The Representation of Identity:

The Intersection of Womanhood and Postcolonial Identity in Adichie's Works

Renee Drost
BA Thesis
Supervisor: Dr. U. Wilbers
15 June 2016

Abstract

Following from Crenshaw's intersectionalitiy theory and Butler's performativity theory, we know that there is no universal experience of womanhood. This is an important aspect of the perspective from which Adichie writes. This thesis will focus on the intersection between how female characters in Adichie's works constitute their gender identity and how they constitute their postcolonial identity in three of Adichie's works, namely *Americanah, Half of a Yellow Sun,* and *The Thing Around Your Neck.* This thesis will be operating under Butler's performativity theory, Crenshaw's intersectionality theory, and Bhabha's *The Location of Culture* with a focus on concepts such as mimicry, hybridity and the Other, as its main methodological framework with which the novels will be analyzed.

Keywords

Adichie, *Americanah*, Gender Identity, Gender Studies, *Half of a Yellow Sun*, Intersectionality Studies, Performativity Theory, Postcolonial Identity, Postcolonial Theory, *The Thing Around Your Neck*

Table of Contents

Introduction P.3

Chapter One: Theory & Methodology P.8

Chapter Two: *Half of a Yellow Sun* P.14

Chapter Three: *The Thing Around Your Neck* P.24

Chapter Four: *Americanah* P.40

Conclusion P.46

Bibliography P.52

Introduction

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's first work, *Purple Hibiscus*, was published in 2003. Although a critically acclaimed author and speaker, she only became 'mainstream' after parts of her 2012 TEDx talk entitled "We should all be feminists" were sampled in Beyoncé's song, ****Flawless*. It is in this TEDx talk that Adichie says the following: "I am angry. Gender as it functions today is a grave injustice. We should all be angry" (Adichie). This awareness of how gender functions in current society is not just present in her work; it is the foundation of it.

Not a lot of research has been done into Adichie or her work, but there are some articles, such as those written by Sackeyfio and Sharobeem. The latter examines cultural conflicts and gender relations in her article, and has the following to say about Adichie: "[Adichie] exposes and deconstructs the power structure [that] informs and dictates society, culture, politics and most importantly human life and gender relations" (34). Adichie is "laden with a post-colonial heritage and aware of what she labels 'the danger of a single story'" – she is aware there is no universal experience of womanhood, no "single story" that can communicate what she calls the injustice of gender, and there is no single story that can empower all women (34).

What the cultural concept of 'womanhood' entails depends on the time and place (Butler 520). Judith Butler's performativity theory posits that "gender identity is the stylized repetition of acts through time" (520). Put very simply, society and culture create gender roles and all they entail, such as appropriate behavior. This is something imposed upon people from birth, and after internalizing this concept of gender it becomes self-perpetuating. A woman behaves as 'woman' because she is told to behave "as a woman."

On the one hand a woman constitutes her gender identity by internalizing these

aforementioned acts as who she is (or should be), and on the other hand a woman constitutes her identity by performing those very same acts as a "compelling illusion" – by externally performing what she is 'supposed' to perform, regardless of how she feels (520). This conflict between internal, personal identity (based in gender) and the external constituting of gender identity is present in many feminist and proto-feminist stories. Novels written by authors such as Sylvia Plath, Jeanette Winterson, Alice Walker, Carol Shields, Virginia Woolf, etc. all contemplate this conflict. This conflict is present in Adichie's works too.

And while this conflict is an important facet of womanhood, it is often analyzed only within the context of white experiences of gender. Feminist theory often excludes other facets of identity, especially race, as "mutually exclusive categories of experience and analysis" ("Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex" 39). Such a single-axis framework erases the experiences of women of color and in doing so fails to acknowledge that there is no universal experience of womanhood (40). That is the danger of a single story Adichie warns us about.

Sharobeem has another insight on Adichie. She "[invites] us to compare between what is conceived and perceived and contrast it to what is actually lived" (Sharobeem 34-35). This is a direct parallel to Butler's performativity theory. A woman must "act" as expected from society; "contesting the script" still leads to "strict punishments" (Butler 531). However, this expected external performance ("what is conceived and perceived") is often in direct conflict with the internal experience of a constituted identity – "what is actually lived" – because these are not universal experiences (Butler 529; Sharobeem 34-35).

A common narrative in Adichie's works are the stereotypes her characters are confronted with – stereotypes often built on being black, African, and a woman. These stereotypes are the expected script, the conceptions and perceptions that come with these various identities. What is actually lived can be more complicated. We see in "The Arrangers of Marriage," in *The Thing*

Around Your Neck, that Chinaza was "expected to be a grateful and dutiful wife who will embrace a false identity that is modeled by her husband" (Sackeyfio 107). On one hand her husband expects her to both embody the Nigerian "ideal" wife, but also criticizes immigrants who maintain their ethnic identities and "constantly corrects her speech and reminds her of the importance of blending into the mainstream" (108). Once Adichie's characters are confronted with these stereotypes they have internal monologues on the conflict between "what is conceived and perceived and […] what is actually lived" (Sharobeem 34-35). Regardless of whether a character decides to contest these expectations, or act out the script, the path that they choose in their struggle is often just as inspired by performativity as the expectations are; and both of those things constitute their identity.

As mentioned beforehand, womanhood is not universally the same and what constitutes 'womanhood' varies depending on the culture and historic period (Butler 520). What constitutes womanhood in the West will be different than what constitutes womanhood in Nigeria, and these gender identities will be further complicated and informed by race; "black womanhood" as an identity is constituted by a different set of "acts" than white womanhood is ("Mapping the Margins" Crenshaw 1242). The clash between all these impositions of womanhood create a necessity for the women in these stories to pick and choose what femininity to don in order to "qualify" as a woman – internally they struggle between juggling these different manifestations of an identity. If we use Ifemelu from *Americanah* as an example, she is very aware of her external presentations of gender when she is with her African-American boyfriend, African-Caribbean hairdressers, or her white (male) boss. This is where postcolonial identity intersects – beyond just the initial 'definition' of womanhood imposed on these black women, these different "womanhoods" must be juggled between in order to keep a job, in order to remain "friendly" or acceptable and reap the benefits thereof both socially and economically. Even in the stories that

do not juxtapose the West with Nigeria, we still see that Adichie contrasts different experiences of womanhood based on ethnicity and culture (in "A Private Experience*,"* for example, between an Igbo Christian woman and a Hausa Muslim woman) (Chude-Sokei 70).

With all this in mind, this thesis will examine the intersection between womanhood and postcolonial identity in Adichie's works. The novels the thesis will be examining specifically are *Americanah,* and *Half of a Yellow Sun*, and a selection of short stories from *That Thing Around Your Neck.* It will answer the following research question: how does the constitution of gender identity, specifically womanhood, intersect with postcolonial identity in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's novels, *Americanah*, *Half of a Yellow Sun*, and the short stories in *The Thing Around Your Neck*? I expect the answer will be similar to Crenshaw's argument, that the gender identity is postcolonial in nature, and that the postcolonial identity is gendered in nature.

In order to answer the research question I will close read the aforementioned works. As I close read, I will employ a methodological framework based primarily in Kimberlé Crenshaw's intersectionality studies, Judith Butler's performativity theory, and Homi Bhabha's postcolonial concepts of mimicry and hybridity. With this framework my primary sources are Bhaba's *The Location of Culture* (1994)*,* Butler's "Essay in Phenomenology" (1988), and Crenshaw's (et al) "Toward a Field of Intersectionality Studies" (2013), "Dermarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex" (1989), and "Mapping the Margins" (1991). I will also be using Spivak's *Can the Subaltern Speak?* (1995) in order to define a more cohesive, complete working definition of postcolonial identity for this thesis, but will draw less from these sources during the close-reading itself.

My primary texts will consist of the aforementioned *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2006)*, Americanah* (2013), and a selection of short stories from *The Thing Around Your Neck* (2009). I exclude *Purple Hibiscus* (2003) (the only Adichie novel the thesis will not be examining). *Purple*

Hibiscus' themes are very religious in nature, to such a degree that they cannot be removed from its narrative. While of course other themes (including religious themes) are present in Adichie's other works, it is so present in *Purple Hibiscus* that examining the intersection between postcolonial identity and gender would not be a viable goal without extensive research into its religious aspects. Religious aspects within postcolonial studies are themselves such a significant theory that the thesis would not be able to do the novel justice. *Purple Hibiscus* was then ultimately not suited for the scope and aim of this thesis.

The thesis will be divided into its introduction, four chapters, and a conclusion. The first chapter will more clearly define the theory and framework the thesis will operate under. It will further clarify the definition of gender and womanhood this thesis will be using and Butler's performativity framework. It will define what the term 'postcolonial identity' will entail for this thesis' purpose and will explain the concepts it necessitates such as hybridity, mimicry, and the Other. It will also expound on Crenshaw's intersectionality theory and its use in the thesis.

The second through fourth chapters will apply the composed theory and framework to Adichie's selected works in the order they were published. Through close reading, and the application of the aforementioned methodology, the thesis aims to find an answer to its research question. The second chapter will analyze *Half of a Yellow Sun*, the third chapter will analyze *Americanah*, and the fourth chapter will analyze *That Thing Around Your Neck.*

The thesis will end with its conclusion, wherein the portrayals of womanhood and postcolonial identity in the three works will ultimately be compared and contrasted.

Theory & Methodology

The theoretical framework this thesis will be employing will mostly take from scholars such as Judith Butler, Kimberlé Crenshaw, and Homi Bhabha. This chapter will expound on performativity theory, will define the concept postcolonial identity as it will be used in this thesis, and will combine and further enhance these two frameworks with Crenshaw's intersectionality theory.

Judith Butler's performativity theory was introduced in her works *Gender Trouble* (published first in 1990) and later *Bodies That Matter* (1993). Performativity theory defines gender as a "stylized repetition of acts through time" (Butler 520). Rather than being a gender, one 'does' gender – gender is not an inherent identity one is born into; it is a role that one is raised into. The acts that Butler refers to are not exclusively physical acts; such as a woman doing housework, a man doing physical labor, a woman rearing children, or a man taking charge of a household. These 'acts' also include cultural norms and values, such as: a woman's nature is to be nurturing and subordinate, a man's nature is to be sexual and assertive. Butler's 'acts' are what society has deemed what gender "should" be – and the repetition of these acts over the course of generations has created the illusion within society that gender is a natural born phenomenon – society knows no truths other than what has been historically constituted (520, 530). Gender is a role, both in action and in being, that must be fulfilled – what this role entails is culturally dependent. This performance of gender has become a societal feedback loop – gender roles have been established, and in performing these roles they strengthen themselves. In strengthening established expectations, the created norms become difficult to break away from even when these norms cause an individual great stress. Opting out of cultural norms is seen as a threat, and often

"punishes" the individual (531).

These cultural norms, and the "punishment" one undergoes for rejecting them, lead to internal conflicts. What a person "should" do and does to survive is not always what a person wants to do, or what a person feels is right. In the larger context of gender, this creates a disconnect between constituting gender identity as a "compelling illusion" or a "stylized repetition of acts" (what an individual is 'supposed' to do) and constituting self-identity internally (how an individual 'feels') (520).

As made clear in the introduction, gender studies alone does not facilitate a suitable reading of Adichie's works – womanhood is not a universal experience, and must be put in its proper context in order to allow for meaningful analysis. Postcolonial theory allows for a more complete analysis; as stated in the introduction, postcolonial identity specifically is especially useful to this thesis. To provide a framework for postcolonial identity, Homi Bhabha's *The Location of Culture* will provide most of the central concepts this thesis will be using. The crucial component, of any definition of postcolonial identity, is Otherness. This Self/Other dichotomy was created by the West in its desire "to dominate in the *name* of a cultural supremacy" (Bhabha 34). This desire itself produces this culture, as "this culture" can only exist after differentiation from "that culture" (34). A cultural difference cannot exist without the West having first constructed crucial differences between themselves and the colonial subject; "'otherness' [is] an articulation of forms of difference – racial and sexual" (67). The colonial Other "loses its power to signify, to negate, to initiate its historic desire, to establish its own institutional and oppositional discourse" because the West is "a designation of institutional power" (31). The West held power over colonial subjects through military power, governmental and religious institutions, and most unscrupulously through systemic subjugation and erasure of local culture and traditions (Bhabha 31; Dube 100; Wong 5; Spivak 24-25). The state of 'Otherness' relative to

the dominant group leads to phenomena such as mimicry and hybridity. The Self (the white colonizers) celebrate all the privileges that belonging to the dominant group entail, while the Other is marginalized because they are a "deviation from an ideal" where the West has constructed itself as ideal in its power and dominance over its colonial subjects (Bhabha 68; Spivak 27). The Other tries to find effective strategies that allow them entrance into the colonial system that "takes power in the name of history; it repeatedly exercises its authority through the figures of farce" (Bhabha 85). Mimicry is a "complex strategy of reform" where the Other tries to construct an identity that is like the Self, the Other tries to 'mimic' them in order to attempt to gain some of the privileges from the Self (85-86). It never 'fully' works, and it represents an "ironic compromise" between, as Edward Said describes, "the demand for identity, stasis – and the counter pressure of [...] change, difference" (qtd. in Bhabha 86). It never 'fully works' because the Self can only exist in contrast to the Other, and therefore the Other must continue to exist for mimicry to be fully effective. This is the compromise it is born from; the identity of the Self and the 'counter pressure' of difference, of the Other. As a result mimicry "must continually produce its slippage, its excess, its difference" – without these things, mimicry would not be effective at all (as compared to 'not fully' effective) (86). What follows this, however, Bhabha calls "profound and disturbing" – mimicry normalizes the colonial state (86). The colonial subject becomes a 'partial' presence; "'incomplete' and 'virtual'" (86). The colonial subject is "almost the same, but not white" – it doesn't fully work (89). They can never become the Self, because it exists only in binary contrast to their Otherness. The attempt to mimic the dominant group, the colonizers, and its subsequent inability to be 'fully' effective, originates what Bhabha refers to as hybridity. Hybridity is a hybrid between the cultures of the Other, and the Self:

> [Hybridity] is a discrimination between the mother culture and its bastards, the self and its doubles, where the trace of what is disavowed is not repressed but repeated as something different – a mutation, a hybrid. (111-112)

Unlike mimicry, which normalizes the colonial state, hybridity challenges it; it "unsettles the mimetic or narcissistic demands of colonial power, but reimplicates its identifications in strategies of subversion that turn the gaze of the discriminated back upon the eye of power" (112). It "disturbs the visibility of the colonial presence and makes the recognition of its authority problematic" because, where mimicry can only exist because of the binary dichotomy of Self/Other, hybridity challenges that very dichotomy and creates for itself a space 'in between' – a metaphorical spectrum of culture, rather than a binary opposition of cultures (111). Hybridity and mimicry are the concepts that this thesis will use foremost in its establishing a postcolonial identity, and are concepts that are very applicable to Adichie's works and characters.

The last theory for the framework is Kimberlé Crenshaw's intersectionality theory. Crenshaw coined the term 'intersectionality' in 1989 in her article, "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory, and Antiracist Politics." Intersectionality identifies the overlap in categories of identity; Crenshaw argues that Black women were either seen as Black or seen as women; being 'Black' or being 'a woman' were seen as mutually exclusive (39). Institutional and systemic power structures inform our society and our identities; black women do not exclusively experience misogyny *or* racism, rather they experience both, and this overlap creates unique experiences also: the misogyny they face is racist, and the racism they face is misogynist (*Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex* 39-40; Cho, Crenshaw & McCall 806). Both the Black community and feminists must recognize "the intersectional experiences of those

whom the movements claim as their respective constituents" and include black women in their movements in order to "free Black people of the constraints and conditions that characterize racial subordination" ("Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex" 48). This ties back into both Butler and Bhabha's theory; both must be critically analyzed as they are applied to Adichie's works. As Crenshaw makes clear, there are no two separate experiences that can be analyzed, being a woman and then being black. Rather, these two categories of identity overlap and as a result Butler and Bhabha must be applied with specifically black women in mind.

How gender is constituted, as a stylized repetition of acts, will be different for white women than it is for Black women (or indeed, any women of color). Likewise, mimicry will be different for Black women than it is for Black men, as for example the short story "The Arrangers of Marriage" will show. Black women will navigate hybridity differently from Black men, as for example "The Headstrong Historian" will show. Intersectionality theory is crucial, both independently and as a link, to applying Butler and Bhabha to literary studies.

Crenshaw originally created intersectionality specifically to criticize the problems Black women faced in the overlap of identity categories race and gender. Since then the term has been broadened to include the intersection between various axes of identities and oppression, not just race and gender, but this thesis keeps its focus on black womanhood, as that is most relevant to Adichie's stories. However, while race is an important factor in any definition of postcolonial identity, this thesis will not specify a *Black* postcolonial identity; in order to analyze Adichie's works, that distinction must be made. Adichie writes about the marked differences between African-American, Afro-Caribbean, and African communities – but these communities are all black. In order to analyze the differences between all of these categories, postcolonial identity as it is used in this thesis would not benefit from being specifically Black.

These three main theories comprise what this thesis' framework will be. Postcolonial

identity, defined in the experience of mimicry, hybridity and a racial identity, and womanhood, defined in performance, combined by intersectionality theory allow for a suitable overview of significant categories of identity that Adichie uses as themes in her work. This thesis will apply them to literary studies as I close read Adichie's works. They will allow me to analyze their representation of race and womanhood, and how the constitution of gender identity intersects with postcolonial identity in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's novels, *Americanah*, *Half of a Yellow Sun*, and the short stories in *The Thing Around Your Neck.* The thesis will be looking specifically at female characters, and how they constitute their gender identity. This is of course enmeshed with their postcolonial identity – how do these two identities affect one another? Looking back at concepts like mimicry and hybridity, to what degree are they applicable to these characters, and how does this affect their constituted gender and postcolonial identities versus their internal feelings? Analyzing the characters in Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun*, *Americanah*, and a selection of short stories from *That Thing Around Your Neck*, with the aforementioned questions in mind, will allow an answer for the aforestated research question: how does the constitution of gender identity, specifically womanhood, intersect with postcolonial identity in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's novels, *Americanah*, *Half of a Yellow Sun*, and the short stories in *The Thing Around Your Neck*?

Do Adichie's works vary in their portrayal of these issues, or is there a larger pattern to be found in her works?

Half of a Yellow Sun

Half of a Yellow Sun was published in 2006 and was well received. In 2007 it won the Orange Prize for Fiction. It was Adichie's second novel, following her first novel *Purple Hibiscus*, which was published in 2003. *Half of a Yellow Sun* follows the lives of Olanna, Richard and Ugwu in Nigeria in the 1960s through-out the Biafran war; it covers the early 60s, the 1966 Nigerian coup d'état, the Nigerian counter-coup of 1966, the 1966 anti-Igbo pogrom, and the entirety of Biafran war until shortly after its end in 1970. This chapter will focus on Olanna – one of the three perspectives through which we experience *Half of a Yellow Sun* – and her twin sister Kainene. A synthesis of Bhabha, Butler and Crenshaw's theories that were discussed in the first chapter will be used to analyze how Olanna and Kainene constitute their gender identity and postcolonial identity and in what ways they intersect.

Half of a Yellow Sun starts when Ugwu, a 13-year-old village boy begins working as a houseboy for Odenigbo, a mathematician in Nsukka who frequently hosts salons with other intellectuals to discus Nigerian politics and postcolonial theory. Olanna, Odenigbo's girlfriend, moves in soon after. Odenigbo cheats on Olanna with his mother's house girl, a young village girl named Amala who was made to seduce him by Odenigbo's mother because she dislikes Olanna. Olanna retaliates by sleeping with Richard, Kainene's lover. Kainene cuts off contact with her sister after she finds out. Olanna and Odenigbo reunite when they learn that Amala is pregnant with Odenigbo's child. Amala refuses to keep her daughter, and Odenigbo's mother rejects her because she is not a son; Olanna decides to keep the child and raise it with Odenigbo. They call the child Baby until they find a nice name. Four years later, political strife between the Hausa and Igbo people begins resulting in violence. After the Nigerian coup d'état, which the

Hausa people see as "the Igbo coup," a counter coup follows and soon after hundreds of Igbo people die in massacres executed by some of the Hausa. Olanna witnesses one of these massacres and her beloved aunty and uncle, and her pregnant cousin, die in the massacre before Mohammed, a Muslim Hausa man that Olanna used to date, saves her from the town and puts her on the train back to Nsukka. Olanna begins suffering from PTSD from the event, is unable to walk for days due to psychological reasons and experiences "dark swoops," or panic attacks for some time after. Right as Olanna begins walking again, through the radio she and Odenigbo learn that a new republic, Biafra, has been founded by the Igbo people. Soon after they flee Nsukka as war breaks out between Biafra and Nigeria and Nsukka is attacked; they end up in Umuahia, a refugee town where they suffer from food shortages, constant air raids, illness and a paranoid atmosphere. Olanna decides to marry Odenigbo during this time. Kainene remains in Port Harcourt, living an affluent life, as she continues to run her father's businesses. When Port Harcourt is attacked via air raid, Kainene experiences the attack first-hand when her own home is bombed and she sees one of her stewards beheaded by shrapnel. She is forced to leave Port Harcourt and ends up running refugee camps in Biafra, where she and Olanna reunite and Kainene forgives her sister. Olanna and her family move in with Kainene and Richard, and Olanna begins helping manage the refugee camps, but they have no food or medicine and the situation is dire. Kainene decides to trade across enemy lines, and is expected to return that same day. She does not return, and even when the Biafran war ends some weeks later, Kainene is still missing. The novel ends with Olanna, Ugwu, Baby and Odenigbo returning back to their home in Nsukka, which is left in ruins and with Kainene's fate still unclear.

Olanna is one of the three perspectives we have in the novel. We see Olanna face her problems through her own perspective; this allows for the reader to know more about Olanna and her introspection than the reader knows about Kainene. When we meet Olanna, we know that she

is insecure about her upbringing. Having grown up upper class, Olanna is criticized by the people around her for acting "white." Mohammed, her previous boyfriend, laughs when Olanna wants to see Kano's statues again and says she is just like the white tourists, and when Mohammed says he was joking she "[wonders] if Mohammed's lightness hid a more serious mockery" (*Half of a Yellow Sun*, Adichie 47). People also think Olanna dances "like white people!" because her buttocks do not move (332). She is also uncomfortable around Odenigbo and his colleagues during his salons because she feels she does not fit in. Odenigbo is not a rich man, and he comes from Abba, a village he describes as a "small bush village" (101). Other professors at the university of Nsukka consider him a "hopeless tribalist" (21). Odenigbo believes that tribe is the only identity that is not a colonial product like nation and race:

> My point is that the only authentic identity for the African is the tribe […] I am Nigerian because a white man created Nigeria and gave me that identity. I am black because the white man constructed *black* to be as different as possible from *white*. But I was Igbo before the white man came. […] the pan-Igbo existed long before the white man […] Go and ask the elders in your village about your history! (20-21)

Olanna dates Odenigbo, a patriot Igbo man, almost as a way to validate her own postcolonial identity. In her upbringing she was far removed from smaller Igbo villages and traditions; Odenigbo's mother calls her an "abnormal woman" and a "witch" who seduced her son into a false relationship because Olanna was breastfed by a midwife and that is "unnatural" (97). Odenigbo's mother criticizes Olanna's more modern views on relationships and her clothes and attitude for not being "normal" and is afraid for her son because Olanna does not want to marry Odenigbo. Likewise, when Olanna visits Uncle Mbaezi and Aunty Ifeka in Kano, who are not as rich as her parents are, she pretends to understand village-ways because she wants them to think

she is used to it; that she is a “real” Igbo like they are. Her family in Kano makes her parents' relationship feel artificial, too “European” in their behavior and obsession with socialite life and appearances; Kainene also comments on her parents' “European” attitude, as this chapter will expound on later. Olanna struggles with wanting to be modern and adhering to the “European” standards she inherits from her parents and from her university life in the United Kingdom on the one hand, and on the other hand wanting to be more “traditionally” Igbo. As a result, despite some discomfort with Odenigbo's political salons, she clings to Odenigbo to a worrying degree: “She wished she could love him without needing him. Need gave him power without his trying; need was the choicelessness she often felt around him” (101). Edna, an African-American woman who works in Nsukka, asks Olanna: “Why do you need so much outside of yourself? Why isn't what you are enough?” (232). It is only after Odenigbo cheats that Olanna begins realizing that “she could be a woman taking charge of her own life” (228). Although initially upset by Odenigbo's infidelity, and she retaliates by sleeping with Kainene's white lover, she decides to move back in with him after her Igbo family convince her. Aunty Ifeka tells her that “Odenigbo has done what all men do and inserted his penis in the first hole he could find when you were away” but that she should not let it change her life; her life will only change if Olanna wants it to (226). Aunty Ifeka warns that “you must never behave as if your life belongs to a man” and Olanna, deciding that she does not want things to change, goes back to Odenigbo on her own terms (226). However, in going back to Odenigbo, Olanna faces a new problem: she is not conceiving a child. Olanna deeply fears that she is not capable of being pregnant, and when Amala falls pregnant with Odenigbo's child she decides to keep the baby and raise it as her own. In freeing herself from Odenigbo, she instead finds value in attaching herself to motherhood: she takes this child and only calls her “Baby,” the most explicit way to tie her identity to the child as “mummy Ola” and refuses the child her own identity by giving her neither the name her

grandmother had thought up nor the name Kainene had thought up. As the war escalates and Olanna and her family flee Nsukka, Olanna consistently fears for Baby in every possible way – she is afraid she forgot to take Baby into the bunker during an airstrike, and is not happy that Baby plays with poorer, sick children out of fear that Baby will begin believing traditional superstitions or get sick, and is consistently irritable with Ugwu when he takes care of Baby (as he often did in Nsukka) for small things like whether or not he heats up Baby's food on the stove or on a fire. In being worried about Baby playing with kids from poor villages, Olanna's problems with her own Igbo identity crop up yet again. During the war, she begins struggling with her identity again. When a group of Igbo people are harassed on the street, she and Arize are called out for being Igbo, but Arize begins speaking Yoruba to pretend she is not Igbo, and "[Olanna] could not believe how easy it had been to deny who they were, to shrug off being Igbo" (133). As she worries about being "real," her mother later says about some of her father's partners that "they are Igbo, but they are Western Igbo. I hear they are the ones who deny being Igbo" (135). When Olanna is caught in the midst of one of the Igbo massacres, it is Mohammed who helps her escape. As the war begins reaching closer to its end, however, Olanna finds solace in considering herself Biafran and the patriotism that comes with it. She begins teaching village children basic school subjects, but also Biafran pride and nationalism. When a non-Igbo refugee is accused of being a saboteur spy by an Igbo woman, Olanna gets angry and slaps the woman, yelling that "we are all Biafrans!" (318). She also begins using her upper-class privilege with little shame; when she goes to a hospital because Baby is sick, the Biafran hospital is much too busy. People have been waiting in line for hours and there is no medicine left, but Olanna left her English accent "crisp" and she was immediately given preferential treatment; she is immediately seen by the doctor, and although no antibiotics are available she is given the prescription so she can try and get the medicine from the black market. Baby starts loosing hair because she is

starving, and although Olanna is worried about Baby, she no longer puts much of her identity in motherhood; she worries about Baby because she is starving, but handles the situation well for Baby's sake and no longer has panic attacks over relatively minor issues such as Baby growing up with poorer children. It is also during this time that Olanna finally decides to marry Odenigbo because "the old framework that fit her ideals was gone now," and she expects him to take the palm wine to her father as is tradition (187). Although Odenigbo begins showing signs of alcoholism and appears to be cheating on Olanna again, Olanna does not fall into a pit of despair but keeps her head high and continues to care for Baby, Aunty Ifeka's words in her mind that she will not let her life change. After the war Olanna begins putting less stock in Odenigbo's opinions, such as when she burns Biafran money. Soldiers come into houses looking for Biafran money, and having it could be very bad for them, but Odenigbo continues to believe in Biafra and complains that she is "burning a memory" (432). Olanna ignores him and refuses to listen to him, whereas in the beginning she would have put a lot of faith in his opinion on identity and cultural memory. Olanna's journey speaks on her insecurity and her constituting her postcolonial identity and gender identity through self-set expectations.

Kainene has much less of a journey in that sense. We can never read Kainene's perspective in the novel, and so any introspection is lost. Instead, we only know of her through Olanna's and Richard's perspective. Richard is a white man who first spends a lot of time around racist, British expatriates, until he meets Kainene and falls deeply in love with her. At first Richard spends time with Susan, a jealous woman prone to bouts of violence when Richard talks to other women about their research – but when he spoke to Kainene, no such outburst came because "Black women were not threatening to her, were not equal rivals" (55). As Susan begins sharing more and more of her rhetoric that Nigerians are "bloody beggars" and that they lack civilization and thus "control," Richard breaks up with her out of disgust and leaves her for

Kainene (53, 154). Kainene is one of the strong women in Olanna's life; Olanna looks up to Kainene and makes difficult decisions (such as whether or not to adopt Baby) based on Kainene because she thinks highly of Kainene and how strong she is. However, through Richard we learn that Kainene struggles with jealous feelings toward Olanna:

> My father gave [the house] to me last year as a bit of a dowry, I think, an enticement for the right sort of man to marry his unattractive daughter. Terribly European when you think of it, since we don't have dowries, we have bride prices. […] Olanna said she didn't want a house. Not that she needs one. Save the houses for the ugly daughter. (69)

Kainene seems to struggle much less with identity than Olanna does, however. Kainene runs her father's businesses and is very good at it; "[Richard] had not fully realized that [Kainene's] was a life that ran fully and would run fully even if he was not in it" (77). She believes very firmly in capitalism, unlike Olanna and Odenigbo who are socialist, because:

> Socialism would never work for the Igbo. […] Ogbenyealu is a common name for girls and you know what it means? 'Not to be married by a poor man.' To stamp that on a child at birth is capitalism at its best. (69)

Kainene in general struggles less with her upper-class upbringing and it seems she does not suffer from the cultural divide Olanna feels their upbringing has caused her. Olanna ties her identity to Odenigbo and his postcolonial theory on tribes, to her poorer family village, to Baby, and to her own cooking. Kainene keeps on servants to cook and clean, thinks of socialism as a European construct, and does not tie her identity to Richard in any way and never marries him. Although her parents are disappointed that she is with a white man, Kainene seems secure enough in her own identity that it bothers her little. Through Richard's perspective we learn that Richard is a

guest in Kainene's life, which would continue on without him if he were to leave. While they care for one another, for Kainene work always comes first. Kainene is actively patriotic. She is friends with many army generals and politicians that are angry with the British and discuss Nigerian politics just as critically as Odenigbo's salons do, albeit with less explicit theory. They discuss the "new slavery" of Nigerian women who sleep with white men so they are taken care of, but the white men refuse to treat them as equals or marry them (81). They are actively critical of their corrupt government and are angry that their British GOC (General officer commanding) institutes an "ethnic balance policy" that caused a rift between the Igbo and Hausa people and eventually led to the coups and massacres. When Richard says that he is impressed with the Igbo-Ukwu art because he did not think "these people" were capable of such things, Kainene tells him that "it's possible to love something and still condescend to it" (111, 114). When Richard falls deeply in love with Biafra because it represents a possibility for him to become Biafran instead of a white British man in Nigeria, he never criticizes any part of the government. Kainene grows critical at Richard's excuse that it is "for the [Biafran] cause" when the government is corrupt and extorts food and sex from women, and instead takes a much more pragmatic stance with regard to her country (182-183). Kainene remains critical of Richard's attempts to uncritically enter into a cultural space that is not his, and eventually Richard begins to understand. Richard begins writing pieces for Biafra in order to garner international support, and when Kainene reads Richard's article about "by the informal divide-and-rule policies of the British colonial exercise" that led to the tensions between the Igbo and Hausa people, she says she feels pride for the article but as time goes on Richard begins to understand that the war was "not [his] story to tell;" a direct result of Kainene's influence (166, 425). Kainene, at first, seems almost distant from Richard and her family, and she cuts off ties to Olanna after she sleeps with Richard. However, during the course of the war Kainene sees one of her stewards beheaded during an airstrike and she becomes less

rigid soon after. She forgives Olanna and has their family move in with her, and she begins managing refugee camps with the same competence that she ran her father's businesses with. She starts the story off as a staunch capitalist, competent at the game of corruption and bribes in Nigerian government and business, but ends the story going on a dangerous trade across enemy lines for refugees that she does not return from. Because we do not have Kainene's perspective, one can only guess at her introspection, but it becomes clear Kainene's change is much more muted and subtle than the changes Olanna struggles with. After going through PTSD from the airstrike in Port Harcourt, Kainene becomes more willing to forgive and begins sharing more vulnerability with Richard and Olanna.

Olanna constitutes her gender identity linking herself to a man, and later by anchoring herself to motherhood. But Olanna utilizes her gender identity to constitute her postcolonial identity. Odenigbo claims that "the only authentic identity for the African is the tribe" and Olanna takes this very seriously; Olanna feels insecure in her identity as an Igbo woman, and feels she can only be Igbo if she is the "good" daughter her parents want. She does not marry Mohammed, and when Arize says "If only Mohammed was an Igbo man, I would eat my hair if you did not marry him […] [but] papa would kill me first of all if he knew I was even looking at a Hausa man like that" it implies Olanna left for the same reason – she broke up with Mohammed when she met Odenigbo (42). However, Odenigbo does not provide the security she wanted; when his mother dislikes her she is surprised, and they argue about his mother's opinion and that Odenigbo did not want to confront his mother in order to change that opinion. She initially wants to remain separated from Odenigbo, and even moves out of his house, after he cheats; but only after her family says that it is normal does she go back to him, and she thinks of her father who also cheated on her mother. Aunty Ifeka, her mother, and even Kainene all accept cheating men back into their lives with the knowledge that it is security in a relationship, not fidelity, that keeps

the marriage worthwhile – being a woman means being a wife and getting pregnant, as Arize, Ugwu's sister, Odenigbo's mother, Aunty Ifeka all insist. The acts that constitute gender identity among Igbo women is keeping these titles, and Olanna holds on to them dearly. Despite her initial fear of marriage, she ends up agreeing to a traditional wedding ceremony. After failing to get pregnant, Olanna clings to Baby for motherhood when she is born. It is only after she can claim a Biafran identity that she gains security in her Igbo identity and begins constituting it without laying the focus on being a wife or a mother. Instead, she focuses on finding Kainene after the war, never losing hope that she is alive.

Kainene on the other hand cares little for actively constituting a gender identity or a postcolonial identity in a traditional way. Kainene paves her own path, sets up her life and keeps it running – Richard is for many years only an accessory to her life, a man who can come and go with little effect on the important things in her life. Similarly, Kainene has a different perspective on being an Igbo woman then Olanna does, and is less afraid of keeping an upper-class, capitalist attitude and remaining a powerful working woman even when Nigerian men seem to disapprove; instead she surrounds herself with like-minded individuals, rather than change her opinion as Olanna does, and is anything but soft spoken. She combines her Igbo identity with the non-traditional attitude she was taught at home, and her studies in the United Kingdom to form a hybridity that feels at home in the ever-changing Nigeria; being black, and being Nigerian, are identities next to being Igbo that she does not condemn the way Odenigbo does, but rather she incorporates them seamlessly into who she is.

The Thing Around Your Neck

This chapter consists of a close reading of five of the twelve short stories from the collection *The Thing Around Your Neck*, a short story collection by Adichie first published in 2009. Published after *Half of a Yellow Sun*, which won an Orange prize, *The Thing Around Your Neck* did not win any prizes but was still positively received. All stories focus mainly on the lives of middle class Nigerian women that are, as *the Guardian* puts it, “caught up in political or religious violence, coping with displacement, loneliness and disappointment in their new lives or their new marriages, surviving tragedy, [..] and tend to be routed by more selfish and amoral characters” (Forna par. 2). The short stories that this thesis will be looking at are: “Imitation,” “A Private Experience,” “The Thing Around Your Neck,” “The Arrangers of Marriage,” and “A Headstrong Historian.” They will be examined in the order that they appear in *The Thing Around Your Neck*, and were selected based on thematic relevance; while all of the short stories are to some degree capable of being analyzed on both the constitution of gender and postcolonial identity, the selected short stories are best suited to this thesis’ framework. All of the short stories portray women who have at one point or another immigrated from Nigeria, and struggle with the change this has wrought not only in their lives but in them. Using the synthesis of Butler, Bhabha, and Crenshaw’s theories this chapter looks at how these women constitute their gender identity and experience their postcolonial identity and to what degree the intersection between them changes depending on their circumstances and the people around them.

1. *Imitation*

"Imitation" is set in Philadelphia and focuses on Nkem, a young married woman with two children. Nkem's husband moved them from Nigeria to the United States as a sign of status, and so that their children could have American citizenship – however, Obiora does not join them full time and only visits her and their two children two months a year. The rest of the year he stays in Lagos for work, where they still have their home – and Nkem learns through a friend that Obiora has moved his mistress into their home. After her friend tells her this, Nkem goes through a process where she begins to doubt her relationship with Obiora and all the ways she has appeased him; the story ends with Obiora coming home for his two months, and she tells him she wants to move back to Lagos with him.

When Obiora moved Nkem to America, she had been proud. As Adichie describes it, she "had been proudly excited because she had married into the coveted league, the Rich Nigerian Men Who Sent Their Wives to America to Have Their Babies league" – it was a sign of wealth and success (*The Thing Around Your Neck*, Adichie 26). In Nigeria many women, including Nkem, had dated married men: "what single girl in Lagos hadn't?" (31). It is considered normal, and it is an exchange of goods – the men get to spend time with beautiful women, and in return they pay for a woman's family's needs – such as hospital bills, furniture, and the education of their siblings (31). No man ever proposed to Nkem because she was still a "Bush Girl" – she came from poverty, had not gone to university, and still made mistakes in her English (31). Nkem is a beautiful woman, but her position in society means she is markedly Other, unable to properly perform the mimicry men expected from her – both in physicality and as a symbol of success. Obiora was the first man she dated who took her on a date where "everyone could see them" instead of somewhere on private property, and when he proposed she thought it was silly he

would ask for marriage; she says "she would have been happy to simply be told," because Nkem could not do better by social standards (32). However, upon moving to America it becomes clear Obiora does expect Nkem (and his children) to adhere to certain standards. Obiora prefers Nkem's hair long, as "[it] is more graceful on a Big Man's wife" (40). He wants their children to be Americanized, so he enrolls them in schools in the U.S. and is proud of their "big-big" English, and that they are "Americanah" now, even as he calls white American life "plastic" (24, 28). Obiora is proud of his children growing up in hybridity, in a cultural mix between Nigerian and American, and equally wants his wife to form a hybrid identity. However, when it comes to his own life he stays in Nigeria; a hybrid identity in America does not gain the same level of success and respect as mimicry does in Nigeria. Obiora is 'allowed' his success in Nigeria and measures his success by Nigerian standards of being a "Big Man," because in America being Other means he would not be allowed the privileges of the Self – he is not white, and would not have the money or respect he is entitled to. Nkem is only a tool in this success – having a wife in America is prestigious, as is having kids who go to school there. He is a "Big Man" – a rich and powerful enough man to move his family to America, but Obiora recognizes that in America proper he would not be as rich and powerful.

Although Obiora is happy with Nkem's Americanization, Nkem is aware of herself changing, of becoming "American." She feels she "really" belongs in this country now because she finally has a Greencard, and does "typical" American things like going to Pilates class and being active in her children's school bakes (37). Another Nigerian woman, also the wife of a rich man, says she and her children have changed, and could never move back to Nigeria because it has been too long, and the change is too significant for her to live comfortable in Nigeria as she did before. Nkem recognizes herself in this description, and knows she has also taken on a hybrid identity to some degree. But she still misses Nigeria, and is becoming disillusioned with her

hybridity.

Nkem hears from her friend that Obiora's mistress has short, curly hair – texturized instead of relaxed. Obiora likes Nkem's hair long and relaxed, which imitates white women's hair more closely. He prefers Nkem's pubic hair waxed in a specific way. Whenever he comes home, Nkem always plans her appearance according to his wishes; she does her hair "the way Obiora likes" and grooms herself "the way Obiora likes" and wears the lingerie he buys her (27). But after hearing of Obiora's mistress, Nkem cuts her hair short and also texturizes it. She does not wax herself when Obiora comes home this time.

When Nkem confides in her housegirl, Amaechi, that Obiora has a girlfriend, Amaechi does not react with surprise. Nkem asks if Amaechi knew all this time – and Amaechi says Nkem did, too. But Amaechi still feels Obiora is disrespectful – not for having a girlfriend, but for moving her into his house. Amaechi argues that Nkem should confront Obiora and move his mistress out of the Lagos home, but when Nkem asks what she should do with this situation after the mistress has left the house, and Amaechi says: *"Oga* Obiora is a good man. […] You will forgive him, Madam. Men are like that" (34). The normalcy of dating married men is underlined again. What is also underlined here is the expectation that Nkem will forgive Obiora; he is a "good man," which is to say he takes care of her financially, and that means she "owes" him – she owes it to him to look and act the way he wants her to, and to be part of his "Big Man" image that requires a happy, submissive wife.

Nkem begins questioning herself, and begins to realize that she is held to standards Obiora is not. She is tired of performing womanhood as she is "supposed" to, and for the sake of a "Big Man's" appearance. She has to function as a hybridization of her culture and American culture, of having to adopt "typical" American customs while Obiora gets to criticize America and remain Nigerian in his customs, such as having his (socially "normal") mistress. Nkem

reaches the understanding that she constitutes her gender identity as an accessory of her husband's life through experiencing, and examining, her postcolonial identity versus Obiora's postcolonial identity.

Obiora is obviously surprised by Nkem's new appearance and her reserved attitude upon his return to the United States. Nkem tells Obiora she wants to move back to Lagos with their children, and Obiora is surprised because Nkem never stood up for her own desires. Another realization dawns on her: "she wonders vaguely if that is what attracted him to her in the first place, that she deferred to him, that she let him speak for both of them" (41). In this silence, Nkem was the ultimate wife, the perfect construction of womanhood: quiet, submissive, and easily malleable as a trophy and a tool.

"Imitation" portrays Nkem's realization of her performance of gender; of her moving to America to please her husband. She maintains her beauty and youth with Pilates classes, waxing her pubic hair and relaxing her hair and keeping its length for her husband, while Obiora gets fatter and cheats on her. Although Nkem initially cuts her hair to imitate Obiora's mistress, and what he apparently thinks is beautiful, as "Imitation" continues it becomes clear Nkem's hair does not symbolize submitting to her husband's 'new' preferences. Rather, she does not want to perform gender for Obiora's status, and so cuts her hair that is more a symbol of a "Big Man's" success than it is important for her own appearance. She also decides she no longer wants to be "Americanah" – she thinks of relaxing her short hair, but decides to keep it natural, and she wants to move back to Nigeria. She gives Obiora little choice to not only succumb to this wish lest he forsake the status of being a successful "Big Man," but with her in Lagos he must cut ties with any mistresses. Where before she constituted her gender identity as a "Big Man's wife," with all the work that entailed, she now constitutes a new gender identity; one that entails less work on her physical appearance and is further removed from white beauty standards, and entails an

assertiveness that allows her more comfort in her cultural background rather than succumbing to her husband's expectations of becoming "Americanah" like he wants his children to be.

2. *A Private Experience*

In "A Private Experience," a Hausa Muslim woman saves Chika, an Igbo Christian, by helping her into an abandoned store for safety as a riot breaks out between Igbo Christians and Hausa Muslims outside; a common occurrence in the region. Despite the riots between their people, the two women find common ground and a connection during the strife; Chika has lost her sister Nnedi during the riots, and the unnamed woman her daughter Halima. Chika is studying medicine at university, and lives a comfortable middle class life away from these riots but came here to visit her aunty. The Muslim woman lives in the city; she has seen these riots before, knows what to do in them and what to look out for. She sells onions in the market place. Chika begins to realize that there is no real difference between them; despite their differences in religion, ethnicity and class background she feels connected to the woman.

Chika remembers Nnedi arguing that "riots do not happen in a vacuum, that religion and ethnicity are often politicized because the ruler is safe if the hungry ruled are killing one another" and feels guilty for wondering if the Muslim woman is intelligent enough to understand that; the Muslim woman says that the riots are "work of evil" (48). After learning Chika studies medicine the Muslim woman immediately asks if Chika can help her with her nipple pain; she immediately takes her breasts out of her bra, and Chika is a bit surprised by it. The Muslim woman's nipples are cracked from breast feeding her baby, and when Chika says cocoa butter would help, she lies that her mother had the same problem and that the cocoa butter had helped then, too (50).

After the riot is over and the two women part ways, Chika will hear on the BBC radio that the riots were "religious, with undertones of ethnic tension" but remembers that the Hausa Muslim woman helped her with her bleeding leg during the riots, prayed for her sister, and told her "Allah keep your sister and Halima in a safe place" and to "greet your sister, greet your people" (51, 54, 56).

"A Private Experience" primarily focuses its themes on the differences between Chika and the Muslim woman – despite both women coming from Nigeria, the Hausa Muslim woman and her people are stereotyped as violent, and while Igbo Christians retaliate with equal violence in the area, they live 'safe' lives in other parts of Nigeria. While at first Chika thinks the Hausa Muslim woman might not be intelligent, she learns that she understands these riots and is a very kind, loving woman – that she is not less 'civilized' because she does not perform the mimicry Chika was raised in. She is Muslim, not Christian, she owns 'little' and cheap clothing instead of the Statue of Liberty shirt Chika wears, and she easily takes out her bare breasts for Chika to look at while Chika was embarrassed just to touch a young boy's naked chest during a class (49). She consistently compares her realizations to her sister Nnedi's political stances, who studies political science and often argues about the effects of British colonialism and had had these realizations already. As Chika begins to understand that there is little difference between them other than what has been created by the colonial dichotomy (and simplified, as Chika hears on the BBC radio), she lies about her mother's experiences with breastfeeding in order to make their sameness more concrete, more real than just the realizations in her head.

"A Private Experience" brings to the forefront the 'partial presence' of mimicry (Bhabha 86). Chika has performed mimicry; she takes trips to London and New York, wears Western clothing and goes to University, acknowledges even to herself that she has always considered these riots "far away," not real, and that she subscribed to the simplified Western overview of

them, even though her sister routinely argued about the direct results of British colonialism. However, Chika's ability to perform mimicry is only possible because women like the Hausa Muslim woman continue to be the "Other" necessary for the dichotomy that allows mimicry in the first place. Chika's identity was based in a Westernized view, but she begins to realize that the differences between them are built on this false dichotomy; that she is no better or more intelligent than this woman because she has a chance for education or travel, and is in this middle class lifestyle more equipped to perform mimicry.

3. *The Thing Around Your Neck*

"The Thing Around Your Neck," the short story the collection is named after, is about a young Nigerian girl, Akunna, who wins the American visa lottery. She and her family expect her to be very successful and rich in the United States, but this quickly turns out not to be the case. In America she starts living with her uncle, a married man with children, until he sexually assaults her, and tries to pressure her into sex with the argument that "smart women do it all the time" – he can make her very successful, if she just do him this "favor" (117). Disgusted and uncomfortable, Akunna leaves the home and ends up in a small town in Connecticut where she ends up working in a diner. Juan, the manager, says that he knows all immigrants work hard as he's been in her position, and he pays her under the table. Unable to afford university any longer, she tries to study in the library with cheaper online courses, but she still sends half of her paycheck to her parents in Nigeria every month despite never writing. Working in the diner is where Akunna meets 'him' – a nameless character. The two start a complicated relationship: he has travelled to many places, including Asia and Africa – one of the first things Akunna

appreciated about him is that he asked whether she was Igbo or Fulani when she said she was Nigerian, as most white people just say they love elephants and want to go on safari or assume she is Jamaican (119). As time goes on, however, it becomes clear that he only uses his knowledge and travelling experience as a sort of gimmick: because he knows about Africa, he pretends he is a white African in an African store and he is proud that the owner believes him; in a Chinese restaurant he talks about how he 'knows some Mandarin' just to impress the waitress; he talks about 'finding' himself and poverty tourism (he only goes to the poor neighborhoods, the rest is too touristy). Despite how knowledgeable he is on many cultures, what Akunna first appreciated about him begins being the thing she hates. He is unable to understand his privilege; he is a rich, white man but complains that his parents "portion out" love because he did not want to become a lawyer, while Akunna can only see the fact that the opportunity is even there. He is vegetarian because the meat makes people paranoid, but Akunna comes from a place where meat was rare because it was so expensive. As she begins being unhappy in her relationship, she finally decides to write her family – it turns out her father had died months ago. In her grief, Akunna returns to Nigeria, and it is unclear if she will ever return to the United States.

Akunna is consistently confronted with being the Other in the States. People often assume she is Jamaican – and if she says she is African, people react surprised or become patronizing. They 'love' elephants and would love to go on safari – what does her name mean? Is it not misogynistic that it means "her father's wealth?" Akunna remarks: "white people who liked Africa too much and those who liked Africa too little were the same – condescending" (120). When Akunna meets 'him' she feels she learns one very important thing: "[She] did not know […] that people could dictate to life. [She was] used to accepting what life gave, writing down what life dictated" (121). She is so surprised that he has so much power in his own life; she has also walked the path she was given. However, as it becomes clear that he only has this power

over his own life because of his money, Akunna begins to realize that she herself has always held on to her agency, too. She had always worked hard in school for her A's, left her uncle despite the difficulties in doing so – she had little opportunities, but has always worked hard for them. When she realizes this, and begins getting angry at him, she finally writes home as she no longer feels ashamed for not having met the expectations of success the American dream promised. In the end, Akunna frees herself by going back to Nigeria – she was unhappy in the States, "the thing around her neck" was the depression she was struggling with, and she was afraid to go back because of her family's expectations. Even the happiness she found in her relationship was temporary; she was happy because he didn't Other her, he was genuine in his questions and took her to African stores and wanted to eat Nigerian food – but as time goes on, she begins to understand that their realities are so wildly different; that she is still Other regardless.

4. *The Arrangers of Marriage*

"The Arranges of Marriage" is about Chinaza Okafor, an orphan raised by her aunt and uncle. They have arranged a marriage to a Nigerian doctor in America. Her aunt and uncle are very excited and promise good things, and considering his status as doctor, Chinaza expects happiness and security from her husband in return for her being the obedient wife and mother of his children. Instead her husband is not rich, he has rejected his Nigerian identity, and she is stuck in an unsatisfying marriage. Chinaza must be the dutiful wife, grateful to Ofodile that he brought her to America – and rather than embracing a hybrid identity, he completely rejects his Nigerian roots and instead opts to mimic white America to the best of his ability. He renames himself Dave, and expects Chinaza to take on the more 'American' name, Agatha Bell. He does not want

her to cook Nigerian food, only American food, so that his apartment complex does not smell like "foreign food" (179). He wants her to only speak English; even at home. He constantly corrects her speech, and even when she speaks English he corrects it to 'American' English (e.g. elevator instead of lift; attending doctor instead of consulting doctor). He is critical of the immigrants who do not reject their ethnic identities, and believes mimicking white America in every way is the only route to success (175). Chinaza learns that Ofodile was married before in order to get a green card –the divorce was not yet final when he married Chinaza, and now his ex-wife is blackmailing him for money, or otherwise she will report him to immigration. When Chinaza argues that she deserved to know this, he says that "it wouldn't have made a difference" (183). When she asks why he married her, he says that he wanted a Nigerian wife; a good, quiet woman. His mother had told him she might even be a virgin, but he "should tell her how wrong she was" (184). And Chinaza is light-skinned, and he "had to think about [his] children's looks. Light-skinned blacks fare better in America" (184). After this discussion Chinaza leaves with her stuff (nothing that Ofodile had bought her, nor her key) and goes to Nia, an African-American woman who lives in the same apartment complex. After talking to her, it becomes clear to Chinaza that she cannot leave her husband yet, not until she has her immigration papers – after that she can leave, apply for benefits, and work to support herself. The story ends when Chinaza goes back to her husband that evening, and he lets her back into the home.

Chinaza never wanted to marry a doctor in the States, she wanted to go to university in Nigeria – but she does what her aunt and uncle expect from her. Chinaza must be the dutiful, obedient wife – and despite her misgivings, always listens to Ofodile. When he corrects her, she listens. When he looks down on other immigrants, she stays silent on the matter regardless of her own opinions. Ofodile is not interested in hybridity – only in mimicry. And with it, as Bhabha says, he normalizes the colonial state (Bhabha 86). He does not want to be the Other; other

immigrants, who refuse mimicry, are the Other – they are the ones that are inferior. He forces Chinaza into mimicry: she must be Agatha Bell, she must always speak American English. Chinaza begins forming a friendship with Nia, an African-American woman who casually swears and casually has sex; a woman who offers Chinaza a job once her application is through; a woman who does not shame Chinaza's culture and is genuinely interested in it; and a woman Ofodile says is a "bad influence" (The Thing Around Your Neck, Adichie 181). Later Chinaza learns Nia and Ofodile had sex before Chinaza married him; a clear indication of his hypocrisy. Similarly to Nkem, from "Imitation," Chinaza is confronted with the expectation of being a good, Nigerian wife to a husband – but unlike in "Imitation," where Obiore is at least a "Big Man," Chinaza does not reap the benefits of a rich husband; she agreed to a transaction, and Ofodile is not even expected to maintain his end of the bargain. Chinaza is consistently angry that Ofodile not only expects her to perform mimicry as he does, but that she cannot work for her own money or make her own decisions because she is tethered to him. Unlike Nkem, she can make little demands of him – Ofodile has no "Big Man" status he needs to uphold – and so Chinaza waits for independence: Chinaza concedes to performing gender as a "good, Nigerian wife" while simultaneously meeting her husband's demands of integration and Mimicry because she must do this to survive – at least until she has her green card, and with it the freedom to leave.

5. *A Headstrong Historian*

"A Headstrong Historian" portrays three generations of a Nigerian family during a cultural shift, from first contact with white Westerners until the third generation, who goes to British university. Nwamgba marries Obierika and bears him one child – a son, born after Obierika's

death. She names him Anikwenwa. After dispute over land with Obierika's cousins, Nwamgba sends her son to a Catholic mission in order to learn English so he can petition at the white man's court for their land back. Anikwenwa is renamed Michael by the mission, and as he grows older he grows distant from his tribe: he is unhappy during traditions and later flat-out refuses to participate, and moves away from his mother. After marrying his wife Agnes (who was name Mgbeke before she was given a new Christian name) she conceives two children: Peter (who Nwamgba names Nnamdi) and Grace (who Nwamgba names Afamefuna). Although Peter follows in his father's footsteps and is distant to his grandmother, Grace regularly visits with her grandmother and learns the language and tribal poetry from her. After her grandmother's death, Grace becomes a historian after graduating from a British college, and later officially changes her name from Grace to Afamefuna in honor of her grandmother.

Nwamgba is a tough woman; "her father found her exhausting, this sharp-tongued, head-strong daughter who had once wrestled her brother to the ground" (199). She marries Obierika, who comes from a known infertile and unlucky family of many miscarriages and infant deaths. They have trouble conceiving, which leads to people in the village saying she is a witch, that she had "eaten his penis [and] sold her womb" – assuming she is the one at fault (200). A friend suggests she should take a lover and get pregnant from another man to continue Obierika's line; she refuses, angry at the suggestion that Obierika could be the problem. When she does get pregnant, she miscarries twice before finally having her son. Obierika, meanwhile, does not care that they don't have children, and doesn't take any other wives, which Nwamgba finds strange. He says he will not marry anyone else until they are both old, so that the other wife could take care of them in their old age. Nwamgba finds this so strange she decides to find a second wife for Obierika herself – but after she is pregnant with Anikwenwa Obierika dies. Nwamgba suspects foul play from Obierika's cousins, considering Obierika was very rich and they were not; and

later these cousins steal the land Obierika left her and her son. After being told a story of land disputes being settled by white men, she seeks a Catholic mission so her son can go to school and learn English; the school is strict and often beats him, and tells stories of the 'savage' heathen tribes. As Anikwenwa (now known as Michael) grows older, he becomes less curious and a 'light' leaves him – Nwamgba's hope for a strong, proud son disappears, and instead she begins viciously hoping that her grandson, Peter, will have Obierika's strong and curious spirit. Instead, it is her granddaughter Grace that is Obierika 'come back' – Nwamgba feels it, feels Obierika's spirit and power, and names her Afamefuna in his memory, which means: "My Name Will Not Be Lost." Although Afamefuna is raised by Catholic missionary just as her father was, she often visits her grandmother and is close with her. At school, she questions the truth of the "savagery" her tribe is accused of and often gets in trouble for being a 'difficult' child (216). On her deathbed, Nwamgba asks her son only one thing: to see Afamefuna. Anikwenwa refuses, saying she is too busy to visit, but against her father's wishes Afamefuna goes anyway. It is the last thing Nwamgba knows before she dies. Afamefuna goes to university to study chemistry, but later switches to history when she hears a story that another Nigerian man was angry when a university board was considering teaching tribal history just as they taught Western history. The short story ends with Afamefuna legally changing her name to Afamefuna from Grace.

Nwamgba does not at all meet the expectations her people have for women, and places little value in meeting them; when the village women are rude to her, she yells back at them, and although her father was ashamed that she had won a fight from her brother, she was proud of it. She marries a good and well-off man despite knowing his family history with pregnancies – even though bearing children is her most important role. She does seem to value the Obierika meeting his cultural expectations, however. She wants to get pregnant because he must have children, not because she must. She wants him to take a second wife, because that shows his status, not

because she necessarily wants to be one of multiple wives. She values her culture highly; for as long as possible she makes her son take part in traditions even when he does not want to, names her grandchildren non-Christian names, gets angry when Anikwenwa's wife disrespects tribal customs, and teaches Afamefuna her language and culture. She places high value in masculinity; not just in the status a man can have, but in knowledge and curiosity, in power and dominance. At first she is happy her son is learning English and can use it to be dominant over other children in the village, but later regrets his path so much she desperately wishes for Obierika's spirit to come back – and finds his spirit in his granddaughter, not his grandson.

Afamefuna takes after her grandmother – despite growing up under white, Christian values and a Western educational system with a father who does not want her near her cultural roots, she is a tough girl who stands up for her grandmother's poetry and her culture's validity in school, even as she gets beaten for it. She is an intelligent woman who initially studies chemistry, but switches majors into history in order to support a growing movement of teaching tribal African history as "real" history. After this, she begins to realize her unhappiness with her British-educated husband and his dismissals of her "primitive" culture and her study of it, and divorces him. Despite Nwamgba 'seeing' Obierika in Afamefuna, and valuing her because of it, all signs point to Afamefuna being reborn not as Obierika but as Nwamgba herself – as a headstrong woman with a fighting spirit, a woman insistent on keeping her culture as Nwamgba was. The parallels with Nwamgba are much more in number than the parallels with Obierika – it was Nwamgba who took the lead in their relationship; even in trying to find Obierika another wife, while Obierika was a laid-back man who did little to dissuade his cousins' jealousy. Unlike her father, who starts in his mother's culture and 'ends' with mimicking the Self to such a degree that he disdains his own culture and removes his children from it and raises them in the oppressor's culture, Afamefuna 'starts' with her father's disdain for her grandmother and their

tribe, goes to school in Britain and negotiates a difficult identity in hybridity, but ‘ends’ in a courthouse in Lagos to change her name.

Both Nwamgba and Afamefuna do walk a ‘typical’ path for their culture (get married, try for kids, do what one is ‘supposed’ to do) but how they negotiate their own place on that path is not typical. They go about it in very similar ways: they forge ahead with anger (anger towards Obierika’s cousins; anger towards her father) and do end up also navigating away from their given path (sends her son away from the village to learn English; divorces her husband and changes her Christian name) in order to stay true to their own values – finding and administering the truth (stolen land; devaluation of her culture).

Americanah

Americanah was published in 2013; it won the National Book Critics Circle Award of that year, and was shortlisted for the 2014 Baileys Women's Prize for Fiction. The main focus of this chapter is Ifemelu, *Americanah*'s protagonist; other characters are only used to contrast with Ifemelu's circumstances and identity. Ifemelu and her constitution of postcolonial identity and gender identity will be close read using a synthesis of Butler, Bhabha, and Crenshaw's theories.

In *Americanah*, Ifemelu and Obinze meet and fall in love in secondary school. Because Nigeria is under military dictatorship in the 90s, and the universities are on strike often, Ifemelu seeks to leave the country to study at university in the United States, and Obinze plans on following her soon after. However, after Obinze is denied a visa post 9/11 he instead goes to London. In America Ifemelu first stays with Aunty Uju, a woman who is like a mother to her, until she moves into an apartment with three roommates. Because Ifemelu is not allowed to work with a student visa, her aunt arranges for her to use a friend's identity to find work; Ifemelu is only able to find a job where she is paid to have sex with a tennis coach. Traumatized by the experience, Ifemelu becomes depressed and avoids contact with Obinze. Ginika helps Ifemelu find a job as a nanny with a wealthy white family. She mostly works with Kimberly, the mother of the children Ifemelu nannies, and starts a relationship with Kimberly's brother Curt. Curt got Ifemelu an interview in a public relations company, which allows her to obtain her citizenship papers. After Curt cheats on her, Ifemelu forgives him – but then she cheats on him, and Curt ends the relationship. Ifemelu then begins dating Blaine, a politically active African-American man who plans and participates in protests for racial equality in America. It is during this time Ifemelu begins writing her blog on the experiences of being African in America (entitled

"Raceteenth or Various Observations about American Blacks (Those Formerly Known as Negroes) by a Non-American Black"), which becomes very successful. The relationship ends when Ifemelu decides to move back to Nigeria after spending 15 years in the United States. Back in Nigeria, Ifemelu is struck by how much America has changed her; that she has become "Americanah." She takes a job as a features editor of a magazine called Zoe and pays two years of rent in advance for an apartment in Ikoyi. She finally decides to call Obinze again; they meet up and they start dating again. Ifemelu begins refusing Obinze's advances unless he divorces her wife and they lose contact again. The novel ends with Obinze arriving at Ifemelu's apartment seven months later to tell her that he's "chasing [her]" and that he divorced his wife (*Americanah*, Adichie 588). Ifemelu invites him in.

When Ifemelu first comes to the United States, she is thrust into a new world, where suddenly her identity must be constituted by all of these new factors she had not previously considered; the main factor Ifemelu struggles with is race. In America, Ifemelu is confronted with being black, and is confronted with a much more complicated categorization of race and ethnicity than she initially experienced in Nigeria. For example, a woman she thinks is white and would have been considered as such in Lagos, is Hispanic which Ifemelu describes as "an American category, that was, confusingly, both an ethnicity and a race" (105). She meets other black women not from America whose attitudes towards African-Americans are similar to the way white Americans think of them; Jane, a woman from Grenada, put her son in private school lest "her child will start behaving like these black Americans" (112). Even Aunty Uju does not want Dike to think of himself as Black. When Ifemelu meets up with Ginika, she learns from Ginika that "half caste" is a bad word in America; the correct term is "biracial" – and that Ginika "wasn't even aware she was supposed to have issues [because she had a white mother]" like half-white African-Americans she had met (123-124). Ifemelu begins struggling with a new

postcolonial identity. On the one hand, America views her as black; the color of her skin marks her as Other in society. When she takes on the identity of another woman to work, she looks nothing like her and is ten years younger than she is, but "all [black people] look alike to white people" (120). Ifemelu mistakes her fake ID's name, but Ginika said it didn't matter, and that she should have said that "Ngozi is your tribal name and Ifemelu is your jungle name and throw in one more as your spiritual name. They'll believe all kinds of shit about Africa" (131). On the other hand, the color of her skin does not make it easier to fit in with African-Americans – at university she struggles to identify with women like Ashanty, who "said "motherland" and "Yoruba religion" often, glancing at Ifemelu as through for confirmation, and it was a parody of Africa that Ifemelu felt uncomfortable about" (334). Shan, an African-American woman, thinks Ifemelu can only write her blog on race because "[Ifemelu is] African. She's writing from the outside [...]If she were African American, she'd just be labeled angry and shunned" (336). Ifemelu agrees with Shan when she says: "It was true that race was not embroidered in the fabric of her history; it had not been etched on her soul" (337). However, she also feels that Shan's observation is not entirely fair; the color of her skin still significantly affects Ifemelu's life, and being African does not make that easier. On her blog, Ifemelu writes:

> Race is not biology; race is sociology. Race is not genotype; it is phenotype. Race matters because of racism. And racism is absurd because it is about how you look. Not about the blood you have. It's about the shade of your skin and the shape of your nose and the kink of your hair. [...] You don't get to decide what race you are. It is decided for you. (337- 338)

Being African, instead of African-American, does Ifemelu no favors when it is her appearance that white Americans judge on. The issues Ifemelu face are two-fold; the same racism for being

the same black as African-Americans, and the racism she faces as a woman from Africa. Ifemelu faked an American accent for a very long time because an administrator at university did not believe she could speak English because of her Nigerian accent, even though Ifemelu has spoken English her entire life. The African Students Association is the only place she feels she does not need to explain herself, and it is only through books by authors likes James Baldwin that "America's mythologies began to take on meaning, American's tribalisms – race, ideology and region – became clear. And she was consoled by her new knowledge" (136). It is with this newfound knowledge that Ifemelu begins to understand her new circumstances, and begins towards a path of hybridity.

It is more complicated because Ifemelu is a woman. In Nigeria Ifemelu was used to speaking her mind, but "in America, strong-minded black women are SCARY" (220). In Nigeria Ifemelu was made fun of for having a flat butt, but in America she must become skinny (124). Although her religious mother did not encourage a strong daughter, Ifemelu nonetheless grows up around women like Aunty Uju and Obinze's mother, who both do encourage her to be financially and emotionally independent. Growing up in Nigeria meant that a schoolboy said that Ifemelu "argues too much" but that some boys like Obinze actively praises these qualities in Ifemelu (60). It is in America where Ifemelu begins changing; she becomes quieter around men and actively begins constituting a gender identity where she is subordinate, always dependent on the men she is dating. She describes it herself as a role; "a role she slipped into as into a favourite, flattering dress" (196). She subsumes herself in her relationships with Curt and Blaine; after she breaks up with Curt, she has to actively try to remember the person she was before him (229). When Ifemelu begins dating Blaine, "she could only inhabit a higher level of goodness" and strives to earn his approval; she begins flossing, stops herself from speaking her mind, becomes vegetarian and only eats organic foods. When she breaks up with Blaine, the first thing

she does is gleefully buy “normal” chocolate, almost as an act of reclamation. In America Ifemelu never feels truly at home – not until she is back in Nigeria does Ifemelu truly feel at peace. But once there, only then does she realize how much she has changed. In America, she was always Other – how she navigated America made little difference to the fact that she would never be the Self, she would never be white. It is only in Nigeria that her hybridity moves to the forefront of Ifemelu’s mind – she has become “Americanah.” Ifemelu only begins constituting her postcolonial identity knowingly when she is back in Nigeria when she acts “white” and has forgotten that Nigeria did not have all the “easy comforts” of America such as vegetarian restaurants, or that in Nigeria people regularly need generators because of power outages. It is here that the difference becomes palpable. To contrast this, it was only in America that Ifemelu actively constituted a gender identity by trying to fit in the role of “girlfriend” and changing this role accordingly to whatever Curt or Blaine wanted. As a result, she never felt quite happy with either – she was always trying to meet an impossible standard. But with Obinze, both before and after Ifemelu’s years in America, this is not the case. With Obinze, she constitutes the gender identity that she was taught in Nigeria: to have a plan, to be independent, to speak her mind. Performing the “role” of girlfriend is something she was taught in America – a role that made her “digestible” to Americans, a woman that follows the lead of her partner. In the same vein, as a black woman Ifemelu must fulfill this role so that she is not seen as, as Ifemelu and Shan put it, “an angry, scary black woman” (220, 336). As Crenshaw argues, this is the result of the intersection between race and gender: white women, such as Kimberly’s sister, are allowed to speak their mind more, and black men such as Blaine are also allowed to speak their mind more – but when Ifemelu speaks her mind, both among white people and African-American men, she is put down for it and perceived as aggressive or unintelligent. When Ifemelu makes herself less palatable to American men, she is immediately punished. Ifemelu cuts her hair and stops relaxing

it, a tactic she had employed in order to get hired during job interviews, and Curt cheats on her soon after. Ifemelu begins to spend time with African academics because she can connect with them, and soon after Blaine makes fun of her and the professors and refuses to talk to her for weeks. The difficulties Ifemelu faces are difficulties stemming from being a black woman, but also from being African.

Conclusion

In her TED Talk "The Danger of a Single Story," Adichie talks about the dangers of relying on one person to tell the story of a culture or a country; she stresses the multifaceted nature of life and identity, and touches upon this again in her TEDx Talk "We Should All Be Feminists," where she speaks out about how women constitute gender and that society should change to allow women more freedom in their lives. In the 1990s she wrote poetry and a play (*For Love of Biafra*), and in the early 2000s she won various awards for her short stories. In 2003 she published her first novel, *Purple Hibiscus*; three years later, she published *Half of a Yellow Sun*. Three years after this she published a collection of short stories *The Thing Around Your Neck*, going back to the roots she had established earlier on in the decade. In 2013 she published *Americanah*, and in 2014 and 2017 she published essays on feminism, namely "We Should All Be Feminists" and "Dear Ijeawele, or A Feminist Manifesto in Fifteen Suggestions."

In this thesis, two major themes of Adichie's works were discussed: gender identity and postcolonial identity. The novels *Americanah* and *Half of a Yellow Sun*, and a selection of short stories from *That Thing Around Your Neck* were the analyzed works; all of these stories shared their roots in Nigerian women who struggled with constituting their gender identity and postcolonial identity in the face of misogyny and racism, during the course of difficult events in their lives such as depression, immigration, massacres, or war. Therefore this thesis sought to answer the question: how does the constitution of gender identity, specifically womanhood, intersect with postcolonial identity in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's novels, *Americanah*, *Half of a Yellow* Sun, and the short stories in *The Thing Around Your Neck*? In order to answer this question the thesis took Butler's performativity theory, Bhabha's *The Location of Culture* with a

focus on his concepts hybridity and mimicry, and Crenshaw's intersectionality theory and synthesized them to form a framework suitable for close reading.

Performativity theory posits that gender identity is constituted through a stylized repetition of acts that create a compelling illusion – gender is a historically constituted script that women must follow, lest they face punishment. Gender is something one does, rather than is – it is a role one takes on, and the compelling illusion the role creates is that there are no other natural options. Intersectionality was coined by Crenshaw because gender studies, such as the performativity theory, were often exclusively analyzed in the context of white women. There is no universal experience of womanhood, and the analysis of gender identity in white women could not be universally applied. Because black women face racism alongside misogyny, the misogyny they experience is racist and the racism they experience is misogynistic; this intersection of systemic oppression means that black women have been given a different script to follow than white women – the way black womanhood has been constituted is different from the way in which white womanhood has been constituted. Both Butler and Crenshaw are American scholars, and in Adichie's novels there is a third base to cover when it comes to constituting gender: the cultural axis of African, specifically Nigerian, women who struggle with identity in a postcolonial world. In order to analyze this facet of identity, Bhabha's *The Location of Culture*, with focus on mimicry and hybridity, was employed. Mimicry is when the Other seeks to mimic the Self, the white colonizer, in order to reap some of the benefits of the privileged group. Hybridity is where the culture of the Self and the culture of the Other meet, and become their own, separate culture, no longer either one but a combination of the two.

The chapter on *Half of a Yellow Sun* focused on Olanna and Kainene. It focused on how Olanna constituted her postcolonial and gender identity simultaneously, where one was dependent on the other, and how she condemned the hybridity of her identity and longed for a

more traditional Igbo identity in the face of a postcolonial world where, as her husband put it, her tribe was the only “authentic” identity left to her. Olanna scrambled for authenticity, but Kainene did not struggle with this at all. We only saw Kainene through the eyes of Olanna and Richard, her white lover, and in these perspectives we see Kainene as someone who embraces hybridity and does not seem to think of it as any less authentic an identity than her Igbo identity would be.

The chapter on *The Thing Around Your Neck* was the analysis of five short stories, namely “Imitation,” “A Private Experience,” “The Thing Around Your Neck,” “The Arrangers of Marriage,” and “A Headstrong Historian.” In “Imitation” we see Nkem, a young married mother, going through the changes from constituting her gender identity by linking herself to her husband to constituting them in her independence. We see her struggle with her identity as she and her children form hybridity in their lives, while her husband remains away from America and the changes it could engender in him. “A Private Experience” centralizes mimicry and its inability to be fully realized; mimicry is based on a “partial presence,” where the Other can only ever mimic the Self if a concept of the Other remains – as we also see in *Half of a Yellow Sun*, due to British colonial rule the Hausa and Igbo people have come to Other one another in order to find opportunity in Nigeria (Bhabha 86; *Half of a Yellow Sun*, Adichie 166). In “The Thing Around Your Neck,” Akunna struggles with being Othered in America even by her well-meaning, but culturally appropriative, white boyfriend. In “The Arrangers of Marriage” we see Chinaza struggle with the lack of freedom; we see constituting gender identity for survival, and we see the very real “punishments” women can face for not constituting gender as is expected of them. The harm of the postcolonial reality is made clear when Chinaza is forced by Ofodile to perform mimicry, and Ofodile is forced to perform mimicry in order to appear a legitimate candidate for job offers and finding a place in American society – and we see, similarly to “A Private Experience,” the partial presence of mimicry – in order for Ofodile to reap the benefits and

privileges of mimicking the Self, he looks down on immigrants who do not relinquish their cultural identities as Other. In the last short story, "A Headstrong Historian," we see three generations of a family interact with the coming of white people and the imprint their colonial rule leaves. Nwamgba condemns the white people and their devaluation of her culture, but sees the use of its power and sends her son Anikwenwa to missionary school. Rather than come back with hybridity, which Nwamgba had hoped for, he comes back having been taught to perform mimicry lest he follow in the footsteps of his "savage" culture. Anikwenwa's daughter, Afamefuna, is the one who grows up with true hybridity and seeks to undo the damage colonial imperialism has wrought on the history of her people.

And lastly, the chapter on *Americanah* analyzed Ifemelu struggling with coming to terms with immigrating to America, and then having been changed by her time there, struggling with coming back to Nigeria. Ifemelu faces the brunt of the intersection between three things: her gender, her skin color, and her culture. We see Ifemelu change to fit the American narrative by relaxing her hair and changing her accent, before opting out as a means of rebellion and being as authentically herself as possible – no longer relaxing her hair, intently keeping her Nigerian accent, and no longer constituting her gender identity based on who she is dating.

The short stories and the novel are all very similar in nature. We often see women constituting their gender identity on the basis of its relation to men – as a wife, as a mother, as a role they slip into. We often see the struggle of interaction with the West; all of the analyzed women have gone to the United States or the United Kingdom to live at some point, and struggle with the differences they are confronted with. Being Othered for both their skin color and their ethnicity creates conflicts within these women; some solve the problem by embracing hybridity, and others condemn it; some perform mimicry to survive and are confronted with its partial presence, and some condemn it. In their interaction with the men in their lives we see that women

face a different postcolonial reality than the men do. The research question this thesis had set for itself was: how does the constitution of gender identity, specifically womanhood, intersect with postcolonial identity in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's novels, *Americanah*, *Half of a Yellow* Sun, and the short stories in *The Thing Around Your Neck*? In the introduction I hypothesized that the gender identity is postcolonial in nature, and that the postcolonial identity is gendered in nature. As we see in the narratives, it appears that this is true. Taking Olanna as an example, she explicitly ties her identities together, becomes a wife and a mother in order to constitute an identity she feels is authentically in line with her ethnicity. If we take Nkem as an example, Nkem's constituting of her postcolonial identity changes as she begins changing the way she constitutes her gender identity. The constitution of gender identity for the women is something that happens simultaneously alongside the constituting of their postcolonial identity; as we see with for example Ifemelu, the role of being Curt's girlfriend changed her interaction with her race; she kept quiet about things that bothered her when Curt did not understand racism, she kept her hair straightened, she performed mimicry more than she did with Blaine, where she kept her hair natural and spoke out about not only the racism she faces but her experiences of being African. We see the same with Olanna, Chinaza, Afamefuna and her grandmother Nwamgba, and the other women in the stories. Only in "A Private Experience" – where there were no men – was this different. But still we see gender identity and postcolonial identity intersect in its simultaneous constitution; the two women find common ground in the experience of the female body (cracked nipples).

Further research has many different directions to choose from. Adichie could be further analyzed by including Purple Hibiscus in the line-up of novels used, and her other short stories or poetry could equally be analyzed. *Half of a Yellow Sun* could be compared and contrasted to her play, *For Love of Biafra* and focus on the themes of war. However, as Adichie herself makes

clear in her TED talk "the danger of a single story," one story of a people can set dangerous precedents. On the topic of gender identity and postcolonial identity, and the intersection thereof, it would be better to analyze the works of other Nigerian women on the aforementioned facets and compare them to Adichie's representation of those facets. This way a clearer picture emerges on the constitution of gender and postcolonial identity in novels about, and by, Nigerian women. One could compare and contrast Adichie's works to those of other Igbo authors, or instead opt to compare and contrast her works to those of Hausa-Fulani authors. The scope of this bachelor's thesis was to analyze Adichie specifically, but to take this thesis and compare it to the conclusions made about the representation of gender and postcolonial identity in the works of other Nigerian authors would reveal a worthy body of research indeed.

Bibliography

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

---. *Half of a Yellow Sun*. London: Fourth Estate, 2006. Print.

---. “The Danger of a Single Story.” *YouTube*, uploaded by TED, 7 October 2009, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D9Ihs241zeg.

---. *The Thing Around Your Neck*. London: Fourth Estate, 2009. Print

---. “We Should All Be Feminists.” *YouTube*, uploaded by TEDx Talks, 12 April 2013, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hg3umXU_qWc.

Bhabha, Homi. *The Location of Culture*. New York: Routledge, 1994. PDF.

Butler, Judith. “Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory.” *Theatre Journal* 40.4 (1988): 519-531. PDF.

Cho, Sumi, Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw, and Leslie McCall. "Toward a field of intersectionality studies: Theory, applications, and praxis." *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 38.4 (2013): 785-810. PDF.

Chude-Sokei, Louis. “The Newly Black Americans.” *Transition*, no. 113, 2014, pp. 52–71. PDF

Crenshaw, K. “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory, and Antiracist Politics.” *University of Chicago Legal Forum* (1989): 139-167. PDF.

---. “Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color.” *Stanford Law Review*, vol. 43, no. 6, 1991, pp. 1241–1299. PDF.

Forna, A. “Endurance tests.” Rev. of *The Thing Around Your Neck*, by Chimamanda Ngozi A. *The Guardian*. The Guardian, 16 May 2009. Web. 30 May 2017.

Krishnan, Madhu. “Negotiating Africa Now.” *Transition*, no. 113, 2014, pp. 11–24. PDF

Sackeyfio, Rose A. “Diaspora Identities in Short Fiction by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie & Sefi Atta.” ALT 31 Writing Africa in the Short Story: African Literature Today, Edited by Ernest N. Emenyonu et al., Boydell and Brewer, 2013, pp. 102–114. PDF

Said, Edward W. Orientalism. London: Penguin, 2003. Print. Penguin classics; Penguin classics.

Sharobeem, Heba M. “Space as the Representation of Cultural Conflict and Gender Relations in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's ‘The Thing Around Your Neck.’” *Rocky Mountain Review*, vol. 69, no. 1, 2015, pp. 18–36. PDF.

Spivak, Gayatri C. “Can the Subaltern Speak?” in B. Ashcroft, G.Griffiths, H.Tiffin (ed.), *The Post-colonial Studies Reader*, London, 1995, 24-28. PDF.