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## Culture and Identity Crisis in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah*

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### Abstract:

In postcolonial African literature, problems of identity and immigration are extremely important. Cultural identity crisis is at the heart of both Chinua Achebe's and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's literary works. Identity and culture distinguish one person from another. Chinua Achebe's and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's literary works deal with the issue of a cultural identity crisis. In contemporary African writing, the loss of identity and the search for it has been a recurring issue. Achebe and Adichie redefine the African cultural identity through their literary texts. This research article examines the African culture and identity crisis with reference to Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah*.

**Keywords:** Culture, Identity, Colonialism, Racism, Language, Immigrant

### Introduction:

Achebe and Adichie are the most prominent writers in African literature who have painted the true picture of colonial and postcolonial impacts on Africans and their struggle for existence and identity. Achebe is known as the father of African literature and Adichie is recognized as the literary daughter of Achebe. Furthermore, Colonialism and the impact of colonialism are the dominant themes of the novels of Achebe and Adichie. During the colonial era, Africans started writing in western languages as they were exposed to western languages. Literacy was a big problem in Africa. In spite of this, we found that there are publishing houses exist in African countries such as Ghana, Nigeria, and Zimbabwe. The widest word for postcolonial literature is postcolonialism, which refers to the period of colonialism and its effects. It illustrates the colonised society's identity as it faces the enormous difficulty of forging a national identity after a traumatic event. In postcolonial literature, the hunt for identity has revolved around the key. African fiction is a key example of postcolonial literature since it explores the struggle for the quest for identity. In the Postcolonialism introduction, Marie Rose Napierkowski says that postcolonialism refers to the representation of culture, race, ethnicity, and identity in the modern world where many countries became independent. Moreover, the

West African novel struggled to gain traction in the half-decade leading up to independence and peaked in the half-decade following 1960. It conveys a deep sense of dissatisfaction with the loss of native identity, as well as widespread disappointment and despair. Moreover, culture is connected to identity because membership in certain groups is emotionally binding for individuals, such collective identity forms individual identity. Culture, in short, links individual and collective identities, at the same time it defines potential boundaries between social groups. Cultural differences between groups (religious, gender, linguistic, racial) are the root cause of conflict in society and it is well portrayed in the novels of Chinua Achebe and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie.

### **Culture and Identity Crisis:**

Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* is a great classic of international literature. From Christian missionaries to British colonization. It depicts a traditional community grappling with the arrival of foreign influence. The native people develop a dependence complex resulting in the loss of their innocence and identity. He starts looking upon the coloniser as a master, wittingly or unwittingly, and begins to copy the coloniser's modes, manners, language, and way of life. Even after getting independence, colonialism is not routed out completely, but neocolonialism establishes its prehistoric characteristics.

Cultural Identity Crisis is at the center of the literary art of both the novelists Chinua Achebe and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie. Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* presents Okonkwo's belief in the communal strength of the clan against the cultural dominance of the oppressive colonial power. His trust in his own clan as a community and its culture is shattered into pieces when he returns to Umuofia from exile. He lost his status and identity as a result of colonialism in Nigeria. On his return, he finds himself alien in his clan. He understands that cultural influences changes as political power shifts. The new religion, the new administration, and western culture have become influential in Umuofia, and native culture starts deteriorating. The principal character, Okonkwo in *Things Fall Apart* stands for African traditional culture. Okonkwo's suicide indicates the fall down of the African culture and African identity, which he represents. The sense of alienation forces Okonkwo to commit suicide. The alienation and cultural identity crisis experienced by Okonkwo is identical to that of protagonist Ifemelu in Adichie's novel *Americanah*.

Adichie's novel, *Americanah* is one of the highly praised novels. The novel exposes the Nigerian immigrants and their struggle for identity in America's heartland as they grapple with their postcolonial identities. As a result, the study aims to draw attention to these immigrants' struggle for identity and self-hood. It not only examines blackness in America, Nigeria, and Britain but also a steady-handed dissection of the universal human experiences and explores the themes of identity and globalization. Eventually, Adichie redefines the African female identity as one that is rooted in the African essence while remaining economically and socially autonomous, politically active, and intellectually sophisticated. *Americanah* is set in the United States and depicts the journey of a young Nigerian protagonist Ifemelu who is a new generation of Nigerian

women. Ifemelu is attempting to define her own identity as well as that of his country. She doesn't get a job easily in America.

Each time she went to a job interview, or made a phone call about a job, she told herself that this would, finally, be her day; this time, the waitress, hostess, babysitter position would be hers, but even as she wished herself well, there was already a gathering gloom in a far corner of her mind...She typed and retyped her resume, invented past waitressing experience in Lagos... She smiled warmly and shook hands firmly, all the things that were suggested in a book she had read about interviewing for American Jobs. (Adichie,144-145)

Moreover, Ifemelu, confronts numerous oppressions that characterize her varied ethnic identity. It was revealed that Ifemelu has been subjected to various forms of oppression, as well as how she deals with American perceptions of foreignness and blackness. She was discriminated against for her colour, gender, and social class which did not fit western norms and concepts. Africans face discrimination because they are seen as second-class citizens. However, Adichie presents the problems and struggles of Black immigrants and their Americanization. Adichie and her self-assured protagonist Ifemelu share a lot of similar traits. The diasporic experiences have been shared by Adichie through the protagonist named Ifemelu. The vast majority of the African characters in *Americanah* face racism in the West.

In *Americanah*, racism is manifested through institutional and societal racism. It can also be seen in assumptions about Africa and Africans. Outsiders' attitudes regarding African women in the West can also be seen through the use of dialect. Ifemelu faces bigotry from white American ladies because of her relationship with Curt, her white boyfriend. Ifemelu encounters institutionalized prejudice during her college days, which makes it difficult for her to enroll in a job. The exact reverse happens, and her explanation is that when recruiters learn she is non-American but African, they become reserved. Ifemelu challenges a woman who claims that race was never an issue during her three-year relationship with a white man in California. Ifemelu confronts her and tells her that she was lying. Ifemelu spoke intelligently and wisely about racism. She proclaims:

I came from a country where the race was not an issue; I did not think of myself as black in America and you fall in love with a white person, race doesn't matter when you are alone together because it is just you and your love. But the minute you step outside, race matters. But we don't talk about it. (Adichie, 290)

Adichie believes in having strong ties to one's homeland. Her statement alluded to her strong links to her homeland. Adichie is a staunch proponent of women's rights. She believes that downtrodden women should be liberated from society's oppressive structures. She recognises the need for them to make a shift and leave repressive environments in order to achieve self-fulfillment. Ifemelu has lived in America for thirteen years, with a decent job, a thriving blog, a home, and American citizenship, but she has voluntarily returned to Nigeria. Despite a great desire to return home, she has established a thriving career in the United States.

Thus, Achebe and Adichie's protagonists are compared with reference to the quest for identity. The loss of identity due to brutal colonial rule proved to be a unifying platform for the people of Africa. Achebe and Adichie presented the loss of African Culture in their novels. They have described certain losses that are almost impossible to be made up for; the loss of culture, traditions, values, family feelings, humanity, love for the nation, for the people, and ultimately the big loss of identity because of alienation. For both Achebe and Adichie, the word postcolonial did not seem to be so encouraging and unifying as it reflected the black image of colonialism.

### Conclusion:

Chinua Achebe and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie stand for the sustenance of indigenous culture, tradition, and ancestral values, as the mark of identity. Their zeal for decolonisation paves the way for an assertion of black identity and culture. In response to an attack on their culture and identity in the early postcolonial era, Achebe and Adichie committed themselves to preserving, sustain, and upholding the values of African tradition and culture.

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