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Adichie's *Americanah*“

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Christina Seiringer-Gaubinger

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*Leaving Lagos is not an option.
I love living here, where Nigeria's energy
and initiative are concentrated,
where Nigerians bring their biggest dreams.*

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie
(NY-Times, 1 February 2015)

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1 INTRODUCTION

Over the last decades, our world has moved closer together. Globalization is on the rise and millions of people are forced to migrate to another country in order to escape war, starvation or natural catastrophes, or they seek their chances and try to make their fortune in another country. Thus, the term interculturality is omnipresent and is used as an umbrella term for any kind of process that involves intercultural encounters between different groups of people. But what is interculturality really and how does it manifest itself? By the term ‘culture’ we generally understand groups of people with a common identity that is based on shared values, ways of thinking and living. When two groups of people with a fundamentally differing culture meet, interculturality comes into play. The term refers to the cultural ‘in-between’ that emerges from intercultural encounters. In this ‘Third Space’ borders are blurry, identities are hybrid and according to Bhabha the concerned subjects “emerge as the others of [their] selves” (39). Intercultural literature, especially migration literature mostly shows the workings of intercultural processes from an inside perspective. An intercultural text does not only give an account of cultural exchange or a migration experience, but also portrays the formation of personal and group identities, moderated by self-reflexions of the affected persons. The field of research on intercultural literature is relatively young, but gains significance in the age of globalization. Most of the research done so far concentrates on the methods and the effects that intercultural literature has on its readers. It has been proven that the minority perspectives displayed help to build understanding and tolerance.

In Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s *Americanah*, Ifemelu, a young Nigerian, migrates to the United States in order to study and is repatriated to her hometown Lagos after thirteen years. Her story is not about the flight from a miserable life in Nigeria, but rather about her search for a good life, education and happiness. Soon after arriving in the US, Ifemelu discovers the concept of race and shares her reflections on an online blog. Therefore, the novel is concerned with interculturality in almost every scene. Hence, my thesis examines how interculturality is visible in the narrative structure of the novel, as well as which elements of intercultural relevance are discussed in the novel and how they are presented.

In the first part, I will provide a theoretical background on the concept of interculturality, on intercultural and migration literature, as well on the socio-historical aspects of the novel, concerning both Nigeria and the United States. Additionally, I will give some information

about the author, in order to point to some parallels in her life with the novel. As opposed to multi- and transculturality, the newest of these similar concepts, interculturality focuses on the new creation, resulting from the blend of cultures. Chambers puts forward the argument that after someone has made the experience of migration “the *promise of a homecoming – completing the story, domesticating the detour – becomes an impossibility*” (5). Most intercultural texts display how the characters develop hybrid identities. Literature offers effective tools to represent the hybridity, for instance through showing the narrators self-reflections, doubts and criticism of societies and cultural practices. Having grown up in Nigeria, where 250 different ethnicities speak 400 different languages, Adichie got used to the coexistence of culturally diverse groups from an early age on; however, the author claims that she, just like Ifemelu, has discovered what race really means, only when she came to the US.

The second part of this thesis will analyse the various narrative techniques employed by Adichie and forms the actual analysis of the novel. First, the structure is studied to justify the classification of *Americanah* as an intercultural text. The novel is certainly a very typical representative of the category, as it was written by a migrant author in a language that is not her mother tongue, using the hermeneutics of the ‘complementary optic’ (Wierlacher 68). Adichie’s choice of a very self-reflective character for the protagonist is certainly one of her most powerful devices to express the perception of a migrant. Furthermore, the use of blog entries which are constantly woven into the text give her the chance to explicitly address certain delicate topics while showing their impact in the story’s action. In the second part of the analysis, I concentrate on specific elements, namely language and accent, food, education, jobs and money, romantic relationships, race and discrimination, identity, literature, migration, hair, ethnicity in Nigeria and politics. Even though some of the elements may appear banal at first sight, they make relevant contributions to the representation of interculturality, as it is the small nuances in everyday situations that weigh the most.

2 THEORETICAL PART

In the first part of this thesis, I will provide some theoretical background information, relevant to the subsequent analysis of the selected novel, *Americanah*. Firstly, I will define the central concept of interculturality and give an overview of intercultural and migration literature, and I will then briefly outline Nigeria's socio-historical background and the current immigration policy of the United States. Finally, I will introduce the author Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie and summarize the content of the novel.

2.1 INTERCULTURALITY

Given that the goal of this paper is to depict the intercultural elements of the novel *Americanah*, it is necessary to put forward a precise definition of the concept 'Interculturality' and the various terms that are crucial to the field, such as 'hybridity', a 'dual narrative perspective' and the 'Third Space', as well as to understand the theory of foreignness and alterity. Therefore, the following section will be dedicated to the clarification of these key concepts.

Epistemology of the term

The usage of the term *interculturality* is inflationary and inconsistent not only in literature, but also in the discourse of many other disciplines. The term is a composition of the prefix *inter* (Latin: under, between) and the noun *culture* (Latin 'cultura': cultivation) (Hofmann 9). The prefix designates both the 'between', as well as the 'together' of cultures (Blioumi 29). Furthermore, Schröer asserts that the *inter* also accentuates the relation between not only majorities and minorities, autochthons and migrants, as well as that which exists between persons and groups on a general level. It opens new possibilities of perception by turning the attention to the space between cultures, but also foregrounds interdependence, interaction and processes of change (Schröer 46). Two factors are required in order to understand the concept of interculturality: on the one hand, that the term assumes a border between cultures that is trespassed, and on the other hand, that the resulting 'between' is defined as an intercultural 'in-between'.

The concept of interculturality has been discussed in various disciplines, which have abandoned the ideas of multi- and transculturality. Instead a broad and dynamic understanding of culture has been developed, which considers the processes of cultural transformation. The

term refers to both minority and majority cultures, and thus helps to critically review power relations, dominant cultures and discrimination. It encapsulates the notions of heterogeneity and ambivalence and therefore nurtures the necessary learning processes in globalised societies (Schröer 49).

Demarcation from multiculturalism and transculturalism

Interculturalism needs to be regarded in distinction to the similar concepts of *multiculturalism* and *transculturalism*. Multiculturalism focuses primarily on the differences between cultures and indicates their coexistence. Transculturalism on the other hand, focuses on the commonalities of cultures and describes the transfer of foreign cultural elements without effecting cultural change. Interculturalism, the most recent of the three concepts seems to be most relevant to a contemporary setting, as it is the only one which considers the possibility of transboundary relations between cultures and understands itself as a way of thinking and acting in-between and as an overlap of mutual dependence. By overcoming the dualism of the 'self' and the 'other', the concept of interculturalism acknowledges culture as a dynamic process and not any longer considers it as the status quo (Blioumi 29 and Schröer 47). The traditional approach of figuring out similarities and differences and of finding ways how to cope with the gap between cultures has been surmounted by interculturalism, which rather focuses on the new creations in and out of the gap (Schröer 47).

The 'Third Space'

Interculturalism often draws on a term from postcolonial theory, namely when it refers to the concept of the 'Third Space', which is usually attributed to Homi K. Bhabha. Before depicting the relevance of the concept to the theory of interculturalism, I have to make a short digression to postcolonial theory. In *The Location of Culture*, Bhabha states that the 'Third Space' he describes, is a "split-space of enunciation" which "may open the way to conceptualizing an *international culture*". Furthermore, "the concept is based not on the exoticism of multiculturalism or the *diversity* of cultures, but on the inscription and articulation of culture's hybridity" (Bhabha 38). The postcolonial subjects do neither belong to the culture of origin, nor to the one of the former colonial power. Thus, the culture of the 'Third Space' is "bafflingly both alike and different" (Bhabha 54). Bhabha also refers to the importance of the prefix *inter*, which is for him "the cutting edge of translation and negotiation, the in-between space – that carries the burden of the meaning of culture" (Bhabha 38). Through the notion of

the ‘Third Space’, he suggests that we may ultimately escape the paradigm of opposites and “emerge as the others of our selves” (Bhabha 39).

Interculturality makes use of the notion of the ‘Third Space’ in order to describe the intercultural situation of certain people. This situation cannot be defined by the supposedly objective cultural differences between the culture of origin and the culture of the majority. On the contrary, these people occupy a ‘Third Space’ in which they develop a hybrid identity (Hofmann 13). They do not have the choice between one or the other presumably homogenous identity, but instead, they develop a new, elusive form of identity, which is a patchwork of reworked cultural perspectives (Hofmann 13). Cultural studies interpret this ‘Third Space’ as a new creation, referring to hybridity, creolisation and translation (Schröer 46). Considering what has been said, the ‘Third Space’ is a symbolic rather than a geographic location (Blioumi); a location, where relations to natives and immigrants become complicated and are overshadowed by a constant conflict of being torn towards the host culture and being repelled by it likewise (Craith 13).

Origins and early usage of the term

Although the term existed before, it was during the twentieth century that a more precise understanding was developed. The rather recent understanding of interculturality is closely linked to the process of nation building and the beginning of national thinking in the twentieth century. National thinking implies a mono-cultural self-evidence that first of all, a nation is identified with a language and a culture and secondly, the idea that a nation is based on a society of origin. This turns culture into a diffuse concept which cannot be understood in a political sense. Consequently, we can only speak of interculturality in the context of nation states. For this reason, the cultural mixing, trespassing of borders and the overcoming of national thinking described in connection with interculturality have to be regarded in light of the origins of the concept (Blioumi 29-30).

2.1.1 The ‘self’ and the ‘other’ - Theories of Foreignness

Theories of foreignness and alterity are multiple and often controversial. However, scholars generally agree on two main facts: firstly, that the ‘self’ and the ‘other’ are relational dimensions, and secondly, that the ‘self’ is closely bound to the ‘other’.

Cultures are heterogeneous inside and thus never really represent the ‘other’ to another culture, therefore, foreignness and alterity can only be regarded as relational dimensions (Sommer 24) and not as objective characteristics of persons or things. So if A is foreign to B in relation to C, it tells us more about their different backgrounds of experience and expectation rather than explaining all differentiating aspects between the two subjects (Hofmann 14). That is why the interest of cultural studies is not to define the ‘other’, but rather to grasp the collective perception of this discursive construction. The consequence of this anti essentialist conception of foreignness is the development of self-reflexive concepts, as for example the ‘complementary optic’ (Wierlacher 86) or the principal of the ‘change of perspective’ (Sommer 22), which are frequently applied in literature. The second aspect, describing the essential bond between ‘self’ and ‘other’ (Sommer 25), also involves the confrontation with the ‘other’ required to define the ‘self’ (Hofmann 16).

The concept of ‘othering’ is very relevant to migration literature, as it is used when individuals or groups want to distance themselves from others. Persons or groups then foreground their differences, accentuate their own superiority and so degrade others. This often happens in the context of race, religion, ethnicities, gender and social class.

2.2 INTERCULTURAL LITERATURE

In this section, I will discuss the research topics of intercultural studies and analyse the distinguishing features of intercultural literature. Furthermore, I will consider whether the novel *Americanah* belongs to the sub-category of intercultural literature, known as migrant literature.

Intercultural studies of literature

To begin with I will cite Bachmann-Medick’s understanding of intercultural literature studies (12):

Interkulturelle Literaturwissenschaft hieße [...], die Methoden der kulturellen Interpretation im überdisziplinären Zusammenhang zu reflektieren, die Grenzen zwischen den philologischen Disziplinen komparatistisch aufzubrechen, den traditionellen Kanon in Frage zu stellen und Universalisierungen abzubauen.

[Intercultural studies of literature means reflecting the methods of cultural interpretation in supra-disciplinary relation, to comparatively break up the limits between philological disciplines, to question the traditional canon and to reduce generalisations.]

The intercultural study of literature is highly interdisciplinary and therefore, it draws on conceptions from other disciplines, such as intercultural hermeneutics and critical theory. Even though these disciplines carry a certain potential for the analysis of intercultural texts, they have to be regarded in a critical light.

In contrast to intercultural hermeneutics, the intercultural study of literature underlines that if the foreign 'other' should be accepted as foreign, it cannot be understood in terms of the familiar 'own'. Moreover, to analyse intercultural constellations, we have to acknowledge that an equal dialogue between cultures does not exist. The remaining heritage of the cultural imperialism of Europe, America, and certain other industrial nations, still wields a certain power over the rest of the world (Hofmann 36-37).

Wierlacher on the other hand, developed a hermeneutic theory that puts the reader of an intercultural text in a position where he or she can take on different roles and see with the eyes of the 'other' and in this way, can extend his or her own perspective. Literature plays a unique role in the understanding of foreign cultures, because by exploring the foreign through literature in a playful manner, stereotypes and clichés are reduced and curiosity is piqued (Wierlacher 68).

Poetic alterity is an important category for the analysis of intercultural texts, which will be explained in depth later on in this thesis. Mecklenburg studies the poetic alterity of intercultural texts and sums up the intercultural potential of literature, firstly by reducing the foreignness of cultural patterns by repeatedly showing them; secondly, by conveying sensitiveness to cultural difference and thirdly, by making its readers sensitive to difference in general, which can help distinguish foreign and familiar elements in intercultural communication (Mecklenburg 96).

Certainly, the intercultural studies of literature also examine the literary techniques that describe experiences and moreover, which of them especially express poetic alterity. Particular linguistic means to display the challenging of normative systems are the use of satire, parody, the grotesque, comic and fantastic elements (Hofmann 59) and the element of alienation. This is an umbrella term which includes the 'complementary optic' as well as the representation of contrast and multilingualism (Esselborn 54).

Intercultural texts

Intercultural literature has proven a particular affinity to the problems and opportunities of intercultural relations for two basic reasons: firstly, in contrast to more rationalist and one-dimensional tendencies of scientific examination of intercultural situations, literature bears better means to produce ambivalent and polysemous texts from many perspectives, in order to meet with the demands of a contemporary polycentric world (Hoffmann 13). Secondly, the big advantage of a literary text is its ability to present intercultural processes not only as a theme, but also to make it the subject of critical reflection. The literary form plays an important role for this reflexion and carries the potential of underlining the polysemy and complexity of the underlying constellations. Moreover, by imagining worlds which may seem odd in comparison to the empiric reality, intercultural literature offers the possibility of reflexion about how to adequately cope with foreigners and intercultural processes (Hofmann 14).

According to Aglaia Blioumi (30), interculturality in literary texts springs from the tension and interaction between the foreign and the known. In order to analyse intercultural texts, Blioumi identifies certain recurring intercultural elements that serve as guidelines for the categorization and interpretation of texts. Most of those criteria have been taken from the Anglo-American debate about multiculturalism and the German debate about interculturalism, with a focus on literary approaches. The following elements have been established from these discourses (Blioumi 31):

- A dynamic concept of culture

One indispensable condition for an intercultural reading of a text is a dynamic understanding of culture, as has been mentioned earlier. Culture cannot be reduced to the elite and high end of culture, but has to involve all the fields of constructed reality. A dynamic concept of culture also accepts change in midst of societies, as displays for example the generation gap and the reduction of national stereotypes (Blioumi 31).

- Self-criticism

To fight against the objectification and dogmatization of the ideas of one's own culture and societal codes, self-criticism is a very effective tool. Especially if this criticism happens on a cultural level, which challenges the imprint of a person or group in a given socio-historic

frame (Blioumi 31). Thus, familiar schemas and perceptions, evaluations, acts and practices become subject to doubt (Göring 10).

- Hybridity

In interculturality and every product of intercultural writing or communication, hybridity plays an essential role. Hofmann (13) indicates a multiple coding of personal and collective identity, according to context, situation and frame of reference. Blioumi describes hybridity as the contouring of personal and collective identities. Hybridity supports the perception of the inner heterogeneity of individual beings and acknowledges diverse communities in a collective. In that sense, hybridity is the opposite of a mono-cultural self-evidence, as it respects the coexistence and interaction of different cultures in a national entity (Blioumi 31).

- A dual perspective (“doppelte Optik”)

In research on the dual perspective (“doppelte Optik”) in literary texts, scholars try to figure out how the ‘self’ and the ‘other’ are displayed from different viewpoints. Consequently, the question arises if the view of the ‘self’ is dominant in a given text, or if there is a serious attempt to show the view of the ‘other’. This category may break up patterns of the own cultural view and hinders objectivism in perspective and evaluation (Blioumi 31).

The intercultural novel

Having given an overview of the intercultural studies of literature and some reoccurring elements of intercultural texts, I will take a closer look at the intercultural novel itself. In many intercultural novels the protagonist or first person narrator tries to track down an intercultural memory, to pass it on or to prevent it from dissolving. Although there are some overlaps with the coming-of-age-novel and the Bildungsroman, the intercultural novel can be clearly distinguished from the latter. A frequent starting point of a contemporary intercultural novel are the urge and desire to reunite the experiences from various phases of life, which happened in different cultures (Chiellino 41).

Two main features can be identified in a number of intercultural novels, firstly, a certain narrative perspective, and secondly, the latency of language. Provided that the narrative perspective of the text is a source of interculturality and not only a narrative frame, it can hint at the structure of an intercultural novel. The narrative perspective often correlates with the distance between applied language and the specific space-time constellation of the novel. This distance is an area of conflict for the writer, in which the protagonist can become aware of the

oddness of his own cultural memory (Chiellino 41-42). The second important feature of an intercultural novel is its bi- or multilingualism, which implies that the protagonist acts in a linguistic context that is constituted by the applied language and at least one latent language (Chiellino 43). The latent language can either be the language of cultural origin of the protagonist, or the language of the space and time constellation in which the novel takes place (Chiellino 46). As opposed to the mother tongue, the latent language is not the language of the author's memories, which makes it easier for the author to distance him or herself from the sometimes torturing thoughts and to analyse them with more neutrality. Some of the immediacy, the affections and colours might get lost through the mediation of the non-native language; however, this is exactly what makes it easier accessible for the reader (Craith 45-47). Nevertheless, there is another essential factor for the choice of language: not only the affections play a role, but also economic considerations, "as the language in which a book is written can determine the size of readership" (Craith 47).

2.3 MIGRANT LITERATURE: WRITING BETWEEN EXILE AND DIASPORA

To define the novel *Americanah* we need another level of specification of the literary category. Therefore, I will introduce the sub-category migrant literature, a wide category with no clear conventions. For my thesis, I have chosen to use the term *migrant literature*, without implying any of the below approaches. As migration is such a wide field, it is hard to establish a list of criteria, and furthermore, there is a multitude of differentiations within the category in order to do justice to the many different authors, backgrounds, stories and themes. To find suitable labels of those categories is difficult and so they constantly change, develop or split into new categories. Hence, the assignment of texts to a certain category becomes more and more complex. Below, I will outline the development of the literary category migrant literature, before I provide an overview of its prominent features.

Difficulties in labelling the genre

Migration literature is a relatively recent area of research which started evolving during the 1970s. In the German-speaking area, the terms „GastarbeiterInnenliteratur, AusländerInnenliteratur, ImmigrantenInnenliteratur, EmmigrantInnenliteratur“ (Rösch 12) are all terms that came into being with the debate around 'Migrationsliteratur'. They partially refer to the same authors and texts, all of which cannot be classified in the traditional categories of the contemporary studies of literature. Although several sub-categories have

been established, Rösch (12) identifies three binding criteria which apply to all of the aforementioned terms:

- the experience of migration background of the author, or migration being dealt with as a topic
- writing in another language than one's mother tongue, or writing within a foreign linguistic and cultural space
- the use of literature as an aesthetic means or a means of fighting against oppression and social marginalisation (Rösch 12).

At the present state, 'Migrationsliteratur' does not only refer to the biography of the author, or solely to the topic of a text. Furthermore, the genre does neither include migrated authors only, nor does it exclude non-migrated authors completely. Instead, it stands for literature that deals with the subject of migration in a politically biased way, that includes texts written from the perspective of the oppressed minorities which display the subject in an aesthetic way. At first, the language of writing and publishing was established as a criterion, but soon it came clear that it was not solid, considering that one important aspect of 'Migrationsliteratur' is that the category as well as individual texts are multilingual (Rösch 31). To sum up, 'Migrationsliteratur' is distinguished from similar genres through its distinction by subject, form and function (Rösch 35). Nevertheless, this terminology is highly criticized by authors and researchers who do not see the claimed opening of the genre. The pejorative trauma of guest-worker and migrant has apparently not been passed yet and so migrant literature still suffers from the consequences.

The Anglo-American sphere has seen similar difficulties in finding a suitable label for migrant literature. Here, an important impulse for the research of migrant literature came from postcolonial studies. Postcolonialism continues the anticolonialist discourse of the last centuries in a modified way and is nowadays primarily researched at American universities by scholars from former colonies (Lützeler 23). In the sixties and seventies of the last century the term *Commonwealth Literature* was commonly used, but was criticized by authors for its ghettoization process. The preferred term at the time in the United States, *Minority Discourse* was however rejected by writers as an unacceptable classification of Western provenance (Blioumi). Sommer elaborates on other terms for a similar kind of literature to be found in Britain, such as "*immigrant fiction [...], black British literature [...], trans-cultural British literature [...], Indo-English novel [...], fictions of (in)betweenness [...or] black fiction [...]*"

(Sommer 3). If the category was distinguished according to ethnic origins, generation or class, it would end in an infinite differentiation, useless to literary studies. On the other hand, if all authors were summarized with one term, one would assume an inexistent homogeneity (Sommer 4).

Due to the confusion caused by all those differentiations, the term *fictions of migration*, proposed by Sommer seems to be a good alternative, as it is less specific than most of the other terms mentioned. The second part of the term – migration - does in this context not refer to a movement in space, but rather to an oscillation between two contrary poles, between old and new home, between various minorities or between minority and majority culture (Sommer 6). This far-reaching concept of migration is a metaphor for a never ending process described by Chambers (5). His definition of *migrancy* does not only apply to the genre fiction of migration, but also to the general understanding of migrancy in my thesis (Chambers 5):

[T]o *travel* implies movement between fixed positions, a site of departure, a point of arrival, the knowledge of an itinerary. It also intimates an eventual return, a potential homecoming. *Migrancy*, on the contrary, involves a movement in which neither the points of departure nor those of arrival are immutable or certain. It calls for a dwelling in language, in histories, in identities that are constantly subject to mutation. Always in transit the *promise of a homecoming – completing the story, domesticating the detour – becomes an impossibility*.

Similarly to the German concept of ‘Migrationsliteratur’, the genre fictions of migration includes texts with an intercultural theme, as well as texts with a certain relation to Britain either as the setting of the plot, or as the explicitly addressed centre of a colonial past (Sommer 7).

Parallels and differences to Postcolonial literature

Colonialism often causes the migration of a big number of people, either from one colony to another, or from the periphery towards the centre of the colony, as for example to the United States, to Britain or France. For this reason, migrant literature and postcolonial literature often fall into the same category. Nevertheless there are many texts assigned to migrant literature which do not have any colonial background. So the question remains, as to how far can the criteria of postcolonial studies actually be applied to migrant literature? One factor that most certainly distinguishes postcolonial and migrant literature is the quantity, concerning both, literary texts and existing research on it (Blioumi).

Sommer summarizes the two main shortcomings of postcolonial theory for diasporic literature. First of all, the *writing back* function of postcolonial literature is too limiting for

diasporic literature and cannot be seen as a central element of meaning. The binary opposition between centre and periphery, between discourse and counter discourse implies a relative homogeneity of the former coloniser at the one side and the diaspora on the other side. Secondly, the concept of hybridity is criticised, since it sums up numerous colonial, postcolonial and diasporic experiences, which makes it ahistorical and methodically questionable (Sommer 12).

Nomads instead of Migrants

As it is a very relevant idea to my thesis, I will introduce the change in perspective of regarding migrants as nomads. In contemporary literary and cultural sciences a deconstructionist debate about migration is going on: in a postmodern conceptualisation, space is not any longer a given entity, but rather a produced one, named and coded in the context of the present discourse. From a deconstructionist perspective, migration is thus a circulation between spaces, the migrant becomes a nomad, who does not have to choose a homeland, who can feel at home at more than one place and who is not bound to a certain national identity. As a consequence, the dichotomy between immigration and emigration country, as well as between host country and country of origin is not valuable any more (Blioumi referring to Baltes-Löhr 86).

The perception of the migrant as a nomad seems to be more neutral, especially when it comes to questions of positively and negatively connoted migration. As far as connotations of migration is concerned, there is a “double standard in relation to the process of migration”. When economically well-off people move to another country, this is perceived as something positive, even beneficial to the host community, whereas when poorer people move, it is regarded as something harmful and negative (Craith 2). Hence, the theory of foreignness and alterity plays a role, as poor migrants are seen as the “other”, the “opposite of us” (Craith 2).

2.3.1 Criteria of Analysis

As mentioned previously in this thesis, the postcolonial paradigm needs to be revised and extended when it comes to the analysis of intercultural literature and migration literature. The postcolonial categories of *rewriting* and *hybridity* are adopted as central elements in the research area of migrant literature; however, they are not sufficient and thus need to be complemented by new criteria.

In order to analyse intercultural novels and migration literature, Sommer came up with three distinctive criteria, namely literary representation, personal and collective identity and cultural and literary alterity. In this section, I will present these three concepts:

a) Literary representation and political critique of representation

Representation is an ambiguous concept; on the one hand, because the relationship between the sign and the object it represents is arbitrary, and on the other hand, because the representation is highly dependable on the intentions of the creator of the sign and what he wants to communicate to his or her contemplators. Literary and artistic representations are subject to social and political conventions. On the one hand, those conventions enable the contemplator to decode the relation between sign and object but on the other hand, those conventions have a very political function, namely as they regulate what appears as acceptable to a society (Mitchell 12-13). So the question arises if literature really carries the potential of helping readers to understand foreign culture, as representation of the foreign probably just is a self-representation. (Sommer 59). In order to overcome the challenge of representational critique, which claims that linguistic representation is too arbitrary to help understand a foreign reality and postcolonial critique of stereotypes, which questions the discriminatory representations of gender, race and class, Uerling (8) suggests primarily asking for the particularities of fictional representation; e.g.: Do literary texts offer possibilities of dealing with cultural alterity that go beyond those offered by theoretical texts? To answer this question, the categories of narratology are convenient, as they do not only criticize stereotypes, but also focus on the staging of interculturality and the multiple functions of literary representations of the foreign.

b) Personal and collective identity

The vast amount of academic studies on the subject, make it almost impossible to give a finite definition of identity (Sommer 61-62). For this reason, Taylor puts forward a definition which is relevant to textual interpretation (33-34): Identity “is who we are and ‘where we are coming from. As such it is the background against which our tastes and desires and opinions and aspirations make sense”. The identification process is a life-long journey, that is never completed, but constantly changing and being revised over and over again. One important component of the self-concept is the society we live in, because identity gets validated just in social interaction (Sommer 62 referring to Glomb 27). Furthermore, memory and identity are closely linked, as the perception of the past is shaped by the present self-conception and vice-

versa (Sommer 62). Thus, social interaction and memory are the two central elements in the midst of which identity evolves.

In addition to personal identities, there are numerous *collective identities*, such as gender roles, ethnic and national identity, that play a role in intercultural texts. Collective identities are mainly formed through cultural symbols and discursive formations that are strategically shown as natural and objective, so that there is no room for individual decisions or political change (Sommer 63 referring to Asmann/Friese 11).

Thanks to feminist and postcolonial theory, collective identities such as race, gender and class have been identified as politically motivated constructs. The central question for the interpretation of intercultural texts is, if characters or the narrator identify with one or more than one ethnic groups. In transcultural contexts, collective identities lose their orientation and thus ethnic origin and cultural belonging are often treated ironically and do not any longer give stability to individuals (Sommer 64).

c) *Cultural and literary alterity*

As has been shown above, identity is shaped by the interaction with other individuals. An important component of identity is the way in which the subject believes they are perceived by the other. The concept of alterity adds the idea we have of the 'other', as an important aspect for one's self-concept. While postcolonial analysis of *othering* and *otherness* assume an antagonist relation between centre and periphery, cultural studies concentrate more on the dynamic of identity and alterity and on the vague borders between them (Sommer 64-65).

Literary interpretation seeks to determine how cultural differences manifest themselves as poetic alterity in texts. Uerling (8) recommends the analysis of the interlacing of perception, projection and patterns of thinking of inter- and intracultural foreignness and difference in intercultural encounters shown in literary texts. The explicit and implicit evaluation of alterity can reveal, if migration is shown as something valuable or something generally negative (Sommer 65).

The example of the *novel of miscegenation*, which deals with romantic relationships between partners of different ethnicities, shows that literary texts are not bound to socially constructed cultural borders and that they can overcome them in the creation of fictional worlds. In fictions of migration, there are numerous incidences of such relationships in all nuances, from

a very racist or stereotypical representation to a differentiated description which underlines the understanding between cultures (Sommer 65).

2.4 Socio-Historical Background

In this chapter, I will provide some basic information about Nigeria, as well as a general overview of Nigeria's history.

Nigeria is one of the largest West African countries, covering an area of 923,768 square kilometres. With a population of 169.3 million, Nigeria is the most populated state in Africa (Gtai 2013). Moreover, the population of the country is very young; according to *Germany Trade and Invest* (Gtai 2013) 63.2 percent of the population were under 19 years old in 2013. The average life expectancy lies at forty-six years, nevertheless the population is growing at a rate of 2.5 percent. Despite a strong urbanization process, the majority of the population live in rural areas. However, the country's largest city, Lagos, has a population of 9.2 million (Falola & Heaton 4-5).

The territory shows a broad range of geographical features, from tropical to arid. For this reason, the country has many different natural resources, its most famous being the large petroleum reserves which were discovered in the Niger Delta in the 1970s (Falola & Heaton 3). Before the country became dependant on oil, Nigeria heavily relied on agriculture. As the country's landscape displays such diversity, there is also a great variety in agricultural goods. The common "[f]ood crops include yams, cassava, bananas, plantains, rice, maize, millet, citrus fruits, groundnuts, cocoa and palm produce" (Falola & Heaton 3). Other than food products, Nigeria also produces timber, rubber and cotton. In rural areas, agriculture and fishing are still the main professional domains; however, since the discovery of the oil fields in the 1970s they are constantly dwindling. Ever since, oil has become the most important export good and now accounts for 90 percent of the overall export earnings, as well as the basic source of income for 75 percent of government revenue. Even though oil is the country's main source of income, a number of corrupt political regulations and international exploitative trades have made petroleum the main reason for extreme poverty among a large part of the Nigerian society (Falola & Heaton 3). Additionally, 23.9 percent of the population were unemployed in 2011 (Gtai 2013).

2.4.1 Ethnicities and Languages in Nigeria

Nigeria is one of the richest countries in terms of ethnic diversity. In total, the country is home to approximately 250 different ethnic groups. The three biggest ethnicities account for the majority of the population: there are the Hausa-Fulani which make up about 30 percent of the population and settle mainly in Northern Nigeria, the Yoruba who live in the southwest of the state and account for about 20 percent and the Igbos, located in the southeast with a 16 percent share of the total population (Brunner 123-124). According to Olu Tomori, approximately 400 languages are spoken in Nigeria, which including dialects makes a total of more than 200 variants (Olu Tomori 288). After the British colonisation, English has been established as the official language of Nigeria. However, many people commonly speak in pidgin, combining English with elements of their indigenous languages (Falola & Heaton 4). Apart from the problems the extreme multilingualism of the nation presents for primary schools and the Nigerian education in general, it also represents one of the origins of the lack of national identity, as it makes the identification with a common state more difficult and causes miscommunication between people with different cultural backgrounds (Olu Tomori 290-291). Briefly, there is no one language which is understood by every Nigerian. On top of that most people speak such poor English that it is not sufficient for communication on an international level. However, English is taught more and more, as it has turned out as the best way to ensure communication across all ethnicities within the country (Olu Tomori 292).

The many different ethnicities living together in one state result not only in many different languages, but also various religions are practiced within the same nation. However, the majority of the population belongs to either Islam or Christianity. Today, over 50 percent of Nigerians are Muslims, many of them live in the northern areas, where the Islam first appeared in the eleventh and the fourteenth centuries CE. Most Muslims are Hausa, Fulani or Kanuri; all the same, over 30 percent of Yoruba identify with the Islam as well. On the other hand, Christianity accounts for more than 40 percent of the population and is concentrated in the south and middle belt. In the middle of the nineteenth century Christian missionaries first appeared in Nigeria and converted large parts of the population. A further 10 percent of the population practices indigenous religions, which are mostly commonly based in conceptions of ancestor worship and reverence for both natural and supernatural phenomena” (Falola & Heaton 4-5).

2.4.2 Nigerian Colonial and Post Dependence History

Before the British came to colonize Nigeria, the territory was not a unified state, but consisted of numerous societies who lived together in independent self-ruled states. Some of those states were rather large and centrally ruled, having a certain influence in the region; others were relatively small and governed by local councils. However, there was never a central administration that put all of those societies under one governance (Falola & Heaton 6-7).

From 1849 onwards the British influence in Nigeria was constantly growing, in the years between 1885 and 1906 they established the Northern and the Southern protectorate, which could later, in 1914 easily be amalgamated to create a unified colonial state under British rule. After colonising the territory, the British established a common currency, nationwide infrastructure and a transport system, but at the same time they intentionally worsened conflicts between different ethnic groups. The Northern and the Southern protectorate were ruled very differently: While in the south Western education, Christian religion and the English language were very important, the social structures and institutions of the North were left practically untouched. In the Northern area, where the mighty Hausa-Fulani Elites once reigned, the British first established the system of *indirect rule*, in which local authorities remained in power but were submitted to the British colonial administration. This system was gradually extended to nearly the whole state till 1937 and was deconstructed again after 1950 (Brunner 131-133).

A small elite of well educated, English-speaking Nigerians was selected to work for the government and European-based companies. Although their jobs considerably bettered their standard of living, they were kept in low positions by a racist ideology. In the end, it was those selected by the British who pressurized the colonial administration for a fairer representation of Nigerians in the government and for an eventual independence of the Nigerian state. The movements that those political leaders founded later turned into “full-fledged parties that negotiated for independence from British rule in the years after the Second World War” (Falola & Heaton 7).

1960 was the central year of African independency: not only Nigeria, but 15 other African countries gained independence from their colonial rulers. Hereafter, a parliamentary system of government modelled after the Westminster system was adopted to govern the state as a federal republic. Nigeria was initially divided into three large states, namely into the northern, the eastern and the western regions (Dare 189). The lacking sense of union among the various

societies living under the head of one nation became visible in the demand for separate states by many minorities. For this reason, the state was split five more times in the years till 1996 and consists of 36 states at the present day. After the state had gained independence, there was a long period of instability; especially religious and ethnic tensions and the constant struggle for power among the largest tribes, the Hausa, the Yoruba and the Igbos have led to political unrest. From 1967 to 1970 those tensions, combined with the fight for oil have even lead to a cruel civil war for Biafra (Falola & Heaton 8).

While conflicts are the everyday bread of Nigerians, politicians do very little to control them, often they even enforce them. Nigeria's political system is very corrupt and also creates huge gaps between ethnic groups by dividing government funds unevenly. In the current so called democratic system, there are still no truly democratic elections, as bribing, manipulation, violence and intimidation are common place during a Nigerian election (Falola & Heaton 8-9).

As a result of the poor civilian administration and their failing attempt to fight against constant insurgency, the ground was fertile for military regimes to take over the rule of Nigeria. For a long period which lasted essentially from 1966 to 1999, Nigeria had several military regimes. There were numerous military coups and counter coups, two of them resulted in the end to a civilian regime and three tackled other military regimes. All of the country's leaders ruled in a corrupt, autocratic and authorial way, not hesitating to use violence to achieve their goals and to keep their opponents silent. Besides, ever since Nigerian independency, both, civilian and military rulers have spent oil revenues and government funds irresponsibly and corruptively (Folala & Heaton 9).

The last military leader was General Sani Abacha, a corrupt dictator and politician. During his de facto presidency, human rights violations and corruption were daily occurrence (Folala & Heaton 229-230). After Abacha's death in 1998 and a period of an interim government, Nigeria returned to a democratic system and elected Olusegun Obasanjo as their president for two terms (Folala & Heaton 234-235). After the death of Umaru Yar'Adua, who ruled for only three years, vice president Jonathan Goodluck, who still holds the office today, was voted for (Nigerian Government Homepage).

2.4.3 Immigration in the USA

2.4.3.1 American Democracy in Question

Immigration into the U.S. is one of the central issues in *Americanah*. For this reason, it is essential to have some basic knowledge about the current American immigration policy, which is far from corresponding to the fundamental values of a 21st century Western democracy. In the following section, I will first discuss the deficiencies in the way immigrants are dealt with in the USA and second, I will explain how it is possible to get through with such policies. I want to note here, that when I speak about immigration, the double standard mentioned before applies very much. In those issues, immigrants from Western countries, with high social and economic status are excluded from the common understanding of immigrants. In this case, it is all about mostly poor, often illegal immigrants, coming from countries subordinated to the US in terms of economics and living standard. Immigrants coming from for example Europe who want to study, work or marry in the USA are not dealt with in this chapter, as they enjoy a very different treatment.

The ills of American immigration policy

After the incidents of 9/11, immigration regulations in the United States have undergone considerable revisions. Therefore, critical light will be shed on some aspects which put the American democracy in question.

After the tragic plane attack on the Twin Towers and the Pentagon in 2001, there was a massive investigation led by the FBI to find the terrorists responsible. There were underground campaigns of racial profiling, 1,200 persons were detained, often without the right to a trial, to an attorney, to see their family or to basic human treatment. Michael Chertoff, at the time Assistant Attorney General for the Criminal Division, was one of the leading men in the process. Whilst incidences of torture occurred under his direction, he did not violate the immigration policy under the administration of G.W. Bush. On the contrary, his work earned him high recognition as a defender of the War on Terror and consequently also the post of the head of the Department of Homeland Security – DHS in 2005. Despite this, “he was appointed to the U.S. court of Appeals for the Third Circuit, a lifetime appointment that removed him from the line of political fire that might have eventually held him responsible for mishandling these crucial human rights issues” (Koulis 2). Chertoff soon made a name for himself for “extending executive power, mismanaging the federal bureaucracy and hollowing out DHS” (Koulis 3). One example of his unique way of dealing

with obstacles is when he declared that his department would not follow more than 30 laws enacted by the Congress in 2008. Even more shocking is the Supreme Court's reluctance to stop him which resulted in him gaining unprecedented political power. After the creation of the DHS in 2003, immigration control agencies were placed under their control. The "vital mission" of the DHS, published on their official website is striking, namely "to secure the nation from the many threats we face" (DHS-Homepage).

The department's weak governance has not bettered the "marginal status in the democratic polity" that immigrants held already before the DHS took over immigration issues. "[I]mmigrant abuses are more easily shrugged off when few resources and rights and fewer votes are at risk, and when the courts have been stripped of the review authority". Furthermore, immigrants are excluded from the election system, as they are denied the right to vote on a national level, as well as in many cases on a local level and thus, "they do not matter to election-minded politicians" (Koulish 4). Moreover, the immigration agency has always been neglected in the federal bureaucracy where it was always the "last in line to receive funding, quality stuff and other resources" (Koulish 4).

Another factor that threatens the American democracy is the virtual absence of due process in immigration court. The immigration judge, who is technically not even an administrative law judge, has an enormous amount of freedom to decide what goes into the records, which evidence to hear and whether to permit hearsay. The number of those regulations that prevents due process is too long to be listed in detail here, ranging from the Anti-Terrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act of 1996 who eliminates the possibility for "criminal aliens" who should be removed to be reviewed before court, till an act from 1997 that prohibits the Court to disclose their real motives for "ruling against nationals of a particular country" (Koulish 5). Koulish sums up, that "once Congress vests power in the Attorney General, it rarely reviews that delegation of power, leaving it to immigration authorities to interpret and enforce the law per whim" (Koulish 5).

All of these aspects combined result in a machinery that functions without a controlling authority that checks the executive power. Koulish goes even so far as to say that it creates a "counter law" with the help of which the government is able to "bypass legal constraints in its effort to secure the homeland" (Koulish 6). From the moment that immigration cases were handed from the Department of Justice to the DHS in 2003, immigrants were no longer regarded from an economic or juridical perspective but were seen under the light of security

for the American citizens (Walters 170). This permitted Bush's administration to regard immigration as a trivial matter rather than a serious political issue.

How the immigration policy is legitimized

Considering the above information, the question arises how it is possible that although all these regulations obviously do not follow the rule of law, there is no outcry in society against the inhumane treatment of immigrants. American immigration authorities have applied very efficient strategies to "frame 'illegal aliens'" (Koulish 13), to plant the fear of terrorism deeply into the minds of American citizens and so legitimize all their questionable means under the false pretence of homeland security and the 'war on terror'.

As certain immigrants are not official American citizens, they easily become subjected to strategic 'othering'. Furthermore, according to Koulish (14), the United States have a strong "legacy of nativism, xenophobia and practices of counter-subversive state repression", which is deeply rooted in American society and thinking, so that a certain portion of the American public were inclined to see 9/11 as rooted in immigration (Walters 169).

Before the tragedy of 9/11 happened, immigration was already regarded as a problem, but rather from an economic angle. The main problem with immigrants was their poverty and therefore they were perceived as a threat to the economic stability of the country. Thus, immigration was a social issue. However, with 9/11, the paradigm changed drastically and from that day on, immigration was a security issue, for every undocumented person could be a terrorist (Walters 170).

Ironically, the 'war on terror' is a construct and far removed from reality, because for example Mexico is not at war with the U.S., which does not justify the technologies used to protect the border. Moreover, even though all of the measures are taken with the pretence of fighting against terrorism, there is virtually no "criminal prosecutio[n] for terrorist-related crimes" (Koulish16). Briefly, there is no justification for the resources that have been spent on fighting the 'illegal alien'.

The linguist Lakoff puts the phenomenon in very comprehensible and clear words: "The war on terror is not about stopping you from being afraid, it's about making you afraid" (Lakoff). Hence it does not only legitimize every means taken, but it also turns those who maltreat immigrants into safe-guarders and defenders of American citizens and so people thankfully keep advocating them.

Another aspect of this construct that makes criminals out of ordinary people coming to the U.S. in the simple hope of bettering their lives, is, as aforementioned, the placing of immigrant administration in the DHS. This is especially significant as it institutionalizes the American perception of immigrants as criminals and terrorists against which the country has to be defended (Koulish 17).

2.5 CHIMAMANDA NGOZI ADICHIE'S *AMERICANAH*

2.5.1 The Author

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie was born in Enugu, Nigeria on 15 September 1977, but grew up in Nsukka, in the former house of Chinua Achebe's family. Chimamanda was one of six children born to her Igbo parents, Grace Ifeoma and James Nwoye Adichie. They both held posts at the University of Nigeria, her father worked as a statistics professor, her mother who had a degree in sociology, worked as the first female registrar of the institution (Tunca).

Adichie's early writings were very much influenced by the British literature she was used to read, especially Enid Blyton's books. At the age of about ten, she discovered African novels by authors such as Chinua Achebe or Guinean Camera Laye. Today she often describes these readings as eye opening, for she thereby understood that literature did not have to be exclusively about white people, but could also reflect upon her own African reality (Tunca 94).

After Chimamanda had finished primary and secondary education at the University's school, where she had already won several academic prizes, she started to study medicine and pharmacy at the University of Nigeria, but quit after one and a half years. While studying, she was the editor of the medical University magazine *The Compass*.

Like the protagonist of *Americanah*, Chimamanda left Nigeria at the age of 19 for a scholarship to study communication at Drexel University in Philadelphia/USA. Two years later she changed to the Eastern Connecticut State University, where she pursued a degree in communication and political science which she finished summa cum laude in 2001. Following this, she did a master's degree in creative writing at John Hopkins University in Baltimore. The gifted author continued her academic career as a Hodder fellow at Princeton University during the academic year of 2005-06 and in 2008 graduated with an MA in African Studies from Yale University.

Her writing career began in 1997, when she published a collection of poems under the title *Decisions* and a year later a play called *For love of Biafra*. While still at Eastern, Chimamanda wrote her first novel *Purple Hibiscus*, which was published in October 2003. Her first work won her a shortlisting for the Orange Fiction Prize in 2004 and the Commonwealth Writers' Prize for the Best First Book in 2005.

Dealing with the Biafran war, her second novel *Half of a Yellow Sun* was released in 2006 and was, like her first book also available for purchase in Nigeria. The novel was adapted to a film of the same title directed by Biyi Bandele and was released in 2014. In 2009, Chimamanda published a collection of short stories with the title *The Thing around Your Neck* and eventually, in December 2013 *Americanah* was published, first in the United States, later also in Europe. For her most recent novel, Chimamanda was awarded the National Book Critics Circle Award of 2013 and the Chicago Tribune Heartland Prize of 2013. Additionally, the novel was selected as one of The Ten Best Books of 2013 by the New York Times. Interestingly, Beyoncé sampled some lines of Chimamanda's speech, entitled *We should all be feminists*, given at the occasion of the TEDxEuston conference in December 2012 in her song *Flawless* which was released in 2013 (TED Blog).

Today, Chimamanda is married and lives and works in both, Nigeria and the United States. In Nigeria she teaches regular writing workshops, in the United States she was a recipient of the MacArthur Foundation Fellowship at Harvard University in 2011/12 (Tunca).

2.5.2 The Novel

The novel begins in a hair salon outside the town of Princeton, in Trenton, where the protagonist Ifemelu gets her hair braided. This salon offers a frame to the story, while most of the other chapters are told as flashbacks from that point. Ifemelu is a Nigerian woman in her thirties, who immigrated into the US to study and after a difficult phase of ugly experiences and nasty jobs, she begins writing a very successful blog about race and being black in the US called "*Raceteenth or various Observations About American Blacks (Those Formerly Known as Negroes by a Non-American Black)*" (Adichie 4). Though most of the chapters are told from her point of view, there are also some parts narrated from the perspective of Obinze. He was Ifemelu's great love since schooldays, but when she left for America, their relation abruptly ended and Ifemelu broke ties. Due to post 9/11 regulations, Obinze himself was not let into the country, but later managed to move to the UK. The reader learns about some of his

experiences; however, most of his journey remains undocumented. Ifemelu meanwhile finds herself in romantic relationships with different men, one white, one an African American, but never really seems to settle down. After 13 years have passed, Ifemelu's longing for her homeland takes overhand and so she decides to give up her blog and the life she has built in order to return to Lagos. A difficult period of transition follows, as her life in America has changed her too much to still truly feel a sense of belonging to her home country and to readapt to the Nigerian way of life. After a long time of hesitating, Ifemelu forces herself to contact Obinze, unfortunately only to find out that he is married. However, they start dating again and ultimately their old love is newly enflamed and so finally, he leaves his wife to be with Ifemelu. The main three topics dealt with in the novel are: the search for identity and a home; race and discrimination; and of course, love.

3 ANALYSIS OF INTERCULTURAL ELEMENTS IN *AMERICANAH*

In the second and practical part of my thesis, I will analyse the selected novel *Americanah* by applying the theoretical knowledge gathered in the first part of my thesis. The analysis consists of two parts: in the first part, I will apply the theory of interculturality on a structural level, while in the second part I will analyse several intercultural elements in the novel's content.

In the structural analysis, I will first examine whether the definition of interculturality and the theories of foreignness can be applied to the novel *Americanah*. Then, I will give an answer to the question I posed earlier: how far *Americanah* fulfils the overall criteria of intercultural literature. Finally, I will analyse in greater detail the features of the migrant novel which apply to *Americanah*.

I have divided the content analysis into the following themes: food, education, jobs and money, romantic relationships, family, race and discrimination, language and accent, identity, home, literature, migration, hair, religion, politics and culture. I will examine each of these themes and consider to what extent they might be considered as "intercultural".

3.1 ANALYSIS ON A STRUCTURAL LEVEL

3.1.1 Interculturality and Theories of Foreignness in *Americanah*

Drawing on the definition I put forward in chapter 2.1., Interculturality stands for the ‘between’ and the ‘together’ of cultures. This ‘in-between’ is omnipresent throughout Adichie’s novel and is manifested in the different kinds of ‘Third Spaces’ in which the protagonist finds herself. First of all, Ifemelu grows up in the ‘Third Space’ of a former colony, she then moves to the United States and experiences the ‘Third Space’ of migrant life and finally, after moving back to Lagos, she experiences yet a different kind of ‘Third Space’, as she feels alienated in her own home.

‘Third spaces’ are always characterised by hybridity of culture, society and identity (Bhabha 38), which is strongly portrayed in the multi-faceted picture Adichie gives of her characters and their surroundings. The reader gets to know Ifemelu as she was raised and can so trace the development of her personality against different backgrounds in the different phases of her life. Ifemelu does not get to choose between a Nigerian and an American identity; it is rather a choice between being an ‘Americanah’ or someone who simply does not fit in anywhere. According to Craith, the ‘Third Space’ is also a location where the relationships between natives, immigrants or returnees become complicated. The novel portrays the difficulties that the two main characters have, in feeling a sense of belonging and bonding with anyone in their environments.

Some prominent features of the concept of Interculturality are: interdependence, interaction and processes of change (Schröer 49). In Adichie’s representation of personal relationships in the novel, the themes of interdependence and interaction are key. As the novelist underlines the many factors which make friendships either hard, impossible or, concrete. Processes of change are present in numerous passages of *Americanah*, which emphasize how Lagos as a city has changed completely during the thirteen years that Ifemelu was gone. Her family, friends and even her own personality alters while she is in the U.S.. In the definition of interculturality, there is always a cultural border that is trespassed (Schröer 49). The story of Ifemelu shows that crossing a cultural border often does not necessarily imply crossing a national border. After coming back to Lagos, Ifemelu is aware of the strong cultural borders, not only between nationalities, ethnicities and races, but also between people with different social standings and different educational backgrounds, as well as “Americanahs” compared to those who chose to remain in their native country.

Moreover, the concept of interculturality indicates how power relations, dominance and discrimination are visible in both, majority, as much as minority cultures (Schröer 49). In *Americanah*, minority and majority cultures clash repeatedly and incidences of discrimination and power demonstration occur several times. One good example is the ‘othering’ Dike experiences in school: being born and raised in the U.S. like his classmates, he feels like a regular American child, but grows into his role of the “black kid” by gradually succumbing to the stereotyping of society. Furthermore, Interculturality means assuming heterogeneity and ambivalence within a culture (Schröer 49), which Adichie addresses in her novel. She distinguishes between the different personalities and social groups of the characters in the novel, in terms of: lifestyle, political orientation, social class, generation, education and significantly interpersonal factors. This detailed portrayal does not permit generalizations or stereotyping.

Theories of foreignness

As I have mentioned in the theoretical part of this thesis (see 2.1.1.), the two main ideas of “theories of foreignness”, are that, firstly, the ‘self’ and ‘other’ are relational dimensions, and secondly, that the ‘self’ is closely bound to the ‘other’ (Sommer 24). The relatedness of ‘self’ and ‘other’ is reflected in Ifemelu’s change of identity according to who she is interacting with. In many social settings, she demonstrates a strong objection to the values of her respective counterpart. When she is surrounded by other African immigrants, she cannot share their glorification of home and simultaneous admiration of the USA. Sometimes she seems to feel too intelligent to even argue. However, when she is amongst university professors, she finds their line of argument often exaggerated or insubstantial. The influence of the theory of foreignness is made evident in Adichie’s writing by her creation of this strong-willed character, who is reluctant to accept or adapt to the view of others. Furthermore, Ifemelu is also a self-reflective character, who criticises herself. This character development allows Adichie to examine the bond between the self and the other. Theories of foreignness also describe the concept of ‘othering’ (Hofmann 16). In *Americanah*, people deliberately distance themselves from others for all possible reasons, starting from race, religion and ethnicity to gender and social class.

Reading the definition of interculturality, as applied to the novel *Americanah*, all the main ideas are evident in the novel, which highlights how aptly the concepts can be applied to the novel, and how nicely the novel illustrates these concepts.

3.1.2 *Americanah* as an Intercultural Novel

In this part of my thesis, I will examine to what extent Interculturality might be considered as a theme of *Americanah*. As aforementioned, an important factor of the literary theme of interculturality is the change of narrative perspective and the ‘hermeneutics of the complementary optic’, as developed by Wierlacher (68). *Americanah* is divided into 55 chapters with alternating third person narrators. Though most of the novel is told from Ifemelu’s point of view, certain chapters are written from Obinze’s perspective. Both narrators share a set of values; however, their experiences of migration to Britain and the U.S. and of returning home, as well as their perception of their romantic relationship with each other, call into question each narrator’s reliability in their re-telling of certain scenes.

In Wierlacher’s hermeneutics, the concept of ‘the complementary optic’ is central, as it helps the reader to take on different positions, in order to grasp the bigger picture (Wierlacher 68). Interestingly, Ifemelu is a character that always seems to be the odd one out and never really feels at home in a group of people. For this reason, she is always quick to criticize people and analyse their behaviour. For readers unfamiliar with Nigerian culture and the problematic of immigration Ifemelu’s outsider perspective helps the reader to follow her narration and, thus, to better identify with the sympathetic protagonist.

The exception to that phenomenon is the relationship Ifemelu has with Obinze. It seems that her relationship with Obinze is the only place where Ifemelu feels a sense of belonging, as their cultural, social and political attitudes are not in conflict. Moreover, Obinze and Ifemelu are the only characters to demonstrate a certain intellectual depth in their perception of the rest of the world, in contrast to the somewhat one-dimensional characters which surround them. This gives a certain intimacy to their relationship, which the reader cannot evade. In that case, Ifemelu does not distance herself and relativize her feelings, in order to give an objective view.

The challenging of normative systems is one of the central aims of intercultural literature (Hofmann 59). Adichie makes use of narrative devices such as satire, parody and comic elements in order to achieve this goal: Many scenes are portrayed exaggeratedly, contrasts are stark and characters often seem ridiculous in their stubbornness and extreme standpoints. A good example is the portrayal of Curt (Adichie 196):

With Curt, she became, in her mind, a woman free of knots and cares, a woman running in the rain with the taste of sun-warmed strawberries in her mouth. [...] She went hiking with him, kayaking, camping near his family’s vacation home, all things she would never have imagined herself doing before. She

was lighter and leaner; she was Curt's Girlfriend, a role she slipped into as into a favourite, flattering dress. She laughed more because he laughed so much. His optimism blinded her. He was full of plans. 'I have an idea!' he often said. She imagined him as a child surrounded by too many brightly coloured toys, always being encouraged to carry out 'projects', always being told that his mundane ideas were wonderful.

The literary form is able to make interculturality the subject of critical reflexion (Hofmann 14): as previously discussed, Ifemelu is a generally self-reflective character, but the narrative structure chosen gives this character trait even more weight. The novel is interwoven with blog entries, which the female protagonist makes a living of. In those blog posts, Ifemelu reflects on a more abstract and explicit level. To give an example, while we observe how Ifemelu is not prepared for the discrimination she is facing for being black when she first comes to the U.S., she later sums up her experiences in a blog post (Adichie 220):

Dear Non-American black, when you make the choice to come to America, you become black. Stop arguing. Stop saying I'm Jamaican or I'm Ghanaian. America doesn't care. So what if you weren't 'black' in your country? You're in America now. We all have our moments of initiation into the Society of former Negroes.

This passage shows that Adichie does not only criticize the racist society by illustrating it in action, but that she also directly points her finger at it.

In a next step, I will apply Blioumi's (31) four guidelines for the categorization of intercultural texts to the novel *Americanah*. According to Blioumi, intercultural texts build on a dynamic concept of culture, which *Americanah* most certainly does: Adichie illustrates the culture of people from different origins and classes, as well as a broad range of personalities. Furthermore, the change of culture through these variable parameters is constantly present. The concept of self-criticism and hybridity are made use of in *Americanah* quite extensively, as displayed above. The fourth criterion, namely a dual perspective requires the representation of the 'self' and the 'other' from different viewpoints. On the one hand, the novel sticks to this guideline because of the change of perspective between Ifemelu and Obinze. On the other hand, when taking a closer look, the perspectives of Obinze and Ifemelu may be too similar to classify the narration as a dual perspective.

According to Chiellino (43), an intercultural novel is generally characterized by bi- or multilingualism. Latency of language does indeed play a role in *Americanah*. However, as the novel is written in English, which is also an official language of Nigeria, it cannot be claimed that the novel is written in a foreign language. Still, English is not the mother tongue of the Nigerian author, and furthermore, the English spoken in Nigeria still differs a great deal from US-American English. This difference and its cultural implications are thematised many times throughout the story. Moreover, we experience characters switching to Igbo, or using certain

Igbo words whenever conversations get emotional. In short, languages, variants and accents play a big role in *Americanah*, so this criterion is certainly fulfilled.

3.1.3 *Americanah* as a Migrant Novel

Americanah belongs to a more specific category of intercultural literature, namely migrant literature. In chapter 2.3., I named the three binding criteria of this literary category, according to Rösch (12). I will now consider how far these criteria can be applied to the novel. Firstly, in Rösch's theory, the author of migrant literature must have experienced migration personally or make it a central theme of the story, both of which are the case for Adichie. She migrated to the United States at the age of 19, just like the novel's protagonist Ifemelu and migration is certainly one of the main focuses of *Americanah*. Secondly, migrant literature must be written in another language than the author's mother tongue, or written in a foreign linguistic or cultural space. As discussed in the preceding subsection, these criteria apply to Adichie's novel. Thirdly, the author of a migrant novel makes use of literature as an aesthetic means or a means of fighting against oppression and social marginalisation. Adichie clearly fights social marginalisation and oppression of migrants by demonstrating the protagonists' hardship both in their host country as well as in their country of origin.

In addition, just like Rösch (31) explains, *Americanah* deals with the theme of migration in a politically biased way, since Adichie tells the story from the perspective of the oppressed minority, namely two young people trying their luck abroad and facing numerous drawbacks on their journey.

To conclude, *Americanah* can definitely be categorized as intercultural literature and also shows the major features of migrant literature. For this reason, the criteria of analysis explained above will be helpful tools for my subsequent analysis of specific thematic areas of the novel.

3.2 INTERCULTURAL ELEMENTS

3.2.1 Language and Accent

Theoretical insights

Language and accent are prominent factors in everything that interculturality and migration. After providing some relevant theoretical insights into the topic, I will analyse how the representation of the issue in the novel.

In every social interaction, people instantly form an opinion about their interlocutors by evaluating their use of language. That is why language becomes an index for “geographic background, ethnicity, and social class, as well as stereotypes attributed regarding their traits” (Dragojevic, Giles and Watson 1-2). The consequences of these judgments range “from prejudice and discrimination to matters of life and death” (Dragojevic, Giles and Watson 2). These underlying “language ideologies”, which are applied unconsciously, are described as “interpretive filter” by Woolard and Schieffelin (56, 62).

Additionally, Shuck (196) put forward the “ideology of nativeness”, which explains foreign-accent discrimination through a nationalist ideology of language. Especially in the U.S., there is a strong differentiation between native and non-native English speakers, who often are victim to ‘othering’, even if English is their first language. Americans usually complain about incomprehensible accents of immigrants and are indignant of their imperfect English (Shuck 196). Language based discrimination can even be seen as a covert form of racism, as it is “a more subtle way of hierarchizing social groups in the contemporary world” (Phillipson 142). Lippi-Green (152) claims that discrimination of accents at a workplace represents a type of institutionalized racism. However, this theory is quickly turned on its head, when US-Americans travel. Then they perceive the accent of natives in their own mother-tongue as heavy, as opposed to their own, non-native, second language learner accents. In that case, language is purely linked to race.

Beside the *nativeness ideology*, the *standard language ideology* is also of significance. From a monolingual viewpoint, there is a standard accent for every variant, which is the best and the only correct form. This standard is usually defined by large institutions, the written form of a language and the upper-middle class of a certain linguistic community (Lippi- Green 64). The ideology of the standard is based on a constructed homogeneity of a language, as in reality, variety is natural and every variant has its own functionality. Usually one variant is

chosen for social reasons of prestige and sometimes does not even exist outside of certain institutions and the media (Dragojevic, Giles and Watson 8). Bourdieu (50-52) describes standard variants as “linguistic capital” that is exploited by governments and institutions to hinder social mobility.

Non-standard varieties are usually regarded as lacking in logic and correctness. These presumptive qualities are also assigned to speakers of non-standard varieties and cause stigmatization. Moreover, there is no proof of standard varieties being actually superior of any kind, but they are just generally accepted to be. This social construct is usually tightened to the point where these beliefs are accepted as common sense or natural laws (Dragojevic, Giles and Watson 11-12).

In Americanah

Multilingualism and use of Igbo

Multilingualism, being one of the classical features of an intercultural novel, is present throughout the novel *Americanah*. Words and whole passages in Igbo, the native language spoken in Lagos, are consistently woven into the text. In their interaction, characters often casually add a *sha*, an *o* or a *nah* to the end of a sentence, or start a sentence with *Ahn-nah*. Sometimes it is also more than just one word, for example when Obinze’s wife Kosi calls him, she usually says “Darling, *kedu ebe I no?*” which means ‘where are you?’ (Adichie 2013: 21); and when Auntie Uju announces her pregnancy to Ifemelu’s parents, she uses Igbo too: “*Adi m ime*” (Adichie 2013: 83). These occasional appearances of Igbo add authenticity to the characters as well as to their cultural background. Sometimes they remind the reader of the Nigerian setting and also underline the presence of the second language in the back of the characters’ mind. The older Nigerian characters in the novel have been raised in Igbo, while many of the younger characters do not even really know how to speak Igbo and also do not particularly value the language of their people. Obinze and Ifemelu seem to be exceptional in that respect. One day they argue about who of them speaks better Igbo and compete in reciting proverbs like “Acho afu adi ako n’akpa dibia. The medicine man’s bag has all kinds of things”. Ifemelu responds: “Many guys won’t even speak Igbo, not to mention proverbs” (Adichie 2013: 61/62). Her surprise about Obinze’s competence in Igbo shows on the one hand, that it is abnormal for young people to know their ancestral language and on the other hand it foregrounds that both of them do value tradition.

However, Igbo does not only play a role in the parts set in Nigeria, but also when the two protagonists go abroad, to Britain and the USA. Certain scenes illustrate that Nigerians switch code when it comes to personal or emotional matters. A good example is when Obinze gets into a heated discussion with Vincent, the man who lends him his identity card in order for him to be able to work in Britain. Vincent asks Obinze for a bigger share of his salary, “affect[ing] a British accent, saying ‘innit’ too many times”, but Obinze sees himself unable to agree to the deal. Getting into an argument, Vincent laps into a Nigerian accent and finally Iloba, Obinze’s friend “spoke up in Igbo” to beg Vincent to be reasonable: “Thirty-five is too much, *o rika, biko*. Please just try and help us” (Adichie 2013: 250). Vincent is still not ready to compromise with Obinze, but at least explains his own situation in his rural accent of Igbo. Here, British English serves as a language of business to take care of formalities and to pretend to be, who they dream to be, as to them the language is distant, impersonal and cold. However, from the second they enter a more intimate level, namely when they discuss a personal favour, Igbo is used to foreground their shared background and to remind each other that they have to stick together in rough times.

As mentioned in the theoretical excursus, language is inextricably bound to identity. Several scenes in *Americanah* underline the identity giving factor of language: Ifemelu’s father is a very clever man, who lost his job because he refused to call his boss “Mummy” at work. He is depressed about all he did not achieve in his life. The description of how language plays a role in this respect, is significant. Ifemelu explains that “[h]is was a formal, elevated English. [...] But his mannered English bothered her as she got older, because it was costume, his shield against insecurity” (Adichie 2013:47). As in contrast “when he spoke Igbo; it was the only time when he seemed unconscious of his own anxieties” (Adichie 2013: 48). The reader gets the impression that speaking Igbo is in the characters’ nature, something which gives them a sense of home and trust in themselves and life. On the other hand, English, the language of their former oppressors, still carries the heavy weight of unfulfilled dreams, high ambitions and great disappointments.

Accents

The implications of having a seamless American or British accent instead a Nigerian one, is thematised numerous times throughout the novel. I will first discuss the representation of accent related issues in Nigeria and then abroad.

In Nigeria

The weight of accents is shown mainly on the basis of certain groups of society, namely on the one hand, among teenagers at school, and on the other hand, among the newly rich and returnees from abroad. Back in Ifemelu and Obinze's high school days, the kids whose parents could afford to take them abroad were admired for their "*air of away*" which was usually accompanied by a foreign accent. One of their most popular classmates, Yinka, for example "went to England often and lived in Ikoyi and spoke with a British accent" (Adichie 55).

Later, when Ifemelu's friend Ginika moves to the United States with her family, her girlfriends warn her: "[J]ust make sure you can still talk to us when you come back". Because many people come back as so called 'Americanahs' like their friend Bisi "who had come back from a short trip to America with odd affections, pretending she no longer understood Yoruba, adding a slurred *r* to every English word she spoke" (Adichie 65).

When Obinze and his wife try to find out which school would be best to send their daughter Buchi to, they talk to the rich Mrs Akin-Cole who tries to convince them to send Buchi to a French school, because "it can only be good for the child to learn another civilized language". The rich woman "spoke with the unplaceable foreign accent, British and American and something else all at once, of the wealthy Nigerian who did not want the world to forget how worldly she was, how her British airways executive card was choking with miles" (Adichie 29). The satire of the scene underlines Adichie's position towards the functionalizing of foreign accents as status symbols.

The identity giving factor of language is also emphasized in an ongoing "America-Britain jousting" Obinze leads with his mother (Adichie 71). Obinze, who is a big fan of the United States, has an American accent, while his mother, a university professor who believes in the academic superiority of Britain over the US and who condemns American pop culture, speaks British English. His mother constantly criticises Obinze: "Trunk is a part of a tree and not a part of a car, my dear son [...] Ifemelunamma, please tell my son I don't speak American" (Adichie 2013: 71). This argument indicates the automatic identification of a person with the image of a country or culture, when adopting a certain accent.

As aforementioned, Nigerians who go abroad for a long time and then come back with a foreign accent are despised and ridiculed; however, they are at the same time jealously admired. When Ifemelu returns, she has no American accent, to the surprise of her friends and

family. Ranyinudo mocks Ifemelu for being an ‘Americanah’, but also claims that “[a]t least if you had an accent we could tolerate your complaining” (Adichie 385). Apparently, Nigerians are annoyed by the returnees’ haughtiness, but their accent is the one thing that makes people accept their constant nagging. Ifemelu mocks Doris, a colleague at Zoe magazine, who returned from the US too, because she “spoke with a teenage American accent that made her sentences sound like questions, except for when she was speaking to her mother on the phone; then her English took on a flat, solid Nigerianness” (Adichie 401). Although she pretends that she is not able to speak normal Nigerian English anymore, the fact that she switches so easily when talking to her mother proves that she just wants to claim her status as a returnee. However, Ifemelu is not completely immune against the Americanah attitude towards the Nigerian English. She and Doris mock the way people express certain things in Nigeria, for example how people say “I’m pressed” or “I want to ease myself” instead of using bathroom, restroom or toilet (Adichie 405).

In the United States

Having mainly status linked implications in Nigeria, accent has an all the more singular role in the US when it comes to immigrants and discrimination.

First of all, accent is a factor that reveals the origin of migrants, at least to those who are familiar with it. This can be both, positive and negative. On the one hand, it creates a bond between Africans, when they notice where the other one was born. Thus, for once they are not regarded as simply black, but even related to a specific region. But on the other hand, Africans living in America sometimes just want to be seen as American instead of wearing their immigration background on their forehead. When Ifemelu takes a taxi to the braiding salon in Trenton “[s]he hoped her driver would not be a Nigerian, because he, once he heard her accent, would either be aggressively eager to tell her that he had a master’s degree [...]; or he would drive in sullen silence” (Adichie 8). But luckily “[s]he could tell right away, with relief, that his accent was Caribbean” (Adichie 9).

The most prominent point Adichie makes about accent is however, that a seamless American accent is a premise for the integration in American society. Ifemelu is annoyed about always having to go to the shabby parts outside the city to have her hair braided. Ifemelu seems to look down on the braiders who wholeheartedly try to succeed in America: The “Francophone West African women braiders [...] spoke English to customers, it was broken, curious, as

though they had not quite eased into the language itself before taking on a slangy Americanism” (Adichie 9). Through them, Adichie presents a group of immigrants who are not educated enough to properly learn the English language, but all the same try to imitate American slang, to accelerate the process of assimilation.

When Ifemelu first arrives in the United States and Ginika, her old Nigerian friend picks her up from the airport, Ginika tries to speak in Nigerian English. She speaks in “a dated, overcooked version, eager to prove how unchanged she was” (Adichie 123), although, later with her friends, she has a perfectly American accent. Ginika seems to try to foreground their common origins in order to give Ifemelu a warm welcome. This shows how much an accent implicitly conveys and how easily identity can be switched alongside an accent. Once Ginika is back with her roommates, she returns to her all American self.

I will now analyse the development of Ifemelu’s accent and her attitude towards it. In her first months in the US, Ifemelu feels the reactions to her African accent very strongly. Once, a girl at the information point at university speaks to Ifemelu as if she must “have some sort of illness that made her speak so slowly, lips scrunching and puckering”. But when Ifemelu notices that the girl just speaks to her like that because she has a foreign accent Ifemelu “shrank like a dried leaf. She had spoken English all her life, led the debating society in secondary school, and always thought the American twang inchoate. [...] And in the following weeks, [...], she began to practise an American accent” (Adichie 133). Even though Ifemelu is an extraordinarily strong character, proud on her Nigerian roots and decided not to give up this identity in order to become an ‘Americanah’, life in the US starts to force her on her knees just some months after arriving. She decides to be reasonable and to no longer struggle with the humiliations for such an irrational reason. This is the point at which her integrity and dignity concerning her accent start to crumble.

After three years, her American accent is perfect. So perfect that people on the phone think she was an educated White American woman. But when one day a telemarketer tells her she sounded American, “did she begin to feel the stain of a burgeoning shame spreading all over her, for thanking him, for crafting his words ‘You sound American’ into a garland that she hung around her own neck” (Adichie 175). This is a traumatic moment for Ifemelu. She seems to suddenly notice how the bond to Nigeria has become weaker and that she was becoming what she never wanted to be. This is the moment when she decides to give up on her American accent that always felt forced and made her sound never truly herself. However, she decides to keep the “British Mr Agbo Voice” she has learned from BBC and uses it to

haughtily raise her voice on people who treat her differently because of her accent. Interestingly, this development demonstrates that after she is able to do an American accent, she does not feel like a victim anymore when she is discriminated for her language. After it is her own choice, to be considered either an American or an African, she grows out of the need to be taken for an American and this makes her look back to her origins. At that point, she is proud of her roots again, as she is not anymore the bad kind of immigrant without a job, a place to live, friends and on top of it, with a bad kind of English.

When Ifemelu first sees Dike in the US after many years, he has grown up to be a “first grader with a seamless American accent and a hyper-happiness about him” (Adichie 105). That is why he is accepted as an African American by his classmates and is not perceived as migrant. Auntie Uju does not want Ifemelu to speak Igbo to Dike, because she is afraid “[t]wo languages will confuse him”. Although Uju knows this is exactly how they grew up, she thinks it is different, because they live in America now, where Igbo isn’t worth anything (Adichie 109). Uju does not regard Igbo as cultural heritage or competence, but rather as a defect on someone’s record.

Parents’ anxiety to raise their kids in their own mother tongue or bilingually is not limited to the United States, but is also thematised in a British setting. Obinze’s cousin Nicolas, who migrated to London a long time ago, raises his kids Nna and Nne in English too: “He spoke to them only in English, careful English, as though he thought that the Igbo he shared with their mother would infect them, perhaps make them lose their precious British accents” (Adichie 239). It seems their overprotection and exaggerated eagerness to offer them a better future, alienates the children from their parents and their culture. They will probably never have problems because of their accent, but on the other hand may have a very conflicted cultural identity.

A scene in the braiding salon also reinforces the fact that kids with American accents have it easier at school. Halima, one of the braiders explains: “When I come here with my son they beat him in school because of African accent. Now accent go and no problems” (Adichie 187).

One day in the supermarket Dike puts a carton of cereal in the cart and Uju tells him to put it back “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” (Adichie 108). This

demonstrates how Uju wants to make sure the cashier thinks of them as American and so deter her from associating Dike's bad behaviour with their immigration background. Moreover, the satirical representation of the situation shows Adichie's standpoint towards Uju's code switching.

Blaine, Ifemelu's African American boyfriend, has a perfectly American accent and sounds, according to Ifemelu, white and educated as he speaks. One of the main differences between African Americans and American Africans is that their American accent comes naturally, as it is their first language. An American accent means not pretending, not hiding their origins to them (Adichie 177). However, Blaine is also able to speak Ebonics, "a dialect of American English spoken by a large proportion of African Americans" (Encyclopedia Britannica). Ifemelu is surprised about his speaking Ebonics to Mr White, the black security guard at the library and thus, asks him about it. He responds (Adichie 342):

I guess I've become too used to my White People Are Watching Us voice. [...] And you know younger black folk don't really do code-switching any more. The middle-class kids can't speak Ebonics and the inner-city kids speak only Ebonics and they don't have the fluidity that my generation has.

Even though the novel conveys the impression that black people born in the United States have it a lot easier than those immigrating, this situation hints to the nature of the identity crises they are facing.

A scene in England, told from Obinze's perspective, exemplifies the theory explained above, that Americans claim not to understand immigrants' accents. At his new job, a Brazilian guy introduces himself as "Dee", but then says: "No, you're not English. You can pronounce it. My real name is Duerdinhito, but the English, they cannot pronounce, so they call me Dee." Obinze does pronounce it correctly and earns "a delighted smile. A small bond of foreignness" (Adichie 251). This indicates how strongly comprehension of an accent is bound to someone's attitude towards it. It is not that Obinze speaks more Portuguese than their British co-workers, rather that Obinze and Dee's relationship is not asymmetrical, so a non-comprehension of his accent would not be regarded as demonstration of power.

Euphemisms and choice of words

Besides language and accent, culture specific usage of language makes a big difference. Therefore, I will now take a closer look on Euphemisms and the choice of words in Nigeria and the United States as displayed in *Americanah*.

When Ifemelu arrived in the US “[o]ne of the first things her friend Ginika told her was that ‘fat’ in America was a bad word, heaving with moral judgement like ‘stupid’ or ‘bastard’, and not a mere description like ‘short’ or ‘tall’” (Adichie 5). In many scenes set in the US there is a big discrepancy between what people think and what people say. However, using a new word to avoid a taboo actually just underlines how badly it is still meant. Thus, sometimes people avoid certain topics altogether. After having spent some time in America, Ifemelu “thought about all the other things she had learned not to say aloud in America” (Adichie 6). While ‘fat’ is substituted by ‘big’ in the US, ‘thin’ seems to be replaced by ‘slim’ in Nigeria. Ginika explains to Ifemelu that “Americans say ‘thin’. Here ‘thin’ is a good word.” In Nigeria, if “you lost weight it means something bad, but here somebody tells you that you lost weight and you say thank you” (Adichie 124). In the area of bodyweight, Nigerians and Americans have a similar language policy: they both avoid the word that describes what is not considered as pretty or desirable in their culture.

On the contrary, when it comes to race and discrimination, the usage of language varies considerably in Nigeria and the United States. While in Nigeria, where race is no big issue, people are not afraid of words like ‘Negro’ or ‘half-caste’, Americans skate around those racially loaded expressions. Again, it is Ginika who explains to Ifemelu that some words have different connotations in America (Adichie 123/124):

Can you imagine ‘half-caste’ is a bad word here? [...] I was telling them [...] how all the boys were chasing me because I was half-caste, and they said I was dissing myself. So now I say biracial, and I’m supposed to be offended when somebody says half-caste.

Adichie very ironically displays how Americans neatly cover up their racism by using overly careful language. They still convey the same meaning, but by using the correct term they are in a safe place and no one can point a finger to it. This scene also shows how arbitrary taboos are, how one word can be a taboo in one country while having a positive denotation in another.

Another strong parody of America’s politically correct language is Kimberly avoiding the word ‘black’. Kimberly is the white woman Ifemelu works for as a nanny and she is also involved with a charity for Africa. Gradually Ifemelu notices that Kimberly avoids speaking about people’s skin colour. “Ifemelu would come to realize later that Kimberly used ‘beautiful’ in a peculiar way [...] and always, the women she referred to would turn out to be quite ordinary-looking, but always black” (Adichie 146). So Ifemelu tells her, “You know, you can just say ‘black’. Not every black person is beautiful” (Adichie 147). This passage is

illustrating very well how delicate the issue of race has become in the U.S., so that even people with good intentions have a hard time to choose the right words. The fact that “Ifemelu would think of it as the moment they became, truly, friends” (Adichie 147), shows that the author does not condemn people who make a fool of themselves skating around racial issues, because they try hard not to humiliate anyone. It seems that Adichie acknowledges the fact that at the basis, there is no correct way of addressing racial questions and that awareness is at least the first step.

3.2.2 Food

At first glance, food does not appear to be an issue of intercultural relevance; however, taking a closer look, the kind of food characters eat and the eating habits they develop, reveal a lot about their cultural identities.

In the scenes set in Nigeria, before the two protagonists go abroad, food is never really thematised. Nevertheless, the reader learns what characters eat, like “rice and fried plantains” (35), “rice and meat and coleslaw” (51), “boiled corn and ube” (232), “Ofada rice” or “chicken stew” (388). However, nutrition and eating habits are not discussed explicitly. On the contrary, as soon as Ifemelu arrives in the US, food becomes an issue. First, she is puzzled by American eating habits, for example that it is “perfectly normal and did not require a humorous preamble [... that] Americans ate bread for lunch” (Adichie 107). Moreover, Ifemelu does not know the first thing about American food, which comes clear to the reader in several scenes – for example, when Dike asks her to prepare a hot dog for him and she fries the sausages, instead of boiling them.

After some time though, she starts to like American food: “She enjoy[s] the unfamiliar – the Mc Donald’s hamburgers with the brief tart crunch of pickles [...]”. All the same Ifemelu “was disoriented by the blandness of fruits, as though Nature had forgotten to sprinkle some seasoning on the oranges and the bananas, but she liked to look at them, and to touch them; because bananas were so big, so evenly yellow, she forgave them their tastelessness” (Adichie 113). In a humorous tone, Adichie points out, that Ifemelu first ridicules American food culture, but then starts to get fascinated by the unnatural perfection of food. Although she is adapting gradually, she never seems to fully ease into American eating habits which is proven when she spots a man, eating an ice cream while waiting for the train: “She had always found

it a little irresponsible, the eating of ice cream cones by grown-up American men, especially the eating of ice cream cones by grown-up American men in public” (Adichie 4).

How characters eat and do the grocery shopping, says a lot about their identities. There is for example Blaine, Ifemelu’s black American boyfriend, who just “cooked organic vegetables and grains whose names she could not pronounce –bulgur, quinoa. [...] He told her which grains had protein, which vegetables had carotene, which fruits were too sugary” (Adichie 310). Blaine represents the American Upper class, who eats very consciously and is ready to spend a lot of money on nutrition. Adichie seems to mock that kind of exaggerated healthy eating. Ifemelu comments on Laura’s child Athena, “a tiny wisp of a child with hair so thin that her pale scalp gasped through”, saying that “[p]erhaps Laura’s blended vegetables and strict diet rules had left the child malnourished” (Adichie 167). Moreover, when Ifemelu gives Taylor a piece of her orange, he is disgusted by the seeds and claims “Oranges don’t have stuff in them” (Adichie 165). By giving those examples, the author clearly states her opinion towards American food culture and also underlines the big difference to African eating. While in the US food serves as a marker of class and is far detached from its real purpose, in Nigeria food is still a lot closer to its primary function of nourishing.

What also stands out, is the representation of migrants’ eating habits. Throughout the chapters set abroad, there are only two occasions where immigrants prepare African food. Namely, when Ifemelu prepares “jollof rice” for Dike, after his suicide attempt (Adichie 379), and secondly, when Obinze is offered “fried chin-chin” at Iloba’s flat in London, which makes him feel home-sick (Adichie 249). Other than that, the migrants presented in the novel, eat only American or British food and mostly not very healthily. Especially when Ifemelu has her hair braided in Trenton, the difference in education and class between the African braiders and Ifemelu is noticeable. While Ifemelu just eats an organic granola bar, which is “no real food” to the braiders and which they put down to her living in the US for fifteen years, the braiders order greasy food from a Chinese restaurant and eat standing up while watching TV. Both representations are exaggerated and seem to hint to the rapid Americanization of migrants. Although to them, their eating habits seem very different, they are in fact just two sides of the same coin (Adichie 103). Uju, who is presented as an unsettled character from the beginning, goes even so far as to allow Dike chicken nuggets for breakfast on special occasions (Adichie 183) and “[at] the grocery store, Auntie Uju never bought what she needed; instead she bought what was on sale and made herself need it” (Adichie 108).

Beside food habits, the Western view on body weight is also satirically displayed. Ojiugo, a Nigerian woman, who lives in Britain, where she gained a lot of weight, decides to join the weight watchers, but is indignant over their attitude: “I’m not going there again. They treat you as if you have a mental problem. I said no, I don’t have any internal issues, please, I just like the taste of food” (Adichie 244). Moreover, it shows what migration did to Ojiugo, who was a stylish girl and in good shape back in Nigeria. Ever since she is in Britain, the only thing she cares for is the education of her children, while she has no goals for herself anymore.

Ifemelu’s breakup from Blaine highlights food as a potent factor in the framing of identity. During their relationship, she loves that he is cooking for her and that he is making her live healthier. However, after they separate, she feels the urge to rip off the identity he has given her and buys ten chocolate bars, in order to eat them on Uju’s couch. “It had given her pleasure, buying chocolate bars from the news-stand, cheap bars filled with sugar and chemicals and other genetically modified ghastly things” (Adichie 348).

After their return to Nigeria, Obinze and Ifemelu find a food culture that has developed a lot, during the thirteen years that she has been absent. It has opened up to Western influences. Obinze is shocked when he comes back from London and notices how fat all his friends had become, but then he “realized that they were the new middle class that [the] democracy created [...] They can afford to drink a lot more beer and to eat out” (Adichie 430). But when Ifemelu claims to have got fat too, Obinze objects: “[Y]ou’re not fat. You are being very American about that. What Americans consider fat can just be normal” (Adichie 430). A curious situation in a restaurant shows how the Nigerian food industry is somewhat lagging behind and how Ifemelu’s attitude towards food has been altered in the US. She asks a waiter if they use real potatoes to make chips and the waiter is rather offended, because of course they are “the frozen imported ones.” Obinze explains to Ifemelu that (Adichie 444):

[r]eal potatoes are backward for him. Remember this is our newly middle-class world. We haven’t completed the first cycle of prosperity, before going back to the beginning again, to drink milk from the cow’s udder.

Obinze takes Ifemelu to many different restaurants, all with foreign food, which is very expensive, but she never seems to be satisfied with their offer. Interestingly, she is buying ‘akara’ from a street hawker, which she does not even like, but is content: “because this is real enterprise. She’s selling what she makes. She’s not selling the location or the source of her oil or the name of the person that grounds the beans” (Adichie 443). In an ironic way, this scene

underlines that Ifemelu looks at the culture of her homeland with completely different eyes after having spent 13 years in the US. Although she occasionally aches for American food too, Ifemelu makes fun of the returnees' complaints about Nigerian food on her blog. According to her: "Nigeria is not a nation of people with food allergies, not a nation of picky eaters for whom food is about distinctions and separation. It is a nation of people who eat beef and chicken and cow skin and intestines and dried fish in a single bowl of fish" (Adichie 421). In the 'Nigerpolitan club' the members discuss how they are missing "good customer service" because "Folks here behave as if they were doing you a favour by serving you." On the other hand, they mock the overly friendly waiters in America who were "hovering you and bothering you all the time. *Are you still working on that?* Since when did eating become work?" (Adichie 408). Ifemelu whose way of thinking is very similar to the members of the "Nigerpolitan club" who she ridicules on her blog, fights against this haughty attitude and also enjoys the traditional Nigerian food, which gives her a sensation of home: "[O]nly when she began to eat her mother's stew, an oil layer floating on top of the pureed tomatoes, did she realize how much she had missed it" (Adichie 397).

3.2.3 Education

From the first paragraph of the novel, the reader understands how important the role of education is to Adichie and the characters of her novel. The fact that the first word of *Americanah* is "Princeton" does not only hint to the weight of education in general, but by evoking thoughts of high quality tertiary education, the author makes clear that her novel is not about migrants who struggle to survive, but about people who try to thrive on many different levels of their lives.

As Adichie does not only deal with education in school and university, but also in the context of the family, I will divide this section into formal and informal education.

3.2.3.1 Formal Education

In Nigeria

The novel conveys how education is a controversial issue in Nigeria, as it is both, neglected and crucial at the same time. On the one hand, Nigerian schools are poor. The government

invests poorly and the Nigerian curriculum is not valued by Nigerians. But on the other hand, having a good education, especially if it is from a foreign school, or even better a degree from abroad, opens many doors.

When Obinze and Kosi are looking at primary schools for their daughter Buchi, the issue is visualized. Among their rich friends, it is logical to send one's children to a foreign school and so the only decision to take is between a French or an English curriculum. Obinze gets annoyed and speaks up: "Didn't we all go to primary schools that taught the Nigerian curriculum?" (Adichie 29). Although, he too, wants his child to go to a good school and good obviously means not Nigerian, he feels the urge to object. He "felt like an intruder in his new circle, of people who believed that the latest schools, the latest curriculums, would ensure the wholeness of their children. He did not share their certainties." When he was younger he had always envied Nigerians with foreign education and accents, but now that he entered in their midst, "he had come to sense an unvoiced yearning in them, a sad search for something they could never find. He did not want a well-educated child enmeshed in insecurities" (Adichie 29). By adding the opinion of rich people about Nigerian schools, Adichie shows once more the gap in Nigerian society: "If you decide to disadvantage your child by sending her to one of these schools with half-naked Nigerian teachers, then you only have yourself to blame" (Adichie 29).

Ifemelu's family is neither rich nor well-educated; still she went to a good private school, with many rich students. Although she was popular, she was aware that she was very different from her classmates who had foreign passports and travelled often. She knew "[s]he would not be here, if she had not done so well on the entrance examination and if her father had not been so determined that she would go to 'a school that builds both character and career'" (Adichie 66). As in contrast, the primary school she attended was for simple people like her.

While the impact of foreign schools on a child's job opportunities is undoubted, Adichie sheds critical light on the learning outcomes these schools produce. When a mother asks the headmistress of a British school why her child "was not yet doing much of mathematics and English" while her "niece goes to a school on the mainland and at age six she could spell 'onomatopoeia'", the headmistress did not even consider it worth the effort to explain it to her. She just haughtily utters that their "approach [was] more conceptual" (Adichie 374).

Nigerian universities suffer from the same problems as the school system, namely a lack of prestige and money. That is why university professors see themselves forced to strike in order

to get paid enough. Students on the other hand feel betrayed and demonstrate against professors. Obinze's mother, a committed university professor at Nsukka University explains to Obinze and Ifemelu: "I understand the students' grievances, but we are not the enemy. The military is the enemy. They have not paid our salary in months. How can we teach if we cannot eat?" (Adichie 91). Although strikes are on the agenda of Nigerian universities, in Obinze and Ifemelu's first year, they last longer than usual, students are sent back home, newspapers talk about "the agreements that were trampled in the dust by government men whose children were schooling abroad" and "[e]veryone was talking about leaving". Years later, the situation at Nigerian universities had apparently become even worse, since during the last conversation of Obinze with his mother, she seemed depressed about her job, saying: "Nobody publishes in international journals [...] Nobody goes to conferences. It's like a shallow, muddy pond that we are all wallowing in" (Adichie 370).

By showing the drawbacks of the educational system due to bad politics in Nigeria, the author of *Americanah* makes sure to present how people in her homeland react to it. She shows how committed professors become depressed and students with potential leave the country, while Nigeria badly needs the engagement of exactly those people.

In the United States and Britain

Adichie's uncertainty about the value of Western schools is expressed again, when Ifemelu asks Dike, who goes to an American private school, what they were doing in school and he just answers: "'Circles.' They would sit on the floor in a circle and share their favourite things" (Adichie 112). It was then, that she came to the conviction that "American children learned nothing in elementary school" and so she decides to teach him mathematics. She tutors and tortures him all summer long and it is just after some years that he admits that her help is what made him succeed in mathematics. However, not only the quality of schools, but also that of universities is questioned. At the beginning of Ifemelu's studies in the US, she cannot believe how easy her classes are, how "they talk about films here as if films were as important as books" and how "almost everybody gets an A" (Adichie 136). Furthermore, the cultural clash of Ifemelu's Nigerian upbringing with the American education system is obvious. Her main problem was with "participation", as it seems strange to her that people are trained to "always say something in class, no matter what" and to never admit not to know the answer (Adichie 134).

Besides the quality of higher education, the author also implicitly criticises that in the US education is all about business. Ifemelu first gets aware of it, when she is unable to pay tuition fee and receives threatening letters on a daily basis (Adichie 132). This feeling grows even stronger when she is supposed to buy a lot of textbooks which she cannot afford and decides to borrow them from a fellow student to copy everything. It is a condescending system, because “it stung her, to beg others” (Adichie 135).

When later, Ifemelu holds a fellowship at Princeton and she attends the seminar of a professor and friend called Boubacar, she is startled about the fact that his students browse the internet during class. He however, remains unaffected (Adichie 341):

They do not doubt their presence here [...] They believe they should be here, they have earned it and they are paying for it. *Au fond*, they have bought us all. It is the key to American greatness, this hubris. [...] That is why they do not understand why they should be grateful to have me stand before them.

All the same, Ifemelu really likes going to Princeton: “She liked most of all, that in this place of affluent ease, she could pretend to be someone else, someone specially admitted into a hallowed American club, someone adorned with certainty” (Adichie 3). This exemplifies how her education gives her another identity; in fact it throws her into the position to choose another identity.

Education and Matters of Migration

The novel also draws attention to just how much many migrants care for the education of their children. The children of Nicholas, a friend of Obinze who also moved to London, go to a private school, learn instruments and also have a French tutor. They spend all their money for Nna and Nne’s education and seem to dedicate their lives to their children’s career. The fact that a Western education is a guarantee for a good job in Nigeria makes parents put their children under a lot of pressure. When Nne speaks to her mother in her very British accent, Ojiugo says: “You see how she sounds so posh? Ha! My daughter will go places. That is why all our money is going to Brentwood School” (Adichie 241).

When Ifemelu decides to go back to Lagos, she browses through Nigerian websites and profiles “and each click brought yet another story of a young person who had recently moved back home, clothed in American or British degrees, to start an investment company, a music production business, a fashion label, a magazine, a fast-food franchise” (Adichie 6). The author makes sure to emphasize that a foreign degree can really heave someone to a better place, but at the same time relativizes the impact of the education itself. It is not what they

have learned abroad, but the fact that they have done it abroad. Many migrants probably had a miserable life, like Obinze in London, but once they come back they have gained respect and status to find a well-paid position or start a business in Nigeria.

While showing that education can be a door opener in many cases, the author also hints to the function of education as a gatekeeper. When Uju, a practising doctor in Nigeria, takes her medical exam for the US, she fails, because “they weren’t testing actual knowledge, they were testing our ability to answer tricky multiple-choice questions” (Adichie 109). Here, education is used to segregate those whom they do not want, by a seemingly objective test. It shows how education can on the one hand give identity to a person, but on the other hand, this identity can simply be crushed by not acknowledging it in another country.

3.2.3.2 Informal Education

Many different scenes in *Americanah* illustrate the difficulty of raising one’s children far from one’s own homeland. Uju’s neighbour Jane, from Grenada, tells Ifemelu: “The hardest thing is raising my kids. Look at Elizabeth, I have to be very careful with her. If you’re not careful in this country, your kids become what you don’t know. It’s different back home because you can control them. Here, no” (Adichie 112). Interestingly, she then adds that she wants to move to a better neighbourhood and send her children to a better school, in order that they would not start “behaving like these black Americans” (Adichie 112). This demonstrates that Jane finds herself in a third space, where she does not truly belong. Although she objectively is part of the group of Black Americans, she does not identify with it. Her children yet are in another level of this third space which is unfamiliar to their parents and so the gap between the generations widens and the relationship becomes more complex.

Besides the difficulty of raising children in a foreign country, the differences of raising kids in Nigeria and America are addressed at several occasions. When Laura’s child Athena is crying, Laura offers her many different toys in different colours, asking her to choose one. For Ifemelu, who enjoyed a simple Nigerian upbringing “[t]o overwhelm a child of four with choices, to lay on her the burden of making decisions, was to deprive her of the bliss of childhood” (Adichie 167). In Adichie’s representation, American children live in abundance, but they do not get the tools to lead a healthy life. A very relevant scene as far as interculturality is concerned happens at Ifemelu’s babysitting job in Kimberly’s family. Kimberly’s child Morgan is very difficult to get close to, that is why her parents try very hard

to please her and avoid challenging her. Ifemelu on the other hand acts cold around her, but in the end, it is just Ifemelu she listens to. In Nigeria, parents are a lot stricter with their children than in the US. This shows how a different cultural influence can implicitly solve problems, without provoking a cultural clash. Sometimes another cultural background figures as the change of attitude needed.

3.2.4 Jobs and Money

Americanah includes a lot of information about finding jobs, as well as about being rich or poor in Nigeria and abroad as a migrant. From an intercultural perspective, these aspects are very relevant, as they relate cultural backgrounds with fundamental existential questions.

The Nigerian job market is presented as being weak and very corrupt. Especially qualified people in the novel are virtually forced to go abroad, because they cannot find eligible posts. Auntie Uju for example studied medicine, but when she graduates, all of her colleagues go abroad “to take the American medical exams or the British exams, because the other choice was to tumble into a parched wasteland of joblessness” (Adichie 45). Uju though wants to stay in Lagos and open a clinic on the Island. What happens to her is only one example of what Adichie presents to be commonplace in Nigeria. On a party, Uju meets a very rich general of the military regime and succumbs to an affair with him. He lives with Uju during the week, but goes back to his family on the weekends (Adichie 74). When Ifemelu’s parents are not able to pay their rent and ask Uju for help, they find out that she has no money, because as she explains: “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” (Adichie 76). Adichie shows that many Nigerian women are treated like servants and are controlled through money and fancy gifts: “It’s such a transactional city [...] Depressingly transactional. Even relationships, they’re transactional” (Adichie 430). Uju’s strong dependency is underlined once more when the general dies, shortly after the delivery of their common child Dike. Uju is immediately chased out of the General’s house, being left with neither job, nor money, nor a place to live (Adichie 85-87).

Using the example of Obinze, the author shows how even the most honest and good people are not immune to the forces of the job market they are exposed to. Thus, when Obinze goes abroad and has to clean toilets, the reader does not judge him. On the contrary, Adichie rather makes her readers compassionately follow his struggle and understand his ordeal as a migrant.

Later, when he gets involved in a shady Nigerian business and becomes rich, the author still presents it in a way that the reader does not blame it on Obinze's character, but rather on the system. Interculturally speaking, this is very important, since it illustrates that culture-specific opportunities are a big influence on how people behave and so Adichie weakens stereotypes that especially Western readers might have. In the following, I will present and analyse the account of Obinze's career in more detail.

When Obinze graduates from university, his mother arranges for him to go to London. After he arrives, he starts working as a cleaner in an office building, but after some time he feels "smaller and smaller [...] it became a personal affront, a punch on his jaw. And all this for three quid an hour" (Adichie 237) and so he decides to quit the job and ask his cousin Iloba for help instead. Iloba has a friend called Vincent, who gives his national assurance number to Obinze and asks for a share of his salary in return. Although Obinze is happy to find a better job at a warehouse, he lives in constant fear that the fraud might be disclosed. A specific scene illustrates Obinze's daily anxiety very well. One day Obinze enters the warehouse and "[t]he men avoided his eyes, an unnatural stiffness in their movements, and Nigel turned swiftly, too swiftly towards the toilet when he saw Obinze. They knew" (Adichie 260). Actually, his fellow workers just prepare a surprise for his birthday, which leaves Obinze "nauseous from relief" (Adichie 260). Adichie illustrates very well, how a person like Obinze with high ambitions and intellectual capabilities is forced unto his knees by the psychological pressure of illegal work. After some months, Vincent asks Obinze for a raise, which he is not able to grant him, so Vincent threatens to call his boss. At first, Obinze is convinced that Vincent is just bluffing, but unfortunately he is not. One day, the boss of the warehouse calls Obinze and says: "Somebody called yesterday. Said you're not who you say you are, that you're illegal and working with a Brit's name. [...] Why don't you just bring in your passport tomorrow and we'll clear it up, all right?" (Adichie 261). When Obinze tries to marry an Angolan woman in order to receive a legal residence permission, his worst nightmare comes true and he is really discovered, put in detention and finally sent back to Nigeria like a criminal (Adichie 278-284). The author shows how this incidence crushes Obinze's pride and how he loses all his confidence in the future. The desperation triggered by his experiences in London makes him vulnerable to the corruptive business in Nigeria.

When Obinze is back in Lagos, the reader gets a good picture of how people become rich in Nigeria. Obinze's cousin Nneoma, forces him to go to a party of the very rich Chief, as she thinks he could help Obinze to find a job. Here, the representation of the Nigerian rich is very

conspicuous: “Chief was sitting on a glided chair that looked like a throne, sipping cognac and surrounded by guests.” He has gathered a lot of people around him, who were all “wearing the uniform of the Lagos youngish and wealthyish – leather slippers, jeans and open-neck tight shirts, all with familiar designer logos – but there was, in their manner, the ploughing eagerness of men in need” (Adichie 24). One evening, Chief explains to Obinze how he makes good deals: “I was Babangida’s friend. I was Abacha’s friend. Now that the military has gone, Obasanjo is my friend. [...] Do you know why? Is it because I am stupid?” (Adichie 26). Obinze keeps attending Chief’s parties, eating with him and his guests, because “[t]hey fascinated him, the unsubtle cowering of the almost rich in the presence of the rich; to have money, it seemed, was to be consumed by money. Obinze felt repulsion and longing”. And so, one day, feeling high, Obinze offers his services to Chief, and immediately self-analyses his behaviour: “His own words surprised him. He had stepped out of himself. [...] He was in Lagos and he had to hustle” (Adichie 25).

Obinze’s cousin describes his job as “evaluation consulting” (Adichie 26), which means he undervalues properties, then buys them and sells half of it for the purchase price and registers his own company. Nnemoa is sure that soon he will have a house in Lekki, some cars and be able to get huge loans at any bank. Striking is the fact that she also advises him to get a white manager for his company: “You will see how many doors will open for you because you have an oyinbo General Manager” (Adichie 27). This hints to the tragic fact that the superiority of white men is so deeply rooted in Nigerians that its legitimacy is not even questioned. Thus, being white stands for quality and trust. Everything works out for Obinze just like his cousin predicted and he becomes rich overnight, moves to a fancy neighbourhood and marries a beautiful upper-class wife. However, Obinze’s ironic self-reflexion conveys the reader that Obinze is still the same person: “it had startled him, too, how easy many other things became, how even just the semblance of wealth oiled his paths.” His perspective is very distinctive at this point of the story - although he just does what is on the agenda in Nigeria, he questions his decisions: “It brought to him a disorienting strangeness, because his mind had not changed at the same pace as his life, and he felt a hollow space between himself and the person he was supposed to be” (Adichie 27).

One day, Obinze explains to Ifemelu how having money in Lagos changes things for you: “People treat you differently [...] it’s so fake and so garish [...], but sometimes you start believing a little bit of it yourself and sometimes you see yourself differently” (Adichie 431). Like in many scenes before, the author makes it clear that when people are exposed to a

system for a long time, they start adapting to it gradually, no matter how strong their personalities are. Therefore, Obinze states: "Ifem, I do what rich people are supposed to do. I pay school fees for a hundred students in my village and my mum's village" (Adichie 438). During this discussion, he also makes an interesting statement about the mentality of Nigerians in general: "One of the things I've learned is that everybody in this country has the mentality of scarcity. We imagine that even the things that are not scarce are scarce. And it breeds a kind of desperation in everybody. Even the wealthy" (Adichie 431). Again, Adichie first points to the ills of society, but then makes sure to give reasons for it, in order to make her readers understand and to prevent them from judging Nigerians.

Although Ifemelu's story is very different from Obinze's, there are also a lot of parallels. When Ifemelu arrives in the US, she expects to be able to work, which she is not, since she only has a student visa. Thus, just like Obinze in England, she gets the social security card of an African friend of Uju (Adichie 106). In her first summer, she applies for numerous jobs without even getting responses "and for this she blamed herself" (Adichie 131). Adichie shows how already in the first months after arriving in America, Ifemelu's strong personality starts to lose its shape. One day, Ifemelu has a job interview with an old tennis coach who needs someone to help him relax and pays a hundred dollars a day, which makes her leave in horror (Adichie 143). After she cannot even afford to eat anymore, Obinze sends her money from Nigeria, which deeply hurts Ifemelu's pride. Finding herself in this really desperate place, Ifemelu makes a horrible experience which figures as a kind of turning point in the novel. The psychological impact the scene has on Ifemelu will later on be taken up again in the section about romantic relationships. As last resort in order to pay her rent, Ifemelu decides to call the tennis coach and earn the one hundred dollars for her rent. She immediately announces that she will not have sex with him, but he says: "Just come here and lie down. Keep me warm. I'll touch you a little bit, nothing you'll be uncomfortable with. I just need some human contact to relax" (Adichie 153). After she leaves, she feels as miserable as never in her life. She is in shock, disgusted by her own body and just wishes to go home to Lagos. "She felt like a small ball, adrift and alone" (Adichie 154). This incidence exemplifies how migrants often have to go places where they never could have imagined themselves in their homeland. Uju's indifferent reaction to Ifemelu's experience, illustrates how cold some years of living in the US have made her already. Later, Ifemelu finally gets a job as a nanny with the rich Kimberly and her family (Adichie 157).

Even after her graduation, Ifemelu has a very hard time finding a job. Like all of her immigrant friends, she applies for numerous jobs, but whenever employers find out that she has no citizenship, they know they would “have to descend into the dark tunnel of immigration paperwork.” Strikingly, she gets a job at the spot, after Curt, her rich white boyfriend helps her and just makes a few calls. Ifemelu is happy to have a job, but “a soberness wrapped itself around her”, she feels like “a pink balloon, weightless, floating to the top, propelled by things outside herself”. Having this job, does not feel like an achievement to Ifemelu, because she is just lucky enough to have the right white guy who makes things happen to her. All her efforts did not pay off, just surrendering to the corruptive system does. Curt “could, with a few calls, rearrange the world, have things slide into the spaces that he wanted them to.” The situation leaves Ifemelu’s idealistic and ambitious character unsatisfied and the reader understands how difficult it is for the two to have a balanced relationship. Of course, Curt wants to share his privileges with his girlfriend, but on the other hand it constantly shows Ifemelu what she lacks and that this glamorous world of his would never be hers (Adichie 202).

After her breakup with Curt, Ifemelu starts writing a blog entitled “Raceteenth or Curious Observation by a Non-American Black on the Subject of Blackness in America” (Adichie 296). Unexpectedly, the blog is going really well, people love it, comment on her posts and want to support her. She gets invited by various universities and companies to give talks about diversity or lead workshops (Adichie 303). After she gives a talk in a company in Ohio which only white people attend, she seems to have upset some participants with her talk, as she gets an email saying: “*YOUR TALK WAS BALONEY. YOU ARE A RACIST. YOU SHOULD BE GRATEFUL WE LET YOU INTO THIS COUNTRY*“. This is when Ifemelu understands, what they really want from her, namely “to leave people feeling good about themselves [... and so] she began to say what they wanted to hear, none of which she would ever write on her blog” (Adichie 305). Her behaviour is very controversial and influenced by diverse cultural factors. On the one hand, she is happy to reach people with her blog, to spread her thoughts about sensitive racial issues and make people rethink their attitudes, but on the other hand, she makes a lot of money with her blog. She can even afford a new apartment and hire a personal assistance. In fact, she puts earning money above her ideals and morals. In order to earn money through giving speeches and seminars, she contents herself with just telling people what they want to hear. In every case, she is profiting from the famous endless possibilities of the US and serves as an example of a successful immigration story.

After her return to Nigeria, Ifemelu has no problems finding a job. She applies to the women's lifestyle magazine *Zoe* and is hired at once. The interview situation is revealing, as Ifemelu is invited to the home of her boss, Auntie Onenu. She is very rich and runs the magazine as a hobby. She makes her attitude towards returnees clear when she proudly announces: "My new features editor has come from America!" (Adichie 391). Ifemelu "thought the home visit unprofessional and odd, but this was a small magazine, and this was Nigeria, where boundaries were blurred, where work blended into life, and bosses were called Mummy. Besides, she already imagined taking over the running of *Zoe*" (Adichie 392). Although Ifemelu seems to ridicule the woman who takes it for granted that returnees from the US are more competent than girls from Lagos, she looks at the magazine with a haughty attitude and an exaggerated self-confidence. But again, the treatment she experiences makes her behave like that. Ranyinudo who accompanies her says: "Talking to your new boss like that, ha! If you had not come from America, she would have fired you immediately" (Adichie 393). This assimilation to the surroundings also works the other way round: When Ifemelu has her bathroom renovated and is not satisfied with the work the Nigerian man has done, she gets really angry and shouts at the worker: "Do you know who I am? You don't know who I am, that is why you can do this kind of rubbish work for me!" and Ranyinudo says with approval: "You are no longer behaving like an Americanah!" (Adichie 393/394). The reader can follow how Ifemelu is gradually adapting to the Nigerian way of doing business. Her behaviour is not even judged, because there appears to be no other way in this society.

Nevertheless, after some months, Ifemelu's idealism makes her quit the corruptive magazine, which pays all their interview partners and she decides to start a blog with the name "*The Small Redemptions of Lagos*" (Adichie 420). The blog is very successful, but in Lagos, where many of her readers know her, she cannot blog just as anonymously as in the US. One time for example, she hurts her friend Ranyinudo with an entry about Nigerian women with rich boyfriends and so, she often ends up in delicate situation.

One issue that comes up repeatedly is that in the world of jobs and money, pride is often luxury. If people need a job, they often have to pay with their pride and keep their idealistic worldview in control. A good example is when Ifemelu's father is fired for refusing to call his boss Mummy, which apparently shows respect. This hints to the importance of family and its hierarchy which is very different from European societies, where it would be considered offensive to call one's boss 'Mummy' (Adichie 46). Ifemelu's father steps up for himself, but in the end it is himself who suffers from his stubbornness. And after some months of

unemployment, his wife tells him: “If you have to call somebody mummy to get your salary, you should have done so!” (Adichie 46). In this scene, the author illustrates very well how people get broken by the system and are so made obedient.

Another example of the fact that pride is a luxury good in harsh financial times, is when Obinze sees himself forced to ask his old classmate Emenike for money (Adichie 266):

To be given money in the Nigerian manner was to have it pushed into your hands, fists closed, eyes averted from yours, your effusive thanks and it had to be effusive – waved away, and you certainly did not count the money, sometimes did not even look at it until you were alone.

As in contrast, when Emenike hands him the money, he even gives him double and says he does not have to give it back to him and even asks him to count it. But Obinze was in great need and so he thinks by himself: “if this was what it took, counting a cash gift while Emenike watched with power in his gaze, then so be it” (Adichie 266).

Another point of intercultural interest comes up, when Ranyiundo talks to Ifemelu about an old friend called Mekkus Parara who “has major money now, but it is dirty money. You know all these guys who do fraud in London and America, then run back to Nigeria with the money and build houses in Victoria Garden city.” A friend of them who works at the bank told her that he never came to the bank in person, but “used to send his boys with Ghana Must Go bags to carry ten million today, twenty million tomorrow” (Adichie 389). On the one hand the scene is revealing as far as the working of Nigerian businesses are concerned, but on the other hand the author also brings up ‘Ghana Must Go bags’. The strong red and blue plastic bags with a zipper and two handles, possessed by most Nigerians and Ghanaians have a historic relevance, because in the political unrest of 1983, millions of Ghanaian refugees had to flee Nigeria overnight and were forced to pack their stuff into these bags which were from then on called ‘Ghana Must Go bags’. The fact that Mekkus Parara carries his money in those huge zip-lock bags, hints to his carelessness with money and the politically incorrect deals he makes.

3.2.5 Romantic Relationships

Analysing the romantic relationships presented in the novel, reveals a lot about Interculturality and Adichie’s attitude towards it. As the most emotional aspect of life, the love various characters perceive for each other tells a lot about the limits of intercultural understanding. The story gives evidence of two contrasting views, at the one hand that love

can cross all borders and on the other hand that cultural ties are extremely strong and hard to cut. Being the extreme form of human understanding and friendship, I will analyse now the various romantic love relations presented in *Americanah*.

3.2.5.1 Ifemelu and Obinze

One of the central elements of the story is the relationship between Obinze and Ifemelu. It gives a narrative frame to the novel, holds various parts together in its own confusing way and gives meaning to their content. Although Obinze and Ifemelu's love story is not a cross-cultural one in the sense that they both belong to different cultures, it is maybe relevant for my thesis exactly because of the fact that they both have the same cultural background. Adichie presents their relationship to be the strongest and most positive bond between two people in the whole story and this is certainly not by accident. Furthermore, both of the characters spend most of the period covered apart from each other, they have a lot of experiences abroad in different cultures which change them; however, in the end they stay the same at their core and somehow find their way back together in the end.

Interestingly, the reader gets introduced to two of the most important men in Ifemelu's life already in the first chapter which is told from Ifemelu's perspective and set relatively late in the story, namely just before she goes back to Nigeria. It becomes clear that Obinze is one of the main reasons why she wants to return to Nigeria and that although it was her who cut the contact many years ago, she never stopped loving him: "Nigeria became where she was supposed to be [...] And, of course, there was also Obinze. Her first love, her first lover, the only person she had never felt the need to explain herself" to (Adichie 6). Furthermore, the first pages also reveal a lot about her relationship with Blaine, her African American boyfriend, which she just ended: "It was simply that layer after layer of discontent had settled in her, and formed a mass that now propelled her", she feels "that her relationship with him was like being content in a house but always sitting by the window and looking out" (Adichie 7). Even though the reader does not know the first thing about the two characters, Blaine and Obinze, they already get a strong sense of the role these men play in Ifemelu's life. Obinze is presented in a very positive light and with a focus on their happy time together, while no information about their break up is provided. On the other hand, we only learn why Ifemelu was unhappy with Blaine and how they broke up. In strong contrast to the feelings Ifemelu claims to have for Obinze, what she feels for Blaine seems trivial and superficial. She does

not mention any cultural explanations, but her equation of Obinze with home might hint to the importance of shared cultural values. This introduction will later always be in the back of the reader's mind, when they learn more about Ifemelu's relationships.

At the beginning of the second chapter, seen through the eyes of Obinze, he receives the first letter from Ifemelu after long years of silence and the way he reacts, his feelings for Ifemelu are evident. He is thrilled about the fact that she calls him 'Ceiling' and explains where the name came from. In secondary school, "the first time she let him take off her bra, she lay on her back moaning softly" and later told him: "My eyes were open, but I could not see the ceiling" (Adichie 20). The way his thoughts are described in this passage illustrate his longing for her.

Obinze and Ifemelu get to know each other in secondary school, when Obinze moves to Lagos from Nuskka with his mother. Their classmates want to set up Obinze with the beautiful Ginika, but somehow he has only eyes for Ifemelu and so they soon get together (Adichie 55-57). A key moment describing their relationship is when Ifemelu "felt, for the first time, what she would often feel with him: a self-affection. He made her like herself. With him, she was at ease; her skin felt as though it was her right size." It helped them that both "their hometowns were in Anambra State. He was from Abba and she was from Umuunnachi and the towns were minutes away from each other" (Adichie 61), which hints to the fact that their cultural similarities brought them close in the first place. Although they are very young, their relationship seems mature, emancipated, equal and respectful. Ifemelu does not dare to tell her parents that she has a boyfriend, but nevertheless spends a lot of time with Obinze and his mother at their place. His mother, a university professor, is very open-minded and raised Obinze in a very modern way. Unlike other Nigerian men in the novel, Obinze is therefore very respectful with women, knows how to cook and loves Ifemelu for her character rather than her appearance.

They stay together even after Ifemelu goes abroad and at the beginning they keep talking, she writes him long emails and they talk on the phone sometimes: "They said 'soon' to each other often", which was vague and satisfied them for the moment (Adichie 118). After the incident with the tennis coach, described in the previous chapter, Ifemelu ends the contact with Obinze. As already mentioned the experience traumatizes Ifemelu and is a watershed in the story. Her trust in the world and in men is broken; she feels lonely and cannot accept the help that Obinze certainly would have offered her (Adichie 160).

At first she gave herself a month. A month to let her self-loathing seep away, then she would call Obinze. But a month passed and still she kept Obinze sealed in silence, gagged her own mind so that she would think of him as little as possible. She still deleted his e-mails unread. [...] She would have to tell him what happened, and she could not bear the thought of telling him what happened. She felt ashamed; she felt failed.

Obinze does not understand what is going on with Ifemelu and suffers badly: “He changed, curled more inwardly into himself. He was, by turns, inflamed by anger, twisted by confusion, withered by sadness” (Adichie 237). However, he keeps sending e-mails and letters to Ifemelu for a very long time and also contacts her friends and her mother, but the wall Ifemelu built inside herself would only be broken many years later. It is the death of Obinze’s mother that brings Ifemelu back from her silence and she tells him in a mail: “*She was everything I wanted to be.*” When Obinze responds, he admits to Ifemelu: “*It’s strange how I felt, with every major event that has occurred in my life, that you were the only person who would understand*” (Adichie 371).

3.2.5.2 Excursus: Obinze and Kosi

In the novel, Ifemelu and Obinze’s relationship stands alone, as it is the one relationship that outlasts all the difficult periods the two protagonists go through. Although one could argue, that it is due to the fact that they are both Nigerian, that their relationship is so much deeper than all the relations Ifemelu has with American men, Obinze’s marriage with Kosi serves as counterexample. He married Kosi in the first rush of his new wealth. At the time, he was very surprised that he was able to get a wife as pretty as her: “If he could be with her, so extraordinarily beautiful and yet so ordinary, predictable and domestic and dedicated, then perhaps his life would start to seem believably his” (Adichie 459). From the first passage she appears, it is evident, though, that Obinze does not feel real affection for her. He is a good man and therefore treats her well and with respect, but he does not truly love her. Unlike the representation of Nigerian men who, so to say, buy beautiful women by offering them all the presents they want, he does not contend himself with just beauty and modesty. Together with Kosi he lives in a nice house, with furniture imported from Italy, their two years old daughter Buchi, a nanny and a housewife, but nevertheless “he was no longer sure [...] whether he liked his life”. He begins to “feel bloated from all he had acquired” and “from time to time, be overcome by the urge to prick everything with a pin, to deflate it all, to be free” (Adichie 21). After Ifemelu’s return, Obinze starts seeing her a lot and invents bad excuses for Kosi. When finally, he forces himself to tell Kosi that he is in love with Ifemelu and that he wants the

divorce, she goes on her knees and says: “Obinze this is family. [...] We have a child. She needs you. I need you. We have to keep this family together. [...] Do you think you can just destroy this family because your old girlfriend came into town?” This reaction of Kosi points to the function a relationship has to many Nigerian women who are dependent on their husband. Not love is the primary goal of a relationship, but the subsistence of the family. Obinze who was raised in a completely different way just “wished she was furious instead” and let her go (Adichie 464).

From the first time Ifemelu and Obinze see each other, it is clear they still love each other and soon spend all their time together. Ifemelu gets very jealous of Kosi and so Obinze tries to end his marriage. The novel ends with an open ending of their relationship. The last passage is representative of the nature of their relationship: nothing is really declared, but as their relationship was always built on trust and self-evidence, the reader is left with a hopeful feeling that they will find their way back together. In the respective scene, Obinze hands a letter to Ifemelu, saying: “It’s what I would like to know if I were you.” He writes that he had left Kosi: “I should never have married her. [...] I moved out of the house today. [...] Ifem, I’m chasing you. I’m going to chase you until you give this a chance.” And all she answers is “Ceiling [...] Come in” (Adichie 477).

3.2.5.3 Ifemelu and Curt

Ifemelu’s first American boyfriend is Kimberly’s cousin Curt from Maryland. He is handsome, very rich, and always in a good mood. He is immediately fascinated by Ifemelu’s exoticism and asks her out. After their first kiss, he already thinks they are in a relationship and although Ifemelu is astonished, she lets herself carry away: “perhaps they were indeed dating after one kiss since he was so sure that they were” (Adichie 193). Whenever she talks about Curt, she never mentions love, but rather that “his boyish enthusiasm fascinated her”(Adichie 193) or “[h]ow glorious it was, to be so wanted” by this man with “the cleft-chinned handsomeness of models in department store catalogues” or that she “began to like him, because he liked her” (Adichie 192). It is evident, that she does not really love Curt, but is proud that she, a Nigerian immigrant has a typical WASP as a boyfriend. With Curt, Ifemelu changes: “She became, in her mind, a woman free of knots and cares, a woman running in the rain with the taste of sun-warmed strawberries in her mouth” (Adichie 196). The way Ifemelu has been introduced to the reader, as a critical mind, her affection for Curt

does not seem very believable. Furthermore, Curt is presented in an exaggerated tone so that character traits that are usually connoted positively somehow seem ridiculous. Ifemelu talks about “his ebullience” (Adichie 197), says that “his optimism blinded her” (Adichie 196), that “Curt’s mother had a bloodless elegance” and describes her and Curt as “both blindingly golden-haired” (Adichie 198). Some passages make him even appear naïve: “He believed 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” (Adichie 197).

Moreover, when she imagines their marriage and pictures “their lives engraved in comfort” (Adichie 199) it is clear that she does not trust this unquestioning happiness. Ifemelu even addresses her internal change explicitly when she compares being Curt’s Girlfriend to “a role she slipped into as into a favourite, flattering dress” (Adichie 196) and a little later, that she “had slipped out of her old skin” (Adichie 200).

The problems caused by their different origins are sometimes worse than other times. Sometimes she feels that people do not approve of their relationship and the “look of people confronting a great tribal loss” (Adichie 292) stings her. Moreover, the attitude of Curt’s mother is very hard to handle for Ifemelu too. She is a very rich woman, who pretends that America is “colour-blind” (Adichie 293) and talks about her son as “her adventurer who would bring back exotic species”. She makes it clear that she “would tolerate anybody he liked, but she felt no obligation for affection” (Adichie 198). Ifemelu, who has already experienced a lot of racial assault, is not even angry at her: “I bet she’s an interesting woman is she’d just be herself. I don’t need her to over-assure me that she likes black people” (Adichie 293). However, even more than the incomprehension of people around them, Curt’s occasional ignorance hurts her. Sometimes, when she feels discriminated, she does not tell him what she thinks, “because she wished it were obvious to him [...] There were, simply, times that he saw and times that he was unable to see. She knew that she should tell him these thoughts, that not telling him cast a shadow over them both” (Adichie 294). This quote illustrates very well how difficult the communication in a cross-cultural relationship can get.

After Ifemelu cheats on Curt with the neighbour from upstairs, she tells Ginika that “[t]here was a feeling I wanted to feel that I did not feel” and she noticed that she “had not entirely believed herself while with him – happy, handsome Curt” (Adichie 287). It is, as if she awoke from a dream, which just when it came true, she realized was not truly hers.

3.2.5.4 Ifemelu and Blaine

With Ifemelu's third boyfriend Blaine, Adichie provides yet another point to complete the cultural analysis of love relationships. She had a Nigerian, a white American and now also a Black American boyfriend and the differences between them are evident. The author at the same time uses clichés, but always makes sure to break them a minute later.

Ifemelu and Blaine meet in the train to Connecticut, where they sit next to each other and engage into a conversation. Before she has to get off, Ifemelu gives him his number and shows once more her courage and decidedness. Blaine is an African American and works as an assistant professor at Yale, his main research interest being Southern Africa (Adichie 177). Eight years later, they meet at a Blogging conference at Brown University and soon afterwards get together. A year later, Ifemelu moves in with Blaine.

Her feelings for Blaine are very different from what she feels for Obinze. At the spot, Ifemelu is fascinated by Blaine, for his sophistication and although she unconsciously criticises his behaviour and attitude, she forgives him. She is enchanted by his humour, but mocks him for thinking they share a cultural background just because of their skin colour: "His use of 'they' suggested an 'us', which would be the both of them" (Adichie 177). Minutes after they meet it was already "as if he believed that they shared a series of intrinsic jokes that did not need to be verbalized" (Adichie 177). Her choice of words suggests that she is not really sharing this intimacy.

The description of Blaine is that of a typical upper-class academic. He only eats organic food, blended vegetables and informs her about the protein in different types of exotic grains. Ifemelu usually has little patience for people like that, because "their righteousness made her feel both irritated and lacking, but she was prepared to forgive Blaine's pities" (Adichie 178). While she loves Obinze for the sum of all his features and attitudes, she likes Blaine in spite of his flaws, motivated by her fascination for him, a sophisticated and well-off American.

Moreover, the reader gets the feeling that Ifemelu feels the need to be someone else in order to be loved by Blaine and that she is also willing to change for him. While she is presented as a very strong person, full of integrity, she seems to change in the presence of Blaine. "When he glanced at her magazine, she wished she had brought out the Esibia Irobi book of poems that she planned to read on the train back" (Adichie 178). Never before, Ifemelu thought about her actions a lot, she is rather presented as a person who speaks before she thinks about it and just blindly follows her instincts. Now her thoughts circle around Blaine, thus when he

laughs “it pleased her to have made him laugh” and when she comes home “she thought it was best to wait for a few hours” before calling him (Adichie 181). Their relationship is presented as being marvellous, like a dream, the other side of the coin being its unreality. When they surprisingly meet again eight years after their first meeting in the train, Ifemelu is in wonder “because her life has become a charmed film in which people found each other again” (Adichie 308). After a while of being with him “she began to floss, as she began to do other things that he did – going to the gym, eating more protein than carbohydrates – and she did them with a kind of grateful contentment, because they improved her” (Adichie 311).

The couple conveys the impression of being satisfied and being good for each other; however, Blaine is not described as a very likeable character. Although nothing about him seems to be especially bad, there is at the same time nothing that makes him appear interesting as a person. His flaws are highlighted with irony which makes it hard to take sides with him. Examples of his unflattering description are when his eyes “announced the high-mindedness of their owner”, when Ifemelu thinks by herself that “he was not the sort of person to do things improbably” (Adichie 309) or that “he did not have a normal spine but had, instead, a firm reed of goodness” (Adichie 310). One phrase illustrates the kind of feelings Ifemelu nourishes for Blaine very poignantly: “He knew about everything; she was intimidated by this and proud of this and slightly repelled by this” (Adichie 310). Overall, it is clear to the readers in every sentence that their relationship is just an episode.

3.2.5.5 Comparison of Ifemelu’s Relationships

To sum up the analysis of Ifemelu’s romantic relationships, it stands out that when she is with Obinze, she trusts her instincts, when she is with Curt she stops thinking altogether and when she is with Blaine she starts overthinking everything. Thus, her relationship with Obinze seems most natural. On the one hand, this could be because of their similar upbringing, on the other hand it may just mean that their individual characters fit perfectly together. The author offers some directions in order to understand the complexity of cross-cultural relationships.

On a certain level intercultural understanding can be compared to romantic relationships. Out of love two people with a different background, upbringing, family, attitude and world view decide to form a union. They have to find a way to live with each other’s differences and so to say, form a third space which both can agree on. Several factors determine whether this bond is successful or not. If the partner’s understanding of the world is very similar from the

beginning, there is not a lot of compromises they have to find. However, similarity is not everything, the stronger the love is, the more people tend to overlook bad habits of their partner.

On a blogpost Ifemelu once expresses her thoughts about the potential of love concerning race (Adichie 296):

The simplest solution to the problem of race in America? Romantic love. Not friendship. Not the kind of safe, shallow love where the objective is that both people remain comfortable. But real deep romantic love, the kind that twists you and wrings you out and makes you breathe through the nostrils of your beloved.

Although, she adds that real love is rare, and so, “the problem of race in America will never be solved” (Adichie 296), she certainly states that love helps to adore things about someone else, even if they are very foreign. At the end of the story however, she underlines clearly the limits of love as cure, when Ifemelu says about her relationship with Blaine: “The thing about cross-cultural relationships is that you spend so much time explaining. [...] I sometimes wondered whether we would even have anything at all to say to each other if we were from the same place” (Adichie 457).

3.2.5.6 Romantic Relationships among Migrants

In *Americanah*, besides Ifemelu’s relationships, those of many other characters are described. When looking at the relationships presented, the message seems clear: once people migrate, the rules of dating change completely.

In the US, Uju is dating a man from Eziowelle, called Bartholomew, which is located close to Lagos. The first thing Ifemelu asks herself is “when had it started to matter to Auntie Uju that a man was from a hometown close to theirs?” (Adichie 115). Moreover, according to her, he is “jarringly unsuited for, and unworthy of, Auntie Uju”, as he is neither rich nor attractive. Ifemelu notices right away that he is from a simple and rural upbringing, which he “tried to compensate for with his American affectation, his gonnas and wannas”. Uju’s expectations of a man have changed, she now just wants a man in her house who takes care of the family and who shares her values: “Auntie Uju had settled merely for what was familiar” (Adichie 116). When Ifemelu overtly criticises him, her aunt gets angry: “[W]e are not in Nigeria, Ifem” (Adichie 118), which is a very curious statement. Before they migrated, they glorified America, now it seems the image has turned upside down.

Ojiugo's friend, living in London, gives evidence of the same phenomenon when she speaks of the man she is dating: "He is the kind of man I would never even look at in Nigeria, not to talk of going out with. The problem is that water never finds its different levels here in London" (Adichie 244).

3.2.5.7 Romantic Relationships in Nigeria

Apart from Ifemelu's and Obinze's very modern relationship, all the rest of the Nigerian relationships shown in the novel are traditional, patriarchal and superficial. Ranyinudo for example tells Ifemelu about her new love: "His name is Ndudi. Cool name, abi? You can't get more Igbo than that. And you should have seen his watch! He's into oil. His business card has Nigerian and international offices" (Adichie 387). Ranyinudo is also presented firm in the belief "that men existed only as sources of things" (Adichie 395). The man she is seeing flirts with Ifemelu at a party, although "he was not interested in her, not particularly; he was simply a big man in Lagos, she attractive and alone, any by the laws of their universe, he had to make a pass" (Adichie 413). While women are looking just for money and power when choosing a man, the men in return, expect a pretty girl that is easy to handle. The following quote by Ranyinudo illustrates this statement: "He said I am not the sweet girl I used to be, I changed." Ifem thinks about "the expression 'sweet girl'. Sweet girl meant that, for a long time, Don had mulded Ranyinudo into a malleable shape, or that she allowed him to think he had" (Adichie 415). It is evident that Ifemelu does not fit into this world and that she cannot understand the behaviour of her Nigerian friends. Thus, when they start pitying her for not having a boyfriend, she invents a long distance relationship with Blaine just to satisfy them (Adichie 398). An old friend of Ifemelu, who works as a wedding planner for rich couples, had to refuse to plan a marriage because "[t]hat girl never understood the first rule of life in Lagos. You do not marry the man you love. You marry the man who can best maintain you" (Adichie 399). When Obinze tells his friend Okwudiba that he is cheating on his wife with Ifemelu, he has to listen to the same lecture (Adichie 472):

Look, The Zed, many of us didn't marry the women we truly loved. We married the woman that was around when we were ready to marry. So forget this thing. You can keep seeing her, but no need for this kind of white people behaviour. [...] We don't behave like this, please."

Okwudiba wants to underline that Nigerians are more loyal, because they stay with their partner, even when cheating on them, while Americans break up and divorce way easier. However, looking at it from some distance, both approaches are very similar at the end of the

day. This is a good point to illustrate that cultural differences are often not as different as they seem from an inward perspective.

3.2.6 Race and Discrimination

Race and discrimination are certainly among the most important themes of the novel as far as Interculturality is concerned. The way in which Adichie approaches it, adds many new and exceptional aspects to the much debated issue. She shows the striking differences in people's view on race in Nigeria and the US. By starting the story in Nigeria, where the narrator knows nothing about the American conceptions of race, the author gives her readers the possibility to experience the gradual development of Ifemelu's race consciousness themselves. Furthermore, Ifemelu's perspective as an immigrant provides insights into the difficult relations between foreigners and Americans and also shows the potential for conflict among migrants with identical or diverse backgrounds. As Ifemelu stays in the US for a rather long period and makes friends from all kinds of groups of the American society, the reader can trace how the experiences change her attitude.

As it was observable for the issues of hair, race is not explicitly referred to in the part of the story, where Ifemelu lives in Nigeria. It is something Ifemelu never really thinks about before she comes to the United States, as she does not feel its impact. She later explains in a blog post that when you "come to America, you become black" and that people do not make a difference. It does not even matter anymore where people come from, as they are just reduced to this one aspect of skin colour (Adichie 220). At the end of the novel, when Ifemelu starts her new blog in Lagos, Blaine asks her if she is still blogging about race and she answers: "No, just about life. Race doesn't really work here. I feel like I got off the plane in Lagos and stopped being black" (Adichie 476). This is a very strong statement and underlines the message which Adichie conveys throughout the whole novel, namely that the constructed concept of race very much depends on the circumstances. A good example is the difference in perspectives of Americans and Nigerians on biracial people. While the Nigerians in the novel merely consider them as particularly pretty and use the term 'half-caste' self-evidently, Americans believe it to be offensive and politically incorrect. Ginika explains: "I was telling them about back home and how all the boys were chasing me because I was a half-caste, and they said I was dissing myself. So now I say biracial [...]." She also adds that in the US she

met many people with white mothers and “they are all so full of issues” (Adichie 124) which shows the impact of the American perspective on people.

After living in the United States for several years, Ifemelu becomes interested in American racism, observes every nuance and also starts a blog to share her findings. In one post she explains the four kinds of American tribalism - “class, ideology, region and race” and writes that “[t]here’s a ladder of racial hierarchy in America”, an image she uses a lot. Interestingly, she adds that “Americans assume that everyone will get their tribalism. But it takes a while to figure it all out” (Adichie 184) and refers again to the constructiveness of the concept of race, which is very relative to the background someone was socialised in: “[R]ace is not biology; race is sociology. [...] In America, you do not get to decide what race you are. It is decided for you” (Adichie 337/338). In another post she even goes as far as to speak about the “oppression olympics”, which implies that all different minorities “get shit from white folks”, but that everything is always worse for black people. And so, “all the others think they’re better than blacks, because, well, they’re not black” (Adichie 205).

On various occasions, Adichie underlines the notion that black people are always on the bottom of the so called “race ladder”. On a subway ride for instance, a man asks Ifemelu if she “[e]ver write[s] about adoption? Nobody wants black babies in this country, and I don’t mean biracial, I mean black. Even the black families don’t want them” (Adichie 4). The man apparently adopted a black child and ever since people just consider him a martyr, although he just tries to be a regular father. On another blogpost Ifemelu states that everyone always accentuates that they have some “Indian” or some “Chinese” in them, “which means Thank God We Are Not Full-Blooded Negroes”. That is why dating is really hard for really dark women, because even the really dark men want lighter women. According to Ifemelu, black women love Obama for having a dark woman, even if he could have had a lighter one. Furthermore, “in American pop culture, beautiful dark women are invisible” - they “get to be the fat nice mammy, or the strong, sassy sidekick standing by supportively [...] But they never get to be the hot woman, beautiful and desired and all” (Adichie 213). The author explains the message she tries to convey with a lot of different examples throughout the whole story. Thus, she does not only make sure that the reader understands the hardship of many black people in the United States, but also shows the dimension of the issue which has an impact on all areas of life, from popular culture, over dating, to finding jobs, friends or just reputation in general.

Although the author focuses on the perspective of black people, since this is the most authentic for her, she also mentions the situation for other minorities in the United States. When she writes about Hispanics, the difference of the African and American view of their skin colour is demonstrative. Dike has a Hispanic babysitter and if “Ifemelu had met Alma in Lagos she would have thought of her as white, but she would learn that Alma was Hispanic, an American category that was, confusingly, both an ethnicity and a race.” It is just years later that Ifemelu grasps what Hispanic means in the US and explains it in a post (Adichie 105):

Hispanic means the frequent companions of American blacks in poverty rankings, Hispanic means a slight step above American blacks in the American race ladder, Hispanic means the chocolate-skinned woman from Peru [...] Hispanic also means the blond, blue-eyed guy from Argentina. All you need to be is Spanish-speaking but not from Spain and voilà, you’re a race called Hispanic.

Once more, the author describes the “hierarchy of races” in the US with a big portion of irony.

One of the most interesting aspects for non-expert readers is probably the difference between African Americans and American Africans. When Ifemelu joins the ASA, the African Students Association at her university, she learns about a distinction that was completely unknown to her before she came to the US. While ‘American African’ refers to people who were born and raised in an African country and who came to the US later in their lives as immigrants, African Americans are what they call their “brothers and sisters whose ancestors were slaves” (Adichie 140). From that moment in the story, the distinction between African immigrants on the one hand and African Americans on the other hand comes up recurrently and Adichie explains to her reader step by step what distinguishes them.

Even though one might think that it is easier for African immigrants to make friends with other black people, the members of the ASA claim the opposite in an initiation talk: “You will also find that you might make friends more easily with other internationals, [...], than with Americans both black and white. Many of the internationals understand the trauma of trying to get an American visa and that is a good place to start a friendship” (Adichie 140). This quote highlights the many factors that mesh together and have an impact on possible cross-cultural friendships. A shared trauma is a very dubious ground on which to establish a friendship and I will later on point out the conflicts stemming from this dilemma. The novel shows how fast people get used to the constructs that dominate society. After having lived in the US for several years, Ifemelu can tell that Blaine is an African American the minute she meets him. She has learned how to distinguish “sometimes form looks and gait, but mostly from bearing and demeanour, that fine-grained mark that culture stamps on people” (Adichie 176). It also turns out that Africans do not fully ignore the distinction after all. When Ifemelu

tells her parents that she is in a relationship with Blaine, her father complains: “But why a Negro? Is there a substantive scarcity of Nigerians there?” (Adichie 314).

One of the main differences between African immigrants and African Americans seems to be their reaction to discrimination and their view of race in general. African immigrants usually do not expect to be treated equally to Americans, because they have been looking towards the West with awe all their life long, while African Americans grow up in the US and feel the prevailing inequality every day. Blaine’s sister Shan says that she talked to a Nigerian author about Ifemelu’s blog and apparently he claimed that “he was sure the Non-American Black was a Caribbean because Africans don’t care about race” (Adichie 318). This theory is reinforced once more, when Blaine organises a protest after an incidence that happened to Mr White, who was suspected of dealing just because he handed his keys to a black friend of his. When Ifemelu does not attend the protest, Blaine gets very angry at her: “That blog is a game that you don’t really take seriously!” And Ifemelu “recognized in his tone, a subtle accusation, not merely about her laziness, her lack of zeal and conviction, but also about her Africanness; she was not sufficiently furious because she was African, not African American” (Adichie 344). Blaine holds against Ifemelu that she, as an African, does not really feel the weight of the discrimination that black Americans experience day-to-day. Besides giving evidence of the different perspective on discrimination, this scene also hints at the potential of conflict this difference bears for a relationship between an African immigrant and an African American. Another situation is used very effectively to provide a potential reason for the chasm between African Americans and American Africans. Laura, Kimberly’s sister, talks about an Ugandan girl in her graduate school which she liked because of the fact that she “didn’t get along with the African American woman in [her] class at all. She didn’t have all the issues”. Ifemelu gets really angry that Laura presents the issue so simplistically and tries to explain: “Maybe when the African American’s father was not allowed to vote because he was black, the Ugandans father was running for parliament or studying at Oxford” (Adichie 168).

As aforementioned, *Americanah* shows that the ground on which immigrants establish their friendships is fertile for conflicts. They are bound to each other, because they face the same adversities; however, if someone manages to break out of the space reserved for migrants and has success, rivalry arises. One day, a cleaner, who looks Hispanic to Ifemelu, comes to Kimberly’s house and when Ifemelu opens the door, the man is very hostile, because he believes that she is the owner of the beautiful big house. When she unveils herself as the

nanny, “[h]is face sank into a grin. She, too, was the help. The universe was once again arranged as it should be” (Adichie 166). The incidence inspires Ifemelu to write a blogpost called “Sometimes in America, Race is Class”, because this order of society makes sure that Blacks are always named with poor whites instead of “Poor Blacks and Poor Whites” (Adichie 166). Another time that the rivalry among migrants is visible, is when Ifemelu gets impatient in the braiding salon: “Why couldn’t these African women keep their salon clean and ventilated?” (Adichie 363). Now that Ifemelu is not a struggling migrant anymore, she climbs up in the social hierarchy. Although just her social status changes, she uses the category of race to look down on the braiders who are all immigrants from Africa, like her. The privileges she enjoys now make her feel superior and share the American racist state of mind that she, just years before, suffered from herself.

While Adichie writes from the perspective of someone who represents the bottom of this hierarchy, she also provides a glimpse of the top by repeatedly referring to the privileges that the WASPs - the White Anglo-Saxon Protestants - enjoy in the US. She describes the privileges in a very strong way, as she does not just write about financial, educational or political advantages, but rather focuses on how the privileges enable them to think how they do. When Ifemelu blogs about the “oppression Olympics” she mentions that although all the minorities are discriminated, they all have a “conflicted longing for WASP whiteness or, more accurately, for the privileges of WASP whiteness. They probably don’t really like pale skin but they certainly like walking into a store without some security dude following them.” Therefore, she comes up with the provocative question: “So if everyone in America aspires to be WASPs, then what do WASPs aspire to?” (Adichie 205). Having in mind the ‘floating like a pink balloon’ of Ifemelu’s white boyfriend Curt, the irony in this question is obvious. She seems to criticise how the white prevent any other minority from gaining ground at the top of the hierarchy and that they are not even satisfied with what they already have. In a different situation and context, she transports the same message. Emenike, who is married to a white woman, says he would love Obinze to stay with them but that his wife would not accept that: ““You know these oyinbo people don’t behave like us.’ [...] He was making fun of his wife, but Obinze knew, [...] that it was mockery coloured by respect, mockery of what he believed, despite himself, to be inherently superior” (Adichie 264). The subtext to the issue is particularly clear in a blogpost entitled “What Academics Mean by White Privilege, or Yes It Sucks to Be Poor and White but Try Being Poor and Non-White”, where Ifemelu hints to the fact that any precarious situation is always worse when the respective person is black in addition. When a white classmate of Ifemelu asks: “Why must we always talk about race

anyway? Can't we just be human beings?", her teacher responds to him "that is exactly what white privilege is, that you can say that. Race doesn't really exist for you because it has never been a barrier" (Adichie 346). The author makes it clear that the white privilege that all American minorities aspire to is the equality, the normality, just the absence of any degrading treatment because of race. That is why many white people often do not perceive this absence as privilege. Moreover, she also refers to the privilege of the white to be generous and to present themselves as do-gooders. At a dinner party at Kimberly's house the guests all brag about their charity work and Ifemelu "wanted, suddenly and desperately, to be from the country of people who gave and not those who received, [...] to be among those who could afford copious pity and empathy" (Adichie 170). The usage of 'afford' in the same breath with 'pity and empathy' puts their work in a dubious light.

Without calling in question the progress the United States have made regarding racism, the author also explains how "the manifestation of racism has changed." Now it is mostly neatly covered up, but in the end still stings its victims. In a blogpost, Ifemelu appeals for an acknowledgment of the fact that "racists are not monsters. They are people with loving families, regular folk who pay taxes" (Adichie 315). Sometimes it is exactly the denial of differences that offends those who are disadvantaged by these seemingly ignored differences. One day, Ifemelu and Ginika go shopping and when the cashier asks Ginika which sales assistant helped them, she asks for all their differences but carefully works around their skin colour – one of them is white, the other black. When Ifemelu wonders about the peculiar behaviour of the cashier, Ginika explains: "Because this is America. You're supposed to pretend that you don't notice certain things" (Adichie 126/7). The taboo of even evoking skin colour to distinguish shows the negative denotation that is rooted so deeply in many Americans. Skin colour is not just a neutral quality, like hair length or colour. Adichie manifests the same point in another context, namely when Dike is put in a special education class, for being aggressive. When Uju claims that Dike does not behave any different from his white classmates and that they just call his behaviour aggression because he is black, the principle claims: "Dike is just like one of us, we don't see him as different at all" (Adichie 172). In this scene not only the undeniable gap between language and action is illustrated, but it is also presented very well how it hurts those affected by it.

In the same way, this pretence of political correctness offends the Black Americans in Ifemelu's class, when they watch a film in which the word "nigger" is bleeped out. They regard it as a denial of reality and history: "I mean nigger is a word that exists. People use it.

It is part of America. It has caused a lot of pain to people and I think it is insulting to bleep it out” (Adichie 137) and Wambui points out that “Hiding it doesn’t make it go away”, which seems to be the prominent message that the author tries to get across in scenes like this. Interestingly, they also mention that the reception of such insulting words is dependent on the speaker: “I don’t think it’s always hurtful. I think it depends on the intent and also on who is using it” (Adichie 138). This statement makes clear that a shift of the way people think is way more important than simply avoiding words. In other words, it is the denotation of a word that offends people, not a specific combination of letters.

In her blogpost about “What Things Really Mean”, Ifemelu addresses the American way of masking discrimination by beating around the bush with careful language. For example, she denounces that Americans often avoid a discussion about racism by saying “racism is so complex.” She also adds a list of explanations of euphemisms: “they say ‘culture’ when they mean race. [...] When they say ‘urban’ it means black and poor and possibly dangerous and potentially exciting. ‘Racially charged’ means we are uncomfortable saying ‘racist’” (Adichie 351).

Moreover, the author elaborates on the habituation of migrants to the discrimination they experience – sometimes even to the point where they feel like they deserve it. When Mr White, the black librarian, hands his car keys to a black friend of his, the police suspect him for drug dealing. The fact that “he expects this kind of thing to happen” reminds Ifemelu of Emmet Till’s story which happened in the 1950ies, because “[t]he actual tragedy” of his story, too, “was not the murder of a black child for whistling at a white woman but that some black people thought: But why did you whistle?” (Adichie 343) Even though they get accustomed to this kind of thing to happen, it gradually affects them. When Dike tells Ifemelu how his classmates always ask him for weed and call him ‘bro’ and the principle suspects him of every crime happening in school, he does it with a laughing face and self-mockery in his voice. But when he says: “I feel like I have vegetables instead of ears, like large broccoli sticking out of my head” (Adichie 349), the forced irony in his tone makes it clear how confused and upset he is by the constant nagging. That is why many migrants tend to overcompensate their foreignness. For instance, as regards outward appearance, they learn very quickly that ‘used-look’ or ‘shabby-chic’ is for WASPs only and that not the same rules apply for all Americans. Dike hates that he has to wear nice clothes when he goes to church with his mother, but Uju explains: “If they are shabby, it’s not a problem, but if we are, it is another thing”. This incidence makes Ifemelu think about a Nigerian couple she knows, with

their children always “both buttoned-up and stiff, caged in the airlessness of their parents’ immigrant aspirations” (Adichie 215).

3.2.7 Identity

Identity as one of the three criteria of analysis of migration literature, gives many important insights on how to read the intercultural elements in *Americanah*. As mentioned in the theoretical part (see chapter 2.3.1.), Identity “is who we are and ‘where we are coming from. As such it is the background against which our tastes and desires and opinions and aspirations make sense” (Taylor 33-34). The identification process is described as a life long journey that depends on the previous experiences someone has made and the society someone finds him or herself in. Besides personal identities, the representation of collective identities is an important point of analysis for intercultural texts. According to Sommer (64), the central question is whether the narrator identifies with one or more than one ethnic groups. In this section, I try to illustrate the identification processes shown in the novel.

Americanah gives a detailed account of the identity crisis migrants inevitably go through. Adichie presents different ways in which immigrants get into conflicts with their identities after leaving their home. First, there are people who cling to their old identity and reject anything foreign, like Bartholomew, Uju’s boyfriend. Once he sees an American girl with a very short dress and says: “A girl in Nigeria will never wear that kind of dress [...] Look at that. This country has no moral compass.” But Ifemelu tells him that Nigerian girls wear much shorter dresses - to her, Bartholomew was “an exaggerated caricature [...] with his back-shaft haircut unchanged since he came to America thirty years ago and his false, overheated moralities” (Adichie 116). Secondly, there are people who want to use the chance to create a whole new identity and start over. A Ghanaian woman who is cleaning for the same company as Obinze refuses to talk to him because “he, a Nigerian, was too close to what she was; he knew her nuances, while she was free to reinvent herself with the Polish woman, to be whoever she wanted to be” (Adichie 236). The same holds true for Emenike, an old classmate of Ifemelu and Obinze: “In the stories he told, he and Obinze were the popular rogues who always got into glamorous trouble”, although Emenike was never really popular. “Obinze wondered if Emenike had so completely absorbed his own disguise that even when they were alone, he could talk about ‘good furniture’, as though the idea of ‘good furniture’ was not alien in their Nigerian world, where new things were supposed to look new” (Adichie

268/269). He also offers his guest food on a lot of different plates, which, he explains, are from an Indian bazaar. Obinze thinks that (Adichie 270):

those plates, with their amateur finishing, the slight lumpiness of edges would never be shown in the presence of guests in Nigeria. He still was not sure 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.

Moreover, a friend tells Obinze that Emenike lives “with his oyinbo wife who is old enough to be his mother. He has become posh o. He doesn’t talk to ordinary people anymore” (Adichie 248).

Thirdly, there are people who give up their identities in order to adapt to what they think the local population wants them to be. Uju takes up an American accent, never speaks up and raises Dike as American as possible. Ifemelu gets angry at her aunt in the following situation and cannot understand her demeanour: “Aunty Uju’s cell phone rang. ‘Yes, this is Uju.’ She pronounced it *you-joo* instead of *oo-joo*” (Adichie 104). Uju calls herself that way, because Americans call her like that. She seems to have given up on herself. When Uju advises Ifemelu to relax her hair for a job interview, Ifemelu thinks (Adichie 119):

There it was again, the strange naïveté with which Aunty Uju has covered herself like a blanket. Sometimes, while having a conversation, it would occur to Ifemelu that Aunty Uju had deliberately left behind something of herself, something essential, in a distant and forgotten place. Obinze said it was the exaggerated gratitude that came with immigrant insecurity.

Uju has taught the strategy of assimilation to her son Dike all his life long, which he became painfully aware of later. He serves as a good example of a second generation migrant who suffers from the lack of identity. At the beginning, Dike has a hard time in school, since he is the only black child in his class, but after some time he adapts: “he was playing basketball now, his grades had improved, he liked a girl called Autumn” (Adichie 300). A little later, Ifemelu sees her younger cousin with his friends, which are all white, and Dike seems to have found a way to make them like him by being the cool and joking African American friend they expect him to be: “With them, 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’” (Adichie 322). His mother Uju, a weak and insecure character, who has feelings of resentment towards Nigeria, does not teach him Igbo or other things about the Nigerian culture and so denies him any identification with Nigeria. When Dike attempts to commit suicide by taking a whole box of pills, Ifemelu and Uju talk about the possible reasons. Apparently, he once said “we black folk” whereupon his mother told him “you are not black”, as she didn’t want him to think “that everything happens to him is because he’s

black.” While his mother is of the opinion that he tried to kill himself because of depression - a disease also white kids suffer from, Ifemelu is convinced that Dike is traumatized by his lack of identity: “[Y]ou told him what he wasn’t but you didn’t tell him what he was” (Adichie 380). The author underlines Dike’s hardship as a second generation migrant who does not feel at home in any place. In contrast to his mother and Ifemelu, who grew up in the knowledge that they belong where they were born, this feeling is denied to Dike. Therefore, the cleavage between the values his mother teaches him and his experiences at school nearly tear him apart.

Ifemelu and Obinze are the only two characters who do not follow any of the three patterns of identification presented above. While the reader can guess the identities of the other characters just from their actions not from their thoughts, Obinze and Ifemelu’s internal crisis seems way more nuanced. Therefore, I want to analyse their identification processes as migrants and returnees to Nigeria in greater detail. Ifemelu is a strong character who does not easily identify with a group and thus, as already mentioned, she mostly stands alone as an outsider and criticises the people around her. As she always reflects her feelings towards every group, her state of mind is very visible. When Ifemelu first arrives in the US, she feels lost, because she notices that her Nigerian identity is not valued at all in the US, but is rather considered a handicap. She feels so invisible, that even her first reception of junk mail makes her happy, since it “made her a little less invisible, a little more present. Somebody knew her” (Adichie 132). After some time and being with her white boyfriend Curt, she “has slipped out of her old skin” (Adichie 200) and into the role of Curt’s girlfriend. Ifemelu gets used to the comfort he is offering her and forgets about her old personality. However, it might also imply that this “skin” is just a superficial layer over her real personality, which is ripped off easily, once she becomes aware of her development. While sitting in the braiding salon, she critically comments on her internal change. Ifemelu was “thinking of her own new American selves. It was with Curt that she had first looked in the mirror and, with a flush of accomplishment, seen someone else” (Adichie 191). This quote illustrates that she has taken on different identities during her time in the US.

One identity she is especially comfortable with is that of a student at Princeton University: “She liked most of all, that in this place of affluent ease, she could pretend to be someone else, someone specially admitted into a hallowed American club, someone adorned with certainty”. However, the word “pretend” already hints to what she reveals a little later: She “did not like that she had to go to Trenton to braid her hair” (Adichie 3). Although she is a

student at a prestigious university, her African hair prevents her from fully merging with this pleasant role. It forces her to take the train to the ugly suburbs of Princeton, in order to get her hair braided. Thus, she is always reminded that this new identity is not truly hers. After her hair is done, she is free to slip back into her more pleasant identity of a Princeton student: “She longed to get home and have a long, cold shower, put her hair up in a satin bonnet, and lie down on her couch with her laptop” (Adichie 365). The strong contrast she experiences and her feeling of discomfort when going out of town to Trenton make herself realize her internal change. As she has decided to move back to Lagos, people keep asking her if she would be able to handle Nigeria: “[T]he suggestion, that she was somehow irrevocably altered by America, had grown thorns on her skin. Her parents, too, seemed to think that she might not be able to ‘cope’ with Nigeria” (Adichie 17).

Ifemelu is not very pleased that the African braiders see her as their “African sister”. They expect her agreement on everything. They “expected it, in this shared space of Africanness, but Ifemelu said nothing and turned a page of her novel” (Adichie 103) and she knows they would talk about her after she leaves, they would say she is a typical Americanah. Still, they would be mild on her, because she was part of them. This scene underlines the complexity of collective identities of migrants. These women from different parts of Africa would usually not identify with each other, but in the US, where people regard them as just black Africans, they start solidarizing. The switching of identity depending on the situation is also illustrated when Ifemelu surprisingly meets an old Nigerian classmate in a mall. They are “both lapsing into their Nigerian voices and their Nigerian selves, louder, more heightened, adding ‘o’ to their sentences” (Adichie 222). In her blog, Ifemelu tries to make sense of her experiences as an immigrant to the United States. However, it seems, that thinking and analysing so much, shows her quite plainly how conflicted her identity really is: “Sometimes not believing herself. The more she wrote, the less sure she became. Each post scraped off yet one more scale of self until she felt naked and false” (Adichie 5).

After her return to Nigeria, Ifemelu has a hard time feeling a sense of belonging anywhere. Although she is coming home to what is familiar to her, she experiences Lagos as a third space, because her identity does not really correspond to the culture anymore. Like most returnees, she develops a kind of haughty attitude, misses many things about America and looks down on the Nigerian culture. People call her an ‘Americanah’ which offends her. Her colleague from work, Doris, who also studied in the US, is a typical ‘Americanah’ She takes Ifemelu to a meeting of the ‘Nigerpolitan club’: “a small cluster of people drinking

champagne in paper cups, at the poolside of a home in Osborne Estate, chic people, all dripping with savoir faire, each nursing a self-styled quirkiness – a ginger-coloured Afro [...]” (Adichie 407). Although it is obvious that Ifemelu smiles at the club, she feels that they are “all encircled by a familiarity, because they could reach so easily for the same references, soon they were laughing and listing the things they missed about America” (Adichie 408). A man called Fred tries to invite Ifemelu to an American style restaurant and she is appalled by the temptation she feels (Adichie 409):

They have the kind of things we can eat. An unease crept up on Ifemelu. She was comfortable here, and she wished she were not. She wished too, that she was not interested in this new restaurant, did not perk up, imagining fresh salads and steamed still-firm vegetables. [...] This was what she hoped she had not become but feared that she had: a ‘They have the kinds of things we can eat’ kind of person.

Even though Ifemelu is presented as a very strong and individualistic character, she is not immune to the common feelings of return, which highlights the unavoidable development most returnees are undergoing. However, Ifemelu does not just ease into a life as ‘Americanah’, complaining about everything and yearning for the comforts of the US. On the contrary, her critical mind makes her resist. So, when the members of the ‘Nigerpolitan club’ talk about Nollywood films, which they collectively find very bad and misogynistic, because “they were not supposed to watch Nollywood, people like them, and if they did, then only as amusing anthropology”, Ifemelu objects and says she likes them. In fact, she does not either, but the “urge to be contrarian was strong. If she set herself apart, perhaps she would be less of the person she feared she had become” (Adichie 409).

Ifemelu’s conflicted identity also gives her a hard time reconnecting with her old friends, like for example Ranyinudo, who is furious when Ifemelu writes a blog entry about Nigerian women “with Unknown Sources of Wealth” who date married rich men, women “with desperation in their eyes and designer handbags on their wrists.” Ranyinudo gets angry because she feels as if Ifemelu was describing her: “And who are you to pass judgment? How is it different from you and the rich white guy in America? Would you have your US citizenship today if not for him? [...] Stop feeling so superior!” (Adichie 422/423). Although Ifemelu “thought: I’m really home. I’m home” (Adichie 411) after some months in Lagos, she keeps being confused with the Nigerian culture and so the reader is left with the question till the end, if Ifemelu will ever feel truly at home anywhere, other than in the presence of Obinze.

Obinze’s identity crisis is portrayed in a similar way. When he lives in London, he feels “invisibl[e], his existence like an erased pencil sketch; each time he saw a policeman, or

anyone in a uniform, anyone with the faintest scent of authority, he would fight the urge to run” (Adichie 257). After arriving in Britain, he literally has to take up a new identity by borrowing Vincent’s work permission and with his name he seems to give up his pride. When he is back in Lagos, his life changes with the help of Chief (Adichie 27:

This is what he was now, the kind of Nigerian expected to declare a lot of cash at the airport. It brought to him a disorienting strangeness, because his mind had not changed at the same pace as his life, and he felt a hollow space between himself and the person he was supposed to be.

As already shown by Ifemelu’s story, it does not depend on their financial or social status whether characters get into conflict with their new identities. Much more, it is connected to their own set of values. While people call Obinze humble, because he does not boast about his wealth, “[i]t was honesty that he valued; he had always wished himself to be truly honest, and always feared that he was not” (Adichie 33). Having been raised by a very progressive mother, Obinze, just like Ifemelu, never really fits into any society. Other than Ifemelu however, he does not show it. He keeps up the façade of the well adapted caring family father and fights his internal conflict in secret.

3.2.8 Literature

The representation of literature in *Americanah* is certainly a very insightful point of analysis. Through the characters’ discussions about literature on a meta-level, it seems the author wants to give her readers some clues on how to interpret her novel.

Literature is displayed as an effective means to understand foreign cultures, just like Wierlacher said, by extending one’s own perspective through the eyes of someone else (68). When Ifemelu moves to the United States, Obinze advises her to read books about America in order to understand the culture, the people and how they behave and why. Although she is sceptical at first, she soon gets obsessed and spends all her free time in the library: “And as she read, America’s mythologies began to take on meaning, America’s tribalism – race, ideology and religion – became clear. And she was consoled by her new knowledge” (Adichie 135). However, Adichie relativizes the relevance of literature for the understanding of cultures in a heated discussion Ifemelu has with a white customer in the braiding salon. The girl claims to prepare herself for a trip to Africa, by reading a book called *A Bend in the River*: “It made me truly understand how modern Africa works.” Ifemelu on the other hand thinks that this novel was about longing for Europe and contempt for Africa, which the girl

comments with: “Oh, well, I see why you would read the novel like that” (Adichie 190). This hints to the fact that, first, not every intercultural novel builds understanding, and secondly, that the interpretation of literature in the end depends on the reader’s cultural and personal background. In her speech “The Danger of a Single Story” (TED talk) given on the occasion of a TED conference, Adichie discusses exactly this issue.

A discussion on literature about race in the United States is opened by Blaine’s sister Shan, who is an author writing about racial issues from an African American perspective. She explains that many people tell her that her book should “transcend race” which makes her angry: “like race is a brew best served mild, tempered with other liquids, otherwise white folk can’t swallow it” (Adichie 134). This fits in with the basic narrative features of intercultural literature according to Hofmann (59), namely parody, satire and comic elements. Moreover, when Shan writes about an incidence of racism, a reader asks her to “nuance it”. According to Shan though, “‘Nuance’ means keep people comfortable so everyone is free to think of themselves as *individuals* and everyone got where they are because of *achievement*.” She concludes, filled with bitterness, that “You can’t write an honest novel about race in this country. If you write about how people are really affected by race, it’ll be too *obvious*” (Adichie 135). Drawing on the theory presented in the beginning, this directly relates to Hofmann’s argument that there is still no equal dialogue between cultures (36).

The author also brings up the fact that intercultural literature is characterized by a certain affective distance to the story told, which makes it easier accessible for the reader (Craith 45-47). Shan reinforces this argument when she explains why it is possible for Ifemelu to blog about race: “Because she’s African. She’s writing from the outside. She doesn’t really feel all the stuff she is writing about. [...] If she were African American, she’d just be labelled angry and shunned.” Ifemelu is angry that Shan is so triumphant, nevertheless she agrees: “It was true that race was not embroidered in the fabric of her history; it had not been etched in her soul” (Adichie 336). This meta-level discussion of literature illustrates that for cultural aspects it makes a big difference who is speaking.

3.2.9 Migration

As illustrated in the theoretical part, *Americanah* can be defined as migration novel. Therefore, the topic can hardly be seen in isolation, as nearly everything in the story is somehow connected to processes of migration. In this section, I will thus try to analyse how

migration provokes a change of the internal concept of culture and the individual value system of a person. Starting with the expectations and the planning of going abroad, I will look at the arrival, the gradual customization, the growing homesickness and finally the return home of the characters in *Americanah*.

3.2.9.1 Expectations

During Ifemelu's and Obinze's high school time, it becomes clear immediately that most of the students' highest goal is to expatriate to the United States and that they have a very overheated and idealized picture of their life overseas. A lot of casual statements in their conversations give evidence of their awe of America. When Ginika's family leaves for the US, Ifemelu's mother calls them "blessed" (Adichie 65), Kayode claims that an "American passport is the coolest thing", among their classmates "[e]verybody watched American films and exchanged faded American magazines", Obinze "knew details about American presidents from hundred years ago" and "'[y]ou look like a black American' was his ultimate compliment" (Adichie 67). Besides, Obinze has a clear picture of their future: "We'll go to America when we graduate and raise our fine children" (Adichie 94). By simply transferring them to the US, Obinze paints his family plans with Ifemelu in brighter colours. The Nigerian adolescents' unrealistic image of the US is evident as well, when Ifemelu is about to leave and distributes her clothes among her girlfriends. She wants to keep a dress she especially likes, but Ranyinudo objects: "Ifem, you know you'll have any kind of dress you want in America and next time we see you, you will be a serious Americanah" (Adichie 100).

The author makes sure to also integrate how this image is planted into the children's heads. A very good example is a Christmas play of a nursery-primary school which Obinze and Kosi watch. The play is set in Nigeria; nevertheless, they have artificial snow falling at Christmas day. One of the spectators asks with indignation: "Why do they have snow falling? Are they teaching children that a Christmas is not a real Christmas unless snow falls like it does abroad?" (Adichie 374).

The constructed image these young Nigerians have in their mind makes them want to leave and experience what they expect to be 'the real life'. This attitude is relevant, as the story deals with a specific kind of migration, which Obinze describes at a dinner party at Emenike's house in London, where Obinze thinks by himself (Adichie 276):

Alexa, and 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 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.

Other than for migrants who flee from war or poverty, the migrants in *Americanah* have a hard time finding a good life and satisfaction abroad. Their expectations are high and they aim at more than mere survival. Rather, they are looking for happiness and self-realization. When Obinze finds himself in a detention centre, he envies the rest of the men “for what they are, men who casually changed names and passports, who would plan and come back and do it over again because they had nothing to lose”. On the contrary, Obinze “didn’t have their savoir faire; he was soft, a boy who had grown up eating cornflakes and reading books [...]” (Adichie 281). These men are determined to just manage to somehow stay in England, while Obinze’s goal is a happy life in dignity, which he loses faith in during his years in London.

3.2.9.2 Arrival

When Ifemelu arrives in the United States, the discrepancy between the reality and the image she has created in her mind is huge. Her astonishment about ordinary things underlines the stereotypes she expected to come true. For instance, the first heat wave comes surprisingly for Ifemelu, since “all her life she had thought of ‘overseas’ as a cold place of wool coats and snow, and because America was ‘overseas’, and her illusions so strong they could not be fended off by reason, she bought the thickest sweater she could find [...]” (Adichie 103). Furthermore, “[s]he stared at buildings and cars and signboards, all of them matt, disappointingly matt; in the landscape of her imagination, the mundane things in America were covered in high-shine gloss” (Adichie 104) which gives evidence of her expectation of a wonderland. The clichés Ifemelu believes in are relevant for an intercultural discourse, as they show that when people come with a very specific image in mind they can only be disappointed and this hinders successful intercultural encounters. Particularly immigrants, who craft a grand picture of their future in another country, often feel depressed about the hard reality. The first night of Ifemelu’s arrival she has to sleep on Uju’s floor, which she has done numerous times in her life, “but this was America at last, glorious America at last, and she had not expected to bed on the floor.” Moreover, the poor neighbourhood Uju lives in looks “nothing like the pretty street on *The Cosby Show*” and so Ifemelu feels “overwhelmed

by a sense of newness. But she felt, also, a frisson of expectation, an eagerness to discover America” (Adichie 106). Interestingly, she does not accept her picture of the US as an illusion just so easily (Adichie 113):

It was the commercials that captivated her. She ached 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 autumn.

The fact that she still “hungered to understand everything about America” when she starts university, illustrates how firmly she believes in her idea of the United States. Although she has been disappointed and perceives many things in American culture as very bizarre, her attitude is positive enough to be willing to adapt to it. She wanted “to wear a new knowing skin right away: to support a team at the Super Bowl, [...], order a ‘muffin’ without thinking that it really was a cake, and say ‘I scored a deal’ without feeling silly” (Adichie 135). This quote is a very good example of how much easier assimilation works, if someone has an interested and open, maybe even admiring attitude towards a culture.

In these first months, in which Ifemelu feels like “a visitor from space” (Adichie 108), the arbitrariness of cultural codes is represented. Especially fashion is a good way to illustrate this point. When Ifemelu is invited to come to a party with her roommates in Philadelphia, who all “looked almost interchangeable, all small-boned and slim-hipped, their chestnut hair ironed straight” (Adichie 127), they all wear slouchy jeans, while Ifemelu dresses up. Ifemelu expresses her puzzlement about the American dress code in a blogpost (Adichie 129):

When it comes to dressing well, American culture is so self-fulfilled that it has not only disregarded the courtesy of self-presentation, but has turned that disregard into a virtue. “We are too superior/busy/cool/not-uptight to bother about how we look to other people, and so we can wear pyjamas to school and underwear to the mall.”

Years later, when she meets one of Curt’s friends wearing ripped jeans, she still did not get used to this kind of fashion trend: “She did not understand grunge, the idea of looking shabby because you could afford not to be shabby; it mocked true shabbiness” (Adichie 287).

There are many more things that astonish Ifemelu about her roommates. Ifemelu describes them as “[p]eople who live in exclamation points”, as they find everything just awesome and furthermore, she cannot believe they do not scrub in the shower: “the absence of a sponge made them seem unreachably alien to her.” In addition, their behaviour as regards money appears peculiar to Ifemelu. They just casually say: “‘Let’s go get some,’ about whatever it was they needed – more pizza, buffalo wings, liquor – as though this getting was not an act that required money” (Adichie 128). That is why it astonishes her even more that an invitation

for dinner does not mean they would pay for her. On the contrary, in the end they carefully “untangle how many drinks each person had ordered [...] to make sure nobody paid for anybody else” (Adichie 129).

Another important cultural difference represented in the novel is the diagnosing of mental illnesses. Adichie shows that even the field of medicine, a natural science with supposedly objective criteria, bears culture specific differences. After ‘working’ for the tennis coach, Ifemelu is traumatized and behaves weird. Ginika thus thinks that she suffers from depression, but Ifemelu firmly believes that “[d]epression was what happened to Americans, with their self-absolving need to turn everything into an illness.” Although she shows the typical symptoms, she does not accept the diagnosis. Years later, in a post about “Non-American Blacks Suffering from Illnesses Whose Names They Refuse to Know” Ifemelu raises the question if “things begin to exist only when they [are] named” (Adichie 157).

Another example of culture specific tastes is the admiration of thin women in the West. Laura one day shows Ifemelu a picture in a magazine from a charity, showing a white girl between many black kids. Ifemelu observes: “She’s just as skinny as the kids, only that her skinniness is by choice and theirs is not by choice” (Adichie 162). This scene shows how culture is very closely connected to perception and attitude. Although the children and the women have the same body, their slimness gives evidence of completely different things. While the children are associated with malnutrition, the celebrity is probably praised for working hard on a healthy diet and her fitness.

3.2.9.3 Customization

After the initial phase of puzzlement and wonder about the reality of migration life, the characters adapt to certain aspects of their situation while they keep struggling with others. It stands out that it is a lot easier for children to customize to a culture than for people who migrate as adults. For example, Ifemelu is “struck by how like her American friends Ginika”, who came to the US as a high school student, has become. Her friends have Chinese, Japanese, Indian and African roots; however, they all behave alike and seem “well choreographed” to Ifemelu (Adichie 124). “Unlike Auntie Uju, Ginika had come to America with the flexibility and fluidness of youth, the cultural cues had seeped into her skin, and now she [...]” is a real American. Using the example of Dike, Adichie shows that the impression is sometimes misleading. At first sight, he seems to adapt really well. It is just when he attempts

suicide that the reader realizes that his assimilation is only a facade, whereas he feels very confused inside.

Furthermore, the author makes her readers compassionately follow how the migrants in the story grow susceptible to becoming aggressive or to doing illegal things even though they are essentially decent characters. Besides the fact that Ifemelu and Obinze both work under false names, which is comprehensible to the reader, some migrants in the novel also tend to lose their temper from time to time. The scene, in which Elena's dog eats Ifemelu's bacon, provides evidence of the heightened aggression potential that the circumstances create. Ifemelu is already furious, because the dog ate her bacon while she is jobless. Additionally, Elena adds fuel to the fire by evoking a stereotype: "You better not kill my dog with voodoo." This is too much for Ifemelu and she (Adichie 152):

felt acid in her veins; she moved towards Elena, hand raised and ready to explode on Elena's face, before she caught herself with a jolt, stopped and turned and went upstairs. She sat on her bed and hugged her knees to her chest, shaken by her own reaction, how quickly fury had risen. [...] because she was at war with the world.

Uju tells Ifemelu about a very similar situation that happened to her in Dike's school. A teacher screamed with her across the hallway which she would not do with any other parents. Uju explains: "So I went over and told her off. These people, they make you become aggressive just to hold your dignity" (Adichie 217).

Even though Ifemelu never fully understands her American friends and colleagues, she gets used to certain commodities very quickly and so, grows away from her old life. When she talks to her mother on the phone who tells her that they did not have electricity for a week, "it seems suddenly foreign to her, and home itself a distant place. She could no longer remember what it felt to spend an evening in candlelight" (Adichie 159). Over the years, her relation with her parents changes considerably. Even though Ifemelu has always dreamed of her mother and father to visit her, she feels weird and exhausted by them when they finally manage to come (Adichie 301):

They seemed like strangers. They looked the same, but the dignity she remembered was gone, and left instead something small, a provincial eagerness. [...] She watched them with a sneer, and for this she felt guilty; she had guarded their memories so preciously and yet, finally seeing them she watched them with a sneer.

This scene leaves the reader in wonder if her parents really changed as much, if it was her idealization of home or if it is the transformation of Ifemelu's nature that altered the relationship to her parents and makes it so hard for them to reconnect. Even after her return home, the reader does not really learn about Ifemelu's relationship to her parents. According

to the definition of interculturality, in the overlap of two cultures something new develops. Thus, the question arises if the definition also implies that this new emerging is not compatible with the original, meaning that the initial component gets lost and irrevocably altered to the point where it is not accessible anymore.

3.2.9.4 Return

After some years in the United States, including setbacks as well as success, Ifemelu starts to feel a growing homesickness. Her sensation compares to the Nigerian students' vague longing to go abroad which I analysed earlier: "Nigeria became where she was supposed to be, the only place she could sink her roots in without the constant urge to tug them out and shake off the soil" (Adichie 6). So, she starts planning her return and looking for jobs in Lagos.

Contrary to her expectations, when she is finally back, "Lagos assaulted her". Although this time she is returning home, Ifemelu's experience is similar to her arrival in the United States. Again, she has crafted a particular picture in her mind and is disappointed to find something completely different. "And so she had the dizzying sensation of falling, falling into the new person she had become, falling into the strange familiar. Had it always been like this or had it changed so much in her absence?" (Adichie 385). In this quote, interculturality is very visible. No matter how familiar a place is to a person, it can always feel strange for someone, depending on his or her current state of mind and the changes he or she has undergone. Ifemelu finds herself in a third space between the old self she expected to slip in again and the new self which she developed in the US. Either it is Ifemelu's new self that makes her perceive Lagos as a strange place, or Lagos has really changed that much. Probably it is a mixture of both: "She was no longer sure what was new in Lagos, and what was new in herself" (Adichie 387). Long ago, she had started nurturing a "heartbroken desire to see a place made whole again" (Adichie 139) which she anticipated to happen when she returned to Lagos. However, she does not feel a real sense of belonging. On the contrary, she feels "guiltily grateful that she had a blue American passport in her bag. It shielded her from choicelessness" (Adichie 390). Ifemelu's thoughts tie in with Obinze's motive for migration in order to escape choicelessness. Even though her experiences make it hard for her to identify with any place, Ifemelu at least gained the certainty that she can leave anytime.

After some months, she overcomes her identity crisis and starts looking at her old, new home with some distance. In the first entry of her new blog she writes: "Lagos has always been

indisputably itself”, but still, the returnees from abroad feel an urge to change the city. Ifemelu gives them an advice: “[G]et over yourselves and realize that the way of life here is just that, assorted” (Adichie 421). Even though Adichie clearly points out the limits of interculturality and the conflicts stemming from it, she raises hope towards the end of the novel, when summing up her feelings: “[S]he was at peace: to be home, to be writing her blog, to have discovered Lagos again. She had, finally, spun herself fully into being” (Adichie 475). Through Ifemelu’s long struggle to find inner peace, the author illustrates that the biggest potential lies not in finding a place where one can identify with every aspect of the culture, but rather in accepting one’s own hybrid identity and in coming to terms with it. Especially for Ifemelu, a restless character who never really matches her surroundings, it is the first time that she actually is in harmony with herself.

3.2.10 Hair

In *Americanah*, hair, especially African women’s hair, is more than a physical attribute. It can be a political statement, as well as a marker of identity or orientation towards the West. Adichie frequently uses hair as a metaphor for race in her novel. It is a very powerful metaphor, as it is not as delicate of an issue as skin colour, but still leads to similar conclusions. While the impact of skin colour constantly makes the subject of heated discussions, the aspect of hair is usually neglected. Thus, the considerations presented in the novel, are original and have the potential to inspire new thoughts in the readers. Adichie is fascinated about women’s way of wearing their hair in general, as show many interviews and talks she gave over the last decade. In the novel, the author arms Ifemelu with her own theories.

The story gives a good overview of what different groups of society in the US and in Nigeria think about the hairstyles of African women. Ifemelu, who again takes the role of the outsider, shares her observations and feelings on it. In America, natural African hair is not associated with success. That is why nearly all black women appearing in the novel straighten their hair. The beginning of *Americanah* is not set in Princeton, but outside the town in Trenton, where Ifemelu has to go in order to have her hair braided. The fact that she has to see a hairdresser outside the town already shows that the issue is not faced in American society. While sitting in the train to Trenton, Ifemelu reflects: “It was unreasonable to expect a braiding salon in Princeton – the few black locals she had seen were so light-skinned and lank-haired she could

not imagine them wearing braids” (Adichie 3). Ifemelu’s thoughts illustrate the cycle society is stuck in – the women in Princeton do not have natural hair, which makes it evident to people that successful women have straight hair. This false reversal conclusion makes it yet harder for women with natural hair to achieve a certain status in society, as they have a hard time finding jobs, because no one associates natural hair with professionalism. To get their hair done, Ifemelu and her few fellows always have to return to the bad parts of town, to a badly acclimatized and dirty salon, which reminds them that their hair is like an obstacle they have to repress and hide. The fact that the braiding salon in Trenton is the starting point of the novel and also figures as a narrative frame is representative of the importance Adichie assigns to the metaphor of hair.

Before Ifemelu leaves Nigeria, hair is never really thematised. The only time, hair is referred to, is a scene in which Ifemelu accompanies Uju to her hair salon in Lagos at the time where her aunt is still with the rich General. Interestingly, when describing the salon, Adichie refers to its social function: “It was here, at a Lagos salon, that the different ranks of imperial femaleness were best understood.” Uju, representing the newly rich Nigerian women, “patted her silky hair extensions that fell to her shoulders: Chinese weave-on, the latest version, shiny and straight as straight could be; it never tangled” (Adichie 77). As the lover of the General, Uju of course has her hair straightened in order to adapt to the standards of beauty of the Nigerian upper class. The exaggeration of this scene and Ifemelu’s amusement about the hairdressers’ behaviour point to Adichie’s attitude towards hair as marker of status in Nigeria.

While hair is only thematised this one time, before Ifemelu goes abroad, it becomes a recurring issue when she lives in the United States. Uju, who has lost everything, wears her hair in braids now. However, before starting her job as a family practitioner, Uju relaxes her hair. She explains to Ifemelu: “If you have braids, they will think you are unprofessional.” While Ifemelu cannot believe that there are no doctors with braided hair in the US, Uju has grown indifferent: “You are in a country that is not your own. You do what you have to do if you want to succeed” (Adichie 119).

Ifemelu, who was smiling at Uju for relaxing her hair in order to please her employer, keeps wearing her hair in braids. However, when Curt finally gets her a job interview, the only advice Ifemelu’s counsellor at university gives her, is: “Lose the braids and straighten your hair. Nobody says this kind of stuff but it matters. We want you to get this job” (Adichie 202). Although she had laughed at Uju for taking this advice some years earlier, “[n]ow, she knew enough not to laugh” (Adichie 203). So, Ifemelu is trying to relax her hair herself at home, but

it does not work on her hair, which stays kinky. She describes the painfulness of the procedure. It feels as if “needles of stinging pain shot up from different parts of her scalp“, while the hairdresser comments: “Just a little burn [...] But look how pretty it is. Wow, girl, you’ve got the white-girl swing!” But Ifemelu is not convinced (Adichie 203):

Her hair was hanging down rather than standing up, straight and sleek [...]. She did not recognize herself. She left the salon almost mournfully; while the hairdresser had flat-ironed the ends, the smell of burning, of something organic dying which should not have died, had made her feel a sense of loss.

Curt does not especially like her straightened hair and is really concerned about the pain she has to go through to relax them. He describes her natural hair as “full and cool”, which arouses Ifemelu and makes her feel misunderstood: “My full and cool hair would work if I were interviewing to be a backup singer in a jazz band.” Although Curt is trying to be nice, he does not understand the weight of the issue for Ifemelu: “I need to look professional, [...] and professional means straight is best but if it’s going to be curly then it has to be the white kind of curly, lose curls or, at worst, spiral curls but never kinky” (Adichie 204). Ifemelu finally gets the job she is interviewing for, but her insecurity stays and she keeps wondering if she would have got the position even with her natural hair.

When her relaxed hair is starting to fall out because of the aggressive chemicals, Wambui, her oldest friend in the US says: “Relaxing your hair is like being in prison. You’re caged in. Your hair rules you. [...] You’re always battling to make your hair what it wasn’t meant to do” (Adichie 208). In this scene, hair figures as a metaphor for identity. Girls who pretend to be someone else, who fake an American accent and behave like Americans are forced to give up their true identity in order to succeed and will then always have to hide in this disguise. Sooner or later, the pretending will turn out to be a prison and their identity will get more and more conflicted and make them suffer, because just like their kinky hair is growing back, their true personality will show through from time to time and claim attention. The first day she goes to work with her short hair, she gets asked a lot of questions: “Does it mean anything? Like something political?” or “Why did you cut your hair? Are you a lesbian?” (Adichie 211). Some years later, when she resigns, the lady at the cafeteria even says: “They need to treat folk better around here. You think your hair was part of the problem?” The author shows that African women’s hairstyles are heavily loaded with associations and assumptions and that the beauty industry is making it worse, with even “black magazines never having natural-haired women in their pages” (Adichie 212).

On the recommendation of her friend Wambui, Ifemelu joins the online community “HappilyKinkyNappy.com”, a website on which women “sculpted for themselves a virtual world where their coily, kinky, nappy, woolly hair was normal” (Adichie 212). It shows girls with “long trailing dreadlocks, small Afros, big Afros, twists, braids, massive raucous curls and coils.” Besides, the page provides a platform on which women with natural hair can complement on each other’s hairstyles, give tips and support each other. Being part of this online community is a big relief for Ifemelu, as it gives her the feeling of being normal at least somewhere. When one day a black man points at Curt and asks Ifemelu: “You ever wonder why he likes you looking all jungle like that?”, she nearly relapses in the conviction that she should straighten her hair, but this time she overcomes the urge with the support of the natural-hair community. The website brings her to the point where “she looked into the mirror, sank her fingers into her hair, dense and spongy and glorious, and could not imagine it any other way. That simply, she fell in love with her hair” (Adichie 213). Here again, hair figures as a metaphor for identity. Ifemelu has always tried to accept and stand by her hair, but still, she does not really like it. Rather, she keeps her hair natural out of pride and integrity. But after realizing there are more women who appreciate the beauty of natural hair, she learns to truly like it. Soon after this revelation, she also gives up on her American accent which she has practiced over years and so she grows more and more satisfied with what she is.

Research on various English and American dictionaries has shown that most of the terminology to describe natural African hair used in the novel is not part of any reference work. While the word ‘nappy’ exists, probably as it is also used to describe white people’s hair that is frizzy, the term ‘coily’ does not appear in any dictionary at all and ‘kinky’ is listed with a different meaning, namely as a slang word for absurd, perverted or abnormal. This excurses should underline the significance of the metaphor of hair, which Adichie makes use of so extensively.

On a blogpost, entitled “A Michelle Obama Shout-Out Plus Hair as Race Metaphor” (Adichie 296), Ifemelu makes it clear that the American society is brainwashed to consider natural hair not only as unprofessional, but also as ugly: “Ever notice makeover shows on TV, how the black woman has natural hair [...] in the ugly ‘before’ picture, and in the pretty ‘after’ picture, somebody’s taken a hot piece of metal and singed her hair straight?” (Adichie 297). She also adds, that black women with straight hair are so common, that her white girlfriend asks her, referring to Michelle Obama: “[Y]ou mean her hair doesn’t grow like that?” (Adichie 296).

Furthermore, Ifemelu hypothesises on the respective blog post that if Michelle Obama decided to wear her hair natural on TV, “poor Obama would certainly lose the independent vote, even the undecided Democrat vote” (Adichie 297).

As for many of the elements presented before, the author makes sure to convey that most issues do not only concern black people. When Ifemelu sits next to “a dreadlocked white man [...] his hair like old twin ropes that ended in a blond fuzz, his white shirt worn with enough piety to convince her that he was a social warrior and might make a good dust blogger“ she seems to immediately judge him according to the way he wears his hair.

After Ifemelu’s return to Nigeria, hair remains an issue. Now that Ifemelu is part of the newly rich and the returnees from abroad, the so called Americanahs, she finds herself surrounded by people who care about straight hair. Priye, one of her old classmates, who is working as a wedding planner for the country’s rich and famous, is constantly “pushing back the auburn straight weave that fell across one eye” (Adichie 399), “Aunty Onenu’s weave was longer and more incongruous than the last, high and coiffed in front, with waves of hair floating to her back” (Adichie 414) and Esther, one of Ifemelu’s colleagues at *Zoe* magazine complains about Ifemelu’s natural “twist –out style”: ‘Aunty, your hair is jaga-jaga,’ with a kind of sad honesty” (Adichie 415). While Ifemelu smiles at the submissive Nigerians, oriented towards the West, most of which have never been abroad, she debates about natural hair with her friends at the ‘Nigerpoltian club’ who also decided to wear their hair naturally.

They talked about hair salons here, where the hairdressers struggled and fumbled to comb natural hair, as though it were an alien eruption, as though their own hair was not the same way before it was defeated by chemicals.

“The salon girls are always like, ‘Aunty, you don’t want to relax your hair?’ It’s ridiculous that Africans don’t value our natural hair in Africa.”

Even though Ifemelu shares their opinion, she reflects on her own attitude “and she caught the righteousness in her voice, in all their voices. They were the sanctified, the returnees, back home with an extra gleaming layer” (Adichie 408). The author shows that even the fact that they wear their hair natural now, is kind of an orientation towards the West in showing their progressiveness, the cultural freedom they acquired and the self-discovery they have experienced abroad.

3.2.11 Ethnicity in Nigeria

Although the focus of *Americanah* definitely lies on the conflicts caused by ethnic differences in the US, the story also gives the reader some idea of the difficult relations between various Nigerian ethnicities. While the conflicts in the US have been dealt with already in various sections, I will now concentrate exclusively on Nigeria and analyse the representation of the ethnic consciousness that does not cease to trigger unrest in the Nigerian society. In the theoretical part, the historical reasons of the ethnic tensions have been roughly outlined. The novel gives some clues as to how they are visible in ordinary situations. In the first chapter, set in a braiding salon in Trento, Ifemelu's braider Aisha asks her about her ethnicity and when she finds out that Ifemelu is Igbo, she is surprised: "I think you Yoruba because you dark and Igbo fair. I have two Igbo men. Very good. Igbo men take care of women real good" (Adichie 14). Aisha would like to marry one of them, but she cannot: "They love me but they say the family want Igbo woman. Because Igbo marry Igbo always" (Adichie 15). When Ifemelu tells her that it is not true and that many members of her family are married not to Igbos, Aisha decides to bring in her men, in order that Ifemelu can convince them to marry her. This scene underlines the strong African ethnic consciousness, but at the same time shows that not all people have the same attitude towards it. Later in the story, Obinze hears a man say: "The wealthy don't really care about tribe. But the lower you go, the more tribe matters" (Adichie 467). The fact that this statement stands by itself, unmoderated by comments, hints to the author's perspective which will be discussed beneath. After Ifemelu's return to Lagos, ethnic affiliation becomes more present. For instance, when Ifemelu visits a flat, the landlord tells her up front: "I do not rent to Igbo people" (Adichie 393) and Ifemelu is shocked that he just says this so easily. The reader is left with the question, if Nigeria has changed so much or if Ifemelu simply got used to the carefully hidden discrimination of the United States. The awareness of ethnicity is illustrated once more in the scene where Esther, a girl who works for *Zoe* magazine "curtsied, Yoruba-style" (Adichie 416). The fact that her behaviour is assigned to her ethnicity rather than to her character, is reminiscent of American racism, as discussed before.

In contrast to the US-Americans, however, the Nigerians in the novel address ethnicity without taboo. When Obinze wants to make a deal with a man, the potential client says without restraint (Adichie 456):

You see, this is the problem with you Igbo people. You don't do brother-brother. That is why I like Yoruba people, they look out for one another. [...] A Hausa man will speak Hausa to his fellow Hausa

man. A Yoruba man will see a Yoruba person anywhere and speak Yoruba. But an Igbo man will speak English to an Igbo man. I am even surprised that you are speaking Igbo to me.

Obinze tries to defend himself and explains: “It’s sad, it’s the legacy of a defeated people. We lost the Biafran war and learned to be ashamed” (Adichie 456).

To sum up, the issue of ethnicities in Nigeria is not covered abundantly in *Americanah*. In the scenes where it does come up, it is mostly not discussed explicitly and in further detail. While Ifemelu thinks a lot about racism in the United States, she does not seem to care a lot about the ethnic tensions in Nigeria. I have come up with three possible hypotheses to explain this representation: First, it could simply mean that Ifemelu is more used to the situation in her homeland. Secondly, it could hint to the fact that Adichie herself does not attach a lot of importance to ethnicity. It seems that the author has a rather neutral attitude towards ethnic conflicts and thus, does not let shine through any particular standpoint. While in the American race question, she clearly supports the standpoint of the minorities, she does not take sides in the Nigerian ethnic conflicts, even though Ifemelu is Igbo just like the author herself. Thirdly, it is also possible that Adichie did not include a lot of details about the Nigerian ethnicities, as many Western readers would not be able to follow, as they do not have sufficient knowledge on the subject.

3.2.12 Politics

Politics are not discussed in detail in *Americanah*. However, the representation of political issues in Nigeria as well as in the US, are revealing. As regards Nigeria, the focus is mostly on corruption, lack of democracy and abuse of power. At a party at Chief’s house, Obinze meets a politician “who had run for governor in the last elections, had lost and, as all losing politicians did, had gone to court to challenge the results” (Adichie 30). This is a good example of the picture Adichie conveys of Nigerian politics. The way how the system runs is also displayed in a scene where Ifemelu and other girls under the control of sister Ibinabo have to make garlands for chief Omenka who “had donated two new vans to the church” (Adichie 50). Ifemelu, being a very ruthless and impulsive character, dares to speak her mind in front of sister Ibinabo: “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?” (Adichie 51). The scene shows the corruption of rich Nigerian men, the church’s involvement in dirty deals and also, that Ifemelu has already

had a political awareness and a strong sense of righteousness in her young years. On another occasion, Uju sums up quite poignantly how Nigeria works (Adichie 77):

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 know how to lick an ass. I'm lucky to be licking the right ass.

She refers to her affair with a powerful general, who pays for everything she desires. Moreover, the deception of many Nigerians about the ills of the state is expressed, when Ginika's father, a university professor, decides to take his whole family to America, because "[w]e are not sheep. This regime is treating us like sheep and we are starting to behave as if we are sheep. I have not been able to do any research in years, because every day I am organizing strikes and talking about unpaid salaries and there is no chalk in the classrooms" (Adichie 64).

Politics are also thematised when Ifemelu lives in the United States. The kind of information the reader gets about the presidential elections, which Obama eventually wins, is very insightful for the analysis of interculturality. Around the world, people know, read, advocate and criticise many things about Obama's work; however, Adichie gives her readers an understanding of his presidency from a whole different perspective. She tells the story of his election through the eyes of a black non-American woman, who is not even allowed to vote. That is why the focus is very personal and revolves around racial aspects. During the period around the election, Ifemelu is dating Blaine. When first asked whom she supports, she says: "I like Hillary Clinton. [...] I don't really know anything about this Obama guy" (Adichie 329), while Blaine and his colleagues at the faculty all support Obama. However, they are not sure whether white people and the nation are ready for a black president. Later, when Ifemelu has become an enthusiastic supporter of Obama, she writes in a blog post entitled "Even the Idea of Being Ready is Ridiculous": "*Does nobody see how absurd it is to ask people if they are ready for a black president? Are you ready for Mickey Mouse to be president?*" (Adichie 329). Thus, from the starting point of the discussion about Obama's skin colour, the author clarifies the absurdity and constructedness of the issue.

Adichie also underlines the unifying potential that shared political beliefs bear. Blaine and Ifemelu, who are growing apart, feel "new passion, outside of themselves, that united them in an intimacy they had never before, an unfixed, unspoken intuitive intimacy: Barack Obama" (Adichie 352). Together they feverishly follow the news, read his biography, Ifemelu posts regularly about Obama and his wife, while Blaine becomes a volunteer in the presidential

campaign (Adichie 355). Moreover, even among Blaine's friends "Ifemelu no longer felt excluded", as they have this shared belief that is stronger than their differences (Adichie 355).

Later, Adichie goes deeper into the racial aspect of Obama's candidature. Ifemelu brings up the curious perspective many Americans have that "'blacks want Obama' and 'women want Hilary', but what about black women?" (Adichie 355). Moreover, it is discussed that Obama benefits from being black in the elections and that howsoever, "if he wins, he will no longer be black, just as Oprah is no longer black, she's Oprah. [...] So she can go where black people are loathed and be fine. He'll no longer be black, he'll just be Obama" (Adichie 356). This suggests that if a black person achieves something, their kind does not get the credit for it, but rather he or she is regarded as an exceptional case and from then on, this person's most prominent trait is not any longer his or her skin colour. Blaine once explains that Obama's success also depends on the "different kind of black" that he is. Having a white mother and having been raised in different countries "make him somehow a bit like everyone, if he was just a plain black guy from Georgia, it would be different" (Adichie 356). This debate puts the big progress, a black presidency means for the United States into a critical light and fuels reconsiderations. This is also exemplified, when Obama gives a speech about race in which he, according to Blaine "equate[s] black grievance and white fear". Grace, one of Blaine's colleagues, thinks that it "was not done to open up a conversation about race but actually to close it. He can only win if he avoids race. We all know that" (Adichie 357). Adichie shows how the initial enthusiasm and hope gradually cracks, which illustrate the long way the United States still have to go till the characters' expectations will be fulfilled. Obama is presented as wearing his black skin colour just as an accessory, figuring as a signpost; nevertheless he cannot yet truly represent his kind. However, when Ifemelu learns about the victory of Obama, "there was, at that moment, nothing that was more beautiful to her than America" (Adichie 361).

4 CONCLUSION

Americanah is an excellent example of an intercultural novel. The story fully conforms to the definition of intercultural and migration literature. On closer examination, the author interweaves intercultural elements into nearly every scene in the novel. As a result much meaning is read ‘in between the lines’.

An analysis of the elements in which interculturality is specifically visible brings to light how Adichie represents the topic in a very nuanced way. To make a point, she wraps up her message in trivial situations like eating habits, hair styles or online dating. Through the use of these banal aspects, she illustrates how the character’s education and the kind of life they lead in the United States or England overlap and result in a totally new perception. The author tells the story of many characters who find themselves in similar situations and thus, makes her reader aware that people do not just act in a certain way because of their origins. She carefully illustrates how factors like family background, economic situation, accidental encounters and individual personality play a role in forming the characters’ identities, their behaviour and their relationships. As regards identity, the fact that foreignness and alterity are relational dimensions (Sommer 24) is very visible in the novel: for instance, Ifemelu claims that when “you make the choice to come to America, you become black” (Adichie 219). Even though she has been black all her life, she had never considered her skin colour as a distinctive feature until it was contrasted to the mostly white society she finds herself in after migrating. And it is here that she discovers it makes a difference in the way people treat her.

Going back to the epistemology of the term interculturality, which is composed of the prefix *inter* and the word *culture* (Hofmann 9), it is clear that *Americanah* is full of intercultural elements. Most of the scenes describe situations in which the characters feel their own ‘otherness’, as they find themselves in ‘Third Spaces’. Additionally, the protagonist Ifemelu is particularly sensitive to culture. Therefore, the account of her observations and considerations are very culturally loaded.

Besides, it seems that the characters are constantly concerned with migration processes. On the one hand, because they put a lot of thought into imagining and planning their lives abroad, on the other hand, since many of them actually go abroad to the US or Britain. Eventually, the two narrators, Ifemelu and Obinze, return to their home in Nigeria. However, their migration stories do not simply end here. The reader realizes how their experiences as migrants marked them to the point that they perceive their homeland as foreign. Just like Bhabha (54) states,

migrants end up in a situation where they do not belong to any place and where they cannot identify with any social group. By choosing to tell the stories of migrants who leave their homes for economic and lifestyle reasons rather than because of political oppression, war or starvation, the author puts intercultural encounters in the focus. If the characters were only striving to survive, the Author would not have the possibility to show so many facets of the culture and also so many different groups of society as far as economic, educational and ethnic aspects are concerned.

Adichie does not merely show intercultural encounters directly linked to migration processes, but portrays how interculturality manifests itself in everyday situations. Beside the prototypical form of appearance, namely between majority and minority cultures (Schröer 46), she includes intercultural exchange in relations between different ethnicities, different social classes and groups, between the generations, as well as between people who have been changed through particular experiences they made abroad.

Any intercultural text must, according to Schröer (49), build on a broad and dynamic understanding of culture. Adichie takes this idea to the extreme by choosing a character as her protagonist that neither fulfils the expectations of a biased reader, nor feels a sense of belonging to any social group. Ifemelu is very stubborn, has a strong personality and usually disagrees with the people in her surroundings. The use of a critical and self-reflective character is a very useful tool to break down stereotypes and avoid the construction of group identities. Ifemelu's negative attitude towards every society prevents the narration from favouring any of the groups presented. Ifemelu criticises everyone, starting from her family, her hometown and friends, through to Americans, migrants and those who repatriate to Nigeria. Although, we can extrapolate that Nigeria is where Ifemelu's heart belongs, this favouritism is interpreted as argument for the naturally strong bond people have with their home country globally rather than with a preference for the Nigerian culture in general. Ifemelu does not find a source of identification in any society or location; however through the confrontation with the 'other' (Hofmann 16), Ifemelu gets to know herself and eventually finds out that she can only be truly herself in the presence of Obinze, as their set of values and general attitudes is sufficiently similar.

Adichie presents many ways in which the characters' lives are enriched by interculturality, but she also points to its limits. When it comes to interpersonal relationships, she makes it clear that tolerance and acceptance on both sides are prerequisites for fruitful encounters and hints to the fact that true love makes successful communication a lot easier. In Ifemelu's

relationships with a white and an African American, Curt and Blain, the author shows how easy it is for Ifemelu to adapt to the culture of her boyfriends. Since she adores them, she willingly welcomes the changes to her life and just starts disapproving when her love is fading. Moreover, as long as they are really in love with each other, race does not really matter; however, Adichie highlights that as soon as tensions arise in the relationships, their cultural backgrounds are one of the first things that are discussed. As far as romantic relationships are concerned, the author seems to support the attitude that different cultures can be a source of excitement and that love has the power to bridge the gap, but also that cross-cultural couples always have to struggle against the tensions caused by their different cultural backgrounds.

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6 ABSTRACT

Interkulturalität bezeichnet, im Gegensatz zu Trans- und Multikulturalität, den Zwischenraum, der aus der Beziehung zwischen Eigen- und Fremdkultur resultiert. Beim diesem Aufeinandertreffen entsteht ein „dritter Raum“, in dem sich für die Betroffenen ein gänzlich neues Wertesystem herausbildet. In interkulturellen Texten, insbesondere im Migrationsroman, wird dieses Phänomen meist sehr gut dargestellt. Durch die unbekannte Perspektive, die der Leser kennenlernt, wenn er die Migrationsgeschichte durch die Augen der Charaktere sieht, werden Stereotype abgebaut und den Lesern ein anderer Zugang zu fremden Kulturen ermöglicht.

In Chimamanda Ngozi Adichies Roman *Americanah* verlässt die 19-jährige Ifemelu ihre Heimatstadt Lagos, um in den USA zu studieren. Nach dreizehn Jahren lässt sie jedoch ihr amerikanisches Leben hinter sich und kehrt nach Nigeria zurück. Rassismus, Bindung an Heimat und Familie, sowie die große Liebe sind die zentralen Themen des Romans.

Meine Arbeit beschäftigt sich mit der Repräsentation von Interkulturalität in *Americanah*. Ich versuche zu zeigen, wie interkulturelle Vorgänge durch Struktur und Erzähltechnik des Romans hervorgehoben werden und weiters, in welchen Elementen Interkulturalität besonders sichtbar ist und wie das Phänomen in den jeweiligen Situationen dargestellt wird.

Der Theorieteil der Arbeit beinhaltet eine genaue Definition und Erläuterung des Konzeptes der Interkulturalität, sowie eine Beschreibung interkultureller und Migrationsliteratur. Neben den typischen Merkmalen der beiden Kategorien, behandle ich auch Kriterien zur Analyse solcher Texte. Außerdem beleuchte ich den sozio-kulturellen Hintergrund von *Americanah* genauer, indem ich auf relevante Aspekte der nigerianischen Kolonialgeschichte, sowie auf die Ethnizitäten und Sprachen des Landes genauer eingehe. Da das Thema Migration eine wichtige Rolle im Roman spielt, gehe ich auch kurz auf die Immigrationspolitik der USA und das fragwürdige Licht, das diese auf die amerikanische Demokratie wirft, ein.

Den zweiten Teil der Arbeit bildet die Analyse des Textes. Zuerst werden die formellen Kriterien des Romans untersucht um zu rechtfertigen, warum *Americanah* als interkulturelle bzw. Migrationsliteratur gehandelt wird. Danach analysiere ich die Repräsentation von Interkulturalität in zwölf verschiedenen Bereichen, nämlich Sprache und Akzent, Essen, Bildung, Jobs, Romantische Beziehungen, Rasse und Diskrimination, Identität, Literatur, Migration, Haare, Ethnizität und Politik.

Adichie verpackt viele ihrer Botschaften in alltägliche Situationen, in denen es sich um banale Dinge wie Modetrends, Frisuren oder Online Dating Plattformen dreht. Oft muss man auch sorgfältig zwischen den Zeilen lesen, um zu erkennen, was die Autorin durch Ironie oder Übertreibung vermitteln will. Zwischendurch finden sich jedoch immer wieder Blogeinträge von Ifemelu, in der explizit auf sensible Punkte betreffend den Umgang mit verschiedenen Kulturen in Amerika eingegangen wird. Die Wahl eines sehr eigenwilligen und starken Charakters als Hauptfigur, der es schwer fällt, sich mit einem bestimmten Ort einer Gesellschaft oder sozialen Gruppe zu identifizieren, gibt der Autorin die Möglichkeit, jeweils die kritische Außensicht zu reflektieren.. In dem Roman geht es nicht um Migranten, die vor Not und Elend in ihrem Land fliehen, sondern um gebildete Menschen, die nach einem erfüllten und glücklichen Leben streben. Dadurch konzentriert sich die Autorin besonders auf die Nuancen in den Beziehungen zwischen Migranten und Einheimischen, Mehrheiten und Minderheiten, Rückkehrern und Personen, die ihre Heimat nie verlassen haben. Da die Autorin auf ein breites Spektrum von Aspekten eingeht und sich nicht auf eine bestimmte soziale Schicht versteift, erfüllt *Americanah* auf jeden Fall das Ziel eines interkulturellen Romans, den Leser für andere Kulturen zu sensibilisieren.

7 CURRICULUM VITAE

Zur Person

Name: Christina SEIRINGER-GAUBINGER
Nationalität: Österreich

Ausbildung

WS 2014: Fachbezogenes Praktikum im UF Französisch am BG/BRG Tulln, Betreuerin: Mag Marie-Laure Straka
WS2012/SS2013: Auslandsjahr an der Universität Jean Moulin Lyon III
SS 2012: Fachbezogenes Praktikum im UF Englisch an der KMS Theodor-Kramer Straße, Betreuer: Mag. Thomas Schimmel
Seit WS 2009: Lehramtsstudium Englisch und Bewegung und Sport, Universität Wien
Seit WS 2008: Lehramtsstudium Englisch und Französisch, Universität Wien
Juni 2008: Matura am ORG der Franziskanerinnen Vöcklabruck (Auszeichnung)

Berufserfahrung

Seit 01/2014: Kursleiterin Geräteturnen an der Vienna International School
Seit 03/2014: Betreuerin im Jugendzentrum JUVIVO06
Seit 2011: Nachhilfetätigkeit in Englisch

Sprachkenntnisse

Deutsch: Muttersprache
Englisch: C2 (TOEFL 2014: 114 Punkte)
Französisch: C1
Spanisch: A1