

<b>Title:</b>	Untangling & Weaving Identities: Rediscovering and Asserting Individuality and The Collective Africanness at Mariama African Hair Braiding Salon Through the Poetics of Hair Braiding in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's <i>Americanah</i>
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## Abstract

One of the many themes that Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah* explores is the role of hair in shaping the cultural identity of black women. Through hair salons, Adichie emphasizes the importance of reclaiming cultural heritage and the community-building aspects of hair care practices. In this paper, I argue that Ifemelu's experiences at Mariama African Hair Braiding Salon, alongside her interactions with undocumented immigrants Mariama and Aisha, highlight the tension between assimilation and cultural heritage. I interpret the act of hair braiding as a symbol advocating for a balanced connection to one's roots and identity while adapting to a new environment. In the case of Mariama's salon, the African migrants and black American communities interact within this shared space, ultimately creating an intimate environment through hair braiding where both diverging narratives are interwoven. Nurturing this connection has the potential to promote a strong identity within the African diaspora.

Salon owner Mariama becomes an inspiration and a bridge between cultures. The way she balances her Africanness with American hospitality exemplifies the resilience and determination required to navigate the complexities of multiculturalism and assimilation while preserving one's authentic self. On the other hand, Ifemelu and Aisha symbolize the interweaving of diverse narratives within the salon. Their interactions and shared stories demonstrate the potential for connection and mutual growth that arise from embracing cultural diversity among African migrants and Black Americans.

*Americanah* underscores the importance of inclusive spaces and the flourishing of the collective Africanness through shared experiences and understanding. Through the hair salon scenes, Adichie invites readers to reflect on identity, community, and the transformative power of embracing cultural heritage in a new environment, ultimately weaving a more vital and vibrant collective identity within the African diaspora.

## Reflection

I often find my copy of *Americanah* snugly stored in my bedside pocket, together with a second book, my Kindle, and a rose-scented lip balm. Despite having owned it for three years, this novel has successfully resisted being replaced by newer additions. *Americanah* has become my go-to comfort read. Adichie skillfully weaves elements of Igbo and Black American cultures throughout her characters and plot, yet I never feel disconnected or at odds with these cultural experiences. Instead, I discover solace, understanding, and profound wisdom within Adichie's beautiful narrative, which offers poignant insights into the immigrant experience.

As a second-generation Filipino immigrant in Hong Kong, my own journey closely resonates with Ifemelu's story as a Nigerian migrant in the U.S. Like Ifemelu, I struggled to define my identity in an environment that differed from my home. It was this personal connection that led me to choose *Americanah* for my capstone project, where I aimed to explore themes of immigration, identity, and the delicate balance between assimilation and cultural heritage. Through my project, I sought to advocate for more diverse books in school libraries, drawing from my own experiences as a young reader who yearned for literature written by authors from diverse backgrounds, including Filipino, South Asian, and African/Black authors. I firmly believe that literature plays a vital role in fostering strong communities, shaping, and expressing individual & collective identities by providing a platform for diverse voices to be heard and appreciated.