"Hey, I'm African Just Like You": Migration and Identity Construction in *Open City* and *Americanah*

Master's Thesis

Literary Studies

Specialization English Literature and Culture

Leiden University

Jasmin Back

s1600761

Date: January 11, 2016

Supervisor: Dr. J.C. Kardux

Second Reader: Dr. S.A. Polak

Universiteit Leiden

The Netherlands

Table of Contents

Introduction	3
1. The African Diaspora and Cultural Identities	7
2. The Construction of Identities in *Open City*	14
Language as a Means of Constructing Identities	19
Julius’s Narration Style	22
Julius’s Relationships With Other Characters	24
3. The Construction of Identities in *Americanah*	35
The Narrative Strategy in *Americanah*	41
Ifemelu’s Relationships With Other Characters	44
Conclusion	55
Works Cited	57

"To My Fellow Non-American Blacks: In America You Are Black, Baby."

(*Americanah* 220)

"Hey, I'm African Just Like You."

(*Open City* 40)

Introduction

The quotes in my epigraph introduce the main topics of this thesis: the construction of postcolonial diasporic identities and the conflicts of migratory life. The first quote is from Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's novel *Americanah* (2013). It is the headline of a blog entry written by the Nigerian protagonist Ifemelu: "To My Fellow Non-American Blacks: In America Your Are Black, Baby" (220). In the blog post Ifemelu discusses her experience as an African in the United States. According to her, one only becomes black outside of Africa. Race is therefore an important factor in her identity construction. The second quote is from Teju Cole's novel *Open City* (2011). A cab driver is displeased with protagonist Julius's behavior because he did not greet him immediately when getting into the cab. By saying "Hey, I'm African just like you" (40), he implies not only that there is a behavior code amongst black people in the United States but also that African migrants are supposed to "stick together". This scene shows not only the connections within the black community in the United States but also the notion of a cultural African identity. In other words, these two quotes stand for Ifemelu and Julius's experiences as black migrants in the United States. The quotes show that outside of Nigeria, they do not only experience migratory conflicts, but must face race and racism as well. Moreover, it becomes evident from their experiences that their relationships with African Americans vary

from friendship to hostility. While adapting to American culture, both protagonists are forced to contemplate on their racial identities.

In this paper, I will argue that race is very dominant in both novels; in fact, race is the strongest force that shapes Julius's identity, whereas Nigerian cultural identity has the most influence on Ifemelu and her behavior. Even though Ifemelu describes her experiences with the reality of race in the United States in detail in her narration and in her blog posts, in the end she returns home to Nigeria. In the first chapter of this paper, I will discuss the theories I will use to analyze identity construction and the protagonists' relationships with other characters. The main theories are Stuart Hall's thoughts on cultural identity, John Iceland's observation on immigrants in the United States, and Paul Tiyambe Zeleza' theory on the African diaspora. In the second and third chapters, I will analyze the novels to show how Julius and Ifemelu construct their identities and how these identities, in combination with other problems caused by migration, have an influence on their relationships with other characters and their homeland Nigeria.

In the first chapter I will first introduce John Iceland's models of immigrant adaptation, which I will use in chapters two and three for my analysis of the novels. Iceland distinguishes three models of adaptation "to explain how immigrants become incorporated into society: "assimilation, ethnic disadvantage, and segmented assimilation" (23). For my analysis I will also draw on Stuart Hall's theory on cultural identities. The first concept is the notion that a collective identity is stable (233), and the second the idea that identity is fundamentally unstable and metamorphic (236). He argues that the second position is the only view from which people are able to understand the "traumatic character of 'the colonial experience'" (236). Hall's theory is relevant as to how Ifemelu and Julius position themselves within the black

community. Paul Tiyambe Zeleza's theory on diasporic identities is similar to Stuart Hall's notion of collective identity. Zeleza argues that the relationships between the various groups of the historical and contemporary African diaspora are "difficult to map out" because of their diversity (42), and that they can range from "antagonism" to "assimilation" (43). These different sorts of relationships are dramatized in both novels as Ifemelu and Julius interact with African Americans; for example Ifemelu's relationship with the African American university professor Blaine ends because he thinks that she is not passionate enough about fighting against racism. Lastly, Teju Cole and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie do not belong to the generation of early post-independence writers, which Elleke Boehmer defines as a group that is identified with a "national narrative" (225), because they are too young. Cole's and Adichie's generation of writers is a group whose "geographic and cultural affiliations became more divided, displaced, and uncertain" (225). Moreover, Boehmer argues that language is an important tool for the expression of one's identity (197). I will show that accent adaptation plays an important role in *Americanah* and that in both novels certain words are signifiers of belonging to the black community.

The second chapter will be devoted to a close reading of Teju Cole's *Open City*. In this novel the protagonist Julius reflects on identities and migration during his walks through New York City. His encounters with immigrants of various parts of the world show the struggles many have to endure. At the same time he represses his Nigerian past and identity because, as a teenager, he raped a girl, though this event is only revealed towards the end of the novel. The reader does not receive much information about him unless he is specifically asked by another character in the novel. In Nigeria, Julius was considered to be white because his mother is European. While living in the United States he encounters racism as well as African Americans

who try to connect with him on the basis of their shared blackness. Julius often tries to disengage himself from these attempted connections because in his opinion "birth, race, or family [should not] entail ethical obligations" (Dalley 26). However, in the end he does not manage to keep a distance and most of the time, his actions indicate that he does recognize he shares a cultural identity with other African diaspora members.

The last chapter of this paper will focus on Adichie's novel *Americanah*. Whereas in Cole's novel various migrant identities of people belonging to several ethnic groups are shown, Adichie focuses mainly on the two Nigerian protagonists of the novel: Ifemelu, who emigrates to the United States, and her boyfriend Obinze who emigrates to the United Kingdom. I will concentrate on Ifemelu and not on Obinze in this paper because I will compare her to Julius and both go to the United States whereas Obinze goes to England. Ifemelu migrates to the United States for her higher education. There she has problems adapting to the American way of life; she falls into a depression after a traumatic sexual encounter with a stranger, but recovers after some time. She adopts an American accent and stops wearing her hair in braids but has it straightened instead. She also observes that skin color matters in another manner than in Nigeria. She uses these observations for her blog, where she elaborates on the experiences of being black in the United States. Ifemelu argues that white Americans rarely distinguish between a country of origin or an ethnicity but just see her and other people of African descent as black. In the end she returns home to Nigeria because even though she is successful in the United States, she feels restless and drawn to Nigeria. Thus, in this novel even though race plays a crucial role, Ifemelu's national cultural identity in the end has a greater impact on her decisions.

CHAPTER ONE

African Diaspora and Cultural Identities

In this chapter I will introduce the key terms and theories that are relevant for my analysis of the novels in chapter two and three. As I have already mentioned in the introduction Teju Cole and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie do not belong to the generation of post-independence writers but are mostly considered as third-generation Nigerian writers. Elleke Boehmer describes this type of postcolonial writers as cultural travellers or "extra-territorials" (227). This applies to Adichie as well as Cole. *Open City* and *Americanah* portray amongst other things the differences between the cultures of Nigeria and the United States, and protagonists who have to find a way to negotiate these cultural differences.

Boehmer argues that "migrant and/or diasporic writers" deserve more attention "as their situation is increasingly regarded as representative […] of postcolonial writing" (215). In their fiction Cole and Adichie portray the struggle and problems of migration in a postcolonial world. In his book on immigration and race in the United States, John Iceland observes that in general immigrants are less segregated from native-born people the longer they stay in the country (4-5). Furthermore, and most important for my thesis, he claims that the segregation from native-born white people is greatest amongst black immigrants (5). However, this segregation is smaller in metropolitan areas than in rural areas, perhaps because of the larger numbers of other immigrants, who act as a buffer between black and white people (7). A number of other studies have shown that there is a "strong link between black-white segregation and black disadvantage" (9). These disadvantages include, for example, limited "residential choices" and limited "access to good schools and jobs" (9). The characters in the novels face these struggles and problems as well.

According to Iceland, there are three different models of integration: assimilation, ethnic disadvantage, and segmented assimilation. Assimilation is the "decline of ethnic distinctions between groups […] through the adoption of mainstream attitudes and culture, and through educational and work experiences" (23). This occurred mainly with the immigrants from Europe in the nineteenth and early twentieth century. The ethnic disadvantage model explains that a good command of the language of the new country and knowledge of its culture does not automatically lead to assimilation; discrimination hinders this process (27). The segmented assimilation theory develops a similar argument as the ethnic disadvantage model, but it suggests that successful assimilation is more dependent on the social status and age of the immigrants (29-30). Thus, next to race, age and social status influence an immigrant's integration as well, as I will argue in the following chapters on *Open City* and *Americanah*. In the novels these models are intertwined; for instance, Julius in *Open City* appears to be completely assimilated according to the first model – until he meets Moji and is confronted with his past and African identity, which he suppressed earlier in the novel. However, he does encounter racism but chooses not to let it influence him. Moreover, because he goes to the United States as a college student and has the aspiration to succeed, he is able to assimilate in New York City.

Julius's African identity in the United States, and also the identities of the other African-born characters, are partly shaped by their being part of the new African diaspora. According to Paul Tiyambe Zeleza, a diasporic identity "implies a form of group consciousness" which is "constituted historically through expressive culture, politics, thought, and tradition" (33). Diasporas "are complex social and cultural communities created out of real and imagined genealogies and geographies […] of

belonging, displacement, and recreation, constructed and conceived at multiple temporal and spatial scales" (33). Zeleza distinguishes between two main types of diaspora: the historic diaspora and the contemporary diaspora (35). The first one was caused by the slave trade before today's African states were formed. Within the contemporary diaspora Zeleza distinguishes between three forms that occurred in chronological order. Ifemelu and Julius are part of the last one: the "diaspora of structural adjustment," which "has been formed since the 1980s out of the migrations engendered by economic, political, and social crises." It includes "professional elites, traders, refugees, and students" (36). Thus one of the main reasons why young people go abroad instead of staying in Africa is the political instability in some postcolonial African countries (Kaba 115) or, as portrayed in *Americanah,* the prospects of a Western education. Zeleza claims that a migrant who returns does not belong to the diaspora because not "the intention but the duration of the stay" is relevant (Zeleza 41). Therefore, according to Zeleza's definition Ifemelu does not belong to the diaspora because she stays for several years, but eventually returns to Nigeria. In my view, however, she is at least partly diasporic because she does not only stay for the duration of her studies in the United States but works there for several years as well.[1] Moreover, on returning to Nigeria it becomes evident that her stay in the United States has influenced her significantly. Furthermore, Zeleza distinguishes between three types of members of the new African diaspora. There are "African migrants", "diasporized Africans", whom he considers to be long-term African-born residents of the United States, and "African diasporas", who are the children of the diasporized Africans (41). Zeleza argues that this characterization is applicable to both the historic and contemporary diaspora (42). Since he does not specify long-term resident, and

[1] Braga sees Ifemelu as part of the African diaspora as well (2).

Ifemelu's stay has had a great impact on her life, I consider both Ifemelu and Julius as belonging to the African diaspora.

Moreover, Zeleza claims that the relationships between the various groups of the historical and contemporary diaspora are "difficult to map out" because of their diversity (42). These relationships are marked variably by "antagonism, ambivalence, acceptance, adaptation, and assimilation" (45). According to Zeleza possible factors are class, gender, religion or age (43). Moreover, each diaspora group has "its own connections and commitments to Africa, its own memories and imaginations of Africa, and its own conceptions of the diasporic condition and identity" (42), which lead to either "conflict" or "cooperation" (44). These different relationships are also represented in the novels, for instance, during the many encounters between Julius and Ifemelu with African Americans.[2]

Considering oneself or being considered by others as part of the African diaspora is only one factor that influences the construction of identities. Identities are socially constructed (Boehmer 234) and according to Stuart Hall they are a "production, which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation" (Hall 234). He argues that there are two ways of reflecting on cultural identity. He first describes cultural identity as based on the notion of a "fixed or stable" "collective" history, in which people are "affiliated by race or ethnicity" (233). The second position sees cultural identity as an "unstable, metamorphic, and even contradictory" identity because there is no "one experience, one identity" (236). The first notion of identity involves the belief that there is

[2] Louis Chude-Sokei has made a similar observation in his article "The Newly Black Americans. African Immigrants and Black America"; he argues that in Dinaw Mengetsu's novel *The Beautiful Things that Heaven Bears* African Americans do not share the "same notions of identity" as Africans because they do not share the same experience, history or politics (55).

> one, shared culture, a sort of collective "one true self". […] Within the terms of this definition, our cultural identities reflect the common historical experiences and shared cultural codes which provide us, as "one people," with stable, unchanging, and continuous frames of reference and meaning, beneath the shifting divisions and vicissitudes of our actual history. (Hall 234)

This notion can be applied to the collective identity of belonging to an African diaspora, for instance African Americans' shared background of slavery or the migrant conflicts of recent immigrants. Julius and Ifemelu belong to the latter category of immigrants. Moreover, Hall argues that "Africa is the name of the missing term" (235) that unites all people of African descent, and connects African Americans (or Afro-Caribbeans) with Africans abroad and in Africa. As I will show in the following chapters, this connection is represented in the novels in various ways. Furthermore, I want to point out that Hall makes a similar claim as Paul Gilroy does in *The Black Atlantic*. Gilroy argues that people of African origin feel a "bond" through "tradition" (191). However, this "tradition thus becomes the means to demonstrate the continuity of selected contemporary phenomena with an African past that shaped them but which they no longer recognise and only slightly resemble" (191). This phenomenon is depicted in a scene in *Open City* when Julius meets an African American who tells him, after he learns that Julius is from Nigeria, that he wants to raise his children "as Africans" (Cole 186).

The second view Hall describes is "related" to the first one "but different": "Cultural identities come from somewhere, have histories. But, like everything which is historical, they undergo constant transformation" (236). In other words, there is no

such thing as a fixed collective cultural identity. It changes constantly because it is "constructed through memory, fantasy, narrative, and myth". It consists of similarities and differences. For example two African Americans share a slavery background, since their ancestors were taken from Africa to the United States. This is the similarity but one needs to consider the difference as well. In this case this would be the different tribes from which the ancestors were taken and the different locations to which they were brought (238). Nonetheless, cultural identity exists and is not "just a mere phantasm." "It has its histories," which have a real effect on people. It is, therefore, a "point of identification." Hall summarizes cultural identity in one word: "positioning" (237). In the novels under discussion the positioning of the protagonists is clearly visible as Ifemelu and Julius struggle in finding a place as Africans in the United States. According to different reactions of people in their environment, they try to adapt in terms of behavior, language, and outward appearance, such as hair.

In other words, identities are socially constructed and influenced by many factors. The main tools the characters use to construct their identities are language and outward appearance. Elleke Boehmer points out that the choice of language is an important feature of "cultural authenticity, hybridity, and resistance" (197). Because English was the language of the "imperial rule," in colonial and postcolonial writing the use of the imperialist's language has been criticized and considered to be a betrayal (198). As a consequence, some African writers have tried to focus on their mother tongue. Others, however, for instance Nigerian writer Chinua Achebe, argued that "English as a lingua franca helped maintain national unity in Nigeria, a country where over 200 languages are spoken" (199). In Nigeria, English is "the one language which allows communication and cultural exchange between élites in different regions" (201). In fact, "English has been nativized in Nigeria"; thus this form of

English is called Nigerian English (Igboanusi 361). The debate whether an author or the characters in the novels should use a vernacular African language or English is not addressed in the novels I will discuss. Language use is nonetheless still a theme in *Open City* and *Americanah* in terms of dialect and accent adaptation because both protagonists' native language is English. First, while in Nigeria Nigerians generally pick up either a British or American accent, and secondly, being abroad as seen in Ifemelu's case, they try to lose their African accent and sound like a native. Moreover, Nigerian idioms, expressions, and cultural references are incorporated into the dialogues when needed (Boehmer 202). Other language features I will analyze in the following chapters are how black characters communicate with each other, for example, calling each other brother and sister in order to show that they are part of a black community. And lastly, I will analyze the style of narration in the novels. In short, Julius is an aloof narrator, whereas Ifemelu is more engaging, especially when she blogs about her observations on race and racism.

Next to language features, I will also analyze in what way outward appearance plays a role in the construction of identities in the novels. Vera Green points out that "outward signs and mannerism" can be evidence of being an immigrant (84). Being immigrants Ifemelu and Julius are faced with racism when they go to the United States. There they learn what behavior and looks are acceptable. One example is the silent nod black people use on the street to greet each other. Moreover, in *Americanah* hair plays an important role for African American and African women. For instance, straight hair is considered to be more sophisticated than braids or cornrows because it is more similar to the hair of white American women. This adaptation might appear trivial but, as I will show in chapter three, hair is an important part of Ifemelu's identity construction.

CHAPTER TWO

The Construction of Identities in *Open City*

The protagonist of Teju Cole's *Open City* is Julius, a Nigerian psychiatrist, who lives in New York City. He is in his mid-thirties and recently single; one night he decides to go for daily walks to unwind from his long workday at a hospital. On these walks Julius observes the city and encounters many people. His walks lead him to contemplate on the city's past and evoke memories of his own past. The novel portrays the many facets of migrant identities. In fact, Julius mainly meets other immigrants and tells their stories, whereas about his own past only later in the novel more details are revealed.

In this chapter I will analyze how Julius constructs his identities through outward appearance and language as Boehmer and Green argue that these are important factors in identity construction. Moreover, I will use Iceland's theories to show Julius's adaption process, which suggests, for example, that race is a very important factor but that age and class play a role as well. Furthermore, I will use Zeleza's and Hall's theories to analyze Julius's encounters and relationships with other characters in terms of cultural identity and membership of the African diasporas. I will compare him later to *Americanah*'s protagonist Ifemelu since they share similarities in their migratory lives. One of the aspects I will focus on in the first part of this chapter is the language in *Open City*. Firstly, I will show that the language that is used in the dialogues is relevant to Julius's identity. For instance, the word "brother" is used between black males in order to create a common ground. Furthermore, I will show in the second part of this chapter that Julius's identities and his emotional detachment influence his relationships with other people.

Race is very important in *Open City*. Strangers treat Julius the way they do based on his blackness. This means, for example, that he experiences racism from some white people, or some African Americans tell him how much they like Africa. Furthermore, being the child of a Nigerian father and a German mother, he was treated differently in Nigeria because of his lighter skin color. Julius's narration as well indicates that race is important; every time he describes strangers, he categorizes them according to their ethnicity or race based on their looks. For instance, when he goes to the cinema he describes the audience as follows: "The ticket buyers were young, many of them black, […]. There were some Asians, too, Latinos, immigrant New Yorkers, New Yorkers of indeterminate ethnic background" (28). However, when it comes to himself, Julius rarely describes himself as black. Throughout the novel Julius explicitly mentions his whiteness more often than his blackness in the United States. However, race is more present through his many encounters that are based on race and are presented in a more implicit manner than his stories about his whiteness. He mentions that he is aware of some people's racist reaction to his skin color in the United States, but he does not appear to respond emotionally to this racism. He is aware that it is there, but seems unaffected. There are two examples, which I would like to examine more closely with regard to Julius experiencing racism. The first scene is when he describes his experience at a classical music concert:

> […] it never ceases to surprise me how easy it is to leave the hybridity of the city, and enter into all - white spaces, the homogeneity of which, as far as I can tell, causes no discomfort to the whites in them. The only thing odd, to some of them, is seeing me, young and black, in my seat or at the

> concession stand. At times, standing in line for the bathroom during intermission, I get looks that make me feel like Ota Benga, the Mbutti man who was put on display in the Monkey House at the Bronx Zoo in 1906. I weary of such thoughts, but I am habituated to them. (252)

As the audience at the concert is usually all white and elderly, people notice him because of his age and skin color and stare at him. Comparing himself to a Congolese who was on display at an exhibition at the beginning of the twentieth century, he writes that "he is weary of such thoughts," which implies he has had them before, and probably regularly because he is used to them now. Julius does not judge the people who stare at him; in fact, he chooses not to dwell on it too much. This implies that in the beginning of his stay in the United States, Julius had trouble ignoring stares from other people. He was thus – and still is – aware of the influence of his skin color but he has learned to distance himself from it.

The second example is a scene in which Julius is waiting for a train at a subway station, when two children approach him and start talking to him.

> A girl of thirteen sat on the bench next to me. Her ten-year-old brother came to join her. They were out of earshot of their parents who, save one or two unconcerned glances in our direction, were absorbed in their own conversation. Hey mister, she said, turning to me, wassup? She made signs with her fingers and, with her brother, started laughing. […] They both turned to me. Are you a gangster, mister? Are you a gangster? They both flashed gang signs, or their idea of gang signs. It was midnight, and I didn't feel like giving public lectures. He's black, said the girl, but he's

> not dressed like a gangster. I bet he's a gangster, her brother said, I bet he is. Hey mister, are you a gangster? They continued flicking their fingers at me for several minutes. Twenty yards away, their parents talked with each other, oblivious. (31-32)

In this passage children mock Julius because of his race. They have the notion that all black people are gang members, criminals, or "gangsters" as they call them. They probably react to stereotypes they have seen in movies and flash invented gang signs at him and address him in an informal manner by asking him "wassup", thus imitating the talk of stereotypical black criminals they probably hear on television. Julius attributes his lack of reaction to the fact that it was late. Furthermore, he mentions that their parents stood twenty yards away and that they were "oblivious". By doing so, he silently criticizes the parents. His reaction is again very passive; he mentions the occurrence without any explanations of how it made him feel because all of a sudden he thinks about maybe seeing his maternal grandmother again (33).

Julius's skin color played an important role already while he was growing up in Nigeria, since he had a lighter skin than others in Nigeria: His music teacher at military school "looked at [him], a half-Nigerian, a foreigner, and what he saw was swimming lessons, summer trips to London, domestic staff; and thus, his anger" (83). The thoughts of the music teacher show that in Nigeria a lighter skin was often associated with wealth. This experience is repeated when he and his aunt have to go to a poorer part of the city to buy clothing for his father's funeral. Children stare at him when he emerges from the car "because, from their point of view, we would have represented unimaginable wealth and privilege, an impression strengthened by my 'whiteness'" (223). Thus from an early age on Julius has been confronted with being

different because of his skin color. Perhaps this prepares him in a certain way for his experience with race in the United States. Both experiences have taught him that skin color is not irrelevant. Julius attempts not to think about it in depth. In fact, he admits to his sense of being different only once:

> The name Julius linked me to another place and was, with my passport and my skin color, one of the intensifiers of my sense of being different, of being set apart, in Nigeria. I had a Yoruba middle name, Olatubosun, which I never used. That name surprised me a little each time I saw it on my passport or birth certificate, like something that belonged to someone else but had been long held in my keeping. Being Julius in everyday life thus confirmed me in my not being fully Nigerian. (78)

This scene is the only one in the novel where Julius explicitly admits to his feelings of being different. His first name is German, his skin color is neither white nor fully black, and even though he grew up in Nigeria, his Yoruba middle name sounds strange to him. He obviously does not consider himself "fully Nigerian," and rejects a collective Nigerian cultural identity.

Julius does not identify himself by his race. His skin color is a feature that implies his origin. However, in the novel Julius rarely comments on the color of his skin. In his memories of his childhood, he reflects on people's reactions towards his "whiteness" and during his encounters with other black people, he usually retreats when the conversation turns towards his African origin. In other words, Julius does not want to fulfill behavior obligations because of his race. At the same time he

avoids the subject of his country of origin, Nigeria. He represses his Nigerian identity and rejects, therefore, anything that is related to this cultural identity.

Language as a Means of Constructing Identities

Language is an important factor in identity construction (Boehmer 197-198). In *Open City* this is represented in the dialogues, that is, in the language Julius uses and in his narration style. The protagonist, Julius, is the first-person narrator in the novel (Dalley 26). On his walks people and buildings trigger his memory, and his narration mostly takes the form of an interior monologue (Dalley 28).

In *Open City* Julius behaves according to the unwritten code of greeting other black people. This can occur silently or by addressing each other with the term "brother". He reacts to a social obligation and therefore fulfills an expectation based on race. For example after a visit to a museum, Julius has to wait ten minutes in the rain until he can finally catch a cab. "I got into the car and immediately the driver said, Where? I must have looked lost. I tried to remember my home address" (40). Julius still thinks about his visit to the museum while interacting with the cabdriver. Julius's preoccupation occurs more often throughout the novel: Other instances are when he is with his former professor Dr. Saito (14), or when he is with his ex-girlfriend Nadège (61). After he regains the memory of his address, he gives it to the driver and says: "So, how are you doing, my brother?" By calling him "my brother," he implies that the cab driver is black as well (55, 101), and that race is a connection. This is confirmed when the cab driver answers, "Not good, not good at all, you know, the way you came into my car without saying hello, that was bad. Hey, I'm African just like you, why do you do this?" (40). This scene shows that black people are expected to bond with each other in the United States. The African driver feels

rejected because Julius did not greet him immediately and gives him the silence treatment during the entire ride. Julius is not "sorry" because he "was in no mood for people who tried to lay claims on [him]" (40). Inwardly Julius is angry, but in the end when the driver stops several blocks before the actual destination, he does not argue with the driver and pays him, "adding the standard tip." As in the passages I discussed earlier, Julius is very passive. In the beginning of this scene Julius cares for a second when he apologizes, saying that his mind was elsewhere and asking how the drive was. Later, he does not argue with the driver and forgets about the incident. This is similar to the scene when the children mock him while he waits for the subway. But it shows not only a connection among black people in the United States in general, but also the bond of black immigrants. Being African sets them apart from African Americans and the country of origin is replaced by the common factor Africa.

Another example of the term "brother" to denote a racial bond in the novel occurs between Julius and two black men before they rob him:

> There had been, it occurred to me, only the most tenuous of connections between us, looks on a street corner by strangers, a gesture of mutual respect based on our being young, black, male; based, in other words, on our being "brothers." These glances were exchanged between black men all over the city every minute of the day, a quick solidarity worked into the weave of each man's mundane pursuits, a nod or a smile or quick greeting. It was a little way of saying, I know something of what life is like for you out here. (212)

This is an example that shows the connection between young black males, no matter what their origin. Obviously, one cannot ignore the fact that later on they rob Julius; however, it is not explicitly said that they rob him because he is black or whether race is not an issue in this case. They do call him "nigger" in a negative way, though (213), a word which, as Julius explains earlier, is used often among black people without a negative connotation. I think, therefore, that he is "just" being robbed and the word "nigger" is used as a general insult because they do not know whether he is African or African American.

Accent is not much present in *Open City*. Julius never tells the reader what his English sounds like or that he has to make a choice, as Ifemelu does in *Americanah*. The only time an accent is mentioned is when Julius meets Kenneth, the museum guard, again. The small talk appears to be one-sided, which Julius later confirms: "he launched into a monologue, flitting from one subject to another in a Caribbean accent." Here Julius classifies Kenneth by noticing his accent. He uses Kenneth's accent to give him an identity. Kenneth then says, "I'm really interested in African culture anyway. Are you Yoruba?" This generalization of the African continent irritates Julius. "Kenneth was, by now, starting to wear on me" (53). This is similar to the phrase Julius used earlier when talking about the cab driver, "lay[ing] claims on me" (40). The choice of words is repeated and confirmed when Julius continues, "Hey, I'm African just like you. Kenneth was making a similar claim [as the cab driver]" (53). This scene and Julius's choice of words show that he does not wish to feel a connection based on race. However, after leaving the bar he reflects on his encounters with Kenneth and the cab driver and begins to understand the reason of the feeling of connectedness among black people. This is the only scene in the novel where he partly identifies with African Americans, adopting a cultural black identity.

In other scenes in the novel, he shows compassion but does not appear to actually identify himself with them.

> [Ellis Island] had been built too late for those early Africans – who weren't immigrants in any case – and it had been closed too soon to mean anything to the later Africans like Kenneth, or the cab driver, or me. Ellis Island was a symbol mostly for European refugees. Blacks, "we blacks," had known rougher ports of entry: this, I could admit to myself now that my mood was less impatient, was what the cabdriver had meant. This was the acknowledgement he wanted, in his brusque fashion from every "brother" he met. (54-55)

Here it is implied that he recognizes the fact that African Americans and Africans still encounter racism, and that this creates a bond between them. "Blacks had known rougher ports of entry" explicitly refers to the treatment of African slaves on board of slave ships, at their arrival in America, and their enslavement in America. By using "we blacks", he implies that even though the slave trade and slavery have long been abolished, and despite the achievement of the Civil Rights Movement, black people still face racism in the United States.

Julius's Narration Style

In Julius's narration style it becomes evident that he wants to create an identity for himself that is not based on the color of his skin, or his country of origin. Instead, he attaches himself to the city he lives in, New York City. His style of narration is very

distanced. He describes other people in detail, remembers their part of a conversation, but only in flashbacks reveals parts of his childhood and youth.

When Julius describes strangers, he always tries to mention their ethnicity, for instance "I met a Haitian man" (70), "one was white, one Asian, and the other two black" (196); and he identifies someone else as "Filipino" (242). He does that in order to show the vast diversity of people in New York City. Moreover, Julius is a first-person narrator, who on his walks remembers incidents (Vermeulen 41) mainly from his life in the United States, but sometimes flashbacks to his childhood. The latter become more frequent towards the end of the novel after he has met an old acquaintance from Nigeria, Moji, who identifies more with Nigeria than Julius does (Dalley 31-32). Julius's narration, largely an interior monologue (Dalley 27), is distant and aloof. He often mentions that, when talking to other people, he is absentminded, as shown in the example with the cab driver. Another example of Julius not fully paying attention is when he visits his friend Professor Saito: "When Professor Saito asked me […] to read the civil unions story all the way to the end, I did so, fully understanding the printed words but without engaging with them. Afterward, we discussed the story, and that, too, I did at a certain distance" (171). Here he admits to a "certain distance" while conversing with Saito. Furthermore, he usually repeats the words other people say to him. However, when he remembers himself talking, he merely says that he did, but does not mention the contents of his talks: "Again, I did most of the talking. I tried, again, to draw [Moji] out on the subject of recycling. She responded in yeses and nos, as though she knew well that I was prattling, filling in the silence" (204). Julius argues that what he said was not important by saying Moji would probably think so. Louis Chude-Sokei argues that Julius is a narrator with a strong "anomie and penchant for withdrawal". He

continues: “For a novel so deliberately worldly […] and so committed to the random interactions of multiple types of individuals emerging from interlacing diasporas, its dubiously stand-offish relationship to black Americans is notable” (66). Every time Julius is asked about his origin he withdraws from the conversation (67).

In other words, Julius is a native Nigerian, but he distances himself from his home country and barely speaks about his past. “He admits his Nigerian nationality only when pressed and then with an ironic disavowal of its claim to encompass identity“ (Dalley 26). He feels at home in New York City; for instance when being in Belgium he acts how is expected to act as an “outraged American” during a political discussion about the Taliban and 9/11 (Cole 120). At the same time, many of his friends and acquaintances have a migrant background, and he never refers to himself as American. He does, however, act according to his blackness; for example when he silently greets other black people, he feels part of the black community in the United States. Still, some African Americans immediately see that he is from Africa and focus on this fact while talking to Julius. Dalley summarizes Julius as a man who “resists the pressure of collective identification, objecting to the belief that accidents of birth, race, or family should entail ethical obligations” (Dalley 26). I agree with Dalley in so far that this is what Julius tries to be and often is. It is especially true for his relationship with Nigeria, a collective national identity he rejects. However, on the other hand he submits to some external pressures such as greeting other black people.

Julius’s Relationships With Other Characters

In this part of the chapter, I will analyze how Julius’s identities influence his relationships with other characters and to his home country Nigeria. Firstly, I will focus on his relationships with his friends, and secondly, with strangers, whom I will

divide into unspecified black people, African Americans, and Africans. And thirdly, I will focus on his relationship with his family and Nigeria. Here, I will include Moji, an old acquaintance of Julius, whom he, as it turns out, has raped as a teenager, because she triggers his memories of his past towards the end of the novel. In this part of the chapter I will use Iceland's theories on immigration to show how well integrated Julius is, and I will use Hall's theory on cultural identity and Zeleza's theory on the African diasporas in order to analyze Julius's relationships.

In the novel Julius appears to have many acquaintances but only a few friends. In fact, his best friend remains nameless throughout the novel (179, 193, 197, 236) and, in the end, moves out of New York City (242). This friend is the one Julius goes to when he wants to talk, however, though the encounters are never described in detail (179). He thus has a close friend but in his narration he distances himself from him. Another friend of Julius is Professor Saito, who used to be his English literature professor and later on became a friend. He even mentions that he felt closer to Saito than to his relatives (10). They share a connection: Because Saito is part of the Japanese diaspora, he has encountered racism as well (173). He grew up in the United States but during World War Two he was forced to go to an internment camp (9). According to Saito, he felt American and therefore did not understand why this happened to him. When Saito dies, Julius realizes that their friendship has been private and that they had no common friends (184).

Julius opens up to a stranger he meets on an airplane to Brussels: Dr. Maillotte. When he says he is from Nigeria, she says, "Oh Nigeria. Nigeria, Nigeria. Well, I know a great many Nigerians, and I really should tell you this, many of them are arrogant" (88). This is the first time Julius engages himself in a conversation about Africa and Nigeria. He explains Nigerians' arrogance by saying that they probably

want to "make [their] presence felt" (88). Maillotte has lived in the United States for many years, but she is originally from Belgium and returns frequently to her home country, mainly to visit her friends. Julius tells her that his "last visit happened two years ago, and that was after a gap of fifteen years; and it was a brief visit. Being busy all these years was part of it, and losing some of the connection, as you said, also plays a role. Also, my father died not long before I left, and I have no siblings" (142). Significantly, he does not mention his estranged mother but Julius admits freely to this stranger that nothing ties him to his home country. This is the only time in the novel that Julius has an honest conversation about his connection to Nigeria with a stranger.

In an internet café in Brussels Julius meets Farouq, an Arab whom Julius calls "brother" after asking for his name and introducing himself (101). However, he describes Farouq's behavior as "aggressive familiarity" (102). This shows that Julius is aware of this form of greeting other black people and he mostly participates in it, as I have already shown in the first part of this chapter. However, he usually does not initiate it because he thinks it is too forward. Although Julius tries not to identify himself through the color of his skin, in the end he surrenders to these social norms often. One time when he meets Farouq and another friend in a café, they discuss politics and Julius is pushed into the role of the "outraged American" during a political discussion on the Taliban and 9/11 (120). He does act on this expected role, but he mentions to the reader that he did not feel outraged at all. This shows Julius's ambivalent behavior. On the one hand he sees himself as a worldly New Yorker but he also behaves according to the black "code". And on the other hand he rejects his Nigerian identity but he also emotionally does not feel American. In a way, Farouq voices Julius's opinions, which he himself does not speak out loud: Farouq believes

that people are able to live together regardless of their origin and beliefs because it works in his internet café (112-113). These three characters are the ones with whom Julius engages most closely.

Throughout the novel Julius has many encounters with strangers. The focus lies on random encounters between black people. Less than twenty pages into the novel, Julius is walking through Harlem when "an old man with an ashen face and bulbous yellow eyes" passes by and "raise[s] his head to greet" Julius (18). At first, Julius seems to remember the man but then realizes that he does not know him at all. However, he returns the silent greeting and mentions rather randomly that "in the Harlem night, there [are] no whites" (18). This example shows once again that he is an observer but he does engage in the silent greetings among black people. He acts on his identity of being black. In doing so, he fulfills external obligations. This bond between black people is also visible when he treats a patient. A World War Two veteran tells Julius how proud he is to "see a young black man like yourself in that white coat, because things haven't ever been easy for us, and no one has ever given us nothing without a struggle" (210). Thus being black in general forms a connection stronger and more important than whether one is African or African American. Even Julius is affected by the legacy of slavery and racial violence. After his talk to the bootblack, he imagines seeing a lynched man hanging in a tree. He is haunted by the African American past (74-75). Thus Julius feels connected to the members of the historic African diaspora and identifies sometimes with the cultural identity of the members of the African diasporas.

On the other hand, some African Americans seem to recognize Africans on the basis of minor characteristics. For instance, when Julius sends a package to Farouq in

Belgium, he does not want stamps with flags on the package because it might appear too patriotic. The man behind the counter answers:

> I know. And he added, after a pause, I know, my brother. Then he said, Say, brother, where are you from? 'Cause I see, I could tell you were from the Motherland. And you brothers have something vital, you understand me. You have something that is vital for the health of those of us raised on this side of the ocean. Let me tell you something: I am raising my daughters as Africans. (186)

This African American tries to connect with Julius on the basis of the fact that they are both of African origin. Julius remains polite even after the man recites his own poetry to Julius, but he vows to avoid this particular post office in the future (188). Thus some African Americans in the novel try to reconnect with their African origin, and therefore claim a collective identity. However, Julius does not want to be part of this identity and keeps his distance. Chude-Sokei argues on this topic that Cole's novel

> dramatizes a tiptoeing around what is, in fact, a primary concern for African immigrants, and therefore a driving force behind these new fictions: the relationship with black Americans, the most influential representatives of the "old" African diaspora. Not only are the symbols and rhetoric or gestures towards transnational racial solidarity and ethnic pride mocked, stereotyped, or revealed to be meaningless. The very relationship

> with black America is treated as a tense, silent, incomparable, and awkward, more a question than a foregone conclusion. (68)

This is shown through Julius's reluctance to talk about Nigeria to strangers and to actively participate in the silent greetings. He does return these, but does not initiate them. Thus, Julius rejects a Nigerian cultural identity and can relate more to a cultural identity of the African diaspora members.

Julius went to the United States when he was seventeen years old. He left right after he finished military school and applied in secret to American colleges (84-85). In the beginning of the novel the reader learns that his father is dead, and that he has no contact with his mother and only sporadic contact with an aunt in Nigeria. He went to military school because it was far away from his parents, and this suited all of them, himself and his parents (76-77). The reason for Julius's troubled relationship with his parents is not mentioned but it cannot be only his rape of Moji, of which the reader learns at the end of the novel, because Julius mentions his unhappy childhood memories before the rape occurred: "I recall wrestling with myself about my unexamined loyalty to my father, and my growing antipathy toward my mother" (77). These are Julius's thoughts at the age of ten while he is being driven to military school. Thus, Julius's rejection of everything Nigerian might be rooted in his bad relationship with his parents. Julius' last visit to Nigeria was two years ago before the events in the novel and, before that, there was a fifteen-year gap. He has no connections left there, he admits to Dr. Maillotte on the plane to Brussels (142). Moreover, he does not, or does not want to, remember much from Nigeria:

> The past, if there is such a thing, is mostly empty space, great expanses of nothing, in which significant persons and events float. Nigeria was like that for me: mostly forgotten, except for those few things that I remembered with an outsize intensity These were the things that had been solidified in my mind by reiteration, that recurred in dreams and daily thoughts: certain faces, certain conversations, which, taken as a group, represented a secure version of the past I had been constructing since 1992. But there was another, irruptive sense of things past. The sudden reencounter, in the present, of something or someone long forgotten, some part of myself I had relegated to childhood and to Africa. An old friend came to me out of this latter past, a friend, or rather an acquaintance whom memory now made convenient to think of as a friend, so that what seemed to have vanished entirely existed once again. (155-156)

This passage shows that he is aware that his memories of the past and Nigeria are a construct. He also says that this is a “secure version”. Thus, he constructs his memories in a way that they do not have any negative connotations. This passage also announces the arrival of Moji, who will trigger more of his memories of the past that will force him out of his comfort zone for a while. However, at the end of the novel, Julius returns to his old state and focuses again on New York City. “Julius denies the need for rootedness in favor of a mannered performance of worldly sophistication” (Dalley 19).

His relationship to Nigeria is like his narration style: distant. Interestingly enough, even though Julius seems to reject everything that ties him to Nigeria, the reader finds out that Julius is Yoruba and that he still remembers Yoruba culture.

When Julius sees two blind men in a short amount of time, he tells the myth about the Obatala, the creator of bodies in Yoruba religion (25). Once more, Julius only observes but does not elaborate any further. Nonetheless, this scene shows that there is still some connection to Nigeria. He grew up in a Yoruba culture and this knowledge is still present in his thoughts. However, after he finishes the anecdote of the god who forms disabled bodies when drunk, he changes the topic abruptly to the last time he went to see a movie. He appears to repress his memories of Africa and his African culture.

Julius is, however, affected to a certain extent by the misrepresentation of Africa in movies (29). If the music does not relate to the country where the movie takes place, or if Africa is portrayed as waiting for the help of the good white man, he notices. Moreover, he is irritated by the fact that Africa is always represented as a continent as opposed to a landmass consisting of many different ethnicities and cultures, and nations with often enforced country borders (28-29).

Julius appears to be well integrated into American culture; he has a good job, friends and even though he appears detached, he also appears careless. According to Iceland's segmented theory, key factors for a successful assimilation are age and aspiration to succeed. This is true for Julius. He went to the United States at the age of seventeen to study and now he is a psychiatrist. The only problem is that his aspiration to succeed is motivated by his repression of his national identity. This repression is caused by the rape he committed as a teenager and comes back to haunt him at the end of the novel. However, even though the ending suggests a change in his identity construction, I do not believe that it affects his assimilation significantly.

When Julius meets Moji in a supermarket, he does not recognize her. "She looked Yoruba, with a slight slant to her eyes and an elegant swoop to her jaw, and it

was clear from the accent that that was where I should look for the connection between us" (156). Again, Julius describes her in detail, guessing her nationality and ethnicity. Moreover, her accent is mentioned. This is, in fact, the only time an African accent is mentioned. The reader does not know whether Julius has kept his regional accent or if he has adopted a standard American accent over the years. Moji is different from Julius in that she is more connected to Nigeria. She clearly distinguishes, for instance, between Africans and African Americans: "I suppose that the things black people have to deal with in this country – and I don't mean me or Julius, I mean people like you [Julius's unnamed friend], who have been here for generations – the things you've had to deal with are definitely enough to drive anyone over the edge. The racist structure of this country is crazy-making" (203). Moji triggers Julius's memories of Nigeria and his past in the second half of the novel. He appears less distant than in the beginning of the novel. Because Julius tries to deny his Nigerian identity, meeting Moji confuses his routine, his general thinking. He remembers for instance his father's funeral when he was seventeen. Towards the end of the novel, Moji reminds Julius of the time he raped her. This information is given in free indirect speech (Vermeulen 53). "He offers no reply to her accusation, instead turning, as always, to historical comparisons - an anecdote about Nietzsche" (Dalley 31). His reaction is important; it undermines the detachment he has shown throughout the novel. Vermeulen argues that the rape has traumatized Moji; she could never forget (53). Julius on the other hand has forgotten her to the point that he does not recognize her when they meet again in a supermarket. This is Moji's main point of accusation, not the rape itself but that he has forgotten. She reveals, therefore, that in Julius's detachment from places and people lies an "ethical flaw" (Dalley 31). In this denouement of the plot it becomes even more evident that Julius has repressed his

national identity for years. He acknowledges the fact that he has been the villain in someone else's life (Cole 243). Even though he reevaluates himself as a person, he goes back to the old ways because "remaining here in the city is the only thing that makes emotional sense to [him]" (248). Only the metaphor of dying birds at the end of the novel implies a possible change (259-259) in Julius's identity construction towards embracing his African and Nigerian cultural identity because it is a repetition of bird migration he observes in the beginning of the novel (3-5).

In conclusion, Julius creates his identity mainly based on race but at the same time refuses to identify himself by race and his nationality. His awareness of his skin color started at an early age, but as an adult he attempts to negate the fact that it has an influence. When faced with racism, he stays calm and tries to forget about it immediately. He refers to these events as if nothing happened. At the same time, he acts according to the unwritten code of greeting other black people either by exchanging brief looks or addressing each other with the term "brother". Moreover, his distant narration adds to his identity as an observer in the novel. He tries to disengage himself from a collective national identity and a diasporic identity; however, he does occasionally identify himself with African Americans. After his rape of Moji becomes known, he briefly realizes that his behavior was wrong but then he focuses again on New York City. Only the bird metaphor at then end implies a change. Thus on the one hand, Julius is very open-minded and likes to observe and talk to strangers. On the other hand most times, he remains distant and barely reveals his origin or past to others. At the end of the novel, it becomes clear that the repression of his African identity influences his behavior the most: He keeps a distance to friends and acquaintances. Raping Moji when Julius was younger is the

reason for this repression, and with her return, his African identity returns as well. Nonetheless, race is the dominant factor in Julius's identity construction.

CHAPTER THREE

The Construction of Identities in *Americanah*

Americanah is about a couple that experiences migratory life separately. Ifemelu has the chance to obtain a student visa and goes to the United States in her early twenties. After some struggles, she becomes a successful blogger and speaker on race and racism. Obinze on the other hand is not as lucky and cannot realize his longtime dreams of going to the United States. After graduation he goes to England with his mother and stays there as an illegal immigrant. After several years he is exposed immediately before trying to marry a woman with a European Union passport and is deported back to Nigeria. In this paper I will focus mainly on Ifemelu because I am interested in the representations of identities and relationships in relation to the United States and not England.

In this chapter I will argue that nationality, skin color, hair, speech, and narration are factors in the construction of identities. Secondly, I will analyze how these identities influence Ifemelu's relationship to her country Nigeria and other characters in the novel. I will use Iceland's views on immigration and race in order to analyze Ifemelu's integration into American culture, and in order to analyze her relationships I will draw upon Zeleza's theory on African diasporas and Hall's theory on cultural identity. I will show that, as opposed to Julius, Ifemelu struggles throughout the novel "with the many identities [she has] to wear" as a Nigerian and an immigrant in the United States (Guarracino 8). Finally, I will argue that Nigerian cultural identity is the most important factor in identity construction for Ifemelu because in the end she desires to return home to Nigeria.

I will first focus on Ifemelu's Nigerian identity. Like Julius, Ifemelu is Nigerian. Since her family is not very rich, she has never been abroad. In fact, when

she migrates to the United States to study, she leaves her home country for the first time. Her family is not poor, but not as wealthy as that of her classmates. This is evident when she compares her own home with that of her friends. Her childhood is marked with many family visits from more distant relatives (52-53). This suggests a tight bond with her family, which will help her when she moves to the United States and which will eventually be one of the reasons to return home. While growing up in Nigeria the children in the novel usually have an international orientation; many dream of studying in the United States or England (65). Like Adichie herself, they grow up reading British children's literature (Adichie, "African 'Authenticity'" 42). Ifemelu, however, does not share these dreams in the beginning of the novel because of her poorer background. But her schoolmates tell of their vacations in Europe and Obinze shares his passion about the United States, whereas his mother prefers British culture. Obinze admires the United States; "'You look like a black American' [is] his ultimate compliment" (67). This Western focus intensifies when Ifemelu and Obinze are in their thirties. Obinze's wife, Kosi, cannot decide on where to send her daughter to primary school, a French or a British one. Obinze reminds her that their generation had a Nigerian curriculum (45-46, 55-56, 111). These examples show that part of her Nigerian identity is influenced by a Western orientation caused by colonialism in her country.

Ifemelu often claims that race does not play a role in Nigeria. After she returns home, she says, "I feel like I got off the plane in Lagos and stopped being black" (476). However, the nuances of skin color are important in Nigeria as we have already seen in *Open City*. For instance, Ginika is a so-called "half-caste" and has a lighter skin, and is therefore considered to be beautiful (6, 124). Obinze makes a similar observation when he dislikes the fact that his wife, Kosi, enjoys being mistaken for a

“half-caste” due to her fairer skin (22). Furthermore, Aisha, the hair braider, comments on Ifemelu’s ethnicity. In the beginning she thinks she is Yoruba because of Ifemelu’s hair and skin tone. Apparently Yoruba have a darker skin tone than Igbo (14). But skin color in Nigeria does not seem to affect Ifemelu directly as she never comments on it critically. It only becomes important when it turns into race when she moves to the United States.

One of the major themes in *Americanah* is that the social construct of race only applies once being in the United States. As Ifemelu writes one of the first blog entries in the novel, “Dear Non-American Black, when you make the choice to come to America, you become black. Stop arguing. Stop saying I’m Jamaican or Ghanaian. America doesn’t care. So what if you weren’t ‘black’ in your country? You’re in America now” (220). Her choice of words shows that “blackness” is a social construct, which pushes nationality and ethnicity into the background. She implies that in the United States race becomes the primary factor to establish one’s identity. If a person is black, it does not matter where he or she is from. Her aunt repeats this idea when Ifemelu uses the work permit of someone else who does not look like her at all; her aunt Uju argues that to white people all black people look similar (120). At the same time there is a social consensus in the United States that one is not supposed to notice race (127). For example, when Ifemelu goes shopping with Ginika and Ginika is asked at the register by which saleswoman she was helped, Ginika cannot describe the woman according to her skin color because in the United States “you’re supposed to pretend that you don’t notice certain things” (127). This incident is similar to the time Ifemelu babysits for Kimberly. Via Ginika, Ifemelu finally finds a job to babysit Kimberly’s children. Kimberly calls all black women beautiful, which Ifemelu does not realize until one day when Kimberly says, “’Oh, look at this beautiful woman,’

and pointed at a plain model in a magazine whose only distinguishing feature was her very dark skin. 'Isn't she stunning?' 'No, she isn't.' Ifemelu paused. 'You know, you can just say 'black'. Not every black person is beautiful'" (146-147). In her narration Ifemelu rarely speaks of her experience with racism but she elaborates on it more generally in her blog. Thus, the blog is the outlet for her feelings about her experiences with race and racism. Her cousin Dike, on the other hand, suffers so much from racism that in the end he tries to commit suicide because of his sense of otherness. For example, in school camp he is not given any sunscreen because the teacher thinks it is not necessary because of his skin color (183-184). Dike admits that he just wants to be "regular" (184).

Hair is an important means to construct and express one's identity in *Americanah*. This is made clear when in the beginning of the novel Ifemelu describes her mother's "glorious" hair (41). In her younger years Ifemelu wears her hair in braids. She continues this style when she moves to the United States until she has to go to her first job interview. Then she straightens her hair for the first time because braided or natural hair is considered to be unprofessional (119, 202-204, 211-212, 216-217, 296-298). Many Africans and African Americans in the United States, and in Nigeria as well, share this view. Adichie confirms in an interview that these views are taken from real life (Channel 4 News). In the novel Ifemelu attributes the importance of straightened hair to Western influence. She gives the example of before-and-after shoots in magazines where women with kinky hair would always have straightened hair in the after photo. After having straightened hair for a while, Ifemelu sees the impact this treatment has on her hair: Her hair starts to fall out. She immediately cuts it and starts wearing her hair naturally in an Afro (12). In the beginning, she struggles with the proper care of her kinky hair. One time she goes to a

farmers' market with her boyfriend Curt and is verbally attacked by another black man, who says that Curt, a white man, is only with Ifemelu because of her wild hair. He implies that Curt is only with her because she represents the exotic, wild savage (211-213). After this incident she turns to the Internet and finds help in an online forum. There she learns how to best take care of her hair and how to feel good about it, and wear an Afro with confidence. Hair is thus one of the ways Ifemelu constructs first her Westernized identity in the United States and later, before she returns to Africa, she changes her back to normal, and by doing so she embraces her African identity.

Next to hair, language in general and accents in particular are another important tool to construct one's identity. In *Americanah* Igbo does not appear in a major role in relation to Ifemelu even though it is, next to English, her other mother tongue. She speaks it to Obinze at the beginning of the novel when they compare who knows more phrases. Years later when Dike visits Ifemelu in Nigeria, he understands the language and has a desire to speak it as well at some point in the future. As I have already mentioned in this chapter, Obinze is American-oriented and speaks English with an American accent, whereas his mother prefers British English. When Ifemelu moves to the United States, she adopts not only the accent but also the American way of speaking. When during orientation week a student implies that her English is not good enough even though it is her mother tongue, Ifemelu starts practicing an American accent (133-134). Obinze helps her and suggests reading American novels to help her integrate (135-136). And Ifemelu manages well until one day when she decides to stop faking an American accent and to switch back to Nigerian English. "Her decision [is] prompted by a telemarketer's call" (173). The operator is surprised as to how good her accent is and she replies with a "thank you" (175). She is

overcome by shame, feeling that it should not be a moment of victory to sound American, and switches back to her Nigerian accent. Perhaps this is the moment she realizes that she cannot and does not want to sacrifice her Nigerian cultural identity in order to please Americans:

> It was convincing, the accent. She had perfected, from careful watching of friends and newscasters, the blurring of the *t*, the creamy roll of the *r*, the sentences starting with a "So", and the sliding response of "Oh really," but the accent creaked with consciousness, it was an act of will. It took an effort, the twisting of the lip, the curling of the tongue. (173)

Oluwafunlola describes this as the moment when Ifemelu "asserts her identity as a Nigerian" (20). In other words Ifemelu chooses to adopt her nationality as a cultural identity. Moreover, it shows that an American accent does not come naturally to her and that even after spending several years in the United States it still takes "an effort" to perform the accent. After she switches back to Nigerian English, she reflects on her former speech behavior: "Before, she would have said 'I know', that peculiar American expression that professed agreement rather than knowledge […]" (4). She switches back to Nigerian English because she does not feel comfortable and herself when she speaks American English. "He [Blaine] spoke the kind of American English that she had just given up, the kind that made race pollsters on the telephone assume that you were white and educated" (177). This passage about her African American boyfriend, Blaine, shows that by speaking American English on the phone one is considered white and educated. Thus, if one has an accent, one is either black or a foreigner, or both. At the beginning of the novel, Ifemelu felt the need to contradict

this linguistic stereotype but in the end Ifemelu's cultural identity as a Nigerian is stronger than her "perfect" assimilation into American culture.

In the novel, not only accent is part of identity but word choice is important as well. In the United States, Ifemelu learns to adapt her vocabulary. For instance the word "fat" is a word with a negative connotation in the United States and a neutral statement in Nigeria (5-6). "Thin" on the other hand is a good word in the United States but definitely not a compliment in Nigeria (124). Furthermore, the word "half-caste" is an insult in the United States, whereas in Nigeria it is merely a description. In fact, in Nigeria it has a positive connotation because it implies that one's skin tone is lighter. Ifemelu learns to avoid the word "half-caste" and use "biracial" instead. A word that is never used in the novel, except once to discuss its usage, is "nigger". When Ifemelu is in class at university a discussion turns towards the question whether one can say this word or not. An African American says it is acceptable when used by an African American and in a non-insulting context. Another African American thinks that if people hear the word being used often, they will use it too without thinking and thus offending someone. The discussion becomes so heated that the teacher has to stop it, when one African American student accuses the African students that slavery would never have happened if Africans had not sold their own people (137-138). These examples show that Ifemelu adapts not only her accent, but also learns what words she had better replace by other ones.

The Narrative Strategy in *Americanah*

Americanah is a third-person narrative that is mainly focalized by Ifemelu and to a lesser extent on Obinze's life. The narration is not chronological. It starts with Ifemelu making her decision to move back to Nigeria and while she has her hair

braided she remembers the past, making the narrative a retrospective account of her youth and emigration to America. As I have already mentioned, her anonymous blog, called “Raceteenth or Various Observations about American Blacks (Those Formerly Known as Negroes) by a Non-American Black” (4), provides Ifemelu’s social commentary on her experience with race and racism in the United States. It is a very important element of the novel, which is introduced in the opening pages of the novel. She starts her blog after her break-up with her white boyfriend Curt (184-185); according to Guarracino, the blog marks “a wider moment of racial self-awareness of which the blog is the elaboration in writing” (15). The racial/cultural clashes that are thematized in the blog posts echo the rest of the third-person narrative (Braga and Gonçalves 5). Furthermore, Guarracino argues that the blog entries are an active element in the novel because sometimes the reference to the story line is not always explicit, which stimulates the reader to think about the novel’s content more deeply (16). I agree with Guarracino and Braga and Gonçalves that Ifemelu’s blog posts are engaging because her blog content indeed does not always directly refer to the previous part of the narrative. Ifemelu does encounter race and racism but talks less explicitly about it in the third-person narrative than in the blog.

The first blog entry sets the tone of her blog when she elaborates on the racial classifications in the United States: white, Jewish, Hispanic, and black. Braga and Gonçalves argue that Ifemelu uses “limiting categories” (often ironically) in order to describe people. For instance, “Zipped-Up Negroes [are] black people who do not discuss racial issues” (7). “The labels she creates in the blog to describe her experience as a non-American black can only be taken as a backlash of her being misjudged by Americans, who fail to understand ethnic diversity” (Braga and Gonçalves 3). Ifemelu’s way of writing about people is similar to Julius’s habit of

categorizing the people he meets into ethnicities. Her blog represents her opinion. When giving her first talk at a diversity workshop, she realizes that the people who come to listen to her are not necessarily the same people who read her blog. Thus, she adapts her speeches, not stating her true opinion. For instance, she would say that America "has made great progress for which we should be very proud" (305), whereas, on her blog she would write, "Racism should never have happened and so you don't get a cookie for reducing it" (305). This ambivalence is caused by the first workshop she gives, when the audience, which is not familiar with her blog, expects her say that America is on the right track when it comes to racism. When Ifemelu is dating Blaine, an African-American university professor at Yale, he tries to influence the content of her blog. "She did not ask for his edits, but slowly she began to make changes, to add and remove, because of what he said. Then she began to resent it. One of her posts sounded too academic, too much like him" (312). Later on, she removes the post from her blog because, as she says, "I don't want to explain, I want to observe" (312). Thus, in the beginning she gives in to Blaine's opinion but she removes the post after a while and focuses again on her own way of writing. In her blog posts Ifemelu focuses on her observations on and experiences with race. Moreover, she never mentions that she engages with her readers in the comment section; she only deletes inappropriate comments (305). Here, we can see another similarity to Julius's narration style. He, too, prefers to remain distant and only observe without explaining what really is going on. Blaine disagrees with Ifemelu's attitude, as he sees her blog as a "cultural commentary" and therefore as a responsibility to society (312). According to Guarracino, Adichie herself has said that she wanted the novel to be a social commentary because she chose to make her protagonist a blogger (2). However, the blog changes Ifemelu: "The more she wrote,

the less sure she became. Each post scraped off yet one more scale of self until she felt naked and false" (5). In other words, Ifemelu realizes that because she really has to look for new content, she does not present her thoroughly developed opinions on her blog anymore. This change occurs at the same time as her yearning for Nigeria returns. I argue, therefore, that her national identity has ultimately a bigger influence on her than her experience with race and racism in America.

Ifemelu's Relationships With Other Characters

In the second part of this chapter I will analyze how Ifemelu's dual identity, as a Nigerian and black woman in America influences her relationships with her home country and other characters in the novel. Just as in *Open City,* the dynamics between African Americans and Africans and Americans vary. Some African Americans get along well with Africans and others do not because the first group is from the historical diaspora and the second group is part of the contemporary diaspora. Therefore some might share a similar cultural black identity and others do not (Zeleza 43-45). This is summarized nicely in a speech given by the president of the African Students Association of a university in Philadelphia, which Ifemelu attends.

> "Very soon you will start to adopt an American accent […] You will start to admire Africans who have perfect American accents, like our brother here, Kofi. Kofi's parents came from Ghana when he was two years old, but do not be fooled by the way he sounds. If you go to their house, they eat kenkey every day. His father slapped him when he got a C in a class. There's no American nonsense in that house. He goes back to Ghana every year." (140)

In the first part this speech, the president makes it clear that most Africans will adopt an American accent after a while and that it is in fact desirable to do so. This is similar to the incident when Ifemelu describes Blaine's accent-free American English, which is considered to sound educated and white. The president also emphasizes that even though one might adopt a perfect American accent, it is important to hold on to African tradition and values, for instance a good focus on studying. He implies that being lazy is "American nonsense". He continues:

> "Try and make friends with our African American brothers and sisters in a spirit of true pan-Africanism. But make sure you remain friends with fellow Africans, as this will help you keep your perspective. […] Please note that in general, African Americans go to the Black Students Union and Africans go to the African Students Association. Sometimes it overlaps but not a lot. The Africans who go to BSU are those with no confidence who are quick to tell you 'I am originally from Kenya' even though Kenya just pops out the minute they open their mouths. The African Americans who come to our meetings are the ones who write poems about Mother Africa and think that every African is a Nubian queen. If an African American calls you a Mandingo or a booty scratcher, he is insulting you for being African." (140)

In the second part of the speech, he emphasizes the bond between African Americans and Africans but also that it is even more important to keep in touch with fellow Africans. Apparently there are two types of Africans: those who pretend to have been

in the United States for a while but cannot stop talking about their home, and those who do not. Moreover, he describes two types of African Americans: the first type has a deep connection with the "motherland" and loves everything African, and the second one does not like Africans because they do not have a slavery background and take privileges such as education for granted for granted (138). This feeling of resentment can go both ways, though. When Ifemelu talks to a Caribbean-African, she learns that some Caribbean-Africans think that the behavior of African is inappropriate (113).

When Ifemelu meets Blaine, an African American, and her second boyfriend in the United States,

> she knew right away that he was African American, not Caribbean, not African, not a child of immigrants from either place. She had not always been able to tell. […] But the longer she spent in America, the better she had became at distinguishing, sometimes from looks and gait, but mostly from bearing and demeanour, that fine-grained mark that culture stamps on people. (176)

This passage implies that African Americans behave differently, in the way they move and how they look, than immigrants from Africa or the Caribbean. Perhaps, she suggests that they are different because of the legacies of slavery and the decades of racism they had to endure. With Blaine she shares an academic connection (177-182), but towards the end of their relationship it becomes evident that they do not function well together because of their different backgrounds. They do not understand each other fully. For instance, after admitting to feeling restless (340), Ifemelu does not

attend a demonstration Blaine organizes for an old black security guard who was accused of dealing drugs. Ifemelu attends a free lunch organized by another professor instead. They fight and Blaine accuses her of not living up to her blog's content and that the "blog is a game that [she] doesn't take seriously" (345). But more importantly, "she recognize[s], in his tone, a subtle accusation, not merely about her laziness, her lack of zeal and conviction, but also about her Africanness; she was not sufficiently furious because she was African, not African American" (345). This is a similar sentiment Blaine's sister had already mentioned. Blaine's sister writes a memoir and has troubles with her editor because he thinks her book is only about race. The editor tells her that they have to make sure to "transcend race" and make it not about race (334). This statement enrages Blaine's sister because her memoir is in fact about race and racism, and the editor's reaction to the content of her book is a denial that racism is strongly present in the United States. She then argues that Ifemelu can only write her blog successfully because she is from Africa, because she is from outside the United States. Otherwise "she'd just be labeled angry and shunned" (336). Blaine's sister argues thus that African Americans have to struggle more to achieve something in the white-dominated United States. Ifemelu and Blaine stay together throughout Obama's presidential campaign, the only thing they seem to have left in common (352). Hallemeier argues that "Blaine's experience of growing up black in America has left him unprepared to function in a relationship in which his goodness, which is to say his advocacy for racial justice, does not result in the absolute solidarity he desires and expects" (240). Indeed according to Blaine's standards Ifemelu is not political enough, because of her background; as she herself mentions several times in the novel, she only became black when she came to the United States, and in her blog she only wants to make observations. During a dinner

with Blaine and his friends, Paula mentions to Ifemelu that she makes her students read Ifemelu's blog in order to push them "out of their comfort zone" (325). This piques the interest of the group and someone takes out a cell phone and reads her last blog post out loud. This post is about how white Americans should not counter a tale of racism experienced by African Americans with a story of their own but instead should listen and ask questions. Ifemelu argues in her post that neither African Americans nor non-black Americans like to acknowledge that racism still occurs because it is a painful topic. Thus, she proposes that white Americans listen. However, the only thing the group remembers of the blog post is an apparently funny anecdote about a woman's dress of the 1960s, a woman who might have demonstrated against school desegregation (325-328). The point Ifemelu is trying to make here is that Paula says she makes her students read the blog posts in order to start to think differently, but all the group remembers is a fictive anecdote about a former owner of a dress from the 1960s instead of the main point, which is combating racism.

Ifemelu's relationships with white Americans are as complicated as her relationships with African Americans. Before she dates Blaine, Ifemelu has a relationship with a white man, Curt. She knows him through her employer Kimberly. He is Kimberly's brother. Kimberly is overly politically correct, as I already mentioned at the beginning of this chapter. Her sister, on the other hand, often tries to insult Ifemelu, hoping she does not notice or is too polite to reply because early in the novel, Ifemelu often does not recognize a situation in which she is supposed to be insulted. Ifemelu, however, learns quickly and is not too timid to provoke Kimberly's sister sometimes. Kimberly always apologizes for her sister's behavior, and so Ifemelu actually begins to like Kimberly (166). Kimberly and her husband are

affluent, and Ifemelu attends many parties to keep Kimberly company. At these parties, Ifemelu would often be the only black person present and other people approach her and tell her about their safaris and charities on the African continent (169). It irritates Ifemelu that these people generalize Africa. This issue we already encountered in *Open City*. The relationship with Curt gives her confidence and happiness, which is what she needs after her depression and breaking off contact with Obinze. Moreover, he is rich and helps her to get her first job after graduation. For a while, Ifemelu appears to be happily integrated into American culture and society. Her situation here resembles Iceland's segmented assimilation, which posits that not only race, but also age, gender, and class play an important role in assimilation. Ifemelu comes to the United States at a young age, and with the help of the upper-class Curt, she finds a good job. Thus she is happy for a while until she realizes that she should return to Nigeria. After meeting an old school friend Ifemelu is reminded of Obinze and eventually she retreats from Curt. She even begins to dislike Curt because he would deny her encounters with racism (291-294). Reflecting on their relationship later, she says to a group of Blaine's friends:

> "The only reason you say that race was not an issue is because you wish it was not. We all wish it was not. But it's a lie. 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. When you are black in America and fall in love with a white person, race doesn't matter when you're alone together because it's just you and your love. But the minute you step outside, race matters. But we won't talk about it. […] and when we come to nice liberal dinners like this, we say that race doesn't matter

> because that's what we're supposed to say, to keep our nice liberal friends comfortable." (290-291)

In her speech she makes it clear that racism is still an issue in the United States. It is an issue that needs to be acknowledged because Ifemelu observes on several occasions that people pretend that racism is not a major issue, or do not realize that it is an issue, that needs to be dealt with. She mentions the example of a biracial couple. She argues that this constellation might work in private but in public that couple is exposed to racist remarks. However, her main point is liberal white and African Americans' denial that racism exists anymore, their claim that the United States has overcome race. She also criticizes people who suffer from racism yet comply to this façade by saying racism is not a problem anymore. In saying so, she criticizes herself because that is one of the things she did in the past as well.

Ifemelu's relationships with other Africans and Nigerians are less tense than with African Americans. Her relationship with Obinze is troubled because when poverty forces her to accept a job that involves sexual favors; she breaks off contact with him because of her feelings of guilt and depression. However, her relationships with other Nigerians, mostly her friends, are good. In one of her blog posts she advises newly arrived Africans on how to behave and what to expect in the United States:

> To My Fellow Non-American Blacks: In America, You Are Black, Baby!
>
> Dear Non-American Black, when you make the choice to come to America, you become black. Stop arguing. Stop saying I'm Jamaican or

> I'm Ghanaian. America doesn't care. So what if you weren't "black" in your country? You're in America now. […] You must nod back when a black person nods at you in a heavily white area. It is called the black nod. It is a way for black people to say, "You are not alone, I am here too." (220)

This is similar to Julius's story when he mentions the silent greeting with other black men in the streets of New York. Ifemelu mentions other examples of advisable behavior such as making up for bad behavior of other black people or staying away from scenes of crimes committed by a black person if one does not want to be stopped by the police because one fits the profile (220-221). This blog post shows the connection between new African immigrants. All of them have to familiarize themselves with the concept of race first, and what it entails to be black in the United States: to be subject to racism.

Ifemelu's relationships with Nigerians she knows are open and friendly. Upon her arrival in Philadelphia, Ifemelu's old school friend Ginika shows her around, for which Ifemelu is very grateful. Ifemelu notices that Ginika falls back into, a by now outdated, Nigerian English when she talks to her. Ginika wants to show to Ifemelu that she has not changed and does not speak in her adopted American accent. Initially, Ifemelu stays in close contact with Obinze and her parents back in Nigeria, and she lives with her aunt and cousin. Thus her Nigerian network remains intact (132), as opposed to that of Julius, who has almost no connection in Nigeria left.

Ifemelu's relationships with Nigerians who are strangers are shaped in a negative way by a collective national identity because she does not like to meet other Nigerians:

> She hoped her driver would not be a Nigerian, because he, once he heard her accent, would either be aggressively eager to tell her that he had a master's degree, the taxi was a second job and his daughter was on the dean's list at Rutgers; or he would drive in sullen silence, giving her change and ignoring her "thank you", all the time nursing humiliation, that this fellow Nigerian, a small girl at that, who perhaps was a nurse or an accountant or even a doctor, was looking down on him. (8)

This scene shows several things. First, that Ifemelu has a recognizable Nigerian accent when she speaks English, which identifies her as a Nigerian. It is implied that Nigerians feel obligated to engage in more detailed small talk when they meet other Nigerians. Also, there appears to be a competition between two Nigerian strangers when they meet about who is more successful. Secondly, it implies the sexist manner men think about women in Nigeria. Ifemelu does not enjoy encounters with fellow Nigerians in the United States because of their behavior, which is in fact shaped by Nigerian culture. Despite these negative traits and rejecting a collective national identity in this case, Ifemelu returns to Nigeria because that is the place where she feels home the most (6).

Meeting Nigerians whom he knows but who is not friends is not a problem for Ifemelu. For instance when she meets an old school friend Kayode in front of a supermarket, "they hugged, they looked at each other, said all the things people said who had not seen each other in many years, both lapsing into their Nigerian voices and their Nigerian selves, louder, more heightened, adding 'o' to their sentences" (221). This shows that both of them have created an American self by adopting

another accent and reducing the intensity of their way of talking. Moreover this scene implies that the American selves of Kayode and Ifemelu are forced and do not come naturally, for when they can be their Nigerian selves, they appear to be more relaxed and conversation flows more easily. This is another indicator that a collective national identity plays the most dominant role in identity construction in *Americanah* and is enforced when Ifemelu is in company with other Nigerians. Towards the end of the novel, Ifemelu returns home because “Nigeria became where she was supposed to be, the only place she could sink her roots in without the constant urge to tug them out and shake off the soil” (6). Braga argues that her move back is not only made known right at the beginning of the novel but is also shown in how Ifemelu remembers Nigeria during her stay. They are “ambiguous recollections” because “on the one hand, Nigeria lacks jobs, university opportunities and equality between sexes” but “on the other hand, it is the familiar territory in which they know how to face adversities” (2). Throughout the novel Ifemelu feels confident about returning home to Nigeria. Later on when she tells Obinze what changes she observes in herself because of her long stay abroad, she uses self-mockery (433). This indicates that she is not confident about her changed self after she has returned. However, it also indicates that she wants to be home in Nigeria and that she wants to have a life in Nigeria again.

In this chapter I showed that Ifemelu constructs her identities through her nationality and its culture, her outward appearance, her speech, and her blog. She is Nigerian and emigrates in her early twenties to the United States. She suffers from a depression but in the end she is able to adapt quite well; especially her American accent is perfected over the years. With the help of her white boyfriend Curt she finds a good job with a green card (Hallemeier 238), and after they break up, she starts blogging about race and racism in the United States, trying to observe and not engage

herself too much. *Americanah* does not only focus on issue of race in the migrant experience, but also the issue of class as shown in her relationship with Curt (Goyal xi). Her successful integration is an example of what Iceland calls “segmented assimilation”, which suggests that the success of migration depends not only on race but on class and age as well (29-30). Her blog is so successful that it allows her to quit her job and become a full-time blogger. Her yearning for Obinze and Nigeria, however, becomes too strong (6) and she re-embraces her national cultural identity by first losing her American accent and switching back to Nigerian English, and in the end by returning to Nigeria.

Conclusion

This paper has shown that race is a very important factor in identity construction in the novels *Open City* and *Americanah*. However, as I have argued even though race is very dominant in Ifemelu's life, in the end she embraces her national cultural identity and returns to Nigeria. The protagonists do not only construct their identities around their Nigerian nationality and race, but class is important as well in the process of assimilation into American culture. Julius is successful because of his studies and professional status as a psychiatrist, and Ifemelu is able to find a job that provides her with a green card, because of her connection to her wealthy white boyfriend Curt. They came to the United States for education and managed to prosper, Julius as a psychiatrist and Ifemelu as a blogger and speaker on race. Ifemelu and Julius are, therefore, able to integrate well into American culture and have a career because they are educated. This shows that Iceland's concept of segmented assimilation is applicable to these novels. The second chapter of this paper has shown that in the beginning of *Open City* Julius speaks about his Nigerian past and identity occasionally, but the focus lies on his encounters with other people and their stories and his own experience with race and racism in the United States. For the most part he rejects the construct of blackness in the United States and is irritated by the enthusiastic behavior by some African Americans towards Africa in the novel, thus rejecting a diasporic identity. However, he is not consistent in his behavior and participates in certain aspects of a "black code" in the United States; moreover, he also identifies with African Americans when he thinks about their slavery background. His rape of Moji when he was younger leads him to repress his Nigerian identity and detach himself from places and people. His only focus appears to be New York City. However, when Moji confronts him, he realizes that he has been a

“villain” in her life. Even though he does not react to her accusations and appears to continue his life in a similar manner as before, the bird metaphor at the end of the novel suggests a possible change in his identity construction towards an acceptance of his African and Nigerian identity. Ifemelu is more influenced than Julius by her Nigerian identity. She focuses on race and racism while being in America and blogs about this subject. She, too, describes the bond of black people, as manifested for example by the silent nod in the streets, and encounters with enthusiastic African Americans who have a mythical image of Africa they want to share with anyone who comes directly from the “motherland”. Thus, both have positive and negative encounters with members of the historic diaspora. Some African Americans resent Africans for their privileges and others try to bond on the basis the common factor Africa. However, because of the influence of her Nigerian identity, a full, long-term assimilation into American culture is not possible for Ifemelu. One day she feels ashamed because people compliment her on her American accent and decides to drop it. Gradually she then realizes that Nigeria is the place where she belongs and where her roots are.

Works Cited

Adichie, Chimamanda Ngozi. *Americanah*. London: Fourth Estate, 2013. Print.

______. "African 'Authenticity' and the Biafran Experience." *Transition* 99 (2008): 42-53. Print.

Boehmer, Elleke. *Colonial and Postcolonial Literature: Migrant Metaphors*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005. Print.

Braga, Claudio, and Glaucia R. Gonçalves. "Fictional Representations of Contemporary Diasporas: The Case of the Invisible Diasporic Women of Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie." *inter-disciplinary.net*, May 2014. 1-9. Web.

Cole, Teju. *Open City*. London: Faber and Faber, 2011. Print.

Channel 4 News. "Author Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie on love, race and hair." Online Video Clip. *YouTube*. YouTube, 10 Apr. 2013. Web. 13 May 2015.

Chude-Sokei, Louis. "The Newly Black Americans: African Immigrants and Black America." *Transition* 113 (2014): 55-71. Print.

Dalley, Hamish. "The Idea of 'Third Generation Nigerian Literature': Conceptualizing Historical Change and Territorial Affiliation in the Contemporary Nigerian Novel." *Research in African Literatures* 44.4 (2013): 15-34. Print.

Gilroy, Paul. *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*. London and New York: Verso, 1993. Print.

Goyal, Yogita. "Africa and the Black Atlantic." *Research in African Literatures* 45.3. (2014): v-xxv. Print.

Green, Vera. “Racial versus Ethnic Factors in Afro-American and Afro-Caribbean Migration.” *Migration and Development: Implications for Ethnic Identity and Political Conflict.* Ed. Helen I. Safa and Brian M. du Toit. The Hague: Mouton, 1975. 83-96. Print.

Guarracino, Serena. “Writing ‘so raw and true’: Blogging in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s *Americanah*.” *Tecnologia, immaginazione e forme del narrare* 4.8 (2014): 1-27. Web. http://dx.doi.org/10.13125/2039-6597/1320.15 January 2015.

Hall, Stuart. “Cultural Identity and Diaspora.” *Theorizing Diaspora: A Reader.* Eds. Jana Evans Braziel and Anita Mannur. Malden: Blackwell, 2003. 233-246. Print.

Hallemeier, Katherine. “’To Be from the Country of People Who Gave’: National Allegory and the United States of Adichie’s *Americanah*.” *Studies in the Novel* 47.2 (2015): 231-245. Print.

Iceland, John. *Where We Live Now: Immigration and Race in the United States*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009. Print.

Igboanusi, Herbert. “Varieties of Nigerian English: Igbo English in Nigerian Literature.” *Multilingua* 20.4 (2001): 361-378. Print.

Kaba, Amadu Jacky. “Africa’s Migration Brain Drain: Factors Contributing to the Mass Emigration of Africa’s Elite to the West.” *The New African Diaspora*. Ed. Isidore Okpewho and Nkiru Nzegwu. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009. 109-126. Print.

Krishnan, Madhu. “Postcoloniality, Spatiality and Cosmopolitanism in the *Open City*”. *Textual Practice* 29.4 (2015): 675-696. Print.

Oluwafunlola Idowu-Faith, Bimbola. "Fictionalizing Theory, Theorizing Fiction: The Stylistics of Return Migration in Chimamanda Adichie's *Americanah*." *A Journal of African Migration* 7 (2014): 1-23. Print.

Tunca, Daria. "Of French Fries and Cookies: Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's Diasporic Short Fiction." *Présence africaine en Europe et au-delà/ African Presence in Europe and Beyond.* Ed. Kathleen Gyssels and Bénédicte Ledent. Paris: L'Harmattan, 2010. 291-309. Print.

Vermeulen, Pieter. "Flights of Memory: Teju Cole's *Open City* and the Limits of Aesthetic Cosmopolitanism." *Journal of Modern Literature* 37.1 (2013): 40-57. Print.

Zeleza, Paul Tiyambe. "Diaspora Dialogues: Engagements between Africa and its Diasporas." *The New African Diaspora*. Eds. Isidore Okpewho and Nkiru Nzegwu. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009. 31-60. Print.