everybody he is your General Manager. You will see how doors will open for you because you have an Oyinbo General Manager” (Adichie, 38).

Ifemelu’s Blog as Cultural Critique

Moreover, the protagonist of the novel starts a blog on racial inequalities or racism in the country (Mirmotahari, 2024). Throughout the novel, Adichie uses racial posts to criticize the culture of America. The writer has provided insight into the many experiences and incidents of racism with the help of the blog. Ifemelu has written about the varying experiences and suffering of individuals who face racial injustice for the first time in the US.

The writer has explored in the novel that coloured immigrants in the US have different patterns of thinking, but when they live in a racially unequal society, they become conscious of their race and skin colour.

It is explicated in the text as “non-American blacks should avoid arguing when they come to America because no matter where they belong, they were considered only blacks”(Adichie, 40).

Prospects for Challenging Racism

Despite the many examples of racial inequalities in the novel, the writer has also provided a few examples for resolving the racism, such as Nigel, Curt, and Kimberly becoming successful at different levels in their relationship with Obinze and Ifemelu.

In summing up the above discussion, it is found that one of the major aspects of cultures that are criticized in “Americanah” is racism. Through the experiences of the characters, Adichie has highlighted the racial conflicts in Nigeria, America, and England. Nigerian people idealize the whiteness of Americans and try to lighten their dark skin. Ifemelu recognized herself as black when she travelled to the US. Obinze’s experiences in England have highlighted the differences in race in that country. In short, racism is a complex issue in societies that is criticized and justified through the sprawling novel “Americanah” by the writer because she herself suffers from racial clashes in her life.

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