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An Intersectional Reading of Contemporary Women's Narratives: Gendered Migration and Diasporic Identity

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Abstract:

The purpose of the study is to explore how female migrant protagonists in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's Americanah, Cristina Henriquez's The Book of Unknown Americans, and Min Jin Lee's Pachinko experience dislocation and self-identity in relation to migration. Using Homi K. Bhabha's hybridisation theory; Avtar Brah's concept of diaspora space; Kimberle Crenshaw's intersectionality; and postcolonial feminism, the study discusses how migration results in fragmented, but dynamic, Identity formations of female migrants in transnational contexts. Using characters like Ifemelu, Alma Rivera, and Sunja as examples of female migrants who form resistant and self-defined spaces through their experiences but also experience marginalisation due to multiple systems of oppression, the Analysis highlights how diasporic identities are hybrid, relational, and changing. Additionally, the narratives illustrate how diasporic identity can oppose Mono-causal paradigms of assimilation, and redefine the notion of diasporic Space as a site of Negotiation, Resilience, and Gendered Metamorphosis.

Keywords: Female migration; Diasporic identity; Intersectionality; Hybridity; Postcolonial feminism

1. Introduction

When people migrate to another country, it is not only about moving to a new location. Migration has the ability to change the person's view of themselves and their place in the world. Female immigrants face many more additional barriers than male immigrants due to additional issues that may occur as a result of their gender, race, class, ethnicity, language, and cultural expectations. The purpose of this research is to explore how female immigrant protagonists in the novels *Americanah, The Book of Unknown Americans,* and *Pachinko* by Min Jin Lee manage their displacement and reconstruct their identities as transnational women.The theoretical basis for this analysis of women's migration is built on Homi K. Bhabha's theory of hybridity, Avtar Brah's concept of diaspora space, Kimberlé Crenshaw's theory of intersectionality, and feminist post-colonial research. These theoretical perspectives provide a framework for understanding female immigrants' migration experiences as sites of empowerment and oppression. Within the context of an increasingly interconnected global society, the stories of female immigrants discussed in this research reflect the interconnected nature of loss, resilience, and self-construction.

Hypothesis

The research establishes that the interactions of race, gender, class and culture all play an important part in determining a woman's lived diasporic experience. These narratives provide both a lens through which we see the trials of migration and an indication of how a woman's migration could potentially

transform her life. They also present women as not only the excluded voice but rather as active participants in creating their own identity, belonging and home in a globalised environment through a combination of Postcolonial Feminism and Intersectional Feminism.

2. Literature Review

Various articles have been consulted and together these critical pieces present a transnational, intersectional feminist viewpoint on women's writing in diasporic settings. While Omer and Lupo highlight shattered but emerging feminist solidarities shaped by race, religion, and migration, Carrière's thesis of metafeminism emphasizes cautious hope and self-reflexive resistance. Diasporic women's tales negotiate hybrid identities, memory, and belonging across cultures, fusing the political with the personal, as demonstrated by Davis, Benga, and El-Tayeb. Vergara Figueroa and Arboleda Hurtado emphasize the African diaspora's collective feminist resistance, while Sinnott broadens this paradigm by emphasizing queer diasporic identities that challenge rigid ideas of gender and nationality. When taken as a whole, these studies show how modern women's literature expresses fractured yet optimistic forms of identity, unity, and change.

Objectives

- To examine the ways in which women's identities have changed due to migration within diasporic contexts, as a result of the interplay of gender, race, class, language, and culture.
- To utilize Kimberlé Crenshaw's theory of intersectionality to interpret the experiences of female characters from the novels *Americanah, The Book of Unknown Americans*, and *Pachinko*.
- To consider Avtar Brah's concept of diaspora space as a location for identity negotiation, identification, and displacement.
- To understand diasporic identity as fluid, fragmented, and occurring within the in-between of two or more cultural frameworks, based on postcolonial feminist interpretations and Homi K. Bhabha's hybrid identity model.
- To indicate that, instead of following a linear pathway of assimilation, women are transforming the disruption caused by migration into sites of empowerment, self-definition, and agency.

3. Research methodology

This study is based on the qualitative, interpretive approach of literary analysis, which includes close textual reading of the novels. This analysis will consider how these novels depict women's migratory experiences and identity formation using Kimberlé Crenshaw's theory of intersectionality and Avtar Brah's concept of diaspora space. The author draws upon postcolonial feminist theory and Homi K. Bhabha's hybrid theory to provide the context for each of the primary novels. Secondary sources, including theoretical texts and critical essays, are used to support the author's argument about how gender, race, class, and migration are intertwined in the creation of diasporic subjectivities.

4. Analysis

The experience of migration, whether forced or voluntary, is never neutral. One's gendered subjectivity, identity, and sense of belonging are all rearranged by it. Particularly for women, migration is sometimes seen as a process of displacement—not just from one's native country or geographic location, but also from one's culturally, linguistically, and patriarchally constructed

self. The study examines how the female protagonists in *Americanah* by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, *The Book of Unknown Americans* by Cristina Henríquez, and *Pachinko* by Min Jin Lee negotiate and reassemble their identities in cross-border settings. Drawing primarily on Kimberlé Crenshaw's theory of Intersectionality and Avtar Brah's concept of Diaspora Space, and supported by insights from Postcolonial Feminism and Homi Bhabha's Hybridity, this chapter examines how gender, race, class, and migration intersect to produce complex, fragmented identities in global diasporic narratives. When put together, all of these theoretical orientations shed light on how women migrants navigate the contradictions of loss and empowerment, tradition and modernity, inclusion and exclusion to create a dislocated site of self-fashioning. The protagonists highlight the multiple cultural and ideological spaces that reside inside them as they represent diasporic identity as being hybrid and intersectional. Moreover, engaging with migration is indicative of the fact that migration is more than a story of displacement, it includes transformation, resilience and the redefinition of the self in relation to a global/multiple world.

According to Kimberlé Crenshaw's ground-breaking concept of *Intersectionality* (1989), oppressive institutions like race, gender, and class interact to produce multifaceted kinds of marginalization rather than acting independently. Because migrant women must negotiate multiple discriminatory frameworks, intersectionality becomes a reality for them. Similar to this, Avtar Brah's *Diaspora Space* (1996) views the diaspora as a place of coexistence, hybridity, and conflict where identities are negotiated through both exclusion and belonging, rather than just a geographical dispersion. Together, these concepts collectively contribute to exposing how dislocation shapes gendered subjectivities. They also illustrate how women are compelled to rethink home, identity, and agency in a complex constellation of power in diasporic contexts.

Americanah highlights the transforming effect of transnational mobility on identity formation through the story of Ifemelu, a Nigerian woman who migrates to the United States. Because of her journey, Ifemelu is exposed to American racial hierarchy and experiences her first "Black" identity. As Ifemelu navigates race, gender, and her status as an immigrant, Crenshaw's intersectionality is vividly realized as she tries to fit in with a culture that racializes and exoticizes her. Her observation that "*race doesn't really exist for you until someone calls you black*" (Adichie 359) captures how her sense of herself changed under the new power systems. As Homi Bhabha puts it, Ifemelu's blog, Raceteenth or Various Observations About American Blacks (Those Formerly Known as Negroes) by a Non-American Black, turns into an emotional and intellectual "third space"—a zone of negotiation where she expresses hybrid consciousness. Through her writing, she regains narrative agency and challenges the idealization of America in the imagination of the Nigerian diaspora as well as Western racism.

Ifemelu's viewpoint is another way that Adichie questions Western female universalism. Ifemelu's feminism is profoundly anchored in her Nigerian heritage, which she neither romanticizes nor rejects, while her American companion Curt sees her as a symbol of exotic diversity and American feminist rhetoric stresses independence. In *Under Western Eyes* (1984), Chandra Talpade Mohanty criticizes the homogenizing tendencies of Western feminism. Ifemelu's experience serves as an example of the necessity of a situated feminism that recognizes cultural specificity. Furthermore, Ifemelu draws herself into visibility in a society that frequently silences non-Western women, echoing Gayatri Spivak's inquiry, "*Can the Subaltern Speak?" "Dear Non-American Black, when you make the choice to come to America, you become black. Stop arguing. Stop saying I'm Jamaican or I'm Ghanaian. America doesn't care*." (Adichie 359).The act of blogging becomes a subversive medium of reclaiming voice within the global diaspora space.

Furthermore, "*Lagos seemed suddenly small and provincial, and she realized that she had been away long enough to forget the rhythms of the city. She was both home and foreign, familiar and strange*" (Adichie 398)The way in which Adichie depicts Ifemelu's return to Nigeria exemplifies Avtar Brah's idea that diaspora space is neither fixed nor static. Since she is neither wholly Nigerian nor wholly

American, Ifemelu suffers from reverse alienation after returning. Lagos, which Brah claims "the notion of diaspora offers a critique of fixed origins," now feels alienated, despite having been "*home*" (Brah 193). Returning does not, therefore, erase Ifemelu's displacement; rather, she lives with a transnational identity that defies classification. By using her, Adichie illustrates how the female migrant subject constantly negotiates within overlapping gendered and cultural frameworks to rebuild her identity.

This argument is expanded upon in *The Book of Unknown Americans*, which focuses on the Latinx diaspora in the US. Alma Rivera, a Mexican mother who moves to Delaware in order to provide her daughter Maribel with better medical care, is the main character of the book. "*Alma felt the weight of the words she couldn't understand pressing down on her. She wanted to speak, to be heard, but the English she knew was never enough, and she could feel herself fading into the background*" (Henríquez 27).Here, Henriquez examines the linguistic and emotional displacement of female refugees who have to re-establish their identities in a foreign country through Alma. Alma's weak English skills, which limits her ability to participate in public life, exacerbates her sense of estrangement. Here, Crenshaw's concept of intersectionality is especially pertinent because Alma's invisibility is exacerbated by the intersections of her gender, ethnicity, class, and language limitations. She is unable to fully maintain her identity from home and is not empowered in her host nation, therefore she lives in a state of social liminality.

According to Avtar Brah, the local Latin American immigrant population creates what is known as a diaspora space, where people of different nationalities live side by side in the same state of displacement. Gender is revealed as a crucial element influencing how belonging is felt in this context. "*Alma stayed close to Maribel at all times, watching every step, worrying about the other children, the streets, the strangers. She felt responsible for keeping her daughter safe in a world that seemed so much larger than the one she had left behind*" (Henríquez 42).Alma's ongoing concern for her daughter's security and welfare highlights how migration narratives feminize caregiving. Henríquez's representation of women's migration highlights the gendered dimensions of transnational labour that are often overlooked in the mainstream discussion of migration, privileging an emotional resilience and familial sacrifice perspective, relative to economic mobility.

Henríquez's portrayal of Alma's guilt over Maribel's accident in Mexico demonstrates how trauma travels across borders; migration does not erase the past but decontextualizes it. "*Alma thought about the accident constantly, about how she had failed to protect Maribel. Even here, "in Delaware, she could not escape the feeling that she was responsible, that every decision she made might hurt her daughter again*" (Henríquez 15). Alma's internal struggle between maternal protection and self-blame serves as a metaphor for the migrant woman's broken identity. This part of the book is made clearer by postcolonial feminism, which shows how patriarchal expectations and worldwide injustices combine to shape the experience of the migrant woman. Alma exemplifies what Mohanty refers to as the "politics of location"—the understanding that women's identities are formed via particular intersections of geography, culture, and power—through her efforts to negotiate the bureaucracy of the host nation while retaining her dignity in the face of bigotry and mistrust. Thus, Henríquez places her female protagonists in the everyday realities of diaspora space, where surviving turns into a personal act of resistance as much as that of politics.

In *Pachinko*,"*Sunja felt the weight of the town's eyes on her, each whisper a reminder that she was a girl who had brought shame on her family, and worse, a Korean girl in a country that already saw them as outsiders*" (Lee 45) In order to show how colonial history, ethnicity, and gender combine to cause long-term diasporic displacement, the story spans generations of Korean migrants in Japan. In imperial Japan, Sunja, the main character, represents the confluence of gender, race, and class. She begins a lifetime of coping with shame, social disgrace, and exile with her unwed pregnancy and subsequent marriage to a Korean priest. In a hostile Japanese society, Sunja is excluded not only as a

woman but also as a Korean, and Crenshaw's intersectionality provides a lens through whichhh to view how her oppression functions concurrently along racially and gendered lines.

Avtar Brah's diaspora space is vividly realized in *Pachinko*. The Zainichi Korean community in Japan lives in a constant state of in-betweenness—foreign in Japan yet disconnected from Korea. Within this space,"*Sunja spent her days cooking, cleaning, and caring for her children, aware that the world outside the apartment offered little respect or opportunity for Koreans like her. Still, in her small acts of care, she felt she was keeping their heritage and dignity alive*" (Lee 112). It is the responsibility of Sunja and other women to maintain cultural continuity via emotional and household work. They use their kitchens, marketplaces, and family customs as platforms for both resistance and cultural reproduction. These women preserve the memory of the community despite being denied official recognition, thereby establishing the domestic realm as a site of political resistance. Lee's representation aligns with Gayatri Spivak's concept of the subaltern, meaning that the voice of the oppressed is channelled through the mechanisms of power not removed. Though hardly monumental, Sunja exerts her agency through her quiet steadfastness and usefulness.

Both imperialism and patriarchy are criticized by *Pachinko* from a postcolonial feminist standpoint. Despite negotiating their desires under restrictive structures, Sunja, Kyunghee, and Hana—three of the novel's female characters—each exhibits moral and emotional autonomy. They demonstrate the economic aspects of female resilience through their survival tactics, which include managing family finances and operating a kimchi company. The diaspora realm is likewise, as Brah points out, *"a site of encounter, where the native and the diasporic, the colonizer and the colonized, meet in unequal relations"* (Brah 208). The novel's depiction of generational shifts—from Sunja's hardship to her grandson Solomon's corporate struggles—demonstrates how diaspora transforms but never resolves dislocation. The descendants' inability to find full belonging in either nation exemplifies Bhabha's hybridity, a liminal identity that is simultaneously empowering and unsettling. "*Sunja and Kyunghee worked side by side in the small kitchen, making kimchi and other foods to sell at the market. It was hard work, unglamorous and unseen, but it put food on the table and kept their family afloat in a country that refused to see them as fully human*" (Lee 198).

When analysing these narratives, the theoretical convergence of Diaspora Space and Intersectionality provides the most complex analytical framework. Avtar Brah's notion of diaspora space situates these neighbourly experiences within the larger transnational processes of belonging, excluding others, and cultural negotiation; it insists on thinking through migration not simply as transnational movement across borders of place, but also as a transformation of social and emotional borders. Kimberlé Crenshaw's theory of intersectionality, on the other hand, identifies the multiple overlapping axes of power (race, gender, class, culture) that inform migrant women's identity, as well as limiting their ability to obtain social recognition and justice. Collectively, these theories highlight how the women's identities are always produced and articulated through experiences of oppression and possibility.

The women In these texts illustrate what it means to live multiplicity— continually negotiating their position in relation to memory and modernity, tradition and transformation. This can be deepened with the contributions of postcolonial feminism, which draws attention to women's migratory experiences through historical continuities of colonialism and the global hierarchies that continue to shape power relations today. Postcolonial feminism underscored the impossibility of (gendered) migration taking place outside of the broader powers of imperialism, capitalism, and racialization. Homi K. Bhabha's notion of hybridity ultimately offers additional depth to the current discussion by encapsulating the in-betweenness of diasporic identity. In other words, the diasporic subject is not completely situated in the host nation, but also not entirely separated from the homeland. This liminality becomes a "third space," or a space of cultural negotiation in which new forms of identity and meaning can emerge. In this regard, the protagonists do not experience dislocation simply as a wound to heal, but as a condition

through which their own redefinitions of belonging take place and their own hybrid forms of selfhood emerge that can transcend rigid national and cultural boundaries.

5. Conclusion

This study establishes how women's experiences of migration are shaped by simultaneous influences of gender, race, class and culture and therefore create multiple and resilient identities. Based on the texts *Americanah, The Book of Unknown Americans* and *Pachinko*, we find that migration is an experience not only of displacement, but also a means by which self-definition occurs through the process of cultural assimilation. We look at how female characters create alternative locations for agency and opposition via utilizing concepts associated with Intersectionality, Post-Colonial Feminism, and Hybridity. These forms of narrative also contradict historical models of assimilation by demonstrating how diasporic identity continues to evolve and develop.

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