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Statutory Declaration

I declare that I have authored this thesis independently, that I have not used other than the declared sources / recourses and that I have explicitly marked all material which has been quoted either literally or by content from the used sources.

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1 Introduction

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie is one of the most famous African female writers at this moment. Her literary works are full of an incredible amount of themes and topics but it is the inclusion of her memories as a child in Africa and the experience as an immigrant of the USA that make her stories as realistic as they (almost) are. This thesis is a discussion of Adichie's short story collection *The Thing Around Your Neck*. The collection includes twelve short stories that are absolutely independent from each other but nevertheless, links can be established by the themes and topics used within the stories. The aim of this thesis is to depict such links and analyse the most prominent topics by comparing all stories with each other.

Whilst the first part of this thesis deals with the theoretical background of Adichie's writing, the second part is entirely dedicated to the analysis of, firstly, each short story on its own and, secondly, the comparison of the short stories with the help of the main themes detected during the first part of the analysis.

The following research questions are the basis for this thesis and also justify the theoretical part, as well as the analysis of *The Thing Around Your Neck*:

In what way and to what extent do first and second generation African writers and her own experiences and biography influence Adichie's writing?

What is African authenticity and does Adichie attempt to deconstruct African clichés in her short stories as widely claimed?

In order to find an answer to these questions, it is necessary to take a look at Nigeria's past events and critical points of time that generated the most prominent type of writing that seems to have had great influence on Adichie's work – the Nigerian Civil War and Nigerian war literature. It is therefore also crucial to look at previous generations of writers with whom Adichie shares common ground.

The last two points of the theoretical part of the diploma thesis will introduce the reader to Adichie's writing style in general and furthermore gives an overview of the African short story as a special literary genre.

2 Theory

2.1 Nigerian Civil War

Nigeria, especially the southern part, has been in contact with European culture since the late fifteenth century (Booker 171). Colonialists from the neighbouring continent had an enormous influence on the development of this region, which can not only be seen in the ways they treated the natives when introducing the slave trade to America in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries but also in the continuing oppression of Nigeria's inhabitants during British colonial times. At the Berlin Conference in 1884/5, the African continent was divided between Western powers, and Britain gained control over a huge part of land, which is nowadays known as modern Nigeria. Within its borders, the British established a system of indirect rule that made Nigerians local rulers of the colonial government, whereas the British governor was still head and decision-maker of the entire country. Although this system had its benefits, since public transport and road networks were built within this era, corruption and abuse were ruling the country. On top of this, a bigger problem emerged with the arbitrary division of the African continent. The Western powers had ignored already existing borders between indigenous tribal lands, which did not share common languages, traditions, belief-systems and sodality, but they were supposed to live side by side in this newly established country. From British rule onwards, Nigeria was inhabited by people belonging to the Fulani, Hausa, Igbo, Ijaw, Kanuri Tiv and Yoruba tribes (McLeod 75) and it is needless to say that conflicts were inevitable. On October 1, 1960, Nigeria gained independence from the British colonial power and in 1963, the country was again divided into northern, western and eastern self-governing regions since it had never been possible to establish a national unit in the years of colonial rule. Not only different traditions but also especially the two major religions, Christianity and Islam, divided the country and the first years of formal independence were filled with bloody conflicts (Heerten und Moses 172). In 1966/7, two military coups were staged, one by northern Igbo army officers, the other by the Hausa clan (Booth 29). What followed was a migration of Igbo people to the Eastern part of Nigeria, which

led to its secession and the proclamation of the Republic of Biafra. This event marked the start of the Nigerian Civil War, or Biafran War, which lasted until the surrender of the Biafran forces on January 15, 1970. The war was followed by the reinstatement of Nigeria's original boundaries. From then onwards, military rule and a short-lived republic between 1979-1983 were always superseded by additional coups. In 1999, a fully civilian government came to power, which was again headed by a former military head of state until 2007 (Booker 172). The following two presidents were criticized in many points although political upheaval was absent during the time of their reigns. *The Economist Newspaper Limited* states that with the 2015 election of the most recent head of state, Muhammadu Buhari, hopes are raised that he will fight corruption and establish a functioning military force to defeat the militant Islamist group Boko Haram.

This short overview of Nigeria's history¹ can only hint at the complexity of issues that have arisen in the last centuries, but still one might understand the intensity of struggle between those different groups who are trying to safeguard their interests because they feel threatened by one of the other groups. The idea of a nation, or a unity, is a construct that has been developed by the Western world in its role as the colonial power and the question arises whether the idea of a nation with aligned borders as *the* ideal concept is the perfect one for every part of the world, especially the decolonized one (McLeod 113).

¹ cf. (F. Ugochukwu: 2010) for a detailed description of Nigeria's history

2.2 Nigerian war literature

No other event in the history of Nigeria has had more impact on the literary works of African writers than the Nigerian Civil War. Looking at the large corpus of works dealing with this event, it is not surprising that this one is considered as the key theme in Nigerian literature (Pape 20). Its thematic and topical approaches to the war are very distinct and can be explained by the experience itself and different perspectives writers have taken on dealing with this event.

Language has always played an important role in Nigeria's history and authors and scholars have taken part in an on-going discussion about the use of the colonial master's language, English, in Nigerian literature. The problematic nature of this topic will be dealt with in more detail in a subsequent section of this thesis. Despite the discussion just mentioned, most works dealing with the Nigerian Civil War have been published in English.

Notwithstanding its prominence, war literature seemed to be a genre reserved for male writers at first. However, not only women were not part of the discourse on the Nigerian Civil War but also writers of the northern, Muslim, parts hardly contributed work on this topic (Pape 21). It is understandable that mostly works from the Biafra area and by its Igbo inhabitants were contributed to the Nigerian Civil War literary corpus since it was them who were afflicted most by the war (Pape 24). The 1970s and 1980s can be regarded as the most productive years for male writing on the civil war. Subsequently, the number of publications written by men declined and female writing received more and more popularity after 1985. One of the main reasons for the late appearance of female war literature was not the lack of manuscripts but rather the difficulty of finding a publisher who would be willing to take on works written by women. In addition to that, Adimora-Ezeigbo claims that female writers, especially Igbo women, tend to act and speak up as a group. "Hence the group speaks with one voice and preserves a collective memory of events and of the history and culture of the community to which the group belongs. The tendency, in this culture, is for women to achieve 'group identity'" (Adimora-Ezeigbo 224). Writing can be seen as an individual act and as self-

assertion, which stands in contrast to the aforementioned perception and is therefore regarded as undesirable for Igbo women (Adimora-Ezeigbo 224).

Nigerian female and male writing differs greatly with regard to the topics being used in their works. Whereas men tend to produce informative pieces about the war itself, including political and ethical issues, women concentrate on their experiences from a private perspective (Adimora-Ezeigbo 223). Furthermore, what is considered as a woman's way of writing in Nigerian literature, can be seen in their descriptions of "the suffering of the civilian population and women's struggle for survival, [the] pos[ing of] questions about the war and the way in which enemies are conceptualized, and [in them] proffer[ing] images of a visionary 'New woman' (Pape 227). One further aspect that differs between male and female writing is the future perspective both of them depict in their works. Men seem to describe the imagined difficulties of a possible reconciliation as opposed to women, who show a clearer tendency towards a positive future (Pape 57).

As has been mentioned before, works about the Nigerian Civil War were mostly written by insiders, Igbo people that were directly affected by the war. However, one should not underestimate an outside perspective of this event, especially because even within the group of insiders, tendencies of disagreement can be observed (Pape 53). It is therefore important to highlight the common grounds, inside and outside writers share with regard to the war they both experienced from different angles. Firstly, each of them belongs to or identifies with "one of the two war enemies, or with a specific ethnic group, skin colo[u]r, gender, age, the temporal or spatial proximity of the author to the war, as well as the extent of her personal involvement (emotional proximity), social status, and political awareness" (Pape 53).

Additionally, female writers from both parties tend to discuss the same topics and similar storylines, which expand the list of topical points of female writing mentioned before. War conditions are described from a personal point of view, which depict their struggle of survival in chaotic and dangerous times like these (Pape 57).

Taking in account that female war literature only became popular after 1985, a development from a more informative depiction of the war towards a more personal description of war experiences is visible. Additionally, it can be

observed that writers tend to move away from (anti-) colonial topics and concentrate all the more on national topics due to the writers' greater national consciousness (Pape 22). However, despite such developments and a process of institutionalization, which has been started by famous first-generation writers Achebe and Soyinka, Nigeria has not found a sense of a national literature yet (Dawson and Larrivée 922). The main difficulty in achieving a national literature seems to be in the diversity of this country. With so many ethnic groups living side by side but not together due to their differences in tradition, culture and language, it will be hard to establish a national unity. The question remains, whether Nigerian writers can play a part in contributing to such a unity with the help of their works.

2.3 Generations of Nigerian writers

Nigerian literature has experienced a development in the past decades and various scholars believe that significant historical events can be used as markers of identification of three different generations of writers. Dalley puts it down succinctly when stating: "It groups literary works on the basis of their putative affiliation to a nation-state and their location in a historical narrative beginning with foundational figures and proceeding through stages" (Dalley 16). Adesanmi merges the group of writers of the first and second generations since both were born in the first decades of the twentieth century and their attention is mainly drawn to the times when Nigeria was under colonial power. However, he distinguishes between them insofar that writers from the second generation might have experienced the end of colonial rule but their focus is on the following years of independence and the Civil War as opposed to the first generation writers, who were completely and only affected by British rule (Adesanmi and Dunton 8). The third generation of Nigerian writers was mostly born after the 1960s. Some of them have experienced the instable times of the first years of Nigeria's independence, however this generation also includes writers, e.g. Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, who can only rely on other people's reports of earlier events, including the Civil War.

In her discussion about the three generations of female writers, Pape concludes that age difference matters when comparing the focus of and reasons for their literary works but it is widely understood that although the age of the writer plays a role in the correct allocation to one of the three generations, the importance lies on how one has experienced the Nigerian Civil War:

[T]he younger the authors are, the more emotional and dramatic their representations of the events leading up to the secession and of the war tend to be. The continued feeling of many Igbo that there are 'many issues that have been officially swept aside by the country but which continue to resonate for many Igbo people' and that they are second class citizens in post-war Nigeria, even today. In contrast, older Igbo women writers who lived through the war tend to focus less on questions of guilt and rectification but rather on the horrors and the ultimate futility of the conflict. (Pape 151)

As mentioned before, Adichie belongs to the third generation of Nigerian writers. Her performance and the works of some other important novelists of this time, e.g. Helon Habila and Chris Habani, have achieved international success and have opened the door to a different, but realistic, view of Africa (Adesanmi und Dunton 10). This fact alone makes it worthwhile taking a closer look at the purposes and impact the third generation has on the literary world. However, before new Nigerian writing could eventually emerge, many obstacles had to be overcome. Factors like "a grossly harassed socio-political reality of institutional corruption, nepotism and the atomizing blight of economic hardship" (Olusegun-Joseph 2) made it almost impossible to publish new works (Hewett 77). Only when taking their writings abroad, the writers of a new generation of African fiction gained so much attention that their works were eventually included into the transnational academic canon.

As has been mentioned before, the events that formed and changed Nigeria to what it is today, a multi-cultural country, have been and still are mentioned by all generations of writers. However, the largest group of new Nigerian writers, like Adichie, who does not have first-hand experiences of the Nigerian Civil War, relies on an emotional connection it has with their people – the Igbo. Needless to say, the third generation includes several more writers who attribute themselves to different peoples than the Igbo and their importance of

depicting such historical events from a different perspective is not irrelevant in any way. Nonetheless, since this thesis concentrates on the works of the Igbo writer Adichie, this paragraph will only deal with the experiences of this ethnic group.

Writers of the third generation concentrate on a fact that has often been excluded by older writers – the trauma of the past. Whereas earlier writers tend to bring closure to the events that brought so much misery to their people, third generation writers want to point out that closure in the politics of Nigeria has not been achieved. These writers therefore highlight the importance of negotiating the postcolonial conditions of Nigeria (Krishnan 194). By remembering past incidents, new Nigerian literature focuses on forming an identity that is based on the connection in their community: “With the passage of time, the resurgence of Biafra in Nigerian literature marks the importance of the period to contemporary identity formation and underlines its lasting effects on national identity and the national imaginary, particularly relevant at a time when Biafran nationalism is returning to the forefront of Nigerian politics” (Krishnan 186). By taking a different approach to dealing with the past, third generation writers seem to take a step away from earlier generations and create a new identity of writers by redefining Nigerian literature (Hewett 78).

2.4 Exoticism – Igbo language

Most of the literature published in Nigeria, as well as in the rest of the African continent, is written in the language which was imposed by the former colonial powers. Using English in texts undoubtedly reminds of the events that happened in the colonial past but since no universal language, that comprises all peoples of Nigeria has been established until now, writers have to fall back on using English to make themselves understood by everybody.

Writing in one's native language would mean that only a limited audience can be reached, namely the one group of readers that is capable of understanding this certain vernacular. If Nigerian writers want to expand this small circle of readers, they have to write in a language, in this case it is English, that is understood by the entire Nigerian community. Additionally, with a widespread language like English, writers will not only be able to expose their works to a wider audience within the country but they also have a bigger chance of finding recognition internationally (Booth 57).

The need for universalizing their works and choosing English as the literary medium exposes Nigerian writers to an additional dilemma. Whilst it is less problematic to describe their experience of the African world with the use of their native tongue, they often reach limitations in expressing the same thoughts when writing in English. To overcome this dilemma, writers tend to incorporate chunks of their native languages within a text written in English. "Nigerian English", as this phenomenon is often labelled, "is not a bastardised result of colonial corruption, but a resource of urban and rural working classes alike; English is not the vehicle of oppression, but one of national expression. Nigeria is beyond the post-colonial" (Dawson and Larrivée 931).

Einar Haugen explains this phenomenon, which is known as code switching in sociolinguistics, as "[...] the alternate use of two languages, including everything from the introduction of a single unassimilated word up to a complete sentence or more, into the context of another language" (Fishman 521). Code switching meets the writer's demand to "reach the widest possible readership [but] present the exact experience and create the same linguistic effect as in the other language" (Epstein and Kole 60). Every writer tends to

have different opinions on the introduction of new linguistic elements to the English language for the sake of an authentic description of the world they see (Booth 66) but it seems to be the case that Igbo writers dominate Nigerian literature, especially because of their creative use of the English language (Igboanusi 53). Chinua Achebe, who is one of the most famous Nigerian writers, chose to write in English but also pointed out the shortcomings that other writers experience with this language. His discussion with Ngugi wa Thiong'o, a Kenyan writer, did not only divide African writers into two camps but is also a depiction of how the English language is officially presented and rated within the two states. Whereas Achebe understood the colonial past as a challenge that might be overcome with the help of new African literature written in English, Ngugi criticized this approach and published his works in Kikuyu, his native tongue (Eckstein 2007 61). Achebe's understanding of whether and how to use English in Nigerian literary works can be read in one of his essays:

The African writer should aim to use English in a way that brings out his message best without altering the language to the extent that its value as a medium of international exchange will be lost. He should aim at fashioning out an English which is at once universal and able to carry his peculiar experience. [...] I feel that the English language will be able to carry the weight of my African experience. But it will have to be a new English, still in full communion with its ancestral home but altered to suit its new African surroundings. (Achebe 61)

Many Nigerian writers, including Adichie, are influenced by Achebe's understanding of form in literature, and they successfully combine vernacular expressions with the English language in their works (Anyokwu 83). From the seven categories of linguistic innovations in Nigerian literature (Igboanusi 2001 56), Adichie's short stories include loan words and loan blends. Loan words are used to "reflect titles, food, religion and traditional customs" that either "have no direct lexical equivalents in English" or have equivalents but "may not accommodate all the social and semantic nuances of the Igbo language items" (Igboanusi 57). Readers who do not understand this vernacular can still make out the meaning of an unknown word by referring to the context.

Loan blends, the second category of linguistic innovations that can be found in Adichie's works, can be described as combinations of English items and the Igbo vernacular, which then form new meanings (Igboanusi 61). The English reader will be able to understand the meaning of a word taken from Igbo traditions with the help of the English headword within this construction.

2.5 The African Short Story

African fiction can be found in various forms and lengths. Longer narratives, like the novel, exist side-by-side with traditional tales and short stories in an ever-expanding corpus of literary works. However, although it has been argued that the popular oral tale, as it existed in preliterate Africa, is the antecedent of the short story, the latter experienced a decline of interest in the past (Emenyonu 5). For various reasons that will be discussed subsequently, it is important to shed light on this short narrative and give it the attention it deserves. Especially younger writers in Nigeria have already taken first steps into the right direction and the number of short stories published in recent years is on the rise.

As the title reveals already, the African short story varies from the "original" short story, the way Edgar Allan Poe, the person most famously known for experimenting with this genre (Head 1023), developed it. Since this short narrative has a minimal amount of features that characterizes this genre, it is less surprising that its loose boundaries to other forms of narrative fiction are beneficial to individual variation. African fiction is severely influenced by the colonial reign, which means that the majority of works deal with the impact European countries had on African culture, history and its people. With a changed socio-environment, writers had to adjust their ways of writing, which can be seen, i.e. in the alternations done to the Western form of the short story. In order to understand the differences between the original short story and the (post-) colonial African variation, a short characterization of both of them will be presented in the following.

The modern short story emerged as the written form of the oral tale and the ballad in the 19th century and is known for its brevity and scope restriction. Fludernik points out that

[...] the brevity of the short story, cognitively speaking, does not have a 'natural' quality of oral experientiality but serves a secondary, illusionist revocation of orality. The short story is a written genre from the start, and its brevity is linked to artificial effects of epiphany, climatic development, the rendering of moods and sentiments. (349)

The additional feature of "unity of effect" can be considered as the most characteristic aspect and contrasts with the oral narrative (Head 1023). This is the point at which the short story differs from the effect of a succession of episodes, which is used in the simple narrative (Löffler and Späth 360).

When it comes to the history of the modern African short story, it does not seem to differ much from its Western relative at first glance. Both derive from the oral narrative but it appears that the story was far more important in Africa's preliterate times. It was regarded as a cultural vehicle and the messages contained in such oral narratives were supposed to educate the younger generation. The way African values were transmitted was simple but effective; on the one hand, its serious didactic approach invited children to reflect over addressed topics, on the other hand, entertainment was not supposed to go short either (Emenyonu 2). This was the main task of the storyteller, who both acted as an artist and a teacher at the same time. His or her goal was to use people's short attention span most effectively and to introduce them to current problems in Africa's society. As Emenyonu sums up: "The traditional artist had a clear conception of the immediate society, its problems and needs, and reflected these in the course of narration, projecting through the ethical formulas in each tale a direction for the society and the individuals caught in the dilemmas of humanity" (Emenyonu 2). In order to make them more challenging for the listener, artists added various literary styles to the story and this is regarded as a further exercise for the faculties of children (Emenyonu 3). Such characteristics of the traditional oral narrative can be found in the modern African short story as well. This, however, is only one indicator why African writers choose the short story as their favourite literary genre. Other explanations for increased short story writing are

“cultures with small or non-existent publishing infrastructures, the low-capital [and] low-circulation literary magazines (Hunter 138). Furthermore, it has been pointed out by various critics, among others the Irish writer Frank O’Connor, that the form of the short story is the perfect genre to represent the conditions of cultures that were ruled by colonial powers (Hunter 138). Larson points out that African writers tend to change the original Western form of the short story and by doing so, they have “stretched it a bit by injecting a healthy dose of [their] own cultural and aesthetic values into a traditional Western genre and created in the process a frequently new radically different form” (147). However, not only form in postcolonial literature plays a big role but also language. Colonial powers displaced, or “deterritorialized” the native language[s] of their colonies and writers tend to emphasise this deterritorialization by creating their own language and style (Hunter 139). An overview to the various kinds of alternations of the English language in Nigerian literature can be found in the previous chapter of this thesis, which deals with exoticism within literary works.

Short story writing has suffered considerable neglect in the past century but as has been mentioned before, Nigerian third generation writers have started to put new emphasis on this genre. In a critical review, Ada Asoo mentions why the short story outshines the novel in African literature:

[T]he writer seizes the plot at the high point of emotion, when the story is most interesting to the reader or listener and does not relent until the final denouement. This condensation of a full story in a form that can be easily adapted in terms of time and space to the small interstices of busy everyday lives gives the short story a definitive edge over the novel. (26)

Critical reviews of Adichie’s short stories mention her approach in a positive way: “[She] has been able to follow the dictates of early practitioners of the short story” and one can find her inner conflicts of being divided between Nigeria and the USA within the short stories, which is “instructional for us, because it sets the tone, defines the nature, the themes, setting, and the narrative techniques in the short stories” (Asoo 15). Although Adichie follows the demands of unity and coherence in most of her short stories (Asoo 25), it should also be mentioned that her individual approaches include varying

chronological perspectives, different narrative perspectives and unnamed characters. Such features are usually not found in the traditional Western short story, but by adding them to her works, Adichie tries to point out that the Nigerian identity cannot be represented and pinned down with just a small number of characteristics.

2.6 Structure of *The Thing Around Your Neck*

Adichie's collection *The Thing Around Your Neck* comprises twelve stories, which can be read individually and in any random order since the stories are not linked with each other. However, for some stories a chronological or geographical connection can be found.

The same applies to recurring themes, such as racism, gender, family and other relations, the generation gap, immigration, religion, violence, oppression and political corruption. These are just the main themes mentioned in Adichie's collection but their reoccurrence ties those stories together. Although the reader is free to choose his or her own order of reading, it is hardly unnoticeable that Adichie must have put thought on the succession of her stories in this collection. This can be seen in the alternation of settings; the first story is set in Africa, the next one in America, and this order repeats itself throughout the whole collection.

The purpose of such an ordering is to highlight the contrast between those two continents and this depicts even more clearly the main theme that recurs in each of these short stories – the culture clash.

Although Adichie's short stories are fictional, she often incorporates chronological references, such as the death of a former President of Nigeria's wife or the impact of religious colonisers on the lives of indigenous people. Furthermore, personal experiences of her life in Nigeria and the USA can be found in her short stories.

2.7 Narrative point of view of *The Thing Around Your Neck*

The majority, namely seven (*Imitation, A Private Experience, On Monday of Last Week, Jumping Monkey Hill, The American Embassy, The Shivering* and *The Headstrong Historian*) out of the twelve short stories in Adichie's collection, is told in the third-person perspective, or, as Genette classifies it, the heterodiegetic narration (Fludernik 31). The author refers to the main characters either by their names or with "she", since all of them are female. In the omniscient point of view, one can follow the characters' thoughts and activities.

Cell One, Ghosts and *The Arrangers of Marriage* are written in the first-person perspective. The central characters function as the narrator of the story and they are therefore also classified as autodiegetic narrators (Fludernik 31). This kind of narration, not only allows insights into the main character's thoughts but also to the minds of other people involved in the story.

In addition to the two most commonly used narration types, Adichie also makes use of the second-person point of view, telling the story of the narratee. In *The Thing Around Your Neck* and *Tomorrow Is Too Far*, the main character tells the story. However, by using "You" instead of "I" the reader is intentionally drawn to the narrator's side, making him or her part of the narrator herself. This kind of narration invites the reader to align with the narrator's decisions, even if they are ill-minded, as can be seen in the second short story mentioned above (Fludernik 31).

3 *The Thing Around Your Neck*

3.1 The Author – Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie

The novelist and short fiction writer, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, was born on September 15, 1977 in Enugu, Nigeria and was the fifth of six children in the Igbo family. She grew up Nsukka, in the former house of popular writer Chinua Achebe. Adichie's father is a retired professor of statistics and Deputy Vice-Chancellor and her mother the first female registrar at the University of Nigeria in Nsukka. Adichie herself studied Medicine and Pharmacy at the same university but left Nigeria at the age of nineteen to study Communication at Drexel University in Philadelphia, USA. She pursued her studies at Eastern Connecticut State University, graduated summa cum laude and added a Master's degree in Creative Writing at Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore.

Her first novel, "Purple Hibiscus", was released in 2003, shortlisted for the Orange Fiction Prize in 2004 and awarded the Commonwealth Writers' Prize for Best First Books in 2005. Furthermore, Adichie's second novel *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2006) and her short story collection *The Thing Around Your Neck* (2009) received numerous awards and nominations, as it is mentioned in *The Caine Prize for African Writing*. In 2005/6 Adichie was a Hodder fellow at Princeton University, and was additionally awarded a MacArthur Fellowship. At Harvard University she was awarded another fellowship in 2011/12, where she also finished her third novel *Americanah* (2013). Currently, Adichie hosts and participates at writing workshops in Nigeria when she is not teaching in the USA (Tunca).

3.2 Summary of the short stories

3.2.1 *Cell One*

Cell One tells the story of a young Nigerian student who gets arrested for a crime he has not committed. The story does not only encompass the time he spends in prison but the first person narrator also introduces the reader to additional background information that refers to her past. Both, the narrator's brother Nnamabia and she herself, have grown up at the university campus of Nsukka. Their father is a professor and he has ensured that his family lives in a safe environment, shutting out the problematic situation of Nigeria. When the narrator describes their upbringing, she mentions that they were "watching *Sesame Street*, reading Enid Blyton, eating cornflakes for breakfast [...]" (Adichie 5); a construction of an imagined reality, oriented on the Western lifestyle. The peaceful life on the campus, however, is distorted by increased violent actions by cult members. Official police operation is required and they enforce night-time curfews. Nnamabia, a popular and sociable third year student at this time, ignores these restrictions. On the next morning, news reach the family that he has been arrested in a bar. Since Nnamabia was joined by cult members at the time of the arrest, the police accuses him of being part of the violent group and takes him with them.

From the background story, the reader knows about Nnamabia's past that casts a rather poor light on him. He has been caught stealing his mother's jewellery (Adichie 3), his father's car keys (Adichie 4) and exam questions (Adichie 7); he did not attend classes regularly and was excluded from Holy Communion (Adichie 4). Besides his wrongdoings and his good looks (Adichie 6), not much more is known of Nnamabia. Even the narrator herself believes that she knows her brother well (Adichie 4) but she gets less certain about this in the course of the story. What can be extracted from the background story is merely a picture of a spoilt and selfish boy, who does not understand the seriousness of his actions or rather tries to ignore the gravity of this situation. There are no consequences at first but one could argue that the incident mentioned in this story becomes the symbolic punishment for all his past crimes committed.

At the point of his arrest, Nnamabia finally starts experiencing the harsh reality of which he has been protected from throughout his whole life. He clearly is shocked by the conditions in prison, especially in the infamous Cell One, which is even more over-crowded and insanitary than any other cell. After the family's first three-hours-trip to visit Nnamabia in Enugu, his father believes that the experiences he is making in prison have taught him a lesson but the narrator has her doubts:

"This is what I should have done when he broke into the house. I should have had him locked up in a cell."

My mother stared silently out of the window.

"Why?" I asked.

"Because this has shaken him for once. Couldn't you see?" my father asked with a small smile. I couldn't see it. Not that day. Nnamabia seemed fine to me, slipping his money into his anus and all. (Adichie 11)

As opposed to her father's opinion, Nnamabia's sister does not see any changes towards the positive in his attitude and behaviour (Adichie 13) in the course of the first week and therefore believes it as a waste of time and petrol to visit her brother every day. She expresses her discontent by throwing a stone against the windshield of her father's car and consequently stops the family from driving to Enugu for one day. This is the only time when the narrator takes action, whereas in the rest of the story, she is depicted as the passive one of the two siblings. She seems to have been living in her brother's shadow for her entire life. Her brother is clearly their mother's favourite and also outside observers, like traders on the market or a boy she has secretly fallen for, do not notice her (Adichie 6). The narrator's invisibility increases gradually in the course of the story due to the imprisonment of Nnamabia, which puts him even more into the spotlight.

Whilst Nnamabia still lives in a bubble of illusions in the first few days, the arrest of an innocent, old man in the second week of imprisonment seems to bring him down to earth. At their next visit he tells his family about the new inmate, who is treated cruelly by police officers and cellmates. As more days pass by, Nnamabia seemingly becomes more attached to the old man, which can be seen by his less attentive conversations with his family and, in addition

to that, the narrator observes that he eats and speaks less. Only then do her feelings towards her brother become less negative:

Nnamabia was staring at his yellow-orange rice as he spoke, and when he looked up I saw my brother's eyes fill with tears – my worldly brother – and I felt a tenderness for him that I could not have explained had I been asked to. (Adichie 16)

The story seems to turn towards the positive, when another cult attack happens at the campus and an insider confirms that Nnamabia is not a cult member. This confession supposedly leads to his immediate release but when the family drives to Enugu to pick Nnamabia up, he is not there anymore. At this point, the most dramatic point of the story is reached. The narrator uses a flash-forward to indicate her brother's possible death (Adichie 18) but still leaves the reader in the dark about what could have possibly happened to Nnamabia.

In Enugu, the family hardly receives any information from the police officers at the prison and they only find out what has happened after they are being taken to a different place where Nnamabia has been transferred to. At the family's arrival at the new prison, Nnamabia is being released and on their way back home to Nsukka, he tells about his experience in Enugu. Seemingly, Nnamabia dared to speak up for the old man when the policemen's treatment worsened. They let go of the old man, however, the prison officers turned their attention to Nnamabia and he got beaten and locked up in Cell One before being transferred to the other prison. However, the reader does not receive exact information on what has happened in Cell One and the narrator can only assume:

Nnamabia did not say what had happened to him in Cell One, or what happened in the new site, which seemed to me like where they kept people who would later disappear. (Adichie 21)

Nnamabia has learned a lesson that should last a lifetime but also the rest of the family has experienced the seriousness of reality, which they had successfully eliminated from their minds in the past.

3.2.2 Imitation

As opposed to the first short story in Adichie's collection, the second one is situated in America, to be exact, in a house on Cherrywood Lane in a Philadelphian suburb (Adichie 24). Nkem lives there, together with her children whilst her husband Obiora spends most of his time on business trips in Nigeria. But not only his work seems to keep her husband away from their new home for months but also a younger girlfriend, who resides in Lagos. The affair has been discovered by a friend of Nkem's and she delivers the news via phone. After their conversation, Nkem reflects on her life in America (Adichie 32), about the interior of her house (Adichie 25), and about the relationship with her husband (Adichie 24), and every part seems fake, or imitated, to her. She was excited when she moved to America at first and was congratulated by her friends and family on living a very prestigious life.

One of the first observations upon their arrival in the USA was that everything labelled American seemed plastic, but Nkem cannot deny that she prefers her immigrant life to the one she experienced in Nigeria:

She liked them and her lives. Lives Obiora often called "plastic." Yet she knew, he, too, wanted the children to be like their neighbors', the kind of children who sniffed at food that had fallen on the dirt, saying it was "spoiled." In her life, her childhood, you snatched the food up, whatever it was, and ate it. (Adichie 24)

And although Nkem misses home, she rather goes to Pilates classes, bakes cookies for her children in school because "America has grown on her, snaked its roots under her skin" (Adichie 37). She is imitating a life of seemingly everybody's dreams, and still she feels an emptiness inside of her because she realises that this life does not reflect who she really is.

At another point in this story, Nkem is imitating someone else. When she hears the news about her husband's girlfriend, she goes to her bathroom and cuts off her long hair to look more like Obiora's mistress, who has short and curly hair, as her friend has told her on the phone (Adichie 22).

Nkem becomes more and more accustomed to the American lifestyle but she is not able to forget her beliefs that she grew up with. This struggle becomes apparent when she hears about her husband's infidelity. On the one hand,

she is devastated by such news and feels even more forsaken in her American home. On the other hand, Nkem reminds herself of the past life she has led in Nigeria, where she was playing the role of the mistress before meeting Obiora. Nkem mentions two married men by their names that she dated before, and some others, who paid her father's hospital bills and fixed her family's roof but never proposed to her (Adichie 31).

Since Nkem is aware of the traditional practice of polygamy in Nigeria and she has seen the other side of infidelity before, she cannot judge her husband for his wrongdoings. Even her housegirl points out that Nkem should be happy about the life she has with being married to Obiora, although he might not be fully loyal to her:

“You know *oga* Obiora has girlfriends. You don't ask questions. But inside you know. (...) *Oga* Obiora is a good man, madam, and he loves you, he does not use you to play football.” (Adichie 35)

However, Nkem “is not sure anymore” (Adichie 35) of what to believe and she cannot agree with Amaechi that she would be better off with not wanting to know about her husband's infidelities. Therefore, when Obiora returns to America for his annual visit, Nkem tells her bewildered husband that she and her children are going to move back with him to Nigeria.

3.2.3 A Private Experience

A Private Experience tells the story of two women who would have probably never met if the circumstances that bring them together were different. The reader enters the story at the highest point of tension. Chika, an Igbo and Christian woman, climbs into an abandoned store with the help of another woman. Both of them are fleeing from an escalated situation that turned into a riot at the market in Kano. Whereas Chika was there with her sister to visit the market and the ancient part of the city, the unnamed woman is an onion trader, who, accompanied by her eldest daughter, was selling their goods there (Adichie 48). Both women lose sight of their relatives when trying to find a safe place and now they share their worried thoughts. Little is known about the unnamed other woman and the reader has to rely on Chika's guesses since the story is told from her point of view. Judging by her accent and appearance, Chika believes that the woman is Hausa and a Muslim, a Northerner (Adichie 44). Belonging to a different people and religion, however, is not the only thing that makes them differ from each other. Chika comes from a wealthy background (Adichie 43), has always lived in a safe environment (Adichie 44) and studies medicine at the University of Lagos (Adichie 47). The other woman has experienced far poorer living conditions than Chika as can be seen by her worn-out clothes (Adichie 49) and the smell of cheap soap on the woman's skin (Adichie 48). Chika also realises that her companion must have never experienced school life (Adichie 47) and the fact that the woman and at least one of her children are selling goods at the market is another indicator that the family must struggle to survive (Adichie 48). However, the fear of getting killed makes the women overlook their differences and instead they help each other, share clothes (Adichie 46) and medical expertise (Adichie 50). The encounter of the other in this store is the exact opposite of what is happening outside. Every personal and private ritual, whether it is silent crying or prayers (Adichie 51) are noticed by the other woman but they are never judged. It seems as if the small and airless room the two women share is isolated from the politics of hate that is promoted by the media and government outside.

The drama, which is excluded from the store at the moment, will have effects on the futures of the two women but they are not aware of this yet. However, what exactly will happen to the Hausa woman after the women's ways part at the end of the story remains unclear to the reader, and it is also doubtful that Chika will find her sister again and that she has survived the riot:

Later, Chika will comb the hospital mortuaries looking for Nnedi; she will go to newspaper offices [...]. She will tape copies of the photo on the walls of the market and the nearby stores. She will not find Nnedi. She will never find Nnedi. (47)

The two women, therefore, not only share the private experience of both of them hiding in a store, waiting for the riot to end and sharing compassion for each other, but they also experience the possible death of a beloved one, which will make each of them never forget the other woman.

3.2.4 Ghosts

Ghosts is another short story, which is set in Nigeria and it describes the encounter of two colleagues, who have not seen each other for many years. This is the only story in Adichie's collection that is told from the male perspective, namely that of the seventy-one year old university professor, James Nwoye. Meeting his old colleague, Ikenna Okoro, brings back memories, or ghosts, of the past. The whole story has a sense of loss and sadness, which is depicted in the appearance of people, places and the weather. The clerk is "dried-up-looking" (Adichie 57), the men's "faces and arms looked like ash" because of the harmattan season (Adichie 59) and "the armchair leather is worn. The pastel paint above the bookshelves is peeling" (Adichie 73). It appears as if everybody and everything is buried under a layer of dust and the glorious and colourful past of Nsukka is sliding into obscurity. However, this story is full of ghosts of the past that have still a lingering presence in James' life. The first ghost described is the old and malfunctioning university, which is unable to pay not only James' pension but also the ones of many other former employees (Adichie 57f). It is unclear whether a former politician or a professor has corrupted the system but the

people of Nsukka have lost hope to see their money a long time ago and their feeling of resentment has changed into apathy.

“The war took Zik” (Adichie 64). This is the second ghost of the past. James has lost his first daughter in the war but not much is known about her death. However, he does not only mourn one but two deaths; his wife Ebere, James’ third ghost, also died three years ago (Adichie 66). Her death was unnecessary given that the doctors, instead of using standard medication, dosed her with fake drugs, which could not cure her illness (Adichie 70).

James is struggling with the appearances of the ghosts of the past: “We are the educated ones, taught to keep tightly rigid our boundaries of what is considered real. I was like [Ikenna] until Ebere first visited, three weeks after her funeral” (Adichie 67). James vision of his wife visiting him is the only relief he seems to get from all the ghosts of the past that make his life unbearable and not worth living. However, this is only a coping mechanism and he knows very well that he cannot tell anyone about her visits (Adichie 66) because if he did, his second daughter Nkiru “will finally have reason to come here and bundle [him] back with her to America and [he] will be forced to live a life cushioned by so much convenience that it is sterile” (Adichie 67). James’ aversion to the American lifestyle that he has developed in Berkeley during the Nigerian Civil War can be easily detected in this sentence. He and his wife preferred living in Nigeria and therefore moved back home after the war. Their daughter Nkiru is the only person of this family who seems to have no connection to Nigeria and keeps on living in the USA without her parents (Adichie 63).

When the professor meets his old colleague at the university campus, James first believes to be seeing another ghost but he quickly discards this idea (Adichie 57). When he starts talking to Ikenna, however, James “[begins] to feel submerged in hazy nostalgia, a feeling that still has not left [him]” (Adichie 65). They tell each other about their whereabouts during and after the Nigerian Civil War. Both of them were supporters of the independent state Biafra and had to flee the country when the war erupted in 1967. Ikenna, a sociologist, was known for his revolutionising actions and speeches, and because of his commitment to the Biafran cause, it was believed that he died in the midst of war action.

Moreover, also James

was full of sense of [their] collective invincibility, of the justness of the Biafran cause, and so [he] did not think much more of it [Ikenna's return to the campus] until we heard that Nsukka fell on the very day we evacuated and the campus was occupied. The bearer of the news, a relative of Professor Ezike's, also told us that two lecturers had been killed. One of them had argued with the federal soldiers before he was shot. We did not need to be told this was Ikenna. (Adichie 62)

As it turns out, Ikenna is still alive and was able to flee to Sweden, from where he organized Biafran rallies all over Europe (Adichie 64) before retiring and returning to Nsukka one year before the two colleagues meet again (Adichie 66).

The title *Ghosts* already implies that death must play a major role in this short story and it is important to highlight its connection to language. When James is asked about his daughter and wife, he informs Ikenna about their death in Igbo, although the rest of the conversation is carried on in English. The narrator himself explains the reason for his change of language: "Speaking of death in English has always had, for me, a disquieting finality" (Adichie 64). James' cannot or does not want to let go of his beloved ones and this is the reason why he seeks comfort in the past.

3.2.5 On Monday of Last Week

In the story *On Monday of Last Week* the Nigerian-born Kamara experiences various changes in her life when moving to America. Her husband of six years is the reason why she has left Nsukka and is starting a new life with him in the States. Kamara has not seen her husband since their wedding in Nigeria and upon her arrival she can see that he has changed. Not only does he appear different – he is lighter-skinned and has gained weight – but also “his Igbo interspersed with English that had an ungainly American accent” (Adichie 84). Kamara feels as if she is married to a stranger and although she wishes for her old feelings for him to return, the ease of their relationship, they had experienced in the past, has vanished (Adichie 85). In addition to this first negative experience in America, Kamara cannot take advantage of her master’s degree and officially apply for jobs since she has to wait for her green card to arrive first. However, in order to escape her unhappiness that she cannot share with anyone, she becomes a nanny. “She wanted the job, any job; she wanted a reason to leave the apartment every day” (Adichie 79). Watching Court TV that depicts the craziness of American people (Adichie 77) already influences Kamara’s attitude towards the American lifestyle negatively. Yet, at her first encounter with the family she is going to work for, she realises that differences between Nigeria and America are even bigger than imagined. Neil, the father, criticises her vocabulary and points out that terms like “half-cast” that do not have a negative undertone in Kamara’s eyes, are considered racist in America (Adichie 76). Furthermore, she is amused about the American way of cooking, which is “a sanitized string of actions” (Adichie 80) when heating up ready-made meals. What strikes her most, however, is that parents seem to be endlessly worried about their children. Kamara reasons that it is the surplus of money and food, which makes parents to come up with unreasonable anxieties:

A sated belly gave Americans time to worry that their child might have a rare disease that they had just read about, made them think they had the right to protect their child from disappointment and want and failure. (Adichie 82)

American parents seem to be overprotective of their children's needs but Neil far exceeds what is understood as parenting in the States. He reads every parenting guidebook, puts his son Josh on the latest diets and turns child-care into a series of logistics. His almost neurotic behaviour has an impact on the father-son relationship, which lacks of emotion. Kamara does not approve of Neil's parenting methods, be it the spinach juice Josh has to drink every day or the lack of disciplinary actions (Adichie 77). She cannot help feeling sorry for Josh and tends to adjust the father's instructions to what she believes is better for the child (Adichie 74). During Kamara's time of looking after Josh, an affectionate relationship between the two of them develops and it comes to a point at which Josh acknowledges her as part of the family (Adichie 90). He hands Kamara a special family Shabbat card but Neil does not approve of this:

Neil took the card from Josh. "You know, Josh," he said, giving the card back, "it's very sweet of you to give this to Kamara, but Kamara is your nanny and your friend, and this was for family." (Adichie 91)

The father must wonder why Josh seems to care so much about the nanny and obviously feels jealous about this special bondage that he has never achieved to build up in all those years.

Although certain changes are depicted in the relationships between Kamara and the male characters in this short story, the main focus lies on the encounter of Kamara and Josh's mother, Tracy. Absent during most of Kamara's time working as a nanny at this family, the artist finally emerges from the basement, also known as her work place, and introduces herself (Adichie 87). Their encounter must have triggered something in Kamara and from this time onward, the Monday of last week (Adichie 74), her life undergoes a radical change, which is also noticed by her husband:

"You're bright today, Kam," he said as he hugged her that evening. He sounded happy that she was bright. She was both thrilled and sorry, for having this knowledge she could not share with him, for suddenly believing again in ways that had nothing to do with him. (Adichie 86)

Kamara develops feelings for Josh's mother, which is probably due to the artist's very intimate approach. Tracy examines Kamara closely, touches her

chin (Adichie 87) and finally asks her to be a nude model for one of her paintings (Adichie 89). Kamara lacks confidence to agree to this proposition at first but her imagination goes wild and she cannot wait to spend time alone with Tracy. In Kamara's eyes, Tracy is her perfect role model and she starts changing her personality and appearance to resemble the artist more and more (Adichie 80).

At the end of the story, however, she must admit that Tracy is not as interested in her as she had imagined. The narrative ends at the point where Tracy replaces the nanny for Josh's French teacher as the new model for her painting and leaves the reader in the dark about Kamara's reaction.

3.2.6 *Jumping Monkey Hill*

Jumping Monkey Hill is a short story that illustrates the writer's thoughts about stereotypical behaviour. The name of the title is taken from the place where this story is set. Various writers have gathered for a workshop at this resort near Cape Town, and while the group consists of people from South Africa, Tanzania, Zimbabwe, Kenya, Senegal and Nigeria, the host, Edward Campbell, is of British origin. Within a period of two weeks, every writer has to compose one story, which is then discussed by the rest of the group and, at the best, is published in the "Oratory". Although the reader receives glimpses of some of the other writers' works, Ujunwa is the only one whose writing process and experiences in the workshop can be followed. Furthermore, she is the only person, besides the host and his wife, who is known by her name.

In conversation with some writers, it turns out that their inspiration to compose their stories is often taken from events of their own lives. As opposed to Ujunwa, who "had never believed in fiction as therapy" (Adichie 103), the others understand their writing process as a possibility to reflect on and master difficult personal situations. Although Ujunwa vehemently denies that her story includes the slightest biographical touch, it becomes clearer towards the end, that her story's main character, Chioma, is ultimately Ujunwa herself (Adichie 113).

Although Edward has chosen one of the workshop participants, a prize-winning Ugandan writer, to be the workshop leader (Adichie 99), he himself takes over the role of the leader from the very first meeting onwards. Edward justifies his claim to authority by referring to his expertise in African literature (Adichie 99), and even though most of the writers tend to disagree with his opinions, nobody speaks up against him because “Edward was connected and could find [the writers] a London agent; there was no need to antagonize the man, no need to close doors to opportunity” (Adichie 113).

Edward is disappointed that hardly any of the stories presented depict his understanding of the “Real Africa”. However, Ujunwa’s story could hardly be more authentic and therefore Edward’s reaction seems abstruse after hearing it: “‘The whole thing is implausible,’ Edward said. ‘This is agenda writing, it isn’t a real story of real people’” (Adichie 114). Ujunwa, however, is not the only person receiving negative comments from the workshop host. Edward criticises the Zimbabwean writer for writing stories that are too “passé” and he points out that there are more important and topical issues to write about (Adichie 107). The situation has become increasingly tense over the last days but when the Senegalese woman reads the story about her relationship with another woman, Edward’s comment on the unlikelihood of a homosexual relationship in Africa is being challenged by Ujunwa: “Which Africa?” (Adichie 108). However, she does not receive any support from the other writers, who certainly are uncomfortable with the whole situation.

Ujunwa’s dislike of Edward is not only based on their conflicting views on Africa but she is also repulsed by the way he permanently approaches her. It becomes obvious that Edward depicts women merely as objects of the male’s sexual desire and is therefore not ashamed of sexually harassing Ujunwa in front of some of the other writers:

“I don’t mind sitting in the sun,” she said, already getting up. “Would you like me to stand up for you, Edward?” “I’d rather like you to lie down for me,” he said. [...] And Ujunwa laughed, because it was funny and witty, she told herself, when you really thought about it. (Adichie 106)

Reflecting on that situation, however, Ujunwa cannot laugh about Edward’s remark anymore. Later, when she finds out that others have noticed Edward’s

approaches of her, she is upset that none of them have spoken up for her (Adichie 109). It confuses her even more that other women seem not to care much when Edward makes harassing comments about them (Adichie 112). At the end, Ujunwa reads the story she has written, the story of her struggles as a female job seeker in Nigeria. As has been mentioned before, Edward devaluates the credibility of her story by passing misogynistic comments but “it was the victory in his eyes that made her stand up and start to laugh” (Adichie 114). Before leaving the room, she highlights the realness of the story, her personal story, and claims only a minimal alternation of the original ending.

3.2.7 *The Thing Around Your Neck*

Adichie's collection is named after one of its shorter stories, *The Thing Around Your Neck*, which deals with the struggles of a young Nigerian immigrant to the USA. This story is different from the rest of the collection to the effect that it is told in the omniscient point of view. By using the “You”-perspective, the reader seems to be directly projected into the story and one is less inclined to question the narrator's actions.

When Akunna wins an American visa at the national lottery, she is looking forward to living and experiencing the American Dream. Her family and friends tell her many stories about the country they have never seen themselves and Akunna has to promise to send them presents. Upon her arrival, she realises that many things in America are different than she has imagined, but living in her uncle's house, speaking Igbo and eating familiar Nigerian food makes her feel at home fast (Adichie 116). However, her uncle explains to her how America works: “The trick was to understand America, to know that America was give-and-take. You gave up a lot but you gained a lot, too” (Adichie 116). He puts this understanding to use and rapes Akunna in her bedroom. She leaves the house in the next morning, although she does not know where to go but ends up in Connecticut. From this point onwards, her life undergoes a radical change. Since she has told nobody where she is living now, she experiences isolation and anonymity. For the restaurant owner

she is working for, she is yet another immigrant (Adichie 117). Akunna struggles to pay her rent, cannot afford any education and still sends half of her wage home to support her family (Adichie 118). Interestingly, the narrator points out that the brown envelope Akunna chooses to send her money in resembles the money envelopes her parents used to hand over to her brothers' teachers as a bribe for better grades. One could assume that Akunna wants to bribe her parents, asking them to forgive her lack of contact or her not sending presents as promised (Adichie 118).

As has been mentioned before, Akunna is bewildered by the American reality she is exposed to, which does not meet her expectations. She is surprised at the "openness of people", that "people left so much food on their plates and crumpled a few dollar bills down, as though it was an offering, expiation for the wasted food", at "rich people who wore shabby clothes" (Adichie 118) and that "rich Americans were thin and poor Americans were fat" (Adichie 119). Her isolated existence in this country does not offer the chance to talk with any confidant about the differences between the American and her lifestyle. This plays a major part in contributing to her homesickness. Such a feeling is perfectly explained with the following sentence: "At night, something would wrap itself around your neck, something that very nearly choked you before you fell asleep" (Adichie 119).

Working as a waitress, Akunna often gets engaged in conversations with her customers, who seem to be as surprised about her appearance as she is about theirs (Adichie 119). Although many are not interested in her past, others seem to fancy themselves being particular experts on African culture, "who thought [themselves] better than the people [they] knew about" (Adichie 120), and Akunna dislikes both sorts of people. One evening, however, she gets to know a man in the restaurant who she believes to be different. His name is not revealed to the reader, however, it is known that the man is American and white. At the beginning both of them are not yet aware of the massive impact their cultural differences will have on their relationship. Akunna's homesickness seems to become less the more she trusts him: "You knew you had become comfortable [...] [a]nd you knew you had become close when you told him that your father was really not a schoolteacher in Lagos" (Adichie 122). Although there are signs of struggles, their relationship

seems to flourish: “The thing that wrapped itself around your neck, that nearly choked you before you fell asleep, started to loosen, to let go” (Adichie 125). However, the better Akunna gets to know her boyfriend, the more his good nature annoys her and she does not approve of the many presents he gives her (Adichie 126). The feeling of loneliness appears again and Akunna decides to reveal her address to her parents. When she receives an answer only a few days later, she discovers that her father died five months ago. Although her boyfriend offers her to pay the flight tickets for both him and Akunna, she rejects the proposal and flies back home alone. It is unclear whether Akunna will ever return to the USA but the last sentence might reveal that this was the last good-bye from her boyfriend: “You turned away and said nothing, and when he drove you to the airport, you hugged him tight for a long, long moment, and then you let go.” (Adichie 127)

3.2.8 *The American Embassy*

The title of this short story already depicts the setting: the American embassy in Nigeria. An unnamed woman is waiting amongst hundreds of other Nigerian people in front of the building, waiting to apply for their visas. The time frame of this story is short and describes an everyday situation rather than important events. However, the story alternates between the present, everyday situations, and flashbacks to the past. These memory flashes introduce the reader to the woman's causes that make her apply for an asylum visa to America. Already after the first few sentences it becomes obvious that the woman is not actively involved in the present situation. She seems to be not interested that people are trying to include her in their conversations (Adichie 129) and any activities within her ear- and eyesight remain unnoticed (Adichie 128). Only when the man waiting behind her taps her on her back, her mind brought back to the present situation, which forces her to watch a man getting flogged by a soldier (Adichie 129). It appears that a brutal situation like this has become part of the everyday picture during the dictatorship of Abacha. “See how the people have become too used to pleading with soldiers,” (Adichie 129) is the reaction of the man waiting at the embassy and with this

reaction he describes the established normalcy of brutality on Nigerian streets.

Although only parts of the past event are revealed to the reader at first, it becomes obvious that it must have left a major impact on the woman since she has been prescribed tranquilizers to calm her nerves (Adichie 128). Now that she is waiting for her interview at the embassy, she tries to drown out the past events and keeps her mind blank (Adichie 128). Her attempt, however, fails since every action and object around her trigger flashbacks. The photo booth, for example, reminds her that her life was normal until her husband had to flee the country and she attended her son's funeral (Adichie 131). The soldier swaggering along the street after hitting the man resembles the armed men who broke into her house and shot her son, Ugonna (Adichie 132). It is not clear whether the killing was an accident or deliberate intention but the woman feared for her life and escaped by jumping from the balcony (Adichie 133). The appearance of a newspaper vendor next to her is the trigger for another flashback that seems to reveal the cause for all the events just mentioned before (Adichie 137). It was her husband the men were looking for when they broke into her house. He was known as a pro-democracy writer of *The New Nigeria* and therefore posed a danger to the rule of Abacha. Writing about and accusing the dictator of various corrupt undertakings, he had already served time in prison but instead of silencing him, this punishment made the writer even more offensive. The situation became more and more dangerous and at some point he received an anonymous call that led to the decision to flee the country. He hid in the boot of his wife's car and left her and Ugonna behind. The woman did clearly not approve of her husband's actions that threatened the whole family: "It was not courage, it was simply an exaggerated selfishness" (Adichie 136). Nevertheless, she does not blame him directly for her son's death, although he was the reason the armed men broke into their house, looking for the writer. To the contrary, she believes that she has failed her son (Adichie 134) and she "hate[s] herself for not insisting that Ugonna go to bed" (Adichie 138).

Since the woman does not have evidence of her life being threatened by Abacha's regime, it is unlikely that she will be granted an asylum visa. Only the story of her son's death could help her to a new life in America. However,

not only the reader but also the woman will never find out whether telling her story would have been enough evidence for the woman to leave the country. During her interview, she is haunted by guilt

and she realized that she would die gladly at the hands of the man in the black hooded shirt or the one with the shiny bald head before she said a word about Ugonna to this interviewer, or to anybody at the American embassy. Before she hawked Ugonna for a visa to safety. (Adichie 139)

It becomes apparent that the woman does not long for a new life in America because she realises that her new life has already begun with giving birth to Ugonna. Now that he is gone, she decides that she would rather live in danger but next to her son's grave than leaving him behind and joining her husband in America.

3.2.9 *The Shivering*

The Shivering is the longest short story in Adichie's collection. It is set in and around the Princeton university campus but the narration is built on events that take place elsewhere. Ukamaka and Chinedu have both received news about the death of Nigeria's First Lady in Spain and a plane crash in Lagos. Although it is indicated that they have met before (Adichie 143), the reason for actually talking to each other are the two incidents mentioned before. Chinedu has invited himself into Ukamaka's flat and wants to pray (Adichie 143). He is fully convinced that the events are a sign of God, a wake-up call and punishment (Adichie 152) for this corrupt country, Nigeria, and its people. Ukamaka, however, is merely concerned about one person, her ex-boyfriend Udenna, who was supposed to be on the plane that crashed. Ukamaka and Chinedu seem to have different views of religion and she tries to put an end to their praying as soon as possible: "She felt awkward with their hands clasped together, his fingers warm and firm, and it was her discomfort that made her say, the first time he paused after a breathless passage, 'Amen!'" (Adichie 144). The title of the story reveals what is then happening to Ukamaka; whilst they pray, she starts shivering involuntarily and this experience takes her mind back to her teenage years, in which she experienced the same

phenomenon. In the course of the story, Ukamaka's thoughts uncover aspects of her past relationship with Udenna and they indicate that she has not yet recovered from the break-up. When Ukamaka receives news that her ex-boyfriend was not amongst the dead people on the crashed plane, a riot of emotion breaks out of her and the reader understands that her crying comes

from the relief of what had not happened and from the melancholy of what could have happened and from the anger of what remained unresolved since Udenna told her, in an ice-cream shop on Nassau Street, that the relationship was over. (Adichie 147)

The story does not end with the news of her ex-boyfriend's survival but it goes on describing the newly established friendship of Ukamaka and Chinedu. It appears as if both need each other's companionship but for different reasons. Chinedu is looking for someone to drive him to church and the grocery store (Adichie 155). Ukamaka, on the other hand, cannot help but talk about her past relationship and it is Chinedu she turns to with her stories (Adichie 154). It seems as if he patiently listens to her but he himself hardly offers any personal information, which does not concern Ukamaka at first. She only starts confronting him with question after several meetings and Chinedu finally reveals that he is gay and also talks about a past relationship (Adichie 159). However, when Ukamaka compares her boyfriend's failures with the ones of Chinedu's past love, he cannot help but point out Ukamaka's almost compulsive holding on to her past relationship: "Udenna did this to you and Udenna did that to you, but why did you let him? Why did you let him? Have you ever considered that it wasn't love?" (Adichie 161). His words lead to them parting in a fight but when Ukamaka visits Chinedu's flat to apologize, she finds out another secret of his. Contrary to Ukamaka's belief, he never studied at Princeton but was illegally working at the construction site after he had lost his visa (Adichie 163). At this point, Ukamaka must realise that worrying about her past relationship is far less important than Chinedu's very probable deportation (Adichie 164). The story ends in a far brighter mood than many other short stories in this collection. Ukamaka promises to help Chinedu, and the last scene at mass, which they attend together, reveals that his worry of being deported slowly changes into hope (Adichie 166).

3.2.10 *The Arrangers of Marriage*

This story depicts the experiences a Nigerian woman, Chinaza, makes upon her arrival in America. Her story can be followed from her point of view and by the use of the first-person narration, the reader's empathies are automatically on her side. Chinaza has recently been married to a Nigerian man, who has lived in the States before and he introduces her now to the American way of life. Chinaza was brought up by her aunt and uncle and they arranged her marriage, for which she is supposed to feel grateful for (Adichie 170). It is already encoded in the title of the short story that there is a lack of agency. Chinanza seems to have never been involved in planning her life and instead has always followed orders by her aunt and uncle, who dismissed her wishes: "I did not remind them that I wanted to take the JAMB exam again and try for the university [...]" (Adichie 170). At first, Chinanza hopes that her marriage and move to America will increase her freedom because of the pictures the arrangers of marriage present to her. She feels deceived by them of not being told about marital situations she is surprised to encounter, like her husband's snoring (Adichie 168), his smelly breath (Adichie 169), his low income and long working hours (Adichie 174).

Furthermore, already upon her arrival, she realises that the American reality looks rather different:

I had imagined a smooth driveway snaking between cucumber-colo[u]red lawns, a door leading into a hallway, walls with sedate paintings. A house like those of the white newlyweds in the American films that NTA showed on Saturday nights. (Adichie 167)

Contrary to her imagination, America presents itself in a rather negative light; her neighbourhood sits along a "noisy street that smelled of fish left out too long before refrigeration" (Adichie 173), the malls seem to confuse her and appear to be places from another world (Adichie 176) and the food court is "something humiliatingly public, something lacking in dignity, about this place, this open space of too many tables and too much food" (Adichie 176).

Her husband seems not to be aware of Chinanza's unhappiness; quite on the contrary, he urges her to assimilate to the American lifestyle as quickly as possible. He himself has completely let go of his roots by changing his

Nigerian name to Dave Bell (Adichie 172), talking in an American accent (Adichie 176) and trying not to draw attention to himself as being foreign because in his opinion one “will never move forward unless [one] adapt[s] to America (Adichie 175). Therefore, Dave insists that Chinanza calls herself Agatha from now on. He scolds her when she speaks Igbo at home but especially when being surrounded by American people (Adichie 177). In addition, he corrects her British English to American, such as “cookies” in place of “biscuits” in order to fit in with the mainstream. However, not only does Dave control Agatha’s language but he also wants her to adapt to American food and clothing. She misses milk and sugar in her tea (Adichie 171) and can hardly swallow the undercooked ingredients on her pizza (176) but still she thanks him for everything he buys her (Adichie 177). However, when she cooks coconut rice for her husband to show her gratitude, he is only concerned about the intense smell: “I don’t want us to be known as the people who fill the building with smells of foreign food” (Adichie 79). Dave immediately buys her a cookbook filled with traditional American recipes.

Agatha’s dream of freedom seems to have been another fantasy of hers that will never come true. Instead of being released, control over her life has been passed on from the arrangers of marriage to her husband. Agatha is completely dependent on her husband since he does not only control her use of language and other cultural habits but he also fails to file for her work permit. When she asks for the reason, he reveals to her that he has been married to an American woman before in order to receive a Green Card. Knowing that he has remarried in Nigeria, she tries to delay their divorce by blackmailing him (Adichie 182). Shocked by the news that Dave was already married before her, she leaves their apartment and moves to Nia, the only friend she has made since moving to America. However, their friendship tends to be ill fated as well, when Agatha finds out that Nia slept with her husband two years before (Adichie 185). Despite all the recent shocking experiences Agatha has made, she pushes aside thoughts of giving up and returns to her husband the very next day (Adichie 186).

3.2.11 *Tomorrow Is Too Far*

Tomorrow Is Too Far is a story about sibling rivalry. It is told by an unnamed female character who returns to Nigeria eighteen years after her last summer holiday at her grandmother's house. One of the reasons for returning is her grandmother's recent passing away, and upon her arrival the narrator visits the grave in the backyard. When walking through the garden, she remembers the tragic accident that led to her brother's death at this place. However, before revealing further details, the reader is introduced to the background story that led to the mentioned incident.

At various points in the story, the narrator mentions that her brother, Nonso, was the favoured child in this family because he was her grandmother's only son's son and he "would protect the family lineage" (Adichie 189). Therefore, she made sure that the narrator and her cousin Dozie would always come second, i.e. when sharing the milk of a coconut plucked from the tree by Nonso (Adichie 188). The narrator's hate against her brother becomes obvious in the course of the story but the reader also learns that she has fallen in love with Dozie; a feeling to compensate for the other? "[Y]our hate for your brother Nonso grew so much you felt it squeezing your nostrils and your love for your cousin Dozie ballooned and wrapped around your skin" (Adichie 188). At a later point, the narrator describes that the summer of her brother's death was also the time of her first self-realisation. She became aware that her longings for recognition could only be realised if something happened to Nonso. She therefore unveiled a plan to her cousin "to make [Nonso] less lovable, less able to do all that he did. Less able to take up your space" (Adichie 195).

The exact order of events is only revealed at the end of the story but it becomes obvious earlier that Nonso's death was more than an accident. His sister tricked Nonso into climbing too far up an avocado tree and then scared him by warning him about a deadly snake nearby. Nonso lost his balance, fell from the tree and died from a broken skull (Adichie 194). The narrator and her cousin are the only witnesses of this incident and when her mother, an African American living in the USA, asked about details, she accused her grandmother of having Nonso climb up the tree. The consequences of lying

about Nonso's death have a devastating effect. Her father, not believing the narrator's story, (Adichie 195) and her mother filed for a divorce (Adichie 187) and the narrator's hope for finally being recognised vanished. When returning to her grandmother's house, she realises that her childhood experience of an idyllic, almost paradise-like picture of Nigeria is also gone (Adichie 191). Standing in front of the tree where the fatal incident happened, she also meets Dozie again and she must admit that she has involuntarily drawn him into her plan eighteen years ago. The narrator tries to point out how lonely her life is now but it seems as if Dozie is blaming her not only for killing her brother but also ruining the lives of many people. "You want to tell [Dozie] about the pain in your chest and the emptiness in your ears, [...] but he is walking away" (Adichie 197).

This short story is told in the omniscient point of view and therefore draws the readers onto the side of the narrator. Using such a narrative style in *Tomorrow in too far* is quite interesting because it makes the reader feel as if he or she is part of the story. Furthermore, positive feelings for the guilty narrator are developed more easily than for any of the other characters.

3.2.12 The Headstrong Historian

Compared to the rest of the short stories in Adichie's collection, this one is out of the ordinary. Not only does it exceed any timeframe, as the story comprises three generations, but it is also set in a completely different period of time and environment than any of the other short stories. *The Headstrong Historian's* setting is an Igbo clan in Nigeria. The story encompasses perspectives from characters in- and outside of this clan, which enables the reader to conceive his or her own opinion.

Nwamgba's strong character is highlighted from the beginning of the story until its end. Her display of self-will and sharp tongue enables her to marry the man she loves (Adichie 198), ignoring every advice against a wedding. Many miscarriages and the murder of her husband do not weaken her headstrongness but make her even tougher. Furthermore, having lost the claims to her land and valuable belongings of the deceased to the cousins and murderers of her husband, she is even more determined to fight back (Adichie 203). Her only son, Anikwenwa, plays an important role in this plan since she sends him to a school, which is managed by Catholic missionaries, in order to learn English. With his help and the knowledge obtained, she is sure to be able to reclaim the stolen land at the white men's court (Adichie 206). At this point, she overlooks her son's unhappiness of having to attend school and getting used to the settlers' customs, like taking on a Christian name (Adichie 208) and wearing clothes (Adichie 209). Nwamgba pride of her son's achievements in school even overshadows her worries that her son might get too fond of the Christian lifestyle.

She felt her son slipping away from her, and yet she was proud that he was learning so much, that he could become a court interpreter or a letter writer, and that with Father Lutz's help he had brought home some papers that showed that their lands belonged to him and his mother. Her proudest moment was when he went to his father's cousin Okafo and Okoye and asked for his father's ivory tusk back. And they gave it to him. (Adichie 211)

However, her worries are not without any reason. Anikwenwa, now Michael, distances himself from his clan's customs and moves to Lagos in order to

become a teacher. When he marries a fellow converted Christian woman, Nwamgba is certain that she has lost her son for good (Adichie 212). However, the story turns towards the positive with the birth of Michael's second child, Grace. Nwamgba's hope returns when she sees the girl the first time because she is certain that her husband's spirit has returned with Grace (Adichie 214). She is determined to teach her grandchild traditional stories (Adichie 215) and it turns out that Grace is interested in the same culture that her father deliberately abandoned. After Nwamgba's death, it becomes even more apparent that Grace has adopted her grandmother's characteristics. Her strong-mindedness and ability to reflect the silenced past of Nigeria, make her the person, who is described in the title of the story: the headstrong historian. Trying to depict Nigeria's culture, tradition and people in a different light is one of her major achievements in her future. An outlook at the end of the story, however, depicts a woman in search of her roots and she therefore "would go to the courthouse in Lagos and officially change her first name from Grace to Afamefuna" (Adichie 218).

4 Themes in *The Thing Around Your Neck*

4.1 Exile, diaspora, immigration

At most times, people are forced to leave their home country due to unstable politics and ongoing conflicts that threaten the lives of many people. It is therefore remarkable that a depiction of frustration and desperate attempts of immigrating to another country can hardly be observed in any of Adichie's stories. Quite the contrary, in *The American Embassy*, for example, a woman, seeking asylum because of her son's murderers who threaten to kill her as well, decides to stay in Nigeria. With such an unusual ending to the story, Adichie tries to eliminate the negative image of Nigeria and invites the reader to (re-) discover it and realize that her home is a country worth living in.

However, some of Adichie's short stories in her collection display experiences of migracy. Being an immigrant into the USA herself, the writer can draw on her own experiences and thus is able to not only create a realistic picture of the problems but also of the new possibilities of migracy within these fictional stories. Adichie's stories always include the characters' hopeful expectations of their new home, like better job opportunities or an escape from the patriarchal society they grew up in. However, when reality sets in at their arrival, their dreams are often shattered for various reasons.

In the short story *The Thing Around Your Neck*, the protagonist is confronted with numerous failed expectations. Before leaving for America, Akunna and her family expect her to become rich fast, and she is asked to send home "handbags and shoes and perfumes and clothes" (Adichie 115). However, at her arrival already, Akunna must face the facts that reality is not quite as she has imagined. After being raped by her uncle, she flees to Connecticut, where she finds a minimum-wage job that hardly covers her rent, let alone college fees (Adichie 116). Since she has no contact to her family at home, Akunna lives the solitary existence that many immigrants experience in their new homes. Only with the arrival of a young, white man her life seems to change towards the better. Although their relationship is conflictual due to their different approaches to cultural and ethnic topics and due to pointed

comments by others about their relationship, her loneliness starts to ease and “[t]he thing that wrapped itself around your neck, that nearly choked you before you fell asleep, started to loosen, to let go” (Adichie 125). Nonetheless, it is unclear whether this relationship has a future because Akunna decides to return to Nigeria after news about her father’s passing away has reached her.

4.2 Assimilation, Alienation, Identity

Lyubov mentions that by entering the new, unknown country, immigrants often feel alienated from their “native land and from the influence of [their] native culture” (108). Homesickness and a feeling of “unhomeliness of home” (Bhaba) are just a few general signs of the already mentioned feeling of estrangement.

In *On Monday of Last Week*, Kamara experiences such unhomeliness when her expectations of life in the USA cannot be met. When she finally sees her husband again after being separated for six years, she discovers that Tobechei is not the same man anymore as he used to be when they were still living together in Nsukka. She longs for comfort and love but is, by the same token, unable to show such emotion towards Tobechei (Adichie 83). Although she has reached her goal of finally arriving in the USA, all she feels now is emptiness and confusion. Unmotivated to change her fate and disappointed by her failed relationship, she turns to eating and watching TV as a coping mechanism (Adichie 77). Nevertheless, Kamara realises that she cannot escape her misery by staying at home alone and decides to finally approach her new surroundings by taking on a job as a babysitter. Although still being startled by the difference of the American and her own lifestyles, she is trying to make the best of the new life she is bound to live from now on.

As has been mentioned before, being exposed to new cultural aspects often evokes feelings of alienation, which is due to a clash of different beliefs, and a different cultural and ethical understanding. This experience is an irritation for many immigrants, and fearing they will forget about their roots, many distance themselves from the practices of the new world they are living in. Other immigrants, however, are concerned that their otherness makes them stand

out from the rest of the group, and in order to become part of this group as an equal member, a process of assimilation takes place. Acquiring the regional accent, changing names or food and clothing habits are just a few examples of this phenomenon. Yet, immigrants are confronted with the task of having to develop a new cultural identity that involves both worlds.

With the exception of one story (*Ghosts*, which is a narrative about a male protagonist's life story), Adichie's collection depicts the dilemmas of various young women who experience a change of environment and have to deal with the tensions and misunderstandings that arise within this unfamiliar space. Adichie's intentions are to depict extreme forms of assimilation and alienation in her stories, as can be seen in the following examples.

In *Imitation*, the reader gets an inside view of the mind of a wealthy, married but unhappy woman living in the USA. Her every thought is displayed and offers the opportunity to empathize with this character. The discovery of her husband cheating on her back home in Nigeria triggers a chain of thoughts that ultimately leads to an alteration of her appearance (Adichie 28). By cutting her hair the way her husband's mistress wears it, she includes herself in the line of imitations that surround her in her American home. These imitations of Benin masks have been given to Nkem by her husband whenever he comes for a short visit from his various business trips. As the protagonist remarks, they do not have the same cultural significance outside Nigeria's history and context (Adichie 23). The now worthless existence of the masks resembles Nkem's empty life in America and her failing marriage. Although Nkem believes that the plastic world she is living in now has "grown on her, snaked its roots under her skin" (Adichie 37), she becomes more and more reluctant to think of America as her home. The story ends with Nkem wanting to return to Nigeria and to reclaim her identity that she seems to have lost during her acclimatization to the new environment when she moved to America.

In *The Arrangers of Marriage* one can observe Chinaza's irritation when her husband tells her that he has changed his Igbo name to Dave Bell (Adichie 172). She does not understand his almost desperate attempt to assimilate to the cultural norms of America. His argumentation that "if you want to get anywhere you have to be as mainstream as possible" (Adichie 172), does not

meet Chinaza's approval but nonetheless she gets assigned an English name by her husband (Adichie 173). Throughout the entire story, Chinaza is urged to fully detach from her roots and adapt to the American lifestyle. Her husband makes sure that Chinaza does not speak Igbo anymore (Adichie 177) or uses any British vocabulary (Adichie 170). Furthermore, her eating and cooking habits have to be changed as well since he "[doesn't] want [them] to be known as the people who fill the building with smells of foreign food" (Adichie 179).

It is not only within this story (cf. *The Thing Around Your Neck*) that Adichie uses language and food to depict different cultural norms. Tunca's explanation of why these two aspects are so important within this discussion is simple: "Food can be seen as a central constituent of cultural identity and has, surprisingly, often featured in cliché-ridden representations" (Tunca 302). Chinaza's husband's orders, however, are not the only challenges she is confronted with when she arrives in America. When Ofodile shows her the area around their flat and also takes her to the shopping centre, Nkem's thoughts perfectly describe how foreign she feels in this new environment: "I felt as though I were in a different physical world, on another planet. The people who pushed against us, even the black ones, wore the mask of foreignness, otherness on their faces" (Adichie 176). As the story continues, it becomes clear that the relationship between Ofodile and Chinaza is merely grounded on opposites. Their different views on cultural norms can be observed in the scene at the food court. While Chinaza criticizes the toppings of her pizza, his remark is: "We overcook food back home and that is why we lose all the nutrients. Americans cook things right. See how healthy they all look?" (Adichie 176).

Ofodile has already spent more time in America than his wife, which is why his transformation towards assimilation of this new lifestyle is also further developed. In addition to the situation mentioned, this can be seen in the couple's dissimilar perceptions. Although Ofodile points out the healthiness of Americans, Chinaza only sees "a black woman with a body as wide as a pillow held around" (Adichie 176) sitting next to them. It is clear that Chinaza does not support her husband's views, nonetheless she tries to adapt to her new surroundings and eats the pizza she does not like.

In Adichie's stories, confrontations with the new environment often seem to be dealt with within family circles, as can be seen in the story just mentioned. The previously mentioned short story *On Monday of Last Week*, however, shows that Kamara has to rely on her own little experiences of America since she and her husband have grown too far apart from each other to be able to discuss their feelings about the new cultural world they are experiencing. Kamara is irritated by the American way of child rearing (Adichie 77) and is additionally advised against using words that her employer considers racist (Adichie 76).

Although many things seem to be confusing within a new environment, the encounter of a different culture carries the possibility of changing perspectives. So did, for example, Nkem's neighbours take on interest in African culture and started collecting Benin masks, when she and her husband moved to an American suburb (Adichie 23)

This does not automatically mean that living in-between two worlds, or cultures, is always unproblematic. Cultures may be able to interconnect in certain aspects but limitations are to be found as well. Adichie's characters live in-between memories of their old home and encounters of their new surroundings. They try to find *one* identity, a combined identity from experiences of the past and their present life. As can be seen in the prior examples, not every attempt of finding an own identity within their new home is successful and the relationship between father and daughter, brother and sister or Nigerian and African-American becomes a field of tension.

4.3 American Dream or What to expect from the country of boundless possibilities

The pursuit of the American Dream has not always been the primary reason for immigrating to the USA. As numbers show, in the two decades from 1960 onwards, people were concerned about receiving education abroad, however as soon as studies were completed, they would return to their home countries again. In the 1980s a second wave of immigrants started entering the USA with the aim of settling and working hard in order to take part on the American Dream (Okpalaoka 91). Although living permanently abroad, connections to home countries were never cut and the communities left behind received constant support from immigrants. Many of Adichie's short stories include the protagonists' wishes to come to America and follow the paths of family members and other relations that apparently made it in the new world. Such stories told and retold back home lead to high expectations, but as can be read in *The Thing Around Your Neck*, for example, the protagonist has to learn in it the hard way that reality is not as she was told it would be: "Right after you won the American visa lottery, they told you: In a month, you will have a big car. Soon, a big house" (Adichie 115). However, none of these predictions happen to Akunna, and instead of finding the American Dream to be real, her situation worsens with every step she takes in this country.

An entirely different setting is depicted in *Imitation*. All dreams seem to have been fulfilled for Nkem. She has married a rich businessman in Nigeria (Adichie 32) and now lives with her children in a big house in a prestigious American neighbourhood. Although she has and can afford everything, the entire story is based on her unhappiness and loneliness. Being separated from her husband, who works back home in Nigeria and, in addition, allegedly keeps a girlfriend in the couple's old home, she finally decides that she does not care about her privileged life in America anymore and moves back to Lagos with her entire family (Adichie 41).

In *On Monday of Last Week*, Kamara's expectations are disappointed as well. Despite her education back in Nigeria, she cannot apply for jobs since she has not received her green card yet. Although she is over-qualified for this job,

Kamara starts working as a nanny in order to escape the solitude of an empty apartment. Being unhappily married is additionally upsetting for Kamara. She therefore clings to the few happy moments, she shares with Josh, the child she is looking after (Adichie 79). Hence, it is not surprising that Kamara is emotionally overwhelmed when she finally meets Josh's mother, Tracy. Her desire for being regarded as a person, instead of a mere help or willing wife, is answered by this woman as she seems genuinely interested in Kamara's life story, as well as her body. After their conversation, Kamara's sadness seems to have vanished and she feels as if she finally has a reason to start afresh in this strange world. However, as the end of the story depicts, her hopes are disappointed again when Tracy loses interest in her (Adichie 94). The female protagonists in Adichie's stories have experienced different kinds of shortcomings in their home country that made them pursue a new start in America. The protagonist of *The Arrangers of Marriage*, for example, hopes for a different life that enables her to go to college and earn her own money. However, after arriving in America, Chinaza realises that her dependence on Ofodile, her husband, will not bring her a step closer to her wishes. With the exception of Nkem, in *Imitation*, who takes matters in her own hands, the women's life stories do not seem to progress towards a positive end, which casts a shadow on America, the land of boundless hopes and opportunities.

4.4 Racism

When Adichie's protagonists immigrate to the USA, they are confronted with unfamiliar inter-ethnic group dynamics. Most have experienced conflicts between groups of different ethnic or religious background in their home countries. However, a different issue arises in America, when every Black African immigrant, no matter what nationality or ethnic group, is characterized with a pan-national identity. Measuring everything by the same yardstick, consequently leads to rather involuntary formations of groups. Past events have shown that discriminatory acts against minority groups are caused by prejudices that are based on stereotypical thinking. Although there are different forms of discrimination, such as gender, religion, age or disability, Adichie's protagonists mostly experience adverse judgment due to their origin and skin colour. In order to escape the problems of cultures opposing each other, theories have been created that should ensure development towards the better.

Recent theories of culture transformation depict two main forms – transculturation and multiculturalism (Birkle 5). Transculturalism focuses on the idea of constant change. Every culture changes and whenever two cultures meet, a development seems to take place, which eventually leads to a merging of both of them into one, new culture. Whereas transculturation does not agree with the idea of cultural entities, multiculturalism, on the other hand, highlights the existence of more cultures with, more or less, fixed identity constructions. This concept opposes monoculturalism, which is also supported by modern immigrant writers, like Adichie, who criticise homogeneity. The reason for emphasising otherness in her short stories is the idea of shared experiences between cultures and peoples. This should lead to a common understanding of the different cultural groups, enabling them to exist side-by-side.

When Kamara is told that Josh is the child of an African-American woman and a Jewish-white man, she automatically identifies him as a „halfe-caste“. She connotes this term with glamour and coolness and is surprised to hear that in the Western world this word is not to be used due to its negative implications.

„Half-caste“ was what they had called children like him back in Nigeria, and the word had meant an automatic cool, light-skinned good looks, trips abroad to visit white grandparents. Kamara had always resented the glamour of half-castes. But in America, „half-caste“ was a bad word. (Adichie 75)

When entering the USA, Kamara has not only transcended national but also cultural borders. Challenged to accept the existence of various cultural views, her life horizon automatically expands. This story defies a monocultural understanding of the world, however, it also depicts the struggles of an existence of more cultures in an equal way. In *On Monday of Last Week*, Kamara and her employer are confronted with different cultural understandings. It becomes apparent that both feel alienated in the other person's world and they have a long road ahead in order to accept each other's views and understandings. Kamara is confronted with the American lifestyle, which is both regarded as crazy and filled with anxieties (Adichie 77), as well with a different understanding of parenting (Adichie 77). She also has to accommodate to new cooking and eating habits (Adichie 80), and a different kind of work ethics (Adichie 83). Her thoughts depict how hard it is for her to get used to these new and cultural surroundings and she tries to find ways to escape the rules of the American family (Adiche 81). Only when meeting Josh's mother, she finally starts moving out off her comfort zone (Adichie 92).

The following examples from Adichie's short story collection depict a clash of cultures that lead to (inner) conflicts and unresolved problems. Aspects of multiculturalism are often compared to the ones of assimilation with the help of two pictues. Whereas assimilation regards culture transformation as a melting pot that absorbs all minor cultures into the dominant one, multiculturalism, on the other hand, is more like a salad bowl. It accepts the existence of various cultures and ecourages them to maintain the differences. The main characters, Ofodile and Chinaza, in *The Arrangers of Marriage* depict the difference between the two theories of culture transformation. Ofodile's fear of not belonging to the circle of American colleagues and neighbours results into his almost manic attempt to become a person that resembles very much the people around him. However, his understanding of

the American way of life is not only based on stereotypes but also cannot be verified to be traditionally American. When he shows his wife „some other wonders of America“ (Adichie 177) in the shopping center, their last stop is McDonald's. Although Chinaza offers to cook for them at home, he refuses, and it becomes obvious that he eats there often since he does not have to read the menu before knowing what to order (Adichie 178). Ofodile believes this restaurant chain to be the perfect representation of American culture. Furthermore, particular food items, such as the pizza they ate at the food court (Adichie 176) and french fries, and which Chinaza later prepares for him at home (Adichie 182), might have frequent appearances at American dinner tables but are traditionally not regarded as typical foods of the USA. With Chinaza objecting to her husband's understanding of the American world, Adichie points out that the cultural essentialism Ofodile practices is pointless. Culture changes perpetually, and this understanding makes the boundaries that he creates for himself and his wife useless.

Many of Adichie's characters are not fully aware of the cultural influences they are being exposed to. In her works, the writer also mentions Nigeria's colonial past and its cultural implications for Nigerian civilization. In her short stories, transformations in the characters' view of the world take place that support the transcultural theories. For Chinaza, in *The Arrangers of Marriage*, the colonial heritage is already part of her understanding of Nigeria's culture. When she spots „Burton's Rich Tea“ biscuits at the supermarket, she asks her husband to buy them because she connects these with her Nigerian past although they are a product imported from Britain.

“Can we buy those biscuits?” I asked. The blue packets of Burton's Rich Tea were familiar; I did not want to eat biscuits but I wanted something familiar in the cart [...]. „Get the store brand. They're cheaper, but still the same thing,“ he said, pointing at a white packet. „Okay,“ I said. I no longer wanted the biscuits, but I put the store brand in the cart and stared at the blue packet on the shelf, at the familiar, grain-embossed Burton's logo, until we left the aisle. (Adichie 174)

Although it could be argued that this scene depicts the influence of Western culture on the African world, Adichie's main concern is to make readers aware of the different factors that lead to changes of a culture. As already mentioned, cultures are in a constant flux and whenever cultures clash, people

might be reluctant to take on other view's of the world at first, but in the course of time, changes can be observed.

When Chinaza travels from Nigeria to New York, the officers at the airport examine her luggage. They find ingredients for typical African cooking recipes, "ground *egusi* and dried *onugbu* leaves and *uziza* seeds," (Adichie 168) and confiscate them. The whole scene is depicted through the eyes of Chinaza, and it is obvious that the protagonist feels threatened and not particularly welcome into her new home. What is more, by seizing the seeds, Adichie depicts the fear of the Americans of having a "foreign culture" to strike roots on "their" ground (Tunca 303).

4.5 Stereotypes

In one of her interviews, Adichie criticizes the American population for simplifying the picture of Africa. Her complaints are directed at the American media that merely depict Africa's problematic aspects, which in turn gives the average American reader or viewer of news reports a mistaken impression of the alien continent. As Adichie mentioned in her TED talk *The danger of a single story* in 2009,

"If I had not grown up in Nigeria, and if all I knew about Africa were from popular images, I too would think that Africa was a place of beautiful landscapes, beautiful animals, and incomprehensible people, fighting senseless wars, dying of poverty and AIDS, unable to speak for themselves and waiting to be saved by a kind, white foreigner. I would see Africans in the same way that I, as a child, had seen Fide's family." (Adichie)

This problem is also depicted in her short stories since her characters are exposed to and have to deal with one-sided views and stereotypical thinking. In her talk, Adichie points out the importance of broadening everybody's mind in order to see the full picture: "The single story creates stereotypes, and the problem with stereotypes is not that they are untrue, but that they are incomplete" (Adichie). As she does with many other short stories, Adichie uses characters like Akunna in *The Thing Around Your Neck* in order to depict her own thoughts of her first experiences of America. At many occasions,

Akunna is challenged with statements of American people that hit the nail on the head of Adichie's notion mentioned before. People seem to be very interested in her and her home country but are surprised to hear that she has learned English in a Nigerian school and that houses and cars actually exist back home (Adichie 116). However, she is not the only one in this story who has experienced narrow-minded and stereotypical thinking. Before Akunna's arrival in America, her uncle's neighbours confronted him with the accusation of killing and eating squirrels because "[t]hey had heard that Africans ate all kind of wild animals" (Adichie 116). Akunna's first reaction to these conversations is bewilderment, however, she soon gets sick of people asking her the meaning of her Igbo name (Adichie 119) or making other assumptions based on her appearance. Therefore, she is rather surprised to meet a white American man who seems to know more about her home country than the rest of her customers in the restaurant. She assumes that he is a professor of anthropology but learns that he is personally and genuinely interested in Africa. Although she keeps her distance from him at first because her belief is that "people who liked Africa too much and those who liked Africa too little were the same – condescending" (Adichie 120), she soon realizes that he is not like her professor at the community college, "who thought himself better than the people he knew about" (Adichie 120).

However, Professor Cobbledick in the previously mentioned short story is not the only person with such pretentious thoughts in Adichie's collection. In *Jumping Monkey Hill*, Edward believes that his Western education does not influence his views on Africa but he is clearly falling back on traditional and stereotypical observations. However, none of the other participants of the workshop speaks out against his statements. Instead excuses for his behaviour are found (Adichie 112). Moreover, not only Edward but also the rest of the group are using stereotypes to make fun of the other writers' origins. "You Kenyans are too submissive! You Nigerians are too aggressive! You Tanzanians have no fashion sense! You Senegalese are too brainwashed by the French!" (Adichie 102).

The last point proves that stereotypical thinking is not restricted to a certain group of people. In *The Thing Around Your Neck*, Adichie makes sure to point out that at the encounter of two or more different cultures, each party has its

own expectations of the other, which are mostly based on stereotypical assumptions. In Akunna's case, her observation of the people and their lifestyle in her new home country are certainly not similar to the stories about Americans she has been told by friends and relatives back in Nigeria (Adichie 115). Her bewilderment is clearly recognizable in the text, but her isolated circumstances prevent her from sharing her thoughts with others (Adichie 118).

In *On Monday of Last Week*, Kamara is annoyed when her employer is utterly surprised to hear her speak in an excellent English. With his statement about her language skills, he implies that English is his property (Adichie 76) and automatically downgrades her education although she has come to America with a master's degree. Kamara, however, feels alienated about the idea of language property.

Besides language, every other mundane object is connoted with cultural aspects, which are taken for granted, no matter whether one is a native or an immigrant. By writing stories like the already mentioned one, Adichie protests against the lack of background knowledge of other cultures, which automatically leads to the acceptance of connotations and stereotypes. Additionally, in *The Arrangers of Marriage*, she lets her American character speak out against an ignorant behaviour of the American culture on other cultures. One of the neighbours of the Nigerian couple compliments Chinaza on her traditionally African meal: "It smells really good. The problem with us here is we have no culture, no culture at all" (Adichie 179). Shirley criticizes American culture as indefinable and ignorant about its roots. Foods from all around the world, like pizza and French fries, have found their way into American culture (Adichie 176) ignoring their historical backgrounds. The problem arises, though, and Shirley's statement points that out, that recipes from other ethnic origins, like Chinaza's coconut rice, are not included into the definition of what is called typically American. Shirley's character depicts the problematic aspect in which the Western world is trapped. On the one hand side, everybody seems to be willing to open up to foreign cultures, on the other hand, however, this openness is restricted and boundaries to certain cultures cannot be overcome.

As the previous examples in this chapter show, stereotypical thinking is clearly a topic worthy of contemporary discussion in society, for immigrants being exposed to stereotypical accusations or assumptions seems to lead to two possible ways of handling this situation. Some people start acting out the stereotypes they are being subsumed under in their new home country (Adichie 119). On the other hand, immigrants tend to dismiss their roots and try to become as American as possible. This tendency can be seen in *The Arrangers of Marriage* when Ofodile changes his name, his accent and food habits (Adichie 168) in order to show that he does not belong to any African stereotypes anymore.

4.6 Blackness

Adichie also discusses the othering of immigrants in her short stories. Problems do not only arise because of the protagonists' origins, but also their appearance makes them stand out and marks them as part of the group that is not included into American society.

As Stuart Hall mentioned in *New Ethnicities* (Ashcroft 199), there were two phases of Black diaspora that were critical for a Blackness movement and progression. Hall only applied this theory to British immigrants, however, similar observations can be found with black American immigrants. The first phase can be described as a unifying act of black immigrants of different ethnicities. Such building of a community had two purposes: firstly, the rights of black immigrants were questioned and they stood up as a united group against unfair treatment that affected their quality of life. Secondly, their goal for acting as a community and living according to set-up principles within that group was to create a positive but still stereotypical picture of blackness, which was supposed to reach the non-immigrant part of society. In the second phase, however, black immigrants and the following generation still supported the black community but started questioning the lack of individuality.

Especially writers began to distance themselves from the black community since they did not believe in a homogenized picture of blackness. This can also be observed in Adichie's works. Her characters are mostly of Nigerian

origin, nevertheless, she paints a very different picture of each of them. It should be mentioned that the main aspect of Adichie's short stories is not Nigeria's colonial heritage. One of her main concerns is to point out the phenomenon of blackness in today's American society. This aspect can be found in *On Monday of Last Week* and *The Thing Around Your Neck*. In those two stories, the reader has direct access to the protagonists' experiences of various aspects of life, i.e. child rearing, cooking and wealth, which appear to be different in their new living environment.

Discussing race problems in American society refreshes the reader's knowledge about this nation's problematic past. Adichie's depiction of her own experiences of racist behaviour in America can be found in the two stories mentioned above. Although it seems as if the American society is becoming more and more multicultural, the writer insists that people are stuck in the past. Her aim is to awaken her readers' consciousness and make them reflect on their (inter-) actions.

In *The Thing Around Your Neck*, the relationship of a young, biracial couple is being tested. There are struggles to be found between the two lovers because of their different up-bringing and experiences they had in their past lives:

He bought you presents and when you objected about the cost, he said his grandfather in Boston had been wealthy. [...] His presents mystified you. [...] Finally you told him, your voice stretched in irony, that in your life presents were always useful. [...] He laughed long and hard but you did not laugh. You realized that in his life, he could buy presents and nothing else, nothing useful. (Adichie 124)

Furthermore, people around them are criticizing their relationship:

You knew by people's reactions that you two were abnormal – the way the nasty ones were too nasty and the nice ones too nice. The old white men and women who muttered and glared at him, the black men who shook their heads at you, the black women whose pitying eyes bemoaned your lack of self-esteem, your self-loathing. Or the black women who smiled swift solidarity smiles; the black men who tried too hard to forgive you, saying a too-obvious hi to him; the white men and women who said "What a good-looking pair" too brightly, too loudly, as though to prove their own open-mindedness to themselves. (Adichie 125)

With this story, Adichie depicts different reactions by white and black Americans when they see Akunna and her boyfriend walking hand-in-hand through the streets. Both sides, however, illustrate the same problematic aspect of today's society; racial segregation based on skin colour is still very much present in America's society and this problem is not as actively addressed as it should be.

The same thinking pattern can be observed in *On Monday of Last Week*. Racial issues seem to be a prominent aspect in the interracial marriage depicted in this short story. Kamara, a Nigerian immigrant, who is desperately looking for a job to escape her own four walls (Adichie 79), is employed by the Jewish father Neil and Afro-American mother Tracy in order to look after their son, Josh, while the parents pursue their jobs. Neil is constantly worried about his son and in his conversations with Kamara, the reader can observe that his main concern is his son's skin colour: "He told her that he was worried that Josh was having a hard time with being different from the other children in his school" (Adichie: 77). Although this family seems to be very liberal-minded from the outside, the natural bond between family members diminishes in value by Neil adding society's criticism on skin colour to the picture. With the following description of his son, the father reduces him to his skin colour, which puts a shade over Josh's inner characteristics: "He's very quiet, very sweet, a great kid, but I'm concerned that there aren't any biracial kids like him at school or in the neighbo[u]rhood" (Adichie 76). Kamara cannot understand Neil's constant fears about Josh's wellbeing. Her lack of sympathy for the father can be explained by her confusion about a different social construct than what she is used to. The racial hierarchy, which is present in American society, is something new to Kamara and it is not easy for her to adapt to such an understanding of life.

4.7 Religion and War

There is a strong tendency in the Western world of relegating religion to the private lives of its citizens. However, in Nigeria, as one example of many other African countries, religion is tightly bound to politics. Reviewing the wars of this country, it becomes quite clear that these conflicts always include some sort of religious input. It is apparent that great problems exist between the Christian and Islamic parts of Nigeria's population. However, conflicts were and still are bound to get even worse when ethnicity and land divisions are also involved to the already tense situation of this country. Nevertheless, a look behind the curtain reveals that religion merely serves as an excuse and the real interests of the political leaders of Nigeria are hidden behind that.

Adichie also mentions the geographical element of religion in her short stories. She questions Christian missionary work of the 19th century (*The Headstrong Historian*), as well as ethno-religious violence (*A Private Experience*). Adichie points out that indigenous religions became more and more disdained by the colonialized population but different Christian denominations did not seem to matter much likewise. Adichie herself questions Pentecostalism, if not all kinds of religion (*The Shivering*).

The protagonist of *The Shivering* strongly resembles the author herself. Not only does Adichie teach at Princeton University, the same one where Ukamaka studies, but both also have a similar religious background since they are not satisfied with established religions. "Ukamaka grew up Catholic, very much like me, and went through the established religion and its routines, and I think that can be quite comforting to some people, but eventually it didn't work for her" (Tunca 66).

When Ukamaka hesitantly agrees to pray with the other main character of this story, Chinedu, she starts wondering about the presence of God – a theme that seems to run throughout the entire story. Chinedu's answer tells the reader that he is certain about God's active involvement: "God is telling us something. Only God can save our country" (Adichie 145).

When news reach Ukamaka that her ex-boyfriend was not amongst the victims of the plane crash, Chinedu exclaims: "I knew my God would deliver! I

have been praying in my heart for God to keep him safe” (Adichie 147). Chinedu’s belief is strengthened by this miracle but Ukamaka still doubts. What seems to make Ukamaka doubt so much might be the unsteadiness of Chinedu’s own religious beliefs. He often changes the subject when he is at loss and cannot answer Ukamaka’s questions (Adichie 147). A different kind of behaviour can be found in a different short story (*A Private Experience*), however this will be discussed at a later stage of this chapter.

As has been mentioned before, Adichie’s preoccupation against Pentecostalism is also expressed in her works. In this particular story, bad light is shed on this denomination due to Chinedu’s decisions he made about his life and his characteristics. He is an illegal immigrant (Adichie 163) and additionally, he seems to have a weak personality since he was not able to escape an abusive, past relationship (Adichie 158). Furthermore, Chinedu’s sexual preference poses another difficulty. He is homosexual, which is regarded as a sin in most Pentecostal churches. One could claim that breaking the rules of his congregation is another indicator of Chinedu’s unsteadiness. Therefore, Ukamaka doubts when she experiences Chinedu’s way of showing his faith. He goes into extremes and makes her “a little alarmed” (Adichie 147):

What a luxury to have a faith like his, Ukamaka thought, so uncritical, so forceful, so impatient. And yet there was something about it that was exceedingly fragile; it was as if Chinedu could conceive of faith only in extremes, as if an acknowledgement of middle ground would mean the risk of losing everything. (Adichie 165)

Adichie’s criticism of Pentecostalism can also be found when she ridicules Chinedu’s seemingly unbreakable faith in God. He strongly believes that prayer alone can end Nigeria’s crisis (Adichie 143) but the text indirectly suggests that Chinedu is mistaken in his belief.

It seems as if Chinedu desperately tries to hold on to an image of God, Ukamaka cannot approve of. Even when Chinedu seems to accept the Catholic church besides his own belief by explaining God’s ambiguous nature as “being different from human nature”, he can merely educe a “I see what you mean” (Adichie 165) from Ukamaka. Her thoughts are not revealed to

Chinedu and therefore he is not aware that his explanations are not helpful but merely confusing for her.

The reader learns that Ukamaka's experiences with the church in her teenage years drew her away from any kind of religion. Therefore, it is remarkable that she went to see a priest after the breakup with her ex-boyfriend (Adichie 148). One can argue that religious institutions play a big role in times of personal crisis. In Ukamaka's case, it is Father Patrick who listens to her story. She is surprised about his open-mindedness (Adichie 149) since she has always experienced strictness and indoctrination in the past.

"Have faith" is not really like saying be tall and shapely. It's more like saying be okay with the bulge and with having to wear Spanx," he said. And she had laughed, too, surprised that this plump white man with silver hair knew what Spanx was. (Adichie 149)

Ukamaka tries to find peace with her own, confined version of faith, and this means for her that she will have to let go of her past, including the memories of her ex-boyfriend. The question arises, however, whether she is strong enough to do so. The story describes Ukamaka as a person who moulds herself according to other people's liking. On various occasions, Ukamaka tells Chinedu about the changes she has gone through during her time with her ex-boyfriend in order to please him. Furthermore, the reader finds out that she is keeping certain habits although the relationship is definitely over.

"I never liked hot food until I met Udenna. I'm not even sure I like it now."

"But you still cook with it."

She did not like his saying that and she did not like that his face was closed, his expression unreadable, as he glanced at her and then back at his plate. She said, "Well, I guess I'm used to it now." (Adichie 151)

Ukamaka also seeks approval of Chinedu whenever she meets him. Whilst driving home from church, she nods to the music in an agreeing way although Chinedu has changed her favourite radio station to one that is playing loud music (Adichie 157). Furthermore, her reaction about him coming out to her as gay is a mere performance and although she seems to approve of his sexual preference, she only acts surprised because she believes that he wants her to behave like this (Adichie 159).

Taking in account all her actions, namely personal and spiritual as well as past and present ones, it seems as if they are taken to build some sort of safety net for her life. The question arises whether she will remain in the shelter of religion and the shadow of the people she surrounds herself with; but this is left open for the reader to answer.

The Shivering is one of Adichie's short stories that ends on a surprisingly but rather unrealistically, positive note. Chinedu is still an illegal immigrant and on the verge of being deported because he "doesn't have a case" (Adichie 163). Nevertheless, Ukamaka tries to reassure him that he will stay in the USA: "We will find a way. We will!" (Adichie 165). It is not clear whether her optimism is based on illusionary thoughts or whether she is hoping for a miracle directly from God.

Adichie does not want her reader to believe that all hope is lost, whether it is the constant fear of being deported or being killed during the war. Undoubtedly, the war has lasting effects on the people who experienced it first-hand. Adichie's primary focus, however, is not to highlight the cruel conditions of the war but she wants to open her readers' eyes to a more positive perspective of the future. This she does by pointing out in *Ghosts* what matters most to James, his family and the rest of the people fighting for independence; they are survivors and their focus lies on the future: "It was a tacit agreement among all of us, the survivors of Biafra. Even Ebere and I, who had debated our first child's name, Zik, for months, agreed very quickly on Nikura: what is ahead is better" (Adichie 73).

In *A Private Experience* religious matters in Nigeria are also discussed, however, its focus is not primarily brought into this topic. Certainly, the story starts with the encounter of two women of different religious affiliations, who are forced to flee and hide from an outbreak of violence. The real differences depicted in this story, however, are not of ethnic or religious matters but social status. The reader learns that Chika is a middle-class woman with an excellent education (Adichie 47), whereas the nameless Hausa woman has to work hard to earn her daily bread (Adichie 50). At some points of this story, it is directly implied that the two women are aware of their different positions on the social ladder. This can be seen in the following examples:

At their arrival in the hide-out, Chika examines the other woman's appearance and sees "a long, flimsy pink and black scarf, with the garish prettiness of cheap things" (Adichie 44), whereas she wears a "denim skirt and red T-shirt embossed with a picture of the Statue of Liberty, both of which she bought when she and Nnedi spent a few summer weeks with relatives in New York (Adichie 46). It becomes obvious that Chika does not have to worry about money since she can easily afford holidays and new clothes whenever she wants. Chika's observation shows that the other woman is definitely not as fortunate as she is. Wearing old clothes and working to survive every single day, she probably cannot afford to go on holidays. Furthermore, when Chika is asked about her school, "she wonders if the woman even knows what going to university means" (Adichie 47) because it is very probable that the Hausa woman has never received any education. Although Chika fears that she might have sounded pretentious, she cannot detect any criticism from the other woman when she tells her about her job as a trader (Adichie 48). Hearing the woman's story makes Chika feel increasingly embarrassed about how she takes her well-being for granted and how little she cares about her education (Adichie 48). In addition to Chika's uncertainty about her life choices, the reader also learns that she is disinterested in the political affairs of her home country. One can assume that this is one of the reasons that led to her naïve assumptions about life outside the safe zone she is trapped in, namely her family home or the campus grounds. Such behaviour is apparent throughout the entire story, however when the two women part at the end, Chika's innocent and completely unrealistic thinking is again highlighted.

"How far away is your house?" she asks.

"Far. I'm taking two buses."

"Then I will come back with my aunty's driver and take you home,"
Chika says. The woman looks away. (Adichie 53)

Besides the direct references to the difference of the women, Adichie's short story also includes situations that indirectly depict the social status of the two characters. From the beginning of the story onwards, it becomes clear that the Hausa woman is aware of the lower social status of the two women and therefore it seems to take over the role of the servant. Not only does she help

Chika to escape from the riots at the market (Adichie 44), but she also uses one of her few garments to cover the floor in order to not have Chika sitting in the dirt (Adichie 46). However, this is not the only occasion where the woman takes care of Chika. When Chika returns from a short expedition with a bleeding leg, the other woman takes her own scarf and uses it as a bandage to cover Chika's wound (Adichie 54).

It is questionable if the Hausa woman takes on duties which seem to be more appropriate for a servant consciously, having her lower status in the back of her mind, or just because she is used to taking care of other people. But still, the Hausa woman clearly puts Chika's, or anybody else's needs, above her own. However, it cannot be instantly assumed that this woman acts servant-like because of her social status, out of pure compassion or even because of poor self-esteem. If we put aside social, religious, ethic or personal factors and differences of the two women, it becomes clear that the Hausa woman is the true heroine of the story. Her courage and bravery saves both of their lives although she lacks higher education and essential material goods.

Other factors, such as social status, might play a more prominent role in this short story; nevertheless, religion cannot be excluded in this discussion. At one point of the story, the Hausa and Muslim woman prepares herself for her daily ritual, which she does not even skip in an extreme situation like the riot. She is quietly praying and Chika would like to give the woman space for her private experience, however since she cannot leave the room she merely looks away. The prayer seems to help the Hausa woman to cope with this situation and Chika wishes that she had a ritual herself that she could turn to (Adichie 52). Nevertheless, Chika realizes that only a certain kind of people find support in praying rituals. The reader discovers that Chika and her sister have both never been religious, however, whereas Chika always wanted to please her mother, her sister Nnedi was strictly against any kinds of religious events and religious representation in forms of jewellery:

[Chika] touches her finger rosary that she still wears, sometimes on her pinky or her forefinger, to please her mother. Nnedi no longer wears hers, once saying with that throaty laugh, "Rosaries are really magical potions, and I don't need those, thank you." (Adichie 52)

As can be seen in *A Private Experience*, ethical and religious differences do not stop people from caring for each other. What is happening inside the abandoned store is rather uneventful, as opposed to what is going on outside. Politics and the consequences of political decisions can be brutal and very powerful but this does not have to interfere with interpersonal relations:

Later, Chika will read in *The Guardian* that the “reactionary Hausa-speaking Muslims in the North have a history of violence against non-Muslims,” and in the middle of her grief, she will stop to remember that she examined the nipples and experienced the gentleness of a woman who is Hausa and Muslim. (Adichie 55)

Religious struggles might have existed throughout the entire history of Nigeria, however since Western powers gained more and more influence in this area, problems increased dramatically. As history can tell, the attempt of introducing Catholicism to the habitants of the newly established country, which included people of different ethnic and religious backgrounds, proved to be unsuccessful. Adichie discusses the outcomes of this colonial heritage in many of her short stories (*The Shivering, Ghosts*) but with *The Headstrong Historian*, she places the reader into the actual times of missionary work in Nigeria.

Although hearing disturbing stories from the white men arriving in the neighbouring clans, Nwamgba believes that they are the much longed for sign from the spirits she has been praying for. Knowing that the foreigners are much superior to the indigenous peoples because of their highly advanced weapons, for one (Adichie 201), she wants her son to learn their language and their way of living in order to be able to represent her case at a white men’s court. She hopes that an education at a Catholic missionary school (Adichie 204) will be the solution to all her problems and therefore sends him away from the clan despite his reluctance (Adichie 210). However, her plan backfires because Anikwenwa becomes more and more accustomed to the life of the white men and, simultaneously, starts looking down at the traditions of his clan:

Nwambgba said nothing when he announced that he had been appointed catechist at the new mission [... and] talked about winning souls in their clan. The plate of breadfruit seeds she had offered him was untouched - he no longer ate anything at all of hers [... and] he was like a person diligently acting a bizarre pantomime. (Adichie 212)

Nwambgba loses her son to a religion, which she neither understands, nor cares about. Therefore, it is not surprising that she becomes more and more depressed in the course of the story. Her unhappiness reaches the climax when her son is getting married to a Christian woman, not within the circle of clan members but at a Christian ceremony (Adichie 212). She is certainly irritated by her son's behaviour and she is only willing to stay alive in order to get to know her grandchild, hoping "it would be Obierika com[ing] back and [...] bring[ing] a semblance of sense back into her world" (Adichie 213). She prays to her own Gods for a baby boy although her son does not agree with her actions but it seems as if her husband's spirit did not return to this world when she finally meets her first grandchild. Interestingly, it is the second child, a girl, who, Nwambgba believes, is occupied by Obierika's spirit. Her happiness returns because now she can be certain that this child will gladly learn from her grandmother whatever there is to know about the clan's tradition and customs.

Throughout the entire story, the reader experiences situations at which Nwambgba is at war with this foreign religion, Christianity, and even when she feels that it is time for her to die, she refuses to be given the Last Rites, as her son would have loved her to have (Adichie 215). The way in which this story is written makes clear that this woman has never given up hope in the Gods and Spirits of her clan although she has undergone some dramatic events. It seems as if Adichie's understanding and her own experiences of religion are portrayed very clearly in *The Headstrong Historian*. As has been mentioned before, she is confused about Christianity and its rules, and so is Nwambgba. Adichie takes the side of the indigenous woman and consequently points out that traditions and history should not be extinguished but preserved for the next generations. The depiction of Afamefunu's or Grace's, the granddaughter, further life experiences can therefore be seen as an utopian future, as Adichie would like it to be:

It was Grace who would nurse a deep scorn for her father for years [...], teach elementary school in Agueke, where people told stories of the destruction of their village years before by the white men's guns [...], sift[ed] through mouldy files in archives, reimagining the lives and smells of her grandmother's world. [...] It was Grace who, feeling an odd rootlessness in the later years of her life [...], would go to the courthouse in Lagos and officially change her first name from Grace to Afamefuna. (Adichie 216)

Similarities between the relationship of mother and child can be found in *A Private Experience* and the short story just discussed. It seems that in both cases, the gap between them broadens when religion is brought up for discussion. In both families it is expected from the child to take on the religion and beliefs the parents are practicing. However, since both characters are very strong personalities, they decide to not follow their families' but their own interests. It is not clear in how far the relationship changes between mother and daughter in *A Private Experience*. Nevertheless, the reader might be able to filter out the daughter's voice of dissatisfaction when she thinks about the rituals her mother follows (Adichie 52). In *The Headstrong Historian*, the conflict level becomes considerably higher. Even though the bond between mother and son seemed to be very strong at the beginning of the story, their beliefs and worldviews change gradually, which, in the end, makes them turn away from each other.

In all the short stories mentioned in this chapter, Adichie shows different kinds of impact religions can have on humankind. Religion is very powerful and can be used and abused in different ways to change relationships of families, peoples and nations.

4.8 Gender

As has been mentioned before, male writers were the leading group in creating migration narratives. Furthermore, it should be pointed out that male protagonists are primarily used in this kind of genre. This has been the case for the last centuries but in the last couple of years there seems to be a tendency of highlighting the female point of view in migration narratives. Adichie is one of the now growing numbers of female writers who gives women a voice. Their experiences of political upheavals, immigration or family disputes are being portrayed in a way that seems absolutely realistic for the reader.

Most of the characters in Adichie's short stories find themselves in places of estrangement and displacement and they have to find a way out of their miseries. Although just one of the twelve short stories in her collection is written from the male perspective, every other story depicts female characters that are different in their own way, are situated in a different place or time and are therefore not supposed to be compressed to one type of woman. This can be seen by looking at three short stories of *The Thing Around Your Neck* collection that depict three very different female characters.

In *On Monday of Last Week* the female character is looking forward to finally meeting her husband in the USA after being separated for six years (Adichie 84). However, the man who picks her up at the airport is no longer the man she has married back home in Nigeria. He has changed so much in their years of separation that it is impossible for Kamara to love him as the person he is now. In addition to her failing relationship, Kamara feels alienated in the new world she is supposed to be living in. However, Adichie depicts her as a strong enough character who gets going again after weeks of depression.

As opposed to the character in *On Monday of Last Week*, the woman in *Tomorrow Is Too Far* can be described as being weak and living in a world of her own, as she is caught in the past and rethinks a tragic event that cost her brother's life. She is responsible for his accident (Adichie 195) and the secret she only shared with her cousin has haunted her until she finally returns to the place where everything happened. She hopes that her cousin can help her

forget the happenings of the past, however at her arrival she must realize that he is not willing to free her from this burden (Adichie 197).

A Private Experience tells the story of two female characters who could not be more different from each other. Having to share a hideout during a riot at a nearby market, they get to know each other in a way that could have never been realistic in any other situation. The seemingly wealthy and educated girl from Lagos feels grateful to the other woman, who has saved her life. Although both know about each others' differences in their way of living, including their religious beliefs, they help each other in any possible way and therefore separate themselves from the political upheaval not only spatially but also in their behaviour towards each other.

Later, Chika will learn that, as she and the woman are speaking, Hausa Muslims are hacking down Igbo Christians with machetes, clubbing them with stones. But now she says, "Thank you for calling me. (Adichie 44)

With this collection, Adichie not only wants to point out that women have the same right to be heard as men but her goal is to depict their uniqueness.

4.9 Patriarchal Practices

The depiction of differences between American habitants and immigrants is a common theme in Adichie's short story collection. Such differences have been discussed within previous chapters, however, this one lays the focus on the differences in the way boys and girls are raised and how they are expected to lead their adult life. It is believed that African women and men are expected to uphold the family's culture and traditions, which means that men are in control of the family, and especially of its female members (Okpalaoka 78).

With the help of the short story *The Arrangers of Marriage* the reader will be able to determine what kind of issues arise when patriarchal practices are transported to the USA by immigrants.

Chinaza's first attempt to escape her husband's command is triggered by the onset of winter in her new home in America. Seeing snow for the first time not only astonishes her, but it also seems as if she becomes more hopeful. As can be seen from the following section of the story, Chinaza is suddenly determined to gain independence from her husband when she asks him for the much longed for work permit:

Winter had come and I was still unemployed. When my husband came home in the evening, I placed his French fries and fried chicken before him and said, 'I thought I would have my work permit by now.' [...] We spoke only English now; he did not know that I spoke Igbo to myself while I cooked, that I had taught Nia how to say 'I'm hungry' and 'See you tomorrow' in Igbo. (Adichie 182)

In addition to her fighting for independence, she also starts questioning her husband's authority. The reader finds out that she still speaks Igbo behind his back and therefore not only claims her identity as a woman but also does not want to get rid of her roots, as opposed to her husband (Adichie 182).

In *The Arrangers of Marriage*, Adichie uses Chinaza in order to depict the typical marginalized position of female immigrants. She discards the illusionist picture of the happy wife and instead shows the more realistic life of a woman whose hopes and expectations of a different kind of marriage in new surroundings, far away from patriarchal hierarchy have varnished. Her family back in Nigeria, who assured her that her new husband in the USA would be

able to provide her with a secure and wealthy life, had generated such hopes. However, Chinaza has not been told the exact truth:

The arrangers of marriage only told you that doctors started to make a lot of money in America. They did not add that before doctors started to make a lot of money, they had to do an internship and a residency program, which my new husband had not completed. My new husband had told me this during our short in-flight conversation, right after we took off from Lagos, before he fell asleep. (Adichie 174)

Although Chinaza would have wished to enter a university in her home country (Adichie 170), her family decided to marry her off to the seemingly wealthy Nigerian doctor in America. When reading this short story, it can be detected that Chinaza's experience of male authoritarian voices must have chased her all her life. Growing up in a family that was obedient to the uncle's words (Adichie 170), she then ends up with a husband who acts in an equally controlling and commanding way. Chinaza was always deprived of her right of decision, however, this changes in the course of her life in America. She certainly is tired of all the empty promises at the beginning of the story but, as has been mentioned before, unusual happenings like the beginning of winter finally give her a voice and she requests her work permit from her husband. She feels resistant against her living situation, however does not show these thoughts to her husband, even when he tells her about another woman he has and is still married to.

I stared at him in silence, shredding the coupons into smaller and smaller bits; broken-up pictures of detergents and meat packs and paper towels fell to the floor. [...] 'I wanted a Nigerian wife and my mother said you were a good girl, quiet. She said you might even be a virgin.' [...] 'I probably should tell her how wrong she was.' I threw more coupons on the floor, clasped my hands together, and dug my nails into my skin. (Adichie 184)

Having said such assaulting words to Chinaza, she eventually opts for flight and leaves her husband and moves in with her neighbour Nia. If the story had ended at this point, one could claim that Chinaza has found her willingness to fight for her rights. However, Chinaza seems to be too weak to be able to escape Ofodile's wedging influence. In a very unspectacular ending, the

reader finds out that she returns to his flat, where she “rang the doorbell and he opened the door, stood aside, and let [her] pass” (Adichie 184).

5 Conclusion

The preceding discussion of Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's short story collection *The Thing Around Your Neck* depicts very clearly why this work is of outstanding value. The writer highlights many of the most prominent issues of Nigeria by incorporating them into six of the twelve stories. As has been mentioned in the first chapter of this thesis, the Nigerian Civil War is one of the main triggers for the issues mentioned in Adichie's work, and had lasting effects on the country's population. Furthermore, the writer approached issues that emerged with the British colonial rule and their subsequent seizures of power in Nigeria, which led to the before mentioned war.

In addition to the short stories set in her home country, the other half of the collection highlights typical problems of Nigerian people, who start a new life in the United States of America. Being an immigrant herself, Adichie can therefore display the occurring conflicts in a very realistic way.

After a thorough analysis of the themes and topics occurring in Adichie's short stories, it can be argued that the demonstration of the broad variety of issues is based on a deep knowledge of contemporary life in Nigeria and America. Adichie mentions various religious, political and domestic issues not only within the entire collection but often also within one story itself. She wants to highlight that all of the issues mentioned above are connected with each other.

With reference to the research questions mentioned in the introduction of the diploma thesis it can be proven with the help of the analysis of Adichie's short stories that earlier generations of Nigerian writers do have an influence on her writing, which can especially be seen in the detailed descriptions of the war in *Ghosts*. Additionally, by adding Igbo words to the main (English) text, she copies another aspect from her predecessors that has been introduced by them.

As critics have claimed, Adichie's attempt to display African authenticity in her works was successful. By incorporating her own experiences into her works, her short stories display a picture of Africa as authentic as it can be. However,

the writer also questions the whole debate on African authenticity with her short story *Jumping Monkey Hill*.

It is not Adichie's intention to find a solution to the pending problems displayed in her short story collection, however, she wants to shed light onto the existence of such in the hope of triggering a public discussion by presenting them within her works.

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Abstract

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie is one of the most famous African female writers at this moment. Her literary works are full of an incredible amount of themes and topics but it is the inclusion of her memories as a child in Africa and the experience as an immigrant of the USA that make her stories as realistic as they (almost) are. This thesis is a discussion of Adichie's short story collection *The Thing Around Your Neck*. The collection includes twelve short stories that are absolutely independent from each other but nevertheless, links can be established by the themes and topics used within the stories.

Whilst the first part of this thesis deals with the theoretical background of Adichie's writing, the second part is entirely dedicated to the analysis of, firstly, each short story on its own and, secondly, the comparison of the short stories with the help of the main themes detected during the first part of the analysis.

Abstract

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie ist eine der bekanntesten afrikanischen Schriftstellerinnen zu diesem Zeitpunkt. Ihre Werke beinhalten eine Fülle an Motiven und Themen, jedoch ist es die Inkludierung ihrer eigenen Kindheitserinnerungen in Afrika und ihre Erfahrungen als Immigrantin in den USA, die ihre Geschichten so realistisch darstellen lassen, wie sie (fast) sind. Diese Diplomarbeit diskutiert Adichie's Sammlung an Kurzgeschichten *The Thing Around Your Neck*. Diese Sammlung beinhaltet zwölf Kurzgeschichten, die absolut unabhängig voneinander sind, jedoch trotzdem Verbindungen zueinander aufzeigen.

Während der erste Teil der Diplomarbeit sich mit dem theoretischen Hintergrund von Adichie's Tätigkeit als Schriftstellerin beschäftigt, ist der zweite Teil ganz der Analyse der Kurzgeschichten gewidmet. Weiters werden im Anhang diese Geschichten mit der Hilfe der prominentesten Motive und Themen verglichen.