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in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s *Americanah* “

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1. Introduction

Americanah is a term used by Nigerians to affectionately (or not) comment that a returnee has acquired affiliations with the American culture and thus has been Americanized. The term in itself implies a person's change, since the encounter with the American culture and society has resulted in a transformation from which an individual with different values and an altered mentality emerges. This word entitles Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's latest novel (2013) and the changes induced by immigration and the challenges that go along are palpable. Over a time span of approximately twenty years, this novel documents the changes mainly two female and two male Nigerians experience as they move between their homeland and life in either the US or Britain.

This thesis aims to investigate the struggles during the acculturation process the four characters, Ifemelu, Obinze, Auntie Uju and Dike encounter while living between two distinct nations and how they manage to navigate and negotiate their transnational identities over time. The theoretical framework, based on postcolonial theory, postcolonial feminist theory and transnational theory will serve as a lens through which this thesis will examine the issues that lead to the acculturative stress the characters experience and how they construct a new transnational identity. The theoretical background offers a concise overview of the changes in contemporary Nigeria and Nigerian postcolonial literature. There is a focus on the changes between the generations of Nigerian female writers in terms of how they represent their understanding of issues such as sexuality and gender expectations in their patriarchal reality. Taiye Selasi's definition of the concept Afropolitan and the discussion on transnationalism contribute to the framework of how transnational people construct and negotiate their identities when existing in between worlds.

Since embarking on a transnational lifestyle and the negotiation and construction of identity is not an automatically fluid and successful experience, this framework covers various aspects that shape transnational identities. Firstly, the framework identifies transmigrants and the transnational activities they execute. Secondly, this framework deals with the struggles African transmigrants experience when living in the United States, for instance. Berry's theory on acculturation strategies and opinions of other scholars is used to suggest

explanations for matters such as displacement, alienation, racial discrimination, and the potential consequences of acculturative stress. The case of African second-generation children in Diaspora is also covered with the aim of highlighting their 'neither here nor there' status and illustrating the roles their parents, peers and schools might play in their acculturation and well-being (Bhatia & Anjali 2001; Awokoyo 2012). Subsequently, the construction of a transcultural identity is foregrounded since acculturation ideally should represent a merging of cultures, instead of complete assimilation, marginalization or separation. Here a transcultural approach to food, language and the female body are discussed. Finally, it is brought to the fore that being transnational does not only mean participating in transnational activities; it also means obtaining a multiple consciousness from the experiences gained in both countries, with which one can enable development. The use of the internet is presented as a particularly useful medium for said development

Leaning on the information given above, Adichie's dramatization of the immigrants' at times arduous, and at times successful experiences, is viewed chronologically through each character's evolution. Stuart Hall (394) highlights that our identity has a past and a present. Thus, the analysis of the characters is based on the characters' identity before emigration, while in their host country and after they return to the country of their origin. Their engagement with food, language, their body, race and the media demonstrates each character's identity construction process while living in between two worlds and thereby reveals Adichie's representation of transnational identities.

2. Theoretical background

2.1 Nigeria a country of paradoxes: Challenging a single-narrative

The first section of the theoretical background offers an overview of the changes in both Nigeria and contemporary Nigerian postcolonial literature. In addition, the position of Nigerian women will be outlined. Aligned with the time span covered in the novel (1990's and the late 2000's), this thesis will mainly focus on socio-economic and political facts credited to these 20 years and the literature of Nigerian third generation writers.

2.1.1 General overview

Nigeria, Africa's most populous country, is a heterogeneous West African country with a diverse ethnic, religious and linguistic make-up. Approximately 200-400 ethnic groups co-exist in Nigeria, a nation constructed by the British during colonization. Nwakanma (1) asserts: "Nigeria is, in its current formation, a hybrid state: a nation of multiple nations coalescing to form the basis of nationness and national belonging". Three of the main ethnic groups are Igbo, Hausa and Yoruba. Reed & Mberu illustrate that the Nigerian identity is comprised of the ethnic, religious and regional identity, expressing that especially "ethnic identity is the most basic and politically salient form of identity in Nigeria" (419). Nwakanma adds that the "complex ethnic mix" in Nigeria allows the possibility of being "more Igbo, or Yoruba, or Berom than Nigerian" (2). In addition to ethnic identity, language plays a crucial role in this nation's biography. Eluge (qtd in Aito 18) referred to Nigeria as a country of "extreme linguistic diversity" since the official language English and more than 400 languages are spoken here (Aito18). The main religions practiced are, the Traditional, Muslim and Christian religions.

A glance into Nigeria's political history leads back to the time of colonization. The chief administrator Lord Frederick Lugard amalgamated the Southern and Northern protectorates in 1914 and thus forcefully conjoined a number of ethnically, linguistically and religiously diverse groups (Barkan et.al *i*). The conjunction of different ethnicities led to a sense of tension, which was more so intensified when the colonizers favored certain ethnicities over others.

The divide-and-rule strategy enabled the colonizers to prevent an uprising of the people and the indirect rule Lugard implemented gave corrupt indigenous leaders the power to administer the country to their benefit, enforcing segregation and a heightened ethnocentrism (Ebegbulem, 77-82). An artificially constructed nation and an organized tension between the ethnic groups contributed to ethnic conflict and political uproar in the years following Independence (Fawole 17; Reed & Mberu 419).

Since achieving its independence in 1960, Nigeria is undergoing a tumultuous new chapter that included a bloody Civil War (1967-70). Political unrest continued in the years that followed and the nearly three decade long military dictatorship, from 1966 to 1999, represented a long and rutted path to democracy. The governance of despotic leaders such as Ibrahim Babangida (1985-1993) and Sani Abacha (1993-1995) made headlines for their violations of human rights and money theft. Sani Abacha's short-lived period, described as "the most vicious dictatorship in the nation's history" by Oyeade (106 qtd. in Oyeade 2002) resulted in Nigeria's expulsion from the Commonwealth of Nations in 1995 (Abegunrin 265). According to the President's former Special Assistant of Arts and Culture "[t]hirty years of military dictatorship has left its harsh imprint on the Nigerian psyche. Dictatorship seems to have become a culture from which every Nigerian needs to be purged" (qtd. in Fawole 16). Nevertheless, a democratic future dawned with the election of Olusegun Obasanjo, representing the People's Democratic Party (PDP), as President in February 1999. Obasanjo's governance was responsible for the implementation of democracy and for the rewriting of the past's dark legacy. His governance enforced the return of the stolen money Abacha had deposited in foreign banks and secured a debt-relief of \$30 billion, enabling Nigeria to gain more economic stability (Abegunrin 266-67; USIP 2015). Umaru Yar'Adua succeeded Obasanjo's eight yearlong presidency. Yet, after Yar'Adua demise, his running man Jonathan Goodluck became the new president of Nigeria in 2010 (BBC 2010). Since 2015, Muhammadu Buhari is once again Nigeria's head of state. Nigeria remains a developing country due to corruption by the elite and the fact that the resources are ill managed (Ojukwu & Shopeju 2010; Liston 2014).

Even if the facts named above mainly outline Nigeria's downfalls, there is need to consider that they only present a single-sided narrative, which for years the Afro-pessimist point of view perpetuated by documenting the political and economic letdowns of Nigeria and Africa

in general (Gikandi 9; Dabiri 2014). This single story¹ fails to consider the complexity of the Nigerian reality and dismisses the existence of progress. In her Ted Talk “The Danger of a Single Story”, Adichie (2009) expresses:

“The single story creates stereotypes. And the problem with stereotypes is not that they are untrue, but that they are incomplete. They make one story become the only story” (4).

Initially disregarded, Nigeria is Africa’s biggest economy and is one of the fastest growing economies in the world. Significant developments are being made across many sectors, including film, telecom, oil and gas (Robinson 2015, Liston 2014). Economic growth has benefited by Nigerian transnational community transfers of over \$6 billion in remittances annually (MPI 2015).

2.1.2 Nigerian third generation writers: a turn to Afropolitanism

Since independence, an increased inflow of creative production by Nigerian writers could be witnessed. They have dedicated their talents and knowledge to offer a better understanding of their postcolonial country, serving as a mouthpiece to present the diversity of their stories (Eze 2005; Nwakanma 2008; Adéèkó 2008; Pretorius 2013). Since, *Americanah* was written in 2013, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s work cannot be compared to those composed right after Independence². A great array of the Nigerian third³ generation writers, such as Adichie, approach their postcolonial reality with another mentality even if they might refer to topics that are applicable to said episode (Pretorius 9). Eze clarifies that recent Nigerian authors present the postcolonial Nigeria in an altered light because “in essence, they do not ‘write back’ to the Empire in the classic fashion of postcolonial textualities. Rather, they focus on Nigeria as a cultural, transnational and hybridized space with the goal of enhancing human flourishing there” (“Cosmopolitan” 110). These writers try to work against the Afro-pessimism, which documented Africa’s economic and political calamities, propagating Africa

¹ Ted Talk Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie “The Danger of a single story 2009“

² This thesis has no intention to present a valuing comparison between the literature of first, second and contemporary generation. The comparison solely serves as a representation of the literary evolution between the generations.

³ Strictly speaking, they are the fifth generation (1988-) when one considers the literary works prior Independence, nevertheless since the thesis focuses on post-colonialism they remain the third generation. (see Uwasomba, 2)

as the ‘other’ and incapable of success (Gikandi 9). Moreover, scholars such as Dawson & Larrivé (921) and Pretorius (2015) witness that writers introduce a mentality, which goes “beyond” the “traditional postcolonial identity“, since the mindset of nationalism has shifted to an approach which incorporates the global and transnational reality of people, whether they reside in the nation or outside. The works of these writers add a new dimension to postcolonial studies and criticism.

From 1945-1980, Nigerian authors of postcolonial literature focused on “nation building and cultural self-reformation” (Adeeko 11). The “obsessive nation-centeredness” Timothy Brennan (64 qtd. Nwakanma 2) observed, represented a dominant aspect of the former postcolonial novel (Adeeko 11). The characters lived in the confines of “an undivided nation” and proved their loyalty to their homeland by abiding to the “dying for the nation mentality” (Adeeko 11- 12). The third generation of Nigerian writers, however, defy the traditional postcolonial canon because their definition of nation does not equate that of their literary forerunners. In other words, many have become post-nationalist and incorporate themes such as “nomadism, exile, displacement, and deracination” (Adesanmi & Dunton 16). The search of a national identity is challenging⁴ and therefore addressed differently since they understand that their nation is still in the making (Adeeko 12).

In contemporary times, people have become more transnational, embark on transnational lifestyles and thus need to navigate and negotiate their identities between two or more nations (Pries 2001 referred to in Artner& Stanislawski M-48). Eze emphasizes that due to effortless mobility, Africans have a different self-image and Nigerian authors such as Chris Abani represent this shift by targeting their experiences in their writing and hence “blurring cheap dichotomous categorizations of persons” (“Rethinking” 234-235). Whereas in Chinua Achebe’s time, national identities were defined by antagonism, in opposition to the story of the colonizers, in contemporary times, the Africans constitute their identities through ‘elective affinities’, where people construct their identities based on aspects that relate them to others. This results in the observation that contemporary postcolonial Nigerian (African) identities are “transcultural, transnational ... cosmopolitan” (Eze “Rethinking” 235, 241).

⁴ Does not automatically mean that every Nigerian struggles with the question of national identity.

Many Nigerian third generation writers introduce a transnational approach, considering that boundaries are permeable (Artner & Stanislawski M-49). Their character's transnational lifestyles and the departure from their homeland in hopes to find a future in the U.S or elsewhere, are representative for their works. Whereas older authors considered it a betrayal to leave the homeland, third generation authors understand that the devotion to their country from afar is as valuable and thus not redundant. In the newer novels, emigration to the United States represents a safe haven, a form of "closure" which offers improved opportunities (Adeeko 17). With the adaption of a transnational approach, Sefi Atta and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, among others, introduce the representation of different versions of transnational African identities in their writing, giving each version agency. The focus on the collective identity becomes less central, instead, the stories of individuals and their emotional development are foregrounded (Artner & Stanislawski M-49; Tunca 2015).

One of the dominant characteristics of these new narrative selves is that they are dealing with (various) concepts of an 'African identity,' although the different protagonists come from different countries and do not necessarily share common cultural or historical backgrounds. A different notion of an 'African identity' is being formed, not biased by a Eurocentric view, and told by a pluralist group of people with hybrid forms of story-telling and identifying themselves. Artner& Stanislawski,M-49).

Makokha (2007) considers writers such as Adichie, as Afropolitans⁵ due to their international recognition and their transnational lifestyles. Makokha argues that, even if Afropolitan writers might not reside permanently on the continent, they contribute to the cultural and political advancement of their respective nations (16-17). Their experiences of life abroad have endowed them with a "multiple consciousness" (Eze "We, Afropolitans" 117) which enables them to critically engage with issues relevant overseas but, most importantly, within Africa. Nonetheless, Bwesigye (2013), among other critics of Afropolitanism, criticizes the works of the Afropolitan writers Helon Habila and Taiye Selasi in his article⁶. According to Bwesigye, these Afropolitan writers focus on the presentation of successful lives in the West. He notices that the evident and existent struggles that African people encounter on the African continent

⁵ A portmanteau of African and cosmopolitan popularized by Taiye Selasi in her blog entry "Bye Bye Babar (Or What is Afropolitan?)" in 2005. Here she argues that Afropolitans are the "newest generation of Africans" and more "Africans of the world" since they have resided in many parts of the world, speak a variety of languages (including min. one African language) and remain connected to Africa. Intellectuals such Emma Dabiri (2014), Bosch **Santana (2013)** rejected the term and criticized it as catchword, designed to foster the growth of consumerism and cater to the needs of African elites. Santana (2013) stressed in her article "Exorcizing Afropolitanism" that Afropolitanism has evolved to "a phenomenon increasingly product driven, design focused, and potentially funded by the West", resulting in a commodity culture destined to introduce the loss of "authentic, virgin, black culture" (Dabiri 214).

⁶ "Is Afropolitanism Africa's New Single Story"

are dismissed since they are considered “poverty-porn”. Inevitably, the neglect of the “African realities”, denies the disenfranchised a voice and only perpetuates the single story of which Adichie warned (“Single Story” 2009). Pahl (2016) disagrees and posits that the literary works of Afropolitan writers offer another asset to African literature. Especially in this type of writing, authors “navigate a transnational space” which permits them to target topics both relevant on a “national and global level” (75). Even if their Afropolitan reality enables them to explore different cultures, they do not simply rest on the benefits. Instead, they actively try to close the cleft between the privileged and the disenfranchised (83). Via the internet, authors such as Adichie and Teju Cole, critically engage on a political and cultural level, scrutinizing issues related to power dynamics, Pahl argues (84). In their writing, there is an underlying message, which presents the intricacies of being transnational as a “pattern of mixing, blending, combining and then falling apart” (Pahl 75).

This brief comparison between literary works of first, second generation and contemporary Nigerian writers illustrates that there is an evident change in their approach to their postcolonial reality. The once “traditional postcolonial identity” has been exchanged with a post-nationalist (Bwesigye 2013) and “*post-postcolonial*” identity (Dawson & Larrivée 924) since authors understand that Nigeria is changing, influenced by globalization and the transnational lifestyle people live within and beyond Nigeria. Also, the idea of departure and supporting the nation from abroad now represents a viable possibility. Scholars noted the emergence of Afropolitan writers who contribute to the development of both their nation and Africa. Nevertheless, authors need to offer a “balance of stories” as Achebe once mentioned (Bacon 2000). Not only the transnational lifestyles of the economically privileged should be told, but also those of the immobile, perhaps disenfranchised, yet who implement change on the local level.

2.1.3 Nigerian women and their literature

The next section will exclusively focus on the literary production of African (Nigerian) women writers. This is of great relevance because there is need to offer African women a platform to present their story, since many are marginalized and inhabit the “third space” in predominantly patriarchal and or ex-colonized power structures. Historically, Western feminism, as the dominant mouth piece, often has presented African women as dependent on

Western help (Nnaemeka 366). There is however, need for Western feminists to recognize that African women engage and act in order to introduce change (Nnaemeka 378). Accordingly, the identification of their struggles, and more importantly the work accomplished by them is paramount to establish change and aid both parties to form transnational solidarity in the long term (Nnaemeka 381-382; Salem 2014).

In her Ted Talk⁷, Salami (2014), who manages an award-winning feminist blog called *MsAfropolitan*, illustrated that African women have to “grapple with traditions such as female genital mutilation and girl child marriage, domestic violence, poor maternal health care, not to mention the fact that girls do not have the same access to education as boys do” (Salami 2014). In the same vein, Adichie, a self-professed “Happy African feminist”, alludes to sexism in her Ted Talk “We should all be feminists” (2013). Here she portrays the position of contemporary Nigerian (African) women. Mainly, she urges everyone to become a feminist since the “grave injustice” of gender continues to do a disservice to women, who are discredited due to their sex. According to Adichie, gender “prescribes how we should be rather than recognizing how we are” and therefore she urges a mentality shift in regards of how both girls and boys are raised (Goodreads 2016).

The ramifications of existing gender role education make women attuned to thinking that their existence is linked to disgrace and culpability. From an early age, girls are taught to be apologetic for their femaleness, to avoid being a temptation to men and ultimately to neglect their sexual desires. In the same vein, she expresses that girls are expected to be ‘likeable’ whereas boys are not. Girls should pretend compliancy, inferiority and hence repress disagreement (Adichie 2013). Furthermore, marriage is seen as the bedrock determinant of a woman’s value and success and thus becomes the only life ambition (Adichie 2013). On the other hand, traditional gender expectations, dominant in Nigeria and other countries of the world, place boys in a “a hard, small cage” labeled masculinity and ultimately produce men with “fragile egos” which women are expected to strengthen by reducing their capabilities, and by not being intimidating. Correspondingly, Salem (2014) observes that patriarchy and the idea of masculinity are harmful for both women and men. Women suffer due to the points outlined above and men have to prove masculinity. Thus, a lack of masculine traits such as dominance, strength, heterosexuality, results in ‘othering’, which in its mildest form manifests itself in mockery and, in its most extreme, results in the imprisonment or killing of

⁷ “To change the world, change your illusions”

homosexual men (Alimi 2015). Adichie understands that gender matters globally because patriarchy and other forms of power structures dictate what femaleness is worldwide. It is the feminist's (both man and woman) responsibility to acknowledge that women have a disenfranchised position in a world and to implement change (2013).

Literature presents a useful medium to witness and establish change and diversity. A retrospective view into the literature of Nigerian female writers illustrates that Adichie and numerous contemporary Nigerian female authors introduce a shift in their depiction of their female characters. The colonizers set up an essentialist image of the African woman, which perpetuated her as a sexual being, one who is wild, erotic and untamable. This perception of woman remained also after colonization, when male authors produced a reductive portrayal of women in their writing (Oloruntoba-Oju et al. 6). Essentially, men who were the "gate keepers" of African history and social and cultural developments neglected to include women and their struggles with sexism in their narrative (Salami 2014). In their writing, women were often, either inexistent in the plot, ascribed to the role of the obedient, caring homemaker in the village or demarcated as a 'city pariah', ostracized since her femininity poses a threat to men (cited in Oloruntoba-Oju et al 8). Thus, in order to counteract the pejorative depiction of the "femme fatale, a voiceless, mere extension of the man", first generation Nigerian female writers such as Buchi Emecheta and Flora Nwapa started producing their own writing (Akung 115; Oloruntoba-Oju et al 9) which defied the essentialist mentality. Motherhood and wifehood, two essential cornerstones in a woman's life achievements, were here challenged (ibid).

The second generation of Nigerian female writers, such as Ifeoma Okoye and Zulu Sofola, understood that fighting the patriarchal system takes a Sisyphean effort, eventually resulting in the unaccomplished realization of their aims. Hence, these writers revert to aspects the first-generation rejected and accept that a vehement resistance and somehow "violent and militant approach" against motherhood and wifehood fails the achievement of their goals (qtd. in Akung 114). Nnaemeka (2004) identifies "nego-feminism", a practice, highly varied across Africa, which essentially assists these women to negotiate their needs as a mother, wife, and women in general. Feminism is not seen as an "ego trip" (Oloruntoba-Oju et al 11), instead the practice of nego-feminism aids women to understand "when, where, and how to detonate patriarchal land mines" and especially "when, where, and how to go around patriarchal land mines" (Nnaemeka 378).

The more recent generation of Nigerian women writers such as Adichie and Sefi Atta, introduce a distinct depiction of their female characters, a depiction of superwomen, as Olunfunwa (2012) explains. These women exert personal autonomy, try to introduce the same opportunities for both sexes and view their world with a more astute perspective (Olunfunwa 3). Moreover, these women are unapologetic for who they are, understand the restriction of their respective society and yet intend to defend their opinion and their point of views about the worlds they reside in. In *Everything Good Will Come*, Sefi Atta (2005) portrays women with “a sharp mouth” (17 cited in Olunfunwa 4) as a positive to counteract the common negative connotation Nigerian men have towards assertive women. Nonetheless, these (super) women are flawed and in order for them to assert their position in the world, they have to pass through a “journey from ignorance and naivety to experience and selfhood” (Akung 115).

Prior to the characters' transformation, a privileged or untroubled lifestyle made them oblivious to the issue the disenfranchised experience. Nevertheless, a life changing incident, such as the brutal Muslim Hausa on Christian Igbo killing in Adichie's short story “The Private Experience” (2009) urges the well-off Igbo protagonist Chika, visiting Nigeria in her vacation, to share a shelter with a Muslim Hausa onion vender. Even if a religious matter devastates the town, Chika experiences humanity with this heterodox woman. This forces her to reevaluate her existing worldview, to mature and face the death of her sister. Another distinct revolution is that the female characters do not abide by traditional conventions. They introduce a redefinition of sexuality and their bodies, tailored to their individual interests. Meaning, they express their sexual desires and openly engage in romantic relationships (Olunfunwa 5). These women aim to destabilize the entrenched patriarchal structures by defying the clichéd notions of womanhood, in direct opposition to first generation writers who aggressively counteracted the pejorative narrative male writers had introduced. Contemporary writers do not consider men as the enemy. Instead, they defy the patriarchal power structures, which harm women and men (Akung 2012; Salem 2014).

Contemporary Nigerian female writers target their space in their still patriarchal society, differently. Their depictions reject to present idealist imaginations of a better world for women. The authors target the issues existing in the lives of African women. Inevitably, they depict female characters fully empowered or burdened by their patriarchal society. Adichie, for instance, portrays female characters who are “inbetweeners”, women partly empowered and yet oppressed by their respective patriarchal culture (Ordás 3). The distinct shift evident

in the writing of these authors is the twist, the alternative representation that breaks with the prescribed narrative of the victimized and “struggling” African woman (Olufunwa 6; Salami 2014). Female characters are assertive and believe in their independence without compromising their rights (Akung 115). Sexuality is expressed without questioning guilt or shame. On their journey to self-discovery and self-assertion, they learn to view their existence in a patriarchal society with more critical eyes. In many African countries women experience sexism, nevertheless, these writers try to illustrate that women are active and that change is imaginable and thus possible.

2.2. Transnationalism and Identity

2.2.1 We are more transnational than we believe⁸

In an interview, the Nigerian third generation writer Chris Abani and author of *GraceLand* pointed out

“We are more transnational than we believe. We are more peripatetic than we believe; we are more nomadic in that sense. We are more mongrelized than we would ever like to accept [...] We’re all transnational, either in the real sense of a passport, where you’ve lived in different countries and have spent life migrating through different continents, or in the way in which culture mixes” (Aycock 5,7).

Chris Abani illustrates the reality of our contemporary times. Due to globalization, the comfort of mobility and improvements in communication opportunities people can travel from one continent to the other within a few hours’ time and communicate with loved ones via Skype or Facebook. A plethora of cultures is only a mouse click away and people have literally digested a variety of cultures. We have become transnational, netizens and transcultural, ultimately placing issues such as nationality, culture and identity under enquiry. For travelling identities, people in-between two nations and cultures, this question becomes especially salient. Given that, this thesis intends to shed light on Adichie’s representation of immigrant lives and challenges during migration and how they construct a transnational identity, there is need to pose following questions. What happens to the identity and sense of

⁸ (Aycock 5,7).

belonging of African first and second-generation transnational immigrants? More importantly, how do they construct their identities when existing between two or more contradicting worlds? What roles do food, language, their bodies, and the media play in their realities between two or even more countries, languages and cultures. *Americanah* is considered the prototypical Afropolitan novel, next to Taiye Selasi's *Ghana must Go* and Teju Cole's *Open City* (2011). Selasi's⁹ much disputed definition of Afropolitan can, however, be of great help when it comes to understanding how African transnational immigrants, negotiate and navigate their identities in and beyond the confines of a nation. Selasi recognizes the participation and the struggles of transnational Africans. She posits a negotiation of identity and the willingness to learn in order to attain a new mentality and thus give back to their respective societies (Selasi 2005).

2.2.2 Transnational activity and practices

The reasons for embarking on a transnational lifestyle are diverse and hence not generalizable. Glick Schiller et al. (48-49), among others, explains in her study¹⁰ that there has been a paradigm shift, since immigrants have become transmigrants, who “forge and sustain multi-stranded social relations that link together their societies of origin and settlement” since, in contrast to diasporic people, they do not solely dedicate their obligation to their home country. (Basch, Glick Schiller & Blanc-Szanton 7; Bradatan et. al 172-175; Faist 197). Itzigsohn (317) outlines that these immigrants live within transnational social networks in which social interaction takes place beyond geographical or political boundaries of a single nation. Further, Portes et al. (1999) explain that transnational people partake in “occupations and activities that require regular and sustained social contact over time across national borders for their implementation” (219). Levitt et al. illustrate that new technologies and their inexpensive accessibility facilitate these “regular and sustained social contacts” (569). Usually, transnational practices and ties have socio-cultural, economic and political effects on migrants and their communities. The remittances sent back to their homeland are beneficial to

⁹ Selasi's neologism was condensed to commodity culture catered to the “transnational bourgeoisie”, fixated with the mimicry of whiteness and becoming part of the “global capitalist modernity”. This perpetuated a single story, in which mainly the educated, privileged and financially secured have agency (Arat-Koc 1). In this thesis, Selasi's understanding of Afropolitans will be seen holistically, which scholars such as Mbembe (2007), Eze (2014), Eze (2016), Pahl (2016) illustrate. According to them, this concept targets all transnational Africans and not only the well-educated, privileged and mobile.

¹⁰ “From Immigrant to Transmigrant: Theorizing Transnational Migration”

the economies of sending countries. Yet, since some families depend on the money sent back, this can add great additional pressures on transmigrants (Vertovec 575). Concerning political effects, double citizenship allows transmigrants political agency in both their home and host society. This leads to advantages such as rights on a multicultural level, which might have a constructive effect on existing and further transnational ties (Faist 202).

Usually, international students (Garrett 2013) and Third Culture Kids (TCK), for instance, are subjects of transnational lifestyles. Economic related or interest-based reasons drive the former group to study away from their home country. The latter are “children who spend a significant period of their development years in a culture outside their parents’ passport culture(s)” (Van Reken xi). Here, again the reasons for this lifestyle range from diplomat parents bringing along their children, to families who, due to economic and political instability in their homeland, must begin another life elsewhere. Also, an inconvenient organization of capital in the country of origin, experienced racism or insecurities of political and economic nature in the host society might encourage new arrivals and even the second generation to lead a transnational lifestyle (Glick Schiller et al. 50). Faist (2000) sees opportunity in the behavior of transnational people and communities and argues, “that migration and remigration may not be definite, irrevocable and irreversible decisions – transnational lives in themselves may become a strategy of survival and betterment” (191).

Even if, as Chris Abani points out, “[w]e are more mongrelized than we would ever like to accept” (Aycock 5) and Faist (191) considers transnationalism as “strategy of survival and betterment”, there is need to understand that not all transnational people are mobile and engage in transnational practices actively and regularly. Accordingly, their engagement exists along a continuum between narrow and broad degrees of involvement (Itzigsohn 1999). Reasons such as lack of financial means, the distance between the host and home country and even restricting immigration policies might impede the chances for mobility (Faist 191). They are still flexible and multicultural since they create a realm for “immobile transnationalism” via media, for instance (Park 201; Drake 4-5). However, a ‘double loyalty’ to both nations eases their integration into their new host society (Bradatan et al 172; Snel et al. 2006).

2.2.3 Struggles

Nevertheless, this double loyalty, usually, entails struggle. Migration represents a life-changing event, linked to leaving behind family members, feeling alienated from one's own culture and displaced in the receiving country. Pre-emigration, religious, cultural, and political factors shape the person's identity (Bhugra&Becker 18). Moreover, many immigrants lived with an illusionist perception of their new host society, expecting it to be the place of "milk and honey" and thus opportunities. Yet, after emigration, the adaption to the new host society expects the person to reevaluate their accustomed concepts of themselves and their culture (Bhugra&Becker 18).

Especially, for racially marked immigrants, the manner in which they are accepted and received determines if the "dual process of cultural and psychological change", known as acculturation¹¹, can have either a positive or negative outcome on the individual's psychological development and assertion of self (Suárez-Orozco 176; Berry 2005, 698). Selasi understands the struggles of transnational African people when she explains "Brown-skinned without a bedrock sense of 'blackness'; on the one hand; and often teased by African family members for 'acting white' on the other" (2005). She thus accentuates that the "in-between" reality can result in a state of being "lost in transnation". African transmigrants might learn for the first time that they have a racial identity, since mostly their ethnic identity defined who they were in their homeland. Yet in the US, for instance, their phenotypical features and the associations they evoke will play a more dominant role (Clark 179). Here the "system of racialization, in which race is the most salient identifier" will urge African transmigrants "to redefine their identities based on America's racial categories" (Awokoya 257). Consequently, the cultural and ethnic diversity of their home country might become redundant and reduced to a stereotypical and holistic idea of "blackness", and "Africanness", often negatively marked (Suárez-Orozco 176; Awokoya 257,259).

Another point is the loss of authenticity. Individuals construct their multilayered identities through a "play of difference, [...] in and through their multiple relations to other identities" (Robins 173) Hence, one owns a variety of intersecting identity labels such as gender, nationality, culture, ethnicity and depending on the person's societal, geographical and even historical positioning, identity construction might be impeded, unsettled or empowered

¹¹ Sometimes acculturation and assimilation are seen as mutual, yet here the latter is a phase of acculturation (Berry, 701)

(Chapman&Beagan 368-69). For African transmigrants, their encounter with members of both nations will influence this process considerably. Whereas some individuals only identify with one nation, people with a transnational identity might encounter difficulties since they have to meet the expectations of both societies (Bradatan et al. 175-76; Awokoya 260). On the one hand, the United States views African transmigrants according their integral and generalized “racial categories” and the African American community might reject them, since they have not experienced the same history of slavery or racism (Awokoya 258; Clark 170). On the other hand, their respective ethnic group might place them under “ethnic authenticity tests”, in order to prove group membership (Pyke&Dang 2003 cited in Awokoya 260). If they fail to reach the standards of said test, monikers such as “coconut” or “acting white”, undervalue their experience abroad and present them as unauthentic Africans when they return home (ibid). Especially for second-generation immigrants, who usually refer to their parent’s host society as their home country, this fact can be taxing. Parents are apprehensive of their child’s Americanization, which ultimately urges the child to “prove their Africanness” (Clark 178). They must learn to navigate their identity between the mostly conservative expectations of both their parents and the US (Awoyoka 258).

The issues stated above emphasize the transmigrant’s outsider status on both frontiers (Awokoya 255). This fact, and racism, class differences and economic instability can result in social and cultural stress factors that can lead to acculturative stress (Berry 2005), impeding a successful acculturation since they are “between rights and identity, culture and politics, states and nations (Tsakiri 103). In the case of second-generation immigrants, too many disparities between the mainstream and heritage culture can lead to an “identity confusion” (Suárez-Orozco 179). Acculturative stress, which Berry understands as a “stress reaction in response to life events that are rooted in the experience of acculturation” might cause mental illnesses such as depression (708). Depending on the duration of displacement, level of experienced discrimination, the differences between both cultures and even whether a person is competent in the host countries’ language will determine whether mental illness will have lifelong impact (Bhugra &Becker 19; Bhugra 129; Berry 704). It becomes the African transmigrants’ mission to negotiate their identities on a racial, national, and cultural level (Selasi 2005). Mainly, for second-generation “the crafting [of] a transcultural identity” represents a relevant role in their identity construction process. Here both the parental and the host societies’ culture must be “braid[ed] together” in order to attain a fusion, an identity which accepts both sides (Suárez-Orozco 192, 197).

2.2.4 Transcultural identity

Since immigrants transport their pre-conceived cultural traits, a merging of cultures is inevitable. In contemporary times, understanding culture as a homogenous set of “spheres and islands” neglects to appreciate the complexity of the entangled and intermingled nature of culture (Welsch 1999). Hybridization is a dominant trait of cultures and the people consuming and exerting them. The development of one culture is dependent on the formation of another and vice versa. Due to globalization and the emergence of effortless communication and internet access, people can delve into a variety of cultures via their screen and the once mystified image of ‘exotic’ loses its gravitas (Welsch 1999).

In respect to acculturation, Berry’s (2005) work on immigration recognizes four acculturation strategies. Assimilation represents the dominant culture’s prevalence, resulting in an individual’s simulation of the new culture and the complete negligence of the erstwhile culture (Berry 705; Bhugra 134). Fear of exclusion or the need of an effortless beginning in their new home, might stimulate this “ethnic flight” (Berry 705, Suárez-Orozco 192). The opposite applies for separation, where individuals discard the new culture and focus more on the celebration of the heritage culture. The emergence of this ‘co-ethnic identity’ might result from the inability to establish contact to the mainstream culture, experienced rejection or the need to prove cultural loyalty (Berry 705; Suárez-Orozco 188). Marginalization is the denunciation of both home and host societies’ culture, usually, due to the individual’s unhealthy relationship to both cultures. For young transmigrants who choose marginalization as an adaption style, gangs can represent a new sense of identity (Berry 705; Suárez-Orozco 190).

Ultimately, integration means that a person manages to embrace aspects of the new culture while maintaining connections to the heritage culture, given that the dominant group accepts and encourages cultural diversity (Berry 705). Accordingly, Glick Schiller et al. argue that, in contemporary times, transmigrants do not simply “uproot” themselves and assimilate to the culture of their new host country (Glick Schiller et al. 48). “[T]he integration of components of differing cultural origin” (Welsch 1999) and constructing hybrid and transcultural identities represents the new task of transnational immigrants (Suárez-Orozco 197). Body/beauty ideals food and language are particularly crucial points in the process of forming a hybrid transnational and transcultural identity (Plaza 38).

Body ideals and beauty standards are “learned or expected culturally” (Lightstone 2006 qtd. in Oloruntoba-Oju 1) However, many cultures have a distorted idea of beauty. From the colonial narrative to contemporary mainstream media coverage, western racial ideology and its homogenous dissemination of beauty ideals mostly racialize black beauty (Tate *Black Beauty* 18). The black female body has been the subject of such racialization and othering, having a detrimental effect on the individual’s assertion of self (ibid). In many parts of the world “European facial features” entailing smooth, straight hair, and fair skin tone are aspirational (Tate “Black beauty” 301). Thus, the mimicry of whiteness via hair extensions and skin bleaching have become repeated beauty rituals of many African women. Also in the US, for instance, the homogenous expression of beauty in the mainstream media underrepresents women of color. Those represented “(meet) Eurocentric ideals in terms of [...] skin color and hair texture” (Sekayi 469). Many women feel the pressure to conform to these beauty standards. Yet, some “go natural”, wearing their hair naturally. For these women hair becomes not only an issue of stylization but also one of politics since they defy the hegemonic “male/white/heterosexual gaze” (Thompson 835; Tate *Black Beauty* 157). African female transmigrants are in the “third space” on both frontiers and must learn that their transnational body becomes a space of negotiation but also of self-government.

In addition, eating habits change. Food is a dominant cultural identity marker that satiates physical and emotional hunger (Chapman&Beagan 368-69). For people living abroad from their country of origin, food can become a resort to relieve homesickness or deal with acculturative stress (Dawkins 2009). Studies have shown that transmigrants tend to use food as a coping mechanism in the process of acculturation (Sussman et al 2007). Since the preparation of meals will always have dissimilarities to how they were made at “home”, food can become a medium for the “production of a *present* rather than the reproduction of the past” [emphasis added] (Manekar, 2005 205 qtd. in Dawkins 37). Transmigrants learn to use food as a medium to celebrate the best of both worlds by intermingling the once familiar with the new. Language is the “key into the front door” of culture (Hosseini¹²). Even if not all immigrants speak English when they immigrate to the United States, the majority of Nigerians are fluent in English. In their case, accents play a more crucial role since they “signal one’s origin” and determine how a person identifies internally and is identified externally (Clark 178). Language enables transmigrants to adopt codes of both host and home society and permits the construction of their transnational identity (Bradatan et. al 177).

¹² Hosseini, Khaled. *And the Mountains Echoed*. <http://www.goodreads.com/quotes/812034-he-said-that-if-culture-is-a-house-then-language>

Language becomes an asset and a one-dimensional and mostly devaluing mentality towards the 'other' language is contested.

Media and especially the internet can play a paramount role in the construction process of a transnational identity. Our era is marked by the lifestyle of netizens, people living behind screens of anonymity. Disadvantages are privacy invasion, cyber bullying, uncontrollable and extensive spread of propaganda aimed to harm and the decrease of face-to-face interaction. However, it is also this realm of anonymity, which represents an ideal space, in which an immigrants identity, can unfold. "Do it yourself" tutorials on YouTube, for instance, enable African (Black) women to exchange information on hair, beauty and sexuality, empowering them to assert their identity and redefine the rather white and homogenous expression of beauty, existent in Western media. In addition, the internet exemplifies a space for learning about both host society and home society. Watching Nollywood Films in the US facilitates, especially Nigerian second-generation immigrants, to engage in "ethnic communities", which offer cultural input parents might not provide (Plaza 39; Suárez-Orozco 178). Moreover, the internet embodies a space for "immobile transnationalism" (Drake 4-5). Since not all transmigrants have the financial means to visit their homelands regularly, the internet becomes a lifeline to uphold transnational ties to their respective transnational families. Remittances are transferred via a mouse click and phone calls via Viber and Skype create almost authentic reunions (Elias & Lemish 535). Identity construction becomes a personalized project, which is less reliant on external voices, and is instead tailored to the person's interests (Vauclair et. al. 15). The cyberspace enables people to find their voice and thus construct and sustain their hybrid and transnational identities (Plaza 39).

2.2.5 Multiple consciousness

Existing between two worlds and feeling devoted to two or more nations and cultures changes how people process their reality. Being a transnational does not solely mean being an active participant in transnational social fields, sending back remittances, having a highly mobile lifestyle and being politically engaged in both home and host society. More importantly, a transnational identity entails a mentality, a way of thinking about and seeing the world (Eze 2016; Mbembe 2007). A "multiple consciousness" assists transmigrants to be critical of both

home and host countries' culture and mentality (Eze "Afropolitan" 117). Their in-between status teaches them to understand that acculturation is not a rigid process of domination and submission, instead, a realm for negotiation and creation (Bhatia & Ram 148). Instead of thinking in dichotomies, transnational immigrants not only manage to include "the cosmopolitan side, but also a side of local affiliations" (Welsch, 1999). They learn to understand the "multi-dimensional" intricacies of the world, and thus search for the "beauty in otherness" and not the aspects that divide (Selasi 2005; Eze 118). Eze brings to the fore that mobility does not necessarily mean crossing nations, since many people's mobility takes place both between and within cities. Instead, mobility entails "interior mobility" which aids to cross boundaries of "nativism, autochthony and heritage (Eze 117). With an "emphatic imagination", as Eze ("Rethinking" 243) terms it, transmigrants understand the people and the world around themselves without feeling pity or a sense of superiority. Their encounters with "otherness" aid them to learn and grow from their experiences, offering them a better understanding of what it means to be transnational African in contemporary times (Eze "Afropolitan" 118; Mbembe 28).

Especially African transnationals experience their reality in-between two contradicting worlds distinctly. Being from Africa, a continent stricken with poverty and mishaps, places African transmigrants in a position of doubt and maybe discomfort (Selasi 2005). Nevertheless, they learn to "engage with, critique, and celebrate the parts of Africa that mean most to them". It becomes their aim to reject the overgeneralized viewpoint of Africa and accept the positive but also negative sides (Selasi 2005). Undoubtedly, transmigrants might experience feelings of displacement and alienation or partake irregularly in transnational practices. Moreover, how they acculturate is highly diverse, not generalizable and dependent on the person's personality, life conditions and position in the respective host society (Ndika 6; Berry 704). The word 'process', mentioned by Basch, Giller Schiller & Blanc-Szanton (7) is of great relevance here because it indicates that being and becoming transnational is not an instant decision and action. In fact, "the self is on a continuum of transnationality" (Bradatan et. al 177) undergoing a continuing and complex journey, accompanied by trial and errors and phases of utter uprooting, assimilation at times, and at others, successful integration (Bhatia & Ram 148). A complex journey in which racial, ethnic, cultural and national identity are interrogated, results in "a flexible social actor [who] internalized the rules and constraints of different social contexts" (Bradatan et. al. 177). Even if finding a resting place while existing in-between becomes their task, this "in-between" reality permits them to give back to their

respective societies. Especially for the second-generation of African transmigrants this journey of learning the “rules and constraints” enables them to view the world more critically and eventually enforce change (Eze “Afropolitan” 118; Selasi 2005).

2.3 Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie and *Americanah*

2.3.1 Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie

Adichie’s words have been present and recurrent throughout the theoretical part of this thesis. This final part offers some rounding off information about the author and the novel under scrutiny. Adichie was born on September 15 1977 in Enugu Nigeria as the fifth of six children. She grew up in the University town Nsukka and resided in Chinua Achebe’s house. Her mother tongue is Igbo, which is present in her writing. From an early age, Adichie was an avid reader and writer. Even if she enjoyed reading the British children’s literature, the characters were not relatable and her discovery of Chinua Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart* broadened her horizon and made her think that her “world was worthy of literature” (Adichie “Authenticity” 42). After Adichie published her debut and Commonwealth Writer’s Prize winning novel *Purple Hibiscus* in 2003, a professor of hers uttered his concern that the novel was not genuinely African. Since, Adichie’s characters were well-educated and wealthy, her representation faltered to abide by the image of the ‘authentic’ Africa, an image in which poverty, war and complete failure seemed only characteristic. She thus, countered that the poor, the rich and the in-between were all authentically African and that writing gave her the opportunity to explore and represent all versions of Africaness (Adichie “Authenticity” 48). This exploration and representation is existent in Adichie realist fictions such as *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2006) targeting the Biafran War or her collection of short stories *The Thing Around Your Neck* (2009). Even if she disregards the idea of using fiction as anthropology, she also considers literature as “the best way to combat stereotypes” (Adichie “Authenticity” 46). Adichie resides both in the United States and Lagos, where she has been managing a writing workshop (Tunca 2016).

2.3.2 *Americanah*

Her latest novel *Americanah* (2013) is “a love story/bildungsroman steeped in cultural criticism” (Mistry 2013). Hence, topics such as love, race, immigration and black hair play a paramount role. Adichie wanted to write a novel about race, which she considers as an “American pathology”. She believes that many Americans feel most “uncomfortable” with this topic, which however leads to silence and the inability to target the existence of racism (Sehgal 2013). Black hair, which Adichie sees as “political”, also plays a relevant part in *Americanah*. Accordingly, a great part of the plot occurs in an African hair salon in Trenton, New Jersey. In an interview, she remarks that “People make assumptions based on hair. [...] Like a woman with dreadlocks is somehow more “conscious,” even “soulful.” (Sehgal 2013). With this said, this novel documents the changes, mainly two female and two male, Nigerians experience, split between their homeland and life in either the US or Britain. The protagonist Ifemelu grows up in a Christian environment and leaves Nigeria due to a scholarship in the United States, where she lives with her Aunt Uju and her cousin Dike. The intensified immigration policies after the 9/11 attacks, prohibit her boyfriend Obinze entry into the country. Unexpectedly, Ifemelu breaks off her contact with Obinze and delves into a relationship with the Caucasian American Curt. Working as a nanny at his aunt’s house, she leaves the time of unemployment behind but also learns about the relevance of class, race and racism. In addition, her relationship with African American university lecturer Blaine gives her an insight into the Afro-American community and encourages her political engagement during the 2008 Presidential elections. As an anonymous blogger, Ifemelu scrutinizes issues such as race and hair and evolves into a social critic. In the meantime, Obinze immigrates to London, in hopes to escape the unemployment after graduation. However, he ends up working with a false identity card and attempts a sham marriage. On his wedding date, the police apprehend him and shortly after deport him to Nigeria. After his return, a wealthy lifestyle, marriage and a child veil his unhappiness. Other crucial characters are Aunt Uju and her son Dike. Aunt Uju, leaves Nigeria with the aim to attain a better future as a doctor. However, her life in the United States is difficult and although she tries to assimilate into her new host society, she experiences discrimination. Moreover, she shows little understanding for her son Dike, who struggles with issues such as racism and micro-aggressions from his teachers and peers. Dike’s negative experience as a second-generation immigrant results in a suicide attempt. A visit to Nigeria helps him to grapple with his in-between reality. After nearly thirteen years, Ifemelu stricken with homesickness abandons her job as a successful blogger

and returns to a modern and bustling Nigeria. Here she learns that her stay abroad has changed her and that she has to accustom once again to the place she once called home. Her reunion with high school sweetheart Obinze rehashes old feelings in both of them, ultimately urging him to leave his marriage for Ifemelu. Auntie Uju and Dike stay in the United States and Ifemelu and Obinze remain in Nigeria.

3. Literary Analysis: Construction of a transnational identity in *Americanah*

3.1 Ifemelu's transnational identity construction process

3.1.1 Identity in Nigeria

In the subsequent analytical and second part of this thesis, the information from the preceding part will be applied. In order to receive an intact picture of Ifemelu's identity construction process and the image Adichie portrays of this female character pre and post emigration, there is need to pay attention to her identity before she immigrates to the United States. Ifemelu serves as Adichie's social and cultural critic who encounters her environment and the people in it as an observer. Adichie utilizes Ifemelu to critically target gender expectations, beauty, and sexuality in Nigeria.

3.1.1.1 Gender expectations

Obedience, submission and homemaker qualities are some of the common values that many women in Nigeria are expected to possess. Patriarchy and the supremacy of men over women are dominant and internalized in Nigeria's society (Asiyanbola 2). From an early age, girls are educated to be "likeable" or to acquire culinary skills in order to prepare for life in matrimony (Adichie "Feminist" 2013). The issue of gender and gender expectation in the

Nigerian context are prevalent and dominant themes in this novel. Adichie's representation of her protagonist Ifemelu offers insight into a girl, eventually young woman, split between a conservative Christian and modern take on femaleness, beauty and sexuality.

Ifemelu's socialization occurs in a Christian household of a peculiar kind. After her mother undergoes an extreme religious quest, - a journey from ascetism, to eventually a stage of being "absorbed [...] but [...] not destroyed by her new church (*Americanah* 42, 44), Ifemelu learns to be more critical towards her mother's gullibility and the, at times, corrupt and prosper-driven workings of her mother's church. Due to her observant and critical worldview, both her family members and also schoolmates deem her a "troublemaker" (*Americanah* 52). One can assume that in her society, girls and women are expected to be obedient and credulous. The exemplary scenario takes place in a church gathering. For years, Ifemelu observes that many church members base their prosperity on God and overlook that "the money from the three collections at each service" is the actual reason for their affluence (*Americanah* 44). Whereas both her mother and her Aunty Uju are oblivious to such undertakings, Ifemelu develops the courage to express her opinion towards dishonest actions. When asked to build garlands for Chief Omenka, a man responsible for the donation of vans at the church, she counters

"Why should I make decorations for a thief [...] Chief Omenka is a 419 and everybody knows it" [...] This church is full of 419 men, why should we pretend that this hall was not built with dirty money?" (*Americanah* 51)

Ifemelu's blatant and bold utterance, which accuses said man of being part of the 419 scammers, notorious for worldwide money theft, does not make the adults attentive, and instead brands her as a pariah in the church's community (ibid.). Her mother's reaction adds an interesting and crucial aspect to gender expectations in Ifemelu's society. When her mother hears that her daughter made such comment she feels embarrassment and concludes, "[w]hy must this girl be a troublemaker? I have been saying it since, that it would be better if she was a boy, behaving like this" (*Americanah* 51). This utterance firstly illustrates what exactly is demanded from girls and secondly, it highlights the difference between boys and girls and how they are socialized. If Ifemelu were a boy, the behavior and comment at church would have been expected and accepted. Her mother is not capable of approving of the fact that her daughter is strong-minded and only a change of sex would make her open to such behavior. Ifemelu is encouraged to feel shame for her personality and her environment teaches her to be apologetic and thus conform to a pre-set and limiting understanding of femaleness. Since

Ifemelu does not believe in “subordination”, she is scolded and receives the moniker “troublemaker” and is not considered ‘girlfriend material’ (*Americanah* 60). The societal pressure to conform to limiting norms, “others” those who are different and leads to their discrimination. Albeit, Ifemelu, herself has learnt to appreciate and accept her personality traits and not to shrink herself since “she had always liked this image of herself as too much trouble, as different, and she sometimes thought of it as a carapace that kept her safe” (ibid.). Considering difference as a “carapace” underlines positivity towards otherness. Even if her environment reproaches her for her “troublesome” attitude, she paves the way to acceptance of women’s individuality and diversity.

A final scenario, which accentuates that Ifemelu does not fit into the limiting corset of her society’s gender expectations, refers to cooking. According to Adichie’s Ted talk “We should all be feminists” (2013), it is still common that girls are responsible for culinary deeds and also Asiyanbola (8) explains that domestic work is mostly managed in traditional sex roles. In many Nigerian societies, cooking represents a woman’s daily chore and thus the kitchen and household mark her domain. Therefore from an early age on, girls are trained to be ‘housewife material’, since their mothers and grandmothers instill within them that women must learn to cook, prepare the traditional dishes and hence pave an opportune path into marriage. For many women, being a homemaker defines their womanhood and wifehood. Men, on the other hand, tend to be ridiculed when they attempt the work with pots or express their culinary creativity. It is not uncommon that men do not help in the household and often wait for their mothers, sisters or wives to prepare the meals and finally cater to them.

Ifemelu, on the other hand, characterizes the opposite of what is socially and culturally expected of women in many Nigerian and African households. Upon meeting Obinze’s mother, his mother asks whether Ifemelu can cook. Ifemelu contemplates disowning her lack of interest but then counters “I don’t like cooking. I can eat Indomie noodles day and night” (*Americanah* 71). Ifemelu’s hesitation to tell the truth shows that she is aware of the gender expectations and that these have been indoctrinated into her. However, she decides to be authentic and unapologetic for her being and with this scene Adichie introduces a mentality shift in respect to gender roles. Ifemelu has outgrown the fitted and restrictive societal view towards femaleness and actively chooses to rise above them and tailor femaleness to her individual understanding and liking.

3.1.1.2 Beauty

Beauty and its perception in Nigeria is a further aspect, which is discussed in *Americanah*. As mentioned in the theoretical part, beauty is a highly controversial and versatile concept, which is culture-dependent but more importantly reliant on the person's interpretation of one's own beauty. Nevertheless, it would be misleading to neglect the fact that beauty takes place in a realm of interaction and recognition. Since people are viewed by others and mostly attain some form of feedback on their beauty, especially women are always subject to the gaze of their environment. Beauty ideals and beauty standards in many African countries such as Nigeria are very often tailored according to a Western ideal. Due to globalization, the dissemination of a homogenous representation of white beauty, mostly portraying fair skin color and lush hair texture, instigate many women to mimic and appropriate such beauty ideals and transform them to a beauty standard (Tate *Beauty* 57). By means of Ifemelu, Adichie gives the reader an insight into beauty and its interpretation in the Nigerian context. Ifemelu's first recollection of her childhood reverts her back to her mother and that she

“had grown up in the shadow of her mother's hair”. It was black-black, so thick it drank two containers of relaxer at the salon, so full it took hours under the hooded dryer, and, when finally released from pink plastic rollers, sprang free and full, flowing down her back like a celebration” (*Americanah* 41).

Ifemelu grows up with the understanding that when her mother's hair is coiffed she receives positive attention from her environment. After the visit to the hairdresser, Ifemelu's father praises his wife's hairdo with “the crown of glory” and others wonder whether she has “foreign blood” (*Americanah* 41). The immediate reaction by the environment shows that her hair in her unnatural form prompts people to compare it with divinity or exoticism, which are usually positive and aspirational. From a young age, this triggers Ifemelu to think that processed and unnatural hair represents a beauty ideal and a beauty standard. In hopes to attain the same appraisal and attention like her mother, she would try to get her hair to act as her mother's. However, Ifemelu understands with resentment that her hair, which in its natural form grows, “reluctantly, which braiders said it cut them like a knife” placed her in the “shadow of her mother's hair”.

Yet, shortly after, Ifemelu's adoration comes to an abrupt end since her mother embarks on a stringent and at times fanatical religious path. She cuts her “bounteous” hair and refutes everything involving femininity (*Americanah* 41). Finally, her mother joins a church where

she “worship[s] with the prosperous” and here Ifemelu notices a further change. Her mother puts make-up on which was “one shade too light” (*Americanah* 43,49). One can propose that a fair skin color becomes her mother’s interpretation of prosperity and wealth. The need to prove that she is part of the wealthy via a fair skin tone, reveals the entrenched mentality, which suggests that whiteness entails supremacy and success. These drastic changes, however, offer Ifemelu the opportunity to rethink her once internalized take on beauty. It is in this time that Ifemelu looks for a role model to substitute her own mother. The Nigerian singer Onyeka Onwenu “a full-nosed, full-lipped beauty, her round face framed by a low Afro, her faultless complexion the deep brown of cocoa” (*Americanah* 68) represents the beauty ideal in Ifemelu’s mind. With the focus on this woman, Ifemelu aims to find a role model who remained loyal to her naturalness, someone who embraced bestowed facial features, hair texture and skin color. Her anti-racist mentality illustrates that she innately strives for the authentic, unmodified, and rejects the adaption of a Western ideal.

Another scenario, which spotlights the instilled notion that fair skin and lush hair texture are, beautiful and also powerful, can be observed when it comes to Ifemelu’s close friend Ginika. Ginika is a mixed race girl who

“had caramel skin and wavy hair that, when unbraided, fell down to her neck instead of standing Afro-like. Each year, she was voted Prettiest Girl in their form, and she would wryly say, “It’s just because I ‘m a half-caste. How can I be finer than Zainab?” (*Americanah* 56).

Ginika’s answer to the fact that her class continuously votes her as the prettiest girl demonstrates a skewed power dynamics. She understands that Zainab is more beautiful than she is, however since she is bi-racial (half-caste) and mixed with the ‘white race’ she accepts to be the most beautiful. Whereas in the United States, for instance, the “one drop policy” automatically renders a mixed race person black and thus marked with the ‘baggage’ and negative connotation towards the ‘black race’, in Nigeria one drop of the ‘white race’ enables that person to have a better status in society (Tate *Beauty* 112). This mentality has its roots in the times of colonialism, where the “‘mulatto’ [...] was desired for her mimetic quality” (Tate *Beauty* 118). The entrenched mentality that lightness or whiteness results in power is demonstrated and criticized with the example of Ginika.

Ultimately, it crystallizes that beauty standards and beauty ideals are highly subjective and also transformable. The fact that Obinze does not choose the “Prettiest Girl” Ginika, instead

Ifemelu, illustrates this argument. When Ifemelu asks why he chose her, he utters “I thought you were so fine, but not just that. You looked like the kind of person who will do something because she wants to and not because everyone else is doing it” (*Americanah* 61). He does not only appreciate her for her beauty, instead for her strong personality. To him her independence and honesty resulted more attractive than a beauty, which is only “skin deep”. In an interview, Adichie once mentioned that “beauty does not solve any problem” (Louisiana Channel 2014) and when one considers the fact that Obinze does not select the most beautiful girl in school, but instead Ifemelu, there seems to be an underlying message that beauty does not necessarily promise success. Via Ifemelu, Adichie discusses that the prevalence of straight hair and a fair skin color play a dominant and valuable role in the lives of many Nigerian women. The appropriation of whiteness and the beauty ideals and standards dictated by the West seem to be entrenched in the mentality of these women. However, Ifemelu learns to negotiate her way through the fangs of the homogenous expression of white beauty because she discovers a beauty ideal, which lends itself to naturalness and thus refutes modification. The depiction of beauty through the eyes of Ifemelu illustrates Adichie’s criticism towards the mentality of many women living in Nigeria and centers that there is need for change.

3.1.1.3 Sexuality

In *Americanah*, Adichie offers the reader an insight into sexuality in a Christian and patriarchal society. She introduces that change is conceivable in terms of how Ifemelu manages and lives her sexuality. Ifemelu, riven between Christian doctrine and modernity attains a new understanding of her own sexuality. Female sexuality is a highly controversial topic in many parts of Africa. Although sexuality is an individual’s private and personal domain, in Christianity, for instance, a woman’s sexuality has been dictated and prescribed since the story of Eve. Christianity, which is mostly based on a patriarchal power structure, often educates girls and women that their body is a temptation to men and that it is their responsibility to minimize a man’s path to ruin (Adichie “Feminist 2013). Since virginity mostly defines a woman’s virtue, girls are expected to cherish their virginity as the main currency into a ‘man’s heart’ and thus a successful marriage. In case sexual intercourse occurs before marriage, women are usually responsible for contraception and must live with the consequences of pregnancy, which mostly ostracizes them and curtails their opportunity of marriage.

Christianity plays a paramount role in Ifemelu's socialization. Her mother changes from one church to the next, yet each change instills within Ifemelu one underlying message, namely that a woman must present her body appropriately. Here, male pastors tell her mother how to wear her hair and that "jewellery,[...] was ungodly, unbefitting a woman of virtue" (*Americanah* 43). The fact that pastors control how women should present their bodies, suggests how patriarchal some of the Christian teachings are. Nevertheless, not only men dictate how women are supposed to behave but also women control each other and thus perpetuate the workings of patriarchal power structures. Ifemelu's encounter with the highly powerful Sister Ibinabo, a woman seen as "the savior of young females" since she trained girls to be less "troubled and troublesome" implies that judgment and contempt are existent among female church members (*Americanah* 50). Notorious for detecting when a girl was behaving "ungodly", Sister Ibinabo explicitly humiliates a young girl called Christie arguing "I saw you wearing tight trousers last Saturday [...]. Everything is permissible but not beneficial. Any girl that wears tight trousers wants to commit the sin of temptation. It is best to avoid it" (*Americanah* 50).

This scene displays how women keep each other 'in their place'. The fact that Sister Ibinabo mentions that she saw this girl wearing tight fitted clothing on a non-church related day, discloses how girls and women are under constant observation. Sister Ibinabo's comment "[e]verything is permissible but not beneficial" entails that a 'good Christian girl' is supposed to know the rules and how to avoid male attention (ibid.). Thus, her clothing choice automatically concludes that she "want[ed] to commit the sin of temptation", and mislead men. One can assume that girls and women are not only subjected to the gaze of their religious community but also that their body is highly objectified and sexualized. Consequently, if they behave inappropriately, some form of public humiliation awaits them. Since the scolded girl Christie is "humble, gracious [and] carri [es] her shame" (ibid.) points out that girls are taught to feel shame of their body and sexuality, which ultimately inhibits them to express their sexual desires and moreover robs them of agency in their future sexual relationships. This scene shows how not only men but also women in church sustain the perpetuation of patriarchal and misogynous power structures.

The next example unveils that sexuality represents a taboo subject in Ifemelu's reality and is covered with the "cloak of religion" (*Americanah* 50). The fact that Auntie Uju "talked her

through her first menstrual period, supplementing her mother's lecture that was full of biblical quotes about virtue but lacked useful details about cramps and pads" clarifies this (*Americanah* 54). Her mother connects this natural introduction into womanhood with the need of "virtue". Hence, instead of offering her useful and detailed information about the menstrual cycle, premenstrual syndrome and most importantly contraception, she hinders communication and lectures Ifemelu about virginity and how to avoid offence towards God. The fact that Ifemelu's mother burns her sanitary pads connotes her subliminal aversion towards womanhood and sexuality and suggests that menstruation is seen as tainting and the destruction of its evidence (pads) offers her temporal purity (*Americanah* 41). Her mother's "religious guidance" does not facilitate Ifemelu's understanding of her changing body, instead expects her daughter's abstinence until marriage. This attitude creates a cleft between them, which instigates Ifemelu to practice secrecy. Not only that her aunt secretly supplies her with "James Hadley Chase novels wrapped in newspaper to hide the near-naked women on the cover" (*Americanah* 54) but also that her mother is unaware of her boyfriend, indicates that she has mastered the art of pretense in order to avoid confrontation with her mother (*Americanah* 69).

Since her mother condemns the talk of sexuality, Auntie Uju becomes the person Ifemelu confesses her feelings for Obinze too. She plays a great role in Ifemelu's education about her sexuality and thus advises her "let him kiss and touch but not [...] put it inside" (*Americanah* 54). Even if this counsel illustrates Auntie Uju's liberal point of view towards sex, Ifemelu still has an unclear idea about intercourse. It is Obinze's mother who fully educates her about her responsibilities and also her rights. While in high school, Obinze and Ifemelu have been dating for a while and, to Ifemelu's surprise, his mother wants to meet her. Ifemelu finds it "odd" that his mother is open towards their relationship (*Americanah* 68). This lets Ifemelu see past the curtain of her Christian upbringing and understand that sexuality can be viewed as normal and not shameful and forbidden. The scenario, which emphasizes this, takes place at another visit, where the mother leaves the house for a shopping trip. Here both begin to get intimate yet the mother's unexpected return startles both. Immediately she suspects their deed and calls "Ifemelunamma, please come" (*Americanah* 72). Ifemelu, who expects to get the blame for their action, is surprised by the mother's words, "If anything happens between you and Obinze, you are both responsible. But Nature is unfair to women. An act is done by two people, but if there are any consequences, one person carries it alone. Do you understand me?"(ibid.).

Ifemelu is confronted with a reaction she does not anticipate from mothers. To her surprise, she is not considered a pariah who misled Obinze into temptation. Instead, this conversation teaches her that both she and Obinze are equally accountable for their deed. Even though, Obinze's mother confronts Ifemelu with the reality of pregnancy and her consequential responsibility, she does not reproach her with the "religious guidance" she is used from her mother. Ifemelu, who initially feels shame for being caught in flagranti, finds consolation, "absence of shame and "normalness" in Obinze's mother's words (*Americanah* 72) because she clarifies that virginity is not seen as a sign of virtue, a quality to please God and a future husband. Instead, virginity is seen as the time space in which a woman learns to appreciate and accept her own body so that she cannot be taken advantage of by the opposite sex. Obinze's mother encounters her with a relatable story which illustrates that her behavior is human, normal and thus free from culpability.

Nevertheless, there is one point worthy of scrutiny. Obinze's mother gives Ifemelu an education on her rights and responsibilities and yet expects her to come to her before she intends to get sexually active with Obinze. Meaning, her conversation with Ifemelu does not give her practical information about contraception and more importantly sexually transmitted diseases. One can assume that her tactic not only intends to establish a trust base with Ifemelu and Obinze but also plans to wield power over both and hence can inhibit their sexual interaction. However, during her University years Ifemelu and Obinze have intercourse without letting the mother know. Ifemelu perceived her first time negatively since "she had imagined his mother watching them; the image forced itself onto her mind [...]. She knew she could not possibly tell Obinze's mother what had happened, even though she promised to, and had believed then that she would" (*Americanah* 94). The post- intercourse sex education Obinze's mothers gives, illustrates the criticism on sex education in many Nigerian and African societies.

Ifemelu notices that the mother's "tone had hardened, become censorious" (*Americanah* 97). Her repeated use of "should" implies that Ifemelu's and Obinze's actions are denounced because they should have been aware of safe sex. They both are judged and condemned for their actions and the mother does not question her own irresponsibility. If she had offered the information mentioned above the first time Ifemelu and Obinze became intimate, both would have been more prepared. This scenario lends itself to an African anecdote in which a daughter sits on the ground, with her legs stretched out and crossed. The mother decides to

leave her daughter for a longer period of time and asks the daughter to promise her that no man should step over her crossed legs. A few months later the mother returns to her pregnant daughter and when she asks what had happened, the daughter tells her that she had not let no man step over her crossed legs (Unknown). This anecdote highlights the lack of detailed and explicit sex education in many African families since intercourse is often seen as shameful and more often expected to be practiced after marriage. Critical points such as sexually transmitted diseases are not thoroughly discussed, which leads to uninformed women and men, a disconnection from one's sexuality, unwanted pregnancy and in its unfortunate cases life threatening diseases such as AIDS.

Even though Ifemelu is divided between the sexually oppressive teachings of her Church, a more liberal take on sexuality and yet the lack of detailed and practical information, she still becomes sexually empowered and takes her sexuality into her own hands. This becomes clear when she privately meets up with Obinze for the first time. Usually men are expected to 'chase' a woman and thus initiate sexual contact. Nevertheless, to Obinze's surprise, Ifemelu asks him "Aren't we going to kiss?" (*Americanah* 62). When Obinze counters that he does want her to think that he is only interested into her physical attributes, she pursues, "[w]hat about what I want?" (ibid.). Ifemelu takes her sexuality into her own hands and must not pretend coyness and passively await a man's actions. Here again, Ifemelu does not abide by prescribed gender expectations, instead she openly expresses her desires and embraces her sexuality. Also her boyfriend Obinze admires her for this when he remembers "[o]ther girls would have pretended that they had never let another boy touch them, but not her, never her. There was a vivid honesty about her" (*Americanah* 20). Ifemelu is not apologetic for her being and does not compromise her femaleness and sexuality.

Ifemelu's dual position between Christian doctrine and a more modern yet lacking approach towards sexuality, underlines Adichie's criticism on both the teachings of the church but also society. Ifemelu manages to embrace and live her sexuality by working against what is accepted and expected and here Adichie highlights that change is possible and that women should take ownership of their sexuality. Also the need for sexuality to be targeted openly and that women must not hide in the limited closet constructed by a patriarchal society and the church are foregrounded.

3.2 Ifemelu's identity in the United States

3.2.1 Struggles

3.2.1.1 Idealization of America

Ifemelu's move to the United States represents a life changing experience. Therefore, the following part will target which issues lead to the alienation, displacement and the depression she lives. Here the main reasons include her ignorant idealization of America and inability to get a job. After repeated strikes at the University, Ifemelu, who never had the ambition to live in America and build up her future there, is persuaded by Obinze and Auntie Uju to apply for a scholarship as an International student (*Americanah* 91, 99). Prior to her emigration "America was America" in Ifemelu's eyes (*Americanah* 99) and geared by American movies and sitcoms such as *The Cosby Show*, *Angel Heart* and *The Fresh Prince of Bel Air* she imagined her new beginning "in a house from *The Cosby Show*, in a school with students holding notebooks miraculously free of wear and crease" (*Americanah* 67, 99).

Yet, once she arrives at the airport in America, she notices her oblivion and that her preceding imagination of America has been skewed and distorted by the media coverage in Nigeria. As Alli Ibibi (2013) argues "Hollywood has succeeded in selling America to the world [and therefore it] [...] is seen as an utopian society that is devoid of errors" (94). Her programmed ignorance towards this "glorious America" becomes evident when she realizes that in her "illusions" she had pictured "overseas" and everything associated with the West as a cold place which ultimately made her to buy a winterproof sweater. Yet, not only the "sweltering heat" or the "matte" of the buildings but also the old Toyota hatchback, the urinating man on the sidewalk, the cockroach in the kitchen of her aunt's scarcely furnished apartment in Brooklyn and that she has to sleep on the floor in "glorious America", breaches with her idealized prejudice and confronts her with the fact that her preconceived idea of America was biased and incomplete (*Americanah* 103-106).

Ifemelu's introduction into the "real America" takes place carefully and episodically (*Americanah* 111). Ifemelu recognizes a panoply of changes which render her alienated and displaced. Initially, her aunt's "self-abasing" demeanor in the presence of white people or that "behaving like these black Americans" is condemned, startle Ifemelu (*Americanah* 108,112).

Yet, since she stayed in Aunt Uju's apartment, which defined the "margins" of her life (*Americanah* 120), her imaginations were still shaped by American movies and sitcoms which made her

ache for the lives they showed, lives full of bliss, where all problems had sparkling solutions in shampoos and cars and packaged foods, and in her mind they became the real America, the America she would only see when she moved to school in the autumn" (*Americanah* 113)

Also, Obinze's consoling words from Nigeria, tutoring and babysitting her cousin Dike enable her to dream and to overlook the underlying and entrenched problems of racism and poverty. She notices that America is not as she had expected it, yet her aunt's flat represents a safe haven which prolongs her idealization of America (*Americanah* 120).

The incident which exemplifies that Ifemelu finds a part of "real America," occurs when she moves to Philadelphia for her studies. Here she is confronted with poverty and negligence, points she had not expected possible in the United States since she awaited a "pretty street on *The Cosby Show*" (*Americanah* 127, 106). Adichie's criticism becomes apparent here. Ifemelu's oblivion and holistic view towards America illustrates that she has been conditioned by a single sided story of America. However, whereas media usually taints the image of Africa with vice, America's power and subsequent agency spreads a positive and seamless image in which issues such as racism, poverty, and class difference do not seem possible for the outside world (Adichie "Single story" 2009).

3.2.1.2 Unemployment

In addition, Ifemelu discovers that achieving the American dream is not as easy as she expected it. Repeated rejections after numerous job applications leave her "waking up every day worrying about money" and with a "tight, suffocating pressure [...] inside her chest" (*Americanah* 135, 142). The fear of failure urges her to invent qualifications on her CV, yet with no avail (*Americanah* 144). At her lowest point, Ifemelu feels like is "at war with the world" and at a loss of perspectives (*Americanah* 152). Since her overworked aunt cannot cover her overdue rent payment and her roommates lament " [w]hat are we supposed to do? We're not her fucking parents", Ifemelu resorts to the only job confirmation in which she is expected to assist a tennis coach to "relax" (*Americanah* 152, 144). Understanding the

implied sexual innuendo, she approves of this man taking advantage of her body (*Americanah* 154). One can deduce that Adichie intends to show the struggles some immigrants face in their host society and how easily hopelessness urges, especially women, to pursue a path in which they subjugate themselves to oppression and indignity.

This experience marks the incident in which Ifemelu's naivety and endurance converts to self-loathing and renders her in a "vicious haze, shrouded in a soup of nothingness" (*Americanah* 156). Ifemelu's efforts to acculturate resulted in unemployment and prostitution. Shamed by her actions, Ifemelu falls into a deep depression. She shelters herself from her family and also breaches contact with Obinze, contact which she will rekindle only more than a decade later. Absorbed in her self-loathing, Ifemelu rejects Ginika's observation, claiming she has a depression. Annoyed, she utters that depression "happened to Americans, with their self-absolving need to turn everything into an illness" (*Americanah* 157-158). Here, one can assume that Adichie foregrounds that the attitude towards mental illnesses, such as depression, needs to be reconsidered in the mentality of Nigerian people. In an interview, Adichie argues that depression is hardly discussed among Nigerians since it is viewed as a Western construct and especially fortunate people are not entitled to feeling unhappy or sad. Moreover, she explains that people propose prayer instead of providing aid to this, at times, lifelong mental illness. She criticizes that this mindset has a detrimental effect on those suffering from this mental illness (Arlington Reads 2015).

3.2.2 Versatility of transnational identities: Plastic bag in the wind

The following section will specify on Ifemelu's acculturation strategies and how she negotiates and constructs her transnational identity. The adoption of acculturation strategies is rarely definite and clear and exactly this fact becomes clear with Adichie's dramatization of Ifemelu. In the course of the novel, it reveals that she is like a plastic bag shaped by the wind since Ifemelu's identity is impressionable by the people she encounters and which culture she delves into. Even if Ifemelu explores Curt's upper-class white culture and the Blaine's African American culture and at times neglects to uphold kinship with fellow Nigerians or Africans, the multiple consciousnesses she attains from her relationships and experiences encourage her to educate especially, non-American black and white people, about white privilege and racism via the internet. Oscillating between assimilation and transculturalism,

her engagement with food, language and her hair demonstrates how versatile and multidimensional the construction process of a transnational identity is.

3.2.2.1 White privilege

Finally, her new job as a nanny for a white upper- class fundraiser called Kimberly presents Ifemelu the opportunity to flee unemployment and also leads her to meet Kimberly's nephew Curt, a good- hearted, carefree and hyper son of a wealthy upper-class family. With Curt Ifemelu takes on another identity, since she is "slighter and leaner, she was Curt's Girlfriend, a role she slipped into as into a fav[o]rite, flattering dress" [...] [and] "out of her old skin (*Americanah* 196, 200). He offers her the opportunity to bask in the light of his privileges. Even though she initially feels disoriented by the abundance in his lifestyle, she "quickly [becomes] used to their life, her passport filled with visa stamps" (*Americanah* 200). With Curt she feels "a flush of accomplishment" [...] proud-to be with him, and of him." (*Americanah* 191,219). One can deduce that for Ifemelu being with a well-off white man represented prestige and status. Being his girlfriend becomes a part of her identity and thus shapes a better version of herself. Yet, in the progression of their interracial relationship Ifemelu observes how oblivious he is of racism and of his privileges, especially his white privilege.

While she and Curt discuss race in the confines of their four walls and begin to learn about each other's heritage cultures, Ifemelu notices that these conversations are superficial (*Americanah* 291). She manages to make him a "race warrior", who to the displeasure of his mother, becomes more attuned to racism (*Americanah* 293). Nevertheless, Ifemelu also observes that while he "grasped" some issues he would be unaware of other subtle acts of discrimination and only pacify her with explanations, arguing that not everything is race related (*Americanah* 291). Ifemelu grows weary to his oblivion and that she has to constantly explain and justify herself (*Americanah* 457). Yet, when Curt argues that a magazine, which exclusively caters to the beauty needs of black women, is "racially skewed" she takes drastic measures (*Americanah* 294). Not only does she take him to a bookstore in order to elucidate the dominance of white beauty in mainstream media and how black women and their needs are underrepresented but she also lays the ground for her future engagement as a "race blogger" (*Americanah* 294-295, 304) .

Due to Curt, Ifemelu becomes more cognizant of white privilege and its power (*Americanah* 192-193). This transpires shortly after they become a couple. Curt who enjoys being spontaneous proposes they go to Paris the following day without considering the fact that Ifemelu needs a visa and that the procedure might take a few weeks time (*Americanah* 196). In his reality visas were easily attainable and therefore he expected it to be the same for Ifemelu. This oblivion towards his privileges render him to “[believe] in good omens and positive thoughts and happy endings to films, a trouble- free belief, because he had not considered them deeply before choosing to believe; he just simply believed” (*Americanah* 197). The incident which however shows her that his privileges also offer him unmerited power occurs when he gets her a job with green-card guaranty after having made “some calls” (*Americanah* 202). Even though she is grateful for his deed, she has to think about her African immigrant friends who work overtime to pay for their green-card and this realization evokes “a small resentment that Curt could, with a few calls, rearrange the world, have things slide into the spaces that he wanted them to” (ibid).

These examples make reference to white privilege which McIntosh (1988) and Wise (2011), among others, have criticized in the course of the past decades. In white supremacist societies, being white is the default, leading to an “unearned skin privilege” which is “like an invisible weightless knapsack of special provisions, maps, passports, codebooks, visas, clothes, tools , and blank checks” (McIntosh 1). Nevertheless, usually white people are not taught to engage with critical whiteness, an approach which essentially expects them to decisively question their privileges and which detrimental effects it has on non-white members of the society (ibid.). Due to this lack of awareness, they remain oblivious, which renders some white people to argue that they are color-blind and wonder why racism is still an issue in the United States (ibid). This systematic unconsciousness leads to the perpetuation of racism even in the post-racial era the United States claims to be in (Tim vi-vii).

3.2.2.2 Ifemelu the race blogger

Being in an interracial relationship with Curt urges Ifemelu to launch her blog *Raceteen or Various Observations About American Blacks by a Non-America Black*. Since Curt is unable to fully understand Ifemelu, she decides to cheat on him. Ifemelu reasons that “something was wrong with her. A hunger, a restlessness. An incomplete knowledge of herself” (*Americanah* 289). Henceforth, Ifemelu who had forgotten who she was before Curt delves into another identity, namely that of a race blogger. She eventually, “become[s] her blog” and even can earn herself an affluent lifestyle and financially aid her family in Nigeria (*Americanah* 305-306). The blog serves as a platform from which she can anonymously discuss the American pathologies from an outside perspective and also find to herself.

When Ifemelu launches her blog she explicitly refers to white privilege and raises awareness about the problems of white supremacist societies. The fact that she mentions McIntosh’s article and even does diversity workshops in all white areas called “sundown towns”, or encourages white friends to stand up for their non-white friends shows her dedication to encouraging critical whiteness and ultimately tackle the entrenched injustice (*Americanah* 305, 346-347). Nevertheless, soon she notices that those hiring her for these diversity workshops do not have the intention “to inspire any real change but to leave people feeling good about themselves” (*Americanah* 305). Subsequently, she reads a comment in her blog arguing “YOU ARE A RACIST. YOU SHOULD BE GRATEFUL WE LET YOU INTO THIS COUNTRY” (ibid.). With the aim to avoid confrontation, Ifemelu divides her speech voice from her blog voice. Thus, she commends America’s progress in terms of racism during her diversity workshops and in her blogs she upholds the opinion “*Racism should never have happened and so you don’t get a cookie for reducing it*” (ibid.). It becomes apparent that Ifemelu’s dedication to implement change and discuss racism openly fails due to the resistance coming from those enjoying their “unearned skin-privilege”. Nonetheless, her blog becomes an outlet which she utilizes to confront especially white Americans with the unvarnished truth about America’s perennial history of racism, a reality she will only fully grasp once she begins her relationship with the African American Blaine.

3.2.2.3 Black is not black

Once Ifemelu comes to America she becomes black. In Nigeria her Igbo ethnic identity was the most salient to Ifemelu and like many other Africans she failed to “care about race” (*Americanah* 318). Yet, in America she learns from her aunt that all blacks look “alike to white people” (*Americanah* 120). Desperate to find a job she gives up her identity as Ifemelu and lives with the social security card of Ngozi Okonkwo (*Americanah* 125-6). Here Adichie’s criticism on America’s “racial categories” (Awokoyo 257) becomes apparent. Studies on this phenomena of the Other-Race-Effect conclude that the lack of interaction with people from the other race, indifference towards the other race and “racist thinking” maintain this mentality (Pomeroy 2014). Her aunt advises her to play into the oblivion towards alterity which results in Ifemelu’s invisibility and loss of agency.

During her University years, Ifemelu learns that a certain identity is imposed on her that she initially dislikes since she has learned from her Aunt Uju and her neighbors that America’s understanding of ‘black’ renders one “at the bottom of America’s race ladder” (*Americanah* 220). Ifemelu discovers that she is expected to “give the black perspective” on specific topics or to feel offended when words such as “watermelon” or “tar baby” are used without knowing why these expressions are negatively marked (ibid). In the course of time, Ifemelu becomes more cognizant of the stereotypes associated with black people and thus avoids being a ‘credit to her race’. Accordingly, in her blog she advises other non-American blacks to avoid areas where a crime had taken place, to “tip generously” with the intention to defy the stereotype that African Americans do not tip, or black males to act “hyper-mellow” in order to avoid unwanted attention from others (*Americanah* 220-221).

Ifemelu discovers what it means to be ‘black’ in the United States since her environment forcefully places her in this identity. Nevertheless, her relationship with Blaine, an African American assistant professor at Yale, introduces her into the perpetual history of racism with which she possibly cannot identify. When Ifemelu initially meets Blaine he is “the perfect American partner” in her eyes (*Americanah* 191). Eight years after their initial encounter on a train ride she meets Blaine on a blogging convention (*Americanah* 308). With him she takes on his a version of an African American identity. Ifemelu listens to his music and reads the books recommended by him. She delves into a lifestyle of eating protein laden meals and

flosses regularly. To her, Blaine represents a man with “a firm reed of goodness”, a goodness into which she can tap (*Americanah* 309-311).

Yet soon, Ifemelu notices that her understanding of racism differs from that of Blaine’s. This transpires when he disapproves of her blogs and condemns them without “depth” and argues that she has the “responsibility” to offer a “cultural commentary” for those reading (*Americanah* 312). Ifemelu who initiated the blog in order to observe race in her host society, is confronted with a man who sees his task in fighting racism in the United States. This becomes apparent when a white woman asks Ifemelu if she can touch her Afro. Ifemelu, who aims to educate this person, assuming she “probably doesn’t know any black people”, is perplexed by the rage this incident evokes in Blaine (*Americanah* 313). One can assume that Blaine feels resentment because he and his forefathers have been a “guinea pig” (ibid) in America since the time of slavery and that their existence is put on display or scrutinized, whereas Ifemelu is unaware of this because “race was not embroidered in the fabric of her history; it had not been etched on her soul” (*Americanah* 337). Thus, Ifemelu feels that Blaine “expected her to feel what she did not know how to feel” which ultimately renders her excluded.

This sense of exclusion becomes apparent when Ifemelu observes the rift between Africans and African Americans. This is revealed when one of Blaine’s friends admires the fact that she has “[a]ncestors that go way back” and when Ifemelu agrees with him, she is confronted with “an expression that made her uncomfortable” (*Americanah* 327). This incident shows Ifemelu that she and many African Americans do not share the same identity, since she is unaware of what it feels like to be ‘rootless’. The feelings of resentment and hostility become more obvious when Ifemelu meets Blaine’s sister Shan. She is a well-travelled, captivating woman on the verge of publishing her first book. Even though Ifemelu is initially mesmerised by her beauty and authority, she soon observes that Shan is broken, broken by the covert racism she and her family experienced in the course of the years. Not only did her mother lament that her race impeded her professional growth until the day of her death, but she also experiences that her publisher advises her not to discuss racism in her work, rendering her to argue “You can’t write an honest novel about race in this country” (*Americanah* 334-5). Enraged about the muzzle he places on her, she develops a resentment towards Ifemelu and reasons that Ifemelu’s “exotic credentials, the whole Authentic African thing” (*Americanah* 320) legitimizes her to

“[write] from the outside. She doesn’t really feel all the stuff she’s writing about. It’s all quaint and curious to her. So she can write it and get all these accolades and get invited to give talks. If she were African American, she’d just be labelled angry and shunned” (*Americanah* 336).

This comment lets Ifemelu recognize that even if she uses her blog to raise awareness about racism and how to engage with those who have lived with trans-generational inferiority and exclusion, she still will not be affected by what it means to come from a country that does not accept her as its own. Accordingly, Ifemelu writes a blog entry which non- American black people can use as a tool kit in order to understand the mentality of African Americans and thus create a sense of “pan-Africanism” (*Americanah* 325-327, 140).

Exhausted by the new identity she slid into, Ifemelu chooses to escape it. In her first year in America, Ifemelu attended the African Students Association, where students from different African countries gathered to receive a “welcome talk” (*Americanah* 139). Among sarcastic and facetious remarks, Ifemelu is advised “to make friends with our African American brothers and sisters in a spirit of true pan-Africansim. But make sure you remain friends with fellow Africans, as this will help you keep your perspective” (*Americanah* 140). Nevertheless, as Ifemelu delves into Curt’s upper-class white culture and Blaine’s upper-class African American culture and only holds infrequent calls and visits with her Americanized Auntie Uju, she begins to long for Africans. The fact that Ifemelu does not know the insult “*acata*” (*wild animal*), a common word Nigerians use for African Americans, assumes that she has not mingled with many Nigerians (*Americanah* 319).

Her encounter with the Senegalese professor Boubacar, teaching at Blaine’s University, shows her how much she had missed the interaction with fellow Africans and how little Ifemelu identifies with the struggles “etched on the soul” of African Americans (*Americanah* 337-340). Shortly after she meets Boubacar, the African American security guard Mr. White, a man “beaten down by life” (*Americanah* 342) is imprisoned because a white employee observed how Mr. White and his friend exchanged money and car keys and assumed they were dealing drugs (*Americanah* 343). Blaine, who is enraged by the injustice because he also repeatedly gets accused for the possession of drugs, arranges a protest even the local TV will attend (*Americanah* 375). Engulfed in his conviction he assumes Ifemelu’s participation (*Americanah* 343-345). Nevertheless, Ifemelu consciously decides to go to a lunch Boubacar

will be attending. After a successful protest, Blaine discovers that Ifemelu purposefully avoided this relevant event and accuses her,

“You know, it’s not just about writing a blog, you have to live like you believe it. That blog is a game that you don’t really take seriously; it’s like choosing an *interesting* elective evening class to complete your credits.” (*Americanah* 345)

Ifemelu realises here that she is “not sufficiently furious because she was African, not African American” (ibid). Ifemelu who tries to delve into the ‘black’ identity her society imposes on her and thus actively educates others about racism and how it can be changed, learns that her understanding of racism does not correlate with that of African Americans. She witnesses that she has neglected to maintain regular interaction with Africans, which ultimately leaves her disconnected from her true self and overtaxed by her new identity.

It is her involvement with the Obama election and especially the speeches of his wife Michelle Obama that offer Ifemelu the opportunity to recover a “glint of her old self” since Michelle Obama’s words represent “the absence of apology, the promise of honesty” (*Americanah* 354). Ifemelu recognises that her life in America has made her transformable and open to new things, nevertheless she also sees that she has generally given up many aspects that used to be characteristic for her, per se her unapologetic ways and her honesty. Like a plastic bag in the wind, she let her environment shape and experience different identities. Yet, after having lived in the United States for more than thirteen years she understands that racism is generally silenced and learns that her historical make-up does not correlate with that of African Americans. Ultimately, Ifemelu feels “cement in her soul” because her experiences in America enforce the need to “sink her roots in without the constant urge to tug them out and shake off the soil” (*Americanah* 6). Not having visited Nigeria for more than a decade leaves her with a “piercing homesickness” and the feeling of “early morning disease of fatigue, a bleakness and borderlessness” (ibid). Since Ifemelu did not actively make the effort to maintain contact with fellow Africans or even visit Nigeria, her disconnection from her past renders her subdued and feeling like a waif in America. One can conclude that Adichie demonstrates that there is need to uphold contact with the home country and also engage with those who share emigration, the same home country or continent. This enables immigrants to have a well-rounded experience of living abroad and can help to prevent mental illnesses such as depression. Albeit, even though Ifemelu generally disassociates herself from her heritage culture, her engagement with food, language and her hair, shows that she still manages to construct a transnational identity.

3.2.2.4 Food

For émigrés, food plays an important role in coping with homesickness or acculturative stress. Food represents a medium to temporarily recreate culture in the new host society. Nevertheless, food can also serve as a platform to interact with and exchange edible cultures and perhaps create a new version of culture (Dawkins 37). Ifemelu's first encounter with American food makes her notice the "blandness" and "tastelessness" of fruits which enforces a feeling of disorientation (*Americanah* 113). When she joins the African Student Association at University, she witnesses that there are other African émigrés with whom she shares the same feeling. They mockingly argue "[y]ou are in America do not expect to have hot food for lunch." That African taste must be abolished" (*Americanah* 139). This group becomes a realm in which she does not have to "explain herself" (ibid).

Nevertheless, outside this group Ifemelu acknowledges that her cooking style and her taste in food are generally not valued. She first learns this when she has to prepare a meal for her six-year old cousin Dike. A clashing of cultures takes place since she intends to deep fry the sausages as she usually does in Nigeria (*Americanah* 107). However, her cousin advises her otherwise and the failed meal makes her understand how little she knows about her host society. Consequently, she embarks on a "summer of eating", where she delves into the food dominantly eaten in America (*Americanah* 113). This example highlights that food can become a dividing or uniting factor. The aversion to otherness can easily be observed with regards of food. Yet, since Ifemelu tries to learn about her host society via food shows that she actively chooses to partake in transculturalism and act more open-mindedly.

A further example which highlights the disparities between the cultures in respect to food occurs at another conversation with her cousin Dike. He is puzzled about why she eats bananas with peanuts and when she counters that this is customary for Nigerians, his response "I don't think I like Nigeria, Coz" (*Americanah* 113) helps Ifemelu understand that her otherness is not appreciated. Nevertheless, an incident almost a decade later makes conceivable that in the course of time, Ifemelu has taught her cousin to be more tolerant of their cultural differences. This takes place shortly after Ifemelu retreats to her aunt's home, after her break up with her boyfriend Curt. Aware of her situation, Dike brings her "a banana and a can of peanuts" (*Americanah* 299). Even though he still does not approve of her taste, the fact that he tries to console her with a snack that reminds her of her home assumes that

Ifemelu and Dike have learnt that cultural difference must not be necessarily liked or appropriated, yet this difference should not be discriminated against. This tolerance represents the negotiation of a transcultural/national mentality and identity. Another example, which reinforces this argument, occurs after Ifemelu and her new boyfriend Blaine have an altercation. A “reconciliary meal” (*Americanah* 350) intends to mend the cleft that grew between them. Her choice of the Nigerian dish “coconut rice” (*Americanah* 349) shows that Ifemelu has managed to raise awareness about her cultural heritage and thus create a realm for transculturalism and transnationality.

3.2.2.5 Language

A further point which presents a challenging yet educational experience for Ifemelu’s identity construction process abroad is the use of language and the power of accents. From the onset, Ifemelu is indoctrinated with the ‘we only speak English in America’ sentiment. She observes this when her Aunt forbids her to speak Igbo with her cousin Dike or when her high school friend Ginika, actively corrects her when she code mixes between English and Igbo (*Americanah* 125). Soon her environment puts a muzzle on her and consequently words such as “fat” or stating whether a person is “black” are not condoned (*Americanah* 6,124). However the most salient reason which finally pushes Ifemelu to conceal her Nigerian accent and sound like an American, is influenced by institutional discrimination. When Ifemelu registers for University as an international student she comes across the patronizing and belittling woman Cristina Tomas. Ifemelu who “had spoken English all her life [...] and always thought the American twang inchoate” suddenly recognizes that this woman sees her Nigerian accent as a marker for her language incompetence (*Americanah* 133). Ifemelu notices that her ‘non-American’ accent robs her of agency. She, who used to be active in debating groups and highly assertive, loses her voice on the premise of the way she sounds (*ibid*). This experience renders an uncompromising Ifemelu “shrunk [...] [and like a] defeated animal” and this represents the beginning of her adaption of an American accent (*Americanah* 175). With the aim to prove to Cristina Tomas that she can converse “normally” (*Americanah* 175), Ifemelu “perfect[s]” her American accent and even becomes quite “convincing” (*Americanah* 173). The fact that Ifemelu equates an American accent with speaking normally, makes Adichie’s criticism conceivable. One can deduce that immigrants learn to view their accent as inferior due to the discrimination they experience. Since accents play a paramount

role for Nigerian immigrants, for instance (Clark 178), the devaluation of this accent suggests that there is an inherent intolerance and ignorance towards alterity. Soon Ifemelu understands that maintaining this accent is highly unnatural and exhausting because of the concentration needed to perform it. For three years she manages to sustain, yet after a young telemarketer compliments her for sounding American, Ifemelu reevaluates her mentality and assertion of self. By critically confronting herself with the question “[w]hy was it a compliment, an accomplishment, to sound American?” (*Americanah* 175), Ifemelu realizes that she is doing a disservice to herself. Thus, Ifemelu actively decides “to stop faking an American accent” and embraces her cultural and ethnic marker, which is her Nigerian accent (ibid.). Ifemelu learns that acculturation does not represent denial of one’s past and heritage.

Finally, Ifemelu’s restoration of her Nigerian accent enables her to act as a role model and thus challenge the oppression people who do not sound like the norm experience. This becomes clear in an African hair salon, nearly a decade after the previous scene. It surprises the hair dressers that she has not adopted the American accent in the course of the thirteen years in America (*Americanah* 188). In their minds, a well assimilated immigrant sounds American since this is a paramount currency into their host society. Moreover, one of the hair dressers’ child was violently abused due its “African accent” and so the American accent represents an armor against discrimination (*Americanah* 187). The fact that Ifemelu embraces her originality, offers these women the opportunity to reevaluate their mindset and conquer their fear. Accordingly, these African women, who have not been in the United States for very long, can learn that they must not shed a crucial part of their past in order to be accepted in the United States. They can actively participate in being accepted for their alterity. Ultimately, Ifemelu manages to negotiate her transnational identity and even educates others do similarly.

3.2.2.6 Hairism

In *Americanah*, hair is one of the most recurring themes. Essentially, with every person being described, a reference to their hair texture or color is not missing. As mentioned in the part dealing with Ifemelu’s identity before her emigration, hair used to have a relevance in her environment. Yet, Ifemelu manages to strive for naturalness and does not consider processed hair as aspirational. Once Ifemelu moves to the United States, however, she becomes cognizant of hairism not only among African Americans but also on an institutional level.

Initially, Ifemelu ridicules Aunty Uju's comment about unnatural hair being "unprofessional", nevertheless, in the course of time Ifemelu becomes a victim of societal pressure and ultimately conforms to the idea of 'good hair' (*Americanah* 119, 203).

In the United States, for instance, black hair in its natural form is mostly covered with a societal intolerance and thus racialized. The racialization of black hair has its origin in the times of slavery during which the slaves with the 'nappy' or 'bad hair' were deemed to work on the fields, whereas those with a softer hair texture, seemingly closer to the 'white ideal of beauty', were privileged and worked as house slaves, attained access to education and health care (Byra &Tharps 18). In the course of time, this doctrine remained instilled within the African American community and a trans-generational inferiority seems to manifest itself in the entrenched favoritism of 'good hair', even today. The ongoing institutional discrimination, usually coming from a white supremacist society, represents the root for the concealed oppression of especially, female black hair (Byra &Tharps 14).

The example which demonstrates this argument occurs when Ifemelu applies for another interview. After having been rejected several time with her braided hair, the African American job counselor Ruth advises her "[l]ose the braids and straighten your hair. Nobody says this kind of stuff but it matters. We want you to get that job" (*Americanah* 202). Ifemelu thankfully goes to a drugstore and buys the hair damaging 'creamy crack' also known as relaxer which promises black women "impossibly straight and shiny hair" (*Americanah* 203). The fact that an African American woman advises her to undergo such a procedure suggests that she has internalized the unspoken norm that in Corporate America the dress code expects only 'good hair'. Ifemelu initially sees it as a "new adventure" and when the hairdresser remarks that she has now got the "white-girl swing", since her hair moves easily when she moves her head, Ifemelu suddenly compares her transformation with loss and even death (ibid.). From the onset, Ifemelu's relaxed hair presents her with difficulties since her body rejects the toxic treatment it had just undergone. She gets "relaxer burns" which initially scab and finally pus (*Americanah* 204). When her boyfriend Curt obliviously wonders why she does not maintain her "full and cool" hair, she explains:

"My full and cool hair would work if I were interviewing to be a backup singer in a jazz band, but I need to look professional for this interview, and professional means straight is best but if it's going to be curly then it has to be the white kind of curly, loose curls or, at worst, spiral curls but never kinky" (ibid)

Desperate to get employed Ifemelu endures a journey of self-denial and injury yet she finally adopts self-embrace. Soon after she gets hired her hair begins to shed at the temples, induced by the toxic chemicals of the relaxer (*Americanah* 208). Thus, her friend Wambui encourages her to 'go natural' by cutting her hair short. She argues that "relaxing your hair is like being in a prison" since she has to worry about its maintenance. Ifemelu hesitantly follows her advice and is ultimately shocked by the result. She thinks that she looks "like a boy, at worst like an insect" and feels "unfinished" (ibid). Her new haircut renders her so insecure that she refuses to go to work for several days and even sees the reason for Curt's emotional cheating in her hairdo (*Americanah* 209, 210). Ifemelu's reactions seem to represent the inherent norm that a woman's hair should be kept long. Once Ifemelu begins her job, comments such as "brave look" and questions about whether she is a "lesbian" or whether her hairdo has "political" roots, makes Ifemelu aware that especially black hair is not only hair, but rather that it can be symbolic for an individual's personal, sexual identity and even political views (*Americanah* 211-212). For instance she learns that the Afro hairstyle has a political sentiment since it represents the Black Power movement, in which the protesters aimed to present "Black self-love/knowledge" (*Americanah* 297, Tate *Beauty* 37).

At war with her new look, Ifemelu encounters an internet group, in which many followers of the 'natural' hairstyle have established a bond in which they exchange useful products and encouraging words. This cyberspace offers Ifemelu a realm to rebuild her self-esteem and to educate herself about the importance of her "God-given halo of hair" (*Americanah* 204). This becomes apparent when she goes shopping with her boyfriend Curt and a black man suddenly remarks "You ever wonder why he likes you looking all jungle like that?" (*Americanah* 212). Startled by his auto-racist and ignorant question she initially goes to a drugstore to buy herself a weave, yet a comment from the group encourages her to ignore the man's comment and practice self-embrace and love (*Americanah* 213). Moreover, her empowerment also transpires when her aunt praises her boyfriend for being with her despite her hair being "like jute" (*Americanah* 216). With assertion she counters "[w]hat if every magazine you opened and every film you watched had beautiful women with hair like jute?" (ibid). With this comment she intends to educate her aunt about the roots of her mindset, which lie in the perennial and aggressive expression of homogenous white beauty in the mainstream media. Ifemelu proceeds with raising awareness once she launches her own blog, which she uses as a platform to discuss the entrenched mentality the comedian Paul Mooney criticizes "[i]f your hair is relaxed, white people are relaxed, if your hair is nappy they're not happy" (Stilson

Good Hair 2009). In her blog she does not only offer her followers useful and applicable suggestions but she also critically discusses the aversion some black women have towards their natural hair and points at the systematic and subliminal influence the media and politics have on its viewers. Ifemelu also refers to the policy of ‘black respectability’, which essentially means that members of a marginalized group conform to the mainstream values instead of demanding the mainstream to be more tolerant of diversity. Hence, Ifemelu targets black public celebrities such as the coveted singer Beyoncé suggesting that she perpetuates hairism and colorism since she abides by the common ritual of ‘white washing’ and conforming to the ideal of ‘good hair’. Ifemelu presents the media as the culprit of the repression of natural hair and the diversity of skin color (*Americanah* 296-298). In addition, Ifemelu argues that Michelle Obama also conforms to the “black respectability policy” when she explains:

Imagine if Michelle Obama got tired of all the heat and decided to go natural and appeared on TV with lots of woolly hair, or tight spirally curls. [...] She would totally rock but poor Obama would certainly lose the independent vote, even the undecided Democrat vote (ibid)

Adichie’s criticism shines through because in an interview she posits that if Michelle Obama had worn her hair naturally, Obama would have not won the election, on the sole premise that her natural hair would have evoked connotations such as “radical” or “black panther” (Det Kongelige Bibliotek 2014). Via her blog, Ifemelu intends to disseminate an anti-racist image of black hair and aid those living in the shadow of systematic racism to embrace their naturalness without having to justify their motives. The internet becomes a realm in which she partakes in “immobile transnationalism” and thus has the agency to educate women, not only in the United States but also throughout the African Diaspora and Africa to contribute to the natural hair movement.

3.3. Ifemelu's identity after her return to Nigeria

3.3.1 Embellished Nigeria

As mentioned above, Ifemelu's prolonged stay in the United States and her overall estrangement from her home country ultimately drives her to move back to Nigeria. Yet, her return evokes a pessimist sentiment from her Auntie Uju, her family members in Nigeria and also the Senegalese woman in the hair salon. The news comes as a surprise and makes them wonder whether she can "*cope*" in Nigeria (*Americanah* 17). These questions let Ifemelu understand that moving back to Nigeria is not considered a wise choice. In the eyes of her family members, her experiences abroad have rendered her "irrevocably altered by America" and thus inapt to deal with the issues Nigerians are confronted with on a daily basis (*ibid*). To her displeasure these question imply that her departure from Nigeria has erased her past and has made her a spoiled Americanah. As a teenager, she felt great resentment for returnees who denied their heritage culture and therefore mocked them (*Americanah* 65). One can assume that Ifemelu feared being seen as those 'been-tos'. Her return to Nigeria will also foreground how much America has changed her and that she has been in denial about this change. While in America, especially after she breaks up with Obinze, Ifemelu begins to distance herself from everything Nigerian. She stops reading articles about Nigeria because they would remind her of Obinze and ultimately she becomes estranged from her past (*Americanah* 159). Soon she forgets the feeling of "spend[ing] an evening in candlelight" and fails to remember the kiosk her family used to go to (*Americanah* 200). Even if she maintains contact with her high school friend Ranyinudo, who updates her about Nigeria's progress, Ifemelu's return to Nigeria reveals that she lived with the imagination of an embellished Nigeria (*Americanah* 15). Coupled with this and the fact that her family members do not support her decision, Ifemelu develops insecurity about returning back.

3.3.2 Americanah ?

Thus, to her disbelief, Nigeria initially “assault[s]” her and represents a new feeling of displacement and alienation (*Americanah* 385). She finds herself in an “adult Nigeria” (*Americanah* 429) and is confronted with its vivacity and its smell of “perfume, exhaust fumes and sweat”. Not only the “heaps of rubbish”, the sleeping man on the side road, or the “roads infested with potholes” but also her inability to remember all street sides reinforces her feeling of confusion, estrangement and an “unbearable emotion” which “was nostalgic and melancholy, a beautiful sadness for the things she had missed and the things she would never know” (*Americanah* 385). Disoriented Ifemelu wonders whether cell phones were always accessible to all or whether women were always denied access into the church on the sole premise of their dress code being “indecent” (*Americanah* 385, 387). Ifemelu realizes that Nigeria has altered without having taken her into account and that her absence has made her a stranger in the place she unequivocally believed to be her own.

Consequently, her friend Ranyinudo mockingly calls her an Americanah because she cannot stand the humidity, for instance. Thus, the first time she is confronted with the sweltering humidity she feels “guiltily grateful that has a blue American passport in her bag” [since] [i]t shielded her from choicelessness [because] [s]he could always leave, she did not have to stay” (*Americanah* 390). Pacified by this privilege of being able to leave Nigeria whenever she pleases, Ifemelu maneuvers through her initial period in Nigeria. In the course of time Ifemelu manages to build up a successful life. She buys a flat in a prestigious area, works as a features editor at *Zoe Magazine* and finally feels that she is at “home” (*Americanah* 411). Coming from America enables her to be regarded with respect since “status [...] surpassed age” (*Americanah* 401). Moreover, Ifemelu is seen as a Nigeropolitan, a member of the assorted group of wealthy and hip returnees. One can conclude that her environment places more power on those who have been abroad and that she herself begins to believe that she is superior. Thus, Ifemelu becomes a madam, which is a “generic respectful term for [an] older woman” and plays the part her society expects convincingly (Blench & Dendo 16). She has a “playful and patronizing” demeanour with her work colleges in *Zoe Magazine* and showers them with presents (*Americanah* 402). Moreover, Ifemelu acquires a “false bravado” and commands both her driver and people working on her new flat with threats and strictness (*Americanah* 395,403). She cannot “convince even herself of her own madamness” yet conforms to the image expected from returnees (*Americanah* 402).

3.3.3 Multiple consciousness

Even though Ifemelu was initially ridiculed for seeing things with “American eyes” her return to Nigeria shows that her stay in the United States has given her a multiple consciousness (*Americanah* 385). One of the most outstanding pieces of evidence refers to the fact that Ifemelu, who once believed depression to be an ‘American thing’, acknowledges the full severity of the mental illness. After her cousin Dike, who recently attempted suicide, returns to America from his visit in Nigeria, Ranyinudo argues “I don’t understand how a fine boy like Dike would want to kill himself. A boy living in America with everything. How can? That is very foreign behaviour” (*Americanah* 425). Infuriated Ifemelu counters “[h]ave you read *Things Fall Apart*” (ibid.). The fact that Ifemelu refers to a novel written by the Nigerian Chinua Achebe, in which the protagonist Okonkwo commits suicide, intends to accentuate that suicide and mental illness such as depression have also been part of Nigeria’s history. Ifemelu’s life abroad has given her a multiple consciousness which enables her to view her life in Nigeria distinctly and eventually enforce improvement and development.

Moreover, Ifemelu notices problems in her society which she intends to target via the magazine. Irritated by how the magazine, for instance, exclusively portrays the accomplishments of wealthy and Eurocentric women, she proposes to also introduce the voices of the less privileged. Nevertheless, she experiences resistance from her boss and her co-workers. Since Ifemelu feels silenced she finally decides to leave her job in order to manage a new blog called *The Small Redemptions of Lagos*. Once again Ifemelu uses this blog as a platform to “provoke” those who are not willing to hear the truth (*Americanah* 415). Mainly, she gets her inspirations from the majority of women in her society whose highest priority is marriage and who see men as “sources of things” (*Americanah* 396). Accordingly she shares her criticism on her blog and even though her comments are not received well, she paves the road for a distinct mindset towards the motivations of marriage. Most importantly her experience of being a Nigerpolitan aids Ifemelu to be more critical of her home country. Her Americanized work colleague, Doris invites her to the Nigerpolitan Club and initially she finds a refuge there since she must not explain herself. Here she can safely complain about Nigerian peculiarities or share the things she misses about America. Nevertheless, soon Ifemelu observes a problem with this group of African identities because she understands that the mentality of these Nigerpolitans leads away from her own principles. The fact that the

members criticize that their house help are inapt to prepare a “simple sandwich” or vegetarians are underrepresented in Nigeria renders Ifemelu taken aback (*Americanah* 408). She observes a certain level of condescension towards those who have not been abroad and a conviction that Nigeria’s progress is lacking and worth ridicule. Ifemelu understands that this group elevates itself from the rest, even with the taste of food. Consequently, Ifemelu scrutinizes in her blog entry:

Nigeria is not a nation of sandwich-eating people and [...] Nigeria is not a nation of people with food allergies, not a nation of picky eaters for who food is about distinctions and separations. It is a nation of people who eat beef and chicken and cow skin and intestines and dried fish in a single bowl of soup, and it is called assorted, and so get over yourselves and realize that the way of life here is just that, assorted. (*Americanah* 421)

Even though Ifemelu might have been enticed by the glamour and status her new lifestyle offers her, she also understands that she has the responsibility to educate ‘been-tos’ that Nigeria “has never been [and] will never be” like any other country and that its originality needs to be celebrated (ibid). One can assume Adichie’s criticism on how some wealthy transnational Africans misinterpret Selasi’s understanding of the concept Afropolitan and instead promote elitism, Eurocentrism and exclusion of the less privileged. In a talk at the 2015 Pen World Voices Festival in New ¹³York she posits that Africans should pay more attention to the opinion of fellow Africans and not aspire to the recognition and validation of the West.

Due to her mindset and demeanour she is not considered an *Americanah* anymore (*Americanah* 395). It becomes apparent that Ifemelu aims to incorporate the voices of the voiceless, especially when she plans to use her blog as a template to “travel through Nigeria and post dispatches from each state, with pictures and human stories” (*Americanah* 436). Ifemelu’s development from a displaced and alienated *Americanah*, to a prestigious and powerful Nigerpolitan to finally a critical blogger shows how she manages to negotiate her transnational identity. Her experiences abroad have shaped and altered her to a certain degree, yet whereas her fellow returnees develop condensation and contempt for the place they once called home, Ifemelu tries to adopt an appreciation of Nigeria’s uniqueness. Ifemelu has profited from her experiences abroad and still does not reject the country which played a great part in molding her identity. Lastly, the fact that she keeps up regular phone calls with her ex-boyfriends Blaine and Curt and also her cousin Dike and Auntie Uju or engages with

¹³ <http://worldvoices.pen.org/2015-on-africa> [Consulted: 12.06.2016]

American blogs such as the *Postbourgie* assumes that, even if Ifemelu has found her home in Nigeria, she still considers the United States a part of herself (*Americanah* 414, 420, 475). Ultimately, she manages to find a resting place while in between worlds. In the next section, the analysis of the character Obinze will be presented and discussed.

4. Obinze's transnational identity construction process

4.1 Identity in Nigeria

In order to offer a complete overview of Obinze's transnational identity construction process, the analysis of his character also begins in Nigeria. By means of Obinze, Adichie offers an insight into a male character who defies the typical gender expectations of men in Nigeria. Moreover, Adichie establishes a critical insight into the upper-middle class and the roots for an obsession with America. The following section will outline and discuss these observations.

4.1.1 Masculinity

According to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary, masculinity means "having qualities appropriate to or usually associated with a man" (2016). In Nigeria, these qualities entail bravery, dominance over women or in their peers and the exertion of domestic work, which is traditionally deemed as masculine (Asiyanbola 2). From an early age, these gender expectations are instilled within boys by either their fathers or other male members in their society. The pressure to conform to such norms is immense and an insubordination to them can have detrimental ramifications ranging from poor self image to substance abuse, violence towards women and also the rejection by the society (WPP 2015; Alimi 2015).

By means of Obinze, Adichie dramatizes masculinity differently from the dominant rhetoric. This argument transpires in numerous incidents. The initial one refers to the fact that Obinze lacked the need to prove this masculinity. After his mother moves to Lagos for a sabbatical, he makes an impression for his "air of calm and inwardness" (*Americanah* 55). Soon he is initiated into the "clan of swaggering, carelessly cool males, the Big Guys" (ibid), who are known for their impropriety. Nevertheless, whereas the members of this group defy the school rules of "tucking in " the shirts in order to mirror their careless masculinity, Obinze daily comes to school styled according to its demands. Shortly after his peers follow him. One can assume that for Obinze, the idea of masculinity does not entail display of disobedience and negative conduct. He has a "quiet strength" (*Americanah* 139) which encourages confidence and rejects arrogance and thus he sets a role model for his fellow male friends.

This argument also ties in with the following example where Ifemelu exclaims:

“You know what I admired most about you in secondary school? That you never had a problem saying ‘I don’t know.’ Other boys pretended to know what they didn’t know. But you just had this confidence and you could always admit that you didn’t know something.”
(*Americanah* 281)

Her observation not only accentuates his confidence but also criticizes the mindset of their society. Boys are conditioned to believe that they must have an answer to all the problems posed to them in life, in order to avoid the stigma of inferiority or stupidity (Adichie “Feminsit” 2013). The fact that Obinze openly acknowledges his lack of knowledge illustrates that Adichie implies the need for change in terms of the pressure placed on boys and men. Obinze’s mentality and behavior, however needs to be credited to the upbringing he enjoyed from his independent, plainspoken and feminist mother. She teaches him to adopt a mindset which does not belittle femininity or conform to entrenched beliefs of masculinity. When Obinze is seven years old, his father passes away, leaving him with a “consoling spirit of his father, idealized, frozen in joyful childhood memories” (*Americanah* 466). Henceforth, his widowed mother raises him alone and informs him about the value of equity between the sexes, the respect towards women and about his responsibilities when engaging in a romantic relationship with the other sex (*Americanah* 97).

The most salient evidence for her distinct parenting transpires when she teaches him to cook. As mentioned in the preceding section of this thesis, in Nigeria, cooking is socially and culturally considered a woman’s duty. A man’s introduction into the kitchen is often seen as the source for his effeminacy and thus boys and men are warded off this ‘feminine’ domain (Asiyanbola). Nevertheless, Obinze’s mother deflects the negative connotation towards this tradition and educates her son to be and become self-sufficient. She expects his help when she is in the kitchen and teaches him to prepare basic dishes (*Americanah* 69). This education lays the ground for his open-minded views towards both womanhood and manhood. Obinze learns to outgrow the preset limitations of gender expectations in his society and to rethink the conviction that women ‘belong into the kitchen’. This teaches him to appreciate the work done by women and to acknowledge that a man in the kitchen is not less masculine, instead only meeting the basic needs of nourishment.

The fact that Obinze’s mother adopts such an approach when raising her son, illustrates Adichie’s emphasis that in order to prevent sexism, parents have to implement change from the foundation (Adichie “Feminist” 2013). Mothers and fathers have to raise awareness of the

existence of sexism and encourage their sons to contribute to alter the image of women in patriarchal societies.

4.1.2 Version of Africanness

As an advocate of portraying versions of Africanness in her literary work, Adichie offers insight into the lives of the upper-middle class with her character Obinze. By means of Obinze, she demonstrates the existence of privileged Nigerians and also shows that this privilege does not exclude disenfranchisement.

Obinze is the son of a female University lecturer and prior to his move to Lagos, he grows up on the University campus of Nsukka, where he had a “childhood cushioned by family [and] by regular meals” (*Americanah* 236). He is considered a ‘butter-eater’ in his society, which not only refers to his family’s affluent status since they can afford to eat butter, but also implies his pampered lifestyle (*Americanah* 250). Albeit, Obinze still experiences an insight into scarcity under General Buhari’s rulership since relevant commodities such as free tins of milk (*Americanah* 281) were not supplied to the population. Nevertheless, that fact that he has the choice to refuse his mother’s homemade soya milk implies that he did not suffer from this scarcity (*ibid*).

In addition, Obinze enjoys a good education and is mostly surrounded by people who were abroad. Thus, he remains oblivious to the issues the disenfranchised experience. This becomes apparent when he does not acknowledge that Ifemelu lives without a telephone or that her mother has no passport. His privileges shield him from how those disenfranchised perceive their reality. While studying at the University of Nsukka, Ifemelu must wake up early to get a place in the communal toilets, whereas Obinze resides in his mother’s home on the Campus (*Americanah* 90). It becomes clear that Obinze obtains an insight into the macro-level of scarcity because he witnesses occasional shortages; nevertheless he does not understand the micro-level of poverty since his environment and his privileged position in it do not offer him the opportunity to engage with the disenfranchised.

Nonetheless, the next point aims to illustrate that privileges always intersect with disadvantages depending on the individual’s position in society. Obinze dedicated his teenage

and young adult years to acquiring knowledge about America, a country he always “loved from afar” (*Americanah* 271). Once he graduates from University he applies for a visa, yet gets rejected several times. His mother explains “It’s the terrorism fears” [...] “The Americans are now averse to foreign young men” (*Americanah* 233). The post-9/11 policies enforced regulations to prevent further terrorist attacks. With the ‘Visa Security Program’ the consular posts in Nigeria, for instance, were expected to scrutinize applications coming from ‘countries of interest’ like Nigeria (Chishti & Bergeron 2011; Akram 43).

Obinze’s dream of living and studying in the United States is crushed due to his nationality. While he basked in the benefits of his upper-middle class lifestyle in Nigeria, the sheer fact of his country of origin reduces him to a potential terrorist. He might be entitled to certain privileges in Nigeria and still simultaneously experience subjugation in the face of America, where his nationality renders him an ‘other’. He would realize this years later when he gets deported from England. Handcuffed and on his way to the airplane to Nigeria he acknowledges that the “tall white woman” ahead of him

“would [...] not approach travel with anxiety about visas. She might worry about money, about a place to stay, about safety, perhaps even about visas, but never with an anxiety that wrenched at the spine (*Americanah* 280).

One can conclude that Adichie intends to disseminate the existence of educated and wealthy Nigerians living in a developing country, with the aim to work against the single-sided discourse in which the lives of Africans are seen as wretched and hopeless. Moreover, there seems to be a clarification that living in a developing country does not always guarantee the awareness of the life of the less privileged. Coming from Africa does not render that individual as the ambassador on issues of poverty or political unrest. Finally, Adichie offers insight into the fact that privileges intersect with disadvantages simultaneously. Especially, for non-white individuals coming from Africa, where Afro-pessimism is a dominant rhetoric, subjugation is easy to experience.

4.1.3 Obinze’s single story

The following section will outline Obinze’s admiration with America and discuss the main reasons for his mindset. Obinze is a wealthy boy who enjoyed affluence and a good education. Nevertheless, as many of his school friends, Obinze develops a great affinity and admiration

with everything American. Even though Obinze is well-versed in Igbo proverbs and does not deny his ethnic identity, his fascination with America makes him regret his Nigerian citizenship (*Americanah* 62, 66). The core incident which fosters this “longing” reverts back to an advertisement, which was emitted during General Buhari’s military dictatorship (*Americanah* 232). Here a child exclaims “Men, I’m checkin’ out” after having lamented “No good roads, no light, no water. Men, you can’t even get a bottle of soft drink” (ibid). This incident embeds into him the need to aspire for America. Since his mother suddenly only allows him to drink Fanta on Sundays, “America bec[omes] a place where bottles and bottles of Fanta were to be had, without permission” (*Americanah* 233). Conditioned by the advertisement, he repeats the child’s words in front of the mirror. Forthwith, Obinze evolves to an America expert, schooled in everything American (*Americanah* 67). With his expertise comes the conviction that American literature or movies are “superior” to English ones and only the United States of America seems to embody the idea of “abroad” for him. (*Americanah* 224, 232) Repeatedly he indulges in “American-British jousting” with his mother, in which he adamantly posits that the American pronunciation and American vocabulary is better (*Americanah* 71)

These examples foreground one essential point worth scrutiny, namely the power of media and how it shapes the minds of people. The young Obinze who was well-off felt disparaged since the media announcement made him believe that he was lacking. Moreover, his appreciation for America is shaped by the books he reads and the movies he consumes. The following passages establishes this argument:

[...] seeking out magazines and books and films and second-hand stories about America, his longing took on a minor mystical quality and America became where he was destined to be. He saw himself walking the streets of Harlem, discussing the merits of Mark Twain with his American friends, gazing at Mount Rushmore (*Americanah* 233).

It crystallizes that Obinze was fed by a generalized and single-sided image of America. The fact that “gazing at Mount Rushmore” seems representative and natural for the daily life of Americans, shows how susceptible people tend to become in the face of the media they consume and how the dissemination of a wrong or one-side message can condition people to think in terms of incomplete stereotypes. One can deduce that Adichie criticizes the power of media and which detrimental effects a ‘single story’ can have on those consuming this media (“Single Story” 2009).

4.2 Obinze moving to England

The subsequent segment will firstly discuss the reasons which complicate Obinze's stay in England and finally clarify how he manages to construct a transnational identity both while in England and then once he returns to Nigeria. His unsuccessful acculturation into his host society depends on numerous factors, including his "choicelessness" and his fear and invisibility as an illegal immigrant. Nevertheless, Obinze also acquires a multiple consciousness and gains more insight into the power of accents and scrutinizes the behavior of his Nigerian émigrés friends.

4.2.1 Struggles

4.2.1.1 "Choicelessness"¹⁴

One of the prominent factors, which promotes Obinze's struggle in his new home country is his indiscriminateness. Repeatedly the consular post in Lagos rejects his visa application and therefore his mother advises him to apply for jobs in order to bridge the time gap until his visa application might be approved. Nevertheless, all his efforts are of no avail, rendering him reserved and discontented. Ultimately, his demeanor urges his honest and law-abiding mother to decide:

"I'm going to put your name on my British visa application as my research assistant" [...] "That should get you a six-month visa. You can stay with Nicholas in London. See what you can do with your life. Maybe you can get to America from there. I know that your mind is no longer here" (*Americanah* 234).

Unexpectedly, Obinze must reevaluate his life aspirations since England was never an option for him. He lived with the firm conviction that the "universe would bend according to his will" (*Americanah* 232) and thus he never doubted his plan of building up a life in the United States. Yet the sudden change in his fate makes him feel like a "failure" (*Americanah* 234). After he arrives in London, Obinze realizes that his life in Nigeria was veiled by oblivion and the following three years will confront him with an insight he had never imagined and expected. Shortly after Obinze's high school friend Emenike invites him to a dinner in order

¹⁴ (*Americanah* 276)

for him to meet his British wife Georgina and friends. At the gathering a woman called Alexa utters that the former home secretary David “Blunkett must be sensible and make sure this country remains a refuge. People who have survived frightful wars must absolutely be allowed in!” (*Americanah* 276). The fact that this woman asks for his confirmation on her opinion renders Obinze to feel “alienation run through him like a shiver” (ibid). Obinze realizes that the woman expects him to act as a spokesperson for all refugees, which implies that there is an underlying conviction that people coming from Africa can only be suffering and in exile. Consequently Obinze reflects that:

the other guests, and perhaps even Georgina, all understood the fleeing from war, from the kind of poverty that crushed human souls, but they would not understand the need to escape from the oppressive lethargy of choicelessness. They would not understand why people like him, who were raised well fed and watered but mired in dissatisfaction, conditioned from birth to look towards somewhere else, eternally convinced that real lives happened in that somewhere else, were now resolved to do dangerous things, illegal things, so as to leave, none of them starving, or raped, or from burned villages, but merely hungry for choice and certainty (*Americanah* 276)

By means of this argument one can suppose that Adichie intends to criticize the general discourse that immigrants from Africa are either war or poverty stricken. Obinze’s case attempts to demonstrate the existence of educated and well-off individuals who due to the lack of work and the desire to ‘look for green pastors’, like many sojourners do, attempt to embark on immigration. One can deduce that Adichie attempts to educate about the versions of immigrants and their reasons for embarking on a life abroad.

4.2.1.2 Fear and invisibility

The next factor which presents problems during Obinze’s stay in England is the fact that he is an illegal immigrant and that he lives with another identity. In the first six months he resides with his cousin Nicholas and his family. They represent a transnational network and enable him to manage in the initial months. In this time he applies for jobs and “each time the phone [rings], a mild panic would seize his chest” (*Americanah* 240) yet with no avail and therefore he helps his cousin’s wife Ojiugo in the household (240-241). Obinze’s seeks asylum, however he is not accepted which ultimately urges him to consider the lifestyle of an illegal immigrant. Thus, he locates his cousin Iloba, who lives in London. Shortly after his cousin connects him with Vincent Obi, a man who would supply him with a National Insurance card and enable Obinze to take on the identity of Vincent (*Americanah* 250). Obtaining a

successful job in a warehouse, Obinze initially manages to earn money and sustain a living; nevertheless soon the supplier of his National Insurance card increases the price for the card. Since Obinze is not able to meet his demands, the man reports him to his employer (*Americanah* 261). Afraid of being deported he leaves his well-paid job and slides into another illegal endeavor. Desperate to build a life in England, he finally considers undergoing a sham marriage. Only a few of his friends are aware of his situation, however the fear of being caught and deported render him paranoid and restless. Moreover, the fact that he sheds his identity and becomes Vincent Obi leads to his loss of agency and invisibility.

The following examples demonstrate these arguments. In the initial weeks of being Vincent Obi, Obinze remembers the cold, which perpetuated his fear and alienation, “drying his nostrils, deepening his anxieties, making him urinate too often” (*Americanah* 227). Watching the pedestrians he resented his lack of “purpose” and envied their privilege thinking: *You can work, you are legal, you are visible, and you don’t even know how fortunate you are.* (ibid.). This example grants an insight into the worries and thoughts of an illegal immigrant. It becomes clear that Obinze is not the self-assured man he used to be and instead he has transformed into an anxious and purposeless man, who is a bystander of life. His urge to “urinate too often” can be understood as his body’s reaction to his stressful life circumstances, where his awareness about his illegal doing and the fear of being caught dictate him. In addition, the national newspaper articles aggressively discuss issues such as “Schools Swamped by Asylum Seekers” [which] “stoke [] new panic in his chest” (*Americanah* 256). Conditioned by the media’s representation of immigrants and asylum seekers, Obinze develops a paranoia which reaches its apex at his workplace in the warehouse. Once he enters the place he senses that his co-workers are acting differently, which lets him conclude that

[t]hey knew. It had to be that they had somehow found out. They saw the headlines about asylum seekers draining the National Health Service, they knew of the hordes further crowding a crowded island, and now they knew that he was one of the damned, working with a name that was not his (*Americanah* 260).

Obinze’s fear of the repercussions make him “[feel] naked” and “numb” and even though he wants to escape from the scenario his body is unwilling to comply. Eventually, it reveals that the conspicuous behavior of his co-workers masked a surprise birthday party. It becomes apparent that Obinze’s life is conditioned by stress, insecurity and fear who “anyone with the faintest scent of authority” triggers (*Americanah* 257). Not only does his stressful life circumstance cause his “shoulders hunched” (*Americanah* 265) but Obinze also becomes low-

spirited which leads to his loss of self-worth and agency. He becomes an invisible and broken person, disconnected from his former self. Ashamed to report about only his failures he keeps distance from his mother and thus hardly ever calls Nigeria (*Americanah* 234-235). Feeling like a “erased pencil sketch” (*Americanah* 257), Obinze sheds his self-assured personality and transforms into an inferior and faceless second-class citizen. This becomes clear when Obinze attempts to partake in a sham marriage. Soon it transpires that Obinze is susceptible to blackmail and exploitation. Dependent on the help of the Angolan marriage arrangers, he accepts their “slight condescension” and the fact that they demand an unjust amount of money. In addition, when the marriage arrangers do not pass the promised and agreed money to his wife-to-be Cleotilde, Obinze remains passive. His “choicelessness” renders him exploitable and without a voice (*Americanah* 227).

The final example which epitomizes his invisibility and loss of agency occurs when the police detect his sham marriage attempt, shortly before the wedding ceremony. While in detention and awaiting a plane to board him to Nigeria, “he [feels] raw, skinned, the outer layers of himself stripped off” (*Americanah* 281). In prison, the lawyer explains that filing an appeal would eventually lead to him being “removed” from the England, (*Americanah* 279) which illustrates his position in his host society. Obinze becomes dehumanized and thus “a thing without breath and mind”. This also becomes apparent when a ward is surprised when he asks for something to read (*Americanah* 280). One can assume that in ward’s eyes, deportation and education are not mutual. People worthy of deportation are not literate or even interested in educating themselves. Also in the airport, handcuffed he understands that people would ostensibly see him as a criminal, and they would unlikely grapple with the fact that he used to be “a boy who had grown up eating corn flakes and reading books” someone who had life aspirations and dreams (*Americanah* 281). Obinze learns that his life and his experiences will be seen holistically. Fueled by the media coverage about illegal immigration he will, for them, remain stigmatized, without barely someone taking the time and interest to understand why he ended up in this dead end (*Americanah* 280).

One can deduce that Adichie aims to dramatize the reality of illegal immigrants and to give them agency and a voice. By means of Obinze, Adichie criticizes that once a person is deported his humanity is lost, which ultimately reduces that person to a perspective less, criminal object. By depicting a son from an educated and well-off family, she reveals that the routes to illicit behavior are unforeseeable because of traps such as “choicelessness”,

blackmail and fear of failure. Needless to say, one cannot propose that Adichie justifies illegal conduct, rather she urges the reader to recognize that every illegal immigrant once had aspirations and therefore should not be dehumanized and seen as merely vile.

4.2.2 Braiding a transnational identity

4.2.2.1 Multiple consciousnesses

Even though Obinze undergoes numerous negative experiences, his time in England also serves as a template to become more critical towards his host country, immigrant friends, family members and himself. On his journey of transnationality he obtains a multiple consciousness in which he becomes more aware of his preconceived prejudices towards English people and America. Hence he tries to embrace and learn from the cultural differences. In addition, he critically observes the power of language how life abroad changes the mentality of his friends. In England, Obinze begins to reevaluate his fixed mindset about both England and America. This reevaluation also enables him to be more critical towards cultural differences. On numerous occasions he learns that he too is conditioned by prejudice. This argument can be observed when he first meets his employer at the warehouse. To Obinze the man Roy Snell “looked like the Englishman archetype [he] carried in his mind, tall and spare, sandy-haired and blue-eyed” (*Americanah* 252) yet he is surprised of the man’s jolliness because in his “imagination, Englishmen were not smiling men” (ibid). One can assume that due to Obinze’s indifference towards Britain, he based his judgment on his limited point of view. Nevertheless, the encounter with his employer and the man’s generous interaction with Obinze, offers him a safe haven to which he can escape.

A further evidence of his multiple consciousness refers to his critical observation of the immigration discussions in England. His position as an illegal immigrant offers him an insight as a person at the bottom of the ‘social food-chain’. Whereas the media laments about and demonizes the influx of asylum seekers, Obinze’s disparaged situation renders him to criticize the root of the problem, which he finds in Britain’s “denial of history”. He argues that the writers of the newspaper articles “[live] in a world in which the present was unconnected to the past, and they had never considered it to be the normal course of history: the influx into

Britain of black and brown people from countries created by Britain” (*Americanah* 258-259). This reflection shows that Obinze manages to unravel the intricacies of his host society and to engage with the colonial past of Britain. One can deduce that Adichie introduces the paradox of colonialism. Whereas the colonizers manipulated, exploited and forcefully created nations and countries, there seems a great upheaval when the ‘products’ of their construct attempt to build up a future in the ‘motherland’.

In addition, a conversation between the Americophobe and self-righteous woman Alexa and the paediatric surgeon Mark offers Obinze an insight into the slanted power dynamics between Africa and Europe. Here Alexa informs that she supports a charity which inhibits African doctors to exercise their skills abroad because “[t]here are simply no doctors and nurses left on that continent [...] [and that] African doctors should stay in Africa.” Mark who himself comes from a “blighted” area in England does not understand why African doctors should not have the liberty to go wherever they please since Western doctors do too. Alexa counters that “it isn’t quite the same thing, is it? We’re speaking of some of the world’s poorest people. The doctors have a responsibility as Africans;” [...] “Life isn’t fair, really. If they have the privilege of that medical degree then it comes with a responsibility to help their people.” Mark’s response “I don’t suppose any of us should have that responsibility for the blighted towns in the north of England?” highlights the inequity between the continents (*Americanah* 273).

This conversation targets how those in power can determine whose poverty is direr. African doctors are supposed to dedicate their skills to their continent since it is a “privilege” to aid their deprived and hopeless continent, whereas non-African doctors have the liberties to exercise their skills where they please. They are not covered with the pressure to serve their country or continent, even if poverty and hopelessness are existent as well. It is indispensable to acknowledge the fact that there is a ‘brain drain’ in many African countries since many academics feel entitled to exercise their skills in places where there is more comfort (Firsing 2016). Nevertheless, Alexa’s approach implies that African doctors would not have the opportunity to attain additional and specialized knowledge abroad in order to eventually aid their home countries. It becomes apparent that the poverty existent in many African countries has been disseminated in a manner which reduces it to a lost continent in need of the help it can get and the poverty also on going in England, for instance, is not regarded as grave.

Another crucial point which portrays Obinze's shift in mentality occurs when he realizes his idealized America is losing its appeal. By means of American fiction, Obinze tries to still his "longing" for his failed American dream. Immersed in this literature he intends to escape his reality, nevertheless, his almost ritualized engagement with American fiction renders him "disappointed" since he notices that he encounters that "nothing was grave, nothing serious, nothing urgent, and most dissolved into ironic nothingness" (*Americanah* 256). Here Obinze becomes more critical of the media he consumes and begins to understand that the American literature is no consolation to the problems he faces during acculturation.

4.2.2.2 The power of accents

In England Obinze experiences diversity in accents and is forced to reevaluate his preset mindset. The conversations with his co-worker Nigel's accent leave Obinze taken aback at first because he pronounced "each word twisted and stretched until it came out of their mouths having become something else" (*Americanah* 254). Here, Obinze discovers that in England not only the RP pronunciation is common and that there are a variety of dialects which are not intelligible to the unschooled ear. To his revelation, his co-worker Nigel thinks that Obinze has an "African posh" accent (*ibid*). This scenario shows the clashes of stereotypes. Whereas Obinze is surprised to hear that in England people sound unintelligible, Nigel is confronted with the fact that Africans are competent to sound 'upper-class'.

Moreover, Obinze gains awareness about how a person's accent can enable one to exert power and savor prestige. With this insight, Obinze becomes aware of power dynamics attached to the type of accent a person speaks. He first observes this in the manner his cousin Nicholas and his wife raise their children. Nicholas, for instance only converses in "careful English" with his children as if the Igbo he spoke with his wife "would infect them, perhaps make them lose their precious British accents" (*Americanah* 239). This also becomes apparent when his wife Ojiugo praises their daughter's "exaggerated British accent" arguing that she "will go places. That is why all our money is going to Brentwood School" (*Americanah* 241-242). Even though she mocks her daughter's posh articulation, she still instills within her children that they have to sound perfect. Subsequently, Obinze reflects that his cousin Nicholas had a difficult acculturation process himself and thus intends to compensate this by means of an elevated British accent. The accent should mirror his

families' successful assimilation and his children's disconnection from a crucial part of their Igbo culture is the sacrifice he brings.

However, Obinze criticizes that there is a certain privilege which comes with the accent. The example which foregrounds the power of accents and how they can deceive one's judgement occurs when Obinze and his co-worker Nigel deliver a kitchen item to an elderly man who was "dishevelled" and whose home was in disarray. Whereas Nigel usually complains when their customers' houses are untidy, he argues that this man is a "real gent" on the premise of his accent (*Americanah* 254). One can conclude that people experience acceptance or rejection solely on the basis of their accent and this observation has detrimental consequences for those who do not conform to the societal standard or norm of 'proper' English, for instance. Consequently, the voices of those with an 'improper' accent remain unheard and undervalued, whereas the opposite might enjoy unmerited liberties and acknowledgement.

4.2.2.3 Criticism on the behavior of immigrants

Obinze's stay in England makes him susceptible to the changes his immigrant family members and friends undergo. From the onset, Obinze realizes that his friend Emenike is different from the person he used to be in Nigeria. At their first meeting in a bar, Emenike reports about the covert racial discrimination he witnesses during his stay in England and that he is fed-up about the injustice, nevertheless in the presence of his British wife Georgina or his white friends, Emenike transforms into an entertaining storyteller (*Americanah* 275). When asked to certify whether he experiences racism by his friends, he tells his stories as if he were unaffected, as if aiming to avoid the irritation of his audience. Obinze scrutinizes how pretentious his friend becomes in the presence of his new friends. In order to avoid confrontation, he auto-silences himself and thus does not inform his unaware friends that racism is an inherent part of his life in England (ibid.). In addition, not only does he avoid to shed light on racism but he also depicts a distorted image of Africa, which only perpetuates the Afro-pessimism towards the continent. By "cast[ing] home as the jungle and himself as interpreter of the jungle" when he explains that his wife would not survive in Nigeria clarifies this argument (*Americanah* 265).

Another observation Obinze makes about Emenike refers to his denial of his heritage. In Nigeria, Emenike grows up as the son of a poverty-stricken man and who invents stories of royalty and wealth. In England he constructs an identity which denies his past since he sees himself as British and also abides by the unspoken rules of “Britishness”. This becomes apparent when Emenike appreciates antique furniture or handmade chipped plates, which in Nigeria are generally considered dispensable (*Americanah* 271). His difference in mentality renders Obinze to wonder “whether Emenike had become a person who believed that something was beautiful because it was handmade by poor people in a foreign country, or whether he had simply learned to pretend so” (ibid). In addition, Obinze observes Emenike’s “self-satisfaction” since he is “married to a British woman, lived in a British home, worked at a British job, and travelled on a British passport (*Americanah* 267). Thus, Obinze surveys that even though his friend mocks his wife Georgina, “it [is] mockery [colored] by respect, mockery of what he believed, despite himself, to be inherently superior” (*Americanah* 264). One can deduce that to Emenike marrying a British woman and being British represents an upgrade and the epitome of the accomplished immigrant. Moreover, after Obinze looks at Emenike’s gallery of pictures, usually taken in front of historical or cultural sites, he criticizes that he probably took the pictures, “thinking, as he did so, not of the things he was seeing but of the photos he would take of them and of the people who would see those photos” (*Americanah* 268). The depiction of Emenike shows Obinze the pitfalls of immigration and how some people tend to shed their past in order to reinvent themselves. The fact that Emenike does not raise awareness about racism and even perpetuates the skewed image of Africa suggests Adichie’s criticism on how some African immigrants are passive contributors to the dissemination of Afro-pessimism.

4.3 Obinze's identity after his return to Nigeria

Obinze's coerced return to Nigeria introduces another chapter of his life in which he has to grapple with alienation, the repercussions of unexpected wealth and the submission to his society's expectations. His difficult reintegration and inability to get a job, the sudden wealth and marriage all enable him to view his world more critically and to negotiate his transnational identity. Especially, he becomes attuned to sexism in his society and eventually begins to think like a feminist. The return of Ifemelu and the rekindle of their high school love aid him to break free from his preset and oppressive societal expectations, by which he abided.

4.3.1 Struggles and transformation

4.3.1.1 Lack of emotional support

When Obinze involuntarily returns to Nigeria he experiences mixed reactions from his environment. On the one hand side the flight attendant views him and the other deportees "with disgust, as though they were all criminals bringing shame on upright Nigerians" and on the other hand the immigration officer asks for a financial compensation as if "deportations happened every day and the living went on living" (*Americanah* 283-284). Obinze realizes that on both frontiers, England and Nigeria, he is devalued and stigmatized. In addition, the immigration officer's assumption that a person coming from abroad can spend some money, suggests that there is an inherent expectation that returnees, involuntarily or not, affluent or deprived, should support their nation.

Another point which leads to his sense of alienation refers to his resentment that "things should have waited for [him] but they hadn't" (*Americanah* 429). He understands that in a period of three years Lagos changed and that he was not a part of it and suddenly the place he used to call home had become foreign to him. Obinze must deal with his outsider status and that his environment does not facilitate his reintegration process. This becomes clear when his job applications remain fruitless and his high "school friends, who [are] now working at banks and mobile phone companies, beg[in] to avoid him, worried that he would thrust yet another CV into their hands" (*Americanah* 23).

In addition, his feeling of alienation gets reinforced by his cousin Nneoma's indifference to his difficult time in England and his humiliating experience of deportation. Obinze does not receive the opportunity to process his traumatizing experience, instead he is expected to 'man-up' since he is not "the first person to have this problem" (*Americanah* 23). Moreover, his cousin proposes him to "hustle" since "[e]verybody is hustling. Lagos is about hustling" and that he must adopt "gra-gra", which in Nigeria refers to a tough and street smart mentality and demeanour (ibid). Even though her 'tough love' intends to help him to get out of his "self-pity", there is a danger when people do not get the opportunity to tell and process their experiences (ibid). One can suggest that Adichie criticizes that some family members do not consider offering psychological support to those in need and thus nurture the probability of mental illness such as depression (Kleist & Bob-Milliar 3). This argument transpires in the observation that Obinze, even when he transforms into a wealthy member of Nigeria's hustlers, remains broken and unhappy. On many occasions, Obinze realizes the "physical fatigue" albeit being in shape and the "draining lassitude that numbed the margins of his mind" (*Americanah* 243).

Considering that Obinze obtains insufficient emotional support during his reintegration in Nigeria the internet offers him a medium to firstly process his difficult times in England and secondly construct his transnational identity. From the onset Obinze and Ifemelu have kept contact via letters at first, then emails and then Black Berry messages. Even though their communication was stopped for a long time, their infrequent communication is a sign for his transnational practices and activities. When they begin to take on their contact after nearly a decade, writing represents as a psycho-hygienic ritual for him, which enables him to reflect on his life, which is riven between poverty, deportation, sudden wealth and an unhappy marriage (*Americanah* 372).

4.3.1.2 In the shadow of wealth

After repeated declines of his job applications, his cousin Nneoma connects him with the Chief, a chauvinist Lagosian Big Man who "d[oes] not talk to people, [...] instead talk[s] at people" (*Americanah* 24). Every week Obinze comes to the man's office yet the Chief does not offer him a job. Nevertheless, Obinze "keeps hanging around" (*Americanah* 25) especially because he wants to be part of his power. Mesmerized by the Chief's power and defeated by

his inability to get a job, he “step[s] out of himself” and “hustle[s]” when he asks “Chief, if there is something I can help you do, please tell me” (ibid). This question introduces Obinze into the dark side of Nigeria’s economy and lays the grounds for his future in ‘dirty deals’. Obinze who “was raised by a mother during a time when truth-telling was not yet a luxury (*Americanah* 281), and thus oblivious to issues such as corruption, learns that he is living in a country where “even the rich men are hungry, but nobody is honest” (*Americanah* 26). Since the Chief appreciates his honesty, he offers him a job in real estate.

Almost overnight, Obinze transforms into a newly-wealthy and with this status he experiences power. The fact that the digits in his bank account enable him to enjoy a special treatment from his environment and the American Embassy shows Obinze how ‘money rules the world’. While only a few years ago, the consular post rejected his visa applications, he suddenly is expected to “declare a lot of cash at the airport” (*Americanah* 27). This lifestyle enables him mobility and the participation in transnational activities and transitions. His regularly travels to the United States and even the property he buys in Dubai illustrate how transnational his life has become.

4.3.1.3 Emphatic imagination¹⁵

Soon Obinze senses the pitfalls of his lifestyle which “b[rings] to him a disorienting strangeness, because his mind ha[s] not changed at the same pace as his life, and he fe[els] a hollow space between himself and the person he [is] supposed to be” (*Americanah* 27). The societal pressure placed on wealthy men, expects him to exert dishonesty and corruption. Even though, he initially abides by these expectations, rendering him unhappy and paranoid, it becomes clear that he obtains a distinct mentality which discerns him from the rest of the “new middle class that [his] democracy created” (*Americanah* 21, 432). The more Obinze slithers into the malaise of corruption, the less he simply rests on the benefits of his transnational lifestyle and wealth, instead he aims to contribute to change and adopt a more critical mind set.

On a regular basis, Obinze is confronted with other Afropolitans or the “transnational bourgeois”, which Arat-Koç (1), however, deems people who are “on the side of winners in

¹⁵ Eze (“Rethinking” 243)

the new economy of globalized capitalism”. She criticizes that in many post-colonial countries those who are privileged and part of the “new middle class” are obsessed with whiteness and thus aspire to appropriate Western ideals. Arat-Koç sustains that this not only a “psychological legacy of colonialism” but also a mechanism the enfranchised apply to wield power over their societies (Arat-Koç 2). The obsession with whiteness and the lack of honesty, even between fellow Nigerians becomes conceivable when his business-oriented cousin Nneoma introduces him into the dishonest mind set of their society when she explains:

You undervalue the properties and make sure it looks as if you are following due process. You acquire the property, sell off half to pay your purchase price, and you are in business! You’ll register your own company. Next thing, you’ll build a house in Lekki and buy some cars and ask our hometown to give you some titles and your friends to put congratulatory messages in the newspapers for you and before you know, any bank you walk into, they will want to package a loan immediately and give it to you, because they think you no longer need the money! And after you register your own company, you must find a white man. Find one of your white friends in England. Tell everybody he is your General Manager. You will see how doors will open for you because you have an oyinbo General Manager. Even Chief has some white men that he brings in for show when he needs them. (*Americanah* 26).

Her advice foregrounds one point worth inspection. Upon closer consideration, his cousin teaches Obinze that it is difficult for Nigerians to build up a business on the sole premise of honesty. The fact that Obinze needs to deceive the banks by pretending wealth and financial security lets one suspect the existence of mistrust. This becomes more transparent when she asserts that he “must find a white man”. One can assume that a “white man” represents more reliability and credibility and considering that the Chief’s prosperity is built on this standard, suggests Adichie’s criticism on the distrustfulness between fellow Nigerians. There seems to be an auto-racism and an underlying inferiority which is rooted deep in the nations psyche. Another incident which exemplifies his argument occurs when Obinze and Ifemelu reunite after nearly two decades. While they both scrutinize the differences of their “adult Nigeria”, they observe that “Nigerians can be so obsequious. We are a confident people but we are so obsequious. It’s not difficult for us to be insincere” [...]. We have confidence but no dignity” (*Americanah* 431).

Numerous occasions illustrate that Obinze does not represent the image of the “transnational bourgeois”, Arat-Koç describes. One of the most salient one is the fact that Obinze is humble. Obinze acquires an “emphatic imagination” since he does not feel pity for or superiority over the people in his society (Eze “Rethinking” 243). Unlike the returnees he usually sees in Lagos he does not define his self-worth on the premises of his wealth. He

helps beggars even though he hears that their begging is a guise to become more prosperous, and this shows that he does not yield pity or condensation over the disenfranchised. Moreover, Obinze is critical about the people's appreciation of his humility. This appreciation implies that in his society, rich people are usually arrogant and disrespectful towards others and more importantly, that this behavior has become acceptable. The fact that he insists to breach with this unspoken norm, suggests that Obinze acquires the mentality which Eze (ibid.) proposes might help Afropolitans to negotiate their identities in contemporary Africa.

A further crucial aspect points to Obinze's multiple consciousness and this enables him to establish growth for the benefit of Nigerian people and not with the aim to satisfy non-Nigerians. As his position in real estate, he actively chooses not to aspire to Western ideals and instead focuses on the needs of fellow Nigerians. This becomes obvious when he explicitly tells his General Manager Nigel that he does not intend to build houses, which cater to the needs of expats. He sustains that "Nigerian cooking [is] not cosmetic [...] and [that] Nigerians prefer[] to present the final product, not the process" (*Americanah* 460-461). Moreover, Obinze observes that "Nigerians don't buy houses because they're old" (*Americanah* 436). He begins to scrutinize why this is so and discovers that "we are Third Worlders and Third Worlders are forward-looking, we like things to be new, because our best is still ahead, while in the West their best is already past and so they have to make a fetish of that past" (ibid). His critical confrontation with the desires of Nigerians and which psychological roots exist, reflects his distinct mentality.

Even though he has been abroad, he still aims to foreground the values and originality of his people at home. Obinze does not see the solution to the problems of Nigeria in the West and this argument becomes conceivable when he criticizes Eze who is an avid and proud art collector. His obsession with art reminds Obinze of his Aunty Chinelo, who years ago, spent some time in the United States and upon her return, advised her family "[t]he problem is we have a very backward [bourgeois] in this country. They have money but they need to become sophisticated. They need to learn about wine" (*Americanah* 469-470). Presuming that Eze was also advised by such a condescending person, he feels the urge to advise Eze "to give it all away and free himself" (ibid). Obinze learns that the rich and transnational in his society are fixated with adopting Western ideals on the African continent. The fact that he tries to work against this entrenched mentality illustrates that he attempts to be an unapologetic and

proud Nigerian who does not forget his roots. Instead of changing his nation, he enforces improvement to the benefit of its people and not the Western world.

4.4.1.4 Obinze a feminist?

As outlined in the initial section, Obinze was raised by a feminist mother who laid the ground for her son to think in terms of gender equity. Nevertheless, once Obinze returns to Nigeria he becomes more aware of the sexism in his society and that he is not immune to it. Obinze's generally "inward" personality becomes more stifled due to his struggling time abroad and the pressure of his sudden aggrandizement. Thus, he generally remains passive and mostly does not utter his concerns on various issues. His silence upholds the sexism in his society, yet his critical observations suggest that he eventually begins to think like feminist.

This argument becomes apparent on numerous occasions, especially after he marries his wife Kosi. His marriage to Kosi, shows Obinze that his motives are conditioned by the societal expectations put on wealthy men. The fact that he appreciates her beauty, predictability and her 'homemaker' qualities, reveals that Obinze sees her as an accessory, a 'trophy wife', to certify his wealth and prestige (*Americanah* 459-460). Conforming to the notion that men base marriage on availability, instead of true love (*Americanah* 472), Obinze ignores that he and Kosi do not share the same values, that she is "content rather than curious" and that she manipulated him into the marriage (*Americanah* 459-460). With the hope that she might "gain a certain heft" in the course of their marriage, Obinze dutifully consents. Pressured by the voices of the majority society, he denies what he truthfully appreciates in a woman and instead chooses to play safe with Kosi, who is a well-trained product of their patriarchal culture.

Nevertheless, his marriage also offers him the opportunity to become critical of his wife's behavior, which repeatedly leaves him "struck" (*Americanah* 28). One of the first things he observes is that she aims to be "wholesomely agreeable". Kosi chooses to please people in her vicinity and to compromise her own wishes and thoughts for the sake of harmony (ibid). He witnesses this when they gather at a dinner party where a few women from the upper-class advise them to select a school with a French or British curriculum, since these would only offer their daughter Buchi a 'civilized' and quality education. Obinze who feels offence by

their self-righteous and elitist mentality argues “[d]idn’t we all go to primary school that taught the Nigerian curriculum” (*Americanah* 29). The rest of the women are troubled by his question, yet his wife, seeking to maintain harmony, reassures that they would consider all types of schools. Obinze feels resentment that “[s]he was taking two sides at once, to please everyone; she always chose peace over truth, was always eager to conform” (ibid).

In addition, Obinze surveys that Kosi lives by the teaching of her culture and that she feels pride in doing so. To Kosi, subservience, “modesty” and abiding by the traditional gender roles seem to define her. Thus, Obinze views that she caters to the family at gatherings, that, when talking with male relatives, she deliberately ends her sentences with “sir” and she that feels offence when Obinze’s mother attempts to clear the table after their meal (*Americanah* 28). At first, her behaviour seems generous and kind-hearted, nevertheless, upon closer consideration it becomes apparent that she lacks assertiveness, confidence and agency. The only power she yields is when she forbids Obinze to practice his hobby, cooking, since she finds it an “indictment of her” (*Americanah* 450). Desperate to please her man and live by the “really basic, mainstream ideas of what a wife should be”, she understands a breach with these pre-set rules, as the loss of her wife-and womanhood (ibid.). It becomes conceivable that Kosi was conditioned to believe that a woman is inferior to the man and that it is her responsibility to uplift her husband’s worth by lessening her own. Even sexually, she aims to foreground Obinze’s wishes and makes no demands (*Americanah* 461). One can deduce that Adichie intends to criticize how many Nigerian women conform to patriarchy and find solace in their oppression.

Furthermore, Obinze notices that women compete for a man’s attention and that the church fuels auto-sexism, jealousy, insecurity and animosity between women. This argument becomes evident when Kosi hires a new house help. While searching the woman’s belongings, Kosi finds a condom. After angrily asking her if she intends to exercise prostitution in her house, the girl reluctantly confesses that the husband of her former employer was “always forcing” her to sleep with him (*Americanah* 34). Angered she throws the domestic help out and consults Obinze, in hopes of affirmation. However, when Obinze argues that it was the woman’s right to “protect herself this time”, Kosi accuses him “[y]ou feel sorry for her. You don’t know these housegirls [...]?” (ibid). Obinze, who is aghast and wonders how she possibly could not feel likewise, is silenced by the “tentative fear” in her eyes and begins to reflect on the source of her mentality (ibid).

Kosi's lack of empathy for a woman, who utters that she was the victim of rape, implies that there is an entrenched hostility between these two women. Immediately, she assumes that "these housegirls" bring the trouble to themselves and thus, even if they were raped, they are to be held accountable. Obinze's reflection lets him understand

Lagos could do this to a woman married to a young and wealthy man; he knew how easy it was to slip into paranoia about housegirls, about secretaries, about *Lagos Girls*, these sophisticated monsters of glamour who swallowed husbands whole. (ibid)

It becomes conceivable that since a man's wealth makes him more attractive to women, wives must actively ward off potential threats or so called 'homewreckers'. Instead of making men accountable for their promiscuity and building up a sense of sisterhood, they look for the fault in each other. The fact that Kosi forbids her single friend to visit their house or diligently attends the "Keep Your Husband" service in church, criticizes that it is the woman's responsibility to sustain her marriage (*Americanah* 35). Moreover, the church's role in the perpetuation of sexism and auto-sexism is criticized. Since Obinze's wife rather "offers" him her body, instead of making demands to be pleased, Obinze imagine[s] her pastor telling her that a wife should have sex with her husband, even if she didn't feel like it, otherwise the husband would find solace in a Jezebel" (*Americanah* 461-462). The binary between compliant wife and devilish Jezebel do a disservice to women on both side of the spectrum. The one is filled with insecurity and the other demonized. The fact that Obinze feels irritated that his wife does not consider that he only will decide whether he cheats or not, reinforces the argument that a man's liability is usually taken out of the equation.

Obinze witnesses these unspoken cultural and societal norms himself when he rekindles with his high school love Ifemelu. Even after she unexpectedly and abruptly broke off their relationship almost two decades ago, he still is in love with her. Although he courts her and they get intimate, he keeps his infidelity a secret since he "feels a great responsibility" for his wife (*Americanah* 451). It becomes apparent that Obinze is torn between his true love and the responsibility to his marriage. Obinze is conditioned by the mindset that his friend proposes in the following passage:

"You can keep seeing her, but no need for this kind of white-people behavior. If your wife has a child for somebody else or if you beat her, that is a reason for divorce. But to get up and say you have no problem with your wife but you are leaving for another woman?" (*Americanah* 472)

Nevertheless, two crucial incidents initiate Obinze to overcome the rules and expectations placed on him as a man. Not only that his indecisiveness renders Ifemelu to criticize him as a “fucking coward” but most importantly that his wife ignores his infidelity, urges Obinze to reevaluate his life. Firstly, Obinze feels “self-disgust” because of his “fear of disorder” (*Americanah* 458, 456). He notices that in the course of time he has ignored his principles and ultimately become complacent with what was socially expected. Secondly, he feels resentment that his wife would cover up for him and delve into pretence, only to save the face of their family. Abiding by the conviction that they made “a vow before God” they have to endure, even if it means the loss of his happiness and her dignity (*Americanah* 464). Obinze’s separation from his wife and his choice for Ifemelu, illustrates that he does not support the silencing of promiscuity. He promises to financially support his daughter and her mother and he chooses to breach with the entrenched norm that men have mistresses and wives pretend not to know.

Initially, Obinze remains silent even though he observes the sexism in his society. This implies that there are men who believe in gender equity, yet still perpetuate sexism since they do not actively change something about the injustice towards women. Nevertheless, considering the fact that he cannot tolerate his cheating and pretence and instead chooses honesty shows that Obinze becomes a feminist. One can deduce that Adichie proposes that men have the responsibility to raise awareness of the disenfranchised position women have in many Nigerian societies.

5. Aunt Uju's transnational identity construction process

5.1. Identity in Nigeria

In order to grasp how Aunt Uju negotiates and constructs her transnational identity, there is need to look at Aunt Uju's pre-migration life in Nigeria, and which aspects influenced her identity. The themes sexism and sexuality are the most salient and will thus be outlined and discussed.

5.1.1 Sexism

In general, Aunt Uju is oppressed by her patriarchal society and culture and does not actively attempt to change her fate. This argument becomes apparent on various occasions in *Americanah*. Nevertheless, her compliancy developed in the course of the time. Initially, Aunt Uju was an ambitious and determined girl from the village, in whom Ifemelu's father saw potential and thus sponsored, since she was "too clever to waste away in that backwater" (*Americanah* 53). Subsequently, she studied medicine at the University of Ibadan and while her fellow students considered England or America as an attractive prospect after their graduation, Aunt Uju understood the economic instability in her country as temporary and strived for a private clinic in Nigeria (*Americanah* 46).

The scenario which illustrates her oppressed situation in her society and culture, occurs after she graduates. Upon meeting the General, Aunt Uju succumbs to his power and also benefits from his wealth. With the intention to "take care" of her, he provides her an unpaid position as a doctor, and finances a Mazda and a house in a well-off neighborhood. In exchange she becomes his mistress to whom he pays a visit when he is not with his wife and children. When Ifemelu's family learns about her relationship and its benefits, both the mother and the neighbor are impressed about how "lucky" she is to have found such a "mentor" (*Americanah* 45). The neighbor's comment brings one relevant criticism to the fore: "God should bless the man o. Me I hope I will also meet a mentor when I graduate"" (ibid). It crystallizes that in Aunt Uju's society a woman's success is ultimately reliant on the help of a man. Moreover, it materializes that Aunt Uju's efforts in medicine school are overshadowed by the General, who "wanted to be a doctor when he was young". For both Ifemelu's mother and the neighbor

all her accomplishments are placed in the shadow of this powerful man. With the observation that the assistance of a man is aspired, one can assume that Adichie criticizes that some women do not strive towards independence and self-preservation. It seems that “crippled by their culture of dependence”, women result being reliant on men and do not seek alternative to achieve their goals (*Americanah* 422).

Further argument refers to the fact that Auntie Uju becomes the possession of the General. Since he enabled her affluence and thus financial security, she becomes his prized accessory who lives alone in his house and desperately awaits his visits (*Americanah* 74). Consumed by his omnipresence, she accepts her situation and effaces her rights and dignity. The following passage criticizes the sycophant mentality of her society and reflects her subdued position in it.

You know, we live in an ass-licking economy. The biggest problem in this country is not corruption. The problem is that there are many qualified people who are not where they are supposed to be because they won't lick anybody's ass, or they don't know which ass to lick or they don't even know how to lick an ass. I'm lucky to be licking the right ass.” She smiled. “It's just luck. Oga said I was well brought up, that I was not like all the Lagos girls who sleep with him on the first night and the next morning give him a list of what they want him to buy. I slept with him on the first night but I did not ask for anything, which was stupid of me now that I think of it, but I did not sleep with him because I wanted something. Ah, this thing called power. I was attracted to him even with his teeth like Dracula. I was attracted to his power. (*Americanah* 77-78)

Instead of showing defiance, she feels gratitude and pride that the General chose her and that he appreciates her naïveté. Amazed by his power, she opts for comfort, even if it reduces her to the General's sexual adventure. The situation which supports this argument occurs when Ifemelu asks Auntie Uju if she could lend her bankrupt father some money. Her reply “Oga never gives me big money. He pays all the bills and he wants me to ask for everything I need. Some men are like that.” (*Americanah* 76) demonstrates her oppressed situation “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” (*Americanah* 76-77). Moreover, her tolerance and pretense is criticized because she adopted the mentality that, since she is reliant on the General, she loses her agency and her rights. This also becomes apparent when she lets him dictate her body. Instead of shaving her intimate areas for herself, she does it because “it disturbs him” (*Americanah* 81). Ultimately, she embodies a belittled woman who is “slaving and shaving for him [and] always eager to fade his flaws” (*Americanah* 83).

The final scenario, which illustrates that Auntie Uju is a passive and compliant victim of sexism, occurs when the General tries to yield power over her relationships outside theirs. Auntie Uju learns from her driver that he regularly interrogates him about “where she went and how long she stayed” (*Americanah* 78). Her response “Does he think I can’t see another man without him knowing, if I wanted to?” (ibid) foregrounds the hypocrite mentality of this power-hungry and self-righteous man. Namely, the General has a wife and two children in Abuja, whom he visits on the weekends and thus he successfully leads a polygamous lifestyle. Nevertheless, he also enjoys the entitlement to control the life of his mistress. One can suggest that in, even infidelity, there is an imbalance in power dynamics between the sexes. Whereas his polygamy is not questioned, Auntie Uju is expected to remain loyal.

5.1.2. Sexuality and womanhood

In regards to Auntie Uju’s sexuality, she undergoes a slight mentality shift. Initially, Auntie Uju’s sexuality is defined by pretense and self-deprecation. Auntie Uju was not traditional in terms of her sexuality because she partook in pre-marital intercourse. Nevertheless, like Ifemelu, she was conditioned by her society in which a woman’s sexuality is tabooed, vilified and condemned. Even if she breached with her society’s expectations, she “thought of sex as something a woman gave a man at a loss to herself” (*Americanah* 288). This demonstrates the point of view she has towards herself. Since she was not able to keep her virtue until marriage, she became self-deprecating and considers herself as lost. According to her, a woman who gives up her virginity and participates in pre-marital sexual activities must live with the consequences. Thus, a woman becomes condemned and must show appreciation and gratitude for the male attention she receives. One can relate her submission to the General to this argument.

Even though, Auntie Uju lives with the consequences of her sexual lifestyle, it becomes clear that she experiences a shift in mentality. Eventually Auntie Uju refuses to accept her disenfranchised position in her relationship with the General and decides to speak up and convey her opinion to the General. After this incident she falls pregnant with his child. Once again Auntie Uju breaks with what is expected socially and culturally. Traditionally the man is supposed to pay a bride price and await the parent’s confirmation. Only if the bride prices is deemed satisfactory, the parents accept. She is not married to this man and is his mistress.

When she delivers this news to Ifemelu's parents, a tense yet revolutionary situation emerges since Aunt Uju defies the expectations of her society. Ifemelu's mother is shocked by the news and expresses "My God, why have you forsaken me?" (*Americanah* 83). Even though she is a strict Christian, she becomes more lenient when Aunt Uju found a marriage prospect. Here, the fact that he is married and fathered two children becomes irrelevant. However, now she refutes their relationship since there is an evidence of her hypocrisy (*Americanah* 85). Aunt Uju, however argues that she already had an abortion in University and that she will not repeat that error. She protests against Ifemelu mother's escape plan. She learns to stand up for herself and to not feel shame for her "unconventional" circumstance. This mentality shift is perpetuated by Ifemelu's father atypical reaction. He asks "Well, I cannot ask about the man's intentions [...] So I should ask what your intentions are" (*Americanah* 83). This question shows Aunt Uju that her opinion is valued and not that of either her partner or the society. She receives agency and dominates her life choices.

A final shift refers to Aunt Uju's desire of having a daughter and not, as traditionally aspired, a boy (*Americanah* 84). In Nigeria, especially amongst the Igbo culture, son preference plays a crucial role in many families, and places a great pressure on women. They are expected to deliver a male baby and the rooted disfavor towards a female offspring, causes some marriages to dissolve or women to experience exclusion from their society (Nnadi 134-137). The fact that Aunt Uju eagerly selects names for a female baby criticizes this sexism from the cradle and propels a mentality shift. Moreover, she decides to give her son Dike her own surname and this made Ifemelu's mother "agitated and sour" since she worried that the General would deny his own child. Here again, a break with tradition is presented and this scene shows Adichie's disapproval of the patriarchal power dynamics in Nigeria. Lastly, the fact that the General does not reject, and instead dedicates his time and affection to his newborn son, illustrates that the child is not merely Aunt Uju's responsibility and that the child's father is also expected to participate in its upbringing, even if he has a non-marital relationship to the mother. These scenes demonstrate that a re-negotiation of socio-cultural standards and expectations towards men and women are necessary. In the following section, Aunt Uju's identity construction will be outlined and discussed.

5.2 Aunt Uju coming to America

5.2.1 Struggles

5.2.1.1 The working poor

The following section will initially discuss Aunt Uju's struggle in the United States and finally target how she manages to construct a transnational identity. The acculturative stress she experiences result from a number of challenges, including finding a job vacancy, assimilation, racial discrimination and sexism.

Aunt Uju's departure from Nigeria sembles an exile. After the General's sudden death, his family threatens her "Common harlot! God forbid that you will touch our brother's property! Prostitute! You will never live in peace in this Lagos!" (*Americanah* 86). Since she gave birth to her son Dike in the United States, her American visa and a stolen generator financed her expenses. The traumatized Uju flees from Nigeria in the hopes to find a better future for both her son and herself. Aunt Uju, who had never had intended to leave Nigeria, struggles in her host society. One of the most prevalent reasons for her struggle is the fact that she cannot find an occupation as a doctor. In Nigeria her occupation as a physician represented prestige. Nevertheless, she soon learns that in America she is not qualified enough. Moreover, she observes that the exams are "not testing actual knowledge, they were testing our ability to answer tricky multiple -choice questions that have nothing to do with the real medical knowledge" (*Americanah* 109). She undergoes various exams and, in order to finance her expenses and lifestyle, she works three jobs, spends no time with her son and feels drained after more than four years of trying. After she failed another exam she utters

"I'm tired. I am so tired. I thought by now things would be better for me and Dike. It's not as if anybody was helping me and I just could not believe how quickly money went. I was studying and working three jobs. I was doing retail at the mall, and a research assistantship, and I even did some hours at Burger King." (*Americanah* 109)

The following observation made by Ifemelu criticizes a crucial point in respect to immigrant lives: "She had assumed, from Aunt Uju's calls home, that things were not too bad, although she realized now that Aunt Uju had always been vague, mentioning "work" and "exam"

without details (*Americanah* 110). With the intention of upholding the image of the accomplished immigrant, Aunt Uju veiled her challenging experience in America with pretense. The high expectation of her family members at home transpires in the following passage:

Whenever Ifemelu's mother suggested asking Aunt Uju to send them something from America—multivitamins, shoes— Ifemelu's father would say no, they had to let Uju find her feet first, and her mother would say, a hint of slyness in her smile, that four years was long enough to find one's feet (*Americanah* 98-99).

One can assume that Ifemelu's mother's mentality represents the notion that "abroad" automatically entails success and fortune. Consequently, those privileged enough to live abroad are also expected to provide for their family members at home. However, Ifemelu's father's argument highlights that there is need to acknowledge the fact that immigrants struggle to "find [their] feet".

5.2.1.2 Assimilation

Aunt Uju is a first generation immigrant who "had [not] come to America with the flexibility and fluidness of youth" (*Americanah* 125). In the course of the novel, it becomes apparent that she chooses to assimilate into her new society and that she develops an "immigrant insecurity" in the presence of Caucasian Americans, which she passes on to her son Dike. The following scenes illustrate these arguments. The initial example refers to the fact that Aunt Uju lets Americans pronounce her name differently. "She pronounced it *you-joo* instead of *oo-joo*" and when Ifemelu asks why, she replies "It's what they call me" (*Americanah* 104). African names are highly diverse and serve as signifiers of the child's future or its relationship to religion, which represent a great part of an individual's identity (Wieschhoff 219-20). However, African names are often mispronounced by Americans, for instance, since they are deemed difficult to articulate. The fact that Aunt Uju accepts her name to be mispronounced symbolizes her assimilation and loss of ethnic identity. She does not raise awareness about the importance of her name and its ethnic value; instead, she accepts the indifference of her new host society at the loss of herself. Ifemelu witnesses her complete assimilation when she observes a

strange naïveté with which Aunt Uju had covered herself like a blanket. Sometimes, while having a conversation, it would occur to Ifemelu that Aunt Uju had deliberately

left behind something of herself, something essential, in a distant and forgotten place (*Americanah* 119).

Another incident occurs in the supermarket where Dike acts up and does not obey her.

“Dike, put it back,” Auntie Uju said, with the nasal, sliding accent she put on when she spoke to white Americans, in the presence of white Americans, in the hearing of white Americans. *Pooh-reet-back*. And with the accent emerged a new persona, apologetic and self-abasing (*Americanah* 108)

One can observe that Auntie Uju develops an “immigrant insecurity” and seeks affirmation from Caucasian Americans (*Americanah* 119). She considers an American accent as her currency into the society. Her overzealous behavior robs her of authenticity and renders her “apologetic and self-abasing”. Moreover, she masters the art of pretense which can also be observed in the way she raises her son Dike. She demands that he neglects their ethnic language, Igbo, and ultimately leaves him lacking the knowledge of his ethnic identity and culture of origin. Furthermore, she desperately aims that she and her son look presentable while living in a mainly white neighborhood in order to shield themselves from prejudice and rumor (*Americanah* 215).

A final key scene refers to the fact that once Auntie Uju receives her first job offer as a doctor her initial thought is “I have to take my braids out for my interviews and relay my hair. Kemi told me that I shouldn’t wear braids to the interview. If you have braids, they will think you are unprofessional.” When Ifemelu wonders if there are no doctors with braids, Auntie Uju’s replies “I have told what they have told me. You are in a country that is not your own. You do what you have to do if you want to succeed” (*Americanah* 119). This conversation highlights two points worth of scrutiny. Firstly, the connection of braids and natural hair with unprofessionalism represents the power of hegemonic expression of white¹⁶ beauty and the exertion of institutional racial discrimination. Thus, women with non-straight hair texture are expected to consider their “condition” when applying for a job. Not only their qualifications, but also their hair growing naturally and its stylization might determine their fate. The other issue worth scrutiny, criticizes that some women conform to this form of discrimination. By their compliance, the perpetuation of such racial discrimination maintains and eventually becomes an unspoken norm. Auntie Uju who thinks that “[t]here is something scruffy and untidy about natural hair” (*Americanah* 216) has internalized the message perpetuated by the

¹⁶ Notwithstanding, white women (people) also have curly or non-straight hair and usually also are forced to conform to the mainstream ideal of beauty.

media and her environment. Desperate to establish a future, she sacrifices her natural attributes. According to her, an accomplished immigrant must shed his past and originality and succumb to the rules of the host society.

Based on Aunt Uju's need to assimilate, the existence of some immigrants and immigrant parents who get lost in their new host society and thus forget to educate their children about their roots and stay loyal to a part of their preconceived identity, is criticized.

5.2.1.3 Racial discrimination

A further point, which leads to Aunt Uju's difficult experience in her host society refers to racial discrimination. Once Aunt Uju and her recent husband Bartholomew move to Warrington, it surprises her that "[t]his place is so *white*," and that when she "went to the drugstore to quickly buy lipstick, [...] all the shades were too pale! At first she is impressed by her new home since it offers comfort and a high quality of drinking water (*Americanah* 171). Nevertheless, soon Aunt Uju experiences racial bigotry and discrimination. Especially in her new work place, she notices that her alterity is the reason for such behavior.

[...] one patient, a useless lay about with tattoos all over his body, told me to go back to where I came from. All because I knew he was lying about being in pain and I refused to give him more pain medicine. Why do I have to take this rubbish? (*Americanah* 217-218).

These examples of nuanced racism demonstrate Aunt Uju that she is not welcomed in her environment. Here her professional judgment or medical knowledge are undermined on the premise of her skin color (*Americanah* 182-83). Also, in her son's school the teacher's assistant "shout[s] at [her] across the hall" (*Americanah* 218). Aunt Uju recognizes that her status as a doctor does not offer her prestige or respect, ultimately because she is a black woman.

A further example of racial discrimination occurs when she "had gone to the public library the other day, had forgotten to bring out the unreturned book from her handbag, and the guard told her, 'You people never do anything right.'" (*Americanah* 182). Here Aunt Uju is seen as the member of a people, presumably the black people who, according to the preset and biased perspective of this man, are not capable of something good. Aunt Uju is reduced to an

integral idea of blackness, usually entailing stereotypes of laziness and criminality (Clark 170; Awoyoka 258). She becomes the spokesperson for her “people” and the fact that she is a hardworking doctor loses its relevance.

5.2.1.4 Gender inequity

The last reason for her struggles in America refers once again to sexism. As discussed in the proceeding section in Nigeria, Aunt Uju internalized the mentality that men define a woman’s worth and life accomplishments (Achiche “Should” 2). In the United States she establishes a relationship with a self-righteous Igbo émigré called Bartholomew and throughout their initial encounters and their marriage, Aunt Uju once again slips into the “rituals” of patriarchy (*Americanah* 115). She unites with this man because she wants to firstly have children again and secondly she hopes Bartholomew will “act as Dike’s legal parent” (*Americanah* 142). Nevertheless, sexism represents a dominant issue in Aunt Uju’s marriage and life, and she continually does not actively stand up for her rights.

This argument transpires the first time Bartholomew visits Aunt Uju. He is indifferent towards her son, and his valuing comment of the meal prepared “let me see if this is any good” forebodes the relationship they will eventually be leading (*Americanah* 115). His comment insinuates that Aunt Uju’s place is in the kitchen and that she is measured on the premise of her culinary skills. The “assent” and pride in her demeanor, suggests that she herself understands that her cooking skills will have a determinant influence on his choice for her (ibid). She conforms to the cultural teaching which conditioned both her and her conservative suitor. Bartholomew left Nigeria thirty years ago and never returned, nevertheless, his view towards gender roles and wifehood are still traditional and patriarchal (*Americanah* 116).

A further example which reinforces this argument occurs when Aunt Uju leaves her occupation in Brooklyn and follows Bartholomew to Warrington. Both work full-time and when they return home he sits down to relax and watch television, whereas she is expected to dutifully prepare dinner and finally cater to him. The fact that the distribution of housework are traditional suggests the gender inequity in their relationship. In addition, the injustice and sexism in their marriage becomes clearer in the fact that he expects her to give him her salary.

He intends to yield power over her because she is more successful in her job and instead of investing the money in Dike's future, he pursues his personal life goals. He argues "it is how marriages are [and] since he is the head of the family" he is entitled to control and manage her money (*Americanah* 217-218). Consequently, he expects notification when she wants to send money to her relatives in Nigeria. These experiences render her "subdued", frustrated and overweight (*Americanah* 110, 217). The weight gain especially can be seen as a long-term effect of acculturative stress she experiences in her environment and her marriage.

As is characteristic for Adichie's female characters, Auntie Uju also represents an "inbetweener" since, even if she is disenfranchised, she eventually reevaluates her position as a woman. After enduring the inequality, negligence and injustice in her relationship, she finally decides to negotiate womanhood according to her parameters. This becomes apparent when she leaves her husband Bartholomew. The trigger for her decision was a "blob of toothpaste left in the sink" (*Americanah* 219). Whereas she used to obediently clean the sink, his disrespect dawns on her and ultimately motivates her rebellion. Auntie Uju comprehends that she deserves better and thus moves to Willow and eventually takes up a relationship with a doctor who is "a gentleman and a gentle man", treats her like a "princess" and shows interest for Dike (*Americanah* 289, 299).

5.2.2 Continuum of transnationality¹⁷

As mentioned in the theoretical part, the construction of one's transnational identity is a highly complex, non-linear and transformable process. Vertovec (576) confirms that migrants adopt a variety of transnational patterns, which differ depending on political, socio-cultural and economic circumstances. This circumstantial and situational behavior is underlined by Itzigsohn's work on 'broad' and 'narrow' transnational practices. He emphasizes that not all transnational people are active participants in the transnational social field. Transnational participation and practices exist along a continuum between narrow and broad degrees of involvement. Auntie Uju's case becomes representative for these arguments. Even though she chooses to assimilate into her host society and forbids her son to speak Igbo, she manages to negotiate a transnational identity. She is on a "continuum of transnationality" because she

¹⁷ Bradatan et. al 177

partakes infrequently in transnational practices or activities (Bradatan et. al. 177). Crucial examples of evidence for her transnationality are the remittances sent back to Ifemelu's father and his family (*Americanah* 217-18) and also the fact that she maintains relationships with her relatives in Nigeria through phone calls (*Americanah* 98).

A final and essential example of her transnational identity refers to the fact that after her break-up with her husband, she does volunteer work for an organization called "African Doctors for Africa". She goes on "two-week medical missions" and contributes to the betterment of Africa (*Americanah* 299). Auntie Uju's actions have similarities with what Taiye Selasi means with her highly disputed neologism Afropolitan. Selasi argues that Afropolitans have the responsibility to give back to the continent Africa since there is a "brain drain" in many African countries (Selasi 2013). Even though Auntie Uju does not move back to Nigeria, her contribution to improvement illustrates her dedication to her continent. Her well-paid salary is not only a source of self-sufficiency, instead one for transformation. The next section will focus on her son's identity construction process.

6. Dike's transnational identity construction process

6.1 Struggles

The analysis of Dike's transnational identity construction process differs from that of the preceding characters, since he moved to the United States when he was only one years old. As a second-generation immigrant, he considers his mother's host country as his home country. Nevertheless, in the course of the novel, it becomes apparent that Dike struggles with this fact. His suicide attempt at the age of sixteen manifests itself as a reaction to numerous problems throughout his life. These include the lack of an ethnic community, micro-aggression from his environment and missing empowerment about his ethnic and racial identity from his mother.

6.1.1 Lack of ethnic community

One of the most prevalent reasons for Dike's unsuccessful acculturation in the United States is the lack an ethnic community. After his single mother moves to New York, she struggles to provide for her family, which ultimately forces her to work overtime, leaving Dike to a Hispanic babysitter and American television. Ambitious to "fit in" with her new host society, his mother fails to offer her son an ethnic community with role models who can educate him about his cultural heritage. The fact that she forbids Ifemelu to speak Igbo with Dike, since in America "two languages will confuse him" portrays how his mother intentionally lays the ground for his disconnection from his ethnic identity (*Americanah* 109). Thus, Dike grows up with a "seamless American accent" and since his mother only reverts to Igbo when she scolds him, it represents a "language of strife", which he understands but cannot speak (*Americanah* 105,171, 424). This scenario assumes that the pressure to assimilate into the new host society forces some immigrant parents to fully uproot themselves from their heritage culture, which ultimately not only harms themselves but also the second-generation.

Another relevant example refers to the fact that Dike and his mother move to a white and well-off neighborhood in Massachusetts, where they lives in the "woods" which secludes them not only from black people but also people with the same ethnic background. Recurrently, he asks "about his name" and why he has the name of his mother and not his father (*Americanah* 171). This ties in with the next crucial argument, namely that Dike lacks a

father who can offer him love and devotion. Since his father passed away shortly after his first birthday, Dike has inadequate recollections of him. His feeling of loss is perpetuated by the fact that his mother offers him insufficient information about his deceased father. Shamed that she was his father's mistress, she avoids educating him about his past and thus a crucial part of his identity. His mother, in her search for financial security, marries an Americanized Nigerian man who is indifferent towards Dike. In the course of the time, Dike develops an "identity confusion" since he does not really know where he belongs (Suárez-Orozco 179). This becomes evident when he writes in an essay that he "does not know what he is" and that his "name is difficult" (*Americanah* 216). His need to find the meaning for his name highlights that Dike is searching for to his ethnic identity and that the absence of clarification keeps him in the dark, a rootless waif between two distinct cultures and countries.

6.1.2 Micro-aggressions from peers and in school

In the life of second-generation immigrants, next to the family, peers and the school play a paramount role in the identity construction process and the well-being of the child and teenager (Awoyoka 2012). From the onset of Dike's move to a predominantly white neighborhood where the locals refused to get the main road "widened for fear that it would bring in foreigners from the city" (*Americanah* 182), Dike experiences concealed racial discrimination and micro-aggression from his environment. Dike, who was a generally happy and positive child, changes and his success at school diminishes (*Americanah* 171).

The initial incident which demonstrates this argument occurs when Dike's mother receives a notice about his altercation with a class mate. The teacher deems Dike as "aggressive" and thus recommends his transfer to a special education program (*Americanah* 172). His mother refuses to accept this and expresses her dismay about the inequality since her child is the only dark-skinned boy in the classroom. The principle's reply "Dike is just like one of us, we don't see him as different at all" (ibid) brings one crucial point to the fore. The principal who presents as color-blind does a great disservice to Dike. Her color blindness makes her oblivious to the "consequences of color", and thus inhibits her to conceptualize that some children have to deal with racism (Wise 67). Unable to react appropriately with this situation she intends to leave his case in the hands of special education, which ultimately would only "mark" him

negatively for his alterity and impair his opportunity for growth in the future (*Americanah* 172).

Moreover, Dike also learns in the course of his lifetime that his phenotypical features impose an identity on him and trigger certain reactions from his environment. Even though he is not African American, his skin color reduces him to a holistic idea of blackness, neglecting his ethnic Igbo identity. Thus, Dike is automatically reduced to stereotypical and mostly negative connotations towards black people in America. The stereotype tainted mentality becomes apparent when a white pastor exclusively greets him in Ebonics (*Americanah* 348), and his football teacher distributes sunscreen to his white team mates and argues that he does not need it (*Americanah* 184). This seemingly “harmless” treatment he receives singles him out and intensifies his wish to be “regular” and not reduced to his skin color (ibid). The more overt racial discrimination occurs when certain comments or behaviors become racialized, since they refer to his “blackness”. This transpires when a classmate jokingly asks him “Hey, Dike, got some weed?” (*Americanah* 349) or when the principal calls his mother to inform that he had hacked into the school’s computer network on the weekend (*Americanah* 348). Dike, who “[doesn’t] even know *how* to hack” laughingly utters “[y]ou have to blame the black kid first” (ibid). Here, Dike is confronted with racial discrimination which assumes criminality and hostility, two stereotypical perceptions of African Americans (Clark 170). Nevertheless, he veils his response towards his socially prescribed racial identity with laughter and pretence. Thus, he conforms to what society expects from him to do and behaves accordingly. This becomes apparent when Ifemelu observes that with his white friends “Dike changed; he took on a swagger in his voice and in his gait, his shoulders squared, as though in a high-gear performance and sprinkled his speech with “ain’t” and “y’all” (*Americanah* 332). One can assume that Dike’s need to “fit in” renders him to slip into the role of the stereotypical image of an African American - to hold up the persona his friends have ascribed to him.

6.1.3 Absence of communication and empowerment

Finally, the remaining reasons which exemplify the struggles in Dike’s identity construction process as a second generation immigrant can be traced back to the lack of communication and empowerment. From the beginning, it becomes clear that Dike’s mother does not recognize and acknowledge his situation as a black second generation immigrant. Immersed

in her struggle to get a job and to sustain the family, she fails to offer him emotional support. She believes that a monolingual upbringing or residing in a pre-dominantly white neighborhood will accomplish her “immigrant aspirations” (*Americanah* 215), yet she is not prepared to deal with the consequences of that lifestyle, especially for a black second generation immigrant. Dike’s mother does not give him input on his cultural heritage and forcefully tries to mould him into a Caucasian American. In her desperate search for acceptance by the “white” Americans she neglects the fact that Dike is generally perceived as an African American. One outstanding scene highlights her negligence of education and empowerment. After Dike utters “we black folk” she reprimands him saying that he is “not black”, with the intention that his skin color should not become a marker of victimization (*Americanah* 379). According to her the word “black” entails a negative connotation, coated with mainstream stereotypes towards African Americans. Nevertheless, she fails to explain him what he is and this lack of information and communication occurs repeatedly. Thus, when he misbehaves, she blames America for his behavior, and when he becomes curious about his sexuality at the age of seven, she deems America the reason for his “not normal” actions. Because she does not attain some sociological and historical knowledge on raising children, sexuality, race and racism, she is unable to offer Dike practical information about his situation as a black third culture child. Ultimately, he evolves to a teenager who is conflicted. The following passage illustrates the lack of communication:

“You should talk to him, Auntie. If that is how he feels, then that is how he feels.”
 “I think he wrote that because that is the kind of thing they teach them here.
 Everybody is conflicted, identity this, identity that. Somebody will commit murder
 and say it is because his mother did not hug him when he was three years old. Or
 they will do something wicked and say it is a disease that they are struggling with.”
 (*Americanah* 217)

According to her, identity and identity conflict are a “Western construct” which is instilled by the society. Instead of listening to her son’s call for attention, she vilifies America and denies her responsibility. This behavior recurs when Dike attempts suicide. After his hospitalization, Ifemelu makes her liable for his actions since she “never assured” him about his racial identity and “told him what he wasn’t but [not] what he was” (*Americanah* 280, 379). His mother argues that suicide attempts are depression-based and common among teenagers. She compares his situation with other Caucasian teenagers who had committed suicide and chooses to overlook the entrenched and long-lasting issues, which could have been avoided if she were more “diligent and awake”, and responsive to his early signs of discrimination (*Americanah* 379). Here Adichie’s criticism towards indifferent and oblivious immigrant

parents shines through. In an interview she explains “I wanted to terrify all immigrant parents who raise their kids in the US, who don’t have experience to understand that it is very different and who dismiss it [...] I wanted them to stand up and stop dismissing it” (Arlington Reads 2015).

Finally, his mother also raises him to accept live with inferiority. Even though she understands that the people in his school and his peers racially discriminate against him and even laments about these micro-aggressions she does not encourage him to become confident in himself. Instead, she expects him to be apologetic and thus remain ever-stigmatized. This becomes apparent in the conversation with Ifemelu where she worries

“that if he does not dress properly, they will find something to say about us. If they are shabby, it’s not a problem, but if we are, it is another thing. This is the same way I have been telling him to tone it down at school. The other day, they said he was talking in class and he said he was talking because he had finished his work. He has to tone it down, because his own will always be seen as different, but the boy doesn’t understand. Please talk to your cousin!” (*Americanah* 215)

From an early age Dike is conditioned to think that he cannot afford to look “shabby” in his mainly upper-class and white environment since that would only render discrimination and rumor. His mother instills into him that he is not entitled to the liberties of white people, which ultimately indoctrinates a feeling of inferiority. She teaches him that “his own will always be seen as different” and instead of empowering him to find pride in his racial identity, she trains him to shrink himself and become invisible and apologetic. The fact that Dike utters after Obama’s election “*I can’t believe it. My president is black like me* (*Americanah* 360)” presumes his doubt that people of his skin color could play leading roles.

6.2 A turn to transnationalism

Although Dike’s assertion of self includes difficulties, there are certain points which opportune the construction of a transnational/cultural identity and mentality. Especially, his relationship with his cousin Ifemelu, his first visit to Nigeria, social media, and rediscovery of the Igbo language enable the construction of his identity.

Dike’s suicide attempt calls attention to Dike and his family. The regular visits with a psychologist aid him to deal with his “trauma” and thus target his identity confusion as a third

culture child (*Americanah* 379). Even though Dike rarely sees his cousin Ifemelu, she has played an important role in supporting his assertion of self. She babysat him when he was a child and throughout the years their relationship remained close, albeit phone calls and visits were infrequent. Moreover, she looks after him after his suicide attempt keeps him grounded and thus aids his recovery. However, the most prevalent experience which offers Dike the opportunity to construct a transnational identity is his visit to Nigeria. This visit confronts Dike with feelings of alienation and culture clash, yet it also represents a therapeutic trip which lets him trace back his roots and grapple with a crucial part of his identity. In Nigeria, on his drive to Ifemelu's house he utters "Oh my God, Coz, I've never seen so many black people in the same place!" (*Americanah* 420). One can assume that in America Dike lived in an environment where there were few black people. He lacked role models to whom he could relate and with whom he could identify. Initially, he is perplexed by the regular power cuts, and the heat and mosquitoes; however after a while he gets accustomed to the lifestyle his aunt is living. This also becomes apparent in respect with food. Ifemelu initially lets him eat hamburgers, however, Dike dislikes the taste and instead decides to eat Nigerian dishes such as "jollof rice and fried plantain" (ibid) By means of food, he immerses into the culture and partakes in transculturalism. This experience offers him the opportunity to delve into diversity and appreciate its beauty.

Another crucial point is that Dike makes use of social media to disseminate an alternative image of Africa. At a get-together with a few Nigerian girls he takes pictures with them. He posts these pictures on Facebook and comments "no lions yet to eat me folks" (*Americanah* 424). With this sarcastic comment he intends to educate his friends that Africa is not a safari park in which wild animals roam. Dike's visit to Lagos has made him see the world differently and thus enables him to be critical towards his own veiled mentality and that of his peers. He targets the holistic idea of Africa, which is rather disparaged as the continent of poverty and misfortune or exoticized as the wild and uncivilized 'other'.

Moreover, this visit discloses the importance of his ethnic language Igbo. After the meeting with the girls, Dike regrets that he does not speak Igbo. As a child, he was oblivious to the relevance of this language and since his mother warded it off from their household, he never considered its use. However, the fact that Ifemelu proposes that he can still learn it (*Americanah* 424) predicts a further milestone on this journey of constructing a transnational identity. From this trip, Dike deduces his obligation to his Igbo ethnicity. Furthermore, it

becomes his duty to braid together both American and Igbo culture and thus construct his transnational/cultural identity.

Finally, this visit also enables him to visit the house of his deceased father. Moreover, Ifemelu reveals that his mother was his father's mistress, yet that his father was caring and endearing (*Americanah* 424). Both this information and the visit to his father's house represent a therapeutic trip to his past and a clarification about an essential part of his identity. Here Dike finds closure and the fact that he "kind of like[s]" it in Nigeria" (*Americanah* 425). It lets the reader predict that he might choose to dedicate himself to both cultures and countries in the future, thus adding to his lifelong process of constructing a transnational/cultural identity.

7. Conclusion

The analysis of the factors which contribute to the struggles the characters Ifemelu, Obinze, Auntie Uju and Dike face during acculturation and how they construct their transnational identities, shows that Adichie, as an opponent of a single story, presents four versions of educated African transnational immigrants, namely that of an international student, an illegal immigrant, a single mother and doctor and that of a second-generation immigrant.

The theoretical part of this thesis offers a general overview of Nigeria's historical and political background and pinpoints the country's diversity in terms of ethnicities and languages. It also establishes that even though Nigeria has earned a negative reputation for its political downfalls and its corruption, the country's growth across sectors such as telecommunication, film and natural resources make it a country of potential. The elaboration on the writing of Nigerian first generation, second generation and contemporary writers outlines the shift from a nation-centered approach to a more Afropolitan approach, illustrating the recurring dramatization of transnational Africans. The analysis on the writing of some first generation, second generation and contemporary Nigerian female writers shows the evolution from misandry to nego-feminism and to, eventually, the uncompromising demand for gender equity. Many contemporary Nigerian female writers, including Adichie, dramatize female characters who try to establish equity between the sexes, even as they are living in a patriarchal society. Leaning on transnational theory, Taiye Selasi's concept of Afropolitan and Berry's acculturation strategies, the final part elaborated on how transnational immigrants (transmigrants) construct and negotiate their identities in between two distinct countries. It highlights the African transmigrants' engagement in transnational activities and that factors such as racism, unemployment and, especially for second-generation immigrants, the lack of an ethnic community, can lead to acculturative stress and mental illness such as depression. Consistent with Berry's acculturation strategies this study shows that although immigrants apply different acculturation strategies, integration and the "braiding together" of cultures appear to be the most successful approaches. Lastly, the multiple consciousnesses transmigrants develop from their experiences in between two countries evoke their contribution to both nations they reside in.

In terms of the factors that lead to the struggles during acculturation, the analysis has shown that the idealization of, and oblivion about the United States or the West in general,

represented a crucial reason for the characters' difficult beginnings abroad. Obinze's obsession with America was conditioned by advertisements and literature and ultimately rendered him to dream about only a life there. Even though Ifemelu was not keen on building her life in the United States, she was not immune to the powerful and one-sided portrayal of America's virtues because she is confronted with poverty and negligence once she arrives in Brooklyn. Adichie suggests immigrants to critically engage with the media coverage about America and to acknowledge that America, like any other country, is flawed, even if it is presented as immaculate.

The characters' idealization convinces them that life abroad will offer them better opportunities. However Aunt Uju struggles to pass the exams for her doctor's qualification and has to work overtime to provide for her family and unemployment ultimately drives Ifemelu to see the exploitation of her body as the last resort highlight Adichie's representation of the pitfalls abroad. This becomes even more apparent with Obinze's case. His identity construction process shows how, although he had a promising future and is from a privileged household, he is suddenly reduced to a paranoid, voiceless and invisible illegal immigrant, who embarks on illicit and futile undertakings including a sham marriage. Adichie dispels the myth that abroad is ostensibly the place of prospect; instead it presents failure, alienation, displacement, indignity and hopelessness as possible side effects of the acculturation process. Moreover, she aims to give illegal immigrants, who often become invisible, a face and accentuates that there is need to consider that they also once had life aspirations and dreams, and that their illegal deed does not justify their dehumanization.

Another reason for the struggles during their acculturation is the pressure to assimilate. This becomes apparent with Aunt Uju's as she aggressively tries to fit into the upper-class white community by moving to a predominately white neighborhood and refuses to speak Igbo with her son Dike. The people in her predominately white environment do not fully accept her, yet she still strives to be part of this community. The repercussions of her assimilation and 'ethnic flight' are her eventual unhappiness and most importantly her son's disconnection from his heritage culture and identity confusion. The strong-minded and plainspoken Ifemelu succumbs to the pressure to assimilate when she is disdained for her Nigerian accent and thus adopts an American accent. Obinze's observation of how his relatives and his high school friend Emenike conform to the norms of their host society and reject to speak Igbo or intend

to forget their past highlights assumes Adichie's criticism on how immigration urges people to shed their originality and mimic something that was never theirs.

Also the racial discrimination the characters experience is another problem they face, while adjusting to their host society. Especially in the United States, they are ascribed a racial identity which they did not have prior to their emigration. Both Ifemelu and Auntie Uju become black in the United States and, more importantly, are confronted with mostly negative stereotypes about the color of their skin. Ifemelu is expected to speak on the behalf of black people and only learns in her relationship with an African American how distinct their 'black' identities and histories are. Auntie Uju is continuously reduced to her skin color and her competencies as a doctor are ignored. Dike's case in particular highlights the problems of African second-generation immigrants. He hears from his mother that he is not black yet is treated like a black person by the white people in his environment. By means of these examples, Adichie aims to raise awareness about race and racism in the United States and emphasize that 'blackness' should not be seen holistically. Finally, the return to Nigeria also provides yet another reason for the Ifemelu's and Obinze's feelings of alienation and estrangement. Adichie highlights that returning home is often connected with sense of loss and that some transnational immigrants feel displaced in the place they once called home. Ifemelu's depression, Dike's suicide attempt, Obinze's unhappiness and Auntie Uju's weight gain can be considered as the side effects of the struggles they encountered. Ifemelu initially is indifferent about her condition and Auntie Uju refuses to accept that the racial discrimination against her son and his lack of an ethnic community are the source for his depression and suicide attempt. This foregrounds Adichie's criticism of the dismissive mindset some Nigerian people have towards mental illnesses such as depression and thus her dramatization intends to "terrify" them about the severity of the condition (Arlington Reads 2015). Although the characters experience these problems during their acculturation, they still manage to negotiate and construct their transnational identities.

One of the salient indicators for how they manage to do this is their participation in transnational activities. Even though this participation is not always linear and frequent, it is evidence of how they constitute their transnational identities. Auntie Uju for instance, sends back remittances and upholds phone calls with her relatives in Nigeria. Ifemelu who only keeps sporadic contact with her parents in Nigeria sends money once she launches her blog and writes to Obinze. Moreover, Ifemelu's participation in "immobile transnationalism" via the internet shows how immigrants, unable to regularly visit their home country, can use the

internet to process their identities between their home and host society. Ultimately Ifemelu acquires an American passport and Obinze owns a property in Dubai and this offers a glimpse into how they might engage in transnational activities in the future. Here, Adichie demonstrates that their engagement with not only the host society but also the home country, points out their attempts of being transnational.

Another marker for how some characters manage their transnational identities refers to their transculturalism. Ifemelu, for instance, initially understands that her Nigerian food taste is not accepted by her cousin, yet educates him in the course of the years to be tolerant towards their differences. Moreover, considering that she uses food as a medium to learn about her host society and still educates her boyfriend Blaine about Nigerian dishes highlights her interest in engaging with her host society and still embracing her cultural heritage. Language is another aspect which illustrates that some characters practice transculturalism. The fact that Ifemelu reintroduces her Nigerian accent after having ‘faked’ an American accent, that Obinze becomes cognizant about the difference in accents or that Dike understands that he must learn the Igbo language foregrounds that the characters have conceptualized that their accent or the Igbo language need not be rejected or neglected, and instead should be celebrated and embraced. At this point, Adichie draws attention to the fact transnational immigrants must not shed their cultural markers such as food or language in order to receive acceptance in their host society. Instead she brings to the fore that acculturation is an interaction of taking and giving, without having to compromise one’s originality.

A final indicator for how the characters manage to construct transnational identities refers to the multiple consciousness they attain from their lives in-between two worlds. It is important to realize that being transnational does not necessarily require frequent participation in transnational activities or being mobile. Instead, it entails a distinguished mindset about the cultures one engages with. On numerous occasions it becomes apparent that the characters use their multiple consciousnesses to enforce improvement and betterment. Ifemelu’s exposure to Curt’s white upper-class culture and Blaine’s upper-class African American culture make her attuned to white privilege, racism and the rift between African and African Americans. By means of her blog, she targets these issues and includes non-American black people and white people into the conversation. Also, Ifemelu’s hair journey from braids to relaxed hair to ultimately an Afro look not only presents her voyage of self-discovery but also accentuates her knowledge about the politics behind hair, and renders her a role model and a supporter of

the Natural Hair Movement. Moreover, as Ifemelu grows up in a strict Christian and patriarchal society she learns to be critical of sexism and gender expectations of her country upon her return to Nigeria. Via her blog she targets how women aspire to marriage or intend to remain reliant on men. In concordance, Obinze's separation from his wife after having committed adultery expresses that he finally thinks like a feminist and aims to stop the injustice towards women in his adultery accepting society. A further example of how the characters employ their multiple consciousness refers to how both Ifemelu and Obinze work against the Eurocentric mindset of affluent and contemptuous returnees. Obinze, active in real estate, designs houses by considering the needs of Nigerians and not expats. Ifemelu criticizes the condescension of Nigeropolitans or Americanahs via her blog and establishes that there is need to improve Nigeria from within, without aiming to be like the West. Also, the fact that Dike works against the single-sided and often Afro-pessimist image of Africa via the social media shows that his short stay in Nigeria has changed his mind set. Lastly, Auntie Uju's engagement as a voluntary doctor in Africa accentuates that she uses her qualifications to enforce betterment not only in her host society but also on the African continent.

By closely analyzing the struggles Ifemelu, Obinze, Auntie Uju and Dike experience during acculturation and how they ultimately manage to construct a transnational identity, it becomes clear that Adichie foregrounds that the idealization of America, unemployment, pressure to assimilation and racial discrimination are the main reasons for the character's acculturation struggles. However, their execution of transnational activities, their participation in transculturalism and their open-minded and improvement-oriented mentality not only enables them to negotiate their identities in between two worlds but also to implement betterment. Adichie's depiction lays emphasis on issues such as the skewed media coverage of the West, racial discrimination, white privilege, the politics around black hair, Afro-pessimism, sexism in Nigeria, Nigeria's Euro-centrism and the contemptuous behavior of some Americanahs and foregrounds that there is need to critically engage with these points, especially as an African transnational individual. One can assume that Adichie accentuates that acculturation will be challenging for Nigerian and even African transnational immigrants, yet highlights that they have to take responsibility for raising awareness about these issues and enforcing betterment while existing in between America (West) and Nigeria. Second-generation immigrants, in particular, despite growing up away from their parent's home country, have the duty to educate themselves about their heritage and culture and to eventually contribute to the development of their countries.

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9. Appendix

9.1 Abstract

Diese Diplomarbeit befasst sich mit Chimamanda Ngozi Adichies Roman *Americanah* (2013) und beabsichtigt zu untersuchen, welche Gründe zum Anpassungsstress der vier nigerianischen Charaktere Ifemelu, Obinze, Auntie Uju und Dike in Nigeria, den USA und England führen und wie sie dennoch ihre transnationale Identität im Laufe der Jahre konstruieren. Sich an die Postkoloniale, Feministische Postkoloniale und Transnationale Theorie stützend, hat die Analyse der Charaktere ergeben, dass Adichie vier Versionen von afrikanischen transnationalen Identitäten dramatisiert und somit einen Einblick in das Leben einer internationalen Studentin, eines illegalen Immigranten, einer alleinerziehenden Ärztin und eines Immigrantenkindes der zweiten Generation gewährt. Adichie bringt in den Vordergrund, dass die Idealisierung von den USA, die anfängliche Arbeitslosigkeit, unterschwelliger Rassismus und der Druck sich an die Gastgesellschaft anzupassen, diesen Charakteren die Akkulturation in den USA oder England erschwert. Jedoch hebt Adichie auch hervor, dass die Geldüberweisungen an ihre Familienmitglieder in Nigeria und ihre Transkulturalität im Hinblick auf ihren Sprachgebrauch und Essen ein Zeichen für die Konstruktion ihrer transnationalen Identität ist. Überdies erlangen die Charaktere auf Grund ihrer vielseitigen Erlebnisse zwischen zwei Welten eine andere Einstellung, welche sie mithilfe des Internets zum Nutzen ihrer und anderer einsetzen. Somit lenkt Ifemelu die Aufmerksamkeit auf den Begriff ‚white privilege‘ und setzt sich mit Rassismus in den USA aus. Ifemelu und Obinze wirken gegen den Sexismus und kritisieren auch die eurozentrischen und elitären Einstellungen einiger wohlhabenden Rückkehrer in Nigeria. Dike benutzt die sozialen Medien um ein anderes Bild von Afrika darzustellen und Auntie Uju leistet ihren Beitrag, indem sie als ehrenamtliche Ärztin in Afrika arbeitet. Schlussendlich betont Adichie, dass das Leben und die Erfahrungen zwischen zwei unterschiedlichen Ländern herausfordernd sein können, aber stellt auch dar, dass die daraus gewonnene Einsicht afrikanischen transnationalen Immigranten die Möglichkeit gibt, ihren beiden Ländern von Nutzen zu sein. Vor allem Immigranten der zweiten Generation können zur Entwicklung und Verbesserung im Westen und vor allem in Afrika beisteuern.