

Americanah Study Guide

Americanah by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie

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Plot Summary

Americanah, by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, is the story of young lovers Ifemelu and Obinze who meet as teenagers growing up in Nigeria. They form an instant bond, but when Ifemelu moves to America, Obinze is unable to go with her. He eventually moves to England where he stays as an illegal immigrant. The two are separated by distance, time, and Ifemelu's silence due to a traumatic experience. While their lives are separate, they face many of the same hardships as they encounter issues of race for the first time and seek to find their identities.

As the novel begins, Ifemelu is in America and preparing to return to Nigeria after 15 years. She is having her hair braided at Mariama African Hair Braiding in preparation for her trip. While she is there, Ifemelu's story is told in a series of flashbacks.

Ifemelu grows up in Nigeria with her mother and father. Her mother is a religious woman and her father is an intelligent man who regrets never having had the opportunity to pursue an education. Also in Ifemelu's life as a girl is her Auntie Uju, an intelligent woman who dreams of being a doctor, but chooses instead to be the mistress of a wealthy man called The General who pays for Uju's elaborate lifestyle leaving her completely dependent on him.

While in high school, Ifemelu meets Obinze and the two begin dating. They decide to attend the same college in Nigeria, but when constant faculty strikes threaten Ifemelu's educational future, she decides to move to America where Auntie Uju and her son Dike fled to after The General's death. Obinze plans to go to America when he finishes college, but is unable to because of travel restrictions due to terrorism.

Ifemelu lives with Auntie Uju during her first summer in America and forms a close bond with Dike. That summer she begins to see how different America is from Nigeria and from what she had expected from watching American television shows.

When Ifemelu leaves for college Auntie Uju arranges for her to use the identity of a friend so that she can find work since she is not able to legally work under her student visa. Ifemelu applies for many different kinds of jobs, but is unable to find work. Finally, when she is running out of money, she takes a job that requires her to degrade herself. Afterward, she is so ashamed that she is unable to talk to Obinze and the two lose contact.

Ifemelu is eventually hired to be a nanny for Kimberly, a wealthy white woman. Ifemelu meets Kimberly's brother, Curt, and they begin a romantic relationship. She is happy with Curt and he treats her well, but it is during this time that she begins to encounter challenges due to her race and immigrant status. For a time, Ifemelu tries to blend in by taking on an American accent.

Meanwhile, Auntie Uju has graduated from college and is now a doctor. She marries Bartholomew who is lazy and indifferent toward Dike. Dike struggles with his identity



and is one of the only black students in his school, making him feel singled out. Uju does not tell Dike about his true heritage, instead telling him that he has her last name because she was a second wife. She does not want him to identify with Black American teenagers.

Curt helps Ifemelu to get a job in communications when she graduates from college and the company she works for helps her to get her citizenship papers. When she begins the interview process for the job, Ifemelu relaxes her hair to increase her chances of getting the job. This eventually leads to her cutting off her damaged hair and reclaiming her natural hair and is the start of her desire to write her own blog about her observations on race in America.

While Ifemelu is in America, Obinze travels to England with his mother and stays there illegally. He, too, is forced to take on another identity to get a job there. He pays to have a marriage to a citizen arranged so that he can obtain his papers, but is deported before the marriage can take place. When he returns to Nigeria, he begins working for a Chief and becomes a wealthy businessman.

Back in America, Ifemelu breaks up with Curt and begins dating Blaine who is a Black American. Blaine holds himself to a high standard and expects the same from Ifemelu. The two break up for a time when she fails to attend a protest he has arranged. When they reconcile, the only thing they have in common is the desire to see Obama elected president. The relationship ends for good when Ifemelu returns to Nigeria.

Ifemelu emails Obinze and tells him she is returning to Nigeria, but Dike's suicide attempt delays her return. When she finally gets there, she takes a job at a magazine, but isn't happy there. This leads her to start a new blog about the important issues she sees around her in Nigeria.

Ifemelu and Obinze reunite and Obinze must make a decision about whether or not to leave his wife, Kosi, and his daughter to be with Ifemelu. He finally decides to end his marriage and the novel ends with Obinze arriving at Ifemelu's apartment to tell her this.



Part 1: Chapters 1-2

Summary

Americanah by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie is the story of Ifemelu and Obinze, two young Nigerians who are deeply in love, but have dreams of a bigger life outside of Nigeria. The novel follows their stories as Ifemelu moves to America to pursue an education while Obinze travels to London when he finds himself unable to follow Ifemelu to the United States.

Chapter 1 begins with Ifemelu in Princeton waiting for a train to take her to Trenton to get her hair braided. Ifemelu likes Princeton and regrets that she has to go to Trenton to find an African hair braiding salon. As she travels to the salon, she thinks about the blog she writes and that she would normally be looking for an encounter that she could use as inspiration for a blog post. However, she is closing her blog because she is moving back to Nigeria in spite of the success she's found in America.

Ifemelu arrives at Mariama African Hair Braiding and it is a run-down shop with a broken down air conditioner. Her braider, Aisha, questions why Ifemelu doesn't relax her hair. Ifemelu responds by saying she likes it the way God made it and proceeds to comb through it with a comb she's brought from home. A Nigerian film is playing on the shop television and when Aisha says she likes Nigerian films, Ifemelu thinks how good it is to hear someone say something positive about Nigeria.

When Aisha learns Ifemelu is Igbo, she wants Ifemelu to talk to her two boyfriends who are Igbo and convince one of them to marry Aisha. As Ifemelu sits in the chair, she sends an email to Obinze to tell him she's moving back to Nigeria. Aisha is shocked that a woman who has been in America for 15 years would move back to Nigeria. Ifemelu casually says she's going back to America to see her man.

Chapter 2 focuses on Obinze who is sitting in the back of his expensive car in busy Lagos traffic when the email from Ifemelu arrives, which makes Obinze very happy. His wife, Kosi, calls and asks where he is as she always does when she calls. When he arrives home, Kosi is dressed for the party they are attending at Chief's house. Chief is Obinze's employer. Kosi and Obinze talk about his day and he thinks about how Kosi is only concerned that her life stays the way it is. Obinze is employed by Chief because he persistently hung around Chief until an opportunity presented itself and he was able to make a good business deal that led to his hiring. At the party, Kosi is approached by several people who tell her where she should take her daughter for schooling. She agrees with all of them to avoid conflict.

Obinze finds himself touching his Blackberry and wishing he could go home to send an email to Ifemelu. He remembers running into Ranyinudo at the mall and how she fawned over him because of his new wealth. When Obinze and Kosi get home from the party, Obinze is hungry so Kosi asks their housegirl to bring him food. Kosi is very



paranoid about housegirls because she is afraid they will seduce her husband. Obinze retreats into his study and listens to music he once listened to with Ifemelu while writing her an email. He makes no mention of Kosi in the message.

Analysis

The opening section of *Americanah* introduces the reader to the protagonists of the story, Ifemelu and Obinze. Ifemelu is a Nigerian woman who has relocated to America where she has become a successful blogger and has completed a fellowship at Princeton, an Ivy League university. She likes her life in America and feels a sense of satisfaction at what she has accomplished there, going so far as to say that her life in Princeton feels a bit like she's been admitted into a private club. This statement hints at a feeling of superiority, which will resurface as a source of unease in Ifemelu's life as the novel progresses.

The theme of identity emerges in this section and the reader learns that Ifemelu places a priority on maintaining her African identity as she goes to an African hair braiding shop to have her hair braided rather than using relaxers as many African American women do. When her braider, Aisha, asks why Ifemelu doesn't use relaxers on her hair, Ifemelu responds that she likes her hair the way God made it. She even brings out her own comb from home to comb through her hair when Aisha seems to find it difficult to deal with. This is a foreshadowing of a major plot point that takes place later in the novel and centers around Ifemelu's hair, leading to the creation of her blog. Ifemelu places a great importance on her natural hair and looks at it as a link to her life in Nigeria and her identity as a Non-American Black. The author uses hair as a symbol for identity, which becomes more readily apparent as the book progresses.

Ifemelu writes a blog called *Raceteenth* or *Various Observations About American Blacks (Those Formerly Known as Negroes)* by a Non-American Black. The focus of the blog is on what it is like to be identified as Black in America and the difference between being a Black American and a Non-American Black. The blog posts stem from things Ifemelu sees around her as she goes about her life. She sometimes strikes up conversations with strangers to see if they might lead to a good topic for the blog. This detail indicates that Ifemelu is a curious, outgoing person who isn't afraid to go outside her comfort zone in pursuit of her interests.

Aisha is in awe of Ifemelu and clearly impressed by this successful woman who has "made it" in America. For Aisha, Ifemelu is a symbol of what her life could be in America if she could just get her papers. Aisha's two boyfriends are Igbo like Ifemelu, but they try to tell Aisha that they can't marry her because she isn't Igbo. When Aisha learns that this successful woman in her salon chair is also Igbo, she is certain that Ifemelu can convince one of her boyfriends to marry her.

As Ifemelu sits in the salon chair, she thinks about Obinze, a man she grew up with in Nigeria and whom she was in love with during her high school and university years. At



this point in the story, the reader does not know why the two stopped communicating, but it's clear that Ifemelu still has feelings for Obinze.

Although Ifemelu has lived in America for fifteen years and has a good life there, she has made the decision to move back to Nigeria. The salon girls are surprised to hear this as they left Africa for a better life in America. They can't quite imagine why anyone would want to return. Ifemelu has found that she misses her life in Nigeria. She is pleased to hear the salon girls say that they like Nigerian films because she so seldom hears anyone say anything good about Nigeria, a place she loves and still thinks of as home.

Obinze receives Ifemelu's email while he is sitting in the back of a Range Rover on his way home. Obinze is apparently a wealthy man since he rides around in a nice vehicle and has a driver. The fact that he has not always been wealthy is alluded to, but the reader is not given enough detail to know what Obinze's past entails. He has been in England and struggled to find work when he returned to Nigeria, which indicates he probably was not in England for an education.

Obinze is a persistent man as is evident from the way he finally gained employment with Chief. He continuously makes himself available and sticks around until the right opportunity presents itself, and then he offers to help Chief. He's also a risk taker since he makes a real estate deal that others apparently weren't willing to undertake.

This section perhaps tells the reader more about Obinze's marriage to Kosi than about Obinze himself. First, he's thrilled to receive an email from his old lover, Ifemelu and he checks his BlackBerry throughout the night hoping for another message from her. This indicates that perhaps he isn't entirely happy in his marriage. Kosi is a beautiful woman, a good mother, and a good wife – everything a man should want, but Obinze is sometimes irritated by the way she never challenges him on anything. She is content to simply not have anything change. Kosi is also clingy and insecure, so perhaps she knows the marriage isn't stable. She worries that the housegirl they employ will seduce Obinze and she keeps tabs on Obinze by telephone throughout the day and always starts her calls with "where are you?" as though he might be somewhere he shouldn't be. Obinze, on the other hand, isn't bothered by whether or not Chief may have propositioned Kosi. He wonders about it, but it doesn't seem to concern him since he doesn't ask Kosi about it and doesn't act protectively toward her when Chief is around.

Discussion Question 1

Why is Ifemelu's hair so important to her?

Discussion Question 2

What is the state of Obinze's marriage to Kosi?



Discussion Question 3

Why are the women in the hair braiding shop surprised to hear that Ifemelu plans to return to Nigeria

Vocabulary

tranquil, stately, organic, peculiar, dreadlocked, martyrs, amorphous, blog, epiphany, cornrows, coaxing, cope, immigrant, infuriating, intellectual, reeling, principle, modesty, conform, paranoia



Part 2: Chapters 3-9

Summary

Chapter 3 begins with Ifemelu still at the braiding shop. Mariama goes to pick up food and while she is gone Aisha calls her boyfriend Chijioke who says he will come to meet Ifemelu. Ifemelu protests and Aisha says she must speak Igbo to Chijioke, but then questions whether or not Ifemelu still knows Igbo, which offends Ifemelu.

The storyline then shifts the past and focuses on Ifemelu's upbringing in Nigeria. Her mother's hair is very beautiful and a point of pride, but when Ifemelu is 10 years old her mother cuts it all off saying that she's been saved and the family will now begin attending a new church. After that, Ifemelu's mother is a different woman who no longer laughs or sings. Ifemelu's mother is very religious and prays for The General who she refers to as Auntie Uju's mentor rather than admitting he's Uju's lover. Auntie Uju's relationship with The General is a source of gossip since she is obviously living a higher lifestyle than her own income would afford. Ifemelu's mother says the gifts

Ifemelu's father is fired from his job because he refuses to call his new boss Mummy. He is unable to find work. He becomes depressed and very quiet, no longer showing off the intelligence he had once been so proud of. The family is unable to pay their rent and the landlord comes to tell them they owe three months' rent.

When the landlord leaves, Ifemelu's mother invites her husband to join her at church and then go with them to see Auntie Uju's new house on Dolphin Island. He refuses and Ifemelu's mother comments that Uju is fortunate to be able to afford such a nice house. Ifemelu points out that Auntie Uju isn't paying for the house which irritates her mother. At church, Ifemelu gets into a disagreement with Sister Ibanabo mainly because Sister Ibanabo reminds her of her own mother using religion to hide her own desires. When she returns home, she is scolded for embarrassing her mother. Auntie Uju talks to Ifemelu about it and reminds her she doesn't have to say everything she thinks.

Chapter 4 focuses on Obinze and Ifemelu meeting for the first time. Obinze has just moved to Lagos from Nsukka where his mother was a professor at the university. Obinze immediately fits in and becomes one of the popular boys. Obinze attends a party at Kayode's house where he is supposed to be Ginika's date, but he and Ifemelu feel an immediate connection and spend the evening talking. They become an inseparable couple after that.

In Chapter 5 Ginika is preparing to move to America. Ginika doesn't want to go, but her friends think she is lucky. They gather at her house and talk about which of them is lucky enough to have their own American passport. Emenike says he doesn't have a passport now, but his father has promised him one when he goes to America for university. The other kids know that his family could never afford to send him to America. Ifemelu doesn't want to admit to Obinze that she doesn't have a passport. Her



family doesn't have as much money as the other students' families. She is only able to attend the same school because she did so well on her exams and her father insisted she go to a good school. Obinze fits in better with the other kids than Ifemelu does. He is very knowledgeable about America and reads American books. Ifemelu sometimes feels like their relationship will end because she has so little in common with him.

Ifemelu goes to Obinze's house and meets his mother. Obinze's mother is sophisticated and she and Obinze have an atypical parent-child relationship, acting more like friends. When Obinze's mother leaves the house one day while Ifemelu is there, she and Obinze go to his bedroom and lay on his bed kissing and touching. When Obinze's mother returns, she realizes what has been happening and takes Ifemelu aside to talk to her about safe sex, saying she must be the responsible one.

Chapter 6 begins by further describing Aunt Uju's relationship with The General. Aunt Uju spends weekday evenings with The General, but is free to lounge around on the weekends because The General is with his wife. She is mindful of her looks and uses expensive products to help her skin look lighter. Her house has many amenities that Ifemelu's doesn't. Ifemelu tries to convince her parents to let her stay with Uju during the week, but her father refuses even though her mother is for the idea.

The landlord comes again and demands two years' rent. Ifemelu goes to Aunt Uju for help and is surprised to learn that Uju has no money of her own. However, she goes to The General who gives her the money. Ifemelu is worried for Uju because she is so dependant on The General.

Aunt Uju becomes pregnant with The General's child. The General is happy about the baby and sends Uju to America to give birth there. Uju names the baby Dike and gives him her surname instead of The General's. The General helps throw an elaborate first birthday party for Dike and dies the next week in a plane crash. His relatives force Uju and Dike to move out of the house and they go to America.

In Chapter 7 Ifemelu and Obinze are filling out forms for university. They both go to university in Nsukka to be closer to Obinze's mother. Ifemelu likes Nsukka because she feels like she fits in better there. However, the faculty is often on strike because the government fails to pay them. When Ifemelu thinks she is pregnant, Obinze's mother steps in to help and they discover she has appendicitis. Obinze's mother again cautions her to be the responsible one in the relationship.

At the start of Chapter 8, Aunt Uju has been in America for four years. She encourages Ifemelu to come to America to continue her education there because the faculty at the university in Nsukka is on strike so often. Ginika helps Ifemelu apply to school in the Philadelphia area and when she is accepted Obinze tells her to go. He will follow her when he has finished university.

The beginning of Chapter 9 returns to the present day with Ifemelu still having her hair braided. The women in the shop talk about a young customer who has just left. The customer has two children. They say that girls in America learn about sex too soon and



that would never happen in Africa. The shop is very hot and it reminds Ifemelu of her first summer in America so the focus shifts again to the past.

Ifemelu spends the first summer at Auntie Uju's house where she forms an immediate connection with Dike who is in first grade. He introduces her to his Hispanic babysitter. Ifemelu is confused by the term "Hispanic" and it later becomes the inspiration for a blog post, which is included in this chapter. Auntie Uju suggests she take care of Dike for the summer and look for work using a friend's Social Security number when she starts school since she won't be able to work using her student visa.

Ifemelu goes grocery shopping with Uju and notices she only buys what is on sale instead of what she needs. She also notices that Uju acts differently around white people and admonishes Ifemelu for speaking Igbo to Dike. Uju is tired and tells Ifemelu she thought her life would be better by now.

Analysis

This section of the book provides a look at Ifemelu and Obinze as adolescents. Ifemelu's young life is largely influenced by three major players: her mother, her father, and Auntie Uju.

Ifemelu's mother is an attractive woman with particularly beautiful hair. Her hair is so striking that Ifemelu feels like it sometimes overshadows her. People comment on it frequently and her father thought of it as his wife's "crowning glory." Ifemelu's mother relaxed her hair, which made people ask her if she were perhaps Jamaican because hair like that could not have come from Africa. Because her mother's hair was so pretty, Ifemelu's memory of her mother cutting it all off is vivid. Her mother's hair was her identity, so when she cuts it off, it's as though she is removing a part of herself instead of just her hair. Indeed, this act leads to a change in her personality from a woman who sings and smiles to a woman who is a religious fanatic whose life revolves around prayer and fasting. This incident serves to further develop the theme of identity and hair as a symbol of identity in the novel. Her mother's change after cutting her hair no doubt influences Ifemelu's own feelings about her own hair later in the novel. A large part of Ifemelu's personal identity lies in her hair. She associates her natural hair with her life in Africa and her identity as an African woman. Perhaps the great importance Ifemelu places on her hair and what it says about her is tied to the fact that her mother's hair was once such a great part of her own identity. When she cut it off, she cut away the piece of herself. Ifemelu is determined not to lose that part of her that is African.

In many ways, Ifemelu's mother hides behind religion. She explains away the gifts Auntie Uju receives as The General's mistress as gifts from God because it's easier to do so than to accept that Uju is essentially prostituting herself to gain the type of lifestyle she wants. When Ifemelu's mother wants to make a change in her life from one church to another she claims an angel appears to her and tells her to do so, thus indicating she cannot take responsibility for her own actions and choices.



Ifemelu loves her mother, but her love is complicated by the way she feels about her mother's inability to cope with life through any other lens but religion. When Sister Ibanabo tries to get Ifemelu to make garlands for an important man, she refuses in part because Sister Ibanabo reminds her of her mother and the way she uses religion to disguise her own desires. There is obviously some animosity in Ifemelu's feelings toward her mother.

Ifemelu's father plays a smaller part in Ifemelu's development, but an important part nonetheless. He is a proud man who places a great value on education. He speaks in a manner that would suggest he is more highly educated than he actually is. This bothers Ifemelu as she isn't one to pretend or put on airs—she simply is who she is. But, because he places a great importance on education, he sees to it that Ifemelu attends a good school, which ultimately leads to her going to America to receive a college education.

The third major player in Ifemelu's adolescent years is Aunt Uju. The two are incredibly close when Ifemelu is young. The family stories have it that only Aunt Uju could calm Ifemelu when she was a fussy toddler. Uju is an intelligent woman who aspires to be a doctor. She is Ifemelu's confidant as she grows up and someone that Ifemelu looks up to. Ifemelu is not fooled by Aunt Uju's relationship with The General, though. She knows that Aunt Uju's lavish lifestyle is a result of her being mistress to a wealthy and powerful married man. This is evident in the fact that she asks Uju why her mother must always say The General's gifts are from God.

Ifemelu's view of Aunt Uju is somewhat tarnished when she discovers that Uju's bank account is empty. Up to this point, she hadn't really realized how powerless Aunt Uju is as a result of her dependence on The General. She is frightened for Uju, which Uju laughs off. Her fear foreshadows Aunt Uju's predicament when The General dies and Uju is forced to flee to America.

When Ifemelu finally arrives in America at Aunt Uju's urging, she finds that Aunt Uju is no longer the beautiful, fearless woman she seemed to be in Nigeria. She has been working three jobs and struggling mightily to get through medical school while raising Dike. Ifemelu is surprised by how exhausted and unhappy Uju is and how difficult her life in America is. She seems to feel a bit misled by Uju and by her own dream of what America will be like.

The other major focus of this section of the novel is the budding relationship between Ifemelu and Obinze. Their courtship is a typical teenage romance. They meet at a party and it's love at first sight. Their lives revolve around one another from that point on.

Obinze is a confident young man who is fiercely intelligent and a lover of books. In fact, as the novel progresses, books will become Obinze's touchpoint for his life back home and become a symbol of a better life. He is obsessed with life in America and, among their friends, is considered something of an expert on the subject. Although he's the new boy at school, he fits in better with the other students because, like the other students,



he comes from a higher economic class than Ifemelu does. Their differences due to economic status are the emergence of class as a theme in the novel.

Obinze's relationship with his mother is very different from Ifemelu's relationship with her mother. Obinze's mother is a college professor and the two have more of a friendship than a mother-son relationship. Although Obinze's mother is highly educated and wealthier than Ifemelu's family, she never treats Ifemelu as second-class. She is welcoming and kind and speaks to Ifemelu as though she were her own daughter, even going so far as to give her advice on birth control when Ifemelu and Obinze reach that point in their relationship. Even Ifemelu's fear that she may be pregnant doesn't change the way Obinze's mother treats her.

Another point of interest in this section of the novel is the emergence of the hair braiders in Mariama's salon as commentators on life in America. When Ifemelu says she has an organic bar with her to eat, they nod their heads knowingly and Aisha comments that Ifemelu has been in America for fifteen years, which is meant to explain why she would eat such a thing. They also talk about how girls in America are more sexually advanced than they are in Africa.

Race also begins to emerge as a theme. It is in this section that the reader get a first glimpse at the types of blog posts Ifemelu writes. Her commentary on race isn't confined only to what it's like to be black, but also looks at the complexities of race in America. She is intrigued by just what it means to be Hispanic, since there are some many sections of the population that can fit into that category.

Discussion Question 1

Compare and contrast Ifemelu's relationship with her mother with Obinze's relationship with his mother. How might Ifemelu be different if she'd been raised by Obinze's mother?

Discussion Question 2

Why is Ifemelu so shocked to learn that Auntie Uju has no money of her own? How does this revelation change the way she feels about Auntie Uju?

Discussion Question 3

Why does the author tell the story as Ifemelu is sitting in the hair braiding shop? What purpose does this structure serve? What purpose do the hair braiders serve in telling the story?

Vocabulary

bounteous, demeanor, dour, placating, affluent, imprudent, pious, insubordination, half-caste, regime, impending, mesmerized, ignominy, gossip, tense, strike, tuition, scruffy



Part 2: Chapters 10-16

Summary

Chapter 10 describes Ifemelu's first summer in America. She spends her days watching Dike and sitting with their neighbor, Jane, who is a young woman from Grenada. Jane tells Ifemelu the biggest difference she's seen in America is in the raising of children because it's harder to control them in America. When Jane's husband makes a pass at Ifemelu, she avoids both of them and spends her time with Dike making up games. When she discovers that Dike is not yet learning long division, she decides to teach him.

Ifemelu also spends that summer discovering how different food in America is. Dike finds it strange that people in Nigeria eat bananas with peanuts. Ifemelu is also captivated by American commercials and the evening news. The evening news frightens her because there is so much reporting on crime and violence. In Nigeria, the news was full of army officers giving speeches and cutting ribbons. Aunty Uju says Nigeria has crime, too, they just don't report it.

In Chapter 11, Aunty Uju tells Ifemelu she's met a Nigerian man named Bartholomew who wants to settle down. When Bartholomew comes to visit, he treats Dike with indifference and acts as though he is evaluating Uju's potential as a wife. Ifemelu does not like him. When he comments on a woman on television wearing a short dress and says women in Nigeria would never dress like that, Ifemelu tells him that's not true and girls in Nigeria wear even shorter dresses. That night, Ifemelu tells Uju that in Nigeria a man like Bartholomew wouldn't even be brave enough to talk to a woman like Uju. Uju shrugs and says he's not bad and has a good job.

Aunty Uju passes her medical exams and says she'll have to take her braids out and relax her hair for interviews. Ifemelu feels like Uju has left a part of herself behind in Nigeria.

Ifemelu leaves for college and as she looks at the license and Social Security card of the woman she's meant to impersonate to get a job, she says to Aunty Uju that the woman doesn't look like her. Aunty Uju says it doesn't matter because to white people they all look the same.

In Chapter 12, Ginika is waiting at the bust station when Ifemelu arrives in Philadelphia. Ginika, who looks very different, speaks in Nigerian English as though trying to convince Ifemelu she hasn't changed. She tells Ifemelu that in America she is supposed to be offended by people who call her half-caste even though that was a compliment in Nigeria.

Ifemelu and Ginika go dress shopping. There are two salespeople in the store, one is black and the other is white. When they take a dress up to the cashier, the cashier asks



which salesperson helped them. They go through a series of questions to determine which salesperson it was and when they leave the store, Ifemelu asks Ginika why the cashier didn't just ask if it was the black girl or the white girl. Ginika tells her that in America they aren't supposed to notice such things.

Ifemelu moves into a shabby apartment with three other girls. Ifemelu doesn't fit in with these girls who live with such certainty, buying things whenever they want them. She also doesn't understand some of the cultural norms. She's invited to go to a party and is surprised when her roommates don't dress up. The topic of how people in America dress becomes the topic of a blog post in which Ifemelu observes that Americans are so self-fulfilled that they don't bother about how they look to other people.

Chapter 13 finds Ifemelu struggling to find employment. She has some trouble at first remembering to use the name of the person's whose identity she has borrowed. She applies for many jobs and has no luck. Ifemelu's money begins to run out and she receives a letter telling her she must pay her tuition or her records will be frozen. When she calls Obinze and tells him this, he advised her to get on a payment plan. She finds their phone conversations calming and feels like she can just be herself with him. She also continues to call Dike and when she receives a piece of junk mail with her name on it, she tells Dike about it because it makes her feel somehow less invisible.

In Chapter 14, Ifemelu registers for her college classes. The woman at the registration desk speaks very slowly to Ifemelu as though she doesn't understand English. Ifemelu realizes it's because of her accent and so begins to practice speaking with an American accent.

Ifemelu finds her classes to be very easy, but still struggles to understand America. Obinze suggests she read American books to learn more. She begins to spend a great deal of time at the library, which she loves because the books are in good condition unlike in Nigeria. She writes letters to Obinze about the books she's read and finally understands the power books have over him. Obinze tells her she is starting to sound more American.

In history class, Ifemelu watches *Roots*. The class discusses the movie and an African student asks why the word "nigger" was bleeped out since it's a word that has caused a lot of people pain and it's insulting to remove it. This incites a passionate discussion. Ifemelu approaches the woman who started the conversation and is invited to attend a meeting of the African Students Association (ASA). Ifemelu feels at home at the meetings surrounded by people who understand her experience. There is also a Black Student Union, but that is for Black Americans. Ifemelu wonders which club Dike will attend when he is in college.

Aunty Uju calls Ifemelu and tells her she and Dike are moving to Manhattan with Bartholomew. Uju says she and Bartholomew will be going to court to get married so Bartholomew can act as Dike's legal parent.



In Chapter 15, Ifemelu responds to an ad for an assistant for a tennis coach. When she meets him, she discovers he is looking for someone to help him relax with sexual favors. She tells the man she'll think about it and leaves. She continues to apply for many different jobs, including a job as a nanny for a woman named Kimberly that Ginika did some charity work with. She is unsuccessful in finding a job and her roommates leave her notes reminding her that she needs to pay her portion of the rent.

Ifemelu finally goes to the tennis coach's house in desperation and is paid for allowing him to touch her. Afterward, she falls into a deep depression and stops communicating with Obinze. Ginika calls her to ask what is going on since Obinze and Uju have been calling her. She also tells Ifemelu that Kimberly called asking for Ifemelu's number because she has decided to hire her as a babysitter.

At the beginning of Chapter 16 Kimberly gives Ifemelu a signing bonus because Ginika has told her about Ifemelu's recent challenges. Ifemelu is able to pay some bills and send gifts to her parents. She hasn't spoken to Obinze and deletes his emails. She tells herself she'll give herself a month to feel better and then contact him.

While Ifemelu is babysitting at Kimberly's one day, a carpet cleaner arrives. He is hostile toward her at first, but changes when Ifemelu indicates she is not the homeowner. This incident is the basis for a blog post in which Ifemelu remarks that it wouldn't have mattered to the man if she'd had a lot of money, she was not his idea of the person that should own that home because of the way she looks.

Ifemelu calls Aunt Uju's house to speak with Dike and Aunt Uju tells her that Dike has been asking about his name. He asks if he has his mother's surname because his father didn't love him. Ifemelu suggests it's probably time to tell Dike that Uju was not a second wife. Since moving to Manhattan Dike has changed. He's no longer transparent and his grades are dropping. The school tells Uju that Dike is aggressive and needs to go to special ed classes where they are trained to deal with him. Uju tells the school he is not aggressive and that they are blaming him just because he looks different.

Analysis

Ifemelu begins to see just how different America really is from Nigeria in this section of the book. One of the differences she encounters is the way children are raised. Jane talks about how much more difficult it is to raise children in America because it is, according to Jane, more difficult to control children in America. This comment isn't fully explained, so it's left up to the reader to decide just what that means. Jane may mean that parents cannot or do not discipline their children in the same way they do in other countries. This is the most likely explanation since Aunt Uju tells Ifemelu that Jane and her husband are good people because they spank their children just like Nigerians do.

Ifemelu also finds America to be a less formal place than Nigeria. When she is invited to her first college party she dresses in nice clothing. She's surprised to discover that her roommates are planning to attend in their scruffy jeans and casual shirts. Then, when



she's invited out to dinner, she expects the person making the invitation to pay the bill. She's taken aback when she's asked to pay her portion.

Ifemelu is shocked by the television news in America. It seems to her that America must be an extremely violent place where crime is rampant. The news is filled with stories of bad things that frighten Ifemelu. In Nigeria the television news is comprised of self-important people making lofty speeches and cutting ribbons. Auntie Uju laughs when she discovers Ifemelu is disturbed by American news. She points out that there is just as much crime in Nigeria, it's just not reported on the news. Although Ifemelu left Nigeria in search of a better life, it's interesting to note that she has certainly looked at some aspects of her home country through rose colored glasses. Ifemelu is able to see that the government of Nigeria is corrupt and yet she cannot see the crime around her.

Another difference Ifemelu encounters is the food. She is thoroughly confused by the processed hotdog that Dike requests for lunch. The food is so foreign to her that she compares herself to an alien from outer space who wouldn't be expected to know the difference between a hotdog and a sausage. Ifemelu is clearly feeling out of place. Dike finds the foods Ifemelu eats equally as strange. He is amused by the way Ifemelu eats bananas with peanuts. This is the first mention of bananas with peanuts, which the reader will later learn is a symbol of home for Ifemelu. It is a comfort food that reminds her of who she is and where she has come from.

The difference in the way American children are educated in comparison to the education Ifemelu received in Nigeria is what helps her to develop her strong bond with Dike. When Ifemelu discovers that he isn't learning mathematics yet in first grade, she is determined to teach him long division over that summer. They spend many hours together as she teaches him, and while he doesn't always enjoy it, he later admits that math is easy for him as he advances through school because of the time he spent with Ifemelu. That single summer together cements their bond.

After Ifemelu leaves for college, Dike begins to question his identity, and this is one of the major themes of the novel. Throughout the book Ifemelu examines through her blog posts the identities people form for themselves based on the way society sees them. Dike asks his mother about his last name and his father. Auntie Uju lies to him and says he has her last name because she was a second wife. Ifemelu cautions that she needs to tell Dike the truth. Dike's grades at school begin to slip and he develops a shell around himself after moving to Manhattan where he is one of only a few black students in his school. This turn in Dike's personality foreshadows his tragic suicide attempt that occurs later in the novel.

The theme of race is further developed after Ifemelu leaves Auntie Uju's to begin college. One aspect of racial issues that the author explores is how a person's views on race are influenced by the history of their culture. When Ginika picks Ifemelu up at the airport they talk about the fact that the term "half-caste" is an insult in America, but it was considered a compliment in Nigeria. The difference in the perception of the term probably comes from the fact that "half-castes" in American history were often the result of slave women being raped by slave owners and overseers. During one of Ifemelu's



classes, one of her classmates who is a Non-American Black asks why the word “nigger” is beeped out of a broadcast of the movie *Roots*. A heated debate takes place, which centers around the way the word is perceived dependant on the history of the person watching the movie. That event leads to Ifemelu joining the African Students Association (ASA) where the students support one another in becoming acclimated to life in America.

The author also uses Ifemelu’s joining the ASA as a way of further exploring Dike’s own struggle with his identity as both a Black American and African. Ifemelu wonders which of these groups Dike will join when he attends college. The author highlights his unique experience as a young man who moved to America early enough in his life to grow up as an American, yet he is originally from Nigeria and is therefore an African. And, since his mother identifies as African, she has in some ways tried to prevent Dike from becoming to American and from identifying as a Black American.

On another occasion Ginika and Ifemelu go shopping. Ifemelu does not understand why the cashier doesn’t simply ask if Ginika was helped by the white sales representative or the black sales representative. Ginika’s response that you aren’t supposed to notice certain things in America is telling of the author’s views on race relations. Adichie seems to feel that it isn’t actually possible for people not to notice racial differences, regardless of their own ethnicity or background. For example, when a carpet cleaner comes to the house where Ifemelu is working as a nanny, he seems offended that someone who looks like Ifemelu could own such a beautiful house. He’s a working class man, and yet he reacts to Ifemelu based on her race even though she might be the homeowner who would clearly be in a higher economic class than he.

The incident with the carpet cleaner will later become more clear as the author continues to explore the differences between race and class in America versus England through a conversation in which Obinze observes that in America, race seems to be of more importance than class. This is apparently the case since the carpet cleaner is initially offended that a black woman might own such a grand home, but when he discovers they are actually of the same class, he treats Ifemelu with kindness.

Ifemelu’s race is again an issue when she registers for classes. But, this time it’s not simply her darker skin, but the fact that she is not from America that is the problem. When the person at the registration table, Cristina, hears her accent she assumes that Ifemelu is not able to speak English well. Ifemelu has spoken English since she was a child, yet her accent leads Cristina to believe that she must speak slowly so that this foreigner can follow the conversation. This leads Ifemelu to consciously work on adopting an American accent, thus peeling away another layer of her African identity.

Aunty Uju is an excellent example of someone changing her identity and is used extensively in the author’s exploration of identity as a theme. Ifemelu is struck by the change in Uju since she saw her last. She is no longer the stylish, put together woman she was in Nigeria. Now her hair is messily braided, she doesn’t wear earrings, and she looks tired. This is no doubt due to the hardships Uju has endured since coming to America in pursuit of her medical license. She’s been working three jobs in addition to



going to school and raising Dike. Her life has changed considerably since she was The General's kept woman. Ifemelu observes that it's as though Uju has left a piece of herself behind in Nigeria.

Unfortunately, Uju's life has not yet changed for the better and her troubles lead her to look for a man to once again take care of her. Uju's efforts to figure out how she fits into the world as a woman are a part of the author's discussion of the role of women as a theme. Uju is one example the author puts forth and is one of the only women that the reader sees fulfilling a few different options that Ifemelu sees for herself as a woman. One of those roles is as a dutiful wife. When Uju meets Bartholomew she transforms herself to become a dutiful woman who will be good wife material. She cooks for him and treats him with deference even though he doesn't seem to deserve it and is a man who, as Ifemelu points out, would have once been beneath Uju. However, Uju is so interested in finding someone to take care of her again that she ignores the fact that Bartholomew doesn't seem to care for Dike, a fact that angers Ifemelu because she has such a deep relationship with her cousin.

Uju changes her identity again when she gets her medical license, albeit in a smaller way. When Uju realizes she will now have to begin the interview process to get a job, she decides she must take out her braids and relax her hair to make herself more acceptable to prospective employers. She feels the need to leave some of her African identity behind to be successful in America. This again, is an example of how hair is used as a symbol of identity.

Another notable aspect of this chapter is the reality of Ifemelu's American Dream. Ifemelu grew up watching American sitcoms like *The Cosby Show* in which Black Americans lived affluent lives and encountered few issues because of their race. As a result, Ifemelu expects to do the same. These sitcoms symbolize for Ifemelu what life in America is supposed to be. In fact, the expectation of many immigrants is that life will be golden when they reach America, but Ifemelu discovers that it really takes a lot of hard work and hard times to get to her dream. She witnesses this in Auntie Uju, and later lives that out for herself when she cannot find a job. She ends up living in an apartment with three roommates who aren't particularly kind to her just because it's what she can afford, and the apartment itself is not very nice either. Ifemelu finds herself increasingly desperate to earn money to pay her rent and tuition, which leads her to essentially prostitute herself to the tennis coach. She is so traumatized by what she's had to do that she cannot bring herself to communicate with Obinze, which leads to the end of their relationship.

This section of the novel also serves to build and develop the theme of love that will carry through the rest of the story. The theme initially emerged in a very small way when Obinze and Ifemelu first formed a romantic relationship. However, in this section the reader also sees how the love family members have for one another can shape lives. Ifemelu has such a strong bond with Dike that he becomes her touchpoint when her life gets hard. When she makes the decision to degrade herself by visiting the tennis coach, she calls Dike to absorb some of his innocence and steel herself against what she's about to do. Yet, it's her love for Obinze that, in part, leaves her depressed after the



incident. She loves him so much that she can't bear to speak to him after having betrayed him in such a way. She feels as though she is no longer worthy of Obinze's love and ends the relationship with him. This act leads to her life taking a very different path than it might have had she continued her relationship with Obinze.

Dike's life is also shaped by his mother's love for him. Uju loves her son and wants him to have a better life than hers. She believes that she is helping him by denying him the truth about his father and insisting that he retain his African heritage even though he is growing up in America and might better identify with Black Americans of his age. Ultimately, Uju's tight grip on his identity, a grip she maintains out of love, will lead to Dike's suicide attempt

Discussion Question 1

Why does Auntie Uju pursue a relationship with Bartholomew? How has her past influenced her decision to do so?

Discussion Question 2

How does Ifemelu's experience upon first arriving in America differ from what she expected? What differences do you think have the most impact on Ifemelu's perception of America?

Discussion Question 3

What does Ginika mean when she says there are certain things in America that you aren't supposed to notice? Do you agree with her? Why or why not?

Vocabulary

langorous, limpid, conviction, bliss, prying, grandiosely, naivete, exotic, provincial, lassitude, commission, slouchy, calamari, roused, ambled, formidable, abolished, rickshaw, torpid, enmeshed



Part 2: Chapters 17-22

Summary

Part 2: Chapters 17-22

In Chapter 17, Ifemelu decides to stop faking an American accent after taking a telemarketer's comment that she sounds American as a compliment. She speaks without the fake accent for the first time when taking a train to Aunt Uju's house. While on the train she meets a Black American man named Blaine and they spend the trip talking. Blaine gives Ifemelu his phone number, but he never returns her calls.

When Ifemelu arrives at Aunt Uju's house, Uju does nothing but complain. She is being treated badly because of her race and she says Bartholomew is hardly ever home. Dike seems sad and while he and Ifemelu play soccer he tells her that his camp counselor refused to give him sunscreen because the counselor thought he didn't need it because of his dark skin. He says he just wants to be regular like everyone else.

The chapter ends with a blog post about American Tribalism. Ifemelu says in her blog that there are four kinds of tribes in America: class, ideology, religion, and race.

Chapter 18 returns to the present day. Mariama has a new customer who notices a stack of Nigerian magazines and says that Nigerians are known for being criminals. Ifemelu can tell Mariama doesn't like the woman, but when the woman complains about a braid, Mariama graciously redoes the braid. Ifemelu believes that providing customer service is part of Mariama's new American persona. Another customer comes in and tries to draw Ifemelu into a conversation, but she avoids the conversation and thinks about how it was with Curt that she first saw her new American self.

The story again returns to the past. Kimberly introduces Curt and Ifemelu. The two begin to date and Curt tells her he is wealthy and his family has been hoteliers for hundreds of years. Kimberly is happy that the two are dating. Curt tells Ifemelu she is beautiful and he loves her body. She sometimes thinks of Obinze when they are together, but she tries not to compare them. Ifemelu is happy with Curt who spoils her with money and attention.

In Chapter 19, Ifemelu meets Curt's mother who is a stereotypically snobbish wealthy woman. She compliments Ifemelu's eyelashes and Ifemelu thinks she must have tried very hard to find something to compliment.

Ifemelu's life is going well. She is working toward raising her GPA. Curt buys her gifts, purchases her groceries and textbooks, and sends her gift certificates for department stores. He asks her to give up babysitting to spend more time with him, but she says no.

Graduation is drawing near, but Ifemelu isn't certain what she wants to do. Curt sets up an interview for her with a company that will help her get a work visa and start the



process to get a green card. In preparation for the interview, Ifemelu removes her braids and relaxes her hair. The chemicals burn her scalp and Curt is upset that she's done this to herself. She does well at the interview and wonders if things would have gone so well if she'd gone in with her natural hair.

The chapter concludes with a blog post about how everyone in America aspires to be a WASP, but what then, do WASPs aspire to?

Chapter 20 starts with Ifemelu living in Baltimore. Ifemelu has her own apartment, but she spends most of her time at Curt's. She continues to relax her hair and it begins to fall out of the temples. Wambui convinces her to cut her hair and let it go natural. Ifemelu cuts her hair very short and hates it. She is embarrassed by her hair and calls in sick to work the next day.

Ifemelu uses Curt's laptop to look up information about caring for her hair and finds suggestive emails from a white woman Curt met at a conference. He says nothing has happened and the woman knows he has a girlfriend. Ifemelu is hurt and points out that all of his old girlfriends have long flowing hair. She leaves. Curt later comes to her apartment and they reconcile.

Ifemelu calls in sick for three days due to her hair. She begins visiting a website called happilykinkynappy.com and finds inspiration for learning to like her natural hair. One day when she and Curt are at a farmer's market, a black man walks by and quietly asks if she ever wonders why Curt likes her looking "all jungle like that." That night she considers buying a straight weave, but remembers a post on happilykinkynappy.com and decides against it. She goes home and writes a post on the website's board about the incident and receives many supportive comments. She finally falls in love with her hair.

The chapter ends with a blog post titled "Why Dark-Skinned Black Women Both American and Non-American Love Barack Obama." In the post she says that black men like their women to be lighter skinned, but Obama married a woman who is not light skinned, so women like him.

Chapter 21 begins on a Sunday morning with a call from Auntie Uju complaining about what Dike wants to wear to church. Uju is certain they will be talked about if he doesn't dress properly and she's been telling him to tone it down in school so he doesn't look so different. Ifemelu convinces Dike to wear the shirt his mother has chosen and says she'll bring Curt to meet him on the weekend.

Curt is charming with Auntie Uju in a way that makes Ifemelu think he's performing and she realizes she doesn't like charming. Dike and Curt go outside to play basketball and Auntie Uju tells Ifemelu she can see that Curt really likes Ifemelu even with her Afro hair. Ifemelu tells Uju to leave her hair alone and says that if women with natural hair appeared in magazines and movies, Uju would be praising her hair.

Uju asks Ifemelu if she's read Dike's essay and says she wonders how he can say he is conflicted and that even his name is difficult. Ifemelu urges Uju to talk to Dike about how



he is feeling. Uju goes on to say she's tired and that Bartholomew insists she make him dinner every night and is demanding that she give him her salary because he's the head of the family.

One morning Auntie Uju and Bartholomew argue and she calls Ifemelu to tell her that she is leaving him. Uju and Dike are moving to Willow, which is near the university. Uju tells Ifemelu Dike is happy to be leaving and didn't even mention Bartholomew.

The blog post at the end of the chapter is about how Non-American Blacks become black when they come to America and along with that comes all of the stereotypes and racial issues.

In Chapter 22, Ifemelu runs into Kayode in a mall. Kayode tells her Obinze asked him to look her up and she feels numb at the mention of Obinze's name. Kayode tells her Obinze is in England and she feels betrayed to find out there have been changes to his life that she didn't know about. She tells Kayode she is with her boyfriend and walks away. She tells Curt she ran into a friend from high school, but won't say more. He asks if it was an old boyfriend because she seems upset. She says not, but refuses to explain. Later that day she sends Obinze an email apologizing for her silence. He does not reply.

Curt tells Ifemelu he's booked her a massage. She thanks him and tells him he is a sweetheart. He responds forcefully that he doesn't want to be a sweetheart, he wants to be the love of her life.

Analysis

As Ifemelu becomes more immersed in American life, she begins to conform, and thus lose more of her identity. Her American accent has become so good that a telemarketer tells her she sounds American. Ifemelu is initially pleased and considers this a compliment. However, a feeling of shame quickly sets in and she knows she shouldn't think of losing her accent as a good thing. And yet, she also feels a bit like she's won—she has beat Cristina because she now sounds American and won't be mistaken for an ignorant foreigner as she was at the school registration table.

Ifemelu's second act of conformity centers around her hair. When she has a chance to interview for a job after graduation, she believes she must relax her hair and give in to the image that might be acceptable to prospective employers. The relaxing process is so harsh that it burns Ifemelu's scalp, but she continues to relax her hair for some time after getting the job. It isn't until her hair actually begins to fall out that she decides she must stop relaxing it. Finally, at least in terms of her hair, Ifemelu decides to take back something of herself. She cuts off her hair, which is reminiscent of her mother cutting off her own hair when Ifemelu was young. Just as Ifemelu's mother changed drastically after the act, Ifemelu does, too. She is embarrassed by the change and certain she won't be accepted by coworkers, so she calls in sick for three days.



This drastic change and reclaiming of her natural hair is one of the events that lead to Ifemelu starting her blog. Ifemelu finally falls in love with hair after she discovers a website that celebrates natural black hair. The women who post comments on the site offer tips for caring for their hair and support one another in maintaining a more natural look. When Ifemelu tells her story on the blog she feels liberated and loves reading the responses to her post. She realizes that she enjoys having an audience and that she wants to reach more people.

Pieces from the blog are dispersed throughout the book, but it is in this section that a blog post appears that cuts to the essence of the book and the themes the author is trying to convey. The blog post is titled “Understanding America for the Non-American Black: American Tribalism.” In the post, Ifemelu says there are four kinds of tribes in America: class, ideology, region, and race. These are ideas that are explored throughout the book. Although the blog post talks specifically about America, Adichie explores divisions in class that occur in America, England, and Nigeria. Adichie seems to feel that these divisions, whether conscious or unconscious, occur among humans regardless of where they live. This includes race, even though Ifemelu says she didn’t become black until she came to America. However, even in Nigeria, there are issues of race as indicated by Ginika’s being considered beautiful because she is a lighter skinned half-caste. And, it doesn’t matter what color a person’s skin is. When Ifemelu is walking through a farmer’s market with Curt, a black man asks her why she thinks Curt likes her looking “jungle” with her short, natural hair.

This particular post comes after Dike has encountered a camp counselor who subjects him to an act of unconscious racism. Dike is apparently the only black child at the camp and the counselor mistakenly believes that he does not need sunscreen because of his dark skin. This makes Dike feel excluded and he expresses a wish to Ifemelu to just be “regular.” The counselor most likely didn’t mean to hurt Dike, but the fact that she doesn’t seem to have any experience with black people leads her to treat Dike as though his skin makes him different.

This event is clearly not the only instance in which Dike has felt different. He is becoming increasingly unhappy. He argues with his mother about wearing a certain shirt to church. Although rebellion is certainly normal among children as they get older, the change in Dike is more about a feeling of discontent and displacement. This, again, points to his upcoming suicide attempt.

Dike’s attitude is probably influenced by his mother’s unhappiness. In spite of the fact that Uju has achieved her goals of getting her medical license and being married, she is still miserable. Ifemelu notes that she complains constantly. She worries about what people might say about them, which is why she is insistent that Dike wear the shirt she has picked out for him. Uju also isn’t happy in her marriage. Bartholomew believes he is entitled to her paycheck because he is the man of the house even though Uju earns more than he does. He also expects Uju to put a full day of work in and then come home and cook for him while he sits and watches television. She’s exhausted and things just haven’t turned out the way she expected them to.



While Uju is struggling in her relationship, Ifemelu is happy with Curt, her wealthy white boyfriend. Curt treats Ifemelu very well and is madly in love with her. Race, for the most part, doesn't seem to be an issue for Curt. He's extremely supportive of Ifemelu's decision to cut her relaxed hair off and grow out her natural hair. In fact, he's incensed at the damage Ifemelu does to her scalp in an attempt to fit into American norms.

Curt and Ifemelu's relationship is a happy one, but it also bears some striking similarities to Aunty Uju's relationship with The General. Curt, like The General, is very wealthy. He buys Ifemelu gifts like cashmere sweaters, pays for her groceries, and helps with other expenses. As a successful man, he also has some power. When Ifemelu graduates, Curt arranges an interview for her at a company that will also help her get her green card. It would seem that Ifemelu is becoming something of a kept woman just as Aunty Uju once was.

There is some indication that the relationship is perhaps not as stable as it appears. Ifemelu discovers that Curt has been emailing a white woman he met at a convention. Perhaps the most interesting part of this conflict is that Ifemelu is terribly hurt by the fact that the woman has long, flowing hair unlike her own.

Discussion Question 1

What steps does Ifemelu take to conform to American society? What effect do those changes have on her?

Discussion Question 2

Why does Dike's camp counselor refuse to give him any sunscreen? What does Dike mean when he says he wants to be "regular?"

Discussion Question 3

Compare and contrast Aunty Uju's relationship with The General and Ifemelu's relationship with Curt. Is one relationship better than the other? Why or why not?

Vocabulary

contradictions, burgeoning, confident, vegan, reserved, tribalism, articulate, hoteliers, infantile, kiosk, monologues, virtuous, solicitous, identity



Part 3: Chapters 23-26

Summary

In Chapter 23, the focus of the novel shifts to Obinze's past when he lived in London. He is not there legally, so he cannot work. He meets the Angolans and pays them to arrange a marriage for him so that he can get his papers. He meets the girl he is to marry, Cleotilde, a few days later and assures he will make the process as easy as possible for her. Obinze realizes Cleotilde is attracted to him and he asks her for her phone number. The Angolans say he should call them. Obinze gives Cleotilde his number and asks her if she'd like to get together with him so they can get to know each other. She says yes. The two get together over the next few weeks and practice for the immigration interview. Cleotilde tells Obinze the Angolans didn't give her much money, but she knows Obinze doesn't have any more money and she wants to do this for him.

As Obinze waits in line at the marriage registration office he thinks about having gone to the American embassy in Laos to get an American visa. The storyline flashes back to how Obinze came to be in England.

Obinze tries several times to get a visa to go to America and be with Ifemelu. When he cannot, his mother puts Obinze on her visa application so that he can accompany her as her research assistant and then live with his cousin Nicholas. Once in England, Obinze takes a job cleaning bathrooms, but quits when he walks into a stall to find someone has defecated on a toilet lid. He feels like the person who has done this was staging a performance somehow and it makes him feel small. That evening, he receives the email Ifemelu sent after seeing Kayode. He deletes the email.

Nicholas and his wife Ojiugo have changed a great deal since they lived in Nigeria. They are not longer outrageous, fun loving people. Instead, they worry excessively about their children receiving a good education and are careful about only speaking English to them. Obinze and Ojiugo have a conversation about accents and Obinze wonders if Nigerians are more forgiving of their children raised in England because they have foreign accents.

Chapter 25 talks about what drew Obinze to be friends with Emenike when they were in high school. Emenike was a sharp boy who was eager to be seen as someone who knew things and was of a higher class than he really was. He enjoyed reading books, so he and Obinze became friends who talked about books, played Scrabble, and exchanged knowledge. Emenike moved to England during one of the university strikes.

Obinze calls Emenike when he arrives in England, but Emenike puts him off repeatedly saying he is busy with work and travel. Obinze realizes Emenike has changed and will not help him get an NI number so he can work. He calls another friend, Iloba, who has always treated Obinze as a kinsman. Iloba puts Obinze in touch with a man named



Vincent who agrees to let Obinze use his NI number in exchange for thirty-five percent of his pay.

In Chapter 26, Obinze is working at various jobs under the name of Vincent. He works a job in a warehouse where Roy Snell, an Englishman, is his boss. Roy treats him kindly and Obinze fits in well with the other workers. He develops a friendship with an Englishman named Nigel who shows him around London. One day, Nigel and Obinze deliver a refrigerator to an elderly, disheveled man. Nigel refers to the man as a “real gent” in an awed tone in spite of the fact that the kitchen is dirty and the man looks hung over. Obinze realizes that Nigel’s reaction has to do with the man’s accent and that if he had spoken differently, Nigel would have complained about not receiving a tip.

Analysis

This section of the book focuses on Obinze’s arrival in England. In some ways, his life in England parallels Ifemelu’s life in America. Obinze has come to England under his mother’s visa, but stays illegally. Because he is in the country illegally, he cannot find work without using someone else’s NI number. This is similar to Ifemelu’s need to use someone else’s identity to get work in America. When Obinze finally does find work, it’s as a janitor cleaning bathrooms. The job is acceptable until he encounters feces on top of a toilet lid that he would be expected to clean up. At that point, the job becomes degrading to Obinze and he quits. Although the situation isn’t as dire as the one Ifemelu encounters in accepting the coach’s proposition, both characters feel degraded by what they are forced to do to make it in their respective countries. It’s interesting to note that it’s at this point when Obinze is feeling degraded by his job that he deletes an email from Ifemelu without responding, thus making the decision to cease communication with her at a low point in his life just as Ifemelu did after being with the coach.

Obinze eventually seeks out an arranged marriage to obtain his papers. Obinze’s reliance on a relationship to get his papers is reminiscent of Ifemelu’s receiving help from Curt to get her papers. The marriage is set up through some shady men known only as the Angolans. These are some very unsavory characters who prey on illegal immigrants and people who are in great need of money. The woman they set Obinze up with is a kind person who genuinely likes Obinze as he does her. The fact that Obinze treats Cleotilde with kindness and respect says a lot about his character. He wants the marriage to be as easy for Cleotilde as possible and wants it all to occur in a way that allows them both to maintain their dignity. He asks Cleotilde to spend some time with him so they can get to know one another, and it seems a bit like dating. When the time comes for the wedding, he even buys her a dress.

Other similarities between Obinze’s life in England and Ifemelu’s life in America occur in the people around them. Nicholas and Ojiugo both bear similarities to Aunty Uju. As a couple, they are extremely concerned about their children being educated and successful. Uju, while not being as extreme, has the same concerns for Dike. She wants him to do well and fit in. Essentially, all of the parents just want their kids to have



a better and easier life than they have had just as all parents do. However, they all recognize that as immigrants their children face an additional set of challenges.

Nicholas, like Uju, has become quiet and sullen. He's extremely focused on work and making money. Uju faces the same reality as she is forced to work three jobs while going to school to support herself and Dike and pay her tuition. And, Ojiugo has become sloppy in her appearance, paying little attention to her clothing or her hair, which Ifemelu also observes to be true of Uju.

The author uses accents as a symbol of a person's place in society and Obinze makes some observations concerning accents. He notices that Nicholas and Ojiugo seem to be softer on their children than they might have been in Nigeria. The children, having been raised in England, have English accents. This leads Obinze to wonder if the children are treated differently because of their accents. This seems to be the author's comment on the perception of people based on their accents. This is also evident in a scene where Obinze is making a delivery with Nigel to a shabby looking older man who happens to have a posh accent. Nigel calls him a "real gent" in spite of the way he looks and Obinze realizes that Nigel's opinion of the man is influenced by the man's accent.

Discussion Question 1

Why does Obinze delete Ifemelu's email without responding to her?

Discussion Question 2

How are Obinze's experiences in England similar to Ifemelu's experiences in America?

Discussion Question 3

What observation does Obinze make about Nicholas's children and their accents? Do you think he's right? Why or why not?

Vocabulary

jarring, restrained, neutrality, sham, flogging, visa, assessment, entitlement, estrangement, insomnia, masculinity, asylum, tutor, mourn, admiration, ambition, apocryphal, bloke, profundity



Part 3: Chapters 27-30

Summary

In Chapter 27, Obinze is in a bookshop café enjoying his weekly treat of an expensive coffee and reading American fiction and American newspapers. He avoids the British newspapers because the articles about immigration frighten him. A woman and her son come into the bookshop and sit by him. Obinze's conversation with the woman leaves him thinking about love and Ifemelu, so he texts a woman, Tendai, that he once met at a party. Tendai had offered to help him get his papers, but he knows she would convince herself they didn't just marry for the papers. While on the train on his way to Tendai's, he sees a woman reading a newspaper article about immigration and wonders if she thinks he's illegal. Later, on a train to Essex, he notices the car is filled with Nigerians and it makes him think of the life he had imagined for himself and he suddenly feels very lonely.

In Chapter 28, Obinze arrives at the warehouse where he works and everyone is acting strangely toward him. He's sure they've figured out he is illegal. Nigel runs up behind him and shoves a paper hat on his head and wishes him a happy birthday. He hadn't even thought to memorize Vincent's birth date. The men gather in the coffee room and celebrate with him.

That night Vincent calls and demands forty-five percent of Obinze's pay. Obinze decides to ignore his demands. A week later Roy calls Obinze into his office and says he received a call telling him Obinze is illegal and working under someone else's name. Roy tells him to bring his passport in. Obinze leaves the warehouse for the last time wishing he'd told Roy and Nigel his real name. Years later, Obinze calls Nigel and offers him the job as his General Manager in Nigeria.

Chapter 29 returns to the timeline in which Obinze has met Cleotilde. The Angolans call and ask him for more money. Obinze decides to call Emenike and ask him for help. Emenike agrees to help him and asks to meet with Obinze. They meet at a restaurant. Emenike apologizes for not seeing Obinze sooner, but says he was busy with work and travel. He tells Obinze many stories about his wonderful life and work. The work stories are all about someone underestimating Emenike and him coming out on top. He finally gives Obinze an envelope of money and it's double the amount Obinze asked for.

Georgina, Emenike's wife, calls and invites Obinze to join them for dinner. During dinner, Georgina invites Obinze to a party at their home. When Obinze arrives at their home a little early for the party, Emenike takes him into the study where there are many pictures of Emenike posing in front of landmarks around the world. Obinze believes Emenike had the pictures taken in anticipation of the people who would see them.

The party guests are all people with important jobs and interesting lives. They discuss a charity one guest, Alexa, is involved in that is trying to keep the UK from hiring so many



African health workers. She says African doctors should stay in Africa because they owe it to their country. Another guest says that means that English doctors should take responsibility for the poor towns in the north of England. This upsets Alexa.

During dinner, the conversation turns to immigration. Georgina says America has its own immigration problems. One guest points out that in America immigration comes with race issues because immigrants in America are generally not white. Emenike says that in America blacks and whites work together, but don't play together and that in England it is just the opposite. Obinze says he believes class hierarchy is prevalent in England and everyone seems to know their place. In England, he says, a white boy and black girl who have grown up in the same working-class town can get together without race being an issue. However, in America race would be an issue even if they were of the same class. The conversation continues and the guests agree that England should remain open to people fleeing from wars and poverty. Obinze doesn't think they would understand why people like him might want to run from choicelessness.

Chapter 30 begins with Nicholas giving Obinze a suit for his wedding. They arrive at the civic center and are met by police. The police approach Obinze and tell him his passport is expired. They handcuff him and take him away. When a lawyer arrives to speak with Obinze he tells Obinze the government has a strong case. Obinze says he is willing to return to Nigeria. He feels inhuman, like a thing to be removed.

While in detention waiting to be deported, Obinze hears other men talking about how they have been deported before and will try again. Obinze's mother calls him and says she will meet him in Lagos. Obinze is then transferred to a cell in Dover where the conditions are worse. The cell is small and cold and he is only allowed outside to exercise and eat. He becomes depressed and unable to eat. When he finally arrives in Lagos, an immigration officer demands money from him and Obinze gives him what is in his pocket. Obinze's mother is waiting outside.

Analysis

This section of the novel reveals a certain idealism and romanticism in Obinze. It begins with Obinze sitting in a bookstore as he does every week. He spends the time reading American novels and considers the time to be a treat. This further supports the symbolism of books representing a better life. His time among the books reminds Obinze of when his life was better and he had the luxury of spending time immersed in a book.

While sitting in the bookstore, Obinze sees a woman and her son. He is interested in the woman and seems to be looking for a natural connection with a woman that might lead to love and marriage. His encounter with the woman leaves him thinking about love and about Ifemelu. He then calls Tendai to achieve a physical connection if not an emotional one. From previous chapters, the reader knows that Obinze wants to get to know Cleotilde before marrying her and even finds himself attracted to her. This section indicates that Obinze still holds hope for a traditional romantic relationship, which may



be why he approaches the marriage to Cleotilde in the way that he does. Obinze has an idealistic view of romantic love, which is another form of love the author explores through her use of love as a theme.

Obinze is also somewhat idealistic about friendship. Back in Lagos, Obinze and Emenike had been close friends. Obinze knew that Emenike was a bit of a braggart who made himself out to be from a wealthy family even though everyone knew he was not. However, Obinze connected with Emenike on an intellectual level over books and the exchange of knowledge. Obinze expects that bond to still exist years later in England. However, when he initially contacts Emenike, Emenike continually puts him off with excuses of travel and business. It isn't until Obinze calls him asking for money that Emenike agrees to meet. This indicates that Emenike is the kind of person who likes to have power over others and enjoys people groveling for his help, even if that person is a friend. Emenike does indeed reveal himself to be a boastful, self-important person. He goes on and on about his travels, his wife, and his success in business in an attempt to impress Obinze. Emenike has become caught up in the class hierarchy of England and wants to make certain Obinze is aware that he has moved up in class, which supports the author's use of class as a theme.

When Obinze goes to a dinner party at Emenike's, the author again turns the direction of the book back to racial issues, including immigration. The party guests talk of charities they are involved with in a self-congratulatory manner. One guest suggests that people from Africa who receive a medical degree abroad owe it to Africa to return and care for their own people. Another guest says that this means, then, that English doctors have a responsibility for the poor in England. The discussion becomes heated until Emenike's wife diffuses the situation by serving dinner.

Later, the guests talk about immigration, not realizing that Obinze is at the heart of the matter since he is an illegal immigrant living with the fear of being deported. His fear is so great that he wonders if a woman on the train reading an article on immigration is looking at him and wondering if he is illegal. He lives with a kind of paranoia that is so overwhelming that he assumes his coworkers have discovered he's illegal when they are really just throwing a surprise birthday party for him.

The conversation among the party guests explores the differences between immigration in Europe versus immigration in America. The guests suggest that immigration is a deeper issue in America because there are racial issues as well as class issues. The guests talk about whether America is kinder to immigrants than England because it's a country built on inclusion while countries in Europe were built on exclusion. Another guest says that America is bordered by Mexico, which is a developing country, so there are issues of class. On the other hand, the European countries are all similar to one another. When someone suggests that Eastern Europe is England's Mexico, it is pointed out that people from Eastern Europe are white, but people from Mexico are not, so America also has the issue of race. This conversation serves to meld the themes of race and class and discuss their relationship to one another.



Probably the most interesting part of this conversation is Emenike's thought that in America blacks and whites will socialize with one another, but not work with one another while it's exactly the opposite in England. Obinze further offers that in England people understand their place based on class, and whether or not they like it, they accept it. Therefore, in England, class is of a greater concern than is race whereas in America, race is of greater concern than class.

In the end, the party guests come to the conclusion that England should remain open to immigrants who are fleeing great poverty or war. This leaves Obinze wondering if the people around him could ever understand his need to simply get away from a country where he was crushingly dissatisfied with the lack of choices he had for his life.

Obinze's time in England comes to a tragic end when he is arrested just as he is about to be married to Cleotilde. He is placed in detention pending a hearing for his deportation, but instead of going through the legal process to try to stay, Obinze says he will just go back to Nigeria. He has completely given up and is resigned to being removed like a thing that is a nuisance instead of a person. While in detention, Obinze listens to the people around him talking about how many times they've tried to sneak into England and saying that they will just try again. Obinze believes these people are willing to try again because they have nothing left to lose and he envies them. However, the fact that Obinze envies their state of having nothing left, there is a certain hope in his view because it indicates that he still has something left to return to Lagos for. Indeed, his mother is there waiting for him when he arrives at the airport.

Discussion Question 1

What does Obinze suggest is different about race and class in England and America? Do you agree with him? Why or why not?

Discussion Question 2

What do Obinze's attitudes toward romantic love and friendship reveal about his personality?

Discussion Question 3

Why does Obinze choose not to fight to stay in England?

Vocabulary

glum, wistful, passport, unfettered, deported, assuaged, sinister, mockery, prefacing, effusive, fragile, sated, terraced, triumphs, succoring, solicitor, goaded, pediatric, class, lethargy, expired, expectant



Part 4: Chapters 31-35

Summary

Chapter 31 shifts back to Ifemelu's past. She has just broken up with Curt after having cheated on him with a man who lives in her apartment complex. She tells Ginika the relationship just didn't feel right. Ifemelu tries to reconcile with Curt, but he will not talk to her. She finally accepts the end of the relationship and thinks there must be something wrong with her. She feels like she doesn't completely know herself.

Years later, when she is dating Blaine, she attends a dinner party with him. One Haitian woman says she once dated a white man and race was never an issue. Ifemelu tells the woman that is not true and that she only said it because she wishes it were true. Ifemelu says that race doesn't matter when two people who love each other are alone, but as soon as they are with other people, it does matter. They don't tell their white partners how they really feel about certain issues. Ifemelu goes on to recount stories of her relationship with Curt in which he sometimes overreacted to perceived racism and at other times didn't see actual racism as it was occurring.

The chapter ends with a blog post titled "A Michelle Obama Shout-Out Plus Hair as a Race Metaphor." The post talks about how a girlfriend of hers thought Michelle Obama's hair grew in straight the way she wears it. Ifemelu goes on to write about how the before and after pictures of black women in makeovers always show natural hair in the before pictures and straightened hair in the after pictures. She writes that if Michelle Obama were to appear on television with her natural hair, Obama would probably lose the independent vote.

In Chapter 32, Aunt Uju tells Ifemelu she has joined African Doctors for Africa and met a man named Kweku who is also a doctor. She says he treats her like a princess and reminds her that Curt treated her that way, too. Kweku also treats Dike well, which makes Ifemelu like him. When Ifemelu tells Dike she has broke up with Curt, he asks her if she'll be okay and brings her a tray with a banana and a can of peanuts on it.

Ifemelu talks to her parents on the phone and they plan a visit to America. When they arrive they feel like strangers to her. After they leave America, Ifemelu lies on her bed and cries uncontrollably. A short time later she resigns from her job.

Chapter 33 begins by talking about how Ifemelu's blog has grown. She has gained many readers and is receiving donations from people who want to support the blog. She is also being paid to advertise on her blog. She is immersed in the blog and checks her email often and eagerly. Ifemelu also begins being invited to speak at diversity conferences. After her first diversity conference where she speaks honestly and in the way she does on her blog, she is called a racist and realizes that the people who read her blog are not the people who attend the conferences. She comes to the conclusion that the objective of a diversity conference is to leave the audience feeling good about



themselves. Eventually, Ifemelu feels consumed by her blog and speaking engagements. She has become known simply as The Blogger and feels like she's become the blog itself.

In Chapter 34, Ifemelu is attending a blogging conference where she runs into Blaine, the man she met years earlier on the train. He remembers her and they begin to email and call one another. He visits her in Baltimore and the two quickly become lovers. At the end of his visit, Ifemelu returns to New Haven with him. She learns that he eats only organic food, exercises daily, and seems carefully disciplined. He even eats food he doesn't like just because it is good for him.

Blaine's best friend, Araminta, comes for a visit. She was one of the only other black students in Blaine's high school. She tells Ifemelu she is glad that Ifemelu isn't an academic like Blaine's other friends and warns her not to take Shan, Blaine's sister, too seriously.

Ifemelu moves in with Blaine after a year of dating. He shows interest in her blog and she's pleased at first, but then he tells her she needs to add more depth and that she has a responsibility since people read her blog as cultural commentary. Blaine makes Ifemelu feel like he is always trying to teach her something and is disappointed that she hasn't learned enough.

One day Blaine and Ifemelu are at a grocery store and an older white woman tells Ifemelu her hair is beautiful. Ifemelu lets the woman sink her hands into her Afro and Blaine is appalled. He asks how Ifemelu could let someone do that and Ifemelu asks him how else the woman will know what hair like hers feels like.

The chapter ends with a blog post about who racists are. Ifemelu posits that Americans think racism exists but racists are all gone.

In Chapter 35, Shan calls Blaine to tell him she's in New York for the publishing of her first book. Blaine asks Ifemelu to go with him to visit her. Ifemelu says she will and asks what Shan does. Blaine tells her that Shan has done many things and had lots of experiences. He concludes that Shan is a really special person. When Ifemelu meets Shan she notes that it seems like all of the air in the room leaves when Shan enters. She commands attention, but barely acknowledges Ifemelu. However, when Shan finally introduces herself, Ifemelu can't help feeling drawn to her.

Shan receives a call from a French man and ignores the call. She tells Blaine that the caller is a rich French man who wants to date her. She says that it's nice that in Europe men look at black women as women and not black, but says she still doesn't want to date a white man. Blaine nods in agreement, but Ifemelu knows that if anyone else had said these things, he'd have analyzed their words and disagreed. Shan goes on to say that white men in America don't want to date black women. Ifemelu disagrees and says she gets more attention from white men. Shan dismisses her by saying that's just because she's from Africa. Ifemelu resents that Blaine agrees with Shan so readily. Nonetheless, she wants Shan to like her and invites her to be a guest blogger.



The chapter closes with a blog post titled “Obama Can Win Only If He Remains the Magic Negro.” The post focuses on Obama’s pastor and says that Obama can win only if he remains the wise, kind black men who never gets angry and forgives racism.

Analysis

When Curt and Ifemelu broke up, Ifemelu eventually admitted that race played at least a small part of the demise of the relationship, though undoubtedly the biggest factor was the fact that Curt was not Obinze. Ifemelu was unhappy in the relationship and tells Ginika she didn’t feel the way she thought she should. In other words, she didn’t feel with Curt the way she felt with Obinze.

However, years later at a party, Ifemelu confronts a Haitian woman who claims race never played a part in her relationship with a white man. Ifemelu says that’s not true and then goes on to give examples of the instances in which Curt’s being white drove a wedge between the couple because he just didn’t understand her life sometimes. Curt’s misunderstandings were all innocent on his part. He didn’t do or say things out of a desire to hurt Ifemelu or because he was a racist; his statements and actions truly came from a place of not knowing. When he thought he was standing up for Ifemelu in regards to the waxing of her eyebrows, Ifemelu seemed to understand that the people in the salon may have been unaware that her eyebrows were no different from anyone else’s. When Curt’s aunt tried too hard to prove she liked black people, Curt believed his beloved aunt would have acted the same way if Ifemelu had been a white woman from another country.

The event in Ifemelu’s relationship with Curt that may be most telling of her frustration with his not understanding of her life as a black woman is the incident surrounding magazines. When Curt commented that Ifemelu’s magazine aimed at black women excluded white women, Ifemelu couldn’t take it and set out to prove to Curt that there were far more magazines that excluded black women. She spent a great deal of time and effort at the store trying to prove this to Curt, who seemed a bit amused by the whole thing. In the end, he still didn’t say he agreed with Ifemelu, just that he didn’t mean for it to be such a big deal. This event was another of the things that lead to Ifemelu writing her blog. After the incident she wrote a long email to Wambui about the way Curt acted and her thoughts that, like her posts on the happykinkynappy.com website, left her feeling like she had more to say and wanted more people to read. And, when Wambui suggested she start a blog, Ifemelu began the process of doing so.

The discussion with the Haitian woman is told in a series of flashbacks to events that occurred in the past when Ifemelu and Curt were still together. Telling the stories of these events in this way allows the author to transport the reader back in time and gives her the freedom to present Ifemelu’s feelings as they were at the time.

Ifemelu’s discussion with the Haitian woman serves to combine the themes of love and racism. She tells the Haitian woman that when two people who love each other are alone, their race doesn’t matter. However, as soon as they are with other people, race



becomes an issue. In this way, love and race are interconnected for a biracial couple. It's interesting to note that Adichie inserts an untitled blog post about romantic love being the solution for racism in America. The post is included in such a way that it seems more like an author's note on the subject, rather than a part of the story. The author seems to be suggesting that only when people truly love each other without the interference of others can race cease to be an issue.

Following her break up with Curt, Ifemelu goes to Aunt Uju's to recuperate. Uju has finally found some happiness in America. Having left Bartholomew, she is free to become the doctor and person she wants to be. She joins an organization called African Doctors for Africa and has met a man who respects her and treats her well. But, Uju is still unable to completely leave behind the idea of a woman needing a man to take care of her since she tells Ifemelu she's made a mistake in leaving a rich man like Curt who gave her all the material things she could want. Uju offers Ifemelu a place to stay while she nurses her broken heart, but it's Dike that provides her with the emotional support she needs. Throughout the book Dike proves to be the one that Ifemelu continually returns to when she needs to lift her spirits. In this instance, he does so just by bringing her a banana and peanuts. He seems to understand that she needs familiar comforts around her to begin to feel better. The author uses the bananas and peanuts as a symbol of Ifemelu's home and the comfort that being surrounded by people who love you brings.

When Ifemelu's blog takes off and she attends a conference for bloggers she reconnects with Blaine who remembers their short time together on a train. Blaine, on first glance, is everything Ifemelu could want in a Black American boyfriend. He's intelligent, successful, and well-spoken. However, as the relationship develops it becomes clear that he harbors a feeling of superiority over Ifemelu. He is extremely health conscious and prods Ifemelu into changing her lifestyle by eating organic and exercising. He tells her that her blog must be more than mere observations, that she has a responsibility to commentate on issues of race in America. And, when Ifemelu allows a white woman to touch her hair, he is absolutely appalled and thinks it's beneath her to allow such a thing. Ifemelu only wanted the woman to have the experience of knowing what a black woman's hair feels like, and knew there was probably no other way of bridging that gap than by granting the woman's request. To her, it was just a small act of kindness, but to Blaine she is lowering herself.

When Ifemelu meets Blaine's friend Araminta, the conversation serves to foreshadow some of the issues Ifemelu will encounter in her relationship with Blaine: his academic friends and Shan. Indeed, Ifemelu later learns that she does not fit in with Blaine's friends and feels that academics are narrow-minded people. And, Shan proves to be a sticking point for the couple because Blaine dotes on her and Shan doesn't care much for Ifemelu. Shan is a bigger-than-life character. When she enters a room, everything begins to revolve around her and she holds court like a queen. Blaine, normally a confident and self-possessed person, becomes one of her subjects. He follows her like a puppy and runs to her aid anytime she calls on him. He listens raptly to her speak and agrees with things Shan says that Ifemelu knows he would argue with someone else



about. Shan is dismissive of Ifemelu. As the book progresses, Shan will make it clear that she does not think Ifemelu is the right person for her brother.

Through the growth of Ifemelu's blog, she begins to be invited to speak at conferences on diversity. When Ifemelu gives her first talk, she speaks from her true experiences and uses information she had posted on her blog. The talk is not well-received and she realizes that her audience at diversity conferences is not the same audience that reads her blog. She decides that the goal of conferences isn't to educate people on issues of race, but to leave the audience feeling good about themselves, so she changes the way she approaches them to make herself pleasing. This is another case of Ifemelu peeling away a layer of her identity. She cannot speak from her heart, but must say what others want to hear so that she can continue to book speaking engagements and earn money.

The more popular Ifemelu's blog becomes, the more it demands from her time. In addition to diversity conferences, she is also asked to appear as a guest on talk shows where she is always referred to as "The Blogger" instead of by her name. She begins to feel as though her identity has been consumed by her blog. In this way, Ifemelu's story again reinforces the use of identity as a theme in the novel. The loss of her identity to her blog combined with a visit from her parents who have become like strangers to her, leads Ifemelu to make the decision to move back to Nigeria where she hopes she can reconnect with the part of her identity she feels she has lost.

Throughout this section there are pieces from Ifemelu's blog that serve to comment on things that are going on in Ifemelu's life. Ifemelu is in America at the time that Barack Obama is campaigning for presidency, so many of the blogs are about the Obamas. One such blog in this section of the novel sums up the symbolism that is present in Adichie's use of hair to stand for the identity of black women. The post is titled "A Michelle Obama Shout-Out Plus Hair as Race Metaphor." The idea for the post stems from a conversation Ifemelu had with a white girlfriend about whether or not Michelle Obama has a weave. Her friend thought Michelle's hair just grew that way. The post talks about how many black women would rather appear naked than with their natural hair because it's somehow "not normal" for a black woman to wear her hair in its natural state. By wearing her hair straightened and in the style she does, Ifemelu suggests that Michelle is attempting to make herself more acceptable to American society, and thus make her husband more acceptable as a candidate. This blog post enhances the symbolism of hair as part of a person's identity. If Michelle Obama wore her hair in a natural style, people would identify her as a completely different person—one who is perhaps more threatening to white voters.

Discussion Question 1

What part did race play in Ifemelu's relationship with Curt? Do you think they could have made the relationship work? Why or why not?



Discussion Question 2

How does Ifemelu's post about Michelle Obama's hair summarize Adichie's use of hair in the novel?

Discussion Question 3

Why does Ifemelu tell the Haitian woman that she is wrong about race not playing a part in her relationship with a white man?

Vocabulary

flippant, torpor, unkempt, mutate, coquette, exuberance, skewed, objective, groupies, texture, embassy, resign, genetic, doused, panel, bypass, salutary, substantive, unambiguous



Part 4: Chapters 36-41

Summary

In Chapter 36, Blaine and Ifemelu are at a surprise birthday party for a friend of Blaine's. Although Ifemelu and Blaine have been together for over a year, Ifemelu still doesn't feel like she belongs with Blaine's friends. Blaine's friends are academics and Ifemelu tells Blaine they aren't intellectuals because they aren't curious. Instead, they develop specialized knowledge and are stuck there. Blaine is defensive at first, but later his tone changes when he talks to Ifemelu about his friends as though he can tell she's not comfortable with them.

During the party, Blaine's ex-girlfriend Paula reads Ifemelu's blog post titled "Friendly Tips for the American Non-Black: How to React to an American Black Talking About Blackness." The post talks about how Americans who are not black shouldn't try to make their lives sound worse when an American Black is talking about an experience. She goes on to say that American Blacks don't want things to be about race, so when they something is about race, it probably is.

The party guests watch Obama announce his candidacy for president. Ifemelu is asked what she thinks of Obama and she says she likes Hilary Clinton.

The chapter ends with a blog titled "Traveling While Black." The blog talks about the book a friend is writing about his experiences traveling the world as an American Black.

Chapter 37 starts with Ifemelu reflecting on how it seems Dike has changed so quickly. He's become a tall young man who plays basketball at his high school, has a blonde girlfriend, and hangs out with a group of friends. She notices that when Dike is with his friends he is a different person who is full of swagger.

Shan has a party she calls a salon, and it's the first one Ifemelu has been to, so she is nervous. Shan tells everyone about her book and says it is a memoir about growing up the only black kid in her prep school as well as other things that happened as she was growing up. Her editor has asked her to make changes to the book so that it transcends race. Shan says that black people can't write honestly about race in America. She also dismissively says that Ifemelu can get away with writing her blog because she's African and therefore writing from the outside. Ifemelu is disappointed in herself for agreeing with Shan.

The blog post at the end of this chapter is about the way people refer to Obama as bi-racial because his mother was white. She wonders if Obama can really ever be anything but black because race is about how you look, not about your blood.

Chapter 38 begins by talking about Boubacar, Ifemelu's friend who is a Senegalese professor at Yale. She finds him intelligent and charming, but Blaine doesn't like him. Boubacar tells Ifemelu about a fellowship at Princeton and encourages her to apply.



Ifemelu is invited to a luncheon for a professor leaving on sabbatical and she accepts the invitation.

Blaine sends Ifemelu a text asking if she's heard about Mr. White, the security guard at the library. When Ifemelu and Blaine meet, he tells her that Mr. White, a black man, was arrested on suspicion of drug dealing when he met a friend outside of the library to lend the man his car. The man gave Mr. White some money he owed him and a library employee who saw the exchange assumed they were dealing drugs. Blaine says that Mr. White is fine and has returned to work, but thinks it's sad that Mr. White seems to expect things like this to happen.

Blaine organizes a protest about Mr. White's arrest and assumes Ifemelu will be there. Ifemelu goes to the luncheon she was invited to instead and Blaine becomes angry. He tells her she can't just write her blog like it's a game, she has to live it. Ifemelu apologizes, but when Blaine refuses to talk to her for three days, she packs a bag and goes to Aunt Uju's.

At the start of Chapter 39, Ifemelu is at Aunt Uju's and is eating non-organic chocolate. Uju tells her that Dike has been accused of hacking the school's computer system, but Dike couldn't have done it because he's not even good with computers. Dike says he's being accused because he's black. He later tells Ifemelu that other kids sometimes ask him for weed and say "What's up, bro?" to him, which he thinks is ridiculous.

After nine days, Blaine finally agrees to see Ifemelu. They cook coconut rice together and he is still cold and distant, but Ifemelu wraps her arms around him anyway.

The chapter ends with a blog post explaining the meaning of tribalism, diversity, and culture in America.

As Chapter 40 begins, Ifemelu and Blaine are back together, but her feelings for him have changed. Although she still admires him, there is no passion left in the relationship. The one thing that unites them is their agreement on Barack Obama, whom Ifemelu changed her mind about after reading Obama's book.

Ifemelu receives an email from Princeton offering her the research fellowship. She tells Blaine she won't move until after the election.

Blaine volunteers for Obama's campaign and tells her about an old black woman he met who told him she didn't think a black man would be president even in her grandchild's lifetime. Ifemelu writes a blog about the woman. When Obama becomes the nominee for the Democratic Party, Blaine and Ifemelu make love for the first time in weeks.

Blaine becomes depressed after Obama delivers a speech on race in response to negative comments made by his pastor. Blaine is disheartened by the speech because it seems like it's meant to close the discussion on race, not open it, but Obama had to do so to be elected.



A call from Shan's boyfriend, Ovidio, helps break Blaine out of his depressed state. Ovidio says Shan has had a nervous breakdown. Ifemelu feels angry at Shan because it seems like she is just attention seeking. About a month before this, Ifemelu had seen Shan and Shan had said she knew that Blaine and Ifemelu would get back together after their argument, but she said it in a way that made it clear she didn't think Ifemelu was write for Blaine. When Ifemelu had tried to change the subject by talking about Obama, Shan had turned the conversation back to herself and her book. Ifemelu wished Shan would realize everything wasn't about her.

When Obama is elected, Ifemelu receives a text from Dike that says, "I can't believe it. My president is black like me."

Chapter 41 returns to the present day with Ifemelu in the braiding shop. Ifemelu is starting to be bothered by the stuffy, shabby shop and wonders why these African women can't keep the shop clean and ventilated. Then, her attitude changes and she feels a connection with Aisha when Aisha tells her that she couldn't even go to her father's funeral because she didn't have her papers. Ifemelu tries to comfort aisha and tells her she'll go to visit Aisha's boyfriend at his work to talk to him about marrying Aisha. When Ifemelu's hair is finished, she leaves. While she's on the train, Aunt Uju calls and tells her Dike has tried to commit suicide. Ifemelu tells Uju she'll be there the next day.

Analysis

The relationship with Blaine seems doomed from the start and this section serves as the fulfillment of the foreshadowing that appeared in the previous section, which indicated some of the problems with the relationship would be with Blaine's friends and with Shan. Ifemelu does not fit in with his friends or his lifestyle. Blaine is an idealist who believes Ifemelu must hold herself to a higher standard. She actually changes the way she lives to conform to his lifestyle. Blaine is extremely into fitness and runs daily. He also eats only organic food and admits to Ifemelu that he eats food he doesn't like just because it's good for him. The reader knows from previous chapters that this isn't like Ifemelu at all. She loves ice cream and has gained weight since coming to America, so she probably doesn't exercise much. Yet, she wants to please Blaine, so she changes. In this way, Ifemelu surrenders another piece of her identity.

Blaine's friends are academics that Ifemelu finds pretentious. She meets one man who will not read any literature written past a certain point in history because he's convinced that nothing good has been written since then. Ifemelu points this out to Blaine because she thinks it's rather close-minded and Blaine brushes it off by saying the man has his quirks. Ifemelu thinks academics are just people who have knowledge in their niche and close themselves off to any other ways of thinking, yet Blaine surrounds himself with these people. Blaine is still friends with his previous girlfriend Paula which makes Ifemelu a bit uncomfortable despite the fact that Paula is now in a relationship with a woman. Her discomfort isn't out of a fear that Blaine will go back to Paula, but out of a sense that Paula fits better with Blaine in terms of her personality and lifestyle than



Ifemelu does. Blaine and Paula share a history and private jokes that Ifemelu isn't privy to.

Ifemelu also has issues with Blaine's beloved sister Shan, who also comes across as pretentious. Shan doesn't hold mere "parties" or even "dinner parties" at her home—she holds what she calls "salons." These salons are evidently major events that are considered a privilege to be invited to. When Ifemelu is invited to attend one with Blaine, she's nervous. Shan again holds court with all of the guests hanging on her every word. Shan has recently finished writing a book that is pending publication, and she makes sure everyone knows it. She goes on and on about the issues she's had in writing the book and working with her editor. The book is a memoir and her editor has taken issue with some of the sections that deal with race. She's been asked to tone down the way she addresses the issue of race, which she refuses to do.

Shan's talk of her book leads to a discussion on race and brings out another facet of the theme. One guest suggests that perhaps Shan should turn her book into a novel to make it more acceptable even with the incidents that have to do with race, such as Shan's mother being held back at work because she is black. Shan insists that it's impossible to write an honest novel about race in America. She says that black writers have to write about race in such a subtle manner that the reader almost doesn't know their writing about race. Another guest suggests that white writers can write about race because their writing won't be considered threatening, which suggests that when black people write about race it's considered threatening. The guests agree that the world doesn't look like the multicultural group they are in where everyone gets along, but Blaine says it could and their group proves that it could. This statement sums up Blaine's idealistic view of the world. He is certain things can be better and that they all have a responsibility to work toward that betterment, thus his insistence that Ifemelu make her blog something more than mere observations.

Shan says Ifemelu should blog about the discussion they've had and then dismisses her blog by saying Ifemelu gets away with it because she's African. The guests seem to know that Ifemelu should be offended by this since they all grow silent, but Ifemelu gives in to Shan and agrees with her. She is immediately ashamed of herself for doing so and wishes Shan hadn't put her on the spot in front of everyone, yet it's almost like Shan casts her guests under a spell and Ifemelu had no choice but to agree.

Following this dismissal of her blog is a blog post about whether or not Obama, in spite of his mixed race heritage, could really be viewed as anything but black. Ifemelu states that race in America isn't actually about blood, it's about the way someone looks. Therefore, because Obama has dark skin, he will only ever be seen as black. This blog post is in response to Shan's statement that Ifemelu can write the way she does because she's African. By including this post, the author is making a statement that in America, black is black, it doesn't really matter what your heritage is.

When Ifemelu finally challenges Blaine on his idealistic view of the world, she does so in a fairly passive manner, but it still leads to a temporary break up for the couple. Ifemelu simply fails to show up at a protest Blaine has organized in favor of going to a luncheon



for a professor's retirement. When Blaine discovers this he is incensed and refuses to talk to Ifemelu for nine days. His behavior is infantile, but Ifemelu is still desperate to get him back. This is of note because the reader knows she is not entirely happy in the relationship, and yet she doesn't want it to end. Perhaps Blaine represents for her the perfect Black American—the life she thought she'd immediately have upon coming to America, the life she saw on *The Cosby Show* and *The Fresh Prince of Bel Aire*. Being with Blaine may make her feel safe and as though she's finally achieved her American dream.

When the two finally do get back together, the only thing they really agree on and come together over is Obama. Ifemelu picks up a book by Obama that Blaine has just finished reading and is in awe of what she reads there. She sees what Blaine sees in Obama and agrees that he should be the next president. They follow Obama's campaign together and Blaine even volunteers for the campaign effort. Indeed, when Ifemelu makes the decision to move back to Nigeria, she tells Blaine she won't leave until after the election.

Also of note in this section of the novel is the apparent change Ifemelu observes in Dike. He has grown into a young man and dates blonde girls. He has a swagger about him when his friends are around, so it appears that he's found a way to fit in. Yet, the school accuses him of hacking into the computer system, something he's incapable of because he's not good with computers. There isn't any proof that he's the culprit, so he and Uju believe he's been accused because he is black. And, on the night that Obama is elected, Dike sends a text to Ifemelu saying he can't believe his president is black like him. Clearly Dike is still feeling out of place. When Ifemelu learns that Dike has attempted suicide, it comes as a shock. While there has been no clear indication to the reader that Dike is suicidal, there have been signs that Dike is unhappy. He feels like an outsider and Uju isn't able to support him through his feelings because she is very intent on fitting in.

As the section closes, Ifemelu is still sitting in the braiding salon. She looks around her and is disgusted by the shabbiness of the shop and its lack of ventilation. She wonders why these African women can't keep a better shop. When Aisha asks how Ifemelu got her papers and talks about how she couldn't go back when her father died because she didn't have papers, Ifemelu feels a connection with Aisha over their African roots. This foreshadows how Ifemelu will feel when she arrives back in Nigeria. She looks around her and sees how rundown Lagos is, but she still feels a sense of connection with her hometown, even though it has its faults.

Discussion Question 1

Describe Blaine. What kind of lifestyle does he lead? Who are his friends? How does Ifemelu feel about his friends?



Discussion Question 2

What does Shan say is the reason Ifemelu is able to write a blog about race? How does Ifemelu feel about this? Why does she agree with Shan?

Discussion Question 3

Why does Dike attempt suicide? Were there indications that he might try to kill himself?

Vocabulary

exuding, glowering, neurotic, accusation, fey, hierarchy, ancestors, articulate, frenzied, remnants, converged, eclectic, bitter, fraternal, hubris, submerged, academic, hack, inconsequential, fellowship



Part 5: Chapter 42 and Part 6: Chapter 43

Summary

Chapter 42 is set in the present time with Obinze eagerly waiting for Ifemelu's return to Nigeria. It's been an unusually long time between her emails and Obinze worries that she may have changed her mind. Since they've reestablished communication, Obinze has written Ifemelu many emails detailing his life, including the death of his mother. Ifemelu had replied quickly to the email about his mother and said she had sometimes wished Obinze's mother were her own. Ifemelu had asked for his phone number, but hadn't called. Obinze had been certain she still had feelings for him since she'd felt so strongly about his mother. Obinze's last email had expressed his feelings for Ifemelu, but he regretted it after sending it. Ifemelu finally emails back and explains that Dike tried to commit suicide and she is postponing her return to Nigeria. Obinze immediately considers flying to America to be with her, but knows he cannot.

Kosi and Obinze visit a potential school for Bucchi. Obinze's mind wanders to Ifemelu, but Kosi thinks he is thinking about work.

Obinze reads all of Ifemelu's archived blog posts and feels a sense of loss because he feels like he's missed so much of Ifemelu's life.

In Chapter 43, Ifemelu is staying with Dike after his suicide attempt. She stays close by him, but they don't discuss the attempt. She feels a sense of blame toward Aunt Uju. She believes Uju brushed off Dike's attempts to identify as black. She tells Aunt Uju she shouldn't have done that. She says Uju spent too much time telling Dike who he isn't but never told him about who he is. Uju says she only did that because she didn't want him to act like the other kids and says the attempt was because of depression. Ifemelu says the depression was caused by the situation. When Dike is doing better, Ifemelu takes him to Miami for his birthday. They spend a few days in a hotel ordering burgers and lounging by the pool. Finally, Dike tells Ifemelu she should go to Nigeria now, he will be alright. She says he should come and visit her there. He thinks for a moment and then says yes.

Analysis

These two chapters serve as the transitional piece between the past and the present. Although readers have gotten a glimpse of the present day with Ifemelu in the braiding salon and Obinze attending an event at Chief's house, the majority of the story has taken place in the past. This transition is broken into two chapters — one for Obinze and one for Ifemelu.

Obinze's chapter reveals his excitement and anxiety about the possibility of a renewed relationship with Ifemelu as well as his conflicting feelings about his relationship with Kosi. The author reveals Obinze's strong feelings for Ifemelu through the numerous



emails he writes to her detailing his life and even professing his feelings for her. Yet, there is also conflict in that he knows he has a responsibility. He wants to fly to be with Ifemelu, but he knows he cannot. This will prove to be the crux of Obinze's relationship with Ifemelu when the two finally reunite and foreshadows his being torn between his duty to his wife and his love for Ifemelu.

The author further drives this point home by returning the reader to Obinze's real life as he is faced with everyday familial responsibilities like finding a school for his daughter. Even as he moves through the motions of his life, he is consumed with thoughts of Ifemelu. Kosi notices he is distracted, but simply urges him not to think about work. As the book progresses, the reader will learn that Kosi knew about Obinze's relationship with Ifemelu all along and chose to ignore it, which harkens back to this incident. The author may be suggesting that Kosi knew this early on that something was not right in her marriage, but continued to play her role as the dutiful wife, thus further developing the role of women as a theme.

During Obinze's chapter, the reader is also given a glimpse of Ifemelu's own conflict in reuniting with Obinze. Obinze reflects on the fact that Ifemelu asked for his phone number when he told her his mother died, but she never called him. This foreshadows Ifemelu's actual return to Nigeria when she will spend several months continuing to email Obinze without telling him she is now in Nigeria, thus avoiding a real reunion.

Ifemelu's chapter talks about the time she spends with Dike immediately following his suicide attempt. Her discussion with Uju about the reason for the attempt lends itself to the continued exploration of identity as a theme. Dike has struggled with his identity since he was a child. He isn't certain if he should identify as a Black America or as an African. Uju has always told him he isn't black, but she's never explained to him what it means to be African. In fact, since he left Africa as a toddler, he most likely doesn't remember anything about it. Ifemelu herself has questioned his identity and whether he would fit in better with a black student organization or an African student organization when he goes to college.

The chapter also further explores the theme of love as we see Ifemelu caring for Dike while he heals. She never presses him to talk about the suicide attempt, but allows him to be as normal as possible by watching television with him and taking him to Miami for his birthday. She refuses to leave him until he finally tells her it is okay to do so, thus revealing his deep love for her in that he knows she needs to go back to Nigeria.

Ifemelu's invitation to Dike to visit her in Nigeria is her way of offering him a chance to capture a piece of his identity by visiting his home country. The brief inclusion of this invitation sets the reader up for Dike's eventual visit to Nigeria.

Discussion Question 1

Why does Obinze feel freed by having written his life story in emails to Ifemelu?



Discussion Question 2

Why does Ifemelu blame Uju, at least in part, for Dike's suicide attempt? What does Uju think is the cause of his attempt?

Discussion Question 3

How does Ifemelu's reaction to Obinze's mother's death make Obinze feel? Why?

Vocabulary

mocked, appalled, volatile, cursory, despondence, brawl, emboldened, assailed, depression, diligent



Part 7: Chapters 44-48

Summary

In Chapter 44, Ifemelu returns to Lagos, Nigeria. She is struck by how dirty and rundown it is and how rude the people are. Ranyinudo teases her about being an Americanah and says that if she at least spoke with an American accent, they could forgive her for complaining. Ranyinudo is dating a married executive named Don who helps her pay for an apartment. She tells Ifemelu she's been asking Don to buy her a jeep. For some time now. When Ranyinudo turns off the generator for the night, Ifemelu complains about the heat and humidity.

At the beginning of Chapter 45, Ifemelu is looking for a job. She applies for a job at a women's magazine called Zoe. When she meets the owner of the magazine, the woman insists her employees call her Aunty Onenu. Aunty Onenu hires Ifemelu and invites her to her home to talk. Ifemelu thinks this is unprofessional, but goes because she realizes things are different in Nigeria and the line between personal and professional is often blurred. She immediately begins to talk business with Aunty Onenu and comments that a house pictured in the magazine is ugly. Aunty Onenu disagrees and points out the size of the generator. Ifemelu is surprised she didn't notice the size of the generator because a Nigerian would notice that.

As Ifemelu goes about the business of setting up her life in Nigeria, she frequently thinks she spots Obinze in the crowd, but it's never him. She still has not told him she is back.

Ifemelu rents an apartment with a view of a beautiful old colonial house that has fallen into disrepair. The estate agent tells her an army officer once lived there. When Ifemelu tells Ranyinudo about her apartment, Ranyinudo says she should have contacted Obinze for help because he would have given her a deal or maybe even a free apartment.

Chapter 46 tells about Ifemelu's visits to her parents on the weekends. Neighbors and relatives come to greet her and her mother says they are just coming in hopes Ifemelu will give them something. Ifemelu's parents talk about their visit to America and she hopes they won't bring up Blaine because she has lied and told them work has delayed his visit to Nigeria. She also uses Blaine as a way of deflecting her old friends' talk of marriage.

Ifemelu spends time with her old friends Tochi and Priye. Tochi has changed a great deal and speaks in a defensive tone. She is critical of America. Ifemelu can see Tochi is unhappy, so she only talks about the parts of America she did not like and is relieved when Tochi leaves. Priye is the same except that she's become harder and more glamorous. She is a wedding planner and believes that women shouldn't marry for love, but should marry men that can take care of them.



In Chapter 47, Ifemelu begins her job at Zoe magazine. She meets her coworkers Esther, who is the receptionist, and Doris and Zemaye, who are editors like Ifemelu. Esther is ingratiating and constantly invites people to her church. At first Ifemelu is uncomfortable with her ingratiating ways because Esther is older than her, but then she realizes it has to do with status and not age, so she goes along with it.

Doris has a foreign degree like Ifemelu and she makes certain Ifemelu knows they are on the same level. She tells Ifemelu that Ifemelu will share an office with Zemaye and makes a disparaging remark about Zemaye.

When Ifemelu meets Zemaye, Zemaye immediately says she hopes Ifemelu doesn't mind cold rooms because Doris keeps the air conditioner set to high. Doris snaps that the humidity is too high in Nigeria and she couldn't breathe when she returned. The two continue to argue about the air conditioner.

Doris invites Ifemelu to attend a meeting of the Nigeropolitan Club, a group of people who have returned from living abroad. Zemaye calls it the "Been-To" group and says she can't go because she's never been abroad.

When Doris leaves the office, Zemaye asks Ifemelu about her blog and about Blaine. Ifemelu is surprised that Aunty Onenu has shared details of her private life with the other employees.

In Chapter 48, Ifemelu invited Ranyinudo to go to the Nigeropolitan Club meeting with her. Ranyinudo declines because she's going out with a man named Ndudi, whom she likes but isn't sure is serious about her. She asks Ifemelu to lie if Don asks because she told him she'd be out with Ifemelu. Ranyinudo hopes Don will buy her a jeep before she breaks up with him.

Ifemelu goes to the Nigeropolitan Club meeting. She talks to some women who also have natural hair about Nigerian salons and how they all want them to use relaxers. The conversation has a self-righteous air to it. She also meets a man named Fred who had lived in Boston. Other people join the conversation and they all talk about things they had in America that they don't have now. Ifemelu hears someone talk about a new restaurant that has the kinds of things they can eat and becomes uncomfortable with the conversation. When Fred says he doesn't like Nollywood, Ifemelu says she does just because she feels the need to be contrary.

Analysis

This section gives the book its title. Ifemelu returns to Nigeria and is struck by how rundown everything is. She has become used to the American lifestyle and is truly an Americanah. She's surprised to learn how conservative Lagos is when she hears that the bridesmaids at the wedding Ranyinudo was at were banned from the church. This leads the reader to recall her altercation with Bartholomew in which she argued that girls in Lagos wore dresses just as short as those in America. At night, Ifemelu complains about the heat and humidity, so she obviously became used to the luxuries of



American life with readily available air conditioning. Of course, the reader isn't surprised to hear this is a problem for Ifemelu since she found the stuffiness of the braiding salon unbearable for even a few hours shortly before she left America.

Accents are again a topic of interest in this section. Ranyinudo teases Ifemelu about being an Americanah who complains about life in Nigeria. However, she points out that if Ifemelu spoke with an American accent, she would be forgiven for her constant complaining. In England, Obinze noticed that people with certain British accents were treated as higher class regardless of their appearance and he wondered if Nicholas' children were able to get away with more because of their British accents. In America, Ifemelu adopted an American accent for a time in an effort to not be treated like an ignorant foreigner. Now, in Nigeria Ranyinudo indicates that it would be more acceptable for Ifemelu to complain if she were to do it in an American accent.

Once again readers see a woman who is using the affections of a man for monetary gain. Ranyinudo is dating a married man who is a wealthy businessman. She likes him, but clearly doesn't love him since she is also seeing another man. She even tells Ifemelu that she is just waiting to see if Don will buy her the jeep she wants. Ranyinudo seems to think that it's perfectly acceptable for a woman to use the finances of a man since she tells Ifemelu that she should have called Obinze to help her find an apartment. Obinze may have given her a good rate or even given her an apartment for free. Ifemelu does not want to take money from a man, though. Ranyinudo's attitude toward men reminds the reader of Uju's relationship with The General, and to some extent Bartholomew. Although Bartholomew didn't have a lot of money, Uju still wanted a man in her life to take care of her.

Ifemelu looks for a job and eventually finds employment at Zoe magazine. Her boss is a condescending woman much like the woman who fired Ifemelu's father for not calling her Mummy when Ifemelu was young. Ifemelu's boss wants to be called Auntie Onenu and she gossips about Ifemelu's personal life to the other employees. The other employees are a mix of personalities that have been shown in other characters throughout the book. Esther is the ingratiating Nigerian who "sucks up" to her superiors in an attempt to get what she wants. She is a lot like Kosi in that she agrees with what everyone around her says and she's very meek. She is also like Ifemelu's mother in that she is extremely religious and uses religion to explain aspects of her life and the lives of others that she isn't happy with. Doris is an Americanah like Ifemelu, but even more so. It's important to her that Ifemelu knows she has an American education and she keeps the office far too cold for the other women who are used to the Nigerian heat. Zemaye is an educated Nigerian woman like Obinze's mother. She has lived her entire life in Nigeria so she knows how Nigerian society works, but she's still an independent woman who take care of herself.

Doris introduces Ifemelu to the Nigeropolitan club, a club exclusively for Nigerians who have lived abroad and returned. When Ifemelu attends she feels a connection with these people who see Nigeria as she does now. They complain about the things they don't have in Nigeria that they had in America. Ifemelu finds herself feeling guilty, though, when they begin to talk about finding a restaurant with food they can eat as



though they are somehow above the other Nigerians. She feels comfortable with these people and knows somehow that she shouldn't.

Discussion Question 1

What does Ranyinudo mean when she calls Ifemelu an Americanah? Is she correct in her assessment of Ifemelu? Why or why not?

Discussion Question 2

In what ways has Lagos remained the same since Ifemelu left? In what ways does it appear to Ifemelu to have changed?

Discussion Question 3

The author has used certain personality traits repeatedly. How are Ifemelu's coworkers at Zoe like other characters in the book? Who is Zemaye like? Who is Esther like? Who is Doris like?

Vocabulary

assaulted, commerce, cryptic, arresting, indecent, rally, blurred, expatriate, gentility, cowed, sentimental, loomed, ceaselessly, predictable, fixating, quirkiness



Part 7: Chapters 49-55

Summary

As Chapter 49 begins Ifemelu is feeling more at home in Nigeria. She is spending more time with friends, but hasn't seen Obinze yet. She thinks she needs to lose weight before she sees him, but hasn't really been trying to lose weight. She isn't happy with her job at Zoe because she feels stifled. She thinks about starting a new blog and perhaps starting her own magazine some day. She spends much of her work time interview society women and attending events, neither of which she finds interesting.

One day in a meeting Aunty Onenu praises Doris for a story about marriage, but admonishes Ifemelu for including a detail about a society woman that Aunty Onenu deems judgmental. Aunty Onenu leaves the meeting when her daughter arrives and Ifemelu takes a call from Ranyinudo during which Ranyinudo complains about Don.

Esther enters the room and Doris asks if she's feeling better. Doris had send Esther to a clinic to get medicine. She's been given an antibiotic, but the label has only handwritten instructions and not the name of the drug. Ifemelu says they should write about this because improperly labeled medication is dangerous. Zemaye agrees. Doris says they aren't doing investigative journalism.

Ifemelu begins to think about her blog in earnest and plans to write about important things instead of the vapid stories she writes for Zoe. Ifemelu decides to call her blog The Small Redemptions of Lagos. She plans to use a picture of the colonial house she can see from her apartment for the blog header.

Ifemelu tells Doris and Zemaye that it doesn't make sense to running stories about society women. Doris tells her the society women pay Aunty Onenu to run the stories, which shocks Ifemelu. She and Doris argue and Ifemelu leaves the office wondering if now would be a good time to quit her job and start her blog.

At the beginning of Chapter 50 Ifemelu invites Dike to visit. When he arrives in Lagos he is excited to see that he is surrounded by black people. He has arrived one day after Ifemelu began her new blog and one week after she quit her job.

Ifemelu writes blog posts including one about the Nigeropolitan Club and the arrogance of people who return to Nigeria. When she writes a post about women who live expensive lifestyles they cannot afford on their own, Ranyinudo is upset because she's sure people will know it's her that Ifemelu is writing about. She says Ifemelu is being judgmental and reminds her that she lived with a rich white man in America. Ifemelu takes the post down. Ranyinudo suggest Ifemelu is emotionally frustrated and urges her to see Obinze.

Dike moderates the blog comments while he is in Lagos, but sometimes has trouble with the Nigerian expressions and tells Ifemelu he wishes he spoke Igbo. She says he



can still learn. When he asks her about his father, Ifemelu tells him The General loved him and his mother loved The General. She takes him to see the house at Dolphin Estate, which is now rundown. Dike tells Ifemelu he likes Nigeria and she almost asks him to stay. The next day she takes him to the airport.

In Chapter 51, Ifemelu goes to the bank and again thinks she sees Obinze. She returns to her car and calls Obinze. She tells him she is in Nigeria and he asks if he can come to see her now. She says she is on her way to buy a book at Jazzhole. He meets her there. The two talk for a long time. They talk about what each thinks has changed about Nigeria since they were young. Obinze says many of his friends have become fat. Ifemelu says she's gotten fat, too, but Obinze tells her the added weight looks good on her. Ifemelu asks Obinze what has changed for him since he became wealthy. He says the biggest change is in the way people treat him. They suck up to him as though he expects it. Obinze says he sometimes feels nostalgic for his old lifestyle, but knows he wouldn't really want to return to it. Obinze mentions that Ifemelu doesn't have an American accent. She says she made an effort not to have one. He tells her he read her old blog posts and it didn't sound like her. Obinze says she's become more self-aware now and that her blog made him proud. They part ways and Obinze texts Ifemelu asking her to meet him for lunch the next day.

The next day Ifemelu and Obinze meet at her apartment. She points out the old colonial house to him and tells him there are often peacocks on the roof. She tells him it's the picture she has on her new blog. Obinze tells her that she needs investors for her blog and she becomes defensive and says she doesn't want his money. Obinze soothes her and draws her attention to the peacocks that have flown up to the roof. Obinze asks what happened in America that made her stop contacting him. She tells him and he holds her hand as she cries. She feels safe.

In Chapter 52, Obinze and Ifemelu continue to meet often. On one date, Ifemelu asks if Obinze has condoms in his pocket. The conversation devolves into an argument about Obinze having to return home to his wife every night. He tells her their relationship doesn't feel like cheating to him and leaves. He returns a few minutes later and apologizes. He tells her that he didn't like the way she'd made their relationship sound common and that what they have isn't about sex. They make love and Obinze leaves after she falls asleep. She wakes up to her phone ringing and it's Obinze asking if he can come see her again.

In Chapter 53, Ifemelu is giddy about her relationship with Obinze and looks forward to each new day. Obinze is careful to give his time with Ifemelu as much dignity as possible. However, one day as Obinze is cooking for Ifemelu he mentions that he never gets to cook with Kosi. The mention of his wife upsets Ifemelu. He tells her he feels a responsibility for Kosi, but that is all. Obinze invites Ifemelu to go on a business trip with him and she agrees. He later texts her and says he's changed his mind and that he needs to go alone so he can think. Obinze comes to her apartment and tells Ifemelu he feels like things are going too fast and again tells her he has responsibilities. Ifemelu asks him what that means and Obinze remains silent.



At the start of Chapter 54, Obinze is on his business trip alone. He fluctuates between thinking he's done the right thing by leaving Ifemelu behind and wishing she were there. When he completes his business meeting he tries to call Ifemelu many times, but she doesn't answer. He fleetingly imagines she's with another man and feels queasy.

When it's time for him to fly back to Lagos he briefly considers buying a ticket to somewhere else, but knows he will do what is expected of him. As he gets on the plane, Kosi calls him to remind him they are taking Nigel out for his birthday. After he hangs up with Kosi he thinks about how he and his wife never wanted the same things in life. He realizes he married Kosi at a time when he was newly rich and vulnerable to her beauty and the things he was supposed to want.

At Nigel's birthday party, Obinze is irritable and quibbles with Nigel over a floor plan. Obinze apologizes and he and Kosi go home. That night Kosi cuddles up to him and offers sex. Obinze declines and thinks that he should tell Kosi he is in love with Ifemelu.

The next morning Obinze feels as though he hasn't rested. He goes about his duties as a husband and father, but feels sad the whole time. Finally, he tells Kosi he isn't happy and is in love with someone else. Kosi falls to her knees and begs him not to leave his family. Obinze learns that Kosi has known about his affair all along, which makes Obinze angry that she could know and pretend she didn't. He feels a sense of panic at the thought of remaining married and not being with Ifemelu.

The next day Kosi still expects Obinze to attend a christening with her. He goes and as he watches Bucchi he hates the thought of leaving her. Obinze's friends notice he is quiet, but Obinze says he's just tired. As Obinze is leaving the party, his friend Okwudiba asks if there is something wrong. Obinze tells him he wants to marry Ifemelu. Okwudiba tells him he shouldn't leave a wife he has no problem with just to be with another woman.

In chapter 55, Ifemelu finally sees the male peacock dance, but the female peacock just walks away. She has been avoiding Obinze. Ranyinudo encourages her to date other men. Ifemelu continues to write her blog and the pain of not having Obinze never goes away, but she is at peace because she is at home and has her blog.

Ifemelu calls Blaine to say hello and tell him that she always felt like he was too good for her. The call feels stiff, but he does say he is glad she called. Then she calls Curt, who is happy to hear from her. They speak on the phone a few more times after that and he talks about visiting, but never does.

One night Ifemelu runs into Fred and they have drinks. They see each other a few more times and eventually sleep together, but Ifemelu doesn't feel about him the way she wants to.

Then, seven months since the last time Ifemelu saw Obinze, he shows up at her door. Obinze tells her he wants to be with her and will continue chasing her until she gives him a chance. She invites him in.



Analysis

In this final section of the book Ifemelu has begun to re-acclimatize to life in Nigeria. She no longer feels the need to ask Ranyinudo what she should do and is able to just live her life. However, she hasn't yet told Obinze that she is in Nigeria. She has sent him emails since returning, but keeps them vague in hopes he'll think she is still in America. She makes excuses to herself and to Ranyinudo about why she can't see him yet, such as that she needs to lose weight first. While her nervousness about seeing Obinze again is understandable, it is odd that she would hide her return from him while looking for him everywhere. She often thinks she sees him in a crowd, so she's may want to bump into him, thus making their meeting an act of chance and beyond her control. But, she is not willing to take the active step to reconnect with him. This conflict within Ifemelu draws out the suspense of the love story and holds the reader's interest while allowing the author time to further establish Ifemelu's life in Nigeria and her new identity as an Americanah.

In the meantime, Ifemelu continues to work at Zoe. When she started her job there she had many ideas for improvement of the magazine and aspirations for one day taking over the business. Now she finds the job stifling. Ifemelu isn't able to write about topics of her choice. Ifemelu's unhappiness with her job is true to the character's well-established risk taking nature. This woman who took a chance on moving to America and created a blog writing on the controversial topic of race isn't satisfied to sit back and write what others tell her to. Her discontent with her job is crucial to her decision to start another blog and provides her with some of the topics that will be her initial blog posts.

Ifemelu's new blog, *The Small Redemptions of Lagos*, once again gives Ifemelu the chance to speak in her own voice. The name of the blog is significant because, though Ifemelu has been accused of being too critical of Lagos since her return on more than one occasion, the blog title indicates that she believes there is still some good to be found in Lagos. The picture she selects to go with her blog is the view outside her apartment window. It shows an old colonial house that was once the home to a government official, but has now fallen into disrepair. Ifemelu's choice of this picture is perhaps a representation of the country moving on from its past and into the future. It symbolizes Lagos – a city Ifemelu sees as having fallen into disrepair, but where there is still beauty to be found.

On the day after Ifemelu starts her new blog, Dike arrives in Nigeria for a visit. The reader was prepared for Dike's arrival in Nigeria since Ifemelu had previously suggested he might visit some day. The author brings a swift conclusion to Dike's story by allowing him to see the country of his origin and therefore gain a better sense of his identity. Ifemelu even takes him to see the house in Dolphin Estate, which is now run down like much of the rest of Lagos. Dike is happy in Nigeria, so when he is to return to America, Ifemelu briefly considers asking him to stay. However, she knows his life is in America and that his where he belongs. Dike returns to America to get on with his life and appears to be healthy and ready to go on. His visit to Nigeria has furthered the theme of

identity in the novel and allowed Dike to find peace in discovering a part of his identity that had been missing—his Nigerian roots.

When Ifemelu finally makes the choice to contact Obinze, she sets up a meeting at a bookstore called Jazzhole. It's a store that Ifemelu likes and she wants to remember seeing Obinze again for the first time in this setting. Once again, books serve as a source of comfort and hope for the two of them.

Obinze and Ifemelu slide back into their close relationship with ease. They immediately begin talking about their lives and Ifemelu tells Obinze about her new blog, but they remain on a platonic level for quite some time. Obinze wants to treat both Ifemelu and Kosi with the respect they deserve. This is typical of Obinze since he has proven himself to be a man of integrity with a respect for women.

Their recaptured love is, of course, part of the author's theme of love. It is a classic love story in which lovers go through trials and then reconnect, but the reconnection doesn't always go smoothly. Such is the case for Ifemelu and Obinze. The difficulty Obinze has in reconciling his feelings for Ifemelu with his responsibilities for his wife allow the author to remain true to the nature of his character while still providing the reader with a satisfying happy ending.

The theme of love is also explored through Obinze's view of his marriage to Kosi and what his responsibility is to her and to his daughter. Obinze loves his daughter and there is no question that he wants to continue to be involved in her life. However, he recognizes that he does not love Kosi. A conversation with a friend reveals that Kosi was simply in the right place at the right time in Obinze's life and the marriage is a product of Obinze's disorientation due to his new-found wealth and Kosi fitting the mold of what he was supposed to want in a woman. He realizes that it isn't love he feels for Kosi, but only responsibility to a woman who hasn't done anything wrong.

Kosi's reaction to Obinze's admission of his affair with Ifemelu furthers the theme of the role of women. Kosi is still playing the dutiful wife even though she knows her husband has been cheating on her. She seems to be okay with the idea of Obinze carrying on an affair as long as he continues to act as her husband and her life doesn't change. She has become like the wife of The General.

Shortly before Obinze comes to Ifemelu's apartment to declare his love for her and to tell her he has left Kosi, Ifemelu sees the male peacock on the roof of the colonial house dance for the female. The peahen watches for a moment and walks away. The peacocks are a symbol of Ifemelu's relationship with Obinze. There are, in fact, three peacocks that live near the colonial house—one male and two females. The male, of course, represents Obinze and the two females are Kosi and Ifemelu. When Ifemelu finally sees the male dance for one of the females, the author seems to be suggesting that Ifemelu has the power over Obinze that the peahen has over the peacock. Obinze will dance for her, and it's up to her to decide how she will react. She has the power to walk away if she chooses because she has built a life on her own, not dependant on a



man to take care of her. Still, when Obinze shows up at her door and says he'll pursue her until she gives him a chance, she lets him in.

The conclusion is a pleasing, happily-ever-after ending for the majority characters of the book. Uju has a good job and a good man in America. Dike has regained a sense of himself and is healthy again. And, the hero and heroine have found one another again. It's a classic ending for a love story, which Americanah truly is at its heart, even with the heavier themes of race, class, and identity intertwined.

Discussion Question 1

How does Kosi's reaction to Obinze telling her that he is in love with Ifemelu affect Obinze? Does it help or hinder Obinze's eventual move to be with Ifemelu? How?

Discussion Question 2

How does Dike's visit to Nigeria help him to gain a better sense of his identity? How does he feel about Nigeria?

Discussion Question 3

Why does Ifemelu name her blog The Small Redemptions of Lagos? Is the title appropriate to what she writes about in the blog? Why or why not?

Vocabulary

encroaching, emphasis, dapper, snarky, incongruous, initiate, antibiotic, masthead, judgmental, reluctant, fussy, moderate, drenched, platonic, scarcity, philosophizing, prolong, eccentricity



Characters

Ifemelu

Ifemelu is the female protagonist of the novel. Ifemelu is a Nigerian woman who grows up in Nigeria living with her mother and father. Her mother is a very religious woman and her father is a man who values education. Her Aunty Uju is a huge influence on her life and her confidant. She looks up to Uju's wealthy lifestyle until she discovers that Uju really has no money of her own, but is completely reliant on her wealthy boyfriend.

Because her father values education and Ifemelu scored well on her standardized tests, she attends a high school where she doesn't quite fit in because her classmates come from wealthier families. While there, she meets Obinze, a handsome, confidant boy who is new to the school. He immediately fits in better than Ifemelu does. Ifemelu dates Obinze throughout high school and into her college years. When she is in college, Ifemelu moves to America to continue her education there. While she is in America, Ifemelu cuts off communication with Obinze due to a traumatic event and the two lose touch for many years. However, Ifemelu is never able to have a successful relationship with another man. She never feels about them the way she does about Obinze and ends up sabotaging the relationships.

It is in America that Ifemelu is confronted by issues of identity and race. For the first time in her life, Ifemelu is identified as black by those around her. She discovers the intricacies of race in relationship to class and society as a whole. She also finds that she is singled out because of her foreign accent. For a time, she makes an effort to fit in by adopting an American accent and straightening her hair. However, she reclaims her identity when her hair begins to fall out from the relaxer chemicals and she feels guilty about trying to sound American. She reverts to her Nigerian accent, wears her hair in its natural state, and starts a blog about racial issues in America.

In the end, Ifemelu finds herself homesick for Nigeria and still in love with Obinze, so she returns to her hometown of Lagos. She initially has some trouble adjusting and her friends call her an "Americanah" meaning that she's forgotten what it's like to be Nigerian and complains about things Nigerians are used to living with. After some time, Ifemelu finds herself again and feels at home in Nigeria. It is only then that she lets Obinze know she is back and the two can resume their relationship.

Obinze

Obinze is the male protagonist of the novel. He is a Nigerian man who grows up in Nigeria with his single mother who is a professor at a university. He has a very close relationship with his mother, who treats him more like a friend than a child. Obinze is a confident young man who fits in better with the students in the high school than Ifemelu does even though he is new there. While in high school, he and Ifemelu fall in love.



Obinze is separated from Ifemelu when she goes to America to pursue her education. He is unable to follow due to travel restrictions because of the terrorist attacks. While Ifemelu is in America, they stop communicating with each other and the relationship ends.

Obinze goes to England and lives there illegally. Although he encounters hardships like, joblessness and prejudice, he doesn't lose his integrity. When he pays some men to help him with an arranged marriage to get his papers, he is kind to the woman he is to marry and tries to make the situation as easy on her as possible. He is deported from England just as he is about to get married.

When Obinze returns to Nigeria he eventually procures work with a wealthy businessman called Chief. He gets the job through persistence and is able to make a great real estate deal for Chief at the right time. Obinze becomes wealthy and marries a beautiful woman named Kosi. They have a daughter named Bucchi. Obinze is content with Kosi, but not really happy since Kosi is not Ifemelu and is the sort of woman who agrees with everyone around her to avoid conflict.

When Obinze learns that Ifemelu is returning to Nigeria he is thrilled. He sends her several emails explaining his life since they parted and professing his feelings for her. When the two see each other again they begin an affair even though Obinze is still married. He struggles with leaving Kosi for Ifemelu because he feels a sense of responsibility for her. However, he eventually makes the decision to leave Kosi to be with Ifemelu, who is his soul mate.

Aunty Uju

Aunty Uju is the family member Ifemelu feels closest to as she is growing up. She is Ifemelu's confidant and friend. Aunty Uju is a bright woman who aspires to be a doctor. She enters into a relationship with The General, a wealthy government official, who is married. Because of the relationship Uju lives a more expensive lifestyle than she could afford on her pay at a clinic job that The General had created for her when there was not a position available. The General pays for all of Uju's expenses, including her home, groceries, and car. Initially, Ifemelu is taken in by Uju's lifestyle and loves her home in Dolphin Estate so much that she wants to live there. However, when Ifemelu discovers that Aunty Uju has no money of her own, she fears for her.

Aunty Uju has a son named Dike with The General. Right after Dike turns one year old, The General dies and Uju is forced by his family to flee to America with Dike in tow. In America, Uju works three jobs while going to medical school. She convinces Ifemelu to move to America to go to school and lets Ifemelu live with her during her first summer in America.

Uju is the kind of woman who thinks she needs a man in her life to take care of her and make her complete. This leads to her marrying a man named Bartholomew who is lazy and doesn't care for Dike. The marriage isn't a happy one and they eventually divorce.



Uju finally finds happiness with a fellow doctor that she meets while doing work for a charity organization.

Dike

Dike is Ifemelu's cousin and the person who always makes her happy and helps her find peace. Dike is a baby when he and his mother, Aunty Uju, move to America. He is in first grade when Ifemelu moves to America. The two forge a strong bond in the summer that Ifemelu babysits him and teaches him math. When Ifemelu is trying to steel herself to go to the tennis coach to earn some money, it is Dike she calls to help boost her spirits and give her the courage to do what she feels she needs to. It is also Dike who comforts Ifemelu without judgment after she breaks up with Curt.

For much of his school career Dike is one of only a few black students in his school. He feels singled out by this and is falsely accused of hacking the school's computer system. He and his mother believe he's accused because he is black. His mother, however, never wants Dike to identify as one of the Black American kids, so she tells him he's not black and discourages him from dressing or speaking like Black American teenagers. However, she never gives him a clear picture of his heritage, either. As a result, Dike has no sense of identity, which causes him to become depressed and attempt suicide. His suicide attempt delays Ifemelu's return to Nigeria.

Curt

Curt is Ifemelu's wealthy white boyfriend in America. He is the brother of Kimberly, Ifemelu's employer, which is how they meet. Curt treats Ifemelu very well, helping her to pay for groceries, purchase books for school, and buying her expensive presents. He loves her, and although she is happy during the relationship, she realizes something is missing.

Curt is responsible for helping Ifemelu to get her citizenship papers since he helps her get a job through his own connections. The company she works for helps her to get her papers.

Curt is supportive of Ifemelu and tries to understand the racial issues Ifemelu encounters, but he does not, and perhaps cannot, fully understand her. Ifemelu never quite feels about him the way she wants to and ends up cheating on him with a man in her apartment complex. This leads to the demise of the relationship.

Blaine

Blaine is Ifemelu's Black American boyfriend. She meets him on a train and they connect. Years later they find each other again at a blogging conference and their relationship begins. Blaine is part of an academic crowd that Ifemelu is never completely comfortable with as she finds them all a bit close-minded.



Blaine is a man of high ideals who believes that everyone has a responsibility for making the world better, including Ifemelu and her blog. He tells Ifemelu she can't merely write her observations, but that she must go deeper because it's her responsibility as a black woman commenting on culture and society. He eats only organic food and exercises daily, which he draws Ifemelu into doing as well. It's clear, though, that Ifemelu never really embraces that lifestyle since the first thing she does when they break up is eat several non-organic chocolate bars.

Blaine and Ifemelu break up for a short time when Ifemelu fails to attend a protest he organized and assumed she'd be at even though she had a prior engagement at a luncheon. When he discovers she lied when she told him she overslept and missed the protest, he is incensed and won't speak to her for several days.

The two do reunite, but they only agree on Barack Obama's presidential campaign. When Ifemelu decides to return to Nigeria, she agrees to stay with Blaine until the campaign is over. Their relationship ends for good when Ifemelu leaves America.

Kosi

Kosi is Obinze's wife. She is a beautiful woman who avoids conflict by agreeing with everyone around her. Kosi likes her life just the way it is and wants everything to remain the same. Obinze is content with her, but not truly happy. When Kosi learns that Obinze has been having an affair with Ifemelu, she doesn't tell him she knows and just lets their life go along as it has been. Obinze leaves Kosi for Ifemelu.

Ranyinudo

Ranyinudo is Ifemelu's girlhood friend from Lagos. She and Ifemelu keep in touch after Ifemelu moves to America and it is Ranyinudo who informs Ifemelu that Obinze has married. When Ifemelu returns to Lagos, Ranyinudo helps her re-adjust to life in Nigeria. Ranyinudo's calling Ifemelu an "Americanah" gives the book its title.

Emenike

Emenike is Obinze's boyhood friend. Emenike led his friends to believe his family was of a higher class than it was, but his friends always saw through the stories he told. Emenike moves to England and gets married and is successful in business. When Obinze moves to England and needs to borrow money, he goes to Emenike. Emenike lends him the money, but not before he spends a great deal of time trying to impress Obinze with his new wealth and lifestyle.



Ginika

Ginika is one of Ifemelu's high school friends. She is considered one of the prettiest girls in school and was supposed to date Obinze, but Obinze and Ifemelu hit it off and became a couple. Ginika moves to America when they are still in high school, so when Ifemelu decides to go to America Ginika helps her apply to colleges. Ginika helps explain some of the intricacies of racial issues in America to Ifemelu and helps her get the job as Kimberly's nanny.

Obinze's Mother

Obinze's mother is never given a name. However, she is important to the story because she is very supportive of Obinze and Ifemelu's relationship. She talks to Ifemelu about sex and urges her to be the responsible one. She and Obinze are very close and when Obinze tells Ifemelu about her death in an email as Ifemelu is preparing to return to Nigeria, Ifemelu is very sad and tells him she loved his mother and sometimes wished his mother was her own mother. Ifemelu's response to Obinze's mother's death helps cement the relationship between Obinze and Ifemelu.

Ifemelu's Mother

Ifemelu's mother is extremely religious and uses her religion to mask her own desires. She calls the gifts Aunty Uju receives from The General "gifts from God." Ifemelu's mother has beautiful hair when Ifemelu is a child that she cuts off when she joins a church. After that, she isn't the same person.

Ifemelu's Father

Ifemelu's father is a man who values education greatly. Because of this, he makes certain Ifemelu goes to a good school, which is where she meets Obinze.

Aisha

Aisha is the woman at the braiding shop who braids Ifemelu's hair. She is seeing two Igbo men and wants Ifemelu to talk to them because they tell her that Igbo men only marry Igbo women, which Ifemelu says is not true.

Mariama

Mariama is the owner of the hair braiding shop that Ifemelu goes to to get her hair braided before she returns to Nigeria. While Ifemelu is sitting in her shop, her story is told through flashbacks.



Chief

Chief is the man Obinze works for in Nigeria. He is a wealthy and powerful businessman. Obinze is employed by Chief after persistently making himself available until an opportunity to make a great deal for Chief presents itself.

Kimberly

Kimberly hires Ifemelu as a nanny for her children. While employed by Kimberly, Ifemelu meets Kimberly's brother, Curt, and they begin dating.

The General

The General is Auntie Uju's married boyfriend in Nigeria and Dike's father. He is a very wealthy and powerful businessman. He pays for Auntie Uju's living expenses, including a nice house in Dolphin Estate. When The General dies, his family forces Uju out of the house in Dolphin Estate and she goes to America with Dike.

Cleotilde

Cleotilde is the woman that Obinze is to marry in England to get his citizenship papers. Obinze pays the Angolans to handle the marriage details. Obinze genuinely likes Cleotilde and treats her well. He is deported before they can be married.

Nigel

Nigel is Obinze's coworker at the warehouse in England and his friend. Years after he is deported, Obinze contacts Nigel to be his General Manager when Chief tells him he will need a white man for that job.

Auntie Onenu

Auntie Onenu is the owner of Zoe magazine where Ifemelu works after she returns to Nigeria. Auntie Onenu isn't very professional since she insists her employees call her "Auntie," invites her employees to her house, and talks to her other employees about Ifemelu's personal life. When Ifemelu learns that Auntie Onenu accepts payment from society women in exchange for running stories about them in the magazine, she quits her job to start her new blog.



Nicholas and Ojiugo

Nicholas is Obinze's cousin and Ojiugo is Nicholas' wife. Obinze lives with them in England. They are very different from the people he knew back in Nigeria. They are no longer carefree and they are overly concerned about their children being educated and successful.

Ray Snell

Ray Snell is Obinze's boss at the warehouse. He treats Obinze well and only asks him about his citizenship status after receiving an anonymous call telling him Obinze isn't who he says he is. This leads to Obinze quitting his job at the warehouse.

Boubacar

Boubacar is a professor and friend of Ifemelu's. He encourages her to apply for the fellowship at Princeton.

Esther

Esther works with Ifemelu at Zoe. She is ingratiating and very religious. When she is given a prescription that is improperly labeled, Ifemelu is prompted by the situation to consider starting another blog where she can write about those sorts of issues.

Doris

Doris works with Ifemelu at Zoe. She also has an American education and makes certain everyone knows this about her. She and Ifemelu don't get along well and when they argue over Auntie Onenu receiving payment to run articles on society women, Ifemelu quits her job at the magazine and starts her new blog.

Zemaye

Zemaye works with Ifemelu at Zoe. She and Doris don't get along and bicker often. She and Ifemelu are friends and both would like to see the magazine run more serious articles, such as the story of Esther's improperly labeled prescription.

Tennis Coach

The tennis coach is a man that pays Ifemelu to let him touch her. She takes the job because she is desperate for rent money. After being with him Ifemelu falls into a deep depression and stops communicating with Obinze.



Kweku

Kweku is a doctor that Aunty Uju meets and begins dating after she divorces Bartholomew. He treats Aunty Uju well and makes her happy. He is also good to Dike and Dike seems to like him, too.

Bartholomew

Bartholomew is a man that Aunty Uju meets and marries when she thinks she needs a man to take care of her and make her life complete. He is lazy and disrespectful of Aunty Uju. He is indifferent toward Dike. Aunty Uju divorces him.

Bucchi

Bucchi is Obinze's daughter. He loves her dearly and considers staying with Kosi even though he is in love with Ifemelu because he wants to be there to raise his daughter.

Emeka and Chijioke

Emeka and Chijioke are Aisha's Igbo boyfriends. Aisha wants Ifemelu to talk to them because she is Igbo, too. These men tell Aisha they can't marry her because Igbo men only marry Igbo women, which Ifemelu tells her is not true.



Symbols and Symbolism

Hair

Hair is a symbol of identity for Ifemelu. It begins with her mother's hair when she is a child. Her mother cuts off her long, beautiful hair that was often referred to as her "crowning glory." After that, she becomes a different person. After Ifemelu moves to America, the symbolism is further developed. In fact, the part of the book that reveals to the reader who Ifemelu is is told as Ifemelu is sitting in a braiding salon having her hair braided.

Ifemelu makes the decision to relax her hair when she goes for her first post-college job interview because she remembers Auntie Uju doing the same when she received her medical license. In fact, Auntie Uju told Ifemelu she had to do so because she needed to fit in to get a job. When Ifemelu begins to lose her hair because of the relaxer chemicals, she makes the decision to cut off all of her hair (just as her mother did) and she, too, becomes a different person through that act.

The cutting of her hair is one of the things that prompts Ifemelu to become a blogger as she discovers a supportive website about living with her natural hair. The support she receives after posting a comment on the site leads her to think about starting a blog where her voice can be heard by more people.

Peacocks

There are peacocks that often land on the roof of the dilapidated colonial house that Ifemelu can see out her apartment window in Lagos. There is one male and two females. The peacocks are a symbol of her relationship with Obinze. The male symbolizes, of course, Obinze. The two females symbolize Ifemelu and Kozi. Ifemelu talks about wanting to see the male dance for the females. She has that same feeling about her relationship with Obinze. In some ways, she wants Obinze to prove to her that he loves her and it takes a great act for her to see what she needs. Obinze must ultimately leave Kosi for her and then she invites him in.

Colonial House

The colonial house that Ifemelu sees from her apartment window in Lagos is a symbol of Lagos itself. The colonial house was the beautiful home of a government official during Nigeria's days of military rule when Ifemelu was a young girl. When she returns to Nigeria the house is crumbling just as the old regime has crumbled. When Ifemelu returns to Nigeria, she sees that Lagos has become a dirtier, more rundown country than she remembers it being. And yet, there are peacocks that perch on the roof of the colonial house, so there is still beauty there. Ultimately, Ifemelu sees the beauty in



Lagos, too. She uses the colonial house as the picture for her new blog, The Small Redemptions of Lagos.

Dolphin Estate House

The Dolphin Estate house becomes for Ifemelu a symbol of Uju's reliance on The General for her livelihood. At first, it all seems very glamorous to Ifemelu. Auntie Uju lives in a beautiful pink house in Dolphin Estate. Her freezer is stocked with meat and she has a large generator that is full of diesel. However, Ifemelu learns that Uju has no money of her own and has given up her dreams of becoming a doctor to be The General's mistress. Years later when Dike visits Nigeria and Ifemelu takes him to see the house, it no longer seems so grand to her.

Books

Books are a symbol of a better life. Obinze is, from the start, a great lover of books. He is particularly fond of American novels as a teen because he aspires to move to America where he believes he will have a better life. Later, when he is living in England as an illegal immigrant, his escape from his bleak reality is found in bookstores where he treats himself to an expensive coffee and sits among the books reading as much as he can.

Ifemelu becomes a lover of books, too, after she moves to America and Obinze encourages her to read more American novels to learn more about the culture there. She goes to the library and loves it there where the books are in great shape and have all their pages, unlike the books she had in Nigeria.

When Obinze and Ifemelu are reunited in Nigeria, their first meeting takes place at a bookstore called Jazzhole. Ifemelu tells Obinze she's going there to buy a book and he meets her there where their new journey toward a better life together begins.

Accents

Accents are a symbol of a person's place in society. Ifemelu first learns this when she registers for her college classes and is treated like she is unintelligent and can't understand English because of her Nigerian accent. After that, she adopts an American accent for a time.

While in England, Obinze clearly sees how people are treated differently based on their accents. He wonders if his cousin and his cousin's wife are easier on their kids because they have English accents.

And, during one delivery for the warehouse he works at, he and Nigel meet a very shabby looking man who speaks with a posh English accent. In spite of his looks, Nigel



says the man is a “real gent” and Obinze realizes Nigel reacts to the man in that manner because of the man’s accent.

Passports

Passports are a status symbol among Ifemelu’s high school friends. They discuss who among them has an American passport or a British passport. Emenike brags about how he will have a passport when his parents send him abroad to study. His friends know his family could never afford this, but they play along to spare his feelings.

Bananas with Peanuts

Bananas with peanuts represent home for Ifemelu. They are a comfort snack to her and she eats them when she first moves to America and is feeling out of place with the unfamiliar surroundings and unfamiliar foods. Later, when Ifemelu goes through a break up, Dike brings her a banana with peanuts in an effort to raise her spirits.

Blogs

Ifemelu’s blogs represent freedom for her. Through Ifemelu’s blog writing, she is financially secure and free to live a life that is not dependent on a man like Uju’s life with The General or Ranyinudo’s life with Don. The blogs also give her the freedom to express herself and talk about topics that are of interest to her. This freedom is the main reason Ifemelu quits her job at Zoe to start her second blog.

American Sitcoms

The American sitcoms that Ifemelu grows up watching symbolize the life she thinks she will have when she moves to America. These shows feature affluent black families and Ifemelu believes that is how Uju is living in America and that is how she will live, too. However, when she arrives in America, Ifemelu discovers that’s not the case at all. Uju is working three jobs to support herself and Dike while she attends school. She is tired and has let her appearance go. Ifemelu is initially unable to find work and lives in poverty, even degrading herself just to pay the rent. She also encounters issues of race that she never saw on the sitcoms. She discovers that Black Americans are often treated as though they are of a lower class than White Americans. In fact, she never identified as Black until she moved to America.



Settings

Nigeria

The real action of the novel begins and ends in Ifemelu's home country, Nigeria, specifically in Lagos, Nigeria where she grew up. Prior to Ifemelu's move to America she views Lagos as a place to escape from. The government is corrupt and in a state of unrest. Government officials live in fancy houses, while average citizens like Ifemelu and her parents live in considerably less comfortable housing. The more fortunate citizens have generators to keep their power on during frequent power outages. In fact, people are envious over their neighbor's larger or nicer generators. Many women in Lagos live a higher lifestyle than their actual jobs would afford because they are the mistresses of wealthy government officials and corrupt business men. Aunty Uju is one of these women. She is living in a beautiful pink house in Dolphin Estate with a well-stocked freezer, a generator filled with diesel, and luxurious fixtures. Ifemelu is so enamored by Aunty Uju's house that she tries to convince her parents to let her live with Uju. When the power outages and state of unrest become unbearable, Ifemelu makes the decision to move to America to continue her education.

When Ifemelu returns to Nigeria many years later she sees a dirty country with rundown houses. Due to changes in the government many of the fancy houses that government officials were living in have fallen into disrepair, but Ifemelu sees even more dilapidation beyond that. She sees dirty streets strewn with garbage. Ifemelu also finds the heat and humidity nearly unbearable. There is still a great deal of corruption in Lagos with favors to be bought with the right amount of money, such as articles in magazines for wealthy society women and expensive lifestyles for women willing to be mistresses of rich men. However, Ifemelu sees hope in Nigeria and within a few weeks she feels at home again. Nigeria is, after all, the country where she met and reunited with her soul mate, Obinze.

America

As teenagers living in Nigeria, Ifemelu and her friends view America as the land of dreams. They are certain that black people in America live just like the people they see on *The Cosby Show* and *Fresh Prince of Bel Air*. However, the America Ifemelu encounters upon first arriving is much different. Her life is very difficult at first. She is unable to find a job and is confronted by racial issues for the first time in her life. Her inability to procure employment almost costs her a college education since she is unable to pay her rent let alone her tuition. This leads Ifemelu to make a desperate decision to degrade herself in return for money. It also leads to her breaking off her relationship with Obinze. When Ifemelu finally gets a job as a nanny, her life takes a drastic turn for the better.

Once she is employed, America becomes a land of opportunities for Ifemelu and a place where she is afforded the option of speaking in her own voice through her blog. With her



blog she is able to make a good living and is invited to participate in speaking engagements. She is able to send money back to Nigeria for her parents and even buys a condominium for herself. She also receives a fellowship at prestigious Princeton. In spite of the relative luxury she lives in, Ifemelu misses her home and makes the decision to return to Nigeria just when she is at the height of career success.

England

When Obinze is unable to follow Ifemelu to America due to travel restrictions created by the terrorism attacks of 9/11, he goes to London, England instead. He arrives there under his mother's visa and stays illegally. While there, Obinze discovers that England has its own set of racial and class issues, as well as concerns about illegal immigration. Obinze is unable to work legally and so must assume the identity of a legal citizen using the citizen's NI number. In return, he must pay that citizen a substantial portion of his earnings. Obinze's life in London is difficult and he lives with his cousin Nicholas. He works a variety of jobs and finally feels accepted when he begins working at a warehouse where his coworkers treat him well. However, he never really feels comfortable since he knows he will be deported if it's discovered he's not legal. To get his papers, Obinze pays some men to arrange a marriage to a woman who is a citizen. Just as he's about to get married, Obinze is caught and deported.

Mariama African Hair Braiding

Mariama African Hair Braiding is the shop in Trenton where Ifemelu goes to get her hair braided prior to returning to Nigeria. The shop is significant because as Ifemelu is sitting there the story of her life in Nigeria before coming to America and Obinze's story are told through a series of flashbacks. The shop itself is rundown and poorly ventilated. There is no air conditioning, so it's hot and stuffy. The women who work there run an endless stream of Nigerian movies on the television. Aisha, Ifemelu's braider, talks about her life and the men she is dating who refuse to marry her. The women all talk about the customers that come and go and make comparisons between life in America and life in Africa.

Themes and Motifs

Identity

Identity is a major theme of *Americanah*. Adichie explores identity primarily through Ifemelu. Ifemelu struggles with identity as early as her girlhood when she witnesses a shift in her mother's identity. Her mother was once a joyful woman with long, beautiful hair. Her hair was such a big part of her identity that Ifemelu sometimes felt like she lived in the shadow of it. Then one day Ifemelu's mother decides to begin attending a new church and she cuts off all of her gorgeous hair and changes. She becomes a woman who spends her time in prayer and at church and she no longer smiles and laughs the way she once did.

Ifemelu herself experiences a loss of identity when she moves to America. In America she is identified as black, something she'd never had to think about in Nigeria where she looked like everyone else. However, she isn't just black, she's an American African and so must find where she fits between those two worlds. In college she finds that because of their separate histories, Black Americans and American Africans have different feelings about certain subjects like the use of the word "nigger" in literature and movies. In an attempt to fit in, Ifemelu takes on an American accent for a time, but then feels guilty about giving up her Nigerian identity. She seeks out a group of people who are like her by joining the African Student Association.

Ifemelu also loses a piece of her identity as an African woman when she relaxes her hair for her first post-college interview. In doing so, she is trying to make herself more acceptable to prospective employers. She takes her identity back when she cuts off all of her relaxed hair and lets her hair grow back in its natural state and continues to wear it that way in spite of the negative reactions of some people.

When Ifemelu returns to Nigeria she again experiences an identity crisis. She has become an *Americanah* and doesn't really fit into life in Nigeria. She can't stand the heat and humidity and everything seems dirty to her. She again seeks a group of people to fit in with by joining the Nigeropolitan Club. Eventually, she adjusts to Nigeria again and finds herself at ease.

Race

The theme of race is explored during Ifemelu's time in America. Prior to living in America, race is not an issue for Ifemelu because she is surrounded by people who look like her. When she gets to America, there are so many different kinds of people that she's not sure what to make of it all. She's confused by the term "Hispanic" because it seems to encompass so many people. She writes a blog post on the topic that concludes that in order to be Hispanic a person just needs to speak Spanish but not be from Spain.



When Ifemelu goes shopping with Ginika she wonders why the cashier couldn't merely ask them if they were helped by the white or the black sales associate and Ginika tells her that in America you're not supposed to notice such things. She also tells Ifemelu that "half-caste" is an insult in America. In Nigeria, Ginika was considered prettier because she is half-caste and has lighter skin. However, she's discovered that in America she's supposed to have issues because she is of mixed race.

Ifemelu shows a great patience and tolerance when she encounters unconscious acts of racism. For example, when a salon refuses to wax her eyebrows saying they "don't do curly," Curt is extremely angry. However, Ifemelu gives them the benefit of the doubt saying perhaps they simply didn't know that her eyebrows aren't different from a white person's eyebrows. And, when she is in a store and a woman asks to touch her Afro, she allows the woman to sink her hands in. Blaine thinks she's lowering herself by being this woman's guinea pig, but Ifemelu just wants to give the woman a chance to feel her hair because she knows there isn't another way for the woman to find out what it's like.

All of Ifemelu's observations on the complexities of race in America lead her to write her Raceteenth blog. The blog tackles many of the things Ifemelu discovers as an African in America. The novel is peppered with her blog posts, which serve as commentary on the events of the chapters they appear in.

Although Ifemelu seems to be able to handle the racial issues she encounters, Dike has considerably more difficulty. He often feels singled out because of his race. As a child he attends a summer camp where the counselor refuses him sunscreen because she doesn't understand that black people also need to use sunscreen. This makes him sad and he tells Ifemelu he just wants to be "regular." Aunty Uju doesn't help matters when she tells him he is not black because she doesn't want him to be like the Black American teenagers. But, she doesn't tell him about his heritage. As a teenager he is one of the few black students in his school. He is accused of hacking the school's computer system and is certain he's suspected because of his skin color. Eventually all of these issues weigh on Dike and he attempts suicide. Ifemelu realizes the attempt has to do with Dike's confusion over whom he is and how he fits into society as a black man.

The Role of Women

The role of women is one of the themes that is explored in Americanah. Specifically, the role Ifemelu wants to play and the options she sees around her in the women in her life. When she is young, she looks up to Aunty Uju and her elaborate lifestyle as the mistress of a powerful and wealthy man. She likes the material things Aunty Uju receives and even wants to live with her for a time. Then Ifemelu discovers that Uju has no money of her own and is completely dependent on The General, which worries Ifemelu. When The General dies, Uju and Dike are forced out of their home and have to run away to America. But, even in America, Aunty Uju seems to think she needs a man to survive since she agrees to marry Bartholomew, a man that Ifemelu is certain wouldn't have dared to look at Uju in Nigeria because he is beneath her.



Ifemelu's friend Ranyinudo is in this same sort of situation when Ifemelu returns to Nigeria. Ranyinudo thinks of men only in terms of what she can get from them. She has a man in her life that she really likes, but she stays with Don, a rich man who buys her things. She also suggests to Ifemelu that she should have contacted Obinze for help in finding an apartment because he might have given her a place to live for free.

On the other side of the spectrum is Obinze's mother who is single and employed as a professor at a university. She is strong and intelligent and Ifemelu looks up to her. She likes her so much that when she learns from Obinze that his mother has died, she is sad and tells him that she sometimes wished his mother had been her mother.

Although Ifemelu does date Curt, who is rich, for a while, she ultimately rejects this way of living in favor of being more like Obinze's mother. She tells Ranyinudo she doesn't want Obinze's money and tells Obinze the same when he says that her new blog needs investors. Instead, she makes her own way with her job at the magazine and her blog.

Love

Love is the theme around which the book is structured. Americanah is at its heart a love story. Ifemelu and Obinze are obviously the most prominent example of love in the book, but along the way, both experience forms of love with other people.

Ifemelu and Obinze fall in love as teenagers. They are the quintessential high school sweethearts who plan to attend college together and one day get married. When Obinze's plan for which college to attend changes, Ifemelu changes her plan as well to be with him. They are separated when Ifemelu goes to America and although they lose touch, neither ever stops loving the other. In fact, each of them compare other relationships in they have along the way to that first love.

When Ifemelu dates Curt, the relationship ends when she cheats on him and says she just never felt about him the way she wanted to. This, of course, means that she didn't feel about him the way she did about Obinze. Then, when Ifemelu dates Blaine he is always trying to change her, which Obinze never did. She breaks off the relationship for good when she moves back to Nigeria where she hopes to see Obinze again.

While in England, Obinze looks for someone to marry, partially out of a desire to get his citizenship papers, but also because he hopes to find love again. He talks to a woman and her son in a coffee shop, which gets him thinking about Ifemelu and makes him seek at least a physical connection in a girl he casually dated. When he meets Cleotilde, he sees the possibility of romantic love there, but feels the need to keep the relationship on a business level at least until they are actually married. Once back in Nigeria, he marries Kosi. Kosi is beautiful and he does love her, but they are married mostly because she was available when he was ready to get married. He is content with Kosi, but it isn't the passionate love he and Ifemelu shared.

In the end, Ifemelu and Obinze are reunited, but they aren't able to immediately achieve their happy ending. Each has issues they must work out before they can be together.



Ifemelu is not content to be the mistress and Obinze feels a responsibility for Kosi. Only when Obinze makes the choice to leave Kosi for Ifemelu can the two finally have the relationship they both want.

Ifemelu also experiences love through her relationship with Dike, her cousin. Because Dike is so much younger than she is, their relationship is more like an aunt and nephew. Dike is in many ways Ifemelu's anchor. She returns to him time and again to refuel at low points in her life. He is the one whose voice she needs to hear to steel her for what she must do with the tennis coach. And it's Dike who provides her with comfort when she experiences relationship troubles. Ifemelu appears to do the same for Dike in some ways since she is the one he tells about the camp counselor refusing him sunscreen when he is a child and the one who takes care of him when he attempts suicide. Ifemelu understands him in a way that his mother seems unable to. Indeed, it is Ifemelu that ultimately helps Dike find his Nigerian heritage, thus allowing him to further heal.

There are several examples of love between a parent and a child in the book. Obinze and his mother are one of those examples. They seem to have almost the perfect mother-child relationship. She loves her son dearly and wants the best for him, yet she also expects him to be a responsible young man. The two have intellectual conversations and enjoy spending time together. Obinze's mother's love for her son is so great that she sees he needs to escape Nigeria to try to find a life in England, so she brings him in on her own passport knowing that he will stay illegally. And, when that doesn't work out and he is deported, she is the one who meets him at the airport with open arms.

Dike and Uju are another example of love between a parent and a child. Dike and Uju, on the other hand, have a relationship marred by misunderstanding. Uju wants the best for her son and believes that by denying him the ability to identify as black is for his own good. Yet she fails to explain to him what she wants him to be. Even when Dike attempts suicide, Uju cannot bring herself to tell him about his true origins. Perhaps she is afraid that if Dike learns the truth about her relationship with his father, he will no longer love her.

Class

Throughout the book the author explores the theme of class and how differences between classes are handled in Nigeria, England, and America. Obinze encounters issues of class while he's in England. He observes that class is a more prevalent issue than race there. When Emenike comments on the difference he sees between America and England, Obinze goes on to clarify the statement. He says that in England, a person's class is of more importance than the color of their skin. So, a couple where the people were from two different societal classes would garner more scorn from society than would a mixed race couple where both people involved were from the same class. However, in America just the opposite is true.



The reader sees Obinze's view of how race and class are intertwined play out in Ifemelu's relationships with Curt and Blaine. Curt is white and of a higher economic class than Ifemelu. The people they encounter together don't seem to have any problem with the fact that Ifemelu doesn't have a lot of money like Curt, but some of them do have a problem with the color of her skin. For example, a black man makes a comment about Curt liking the way Ifemelu "looks all jungle" and Curt's aunt tries too hard to convince Ifemelu that she likes black people. They also sometimes notice people looking at them as if they wonder what he's doing with a black woman. On the other hand, the problem in Ifemelu's relationship with Blaine is primarily that the two are not from the same class. Ifemelu always feels like Blaine and his friends are looking down on her. She never quite fits in with the academics he spends his time with and Shan certainly doesn't think Ifemelu is good enough for her brother.

Emenike provides an excellent example of the way people can be affected by class. As a youth, Emenike is the braggart of his group who tries very hard to appear to be of a higher class than he really is. He claims his family has money and will be sending him to America for university, which doesn't fool his friends who know that Emenike is poor. As a result, when Emenike does rise in class after moving to England, he becomes a man who finds it necessary to remind people that he has wealth, a good job, and is able to travel the world. Obinze notes that Emenike's stories are always about people underestimating him and Emenike coming out on top, which is exactly how Emenike likely feels about having come out on top of the friends he grew up with.

Another example of the theme of class is in the way people are treated as a result of their various accents. Nigel is in awe of a raggedy looking older man because his accent suggests he is of a higher class. Obinze also notes that Nigerian parents seem to be easier on their children raised in England because of their English accents, as though they were somehow of a higher class than their parents. In America, Ifemelu recognizes the fact that people treat her differently when she speaks with her Nigerian accent and so adopts an American accent in an attempt to elevate herself. However, she later reverts to her Nigerian accent when her American accent makes her feel false.

The theme of class is also apparent in the sections of the book that take place in Nigeria. Early on, Aunty Uju tells Ifemelu that some people don't know which "asses to lick" and she's lucky to have picked the right one, meaning The General, who is from the wealthy class. Obinze sees this as well, since he tells Ifemelu that people treat him differently now that he has money. He feels like people are sucking up to him to gain something and sometimes misses the days when he had nothing.

Doris also wants to make certain Ifemelu is aware of their class rankings. She immediately makes it known that, like Ifemelu, she also has a foreign education and is therefore on Ifemelu's same level. She also invites Ifemelu to attend the Nigeropolitan Club where the people there obviously feel they are at a higher class than those who never lived abroad.

Styles

Point of View

Americanah is written entirely in the third person point of view. The narrator is both reliable and omniscient. This does not change even when the book shifts focus from present to past and from Ifemelu to Obinze. The narrator reveals the actions and thoughts of the characters throughout the book. For example, when Obinze meets a woman and her son in a coffee shop in England, the narrator describes the actions of the three characters while also revealing that Obinze finds her attractive and the encounter leaves him thinking about love. This point of view allows the reader to get to know the characters involved and develop an interest in what happens to them.

The story is told in a mix of exposition and dialogue, with dialogue occurring through a wide variety of characters. The pace is moderate with enough action to keep the reader's interest, but not fast enough to create excitement or suspense.

Language and Meaning

Americanah is written at a level appropriate to a high school reading level. The language is fairly straightforward, but includes enough higher level words to provide a challenge for more advanced readers. There are some foreign words that are not easily understandable through context clues. The character names are also primarily non-American and there are a multitude of them to keep track of.

Although the characters speak in Nigerian accents, the author does not attempt to write their dialogue in accent making the dialogue more accessible to readers. There is no variation in the language style throughout the book, regardless of which setting the action is taking place in.

The tone of the language is appropriate to the action going on at the time. For example, when Ifemelu is feeling depressed following her encounter with the tennis coach, the author uses words like "torpid," "viscous," and "shrouded." Later in the book when Ifemelu is happily ensconced in her life back in Nigeria, the author describes the landscape as having "foaming water," "ivory sand," and trees that are "a bursting well-fed green" giving the book an upbeat feel to match Ifemelu's mood.

The one place the language varies slightly is in Ifemelu's blog posts, which are included in many of the chapters. These are written in first person from Ifemelu's perspective. They give the reader some additional insight into how Ifemelu sees life in America. They also serve as commentary on the action of the chapter.

Structure

The novel is made up of 7 parts and a total of 55 chapters. The chapters are numbered instead of titled with the chapter numbers in each new part picking up where the last part left off (e.g., Part 1 includes chapters 1 and 2 and Part 2 picks up at chapter 3).

Part 1 of the book includes chapters 1 and 1. Chapter 1 focuses on Ifemelu in the present day and provides the reader with the basic facts of her life. Chapter 1 focuses on Obinze in the present and imparts the basic facts of his life.

Part 2 of the book contains chapters 3 through 22. This section is primarily about Ifemelu's life in Nigeria before she moves to America. While this is mainly her story, Obinze plays a prominent part in that the story of their meeting and early relationship is revealed.

Part 3 consists of chapters 23 through 30. The part of the book is about Obinze's time in England. This section provides the reader with information about how Obinze feels about the loss of his relationship with Ifemelu and gives insight into his adult personality.

Part 4 is made up of chapters 31 through 41 and focuses on Ifemelu's life in America. It ends with her leaving the braiding salon and receiving Aunty Uju's call about Dike's suicide attempt.

Part 5 contains only chapter 42 and is about Obinze as he waits for Ifemelu to return to Nigeria. Part 6 is its counterpart and contains only chapter 43, which is about Ifemelu during the time she spends with Dike while he recovers prior to her move back to Nigeria.

Part 7 includes chapters 44 through 55 and is the story of Ifemelu's return to Nigeria and her reunion with Obinze.

The division of the book into these seven parts provides a structure that helps the reader to follow the back and forth movement of the story between Ifemelu and Obinze as well as the past and the present.



Quotes

She liked, most of all, that in this place of affluent ease, she could pretend to be someone else, someone specially admitted into a hallowed American club, someone adorned with certainty.

-- Narrator (Part 1, Chapter 1 paragraph 1)

Importance: This quotation reflects Ifemelu's feeling about having become successful in America. It hints that perhaps she hadn't always been a part of this club or lived with certainty. Indeed, the reader comes to find out that Ifemelu's start in America was anything but affluent.

The flats were in fact already rented by an oil company, but he sometimes told her senseless lies such as this, because a part of him hoped she would ask a question or challenge him, though he knew she would not, because all she wanted was to make sure the conditions of their life remained the same, and how he made that happen she left entirely up to him.

-- Narrator (Part 1, Chapter 2 paragraph 18)

Importance: Here, readers see a glimpse of Obinze's discontent with Kosi. She is the kind of person who avoids confrontation by agreeing with everyone and is happy just to have her life remain the way it is. In this way, she is very different from Ifemelu who generally speaks her mind, even when it gets her in trouble.

Big Men and Big Women, Obinze would later learn, did not talk to people, they instead talked at people, and that evening Chief had talked and talked, pontificating about politics, while his guests crowed, 'Exactly! You are correct, Chief! Thank you!

-- Narrator (Part 1, Chapter 2 paragraph 30)

Importance: This quotation speaks to the theme of societal classes. Obinze sees that how someone acts or is treated is largely determined by their class. This quotation shows that the rich are treated with deference by those who have less.

Ifemelu had grown up in the shadow of her mother's hair.

-- Narrator (Part 2, Chapter 3 paragraph 33)

Importance: This quotation shows the importance of hair as a symbol of identity in Americanah. Ifemelu's mother had beautiful hair that seemed to define her as a woman. When she cuts off her hair, she becomes a different person.

Aunty Uju, in her big pink house with the wide satellite dish blooming from its roof, her generator brimming with diesel, her freezer stocked with meat, and she did not have money in her bank account.

-- Narrator (Part 2, Chapter 6 paragraph 26)

Importance: Here, the author reveals Ifemelu's unease with Aunty Uju's reliance on The



General for her livelihood. Uju appears to be a wealthy woman to the outside world, but in reality she has nothing of her own.

Do you know how much crime happens in Nigeria? Is it because we don't report it like they do here?

-- Aunt Uju (Part 2, Chapter 10 paragraph 20)

Importance: When Ifemelu comes to America she is frightened by the nightly news because there are so many reports of crime and violence. This quotation is Aunt Uju telling her that Nigeria is no different in terms of crime, it's just not reported. Instead, the news in Nigeria is full of government officials speaking and cutting ribbons at events.

He was one of those people who, in his village back home, would be called 'lost.' He went to America and got lost, his people would say. He went to American and refused to come back.

-- Narrator (Part 3, Chapter 11 paragraph 10)

Importance: This quote is about Bartholomew and how he has tried so hard to be Americanized that he has forgotten where he came from. It speaks to his loss of identity, which is one of the themes of Americanah.

You are in a country that is not your own. You do what you have to do if you want to succeed.

-- Aunt Uju (Part 2, Chapter 11 paragraph 34)

Importance: This is Aunt Uju speaking to Ifemelu about her need to relax her hair before she begins interviewing for jobs in the medical field. Aunt Uju is saying that she must do what is necessary to look less African and fit in better so that she is a more acceptable candidate for employment. Ifemelu will later remember this when she begins interviewing after college, which leads her to relax her own hair.

I've met a lot of people here with white mothers and they are so full of issues, eh. I didn't know I was even supposed to have issues until I came to America.

-- Ginika (Part 2, Chapter 12 paragraph 9)

Importance: Ginika says this to Ifemelu when she is explaining that Americans think the term "half-caste" is an insult in America. However, in Nigeria, Ginika was considered one of the prettiest girls in school because of her lighter skin.

Because this is America. You're supposed to pretend that you don't notice certain things.

-- Ginika (Part 2, Chapter 12 paragraph 49)

Importance: Here, Ginika is talking to Ifemelu about why the cashier at a clothing store didn't simply ask them if the sales associate they were helped by was black or white since that would have made identifying the associate very quick and easy. Ginika is



explaining to Ifemelu that they are supposed to pretend that race isn't important and they don't even see the differences in people.

Then, refreshed by [Dike's] innocence, she called the tennis coach in Ardmore.
-- Narrator (Part 2, Chapter 15 paragraph 73)

Importance: This quotation reveals Dike's importance in Ifemelu's life. She calls him to steel herself before contacting the coach to tell him she will accept his money in return for allowing him to touch her. Dike is her source of comfort and is always able to make her feel better, even in the most dire of circumstances.

This was his weekly treat; to visit the bookshop, buy an overpriced caffeinated drink, read as much as he could for free, and become Obinze again.
-- Narrator (Part 3, Chapter 27 paragraph 1)

Importance: In the novel, books are a symbol of a better life. When Obinze is living in England with little money and a fear of being deported, he finds comfort among books and is able to regain something of his old life and dignity there.

It seemed to me that in America blacks and whites work together but don't play together, and here blacks and whites play together but don't work together.
-- Emenike (Part 3, Chapter 29 paragraph 113)

Importance: This is Emenike talking about his observation of the difference between America and England. Obinze further expands on this statement by saying that in England, class is of greater importance in the way people are treated, while in America race is of greater importance. This speaks to the theme of class in Americanah.

He was going to tick on a form that his client was willing to be removed. 'Removed.' That word made Obinze feel inanimate. A thing to be removed. A thing without breath and mind. A thing.
-- Narrator (Part 3, Chapter 30 paragraph 21)

Importance: This quotation is about Obinze's lawyer in his deportation case indicating that Obinze doesn't wish to fight his deportation. Obinze feels dehumanized by the process, as though he's lost his identity as a human being.

You can't write an honest novel about race in this country.
-- Shan (Part 4, Chapter 37 paragraph 30)

Importance: This is Shan's statement about the process of getting her book published because it includes stories of her life that center around race. She goes on to say that Ifemelu can get away with writing a blog about race because she's African rather than a Black American and is, therefore, less threatening. This quote illustrates some of the complexities of race in America, which speaks to the theme of race in the novel.



Their union was leached of passion, but there was a new passion, outside of themselves, that united them in intimacy they had never had before, an unspoken, unspoken, intuitive intimacy: Barack Obama. They agreed, without any prodding, without the shadows of obligation or compromise, on Barack Obama.

-- Narrator (Part 4, Chapter 40 paragraph 1)

Importance: This quote is a foreshadowing of the demise of Ifemelu's and Blaine's relationship. After they get back together following the argument about the protest Ifemelu failed to attend, the only thing they truly agree on is that they both want Barack Obama to be elected president. However, the relationship is never the same again, making it easy for Ifemelu to leave Blaine behind when she returns to Nigeria.

I can't believe it. My president is black like me.

-- Dike (Part 4, Chapter 40 paragraph 52)

Importance: This is a text that Dike sends to Ifemelu when Barack Obama is elected president. It provides the reader with another glimpse of Dike's feeling of being singled out and treated poorly because of the color of his skin. It isn't long after Obama is elected that Dike attempts suicide.

I worry that she will end up like many women in Lagos who define their lives by men they can never truly have, crippled by their culture of dependence, with desperation in their eyes and designer handbags on their wrists.

-- Ifemelu (Part 7, Chapter 50 paragraph Part 7, Chapter 50)

Importance: This quote comes from a blog post that Ifemelu writes for her blog in Nigeria. It is about Ranyinudo's relationship with Don, but could just as easily have been said about Auntie Uju when she was with The General. The quote is significant to the theme of the role of women since this is one of the choices Ifemelu could have made for her life.

One of the things I've learned is that everybody in this country has the mentality of scarcity. We imagine that even the things that are not scarce are scarce. And it breeds a kind of desperation in everybody. Even the wealthy.

-- Obinze (Part 7, Chapter 51 paragraph 64)

Importance: This is Obinze talking to Ifemelu about what is different to him about Nigeria since his return from England. He has noticed that people in Nigeria never feel like they have enough of anything, which alters the way they interact with the world. It may also explain why some people in lower economic classes work so hard to ingratiate themselves to the wealthy.

At the Abuja airport on his way back to Lagos, he thought of going to the international wing instead, buying a ticket to somewhere improbable, like Malabo. Then he felt a passing self-disgust because he would not, of course, do it; he would instead do what he was expected to do.

-- Narrator (Part 7, Chapter 54 paragraph 23)

Importance: This quotation shows Obinze's desire to leave his marriage and change his life, but feeling as though he cannot because he has a responsibility to his wife and daughter. It shows his internal struggle with the direction his life should take.