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„Westernization and Diasporic Identity Construction in
Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah* and *The
Thing Around Your Neck*“

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Disclaimers

First, it is crucial to acknowledge the primary objective of this thesis, which is to respectfully and accurately portray Black African subjectivities as presented in the selected theoretical texts and narratives. Recognizing the importance of avoiding any misrepresentation of Black African realities, I am fully aware of my own perspective as a white woman from a middle-class background. Secondly, the focus of this thesis is specifically centered on Nigerian literary perspectives, aiming to capture the multifaceted nature of the migration experience and individual diasporic identities. However, it is important to note that due to the prevailing postcolonial emphasis within this thesis and the utilization of broad terminology in theoretical sources, there are instances where I employ the term “Africa.” Thus, it is crucial to clarify that, moving forward, references to “Africa” or “African” primarily pertain to the country of Nigeria and its people, denoting “Nigeria” and “Nigerian” respectively. Lastly, in an effort to honor and acknowledge the shared history and culture of Black communities worldwide, I have chosen to capitalize the word “Black.”

Table of Contents

1. Introduction	1
2. Westernization in Context: Acculturation, Representation, and Identity.....	6
2.1 <i>Acculturation and Cultural Imperialism</i>	10
2.2 <i>Representation and Media Imperialism</i>	14
2.3 <i>Defining Diasporic Identity</i>	20
3. Diasporic Identities in <i>The Thing Around Your Neck</i>	24
3.1 <i>Nkem: Unmasking Westernization in “Imitation”</i>	27
3.2 <i>Ujunwa: Challenging the Canon Through Meta-Narrativity in “Jumping Monkey Hill”</i>	34
3.3 <i>Chinaza and Ofodile: Re-Negotiating Cultural Ties in “The Arrangers of Marriage”</i>	40
4. Diasporic Identities in <i>Americanah</i>	46
4.1 <i>American (Dis)Enchantment: Ifemelu’s Acculturation Process</i>	48
4.2 <i>Re-Defining the Concept of Blackness: Ifemelu’s Quest for Self-Representation</i>	54
4.3 <i>Chasing the Nigerian Dream: Ifemelu’s Return to a New Sense of Self and Home</i>	58
5. Conclusion	63
Works Cited.....	66
Appendix.....	70
<i>Abstract</i>	70
<i>Zusammenfassung</i>	71

1. Introduction

In what way is English literature relevant in today's world? If the English canon can be understood as a value system literally written down and inscribed in people's minds, postcolonial literature may provide a reflection of this system. While the English canon gives an insight into the way the world was perceived a few centuries ago, postcolonial literature, via silenced voices from the colonial periphery, offers a new viewpoint, a meditation on the past and the present. With the advent of postcolonialism, new literatures were added to the historic literary collection, and readers and critics were presented with stories that question this debatable value system, stories that uncover the workings of oppressive ideological systems that are still in place today. Therefore, the challenge for postcolonial authors lies in defying these formative historic artifacts by introducing new ways of thinking, seeing, and reading.

Most of all, African Anglophone postcolonial writers – producing literature that communicates across time, countries, and continents – hold the power to present alternative worldviews and, thus, to reinvent the English canon. Birgit Neumann and Gabriele Rippl emphasize the challenging aspect of this mission by stating that it is “almost impossible to open up the western world's literary canon for other, hitherto forgotten and marginalized literary texts that thrive on alternative, non-Eurocentric creative strategies and epistemologies” (166). Further, they point out that African literary “spaces form a discontinuous network, bringing together plural African geographies as well as the various diasporic spaces in the Americas, Europe and elsewhere” (164). By drawing from African creative traditions, African writers connect diasporic spaces while disconnecting themselves from the universality of Western traditions.

In particular, the body of African literature, as noted by Tobias Döring, attempts to make sense of its colonial past while trying to create a national postcolonial identity (95). In Igbo oral tradition, Louisa Egbunike remarks, it is an essential feature of art to connect the present with the past but also the arts with politics, as “[a]rt serves both an imaginative and socio-political function” (18). An important figure not only for African fiction but also popular culture and contemporary postcolonial literature, in general, is Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie. Serena Guarracino remarks that Adichie “owns a sort of celebrity status: her videos show an impressive number of online views, making her a ‘viral’ public figure both inside and outside the traditional boundaries of postcolonial academic discourse” (2). Adichie combines the imaginative with the political by employing Igbo oral, narrative, and cultural patterns in her storytelling. Hence, as Silvana Carotenuto observes, what makes Adichie's fiction remarkable is the combination of cultural techniques and her critical portrayal of the “universality of history and [...] the

interiorization of the norm” (173). This coincides with Elena Rodríguez Murphy’s view that “Nigerian writer Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie has become one of the many African authors who through their narratives have succeeded in challenging the literary canon both in Europe and North America while redefining African literature from the diaspora” (93). Niyi Akingbe and Emmanuel Adeniyi ascertain that “Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie is a burgeoning Nigerian writer who continually forges the link between the [sic] Nigeria’s past and present” (37). I claim that Adichie’s fiction serves as the ideal ground on which to carry out the close inspection of African diasporic identities.

With her diasporic narratives, Adichie complements the “single story of Africa” by portraying the lives of Nigerian individuals who are not affected by poverty and war but impacted by the forces of Westernization (Adichie, “Danger of a Single Story”). The following passage from Adichie’s latest novel, *Americanah* (2013), brings to light one of the main themes of Adichie’s fiction: the influence of the Western world on African cultures and mindscapes.

[They] all understood the fleeing from war, from the kind of poverty that crushed human souls, but they would not understand the need to escape from the oppressive lethargy of choicelessness. They would not understand why people like him, who were raised well-fed and watered but mired in dissatisfaction, conditioned from birth to look towards somewhere else, eternally convinced that real lives happened in that somewhere else, were now resolved to do dangerous things [...] so as to leave [...] merely hungry for choice and certainty. (Adichie, *Americanah* 276)

The theme of Westernization is one of the driving forces of the plot of *Americanah* where characters endeavor to go to Western countries for personal, educational, and career purposes. In addition, it is a prevalent theme in Adichie’s short story collection *The Thing Around Your Neck* (2009). In my thesis, I will argue that Adichie’s fiction dismantles Westernized value systems, in that characters question supremacist ideologies during their migration experience.

As Nigerian characters are “conditioned from birth to look towards somewhere else,” their African culture is constantly contrasted with Western culture (276). This process reaches a climax when the characters arrive in their new Western host country and are faced with the clash of the Western and their heritage culture. In fact, this process can be best defined in terms of acculturation theory. According to John Berry and David Sam, “acculturation refers to all the changes that arise following contact between groups and individuals of different cultural backgrounds” (“Theoretical” 11). In a migration context, acculturation theory is most suitable to explain and analyze the process these characters undergo. Therefore, I will employ acculturation theory to examine the changes resulting from the meeting of the Nigerian and the Western cultural space as well as to scrutinize their effects on diasporic character identities. In order to understand the role of identity in acculturation and the effects of acculturation

processes on identity, this thesis will focus, in particular, on acculturation psychology. Psychological acculturation is concerned with the effects of cultural contact on individuals, as opposed to cultural groups (Intro 2). Therefore, this theoretical approach will be useful in analyzing the changes and challenges experienced by diasporic characters.

In addition, the passage addresses the portrayal of lived realities in the Western world. As a matter of fact, Nigerian characters are “convinced that real lives happened in that somewhere else” (Adichie, *Americanah* 276); they are influenced by representations from and of the West. Stuart Hall asserts that systems of representation are first of all generated by “the use of language, of signs and images”: “Representation connects meaning and language to culture” (“Work” 15). Central to an investigation of representation is bell hooks’ *Black Looks: Race and Representation* which interrogates the “link between race, representation, issues of black self-determination, and decolonization” (ix). Sue Thornham et al. perceive representation as a “signifying system which constructs, rather than merely reflecting or transmitting, meaning” (Textual 188). In Adichie’s narratives, it becomes apparent that Nigerian characters are continuously confronted with images that positively depict Western societies. Accordingly, these representations are part of the driving force that draws characters to the West. Moreover, Steve Spencer points out that representations influence understandings of culture (2). As representations are not merely reflections of society but also directives for groups and individuals to incorporate into their identities, they are paramount to the investigation of diasporic identity construction.

A discussion of Westernization that opposes African and Western value system begs the question of power. As explained above, the process of acculturation and systems of representation are both impaired by Westernization. In other words, both acculturation and representation occur in a context that prioritizes Western culture over African cultural heritage. Hall remarks that “[p]ower, it seems, has to be understood here, not only in terms of economic exploitation and physical coercion, but also in broader cultural or symbolic terms, including the power to represent someone or something in a certain way – within a certain ‘regime of representation’” (“Spectacle” 259). It would follow then that Westernization creates a space of racial, gender, and cultural hierarchies: the everyday of the diasporic individual is impacted by power asymmetries. Adichie’s narratives display the ways in which binary oppositions and colonial ideologies are still at work in sociocultural settings. It can be argued that this “lethargy of choicelessness” represents a certain powerlessness reminiscent of colonial structures (Adichie, *Americanah* 276). Furthermore, characters are impacted by these hierarchical structures when they are faced with the question of cultural identity. The narratives discussed

in this thesis exemplify how diasporic identities struggle with the concepts and circumstances of race, culture, representation, and power in a postcolonial world.

However, Adichie's stories do not serve as a validation of colonial power structures. The transforming characteristics of her works stem from the theme of resistance produced by characters' actions, views, and identity formations. Correspondingly, her migration narratives are defined by resistance and return. I maintain that Adichie's narratives uncover Westernized power imbalances through diasporic identity construction. The protagonists identify the "default position [...] of superiority" of Western culture but ultimately overcome and resist it (Egbunike 22). As a result, Nigerian characters maintain a strong sense of cultural identity and thereby redefine the notion of African (cultural) identity in general. Additionally, I demonstrate that while undergoing the process of acculturation and being affected by representation, the characters challenge oppressive structures and create a new sense of identity *via* acculturation and representation. I pose the following questions: How do characters perceive different cultural spaces? How do cultural systems and media play into the construction of African diasporic identity? And how do the protagonists ultimately resist hegemonic structures? I will investigate these issues via theoretical perspectives on diasporic identity, acculturation and representation and a close reading of Adichie's *Americanah* (2013), as well as "Imitation," "Jumping Monkey Hill," and "The Arrangers of Marriage" from her short story collection *The Thing Around Your Neck* (2009).

As outlined above, the meeting and interplay of cultures is a central concern of contemporary postcolonial literature, particularly, African literature: Tanure Ojaide expounds that the "contemporary African condition" is interfused with issues of migration, globalization, dislocation, and transnationality (46). At the same time, African fiction is concerned with the redefinition and renegotiation of its own cultural identities. Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, as a Nigerian-American writer, directly reflects the contemporary African condition. Rose Sackefio highlights that Adichie's "collection of short stories, *The Thing Around Your Neck* (2009) and latest novel, *Americanah* (2013) unpacks contemporary themes in African literature that situate the African diaspora as a focal point of migration, transnational space(s) and diaspora identity" ("Revisiting" 213). As this thesis examines both several short stories and a novel, these themes are explored in varying forms of texts which will enable a detailed study of the matter.

The texts I chose for my thesis are the three short stories "Imitation," "Jumping Monkey Hill," and "The Arrangers of Marriage" from Adichie's short story collection *The Thing Around Your Neck* and her third novel *Americanah*. Firstly, "Imitation" tells the story of Nkem who lives in a suburban Philadelphia neighborhood with her two children and a maid while her husband lives in Nigeria and only visits for two months a year. When she receives the news

that her husband has a girlfriend who moved into their house, she questions her life situation and the path that led to it. Secondly, “The Arrangers of Marriage” depicts Chinaza’s immigration to the U.S. after her arranged marriage to a Nigerian who is working to become a doctor. Right after her arrival, her new husband starts to introduce her to American culture by showing her their new home and neighborhood. However, he immediately dissuades her from speaking any Igbo and cooking Nigerian food. When his actual circumstances are revealed, Chinaza decides to leave him. Shortly after, she is made aware of her dependency on her husband and her resultant choicelessness which is why she decides to stay with him until she has more options. Thirdly, at the “Jumping Monkey Hill” resort, Edward Campbell, a former lecturer at the University of Cape Town, organizes the African Writers Workshop (Adichie, *TTAYN* 95). Ujunwa and seven other African writers are supposed to produce a short story each, the best of which will be published in the “*Oratory*” (99, emphasis in original). While at the resort, Ujunwa is at first made uncomfortable by the way Edward looks at her and later she is angered by his comments on the writers’ stories. Edward argues as if he is the judge of what is truly African and, as a result, the African writers feel insulted and unseen. Accordingly, this short story is especially suited for an investigation of representation.

Lastly, Adichie’s novel, *Americanah*, narrates the lives of Ifemelu and Obinze who meet in high school, then attend Nsukka University together, and eventually immigrate to the U.S. and the UK respectively. The novel recounts both Ifemelu’s and Obinze’s, as well as their family’s and friends’ migration experiences in Western societies where they must deal with stereotypes, racism, and identity transformations. *Americanah* is considered a “masterfully crafted web of Nigerian immigrant experiences that spans Nigeria, the United States and the United Kingdom” (Sackeyfio, “Revisiting” 216). In summary, these narratives tackle the issues of migration, globalization, and diaspora identity, but above all, they delve into the concepts of agency and empowerment in a transcultural context. This thesis begins with chapter 2 discussing the origins and present-day structures of Westernization. Subsequently, chapter 2.1 delves deeper into acculturation theory whilst considering postcolonial criticism, chapter 2.2 examines the workings and relevance of representation, and chapter 2.3 takes a close look at diasporic identity construction. Chapters 3 to 3.3 then investigate these themes in the three short stories from *The Thing Around Your Neck* and chapters 4 to 4.3 provide a detailed analysis of *Americanah*. Lastly, chapter 5 will conclude this thesis by presenting the insights gained from the analysis chapters.

2. Westernization in Context: Acculturation, Representation, and Identity

“Very little is untouched by the colonial legacies that have infiltrated every fiber of our society” (Mpande, “Diaspora” 33).

The essence of Stella-Monica Mpande’s statement is vividly illustrated in Adichie’s fiction and the reason for why this thesis focuses on Westernization. The body of African literature presents a wide range of diverse topics and themes. So, why focus on the subject of Westernization? The overarching theme of African literature to which all the other topics can be traced back is its ongoing coloniality. Contemporary African writing is concerned with colonial attitudes that were forcibly introduced in the colonial era and are still pervading postcolonial mindsets. Like Mpande, Walter Mignolo points out: “No living organism at this point in time is immune to coloniality, no less the changing cast of actors running the institutions that maintain coloniality under the rhetoric of modernity celebrating change, development, the cybernetic revolution, AI, and democracy as unquestionable victories” (*Politics* 3). Nelson Maldonado-Torres explains that coloniality “refers to long-standing patterns of power that emerged as a result of colonialism, but that define culture, labor, intersubjective relations, and knowledge production well beyond the strict limits of colonial administration” (243). Similarly, Sabelo Ndlovu-Gatsheni remarks that “[t]oday the problem is not colonialism but coloniality, which emerged from colonialism and has assumed global proportions to the extent of being best understood as global coloniality” (viii). What is more, he identifies global coloniality as the “leitmotif of the currently existing empire, that of the United States of America (U.S.A.)” (viii). Therefore, the ongoing coloniality of African societies is what connects to and reinforces the process of Westernization.

The reason for the long persistence of coloniality is mental colonization. In *The Wretched of the Earth*, Frantz Fanon recognizes that “[i]n the colonial context the settler only ends his work of breaking in the native when the latter admits loudly and intelligibly the supremacy of the white man’s values” (43). Catherine Innes explains that “Fanon argues that the process of colonization involved not only physical occupation of the land and imposition of government on the colonized people, but also mental colonization” (43). Similarly, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o maintains that “[e]conomic and political control can never be complete or effective without mental control” (16). In this light, African literature, as a means for redefining and regaining African subjectivity, can serve as a site for, in Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o’s terms, decolonizing the mind. Moreover, Westernization can be understood as the continuation of

colonialism's mental colonization and postcolonial African literature as a development away from colonial discourses.

How does the new empire of global coloniality operate? Coloniality can be subdivided into coloniality of power, knowledge, and being. Mpande breaks down these concepts by citing Finex Ndhlovu: Coloniality of power "references contemporary forms of colonial legacy—evident in social discrimination, social order and invisible hierarchies in culture and language" (Ndhlovu qtd. in "Diaspora" 31); coloniality of knowledge "privileges the Eurocentric knowledge production and [functions] as a default for valid theory and knowledge," and coloniality of being

refers to colonialists' use of Western theories and colonial imaginaries of racism to construct cultural and identity categories that dehumanized and re-identified colonial subjects, leading to present-day binary conceptualizations and understandings of 'us' versus 'them,' 'Global South' versus 'Global North,' and 'developed' versus 'developing.' (31)

According to this, coloniality is to be understood as a three-part system that impacts every aspect of modern societies. This thesis aims to examine all three cornerstones of coloniality: coloniality of power will be viewed in terms of acculturation, coloniality of knowledge will be looked at in the context of representation, and coloniality of being will be outlined by diasporic identity construction.

What is more, this global coloniality – and the concomitant Westernization – continue to affect postcolonial nations and peoples: "Africans in particular and peoples of the Global South in general continue to live under coloniality and as modern subjects they breathe coloniality on a daily basis" (Ndlovu-Gatsheni xi). As expounded above, coloniality impacts culture, knowledge production, and identity.

Thus, coloniality survives colonialism. It is maintained alive in books, in the criteria for academic performance, in cultural patterns, in common sense, in the self-image of peoples, in aspirations of self, and so many other aspects of our modern experience. In a way, as modern subjects we breathe coloniality all the time and everyday. (Maldonado-Torres 243)

What remains is the question of why coloniality pervades all aspects of modern society. As a matter of fact, it is precisely due to the common understanding of "modern" society. Toyin Falola recalls that "[African] modern political institutions are derived more from the colonial past than the precolonial. [...] When colonialism was over, Africa began to think about development in colonial, Western terms" (4). Therefore, coloniality can be understood "as the dark side of modernity, which has always been concealed by the rhetoric of modernity"

(Ndlovu-Gatsheni, *Empire* 7). Ndlovu-Gatsheni specifies: “The darker or underside of modernity included the slave trade, fratricidal colonial wars of conquest, negative development, violent civilizing missions, forcible Christianization, material dispossessions and other forms of violence” (25). Thus, the rhetoric of modernity and global coloniality are coactive forces in the process of Westernization.

These ongoing colonial power structures are part of the process of Westernization. *Oxford Reference* defines Westernization as the “process by which a country or society adopts the customs and institutions that are said to characterize the Western world.” And ironically, this system from the past is equated with developments for the future: The reference entry goes on to say that “[f]or some governments and élites in developing countries, westernization has been seen as synonymous with modernization and development and therefore as a desirable goal” (“Westernization”). Not only does this view reinforce colonial mentalities and suppress African cultural heritage, but it also puts forth the question if there can be an “African” modernity within a Westernized cultural discourse. Instead of promoting a reinterpretation of modernity from an African viewpoint, Ndlovu-Gatsheni argues for questioning the universality of Western epistemology: “What is needed is not uni-versal but pluri-versal rationality, where many worlds have a dignified space” (*Empire* 15). He clarifies that “Eurocentrism [and Eurocentric modernity] denies the co-presence of Africans and Europeans” (15). What is required is decolonial thinking which “strives to delink itself from the imposed dichotomies articulated in the West, namely the knower and the known, the subject and the object, theory and praxis” (Mignolo, “Over” 42). Therefore, decoloniality aims to contest the universality of Western epistemology by means of pluri-versality.

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s narratives inspect Westernization by featuring cultural identity formation processes in Nigerian as well as in Western societies. Examining immigration in the U.S., Baffour Takyi discovered that “missing for the most part [...] are studies that examine the experiences of the emerging African immigrant community in several American cities over the past two decades” (238). Accordingly, Adichie’s stories serve as literary accounts of contemporary immigrant experiences. Further, the stories visualize the power differences present in an acculturation context. Seth Schwartz, Marilyn Montgomery, and Ervin Briones assert that “within each country or region, the dominant group determines what the ‘culture’ is” (5). This is crucial for an understanding of how cultural identity formation plays out in the host society. In fact, it entails how the culture of the host society is defined, which values are approved of, and what other cultural influences are tolerated (5). Berry and Sam add that “in theory, both groups influence each other and individuals in both groups change. However, due to power differences (for example, in economic power [...]), one group

exerts more influence than the other” (“Theoretical” 17). Correspondingly, Nigerian migrants are strongly affected by the dominant group of their host country.

However, the stories already portray the impact of dominant Western culture in Nigeria. Nigerian society is shaped by its colonial past. Byron Adams and Amina Abubakar clarify: “Under colonial rule, European colonial powers promoted their religion, values and the use of their languages mainly through the education system. The notion that ‘West is best’ and ‘White is right’ was systematically ingrained into African society” (359). This points to the conclusion that the acculturation process of Nigerian characters already starts in their home country. In addition, the still-existing remnants of colonial rule and new Western cultural forces explain Nigeria’s “inability to build a strong national identity” (359). John Arthur underscores that diasporic African literature and “African diaspora communities have pivotal roles to play in the (re)building of Africa” (xiii). In this light, Adichie’s literary accounts provide the possibility of rethinking acculturation – or cultural imperialism – in a Western and Nigerian context.

Similarly, the concept of representation is also featured in Nigerian as well as Western spaces. hooks points out that “[t]here is a direct and abiding connection between the maintenance of white supremacist patriarchy in this society and the institutionalization via mass media” (2). As has been suggested before, mass media are part of the machinery that shapes mindsets and worldviews. Therefore, “it is always necessary to ask in whose interests representations have been produced and whose definitions of reality we are seeing” (Thornham et al., *Politics* 251). In fact, these definitions of reality are infused with ideological modes of thinking. Glorija Mavrinac argues that Western media maintain a foothold in Nigerian society, as “global sources achieve more credibility compared to local media sources in less developed countries” (2389). There, they have the possibility to make the Nigerian individual see themselves in “western frames of reference” (2387). Consequently, Nigerian characters are already impacted by Westernized media and ways of seeing before they enter Western societies.

When they arrive in the Western cultural space, representations become more ideological in the portrayal of Black subjectivities: these ideological representations are images visualizing stereotypical or even racist mentalities that “reinforce and reinscribe white supremacy” thereby legitimizing oppression (hooks 1). However, while Westernized representations are even more pronounced in the new host country, it is also there that characters start to question them. In *Americanah* and “Jumping Monkey Hill,” characters create their own spaces of resistance, in the forms of a blog and a short story, that “function as independent metatexts questioning the general media racism” (Mavrinac 2396). Hence, media are not solely mechanisms for ideological installation but also empowering spaces of self-actualization. Pratibha Parmar cannily remarks that the “deeply ideological nature of imagery

determines not only how other people think about us but how we think about ourselves” (116). Then again, this entails that media can serve as tools for redefining the self: spaces where cultural identities can be reworked and reinvented. Thus, a discussion of representation – or media imperialism – offers the opportunity of reconsidering cultural identity in a diaspora context.

What connects all of these issues is the notion of identity. According to Hall, “[cultural identities] are subject to the continuous ‘play’ of history, culture and power. [...] identities are the names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within, the narratives of the past” (“Cultural” 131). The term positioning already alludes to the power mechanisms behind identity formation. In a migration context, identity is forged in the interplay of culture, power, and representation. Firstly, acculturation provides the theoretical tools for an examination of identity in a cultural context. Secondly, representation comprises all images that shape our perception of the world and of ourselves. Thirdly, power is the keyword that stands for the people, institutions, ideologies, and nations determining the processes of acculturation and representation. How is identity as such to be perceived in a diaspora context? In order to account for the characters’ identity formations in a transcultural, globalized world, I will examine identity in the context of decoloniality, acculturation, representation, and Hall’s conception of cultural identity.

2.1 Acculturation and Cultural Imperialism

“But the biggest weapon wielded and actually daily unleashed by imperialism against that collective defiance is the cultural bomb. The effect of a cultural bomb is to annihilate a people’s belief in their names, in their languages, in their environment, in their heritage of struggle, in their unity, in their capacities and ultimately in themselves” (Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o 3).

Cross-cultural psychology asks how “culture influence[s] human behavior” (Berry and Sam, Intro 4). The basic question of acculturation psychology is: “[H]ow do people born and raised in one society manage to live in another society that is culturally different from the one they are used to?” (4). Accordingly, acculturation psychology examines the “meeting of cultures and the resulting changes” in individuals’ behaviors (2). In the age of globalization, as illustrated by Gail Ferguson and Dina Birman, the definition can be extended to “what occurs when groups or individuals having different cultures come into contact, whether continuous or intermittent, first-hand or indirect, with subsequent changes in the original culture patterns” (401). Acculturation begins with contact between cultural groups and individuals which leads to

cultural and psychological changes and ultimately leads to different forms of adaptation (Berry and Sam, “Theoretical” 14). In addition, it must be stressed that while, theoretically, both groups affect each other, “due to power differences (for example, in economic power, military might or numerical strength), one group exerts more influence than the other” (17). This means that one cultural group is perceived as dominant while the other is seen as nondominant, and there are “groups that are ‘valued’ and those that are ‘devalued’ in the larger society” (24). In this regard, the diasporic characters’ migration experiences are shaped by cultural clashes and power differences.

This becomes profound in the context of acculturation strategies. On the individual level, there are four different “acculturation strategies as [individuals’] preferred way to acculturate”: assimilation, integration, separation, and marginalization (15, 21). The assimilation strategy upholds when an individual shows no intention of maintaining their cultural identity and also prefers daily contact with individuals of other cultures; when an individual wishes to keep their original cultural identity and has no interest in contact with the other cultural group, the separation strategy takes place (22). When the wish to keep their cultural identity is combined with the wish to have daily contact with others, the integration strategy can be observed, and when there is interest neither in maintaining their cultural identity nor in participating in the other culture, it is a matter of marginalization (22–23). However, when looked at from the point of view of the dominant group, these strategies become “*acculturation expectations*” and take on new names and meanings (23, emphasis in original): assimilation becomes the melting pot, separation turns into segregation, marginalization would be a type of exclusion, and integration, when desired by the dominant group, becomes multiculturalism (23). Therefore, acculturation strategies and expectations can be indicators of the cultural and political climate in a host country.

This division of cultures into two opposites introduces the postcolonial approach to acculturation. In postcolonial terms, acculturation theory can be translated into the theory of hybridity. Hybridity describes the liminal position, the space in-between, that is created when two assumed opposites meet: “It serves to talk about phenomena that elude the given structure of familiar oppositions or to describe processes which transgress central boundaries like the one between colonizer and colonized” (Döring 35). The binary oppositions prevalent in colonial worldviews and in postcolonial studies create a space in-between that is accessible to those individuals who are in-between: individuals of the diaspora. Accordingly, individuals who have experienced both sides of the opposites take on a hybrid position that can communicate the liminal space within concepts such as culture, race, language, and most and foremost identity.

Hybrid individuals can create new identities for their spaces and themselves: Peggy Ochoa advances that these hybrid individuals

can develop the type of consciousness that perceives the ambiguity of the borderland to be an empowering space, one where the definitions of 'light' and 'dark' can be questioned and where individuals [...] have the agency to refuse the definitions and Manichean constructions of colonial discourse. (225–26)

Sunil Bhatia and Anjali Ram similarly propound that diasporic people “bring into sharp relief the sense of constantly negotiating between here and there, past and present, homeland and hostland, self and other” (3). Correspondingly, diasporic characters hold a position that is charged with the potential of transformation.

However, the ambiguity of their position also grants them the unique opportunity to redefine the concept of cultural identity and the power within it: “Cultural identity regards hybrid identities as the source of diasporic communication” (Mpande, “Diaspora” 25). Furthermore, postcolonial theory not only acknowledges diasporic people’s unique position but also the underlying power asymmetries present in the meeting of cultures. It can be argued that acculturation theory does not sufficiently touch upon the role of power in the migration process. This can be traced back to the former meaning of acculturation, assimilation, which “assumed that an ‘inferior’ group would want to be, and would inevitably become, like the ‘superior’ group” (Berry and Sam, “Theoretical” 13). Due to acculturation being confused with assimilation, the acculturation process is still perceived as a development that only impacts and alters one (“inferior”) group. Moreover, acculturation theory “does not capture how issues of power and race are deeply interconnected with the development of an immigrant’s identity” (Bhatia and Ram 7). Evidently, the former meaning of acculturation sheds light on issues of power, race, and cultural hegemony that are still not entirely accounted for in acculturation theory. Thus, these issues need to be incorporated into an acculturation analysis.

An analysis of migration processes needs to consider these neocolonial influences. Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin maintain that “postcolonial societies are still subject in one way or another to overt or subtle forms of neocolonial domination” (2). For instance, “U.S. state sponsored immigration, naturalization and citizenship laws were historically based on racist ideologies” (Bhatia and Ram 9). Even after laws were changed, the ideologies lived on, which is why “modes of othering and racialization are inseparable from the everyday experiences of a non-European/non-White immigrant in the U.S.” (7). These ideologies are in control of what the dominant and what the nondominant group is. In order not to “undervalue the asymmetrical relations of power and the inequities and injustices faced by

certain immigrant groups,” these remaining systems of power must be kept in mind (8). It becomes clear that the acculturation process is not simply a movement from culture A to culture B with slight changes to both cultures but due to (neo)colonialism these cultures are in contact before the movement starts and this (neo)colonial contact may be the reason the movement is necessary in the first place (10). This is why it is crucial to rethink the process of acculturation from a postcolonial standpoint, so as to represent the “political realities of oppression, discrimination, and exploitation” of acculturating people (9).

The question of why a movement is necessary at all can be answered by examining the current situation in the former colonized countries. Why is Sub-Saharan Africa “one of the most economically underdeveloped regions in the world” (Adams and Abubakar 355)? When it comes to acculturation psychology, there are three salient themes: colonization, multiculturalism, and globalization (355). For the present approach, the themes of colonization and globalization will be of interest. Firstly, the influence of colonization: “Under colonial rule, European colonial powers promoted their religion, values and the use of their languages mainly through the education system and “creat[ed] nation states based on largely arbitrary criteria to suit their interests” (357–59). Further, the “slave trade had a major negative impact on the economic development and functioning of Africa” (357). Nathan Nunn indicates that there is “a robust negative relationship between the number of slaves taken from a country and its subsequent economic development” (168). Naturally, the impact of these measures is still felt in the postcolonial period. Deborah Bryceson illustrates that “[a] century after the scramble for Africa, a ‘scramble *in* Africa’ has been unleashed with profound ramifications for the continent” (725, emphasis in original). The scramble in Africa – “which signifies the internal conflict for limited resources that remained after colonization” – has strongly marked the postcolonial period (Adams and Abubakar 359). Moreover, after independence, colonial powers were replaced by the “more powerful ethnic groups, who like their predecessors seemed only interested in promoting their own interests and wealth creation” which resulted in “ethnic strife, displaced individuals and a lack of national identity development” (359). This shows that even after the European powers left, the power was not returned to the Sub-Saharan African people but redistributed to other powers and elites.

This becomes even clearer when considering the second theme: globalization. Globalization is particularly visible in what is called remote acculturation: “the process by which individuals acculturate to a remote culture to which they have not been directly exposed” (362). This process is “amplified by the consumption of US goods, such as fast food (KFC, McDonalds), consumables (Coca Cola) and fashion (Nike and Guess)” (363). This points to the conclusion that – due to neocolonial and capitalist forces – Sub-Saharan African individuals

migrating to a Western country are already affected by Western culture before leaving their home country. This is also evidenced by a study conducted in South Africa “in transition toward becoming a democratic country”:

the White group made up only 14.3 percent of the South African population and the White culture was considered to be the dominant culture, providing the yardstick by which acculturation is evaluated. This feeds into the concept of a minority who, though they are disadvantaged numerically, hold sufficient economic power to be able to define their context and be defined as the dominant culture. (365–66)

It would follow then that the acculturation process is already impacted by Westernization and white normativity before it even begins.

In the new host country, these impacts are reinforced. On one hand, as Rupert Brown, Hanna Zagefka, and Linda Tip point out, “there is a general appreciation by the British population that multiculturalism is a desirable and enriching feature of British society” (377). This means that the host society is generally open to new cultural influences. On the other hand, “47 percent of British people thought that immigration has a negative economic impact, and 45 percent that the large number of immigrants undermines British culture” (390). The host society’s attitude toward immigrants plays a major role in the acculturation process and the immigrants’ acculturation strategies. For instance, when “there is very little political enthusiasm for UK immigration,” that “makes it more difficult for minorities to adopt an integration strategy” (390). This entails that the preferences of the dominant group within the host society majorly influence the choices of the nondominant group (Berry and Sam, “Theoretical” 23). As illustrated by the example of immigration attitudes in the UK: if the acculturation strategy of a migrant does not match the acculturation expectations of the host society, they are faced with obstacles and limitations. Again, the process of acculturation exemplifies how modes of othering and power structures restrict non-white migrants on a personal and sociocultural level. By examining acculturation processes from a postcolonial perspective, it becomes clear that, in actuality, the meeting and exchange of cultures is impacted by underlying power asymmetries. In this light, acculturation becomes cultural imperialism.

2.2 Representation and Media Imperialism

“Every regime of representation is a regime of power” (Hall, “Cultural” 132).

After considering the capacity for power inherent in the acculturation process, this chapter will inquire into the power that lies in acts of representation. The concept of representation

encompasses images in literature, television, and other media that depict and affect perceptions of reality. In the last five years, the impact and relevance of representation came especially to the fore during two incidents in the context of popular culture. On 16 February 2018, Marvel's *Black Panther* was released in theaters. In his *TIME* article, Jamil Smith underlines the significance of the release of this movie with "an African-American director and a predominantly black cast" by stating: "It hasn't even hit theaters yet and its cultural footprint is already enormous. It's a movie about what it means to be black in both America and Africa—and, more broadly, in the world." The release of this movie demonstrated that "making movies about black lives is part of showing that they matter" (Smith). Moreover, on 10 September 2022, this occurred once more with an even stronger impact. On this day, Disney released the first trailer for the live-action remake of *The Little Mermaid*. The trailer shows a first look at the reimagined story and lead role, Ariel, played by actress and singer Halle Bailey. Shortly after, people were posting videos of their children watching this trailer for the first time with the hashtag #representationmatters. These videos show the Black children's incredulity and joy on seeing a Black Ariel, a lead character that looks like them. Sarah Do Couto emphasizes that "[i]f there were any doubts that representation in popular media matters, the Disney live-action reimagining of *The Little Mermaid* is erasing them entirely" ("Young Girls React"). These occurrences reveal and highlight the significance of representation and point to its world-making capacities.

What is more, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie herself knows of the power of representation. In her 2009 TED talk "The Danger of the Single Story," Adichie remarks "how impressionable and vulnerable we are in the face of a story, particularly as children." She explains that African writers were paramount for her "mental shift in [her] perception of literature": "I realized that people like me, girls with skin the color of chocolate whose kinky hair could not form ponytails, could also exist in literature." When she came to the U.S., she realized that Western countries have "a single story of Africa" which is "a single story of catastrophe" originating in a long tradition from Western literature. Therefore, Adichie notes: "The single story creates stereotypes and the problem with stereotypes is not that they are untrue but that they are incomplete." Accordingly, Adichie addresses the significance of coloniality's pluri-versality; she argues that one-sided and biased representations can only be contested with multiple voices and manifold narratives in different media. Adichie elaborates on this in her introduction to *The African Trilogy*:

The strangeness of seeing oneself distorted in literature – and indeed of not seeing oneself at all – was part of my own childhood. I grew up in the Nigerian university town of Nsukka in the 1980s, reading a lot of British children's books. My early writing mimicked the books I was reading: all my characters were white and all my stories were

set in England. Then I read *Things Fall Apart*. It was a glorious shock of discovery, as was *Arrow of God*, which I read shortly afterwards; I did not know in a concrete way until then that people like me could exist in literature. Here was a book that was unapologetically African, that was achingly familiar [...]. (Intro viii–ix)

This passage shows that Adichie herself is aware of the workings of representation that affect people's views of the world around them, of other cultures, and of themselves. Furthermore, she integrated these notions into the narratives discussed in this thesis.

As displayed above, the power of representation is rooted in its ability to control reality: the way in which we see the world and ourselves. Additionally, Thornham et al. stress that “it is always necessary to ask in whose interests representations have been produced and whose definitions of reality we are seeing” (Textual 251). This means that certain definitions of reality may not represent minority and marginalized groups or only represent them in a way that is favorable to that definition. Further, representation has a bearing on every facet of our daily lives, including race and racism. Sherri Burr foregrounds that “even children perceive these images as negative stereotypes”: In a study on racialized representation on television, the results showed that “[c]hildren more often associate positive qualities such as financial and academic success, leadership, and intelligence with White characters, and negative qualities such as lawbreaking, financial hardship, laziness, and goofy behavior with minority characters” (179–80). These results visualize the issue of cinematic racism (hooks 119). hooks states that “[t]here is power in looking” (115). In fact, “[t]o stare at the television, or mainstream movies, to engage its images, [is] to engage its negation of black representation,” in particular, “its violent erasure of black womanhood” (117, 119). Accordingly, Black people are either misrepresented in mass media or not represented at all. The issue of Black representation can be transferred to the global level, as well. Diana Mafe discerns that there is still a prevalence of “overwhelmingly racist representations of sub-Saharan Africa in British and American cinema” (69). It seems as if filmmakers are overwhelmed with the challenge of portraying Africa (71). Instead of “resist[ing] the visual exoticization of Africa so common in both British and US cinema,” most films orientate to “the default model of white normativity” (73, 74). Therefore, misrepresentation of African(-American) people features on a global scale.

When Black representation is existent, it serves particular purposes: “Within commodity culture, ethnicity becomes spice, seasoning that can liven up the dull dish that is mainstream white culture” (hooks 21). In other words, “the presence of the Other, the body of the Other, [is] seen as existing to serve the ends of white male desires,” validating and reinforcing white supremacist patriarchy (24). Cinematic racism denotes that even when Blackness *is* represented in films it is not allowed its own voice but “black culture and black life [become] backdrop, scenery for narratives that essentially focus on white people” (hooks 32). Again, this can be

observed at a global level; even films that “shine figurative spotlights on violence and oppression in postcolonial Africa [...] are less about black social problems than they are about white male solutions” (Mafe 72). Accordingly, African characters are never fully evolved but become “a collective backdrop for the Western characters” (77). The erasure of Black representation on a national and global scale exemplifies how modes of racism are inextricable from modes of representation.

These notions and the reactions to the release of *The Little Mermaid* trailer and the *Black Panther* movie once again stress the relevance of the politics of representation. The introduction of the politics of representation led to mass media texts, images, and films being analyzed “as a signifying system which constructs, rather than merely reflecting or transmitting, meaning” (Thornham, Textual 188). The investigation of these signifying systems can uncover the “direct and abiding connection between the maintenance of white supremacist patriarchy in this society and the institutionalization via mass media of specific images, representations of race, of blackness that support and maintain the oppression, exploitation, and overall domination of all black people” (hooks 2). This is crucial particularly because “masses of black people continue to be socialized *via* mass media and non-progressive educational systems to internalize white supremacist thoughts and values,” which also leads to a “persistence of low self-esteem” in children (hooks 18,19, emphasis in original). Further, Hall underlines that the meanings produced by representation “define what is ‘normal’, who belongs – and therefore, who is excluded” (Intro 10). These meanings assign people to different sides of “sharply opposed binaries” where one side is perceived as the default (10). Hence, representation partakes in the construction of white normativity and the marginalization of minorities.

To counteract and resist white normativity, hooks proposes to create alternative spaces and worldviews where it is the norm to love Blackness. By quoting James Baldwin, she explains that because “‘there has been almost no language’ to describe the ‘horrors’ of black life,” there are also no “words to articulate our pleasure” (Baldwin qtd. in hooks 2). Due to white normativity in media, “masses of black people (and everyone else) have no alternative worldview that affirms and celebrates blackness” (18). According to that normative worldview, people have a chance of “mainstream success if only [they] are willing to negate the value of blackness” (17). This is why, hooks suggests that what is needed is “a space for the kind of decolonization that makes loving blackness possible” (10).

These spaces serve as tools and stress the need for self-representation. They can take the form of texts and films but also of online spaces, such as blogs and social media. Victoria Bernal claims that “digital media are profoundly changing the experience of diaspora and therefore transforming what diasporas are and how they behave” (247). Further, she argues that

“[t]he Internet is making possible innovative forms of diaspora political engagement and activism that challenge conventional relations of citizenship and sovereignty” (246). Accordingly, these spaces assist marginalized and diasporic communities in telling and sharing their stories thereby increasing their visibility and impact. Additionally, Violeta Duce “highlight[s] the potential of social media to break with the stereotypes, simplistic definitions, and traditional roles created and imposed by Western culture, as well as enabling diasporic subjects to express their own experiences, perspectives on history, stories and voices that would otherwise remain unheard” (244). Creating and promoting spaces where people can love Blackness constitutes an important step toward self-representation and rebuilding Black subjectivity.

As noted above, these spaces also feature a crucial component in the contemporary migration process. In the context of the African diaspora, Maia Butler suggests that social media and “literary texts operate as spaces for negotiation of home” (287). This perception of home is influenced by mass media, as well. Within the framework of Westernization, white normativity features on a global scale. This becomes primarily visible in the context of museums and global news, i.e., in the exhibition of other cultures. The ways in which the Global North represents the Global South are indicators of how Westernization and cultural imperialism operate. Mpande points out that people of the African diaspora “may experience an ‘African-lessness’ in their struggle to disassociate themselves from negative African stereotypes in the news” (“Media” 214). Mpande argues that this can be understood as media imperialism: “Media imperialism, a subcategory of cultural imperialism, has been viewed as an instrument by which more developed countries, particularly of the Western world, would impose their media programs, systems, and content on lesser developed countries and subjugate them to their agenda, cultures, values, and ideology” (211). In this sense, news representation takes part in a media imperialism that produces a distorted image of African countries and prioritizes Western coverage.

Similarly, Henrietta Lidchi puts forth that ethnographic museums are institutions that show us “[h]ow the West classifies, categorizes and represents other cultures” (153). Just as other systems of representations, museums “do not so much reflect the world through objects as use them to mobilize representations of the world past and present” (160). This entails that “a museum does not deal solely with *objects* but, more importantly, with [...] *ideas* – notions of what the world is, or should be” (160, emphasis in original). Against this background, Lidchi uses Hall’s words to clarify that museums represent “the struggle for power between what has been called ‘the West and the Rest’” (Hall qtd. in Lidchi 161). This is also evidenced by Achille Mbembe who evoked the significance of cultural representation at the Kitong-Kiass

International 3RRR Symposium 2022 in Vienna where he spoke about restitution, rehabilitation, and reconciliation in the context of African art. The symposium shed light on the meaning of the displacement and restitution of cultural artifacts for African countries and African diasporas. Hence, museums function as classifying and ranking institutions that participate in the process of cultural meaning-making.

Moreover, the misrepresentation of the African continent in the media leads to what Helon Habila calls “an African aesthetic of suffering” (“Review”). In his review of NoViolet Bulawayo’s *We Need New Names*, Habila remarks that the implicit imperatives of literary-prize judges and publishing houses create a certain kind of representation of the African continent. This infers that “[t]o perform Africa [...] is to inundate one’s writing with images and symbols and allusions that evoke, to borrow a phrase from Aristotle, pity and fear, but not in a real tragic sense, more in a CNN, western-media-coverage-of-Africa, poverty-porn sense” (Habila). When portraying African themes, media seem to focus on poverty, violence, and war. This way, media are “essentializing Africa” and inducing a “Western desensitization to what are perceived as Africa’s endless problems” (Mafe 84, 93). Mpande similarly notes that this negative depiction leads to “compassion fatigue” which subsequently leads to a disinterest in engaging with African themes or investing in African projects (“Media” 216). In this context, the invisibility of Black people is turned into a hypervisibility which generates a misconception based on negative imagery.

Against this background, Mpande rightly asks: “Why [is] so little information about Africa reported [...] from the perspectives of Africans and those with a vested interest in the well-being of Africa?” (209). This is where the literary and online spaces of self-representation come into play once more. As a matter of fact, through virtual platforms “marginalized groups that mainstream media systems have oppressed are increasingly empowered to bypass bureaucratic red tape [and] challenge the status quo by narrating their own truths and experiences” (216). These platforms possess the power to inhibit museums, news, and other media “to underrepresent and distort the image of Africa” so that people and African diasporic communities, in particular, are not “misinform[ed] and miseducat[ed] [...] about their homelands, cultures, and legacy (215). Hence, the goal here is to create and maintain spaces that are untouched by Westernized mindsets and open to voices of the diaspora.

2.3 Defining Diasporic Identity

“Because I am foreigner everywhere, the world is my home anywhere ... and Africa is my heart” (Mpande, “Diaspora” 25, emphasis in original).

In a world shaped by the power imbalances of coloniality and Westernization, diasporic individuals are to establish and sustain connections to home. Prior to that, they need to redefine the concept of home and their own identities. Döring notes that “in view of African experience, diaspora has become a central notion when defining black identity” (31). Therefore, diaspora serves as “the prime site for notions of identity to be defined and defended” (32). Further, Döring outlines how “the history of colonialism, with centuries of slavery, violent dislocation, enforced migration and actual genocides, has radically shaken up, if not eliminated, the traditional structures of belonging” (31). Slavery’s “violent dislocation” refers to the old diaspora, whereas the new diaspora constitutes Africans who migrate for economic, career or educational purposes (31). Msia Kibona Clark indicates that “[w]hile African immigrants are still less than 5 percent of the total Black U.S. population, their increasing numbers are necessitating a discussion of race and ethnicity in Black America” (258). This entails that a discussion of diasporic identity involves a discussion of the concept of Blackness in Western countries. Beauty Bragg addresses this by saying that “the concept of a universal black origin and experience continue[s] to be a core concept in diasporic thinking” (122). In other words, diaspora not only functions as a site for redefining “the sense of self” but also for redefining the notion of Blackness and African subjectivity (Döring 31).

Accordingly, this chapter outlines the major influences on diasporic identities. It asks what happens to African identity when “Africans are further ‘removed’ from their homelands of origin” and if “the impact of globalization further results in serious personality and identity crises for the individual and the collective people of a region” (Mpande, “Diaspora” 25). As I intend to avoid a compartmentalized conception of identity and identity construction, I incorporate multiple approaches into my analysis. Therefore, this chapter inquires into the influence of acculturation and representation on identity. Additionally, by drawing on perspectives on decoloniality and Hall’s conception of cultural identity, this chapter formulates how characters establish their own epistemologies of self and home grounded in indigenous value systems.

Hall argues that diasporic identities and transformations are shaped by three presences and symbolic journeys. As quoted earlier, “identities are the names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within, the narratives of the past” (Hall,

“Cultural” 131). Hall defines these narratives, or influences, from the past as ‘presences’: “*Présence Africaine*, *Présence Européenne*, and [...] *Présence Américaine*” (133, emphasis in original). While Hall refers to Caribbean culture and identity, these presences can be applied to African individuals as well. The African presence is “the site of the repressed” (133). It is a silenced, unspoken presence grounded on an African origin, a conception of home (134–35). This presence alludes to the displacement and dislocation of diasporic communities but also to “symbolic journeys” (135). It is a presence that diasporic individuals “must sooner or later come to terms with” for identity development (134). The European presence “introduc[ed] the question of power,” by means of, among other things, representation (135). In fact, “this power has become a constitutive element in [diasporic] identities” (136). This is why, this presence requires a “dialogue of power and resistance, of refusal and recognition,” as it implements and fosters Westernization within cultures and identities (136). Hall describes the third presence as the “‘New World’ presence,” “where the fateful/fatal encounter was staged between Africa and the West” (136–37). Accordingly, this is the presence that established “the beginning of diaspora, of diversity, of hybridity and difference” (137). It is the presence that prompts a reconsideration of the presences as such: It invites to remember and to reinvent, to question binaries, and to reimagine perceptions of the world and oneself.

Additionally, the “‘New World’ presence” prompts a return to home and self through “necessarily circular” journeys (135, 136). In other words, these journeys are not only symbolic of a new sense of self and home but also of a recognition of all the presences within diasporic identity that made up that journey. Furthermore, Hall clarifies that “[t]he diaspora experience [...] is defined, not by essence or purity, but by the recognition of a necessary heterogeneity and diversity; by a conception of ‘identity’ which lives with and through, not despite, difference; by *hybridity*” (138, emphasis in original). For this reason, diasporic (symbolic) journeys are “necessarily circular” and never complete because “[d]iaspora identities [...] are constantly producing and reproducing themselves anew, through transformation and difference” (135, 138). Correspondingly, the notion of transformation constitutes a component and an asset of the diaspora experience. Thus, Hall’s presences are elementary and revealing for a conception of diasporic identities shaped by multiple cultural influences.

When examining identity in a Westernized context, the influence of coloniality is of particular significance: “The African diasporic identity is layered with innumerable influences that trace its origins to coloniality and that have become even more complicated amidst forces of contemporary forces of globalization since postcolonialization” (Mpande, “Diaspora” 31). It can be said that “[d]ecoloniality offers a multipronged approach to more clearly understanding diasporic identity formations—particularly of ‘minority’ ethnic, racial, and cultural groups”

(30). Decoloniality means “the decolonization of the twenty-first century that is ranged against the ‘metaphysical empire,’ compared to the decolonization of the twentieth century that targeted the ‘physical empire’” (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, *Empire* 96). In particular, the necessity for a decolonial approach stems from the fact that coloniality pervades every major aspect of contemporary societies. Ndlovu argues that “[w]hat decolonial epistemology suggests is that there is need for us to push for the recognition of alternative knowledges and alternative ways of conceptualizing cultural identities in order to both counter and complement dominant Euro-American epistemologies” (37). In this light, coloniality’s ideologies, such as Eurocentrism, strongly affect diasporic identity constructions and create the need for decolonial approaches to identity.

The main issue with Euro-American ways of thinking is their inherent “universalization of modern asymmetrical global power structures” (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, *Empire* 103). This universalization describes the defining aspect of Westernization that prioritizes one worldview over the other which results in white normativity, or white supremacist patriarchy. Accordingly, “[w]hat is needed is not uni-versal but pluri-versal rationality, where many worlds have a dignified space. Eurocentrism denies the co-presence of Africans and Europeans” (15). As Mignolo notes: “Decoloniality operates on pluri-versality” (“Over” 41). More precisely, decolonial pluri-versality “attempt[s] to name a new world in which diverse forms of life and living will be accommodated” (Mignolo qtd. in Ndlovu-Gatsheni “Metaphysical” 103). This entails that by allowing the co-presence of African and Euro-American ways of thinking, the decolonial approach to identity allows multiple presences within identity constructs.

As part of the framework for deconstructing coloniality, Ndlovu-Gatsheni defines “the notion of three empires (the physical, non-territorial-commercialmilitary, and metaphysical) and the three trajectories of decolonization (political, economic, and epistemological)” (98). He describes the metaphysical empire by going back to Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o’s exemplifications on mental colonization: “the ‘metaphysical empire’ [...] survived dismantlement of the ‘physical empire’” (Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o qtd. in Ndlovu-Gatsheni 100). This third empire “is better understood in terms of how it worked on the minds of the colonized in the process adversely affecting the entire mental universe of the colonized through such technologies as epistemicides, linguisticides, alienation, and cultural imperialism” (100). Further, Ndlovu-Gatsheni indicates that the “success of the ‘metaphysical empire’ has been in its submission of the colonized world to European memory. The consequence has been the re-making of the African people in the image of the colonial conqueror” (100). It becomes clear that after political decolonization, what is needed is mental decolonization: the fight against colonial mindsets. In this regard, diasporic identity formation functions as a tool for fighting the

metaphysical empire. This approach can visualize the possibility of another way of thinking and being in the world. Ndhlovu utilizes Mignolo's explications on decoloniality to convey: "The point of greater significance about decoloniality is that it is 'an-other thought' that seeks to inaugurate 'an-other logic,' 'an-other language' and 'an-other thinking' that has the potential to liberate ex-colonized people's minds from the clutches of Euro-American epistemological hegemonies" (Mignolo qtd. in Ndhlovu 38). Mpande then adds: "The goal of an 'an-other thinking' is to translate those thoughts into action so that 'an-other behavior' can lead to an-other reality and an-other set of lived, valid experiences" ("Diaspora" 34). In this light, African narratives are fighting the metaphysical empire by creating 'an-other' creative space, by portraying 'an-other' world, by imagining 'an-other' identity: they enable the rebuilding of African subjectivities.

What role does identity play in the acculturation process? Clark points out that in the U.S. "identity is no longer simply a matter of cultural and traditional expectations; it becomes political" (256). As described in 2.1, the acculturation process is determined by the two dimensions of "adoption of receiving culture ideals and practices, and retention of heritage culture ideals and practices" (Schwartz, Montgomery, and Briones 4). These two dimensions are derived from the acculturation strategies. In this regard, Karmela Liebkind et al. specify the resulting identity patterns as integrated (bicultural) identity, separated identity, assimilated identity, and marginalized identity (38). This entails that the strategy an individual chooses has an impact on their identity. However, "members of visible minorities are likely to be ethnically labeled by others, [...] regardless of their degree of acculturation" (39). This alludes to Hall's positioning and the concept of Blackness in Western societies. Generally, this means that "the overall context provided by the dominant group and society is crucial for how the identity patterns and adaptation of ethnic/cultural minorities develop in acculturation" (41). Therefore, the dominant group of the host society not only has a bearing on diasporic individuals' acculturation process but also on their identity formation process.

Moreover, this constitutes one of the "challenge[s] faced by multiply identified individuals": The challenge of reconciling multiple cultural influences and the issue of being labeled as other or even discriminated against can cause "psychological and sociocultural" stress factors (40, 42). One of these challenges is "acculturative stress" which refers to the distress caused by acculturation circumstances to individuals, also known as culture shocks (Berry and Sam, "Theoretical" 17). While acculturative stress is very common, there are also benefits for multiply identified individuals. For instance, "acculturation to both their heritage and the US culture can provide immigrants with important cultural skills and repertoires that assist them in different settings" (Ferguson and Birman 408). Karen van der Zee, Verónica

Benet-Martínez, and Jan Pieter van Oudenhoven remark that “the literature on biculturalism points at the significance of multicultural experiences as a source of creativity and personal growth” (50). This hints at the different techniques and practices diasporic individuals utilize to establish cultural definitions in their own terms. One defining aspect is one’s accent. Clark indicates that “[i]n the case of African immigrants in the United States, this has played a significant role in how they identify themselves and how other people identify them” (267). Thus, one’s accent is a meaningful signifier of cultural identity and self-identification. Therefore, acculturation creates a space for individuals to be challenged but also to expand and improve their skills by means of intercultural communication and transcultural experiences.

Lastly, this will be linked to the role of identity in representation. In fact, representation, in general, is closely linked with identity (Hall, Intro 5). As illustrated earlier, images play a major role in the construction of identity. Hall explains that “[i]ndividuals may differ as to their social class, gendered, ‘racial’ and ethnic characteristics (among other factors), but they will not be able to take meaning until they have identified with those positions which the discourse constructs, *subjected* themselves to its rules” (“Work” 56, emphasis in original). Moreover, if that discourse is a Westernized one, individuals have to construct their identities in these Westernized terms. However, this is only an issue if they are positioned on the devalued side of the binary: “If you are reading this and you are white, seeing people who look like you in mass media probably isn’t something you think about often. Every day, the culture reflects not only you but nearly infinite versions of you—executives, poets, garbage collectors, soldiers, nurses and so on. The world shows you that your possibilities are boundless” (Smith). In this regard, as a marginalized, oppressed individual “*subject[ing]* [oneself] to its rules” can be understood as ‘giving up one’s subjectivity’ (Hall, “Work” 56, emphasis in original). Therefore, creative spaces offer marginalized individuals the possibility to regain and redefine their subjectivity.

3. Diasporic Identities in *The Thing Around Your Neck*

“Nowhere else was ‘story’ more socially revered as culturally significant and purposeful than in the traditional African society where it was used for the dual functions of acculturation and entertainment” (Emenyonu, “Once” 2).

The central thought of decoloniality and Adichie’s fiction is pluri-versality (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, *Empire* 26). Put differently, Adichie’s narratives uncover the universality of Western thought and propose the plurality of worlds. African writers, in general, “consciously place themselves

as intermediaries or translators who negotiate between the conflicting, but entangled values, histories and economies of the Global South and the Global North” (Neumann and Rippl 182). Furthermore, they “highlight the multiple entanglements between western and African worlds” (182). This way, they employ “literature’s strong world-making potential, its capacity to configure and fathom alternative world spaces that go beyond the Eurocentric model of center-periphery and are characterized by openness and plurality” (168). It can be said that Adichie captures and puts into words the “alterity of the ones never included in the Western single story” (Carotenuto 172). This way, her short stories serve as a ground for diasporic voices to counter Western hegemony.

Although the twelve short stories from *The Thing Around Your Neck* feature diverse plots and characters, there are some noteworthy similarities. The chosen short stories all feature female protagonists who must overcome challenges in their lives induced by transcultural experiences. Their conflicts revolve around migration, culture, representation, and identity. Maitrayee Misra and Manish Shrivastava set forth that these conflicts urge “Adichie’s protagonists [to] try their best to negotiate between the cultures of their home country and the host country” (195). Moreover, their openness toward “newer cultural practices promotes transcultural awareness and a consciousness of cultural diversity in them” (196). This cultural consciousness opens up several new spaces and is a significant part of the diasporic element in the stories, as their “newly achieved transcultural identity empowers them to enrich their lives by adding things that are full of hope and promise for the days to come in any location on the planet” (196). Accordingly, the short stories focus on the meeting of cultures and the vital role of diasporic characters in the process.

Further, it can be said that the short stories “reflect the evolution of the African short story in subject and theme. A noteworthy feature [...] is the emergence of African diaspora identities that are ambiguous and disjointed” (Sackeyfio, “Diaspora” 102). In any case, these “[d]iaspora experiences take centre stage through connecting themes of hybridity, clash of cultures and alienation” (102). Eve Eisenberg keenly observes that “the short story’s length restriction paradoxically frees Adichie from the obligation to provide the closure of positive, resistant, ‘politically efficacious’ answers” (9–10). Interestingly, the “short stories foreground problems rather than solutions” (23). Ode Ogede recognizes that Adichie “has one foot in the modern short-story tradition with its brevity, economy, and unity of mood, and another in the didacticism and the enchantment and fantasy of the Igbo oral tradition” (283). By means of these resources, Adichie presents a compelling protagonist in every short story struggling with clashing cultures, new beginnings, and revisions of the past.

The chosen short stories stand out as they portray the workings of Westernization through acculturation and representation. Each protagonist is affected by these forces while undergoing an identity formation process. By means of diasporic identity construction the workings of Westernization are exposed and challenged. Fouad Mami identifies the forces of Westernization, or Americanization, as cultural reification and mass media influence. He maintains that Adichie depicts immigration as “resulting from cultural reification,” as mass media and popular culture serve as “effective and enslaving myths” that portray “America as a worry free location” (2, 7). This signifies that media not only prioritize Western representation over African representation, but that they additionally produce inaccurate representations. Instead of “locating the exact source of their maledictions,” the “Nigerian immigrant under the hypnotic influence of the mass media trusts the homogenizing ideology of the cultural industry” (2, 4). This means that Westernization can be understood as an invisible force assuming form through false images, the form of media imperialism. Mami clarifies that “[t]he way Adichie’s narrative makes meaning is that America, for a large section of young Nigerians, represents a promise to vent off their media-induced dreams in a better life” (4). Accordingly, the short stories serve to critique this cultural reification (1). By illustrating the impact of cultural and media imperialism, the narratives visualize the role of Westernization in the construction of diasporic identities.

Closely related to Mami’s conception of Westernization is Blossom Ngum Fondo’s reasoning: She argues that the “whooping number of migrants found in America [...] is due to the exportation of the American dream which sells the United States as a land of infinite possibilities and opportunities and where the ‘rags-to-riches’ tendency runs high” (48). The inaccurate portrayal of life in the United States combined with “movement to America being perceived as upward mobility regardless of what awaits the migrants,” leads to the blind pursuit of the American dream (52). Once there, migrants intend to realize this dream by blending into American society and culture, by being Americanized (54). Accordingly, Fondo states that there are three forms of displacement: physical displacement, cultural displacement, and displacement of the dream (64). After migrating to the U.S. – the physical displacement – “some of these migrants [...] shed off some elements of their cultural identity and seek to adopt an American cultural identity” which constitutes the cultural displacement (54). Finally, “through the juxtaposition of the dream and the reality encountered,” migrants experience the displacement of the dream (64). It will become clear that Adichie’s short stories “question the blind acceptance of the idealistic conception of the American dream,” this “new cultural imperialism” (56, 64). Accordingly, by portraying different acculturation processes, the stories challenge the concept of the American dream.

The characters' disillusionment triggered by the disclosure of cultural and media imperialism is accompanied by epiphanic experiences. Leena Eilittä illustrates that these epiphanies act as moments of realization which subsequently initiate identity development. She clarifies that "Adichie's manner of depicting developments in which her female protagonists begin to reflect upon their past and present situations shows traits typical of epiphanic experience" (80). The short stories commence with diasporic characters who "feel themselves trapped between their African background and influences from the West" (79). Therefore, "[i]n 'Imitation', [...] 'The Arrangers of Marriage', and 'Jumping Monkey Hill', the epiphany occurs as a result of the long existential maturing of the protagonist, who eventually finds a clarification for her situation" (91). In each of these three short stories, the protagonist experiences an epiphany which causes a new awareness and the urge to reevaluate and change their situation.

Lastly, it may be said that Adichie's short stories "seek to shape a new world of understanding as they give expression to realities people know and human commitments and awareness they need to know" (Emenyonu, Intro 1). This awareness is surrendered bit by bit through intercultural communication, interpersonal experiences, and close observations. Adichie deploys both the discourse and content level to get across her political and creative message of African plurality. In other words, with Adichie, "art is a messenger" (12). Therefore, "the stories created by Adichie present a metanarrative reflection [...] on writing," in that writing can shape worldviews and create new ways of thinking (Carotenuto 175). The following chapters will provide an analysis of Westernization in "Imitation" (3.1), "Jumping Monkey Hill" (3.2), and "The Arrangers of Marriage" (3.3) from Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's collection *The Thing Around Your Neck*.

3.1 Nkem: Unmasking Westernization in "Imitation"

"Imitation" employs two symbols to convey the intertwined phenomena of acculturation, representation, identity formation, and above all, Westernization. The first symbol is that of the Benin mask. Right in the first sentence, the Benin mask is linked to the protagonist's marriage and foreshadows the major change about to affect her life and identity: "Nkem is staring at the bulging, slanted eyes of the Benin mask on the living room mantel as she learns about her husband's girlfriend" (Adichie¹ 22). As alluded to in the title, the crucial aspect about the Benin mask is that it is an imitation (23). Very early in the story, it becomes clear that Nkem's life is

¹ When I quote from Adichie in chapters 3.1, 3.2, and 3.3, I refer to her short story collection *The Thing Around Your Neck*.

determined by her husband, Obiora, and his expectations: “She liked it when he said ‘we,’ as though she really had a say in it” (26). Eunice Ngongkum states that “everything revolves around the husband whose tastes, position and desires now define her” (84). To be more precise, “Nkem’s identity is constructed on his material achievements” (84). Correspondingly, the imitation mask symbolizes Nkem’s current situation.

This can be traced back to Nkem’s life in Nigeria where it was her responsibility, as the “First Daughter,” to provide for her family by having relations with affluent, married men: “Ikenna, a businessman, had paid her father’s hospital bills after the hernia surgery. Tunji, a retired army general, had fixed the roof of her parents’ home and bought them the first real sofas they had ever owned” (Adichie 31). Nkem’s First-Daughter responsibility and financial dependence would have made her become Tunji’s fourth wife, but he “did not propose” (31). This is why, when Obiora comes into her life, “[takes] her to dinner at the vibrantly public Lagoon restaurant, where anybody could have seen them,” and “ha[s] her siblings enrolled in school,” Nkem feels very lucky and grateful (31, 32). By marrying Obiora, she enters the coveted “Rich Nigerian Men Who Sent Their Wives to America to Have Their Babies league,” and shortly after, the “Rich Nigerian Men Who Owned Houses in America league” (26). Despite being a “Bush Girl” who “mixe[s] up her English tenses,” Obiora wants her and takes her to America (31). Correspondingly, Nkem is granted access into that coveted cultural space through Obiora. The gratitude she feels for him for providing this new way of living creates a power imbalance between them. Accordingly, in return for a prosperous and comfortable lifestyle, Nkem gives up her voice, her agency, and a self-determined identity.

As Obiora is Nkem’s ticket out of her poverty-stricken situation, Nkem automatically, first unknowingly, settles for certain things. Although at her new home in suburban Philadelphia Nkem has a housegirl who does the cleaning and cooking for her, she comes from similar circumstances as her: “She has never told Amaechi how similar their childhoods were. Her mother may not have rubbed yam peels on her skin, but then there were hardly any yams. Instead, there was improvised food” (32–33). Through Obiora, Nkem could escape her underprivileged situation and is now living the American dream. Fondo points out that “[i]t is this life of Nkem’s which pulls Africans in their droves to America, with many not realizing that for individuals like Nkem, it is not America that has provided her with the life of material comfort” (53). However, Nkem and their children live there by themselves, while Obiora visits “only in the summer” (Adichie 27). When Nkem hears about her husband’s girlfriend, she recognizes the fakeness of her marriage and her life in the U.S. She realizes she has settled for imitation masks, “imitation yams,” an imitation marriage, and an imitation life: “Even Amaechi’s efficient hands can’t hide the flatness on one side of the bed, the fact that it is used

only two months of the year” (29, 32). While watching her housegirl prepare dinner and processing the news of her husband’s infidelity, Nkem “wonders why they go through the charade, who they are trying to fool” (33). The neighbors, who also started to collect African masks, “have settled for good imitations,” as well (23); yet, after hearing about her husband’s girlfriend, Nkem not only questions the imitation masks but everything they stand for.

The symbolism of the Benin mask is developed side by side with the second symbol: Nkem’s hair and her transitioning. Cristina Cruz-Gutiérrez clarifies: “transitioning [...] is the change from relaxed to natural hair” (‘Hairitage’ 246). Nkem had “planned to get a relaxer touch-up tomorrow, have her hair set in a flip that would rest around her neck the way Obiora likes” (Adichie 27). However, after her friend’s call, she “runs her hand through her hair. It feels too thick, too old,” which is why Nkem decides, instead, that she wants a change: “She picks up the scissors [...] and raises it to her head. She pulls up clumps of hair and cuts close to the scalp [...]. She watches the hair float down, like brown cotton wisps falling on the white sink. She cuts more. Tufts of hair float down, like scorched wings of moths. She wades in further. More hair falls” (27, 28). It becomes clear that “[i]t is Nkem’s discovery that her husband has a lover in Lagos, while she is living in the U.S. with their children, that acts as a trigger for her aesthetic change” (Cruz-Gutiérrez, ‘Hairitage’ 251). What is more, her exterior change mirrors her interior transformation.

By cutting her hair, Nkem is cutting the ties that bind her to her fake marriage through gratitude and dependency. It becomes apparent that “her decision of cutting her hair symbolizes the change of her personal situation after realizing that her marriage is an imitation of what it was supposed to be, and that her life has been planned and shaped by Obiora” (Cruz-Gutiérrez, ‘Hairitage’ 252). This act can be seen as her first step toward regaining agency. By cutting more and more hair, by “wad[ing] in further,” Nkem wanders deeper and deeper into herself until she arrives at the original (Adichie 28). Therefore, “the external change in her hair [is] running parallel to her internal identity change” (Cruz-Gutiérrez, ‘Hairitage’ 252). Cruz-Gutiérrez points out that “[c]ontrolling her hair can thus be interpreted as metonymically being in control both of her body and her identity” (253). Nkem is shedding the feeling of gratitude and total obedience to her husband and takes a first step toward a self-determined identity. Accordingly, the “transitioning is ultimately a sign of Nkem regaining power and questioning Obiora’s monolithic authority” (253). In this light, Nkem’s hair and her transitioning represent her identity and identity development.

Moreover, in this story, hair functions as a symbol for Western patriarchal power structures. Obiora is a so-called Big Man, as he is a wealthy man who enjoys a certain reputation (Adichie 40). It can be observed that it matters to Obiora what his life looks like to other people.

In this sense, his family living in the U.S. and his children growing up in a Western country are part of the life he has planned out for himself. More precisely, these aspects afford him respect and prestige in Nigeria: “When his friends visited or called, he asked the children to greet Uncle, but first he teased his friends with ‘I hope you understand the big-big English they speak; they are *Americanah* now, oh!’” (38, emphasis in original). This shows that his children’s American English and them growing up in the U.S. serve as status symbols to Obiora. His outsourced Western way of living affords him a high standing in Nigeria. The process of Westernization in Nigeria is depicted explicitly when Nkem meets another Nigerian woman living in the U.S. who observes:

Our men like to keep us here, she had told Nkem. They visit for business and vacations, they leave us and the children with big houses and cars, they get us housegirls from Nigeria who we don’t have to pay any outrageous American wages, and they say business is better in Nigeria and all that. But you know why they won’t move here, even if business were better here? Because America does not recognize Big Men. Nobody says ‘Sir! Sir!’ to them in America. Nobody rushes to dust their seats before they sit down. (28–29)

The Big-Man motif and the *Americanah* motif² epitomize the workings of Westernization in Nigeria. It can be said that Obiora, as a Big Man, profits from Western cultural imperialism and is therefore caught in the web of Westernization.

Consequently, Nkem is a Big Man’s wife (40). When Obiora sees Nkem’s new hairstyle he notes: “You should grow it back. Long hair is more graceful on a Big Man’s wife” (40). Firstly, this statement once again displays Nkem’s marriage-related identity construction. Secondly, it portrays the significance of hair. Cruz-Gutiérrez points out that “relaxed hair can be understood as part a performative act of submissiveness in trying to conform to the standards of femininity dictated by the patriarchal beauty canon” (‘Hairitage’ 253). Beauty standards built on a white-normative viewpoint are a symptom of Westernization. According to this, hair is part of the manifestation of a Westernized mentality. Against this background, Nkem’s decision to cut her hair also stands for her cutting herself loose from these beauty standards, from Obiora, and lastly, from a Westernized mindset. In this light, “Adichie portrays transitioning as a weapon to undervalue the power of Western patriarchal constructs of femininity and beauty” (258). Nkem undermines the bond that defines her as a Big Man’s wife, so that her marriage is not based on gratitude anymore and starts her journey toward a new self-identification.

²Returnees bringing newly acquired cultural norms back to their home country, usually perceived with high regard; prestige of having been abroad.

Westernization also impacts Nkem's cultural identity. Nkem's acculturation process appears rather easygoing. Due to her gratitude for belonging to the coveted leagues, to Obiora, she does not mind leaving Nigeria behind and starting a new life in America: "she strives to fit in the new cultural space, keeping in mind her husband's demands from family life" (Misra and Shrivastava 188). Additionally, as demonstrated above, America is seen as a land of promise and potential which is why American culture is depicted as the valued cultural group: "she had been proudly excited because she had married into the coveted league;" "She had never imagined that her children would go to school, sit side by side with white children whose parents owned mansions on lonely hills, never imagined this life" (Adichie 26, 27). As a result, Nkem does not notice until after some time that "America has grown on her, snaked its roots under her skin" (37). Fondo affirms that "America bestows a badge of prestige and pride and so Nkem in this story is basking in these and suppresses the inescapable nostalgia in order to maintain the status America has accorded her" (52). Nkem realizes that "she really belonged to this country now, this country of curiosities and crudities, this country where you could drive at night and not fear armed robbers"; she realizes that "[t]his is home, this brown house in suburban Philadelphia with sprinklers that make perfect water arcs in the summer" (Adichie 34, 37, emphasis in original). As Nkem does not need to overcome acculturative-stressful situations or other immigration-related worries, she experiences a carefree acculturation process and integrates into the American cultural space.

However, when Nkem becomes aware of her imitation life, she questions the price of the prestige and her prosperous lifestyle. She realizes "the extent to which American culture has challenged these facets of her Nigerian identity" (Ngongkum 85). By means of the mask and hair symbolism, the story illustrates Nkem's evaluation of the two available cultural spaces. Cruz-Gutiérrez stresses that hair is "a powerful signifier of ethnic and cultural difference" ('Hairitage' 245). Therefore, by going against Western beauty standards and cutting off her relaxed hair, Nkem takes away power from the American cultural space: "Before deciding to undergo the 'Big Chop,' Nkem reflects upon the important decisions in her life having so far been made by Obiora, her husband, who systematically silences Nkem while indoctrinating her about American and Nigerian history" (251). Not only does Nkem go against Obiora, but she also questions his production of knowledge and Westernized mentality.

Similarly, Nkem's cultural identity is mirrored in the masks. Nkem is used to Obiora bringing home good imitations of ceremonial Benin masks. What is more, Nkem does not mind that they are imitations. She likes to imagine the "lives behind them," and it is Obiora and his visits that make them come to life: "Yet when Obiora talks about it – and all the rest – he makes them seem breathing, warm" (Adichie 25, 26). After hearing about Obiora's girlfriend, she

looks at these masks and questions their worth for the first time: “She thinks about the role of these original masks in the traditions of West African culture from which Nkem is cut off in her life in the suburbs of Philadelphia” (Eilittä 82). Thus, the masks remind her that she misses home and cannot bear the thought of another woman being in their home in Lagos: “She does miss home, though, her friends, the cadence of Igbo and Yoruba and pidgin English spoken around her. [...] She has sometimes thought about moving back home, but never seriously, never concretely;” furthermore, “Nkem feels a fierce possessiveness now, imagining this girl locked in Obiora’s arms, on their bed” (32, 37). It becomes visible that “the African masks serve as a projection of her inner life, which develops from an immature, submissive wife, dependent emotionally, intellectually and materially on her husband, to an individual who is more self-determined” (Eilittä 83). Hence, the Benin masks not only represent her cultural heritage but also her (cultural) identity development.

Furthermore, the masks function as a signifier of representation. In one passage, the text conveys the workings of museums and of the power of Westernization: a portrayal of colonial and neocolonial forces. Nkem is looking at one of the Benin masks, while remembering what Obiora had told her about it:

One of the best imitations, Obiora had said when he bought it a few years ago. He told her how the British had stolen the original masks in the late 1800s during what they called the Punitive Expedition; how the British had a way of using words like ‘expedition’ and ‘pacification’ for killing and stealing. The masks—thousands, Obiora said—were regarded as ‘war booty’ and were now displayed in museums all over the world. [...] And the British had carted most of those away, too, telling the people (newly Christianized and stupidly blinded, Obiora said) that the sculptures were heathen. We never appreciate what we have, Obiora always ended by saying, before repeating the story of the foolish head of state who had gone to the National Museum in Lagos and forced the curator to give him a four-hundred-year-old bust, which he then gave to the British queen as a present. (Adichie 25)

This passage illustrates how museums impact cultural representation. It addresses how colonialists used words such as “expedition” and “pacification” to rob African peoples of their historic artworks thereby also undermining their beliefs and traditions. The cultural artifacts obtained during this colonial plundering are now exhibited as “war booty” in museums in Western countries where they represent African countries’ history and culture from a Western viewpoint: “Thoughtful meditations and incisive comments by Nkem and Obiora himself on African art help juxtapose the circulation of these forgeries with the history of British colonialism and the thefts and appropriations of the original Benin carvings taken from Nigeria that are now on display in museums in the rich Western nations” (Ogede 272). The fact that most of the “war booty” has not yet been returned to their rightful owners to this day reflects

the neocolonial power structures pervading today's societies.³ It becomes clear that Obiora is saddened by how his culture is treated: "[Nkem] listens, because of how passionately he speaks, because of how his eyes glisten as though he is about to cry" (Adichie 25). In this regard, the imitation masks additionally stand for Western cultural appropriation which affects Nigerian cultural representation and identification.

However, the passage similarly addresses the influence of these power structures on Nigerian society. Through Westernization, Nigerian society is influenced by Western societies, and Obiora is impacted by Nigerian society. It becomes clear that the coveted leagues to which Obiora (as a Big Man) belongs are a symptom of capitalist neocolonial formations in postcolonial Nigeria. Accordingly, his outrage over the head of state who gave away an antique bust to enhance his standing in the West can be perceived as ironic, as Obiora, too, prides himself in Western status symbols. This becomes even more evident when he "always end[s] by saying": "We never appreciate what we have" (25). Instead of being with his family, Obiora spends most of his time in Nigeria focusing on business. In other words, Obiora uses these good imitations as placeholders for him not being there. Therefore, by means of the displaced cultural artifacts, the passage visualizes the masked patterns of Westernization.

The symbolism of the imitation masks and Nkem's hair which represent Nkem's identity formation reaches a climax in a moment of epiphany. Obiora comes to visit and this time he brings with him the first original (39). This incident triggers the final transformation in Nkem: the imitation masks helped her conceal her true self but when Obiora brings home an original, her true self is revealed to the reader and herself: "Suddenly, she can't remember anything, can't remember where her life has gone" (40). The reason for this could be Nkem interpreting the first original as Obiora's guilty conscience, a confirmation of his infidelity. This is what urges her to speak up for the first time: "'We have to find a school for Adanna and Okey in Lagos' [...] 'We are moving back at the end of the school year. We are moving back to live in Lagos. We are moving back'" (41). It becomes apparent that "[a]t the arrival of the first original in the house, her decision is immediate, uttered in the voice of agency" (Carotenuto 177). Further, it becomes clear that the "epiphanic moments in this story are related to her perceptions of the mask, which contribute to her emergence as a more 'original' person who might be able to leave behind her life as a faint 'imitation'" (Eilittä 83). Similarly, her outer transformation underscores her inner development, as well: "Her newly gained independence soon manifests itself when her husband arrives and enquires about her new haircut, [...] mocking her act, not as a representation of agency and empowerment but as a new American

³ In December 2022, 20 stolen Benin bronzes were returned to Nigeria from five German museums. However, many museums, especially in the UK, still need to follow suit ("Deutschland gibt Benin-Bronzen zurück").

fashion” (Cruz-Gutiérrez, ‘Hairitage’ 252). Thus, “not only hair but also identities can transition, from a position of controlled submissive subjects to that of empowered social agents” (258). Therefore, the symbols of the mask and hair highlight Nkem’s identity formation.

Nkem’s position of choicelessness and passivity evolves into an active, powerful, self-determined identity. Nkem realizes that “[s]he had not planned to say it, but it seems right, it is what she has always wanted to say” (Adichie 41). This is stressed through her former indecisiveness. Nkem agreed with the Nigerian woman who said: “But how can I live in Nigeria again? [...] When you’ve been here for so long, you’re not the same, you’re not like the people there. How can my children blend in?” (29). Additionally, that is not the only uncertainty she would face in moving back: “Through her return to Nigeria, Nkem’s notion of marriage, which has become degraded by the long separation from her husband, will face a major new challenge” (Ogede 276). Eilittä points out that “[a]lthough the story remains unclear about her future life in Lagos, [...] she has gained a better understanding of her situation and her own past, a development that strengthens her personality up to the point where she is eventually able to take action in order to improve her predicament” (83). Accordingly, while the short story presents an open ending, it undoubtedly portrays a changed protagonist who has achieved a new sense of self-determination and agency.

This can be applied to Nkem’s cultural identity, as well. Despite the doubts and disadvantages that come with moving back, Nkem decides to do it: “Nkem defeats her identity crisis by valuing her cultural space of origin more than any other place on earth” (Misra and Shrivastava 190). By carrying out Hall’s necessarily circular journey, she revalues the Nigerian cultural space. The story visualizes that the “masks are a part of African cultural traditions and beliefs that are, in a subversive way, confirmed in this story, which ends with Nkem’s decision to reconnect with Nigerian culture” (Eilittä 83). In this light, the masks additionally represent Nkem’s life in Nigeria that she has left behind. By disconnecting with her feelings of gratitude and dependency toward her husband, Nkem reconnects with her cultural identity and resists Westernized ways of thinking.

3.2 Ujunwa: Challenging the Canon Through Meta-Narrativity in “Jumping Monkey Hill”

“Jumping Monkey Hill” is a “story about stories” (Eisenberg 17). Adichie presents a short story within a short story thereby precipitating a reconsideration of literary traditions and expectations: “‘Jumping Monkey Hill’ emphasizes form in order to query the limits – and possibilities – of fiction” (22). Carotenuto lays out that this short story tells of “a seminar in

creative writing [...] run by an English scholar, who gathers writers from Africa and judges the works they create on the premises” (180). Further, she signals that this is “one of the rare occasions in which Adichie uses a meta-fictional device” (180). By means of this device, “writing literally inscribes difference on the page: the tale of the seminar’s anxious atmosphere mirrors, by splitting, into the tale written at night by one female participant to the workshop” (180). This female participant and protagonist, Ujunwa Ogundu, demonstrates how meta-texts and self-writing can challenge Western misrepresentations of African realities.

The character that personifies and represents Western media imperialism is the workshop organizer, Edward Campbell. Over the course of the workshop, it is revealed that Edward exists in a white-normative world, despite his academic career and “lifelong passion” for African literature (Adichie 99). The first sign that Ujunwa detects is the location of the workshop. She

found it odd that the African Writers Workshop was held here, at Jumping Monkey Hill, outside Cape Town. The name itself was incongruous, and the resort had the complacency of the well-fed about it, the kind of place where she imagined affluent foreign tourists would dart around taking pictures of lizards and then return home still mostly unaware that there were more black people than red-capped lizards in South Africa. (95)

This passage already alludes to the invisibility of Black people which seems consciously created. Although the chores are carried out by “discreet black maids,” all hotel guests are white (95). As a result, the mostly Black workshop participants feel hypervisible, as they are “looked at [...] suspiciously” (108). In general, with names such as “Baboon Lodge” and “Porcupine Place,” the resort creates an atmosphere of exoticization (95). Accordingly, the African writers are taken into a Westernized environment where they are to produce “authentic” African works.

After Ujunwa learns that Edward chose this resort, more signs follow. It starts on the second day at dinner when Edward “urge[s] everyone to eat the ostrich” medallions (101). When Ujunwa comments that she “d[oes] not like the idea of eating an ostrich, d[oes] not even know that people ate ostriches,” Edward “laugh[s] good-naturedly and sa[ys] that of course ostrich was an African staple” (101). Clearly, Edward’s demeanor is lecturing and condescending. What is more, Edward, an Englishman, is telling Ujunwa, a Nigerian from Lagos, about traditional African food. That Edward’s behavior toward Ujunwa is lacking respect can be linked to his sexual attraction to her, as well. Ujunwa notices that “Edward often stared at her body, that his eyes were never on her face but always lower” (106). However, she does not address this, not even when Edward – after Ujunwa offers to stand up for him from her seat in the shade – comments: “‘I’d rather like you to lie down for me’” (106). It becomes

apparent that Edward objectifies her. One of the participants remarks that “Edward would never look at a white woman like that because what he felt for Ujunwa was a fancy without respect” (109). In this regard, Edward shows racist attitudes as well, as his “behaviour towards Ujunwa evokes the colonial attitude of a European man towards an African woman” (Eilittä 88). Thus, “the workshop organizers, who seem to act out of humanitarian motivations, turn out to be humiliatingly colonial and self-centred” (86). Through his prescriptive and even commanding conduct that only allows one right answer, the character of Edward can be understood as a representation of white normativity.

This can be observed most distinctly when Edward judges the participants’ writing. After the Zimbabwean participant reads from her story, Edward remarks that “[t]here [is] something terribly passé about it when one considered all the other things happening in Zimbabwe under the horrible Mugabe” (Adichie 107). Ujunwa and all the other participants are left speechless, and Ujunwa wonders: “How could a story so true be passé?” (107). It becomes clear that Edward is creating an environment where the writers do not feel like they can speak their minds. Similarly, after the Senegalese reads from her story next, Edward asserts that “homosexual stories of this sort weren’t reflective of Africa, really” (108). Earlier in the story, the Senegalese tells the others that “her story was really *her* story, about how she mourned her girlfriend and how her grieving had emboldened her to come out to her parents” (102, emphasis in original). This time, Ujunwa speaks up and asks: “‘Which Africa?’” (108). Ironically, Edward then points out that “he wasn’t speaking as an Oxford-trained Africanist, but as one who was keen on the real Africa and not the imposing of Western ideas on African venues” (109). This is why, when Edward asks “how African [it is] for a person to tell her family that she is homosexual,” the Senegalese bursts out: “‘*I am Senegalese! I am Senegalese!*’” (108, emphasis in original). This shows that the African writers feel unseen and unheard despite their attending an African Writers Workshop.

However, even after her outburst, Edward does not hesitate to dismiss the Senegalese’s dissent: “‘I think she had too much of that excellent Bordeaux’” (108). In light of this, Eisenberg rightly puts forth: “A story by an African person that depicts African sexualities as varied and complex is deemed inauthentic, not by an African person, but by an ‘expert’ knower of Africa, one who defends ‘real’ African culture by pointing out how African same sex desire can only happen as the result of Euro-West influence” (16). Furthermore, “Edward’s remarks here, as elsewhere, point to his attempt to colonialize African literature by introducing criteria that do not come from that literature itself but from western literary traditions” (Eilittä 87). By imposing these Western criteria onto the participants and dismissing their personal stories, Edward is silencing them.

In contrast, after the Tanzanian reads from his story – a “story about the killings in the Congo, from the point of view of a militiaman, a man full of prurient violence” – Edward calls it “urgent and relevant” (Adichie 109). It becomes clear that “for Edward, African literature is only truly African if it reveals atrocity” (Eisenberg 15). Therefore, the African representation in this story speaks to Edward, as it portrays Africans in a stereotypical way which revolves around violence, oppression, and war. In order to visualize the workings of stereotypes and racist representation, the story establishes a connection to Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*: “The Senegalese said she nearly vomited when a professor at the Sorbonne told her that Conrad was really on *her side*, as if she could not decide for herself who was on her side. Ujunwa began to jump up and down, babbling nonsense to mimic Conrad’s Africans” (Adichie 102, emphasis in original). This passage shows how Western literary criteria possess the power to decide how stories, how the world should be understood. By mimicking “Conrad’s Africans” at the Jumping Monkey Hill resort, Ujunwa meta-narratively questions age-old representations of African people. Hence, this passage depicts the invisibility and naturalization of racist representations, i.e., the functioning of white normativity and white supremacist patriarchy.

Subsequently, Edward decides that this will be the “lead story in the *Oratory*” (109, emphasis in original). It becomes apparent that the reason for why the writers are not speaking up is Edward’s powerful position in the institutionalized world of literary publishing and prizes. Ujunwa directly asks the other participants: “‘But why do we say nothing?’” (112). The Tanzanian later professes that “Edward was connected and could find them a London agent; there was no need to antagonize the man, no need to close doors to opportunity” (113). Evidently, the writers feel they must hold back their views and opinions – and personal stories – if they want to be part of the literary world. This demonstrates that

it is not necessarily Africans who are regulating what is authentically African and what is not; the ‘Oxford-trained Africanist’, the evaluator whose expertise is authenticated by his self-professed ‘keenness’ for ‘real Africa’, is the one who makes the decisions about which African writing will be published, will receive awards. (Eisenberg 16)

In this sense, Edward possesses a disguised and subtle power which helps him impose his own ideas on the writers; he is forcing his own Western (mis)understanding of Africa onto the African writers.

This, in turn, emphasizes the meaning and power of Ujunwa’s metatexts. Her short story is not only “the embodiment of the required task,” but also “the proof of a possible talent, the girl’s laughter in the face of canonical standard and judgemental [sic] formality” (Carotenuto 180). This means that Ujunwa not only writes a short story as expected from the workshop but

also, in hooks' words, creates a space for loving Africanness. Her story is exactly what Edward would reject and criticize; this is why, it functions as a safe space for herself and her experiences and as a powerful space that subverts Edward's demands: "The very fact that Adichie's story exists, that we are reading it, and that it exposes Edward instead of acquiescing to his demands, demonstrates that there is a place for African literature beyond the limitations of stereotypes, even as the story implicitly calls for more such 'unlimited' places" (Eisenberg 22). Ujunwa's short story within the short story "Jumping Monkey Hill" answers the questions of how metatexts challenge (media) racism and how sharing one's own experiences breaks with stereotypes and traditional Western roles.

Firstly, it becomes clear that Ujunwa's story is based on her own life and experiences. This way, the story within the story functions as a prequel to the main story; the reader obtains additional information which overlaps with and amplifies the information given in the main story. Additionally, by pervading the main story, Ujunwa's text serves as a reflection of her inner life and the fictional world, as certain themes are reprocessed and reconsidered. Before Ujunwa starts writing the story, it becomes evident that she intends to create an authentic representation: "She sat there for a long time, moving the mouse from side to side, trying to decide whether to name her character something common, like Chioma, or something exotic, like Ibari" (Adichie 100). Then she starts with: "Chioma lives with her mother in Lagos" (100). The fact that Ujunwa decides to name her character Chioma, "something common," shows that this story's events could happen to any woman in Nigeria, that it is representative for life in Lagos. Further, it displays how Ujunwa wants to distance herself from exotic representations of African lives. Therefore, Ujunwa takes back control and resists Edward's silencing by means of self-writing.

A theme that is mirrored and foreshadowed in Ujunwa's story is sexual harassment. Ujunwa's protagonist, Chioma, applies to several positions and when she is finally invited to an interview, she is sexually assaulted by the interviewer: "After the first few questions, the man says he will hire her and then walks across and stands behind her and reaches over her shoulders to squeeze her breasts" (100). At the next interview, the manager promises her the position if she can bring in new accounts which denotes flirting with businessmen and allowing their sexual advances, as Chioma learns later on (104). When she visits the first potential customer at his house, and he implies that he will join the bank if Chioma enters a sexual relationship with him, she leaves: "She turns to the door and opens it and walks out into the bright sunlight" (111). Correspondingly, just as Ujunwa at the African Writers Workshop, Chioma experiences sexual harassment at the workplace.

Eventually, it is Ujunwa's turn to read from her story. When she is finished, the other participants praise her story calling it "strong," "believable," a "realistic portrayal of what women were going through in Nigeria" (113). In contrast, Edward comments: "'It's never quite like that in real life, is it? Women are never victims in that sort of crude way and certainly not in Nigeria. Nigeria has women in high positions. The most powerful cabinet minister today is a woman'" (113–14). Thus, Edward again silences a writer's personal story, and then he adds: "'The whole thing is implausible,' [...] 'This is agenda writing, it isn't a real story of real people'" (114). This illusionary statement leads to Ujunwa's epiphanic moment: "Inside Ujunwa, something shrank" (114). She realizes that Edward is trying to nullify not only her believability and authenticity as an African writer but also her subjectivity and very existence as an African woman, because – according to Edward – people like her do not exist. And because people like Edward decide what gets printed or shown in films and on TV, people like her are not represented in media. Accordingly, Edward represents the act of objectifying, dehumanizing, and erasing Black women.

In order to underline the story's connection to her own experiences, Ujunwa enacts her own ending.

He was watching her, and it was the victory in his eyes that made her stand up and start to laugh. The participants stared at her. She laughed and laughed and they watched her and then she picked up her papers. 'A real story of real people?' she said, with her eyes on Edward's face. 'The only thing I didn't add in the story is that after I left my coworker and walked out of the alhaji's house, I got into the Jeep and insisted that the driver take me home because I knew it was the last time I would be riding in it.' (114)

Ujunwa is laughing at the absurdity of the situation, at Edward, and everything that he represents. Accordingly, her laughter can be seen as a metaphor for rebelling against the impositions of white-normative thinking. As delineated above, Ujunwa is laughing "in the face of canonical standard" (Carotenuto 180). In this sense, as she walks out of the workshop, "she wonder[s] whether this ending, in a story, would be considered plausible" (114). By letting her protagonist leave an unsafe situation and exiting one herself, she enacts a double rebellion. She decides against the imposed helplessness and choicelessness and opts for agency and alternative endings.

The open ending of this story recalls the links between the two stories and Ujunwa's self-determined stance toward Edward's misconceptions of African lives. Further, by ending the story with "she wondered whether this ending, in a story, would be considered plausible," Adichie presents highly visible meta-narrativity that questions literary traditions, as "the line draws attention to Edward's opinions about what is plausible and implausible, fitting and

inappropriate, in African fiction” (Eisenberg 16). Eilittä points out: “In both stories the epiphanic moment contributes to the exposing of sexual harassment patterns, which exist both in the behaviour of those influential in the Nigerian city of Lagos, which is in a state of transition to a western style of life, and in that of a western intellectual” (88). As pointed out, “Ujunwa’s future – as a writer of non-stereotypical African stories – remains unclear” (Eisenberg 22–23). However, by means of self-representation, Ujunwa resists Edward’s silencing and reclaims her voice. She uses self-writing as a tool for self-actualization and literally writes her own story thereby restoring power to herself.

Overall, “Jumping Monkey Hill” depicts Westernization and power imbalances. Just as in “Imitation,” the Big-Man and Americanah motif are present (Adichie 100, 110). Moreover, the setting and character constellation visualize global coloniality: Even though the workshop takes place at an African venue, it is a white professor organizing this workshop for African writers at a resort with only white wealthy guests where he forces his Western mindset on them. Neumann and Rippl maintain that “[g]lobal imbalances become even more apparent when considering other major agents in processes of institutionalization, namely literary prizes and reading lists of universities” (179–80). Through Edward’s position, everyone accepts that Western literary traditions are taken as the default model even for African writing. Only Ujunwa speaks up and challenges Edward’s mental colonization. By creating a reflection of her own life, Ujunwa is writing herself into the literary world and substantiating the possibility of alternative worlds.

3.3 Chinaza and Ofodile: Re-Negotiating Cultural Ties in “The Arrangers of Marriage”

“The Arrangers of Marriage” presents a critical examination of cultural identity in the context of U.S. immigration. In particular, it depicts Chinaza’s initiation into American culture. By exemplifying Fondo’s three forms of displacement, the story foregrounds Western cultural imperialism and the disillusionment with the “export[ed] [...] American dream” (48). Moreover, the first (physical) displacement already foreshadows the third displacement (of the dream). When Chinaza arrives in the U.S. after her arranged marriage to Ofodile, the text evokes a juxtaposition between her “new husband” and the old building they will live in (Adichie 167). The building is described in negative terms, such as “brooding stairs,” “airless hallway,” and “frayed carpeting,” creating a battered, decrepit, and unwelcoming atmosphere (167). This is continued when Ofodile shows her the “furniture-challenged flat[...]” where “old, musty smells hung heavy in the air” (167, 168) Furthermore, the recurrent phrase, “my new

husband,” stands for the person that from now on determines and regulates her life; in this sense, “my new husband” is not only a metaphor for her new life but eventually her new identity, as well. It will become clear that the short story presents the “wonders of America” in a subversive way to challenge Westernization (177).

Through the circumstances of Chinaza’s arranged marriage, it becomes apparent that the United States enjoy a high standing in the Nigerian cultural imaginary. Chinaza hears about it first from her uncle: “‘A doctor in America,’ he had said, beaming. ‘What could be better?’” (169). Similarly, her aunt says: “‘We raise you as our own and then we find you an *ezigbo di!* A doctor in America! It is like we won a lottery for you!’” (170, emphasis in original). Fondo illustrates that “America is seen from this perspective as the catalyst that ushers in instant positive transformation” (53). However, the American dream present in the Nigerian cultural imaginary is not Chinaza’s dream for her future, as she “wanted to take the JAMB exam again and try for the university” (Adichie 170). It is the forced gratitude for her aunt and uncle and the highly valued perception of America that make Chinaza go with their plan. Therefore, while it seems as if Chinaza is about to live the American dream, her aunt and uncle are taking away her agency and prospects.

The discrepancy between Chinaza’s vision for her future and her foster parents’ vision is mirrored in the clash of the imagined America and its reality. The notion of an imagined America is created by means of remote acculturation. This becomes clear when Chinaza compares her new home with the home she imagined: “I had imagined a smooth driveway snaking between cucumber-colored 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” (167). According to this, Chinaza obtained a certain perception of life in America through media and imagined that Nkem’s life⁴ – living in a wealthy white neighborhood with a husband who can provide for her – would be waiting for her (Fondo 53). Instead, she is confronted with a minimalist bachelor apartment in a run-down building where she will be collecting coupons to afford groceries (Adichie 174, 182). This clash of imagination versus reality is personified in the “arrangers of marriage” (169). Every time Chinaza is confronted with the notion of imagination versus reality, she reflects: “Another thing the arrangers of marriage failed to mention” (169). This way, the “arrangers of marriage” function as a metaphor for the disillusionment of the American dream.

After Chinaza’s arrival in the U.S., her acculturation process begins. It becomes apparent that Chinaza is forced to abandon one cultural marker after another. At airport

⁴ Protagonist from “Imitation”

customs, the officer “examine[s] [her] foodstuffs as if they were spiders, her gloved fingers poking at the waterproof bags of ground *egusi* and dried *onugbu* leaves and *uziza* seeds, until she seize[s] [her] *uziza* seeds” because the officer suspects that Chinaza will “grow them on American soil” (168, emphasis in original). Thus, the foodstuffs represent parts of Chinaza’s cultural identity which she is obliged to leave behind. In this sense, right after arrival, Chinaza’s otherness is identified and criticized: The foodstuffs “carried along by the heroine can thus be seen as cultural markers that meet their challenge first at the airport” (Ngongkum 90). Therefore, with the beginning of Chinaza’s acculturation process, the contesting of her cultural identity commences, as well.

The process continues when they arrive at home and Ofodile makes it clear to Chinaza that she entered the American cultural space. When Chinaza tells him the line was engaged when she was calling her foster parents, Ofodile corrects her by saying: “‘Busy. Americans say busy, not engaged’” (Adichie 170). Additionally, when Chinaza asks for dried milk for her tea, he says: “‘Americans don’t drink their tea with milk and sugar’ [...] I got used to the way things are done here a long time ago. You will too, baby’” (171). Chinaza has only been there for a few hours and already has to conform to Ofodile’s American way. It becomes apparent that Ofodile presumes that America does not allow any form of difference, not even in people’s homes. This is why, he starts to suppress Chinaza’s Nigerian cultural identity. In this light, Ofodile functions as an overseer of Chinaza’s acculturation process. While Chinaza shows a preference for an integrated identity, Ofodile steers her in the direction of an assimilated identity: “Her wish to maintain her cultural identity is challenged by a husband obsessed with social conformism who tries to constrain her to adhere to what he perceives as typical American mores” (Ngongkum 89). Therefore, Ofodile is succumbing to and taking part in cultural imperialism thereby erasing Chinaza’s cultural identity.

This can also be observed when Chinaza experiences acculturative stress, or culture shocks. At the mall, Chinaza is overwhelmed with the people who “wore the mark of foreignness, otherness, on their faces,” with the “humiliatingly public” food court, and the escalator (Adichie 176, 177). When Chinaza asks Ofodile, “‘*Biko*, don’t they have a lift instead?’,” he replies, “‘Speak English. There are people behind you’” (177, emphasis in original). It becomes clear that Ofodile is ashamed of being connected to anything non-American and does not intend to facilitate her acculturation process: “‘It’s an elevator, not a lift. Americans say elevator’” (177). This shows that “Chinaza has to pass through various culture shocks, Ofodile being her guide in the new cultural space, continuously correcting her language problems” (Misra and Shrivastava 190). Accordingly, Chinaza’s acculturative stress is mainly caused by a coerced adaptation to the mainstream culture.

The moment where Chinaza's identity is truly threatened is when Ofodile fills in her Social Security number application. Prior to that, Chinaza learns that, in the U.S., Ofodile Udenwa goes by the name Dave Bell. Chinaza is in disbelief, as his new name does not show any resemblance to his Nigerian name (Adichie 172). When Ofodile urges her to use her English name, as well, she counters: "'I never have, my English name is just something on my birth certificate. I've been Chinaza Okafor my whole life'" (172). Despite that, Ofodile writes "AGATHA BELL" on the application form (173). With this act, Ofodile is negating her whole life, her entire identity, and cultural heritage. Misra and Shrivastava emphasize similarly: "That her identity is at stake becomes clear when Ofodile fills an application form with the name 'Agatha Bell'" (191). This can be seen as an override of her Nigerian identity: Ofodile is literally rewriting her identity according to his conceptions of an American identity.

Ofodile's obsession to adapt to American culture points to the conclusion that he perceives American culture as superior. This perception is created through a confrontation of both cultures in terms of binary opposites. On the bus, Ofodile shows Chinaza "how to press the tape on the wall to signal [her] stop": "'This is not like Nigeria, where you shout out to the conductor,' he said, sneering, as though he was the one who had invented the superior American system" (Adichie 173). Similarly, at the food court, he remarks: "'We overcook food back home and that is why we lose all the nutrients. Americans cook things right'" (176). Ofodile evaluates American and Nigerian culture overtly and explicitly, thereby creating a visible contrast. It would follow then that, in this short story, the theme of Westernization is expressed in a constructed superiority of American culture.

This perceived superiority leads Ofodile to seek total conformity to American culture. The reason for this lies in his assumption that it is not possible to be successful in this new host country while maintaining ties with one's heritage culture. This becomes clear when Ofodile comments on other immigrants speaking in their native language:

'Look at the people who shop here; they are the ones who immigrate and continue to act as if they are back in their countries.' He gestured, dismissively, toward a woman and her two children, who were speaking Spanish. 'They will never move forward unless they adapt to America. They will always be doomed to supermarkets like this.' (175)

In this sense, Ofodile feels he will be doomed if he does not adopt every aspect of American culture. Additionally, after Chinaza cooks coconut rice, their neighbor Shirley comes to their apartment and remarks: "'That smell,' [...]. 'It's everywhere, all over the building. What are you cooking?'" (178). The next day, Ofodile brings home a "*Good Housekeeping All-American Cookbook*" because he does not want them "'to be known as the people who fill the building

with smells of foreign food” (179, emphasis in original). Evidently, he does not want to be associated with foreignness or otherness. Therefore, “Ofodile, in his pursuit of success in America, has completely yielded to this cultural imperialism” (Fondo 56). Ofodile has accepted that forsaking his cultural identity is the price you pay to live the American dream. By not letting his otherness interfere with his professional and economic success in the U.S., Ofodile opts for an assimilated identity.

However, Ofodile has not only “yielded to this cultural imperialism,” but can also be seen as the personification of cultural imperialism (56). In essence, “The Arrangers of Marriage” portrays cultural assimilation to U.S. culture and “Ofodile is the personification of this process” (56). Firstly, this can be observed when Ofodile gives Chinaza the American cookbook. Even though he “ate the fragrant meal [coconut rice] [Chinaza] placed before him, even smacking his lips like Uncle Ike sometimes did to show Auntie Ada how pleased he was with her cooking,” Ofodile decides to banish all Nigerian food from his life (Adichie 179). Fondo explains that “[t]his constitutes a high point in Ofodile’s cultural unmaking. He is ready to sacrifice food which he loves, to please his American neighbours and not be seen as foreign and therefore different” (56). Secondly, he changes his accent when he speaks to Americans: “He sounded different when he spoke to Americans: his *r* was overpronounced and his *t* was under-pronounced. And he smiled, the eager smile of a person who wanted to be liked” (Adichie 176, emphasis in original). Thirdly, as mentioned previously, he changes his name, as he believes ““you have to be as mainstream as possible. If not, you will be left by the roadside. You have to use your English name here”” (172). Lastly, he undertakes the ultimate act of assimilation. When Chinaza asks him why he married her, he replies: ““I was happy when I saw your picture,’ [...]. ‘You were light-skinned. I had to think about my children’s looks. Light-skinned blacks fare better in America”” (184). This points to the conclusion that Ofodile perceives the host culture not only as intolerant toward other cultures but also as racist. Accordingly, the wish to change skin color over the next generations represents his ultimate form of assimilation. Correspondingly, by adopting and applying Western ideological thinking, Ofodile acts as a personification and an enforcer of cultural imperialism.

Despite Ofodile’s mission to make her relinquish all her cultural ties, Chinaza finds ways to stay true to her cultural identity. This is revealed by the text itself which is infused with Nigerian words. Furthermore, it can be observed when Ofodile corrects Chinaza’s language use. Instead of adopting his correction without question, the narrator gives both versions where the American variant is named last and in parentheses: “biscuits (cookies),” “jug (pitcher),” “lift (elevator)” (174, 177, 183). The use of both versions further points to Chinaza’s wish to develop a bicultural identity. Additionally, Chinaza keeps speaking Igbo to herself and with

their neighbor Nia: “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” (182). Above all, Chinaza questions the American cultural practices that Ofodile admires. At the supermarket, Chinaza compares the packaged food with the fresh produce she is used to in Nigeria: “I was wary when he put a beef pack in the cart. I wished I could touch the meat, to examine its redness, as I often did at Ogbete Market, where the butcher held up fresh-cut slabs buzzing with flies” (173). Moreover, when Ofodile says that “‘Americans cook things right. See how healthy they all look?’,” Chinaza doubts the veracity of his statement: “At the next table, a black woman with a body as wide as a pillow held sideways smiled at me” (176). Therefore, Nigerian linguistic and cultural practices signal Chinaza’s resistance to Ofodile’s attempts at making her give up her Nigerian cultural identity; this way, she questions the superiority of American culture.

At a crucial point in the story, Chinaza experiences an epiphany and questions her own situation. Chinaza realizes that she has been in the U.S. for some time, so she asks Ofodile why she has not received her work permit yet (182). This is the moment Ofodile tells her about his first marriage: “She loses herself the very moment that Ofodile confesses to her his first marriage with an American girl to secure the residential permit in America – the Green Card” (Misra and Shrivastava 191). Even before that, Chinaza undergoes a mental change, as “my new husband” transforms into “my husband” (Adichie 182). Accordingly, Chinaza achieves a sense of awareness for her situation and a desire to become more self-determined: “Winter had come and I was still unemployed” (182). Eilittä argues that Chinaza’s moment of epiphany occurs after she leaves her husband and realizes she cannot stand on her own feet yet: “Although for the time being she has to stay with her husband, she has matured through feelings of doubt, disappointment and despair to a person who understands her situation in more realistic terms in a marriage that, by that point, has become shorn of all illusions” (86). In this light, her marriage represents the illusion of America/nization, and after her epiphanic experience she can see through all these illusions clearly.

Moreover, the open ending of the story presents many challenges but also hopefulness. When Chinaza voices her discontent with the circumstances of their marriage, Ofodile paints a picture of choicelessness and powerlessness for her: “‘with the way things are messed up back home, what would you have done?’ [...]. ‘Aren’t people with master’s degrees roaming the streets, jobless?’” (Adichie 183). Accordingly, Ofodile intends to remind Chinaza of her dependence on him, so as to keep her in her place. After Chinaza nonetheless leaves her husband, she stays with Nia who suggests waiting for her papers before she leaves for good: “She was right, I could not leave *yet*” (186, emphasis added). This shows that despite her seemingly hopeless situation, Chinaza embraces her situation: “this moment allows her to stop

hoping for illusions and forces her to make ‘a leap’ to a new self-assurance, which could be the beginning of her own life” (Eilittä 86). Despite Ofodile’s attempts to erase Chinaza’s cultural identity and self-determination, she stays true to her identity and reconnects with her original vision for the future. Mami recognizes that “[t]he open-ended termination of the story suggests that Adichie is aware that breaking free and circumventing cultural reification cannot be an easy task. But the writer portrays it as an act of will that is vital for one’s self definition [sic] and peace of mind” (7). Therefore, the open ending reinforces the story’s message that the acculturation process is characterized by obstacles and power imbalances but can ultimately lead to a new sense of self. Moreover, Chinaza challenges Westernization by resisting Ofodile’s total assimilation and opting for a bicultural identity. In other words, Chinaza resists and challenges Western universality by sticking to her Nigerian cultural identity and questioning Western ideological thinking.

4. Diasporic Identities in *Americanah*

“The African novel emerged to ‘fight’ the battles of and for African communities in various locations on the continent” (Emenyonu, “Novel” x).

All themes that Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie introduces in her short fiction are developed further in *Americanah* and paint an even more detailed picture of African diasporic experiences. In her latest novel, Adichie not only argues for true African representations but cultural diversity in general. With this, she continues the struggle of African novelists. Emenyonu points out that the African novel emerged to “tell the story of the colonial encounter from the African point of view” (x). Innes similarly emphasizes that the “task of novelists throughout the African continent” is the “affirmation of its cultural validity, the delineation of a history in its own terms” (37). Accordingly, the “African novelist emerged as a true voice of Africa and Africans, and, as the conscience and sensitivity of the society, boldly challenged untenable myths and stereotypes of Africa and Africans in the wider world” (x). By presenting diverse representations, the African novel fights stereotypes and reclaims African subjectivity.

The Igbo novel, in particular, aims to “contest distorted representations of the Igbo specifically and Africa more generally, using the medium in which the distortions originated” (Egbunike 18). Interestingly, the “Igbo philosophy of duality recognized the existence of more than one ‘truth’” (17–18). This reinforces the prime objective of postcolonial African fiction and Adichie’s fiction specifically: to counter Westernized portrayals with a plurality of voices. Nowadays, the mission of African novelists, and Adichie specifically, is to carry on this fight

in the context of globalization: “in its central themes and concerns *Americanah* reflects our transmodern globalized age” (Duce 253). David Brooks and Anastasia Louridas maintain that “the consequences of empire and the role of the novel are now under closer examination than ever before” (2). As Katherine Hallemeier observes, this entails that “literature by international authors with African heritage undoubtedly complicates and enriches representations of ‘Africa’ in the broadly defined west” (232–33). Therefore, Adichie uses the medium of the novel to reimagine and rebuild depictions of African peoples and cultures, whereby she counteracts the process of Westernization.

Americanah is considered the “culmination” of Adichie’s work, as it brings together the key concerns of the migration experience, thereby representing diasporic realities (Emenyonu, Intro 1). I suggest that on the one hand, this book serves as a lens that helps readers see the world in a different light; on the other hand, it depicts the world’s potential for change by suggesting the possibility of multiple worlds. This multiplicity is achieved through a reconsideration of issues such as race, representation, and diasporic identity. More precisely, Guarracino rightly indicates that *Americanah* “offers a good case study” for these topics (2). Furthermore, I propose that Adichie fights the battle against Westernization on an interpersonal level. The power hierarchies between the Global South and the Global North – between Africa and the West – are transferred from the global to the local and challenged in a transcultural digitalized context. This is why, the protagonist, Ifemelu, is of great significance. While *Americanah* narrates many diasporic journeys, Ifemelu’s focalizer position and her migration experience in the U.S. display accurately the role of the West in the African diaspora. Due to this and the scope of this thesis, my analysis of *Americanah* will focus on the character of Ifemelu. Yogita Goyal illustrates that “the novel may, in fact, be placed within a larger tradition of postcolonial writing—reversing the heart of darkness narrative, where rather than Europeans or Americans going to Africa to find themselves, an African character travels to the heart of the West, only to find darkness there” (xii). Accordingly, “Adichie adeptly queries Western ways of perceiving and defining the African *Other* from the position of different and diverse characters” (Rodríguez Murphy 101, emphasis in original). By portraying Ifemelu’s journey from Nigeria to the U.S. and back, *Americanah* sheds light on the key dimensions of the African diasporic experience.

The novel presents three main themes that encompass the workings of acculturation, representation, and diasporic identity construction: the power of online spaces, hair politics, and the concept of Blackness. By offering alternative voices and a space to contest Westernized mentalities, online spaces, such as websites and blogs, give back agency to marginalized groups: “*Americanah* shows that digital sites are powerful tools for the spread of counterstories”

(Duce 252). Additionally, in *Americanah*, the trope of hair politics embodies the workings of Westernization and coloniality. This way, it functions as a key motif for a discussion of diasporic identities. Dina Yerima clarifies: “hair is important as it sparks up conversations on race, tolerance, acceptance, and coloniality” (646). Lastly, *Americanah* portrays instances of racial discrimination that draw attention to racialized systems of oppression and engenders a reconsideration of Blackness: “All of the characters in *Americanah* are transformed by abrasive encounters and a new reality of their *blackness* that splinters their identity” (Sackeyfio, “Revisiting” 213, emphasis in original). Correspondingly, in conjunction with her identity formation, Ifemelu redefines the concept of Blackness in the U.S. and for herself. Gichingiri Ndigirigi explains that the “metropole is the site where Ifemelu, the ‘decolonized modern’ negotiates her identity and representation of self through an enforced hyper-consciousness of race and her place in the world” (207). Concludingly, it can be said that “the novel self-consciously foregrounds its own reception as a new kind of black novel, an exploration of blackness that does not highlight injury or trauma, but focuses on romantic love, hair, and nostalgia” (Goyal xiv). In this light, *Americanah* reimagines diasporic realities but not without highlighting their positive elements, such as community, agency, and empowerment. The following chapters will provide an analysis of Ifemelu’s acculturation process (4.1), her confrontation of racial representations (4.2), and her identity development (4.3).

4.1 American (Dis)Enchantment: Ifemelu’s Acculturation Process

Ifemelu’s journey to the United States already starts in Nigeria. When the opportunity to apply for a scholarship for an American university presents itself, Ifemelu begins to imagine her life in the U.S.: “And so she began to dream. She saw herself in a house from *The Cosby Show*, in a school with students holding notebooks miraculously free of wear and crease. She took the SATs at a Lagos centre, packed with thousands of people, all bristling with their own American ambitions” (Adichie⁵ 99). Accordingly, Ifemelu’s journey starts with the fantasy of the American dream. This dream rests on the strong Western presence in Nigeria. Ifemelu already feels this presence at school when they discuss classmates who have been abroad: “Ginika did not go abroad often, and so did not have the air of *away* as Yinka did” (55, emphasis in original). This “air of *away*” introduces the *Americanah* motif which pervades the plot and the text (55): “They roared with laughter, at that word ‘*Americanah*’, wreathed in glee, the fourth syllable extended” (65). This motif expresses “the centrality of the United States to a Nigerian middle-

⁵ When I quote from Adichie in chapters 4.1, 4.2, and 4.3, I refer to her novel *Americanah*.

class imaginary” (Hallemeier 235). Therefore, the narrative illustrates the impact and prestige of the West which creates the perception of the American dream.

The firm hold that Western culture has on Nigerian society also becomes visible when it comes to education. The discussion about where to send Obinze’s daughter to school not only visualizes the normative position of Western education but evokes colonial binaries, as well: “‘You must send her to the French school. [...] Of course they teach in French but it can only be good for the child to learn another *civilized* language, since she already learns English at home.’ [...] ‘The French school is not bad, but I prefer Sidcot Hall. They teach the complete *British curriculum*,’ said another woman” (Adichie 28, emphasis added). This education system is already based on the assumption that children will go to universities abroad to enhance their future professional lives: “all her classmates were talking about going abroad to take the American medical exams or the British exams, because the other choice was to tumble into a parched wasteland of joblessness” (45–46). Correspondingly, it is not only individual Nigerian perceptions that are set on Western education and careers but society itself. This becomes clear when Obinze tries to start his business in Nigeria: “And after you register your own company, you must find a white man. Find one of your white friends in England. Tell everybody he is your General Manager. You will see how doors will open for you because you have an oyinbo General Manager” (27). Butler contends that Nigerians are not “marginalized [...] by the American racial hierarchy but by globalization’s ‘progress’” (309). However, the fact that “one of [Obinze’s] white friends in England” can majorly affect the success or failure of his business in Nigeria demonstrates how Westernization also imports white supremacy to Nigerian society (Adichie 27).

Additionally, Ifemelu is influenced by her boyfriend Obinze. Obinze is an “America expert”:

Everybody watched American films and exchanged faded American magazines, but he knew details about American presidents from a hundred years ago. Everybody watched American shows, but he knew about Lisa Bonet leaving *The Cosby Show* to go and do *Angel Heart* and Will Smith’s huge debts before he was signed to do *The Fresh Prince of Bel Air*. ‘You look like a black American’ was his ultimate compliment, which he told her when she wore a nice dress, or when her hair was done in large braids. (67, 99)

This passage addresses media imperialism and Ifemelu’s and Obinze’s remote acculturation through popular culture. Fondo points out that “American media occupies [sic] the same position that the colonial school occupied in the context of classic colonization” (59). This shows that Ifemelu’s vision of America is triggered and fostered by Obinze’s obsession with American culture. Against this backdrop, Ifemelu “leaves Nigeria neither for political reasons nor due to economic scarcity, but, influenced by her boyfriend’s veneration of American

culture, she moves to the States in pursuit of personal development” (Duce 246). Hence, Ifemelu’s acculturation process already starts in Nigeria by means of Westernization and remote acculturation.

When Ifemelu arrives in the U.S., she experiences her first disillusionment, as her perception of the American dream is confronted with American reality: “The sweltering heat alarmed her, as did Auntie Uju’s old Toyota hatchback [...]. She stared at buildings and cars and signboards, all of them matt, disappointingly matt; in the landscape of her imagination, the mundane things in America were covered in a high-shine gloss” (Adichie 103–04). Ifemelu realizes that the America she encountered in the media does not exist: “The street below was poorly lit, bordered not by leafy trees but by closely parked cars, nothing like the pretty street on *The Cosby Show*” (106). This realization is accompanied by culture shocks, or acculturative stress. Firstly, what surprises Ifemelu is her roommates’ cleaning habits: “their shampoos and conditioners and gels were cluttered in the bathroom, but there was not a single sponge, and this, the absence of a sponge, made them seem unreachably alien to her” (128). Secondly, Ifemelu is baffled by the stereotypes her roommates have about African people. When Ifemelu voices her anger about her roommate’s dog eating from the kitchen table, her roommate says: ““You better not kill my dog with voodoo”” (152). Accordingly, Ifemelu is met with a few challenges that collide with her African cultural identity. However, she is still searching for the imagined America that she and Obinze have been dreaming about: “Ifemelu stood there for a long time, her body unsure of itself, overwhelmed by a sense of newness. But she felt, also, a frisson of expectation, an eagerness to discover America” (106). This is why, Ifemelu aims to learn about and adapt to American culture.

Ifemelu’s wish to assimilate is challenged right on the first day at university. When Ifemelu goes to the front desk for registration, the woman sitting there addresses her as if she is “a small child, lazy-limbed and drooling”: ““I. Need. You. To. Fill. Out. A. Couple. Of. Forms. Do. You. Understand. How. To. Fill. These. Out?”” (133). Ifemelu realizes that the woman mistakes her for an English-language beginner because of her foreign accent. Put differently, Ifemelu is labeled as other. This incident is a blow to her African subjectivity; she feels misunderstood and unseen: “She shrank like a dried leaf. She had spoken English all her life [...]; she should not have cowered and shrunk, but she did. And in the following weeks, as autumn’s coolness descended, she began to practice an American accent” (133–34). Correspondingly, Ifemelu aims to distance herself from her devalued African cultural group by practicing an American accent. Duce reflects: “Little by little, Ifemelu interiorizes the inferior position American society relegates her to and finds herself silenced and voiceless” (247).

Therefore, this event causes Ifemelu to compromise her African cultural identity so as to blend in with mainstream American culture.

The most crucial aspect Ifemelu must learn about her position in American society is her Blackness. After living in the U.S. for a few years, Ifemelu starts writing a blog where she describes encounters that depict the concept of Blackness in the U.S. By means of these blog entries that pervade the text, the reader already has access to her insights which she forms in retrospect: “These posts, often introduced by the adverbial ‘years later’, upset the chronology of the storyline by projecting it flash-forward to the moment when Ifemelu’s life will be processed by writing” (Guarracino 13). In a blog post titled “To My Fellow Non-American Blacks: In America, You Are Black, Baby,” she explains that American society perceives all non-white immigrants as Black (Adichie 220). This entails that cultural, national, and individual differences are irrelevant, as well, because being Black means being a representative of your race. Ava Landry conveys that “the construction of Blackness as an all-consuming category hinders black people’s autonomy to create a subjective sense of self. When African immigrants enter the United States, their bodies are automatically read as ‘black’” (133). This is why, Ifemelu exclaims: “‘I came from a country where race was not an issue; I did not think of myself as black and I only became black when I came to America’” (Adichie 290). Moreover, Ifemelu realizes that this reading is not neutral but comes with discrimination. Hence, Ifemelu recognizes that the concept of Blackness is defined by inequality and inequity: “African immigrants must learn not only how to enter a new society but also how to enter a new society that has already systematically subordinated them” (Landry 135). Sackeyfio observes that “Adichie candidly expresses these rude awakenings through Ifemelu’s odyssey into America’s racially defined landscape” (“Revisiting” 225). Thus, Ifemelu’s acculturation process visualizes racial hierarchies.

Furthermore, this racial hierarchy is reflected in spatial distribution. This means that not only people but also places are juxtaposed. This becomes apparent when Ifemelu has to go from Princeton to Trenton to braid her hair. Whereas Princeton has “clean streets and stately homes, [...] delicately overpriced shops and the quiet, abiding air of earned grace,” the area in Trenton where Ifemelu goes to braid her hair “had graffiti, dank buildings and no white people” (Adichie 3, 9). This contrasting juxtaposition is introduced in the first few pages of the novel, and the narrator points out that it “still startled [Ifemelu], what a difference a few minutes of train travel made”: “she was struck by how mostly slim white people got off at the stops in Manhattan and, as the train went further into Brooklyn, the people left were mostly black and fat” (5). This physical and racial divide points to the connectedness of white normativity and beauty standards and to a form of ghettoization: “The residents of these inhabited enclosures are not only

marginalized but are physically isolated and consigned to poor residential areas” (Akingbe and Adeniyi 46). This signifies that Blackness marginalizes non-white people not only systemically but also spatially. Correspondingly, this connectedness additionally “underline[s] the nature of beauty shops as places located at the margins of metropolitan centers” (Cruz-Gutiérrez, “Blogosphere” 69). Thus, non-white people are confined physically and socially through discriminatory societal structures.

Through instances of ignorant or even racist behavior, Ifemelu learns about the expectations of her host society. In a blog post titled “Understanding America for the Non-American Black: A Few Explanations of What Things Really Mean,” she writes: “Diversity means different things to different folks. If a white person is saying a neighborhood is diverse, they mean nine percent black people” (Adichie 350–51). Additionally, she explains that people “say a film is ‘mainstream’ when they mean ‘white folks like it or made it’” (351). In this blog post, Ifemelu describes the white normativity integral to American society. In another post, she points out that “racism is about the power of a group and in America it’s white folks who have that power” (327). Even though the host country’s acculturation expectation is multiculturalism, Ifemelu’s blog points out that the dominant group’s conception of diversity is different from a general understanding of it. Accordingly, the acculturation expectation would rather fit the melting-pot category. Further, the post shows that the dominant group is white mainstream culture. Ifemelu recognizes that white normativity comes with privilege for white people. In contrast, for non-white people, Blackness defines their whole being and pervades every aspect of their lives. This is why, in terms of cultural identity, Ifemelu wonders whether her cousin Dike – who has a Nigerian mother but grew up in America – “would be considered [...] American African or African American. He would have to choose what he was, or rather, what he was would be chosen *for* him” (141, emphasis added). It becomes clear that white normative thinking takes away agency and subjectivity from non-white people. Therefore, Ifemelu’s meditations on race uncover how deep white normativity and racist mentalities are ingrained in U.S. society: Her blog describes and explains her experiences to the reader before Ifemelu herself becomes aware of her host society’s expectations.

Despite these experiences, Ifemelu develops an American identity. Due to her fellowship and her white, rich boyfriend Curt, she enjoys a certain mobility and financial stability. It is these privileges that keep her invested in her American self. What she likes about Princeton, for instance, is that “in this place of affluent ease, she could pretend to be someone else, someone specially admitted into a hallowed American club” (3). The American cultural space awards her with a sense of accomplishment and prestige which is why she is content there. Before Ifemelu meets Curt, she experiences her second disillusionment with American

society: When she first starts going to university in Philadelphia, she grows desperate with her inability to find employment. During this period, she experiences the powerlessness of her immigrant status for the first time (142). This frustration leads her to accept a job which ends in sexual abuse (153–54). Mary Jane Androne illustrates: “Discovering what the necessity of survival in America has forced her to do shakes the very foundation of Ifemelu’s sense of her identity” (234). After this event, Ifemelu falls into a depression which causes her to cut her ties to home: “Obinze called many times but she did not pick up her phone. She deleted his voice messages unheard and his e-mails unread, and she felt herself sinking, sinking quickly, and unable to pull herself up” (Adichie 155). Rather than rethinking her assimilation to American society, she loses touch with her home and herself.

Consequently, it is not this traumatic event that urges Ifemelu to reconnect to her Nigerian self but her realization that she has blindly followed her fantasy of the American dream. She has accepted the evaluations that come with the American cultural space and adopted a Westernized mentality. This becomes clear when Ifemelu speaks with a telemarketer on the phone. The telemarketer compliments her accent that she “had perfected” over the last three years in the U.S.: “‘You sound totally American’” (173, 175). To this, Ifemelu replies with: “‘Thank you’” (175). After she hangs up, she asks herself: “‘Why was it a compliment, an accomplishment, to sound American?’” (175). At this moment, Ifemelu recognizes that her acculturation process of assimilation is complete. However, she also becomes aware of the fact that this process moved her away from herself: “‘Her fleeting victory had left in its wake a vast, echoing space, because she had taken on, for too long, a pitch of voice and a way of being that was not hers’” (175). Ifemelu, as a way to avoid preconceptions that come with a foreign accent, has successfully blended into the American cultural space. However, the fact that this transition moved her away from her Nigerian cultural identity, sparks a new cultural awareness in her. Sackeyfio identifies that “Adichie’s Americanized Nigerians [...] accept foreign versions that mutilate their African authenticity, linguistic and cultural connections to *home*” (“Revisiting” 219, emphasis in original). Ifemelu’s decision to shed her perfected American accent attests to a new way of acculturating.

Ifemelu’s new awareness of her cultural identity is reflected in the contrast between her American appearance and her inner longing for her old self. Her life in the U.S. is happy and successful “and yet there was cement in her soul”; Ifemelu feels “a piercing homesickness” (Adichie 6). Accordingly, to Ifemelu, the day with the accent incident becomes “the day that she returned her voice to herself” (180). This incident portrays how her success of assimilation is overshadowed by the loss of her cultural identity. From this day on, Ifemelu opts for a bicultural identity and stops “cho[osing] silence” (298). Correspondingly, the issue of

assimilation uncovers the workings of white normativity that makes non-white people adapt to a white mainstream culture. Thus, from this day on, the words “overpowered her throat, and tumbled out” (290), and Ifemelu starts writing her blog called “*“Raceteenth or Various Observations About American Blacks (Those Formerly Known as Negroes) by a Non-American Black”*” (4, emphasis in original). Ifemelu begins the journey of finding back to herself and filling the “incomplete knowledge of herself” (289). In other words, she begins to redefine the concept of Blackness in America.

Apart from Ifemelu’s blog, two more narrative devices visualize her acculturation process on the discourse level: skin symbolism and season imagery. When she first comes to the U.S., “she hunger[s] to understand everything about America, to wear a new, knowing skin right away” (135). Through her boyfriend Curt, she then gains access to the American fantasy she longed for: “She had slipped out of her old skin,” and “[h]er skin was glowing” from the easy life Curt provided for her (200). However, after some time with Curt, Ifemelu notices the looks that she gets from people when she is with Curt: “The looks had begun to pierce her skin” (293). Being seen with her white boyfriend makes her aware of her own Blackness and the racial hierarchies in U.S. society. Thus, this skin symbolism is very powerful, as it shows that Ifemelu’s skin carries the meaning and the implications of Blackness. Similarly, Ifemelu’s first months in America are described as “her summer of eating” where she “enjoy[s] the unfamiliar” which is followed by her autumn of half blindness [...], the autumn of puzzlements, of experiences she had knowing there were slippery layers of meaning that eluded her” (113, 131). Subsequently, Ifemelu’s depression is depicted in winter imagery: “She was bloodless, detached, floating in a world where darkness descended too soon and everyone walked around burdened by coats, and flattened by the absence of light” (155); Ifemelu’s winter days are “stilled by silence and snow” (156). It becomes clear that the season imagery and skin symbolism aid in the visualization of Ifemelu’s identity development and her conception of Blackness. Before she opts for a bicultural identity, she redefines the concept of Blackness for the African diasporic community and herself. The next chapter will delve into this by examining Ifemelu’s meditations on (self-)representation.

4.2 Re-Defining the Concept of Blackness: Ifemelu’s Quest for Self-Representation

In *Americanah*, the concept of Blackness is constructed and challenged through representation. For instance, it is through books that Ifemelu begins to understand the conception of Blackness in America: “Obinze suggested she read American books, novels and histories and biographies. [...] *The Fire Next Time* was the first. She [...] kept reading until three-quarters of the book

was gone, then she stopped and took down every James Baldwin title on the shelf” (135). It is because of books that Ifemelu “finally understood”: “America’s mythologies began to take on meaning, America’s tribalisms—race, ideology, and region—became clear. And she was consoled by her new knowledge” (136). Bragg suggests that “[i]t is through such texts, in part, that Ifemelu begins to gain an understanding of African American historical experience that allows her to understand the processes of racialization to which she is subjected as a black person in America” (132). Accordingly, it is through this racial consciousness that Ifemelu exposes oppressive racial structures in U.S. society.

With her new knowledge and awareness, Ifemelu reveals that these structures are visible most of all in beauty standards. When Curt sees Ifemelu’s monthly issue of *Essence*⁶ on her table and calls it “racially skewed,” Ifemelu takes him to the bookstore, where she demonstrates the relation between dark-skinned women and representation (Adichie 294): “‘So three black women in maybe two thousand pages of women’s magazines, and all of them are biracial or racially ambiguous, so they could also be Indian or Puerto Rican or something. Not one of them is dark. Not one of them looks like me, so I can’t get clues for makeup from these magazines’” (295). Further, while showing Curt these magazines, Ifemelu points out that “‘hair products for *everyone* [...] means blondes, brunettes, and redheads. I am none of those’” (295, emphasis in original). Ifemelu illustrates how beauty norms in magazines, and society in general, are aligned with white women. Correspondingly, a universal lipstick is only “‘universal if you are white’” (295). This contradiction shows the Westernized mindset and white normativity inherent in “universal” beauty standards.

However, Ifemelu already encounters these beauty ideals in Nigeria. In terms of Westernization, these beauty practices can be referred to as “imperial aesthetics because they were introduced first by colonialism” (Yerima 643). In Ifemelu’s surroundings, people take pride “in being mistaken for mixed-race” (Adichie 22). Ifemelu’s aunt Uju, for instance, “avoided the sun and used creams in elegant bottles, so that her complexion, already naturally light, became lighter, brighter, and took on a sheen” (74). Similarly, Ifemelu’s mother regularly goes to the hair salon to relax her hair: “It was black-black, so thick it drank two containers of relaxer at the salon, so full it took hours under the hooded dryer, and, when finally released from pink plastic rollers, sprang free and full, flowing down her back like a celebration” (41). Accordingly, light skin and relaxed hair are celebrated in Nigerian society. In racial U.S. society, imperial aesthetics gain even more in significance: Before Uju and Ifemelu go to their job interviews, they are told to relax their hair, as braids are perceived as “unprofessional”

⁶ A lifestyle and fashion magazine that only features Black women.

(119). This demonstrates that in American society, in order to “own more power and acceptance therefore, one has to appear more like the powerful race—the White race” (Yerima 643). It becomes clear that imperial aesthetics, or white-normative beauty constructions, are modeled after “the White woman, not in her real self but as a media construction” (643). Hence, in Nigeria, imperial aesthetics are a result of colonialism and a symptom of Westernization.

Correspondingly, in the U.S., these ideals are implemented in TV shows and films and thus spread through popular culture. In her blog post titled “Why Dark-Skinned Black Women – Both American and Non-American – Love Barack Obama,” Ifemelu claims that “American black men like their [...] women light” (Adichie 213). Further, Ifemelu argues that “this is the reason dark women love Barack Obama. He broke the mold! He married one of their own. He knows what the world doesn’t seem to know: that dark black women totally rock” (214). Ifemelu recognizes that the president having a Black wife matters in terms of representation “because maybe finally somebody will cast a beautiful chocolate babe in a big-budget rom-com that opens in theaters all over the country, not just three artsy theaters in New York City. You see, in American pop culture, beautiful dark women are invisible” (214). Therefore, Ifemelu visualizes how white normativity leads to the invisibility of Black women in media.

Furthermore, Ifemelu illustrates this by using hair as a race metaphor. In her blog post “A Michelle Obama Shout-Out Plus Hair as Race Metaphor,” Ifemelu explains that “[s]ome black women, AB and NAB⁷, would rather run naked in the street than come out in public with their natural hair. Because, you see, it’s not professional, sophisticated, whatever, it’s just not damn normal” (296, 297). Cruz-Gutiérrez points out: “Black natural hair is not frequently celebrated in mainstream media, but rather devalued and considered scruffy, in need of being normalized” (“Blogosphere” 66). The normalization of white beauty ideals not only leads to the invisibility of Black women in media but also to their marginalization in society. Moreover, internalized Western beauty expectations drive Ifemelu and multiple other non-white women to not only alter their appearance but harm their bodies. After Ifemelu relaxes her hair for the job interview, she gets a “relaxer burn” (204). The burn grows continuously worse and, eventually, her hair starts to fall out (208). Thereupon, her friend Wambui advises her to cut her hair and “go natural” (208). She says: ““Relaxing your hair is like being in prison. You’re caged in. Your hair rules you”” (208). In this light, hair functions as a metaphor, as it represents the constraints imposed on Black women to fit into a white-normative society. Only when Ifemelu undergoes her transition to natural hair does she break free of these constraints and

⁷ American Black and Non-American Black

defies the representational norms. Consequently, Ifemelu's transition represents the first step toward her redefining Blackness.

A crucial part of her transition process are online spaces. After her transition, Ifemelu is first unhappy with her appearance, and Wambui tells her: "*Go online. HappilyKinkyNappy.com. It's this natural hair community. You'll find inspiration*" (209, emphasis in original). By visiting this website, Ifemelu enters "a virtual world where their coily, kinky, nappy, woolly hair was normal. And Ifemelu fell into this world with a tumbling gratitude" (212). Accordingly, this website, where Ifemelu finds connections and understanding, serves as a space for loving Blackness; it is a space for other voices where non-white women find true representation and validation. Cruz-Gutiérrez emphasizes: "Ifemelu's transition and the online hair community she first explores instigate her to gain agency in order to start a blog which turns into a safe place of communication and production of counter-discursive thoughts" ('Hairitage' 258). Ifemelu's transition signifies her decision to identify herself outside of Westernized definitions of beauty and femininity. Against this background, I argue that hair combines the processes of acculturation, representation, and identity and that online spaces function as forums for a discourse on and recognition of alternative worldviews.

Additionally, Ifemelu's use of hair websites and the start of her own blog introduce the issue of self-representation. After the magazine incident, Ifemelu writes an e-mail to Wambui with "the things she didn't tell Curt, things unsaid and unfinished" (Adichie 295). Again, it is Wambui who influences Ifemelu to take a leap: "'This is so raw and true. More people should read this. You should start a blog'" (295). Starting her own blog represents a decisive step toward redefining the concept of Blackness, as it shows that Ifemelu "never adjusts to or accepts America on the terms this world demands" (Androne 232). Rather, she readjusts the terms to fit her African diasporic self. Later, Obinze comments on Ifemelu's newfound agency when he tells her: "'But your blog also made me proud. I thought: She's gone, she's learned and she's conquered'" (Adichie 433). Obinze's comment suggests that Ifemelu is successful in redefining the concept of Blackness, at least in the space where she possesses the power of representation. It becomes clear that the "politics of self-representation is significant here, for natural hair communities become safe spaces advocating self-expression, countering invisibility and biased representation in mainstream media" (Cruz-Gutiérrez, "Blogosphere" 75). Just as Adichie challenges the English canon with *Americanah*, Ifemelu questions the beauty canon with her lifestyle blog. Therefore, the novel presents Ifemelu's blog as a crucial site for reviewing, reinventing, and reimagining.

In terms of self-representation, Ifemelu's blog achieves multiple goals. Firstly, contrary to other media, it offers a space for loving Blackness. Secondly, it portrays how sharing one's

own experiences breaks with stereotypes and traditional Western norms. By depicting real experiences, the blog uncovers racist mentalities present in the everyday and demonstrates how multiple subjectivities can question white normativity. Thirdly, as the blog entries “are inserted in the narrative tissue of the novel,” they “function as independent metatexts questioning the general media racism” (Mavrinac 2396). This way, the text refuses to portray “the media exclusively as producers of otherness and xenophobia” but rather indicates “the possibility for empowering the voices of those who have been silenced or discriminated” (2396–397). Most of all, the blog helps Ifemelu find her own voice and her true self: “The more Ifemelu writes, the more she understands herself” (Duce 250). This way, Ifemelu’s “digital exploration of race is also an act of self-exploration” (Bragg 131). At some point, Ifemelu realizes that “[s]he had become her blog” (Adichie 306). In other words, Ifemelu lives her reinvention of the concept of Blackness and achieves a new sense of diasporic identity through self-representation.

4.3 Chasing the Nigerian Dream: Ifemelu’s Return to a New Sense of Self and Home

As the previous chapters made clear, hair is not only a signifier of cultural adaptation and representation but also identity. Ifemelu’s identity formation reaches a peak when she finally accepts and even loves her hair the way it is: “On an unremarkable day in early spring [...] she looked in the mirror, sank her fingers into her hair, dense and spongy and glorious, and could not imagine it any other way. That simply, she fell in love with her hair” (Adichie 213). This way, Ifemelu’s transitioning and identity development can be interpreted as her “‘hairstory’, a term understood as a journey of personal development revolving around the importance of hair for Black women’s identity formation” (Cruz-Gutiérrez, “Blogosphere” 68). Furthermore, Ifemelu’s transition from relaxed to natural hair portrays her defying cultural and representational norms: “Adichie portrays transitioning as a weapon to undervalue the power of Western patriarchal constructs of femininity and beauty” (‘Hairitage’ 258). In terms of Westernized representations of beauty, Cruz-Gutiérrez argues that “the notion of controlling one’s hair and body as a metonymic representation of being in control of one’s identity suggests that transitioning can be read as the ultimate sign of Black women rejecting previously internalized discourses of normalized femininity and appearance” (258). In this light, Ifemelu’s transition, or hairstory, represents her identity construction outside of Westernized, white-normative definitions of beauty.

The trigger for Ifemelu’s transition is her moment of epiphany. Just as in “Imitation,” the moment of epiphany in *Americanah* can be linked to transitioning. Guarracino contends that

the “moment of epiphany [occurs] when Ifemelu, after years of fighting, finally ‘falls in love’ with her naturally kinky hair” (15). Accordingly, her epiphanic moment urges Ifemelu to construct an identity “free from patriarchal epistemological discourses on gender and race” (Cruz-Gutiérrez, ‘Hairitage’ 258). It would follow then that Ifemelu “[e]mbracing her natural hair, her natural self, evokes her being in control of her own identity formation from that moment onwards” (258). Therefore, her hair-related epiphany serves as a turning point in the narrative: “transitioning constitutes the beginning of Ifemelu’s journey towards self-discovery and self-understanding” (258). Shortly after this, Ifemelu starts writing her blog. Correspondingly, Ifemelu starts to share her own hairstory and begins to rewrite her diasporic self.

Ifemelu’s identity formation ends with her decision to leave the U.S. to move back to Nigeria. This decision is met with disbelief and warnings. This becomes apparent when Ifemelu tells her aunt Uju about it: “‘You are closing your blog and selling your condo to go back to Lagos and work for a magazine that doesn’t pay that well,’ Auntie Uju had said and then repeated herself, as though to make Ifemelu see the gravity of her own foolishness” (Adichie 13–14). This happens in a similar fashion when Ifemelu prepares for her move to Nigeria: “Before she left America, she had wired some money to Nigeria, and Bank of America had made her speak to three different people, each one telling her that Nigeria was a high-risk country” (426). Despite these negative reactions, Ifemelu sticks to her decision. Bragg clarifies that Ifemelu’s decision to leave America is not a sign of “failure to connect with the host nation; rather [it] engender[s] a political consciousness that gives meaning to her choice to return to Nigeria in the novel’s conclusion. She is choosing home with an awareness of the limits and possibilities offered in each locale” (130). Thus, she acts against the discourse of Westernization that values the American cultural space higher than the Nigerian one: Ifemelu “choosing home,” choosing Nigeria, valorizes the Nigerian cultural space and her Nigerian self.

Moreover, Ifemelu’s decision is in accordance with Hall’s presences as discussed in 2.3. Firstly, her American presence is her Americanah self, the part of her identity that she developed as an immigrant in the U.S. and that helps her navigate transcultural situations. Accordingly, her migration experience in America represents the “fateful/fatal encounter [...] between Africa and the West,” or rather between her American and Nigerian self (Hall, “Cultural” 136–37). Secondly, her European presence is the one that she already encounters in Nigeria before she leaves, the power structures of Westernization that allude to the racial hierarchies in the U.S. In this sense, the Americanah and the Big-Man motif can once again be understood as symptoms of Westernization. In 2.3, I stated that this presence necessitates a “dialogue of power and resistance, of refusal and recognition” (136). Ifemelu starts this

dialogue by creating a space for loving Blackness: she starts a blog that becomes a crucial part in her mission to redefine the concept of Blackness. Thirdly, her African presence is the one that she, in Hall's terms, "represe[s]" at first (133). However, it is also the presence that Ifemelu identifies as her true self and to which she reconnects: she finds back to her true self, her African origin, her home (134–35). Ifemelu's diasporic journey proves that "[t]he diaspora experience [...] is defined, not by essence or purity, but by the recognition of a necessary heterogeneity and diversity; by a conception of 'identity' which lives with and through, not despite, difference; by *hybridity*" (138, emphasis in original). Therefore, Hall's presences represent the influences on Ifemelu's diasporic identity and explain her decision to move back home.

What is more, Ifemelu's decision to return to Nigeria is in accordance with Hall's necessarily circular journeys. In 2.3, I cited Hall to illustrate that diasporic (symbolic) journeys are "necessarily circular" and never complete because "[d]iaspora identities [...] are constantly producing and reproducing themselves anew, through transformation and difference" (135, 138). Ifemelu's diasporic journey and identity formation demonstrate that transformation is an essential part of the diaspora experience. Sackeyfio notes: "Amidst the clash of cultures, transformative energies and multiple settings of the novel, an enduring love story emerges as Ifemelu comes full circle, longs for *home* and eventually returns, not as a splintered immigrant but a fully realized Nigerian woman" ("Revisiting" 226, emphasis in original). In this sense, to achieve full realization, Ifemelu needs to reconnect with her Nigerian roots: "Ifemelu's intellectual and emotional transformation and eventual reclamation of her *Nigerian self* [is] reified through her decision to return to Nigeria" ("Revisiting" 223–24, emphasis in original). The symbolic journeys, as well as the season imagery presented in 4.1, argue for the circular and cyclical structure of the diaspora experience: her return home represents "a new phase in her quest for a coherent identity – an identity which includes her years in America, her disillusionment and her hope. Adichie's bildungsroman does not end with identity achieved, but rather identity building as an ongoing process" (Androne 241). Akingbe and Adeniyi note that all characters in this novel "maintain a cycle of peregrination punctuated by switches in location, love relationship, job and lifestyle" which "affords them the privilege of becoming better persons equipped with cultural knowledge and ability to appreciate the uniqueness of every culture to which they are exposed" (49). The notion of returning in order to progress – displayed on the discourse level in the form of her blog and the content level in the form of her returning home – visualizes the process of Ifemelu's diasporic identity formation.

By foregrounding the African presence within her diasporic identity, Ifemelu precipitates a meditation on Africanness and her African cultural identity. Back in the U.S.,

Ifemelu learns of the African Students Association at her university through her friend Wambui. At their meetings,

[t]hey mimicked what Americans told them: *You speak such good English. How bad is AIDS in your country? It's so sad that people live on less than a dollar a day in Africa.* And they themselves mocked Africa, trading stories of absurdity, of stupidity, and they felt safe to mock, because it was mockery born of longing, and of the heartbroken desire to see a place made whole again. (Adichie 139, emphasis in original)

This passage “demonstrates how the single story of Africa is perpetuated in America, where the majority of people make no effort to distinguish among black people, to know their different origins or cultures, therefore simplifying and denying their identity” (Duce 250). Therefore, at the ASA, Ifemelu can participate in exchanging experiences of being African in America. This way, she is not only redefining the concept of Blackness but also the concept of Africanness. Additionally, this club helps its members maintain their connections to home. In comparison, back in Lagos, Ifemelu joins the Nigerpolitan Club. There, the returnees are “all encircled by a familiarity, because they could reach so easily for the same references” (Adichie 408). Fundamentally, they are mostly “listing the things they missed about America” (408). While Ifemelu feels comfortable in both clubs, she still feels a sense of displacement: “She was comfortable here, and she wished she were not” (409). Hence, these groups enable Ifemelu to compare her Africanness in the U.S. with her Africanness in Nigeria: They make her aware of and reassess her cultural identification and positioning.

Thus, what becomes clear is that in each country she is an insider-outsider: She is at once part of both worlds and outside of them. Duce points out that while her blog “allows Ifemelu to explore her diasporic identity and challenge generalizations about black identity, it also reveals her complex position as an insider-outsider in the globalized world” (251). Moreover, even though Ifemelu decides to return home, she “returns to Nigeria with the tangible American car, and her Americanah self that positions her as outsider-insider” (Ndigirigi 209). In the narrative, Ifemelu first serves as a representative of the African cultural space, and later as a representative of the American cultural space. However, both times Ifemelu resists the label and positioning that society gives her and positions herself in-between. Therefore, she combines the cultural spaces and allows the diaspora factor to become part of her identity. The positionings she obtains by U.S. and Nigerian society first restrict her but, eventually, they strengthen her, as she utilizes her status as an African diasporic individual to re-establish her ties to her cultural identity. It becomes clear that Ifemelu functions as a personification of Nigeria: a postcolonial nation that is “conditioned [...] to look towards

somewhere else,” and in the process of developing a new sense of a national and cultural identity (Adichie 276).

Subsequently, Ifemelu processes these new identifications in her new blog: *The Small Redemptions of Lagos* (418). When she first arrives in Lagos, she starts working for the magazine *Zoe*. However, she soon feels the same dissatisfaction that made her leave the U.S.: “At work, she felt an encroaching restlessness. *Zoe* stifled her” (411). Once again, Ifemelu creates her own safe space, a means for self-representation: “The blog becomes the only medium for her to express her true self” (Duce 249). Correspondingly, in the U.S. as well as in Nigeria her blogs enable her to afford a comfortable lifestyle without compromising her values. Duce notes that “[w]hile her first blog helps her understand the collective identity of African, diasporic subjects, her new blog enables her to consolidate her self-identity as a returnee and transnational subject” (250). Moreover, by means of her second blog, “she delves more deeply into the intricacies of her individual identity as a transnational woman, by reflecting on the clash between the Western and Nigerian cultures” (251). This becomes apparent in her blog post about the Nigerpolitan Club. There, she draws attention to the ways Lagos is different from New York, how Nigeria is different from America, and the faults returnees find with Lagos. However, Ifemelu stresses these distinctions to end with: “it is called assorted, and so get over yourselves and realize that the way of life here is just that, assorted” (Adichie 421). Accordingly, Ifemelu animates people to accept Nigeria the way it is, to cast off Westernized patterns of thinking. By means of self-representation, Ifemelu achieves a new sense of being: “she was at peace: to be home, to be writing her blog, to have discovered Lagos again. She had, finally, spun herself fully into being” (475). Thus, the new blog aids her in accomplishing another level in her identity formation and in elaborating further on her meditations on African diasporic subjectivity.

The novel ends with Ifemelu reconnecting with her first boyfriend Obinze. Androne notes that “[i]t is through her new blog and more significantly her return to Obinze that Ifemelu finds a new balance” (241). In this light, Obinze, the person who was one of the main reasons for why she went to the U.S. – by urging her to live her dreams there – is now one of the reasons she wants to stay in Nigeria. The text makes clear that Ifemelu and Obinze find back to each other and themselves through their cultural heritage: “Both Ifemelu and Obinze begin to identify values they share from their common Nigerian childhoods they had never before realized” (235). Interestingly, “[u]nlike her relationships with American men, Ifemelu finds with Obinze a deep bond that draws from their shared past and is free of politics and race” (241). Therefore, the novel stresses the importance and power of cultural heritage. Put differently, Ifemelu finding back to her Nigerian self goes hand in hand with her finding her

way back to Obinze: “Ifemelu’s relationship with Obinze [...] stands as an alternative ‘Nigerian dream’” (Hallemeier 237). Both Ifemelu and Obinze break out of Westernized systems and create their own normativity. This is emphasized by Obinze’s last words in the novel: “‘I know we could accept the things we can’t be for each other, and even turn it into the poetic tragedy of our lives. Or we could act. I want to act. I want this to happen’” (Adichie 477). With this, he acknowledges the ways their respective diasporic experiences changed both of them, but he also affirms the agency and empowerment gained through their experiences. Additionally, the open ending of the novel suggests endless possibilities due to the transformative element of the diaspora experience. Ultimately, with Obinze and through their shared past, Ifemelu returns to a new sense of self and home.

5. Conclusion

This thesis demonstrated how Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s novel *Americanah* and her short stories “Imitation,” “Jumping Monkey Hill,” and “The Arrangers of Marriage” from *The Thing Around Your Neck* portray Westernization – the predisposition for Western culture due to colonial remnants and neocolonial influences – but also the resistance of Western inclinations and the importance of cultural heritage. Firstly, the analysis of the short stories showed that the length restriction and the open endings enabled a clear address of specific themes: Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s themes of diaspora. The most prominent is the illusion of the American dream induced by cultural reification and mass media influence, or cultural and media imperialism. It became clear that the protagonists are at once affected by Westernization and also undergoing an identity formation process. In fact, this diasporic identity construction, triggered by a moment of epiphany, exposes and challenges Westernization. The short stories portray different forms of displacement which lead to moments of disillusionment with the American dream and the hegemony of Western thought.

The analysis of “Imitation” illustrated how the two symbols of the Benin mask and hair (transitioning) convey the processes of acculturation, representation, and identity formation. It became apparent that the protagonist, Nkem, develops from a voiceless, passive, susceptible character to a self-determined agent. This transition, and her transition from relaxed to natural hair, are mirrored in the original mask and her “original” hair. Eventually, Nkem realizes she is leading an imitation life influenced by Western fantasies. As a result, she questions her husband’s and her own Westernized mentality. Therefore, the imitation masks allude to Western cultural imperialism and appropriation which pose a threat to African cultural representation and subjectivity.

The examination of “Jumping Monkey Hill” gave an insight into meta-narrativity due to the story’s distinct form. It featured a look at a short story within a short story, a so-called meta-text that visualized the workings of representation. What is more, it demonstrated how meta-texts and self-writing can function as a space for loving Africanness, a space for the rebuilding of African subjectivity. The analysis revealed that the setting of the short story, the location of the African Writers Workshop, is symbolic of global coloniality as it recreates and represents white normativity. Furthermore, this revealed the hypervisibility and simultaneous silencing of the Black writers. The protagonist, Ujunwa, is the victim of sexual objectification; however, through her self-writing, she concurrently portrays the erasure of Black female bodies, the invisibility of Black women in media and society, and the possibility to regain representation and counter the universality of Western thought.

The last short story, “The Arrangers of Marriage,” presents all three types of displacement in the form of the protagonist’s move to the U.S., her acculturation process, and her disillusionment with the American dream. In this story, the fantasy of the American dream is subverted through Chinaza’s disillusionment which challenges Westernized mindsets. This is achieved through the clash of imagined America and its reality. The second displacement showed to be an attack on Chinaza’s cultural identity in the form of a forced assimilation to the host society. In this regard, her husband functions as the personification of cultural imperialism, as he reinforces cultural imperialism through a constructed superiority of American culture. However, Chinaza questions this superiority and her husband’s total assimilation to mainstream American culture. Instead, she opts for a bicultural identity and ultimately resists and challenges Western cultural imperialism by adhering to her Nigerian cultural identity.

Secondly, the examination of *Americanah* substantiated the mission of African novelists: to fight for African subjectivities by countering Westernized portrayals with a plurality of voices. As all themes from the short stories are presented and even more fleshed out in the medium of the novel, it served as a good example for a discussion of Westernization. Additionally, it offered a detailed insight into the diaspora experience in the digitalized, globalized age. Through Ifemelu’s diasporic journey and focalizer position, Adichie fights the battle against Westernization on an interpersonal level. The power hierarchies between the Global South and the Global North are therefore contested in transcultural experiences. These aspects speak to *Americanah*’s relevance in the context of the African diaspora and allude to the main themes of the text: the power of online spaces, hair politics, and the concept of Blackness.

The analysis of *Americanah* showed how Ifemelu discovers the workings of America’s racial hierarchy, the white normativity integral to U.S. society, and her host society’s

acculturation expectations. Furthermore, it showed how Blackness and the invisibility of dark-skinned women are both constructed through beauty standards, as Ifemelu illustrates how beauty norms are aligned with white women. To counteract this phenomenon, Ifemelu undergoes her transition whereby she breaks free of societal and representational constraints. Through blog entries that serve as meta-texts, Ifemelu uncovers and criticizes white normativity and racist mentalities in the U.S. Lastly, it showed how Hall's presences represent the influences on Ifemelu's diasporic identity and explain her decision to move back home, thereby enacting Hall's symbolic journey. It became apparent that Ifemelu resists the labels she obtains from each cultural space and positions herself in-between. Therefore, she combines the cultural spaces and allows the diaspora factor to become part of her identity. Ultimately, Ifemelu finds back to Obinze, herself, her home, and her cultural heritage.

Concludingly, it can be said that acculturation is a process of reinvention and creates a space for a redefinition of African subjectivity. Representation is crucial in the making of reality in people's minds and therefore offers a space for a redefinition of Black subjectivity and loving Blackness. Diasporic identity is affected by acculturative and representational factors and can function as the evaluating force between the Western and the African space. It portrays how beauty standards, culture, texts, and films exert influence on the self-perception of diasporic individuals. All of the above are impacted by everyday coloniality: the workings of Westernization that, through media and cultural imperialism, affect every facet of diasporic realities.

As became clear, Adichie's narratives share many similarities utilized to depict diasporic realities. First of all, hair is a cultural and representational signifier. Secondly, the Big-Man and Americanah motifs are shown to be symptoms of Westernization representing neocolonial power structures. Thirdly, the texts portray the power of narratives through meta-narrativity, self-writing, and self-representation. Lastly, all texts have open endings which stress the circular and cyclical nature of the narratives. Further, this points to the possibility of multiple worlds and alternative endings, as it suggests endless possibilities due to the transformative element of diaspora realities. This is also evidenced by the characters' circular journeys. Moreover, each text presents protagonists who rise from a position of choicelessness to the position of powerful agents. These characters are representatives of the Nigerian cultural space. As a result, the sum of diaspora identities from all texts accounts for the first step toward rebuilding a Nigerian national identity. As the narratives describe the two cultural spaces side by side, the reader can experience Westernization for themselves and follow the protagonists on their diasporic journeys. Adichie's diasporic narratives are defined by a plurality of worlds that counters the universality of Western hegemonic thinking.

Overall, this thesis demonstrated that Adichie's *Americanah* and *The Thing Around Your Neck* stress the importance and power of cultural heritage, and the agency and empowerment inherent in the diasporic experience. Moreover, this thesis uncovered how diasporic identities are formed in a globalized, postcolonial world. In this light, Anglophone African literature can be a resource for retrospection and the reinvention of the English canon. This discussion of Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's themes of diaspora revealed that Adichie's fiction dismantles Westernized value systems, as diasporic characters question the supremacist ideologies that they encounter during their transcultural experiences.

30247

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Appendix

Abstract

This thesis explores how Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s *Americanah* (2013) and her short stories “Imitation,” “Jumping Monkey Hill,” and “The Arrangers of Marriage” from *The Thing Around Your Neck* (2009) challenge normative systems and perspectives through diasporic voices. These works not only enrich the English canon but also the “single story of Africa” by narrating diasporic journeys of Nigerian characters who are not impacted by war and poverty but by the forces of Westernization. Westernization, rooted in ongoing coloniality, interferes with the processes of acculturation and representation. These processes are shaped by the notion of power, visualizing how the everyday of diasporic characters is defined by power asymmetries. When these asymmetries merge with culture and images, they create cultural and media imperialism. Drawing on acculturation theory and theoretical perspectives on representation and diasporic identity, this thesis demonstrates how Westernization influences migration experiences. It argues that Adichie’s fiction dismantles Westernized value systems through diasporic characters who question supremacist ideologies during their migration experiences. Through their inquiry of Westernized mindsets, diasporic characters reach a new level in their identity formation and a new sense of African subjectivity. The thesis exemplifies that Adichie’s narratives highlight the significance of cultural heritage and the agency and empowerment intrinsic to the diaspora experience, while also challenging Western mythologies and nurturing Nigerian cultural identities.

Zusammenfassung

Diese Masterarbeit untersucht, wie Chimamanda Ngozi Adichies *Americanah* (2013) und ihre Kurzgeschichten „Imitation,“ „Jumping Monkey Hill“ und „The Arrangers of Marriage“ aus *The Thing Around Your Neck* (2009) normative Systeme und Perspektiven durch diasporische Stimmen herausfordern. Diese Texte bereichern nicht nur den englischen Kanon, sondern auch die „single story of Africa,“ indem sie diasporische Reisen nigerianischer Figuren erzählen, die nicht von Krieg und Armut, sondern von den Wirkungskräften der Verwestlichung betroffen sind. Verwestlichung, welche mit anhaltender Kolonialität verwurzelt ist, greift in Prozesse der Akkulturation und Repräsentation ein. Diese Prozesse sind durch das Konzept von „Power“ geprägt und veranschaulichen, wie der Alltag der diasporischen Charaktere durch Machtasymmetrien bestimmt wird. Wenn diese Machtungleichmäßigkeiten mit Kultur und Bildern verschmelzen, schaffen sie einen Kultur- und Medienimperialismus. Auf der Grundlage der Akkulturationstheorie und theoretischer Perspektiven zu Repräsentation und diasporischer Identität zeigt diese Masterarbeit, wie die Verwestlichung die Migrationserfahrungen beeinflusst. Es wird argumentiert, dass in Adichies Erzählungen diasporische Charaktere verwestlichte Wertesysteme demontieren, indem sie während ihrer Migrationserfahrungen vorherrschende Ideologien hinterfragen. Durch die Hinterfragung westlicher Denkweisen erreichen die diasporischen Figuren eine neue Ebene in ihrer Identitätsbildung und ein neues Gefühl afrikanischer Subjektivität. Die Masterarbeit veranschaulicht, dass Adichies Erzählungen die Bedeutung des kulturellen Erbes sowie die Handlungsfähigkeit und das Empowerment hervorheben, die der Diaspora-Erfahrung innewohnen, während sie gleichzeitig westliche Mythologien in Frage stellen und nigerianische kulturelle Identitäten schaffen.