Ícaro Luiz Rodrigues de Melo

Transnational Identities: Migration, Misrepresentation, and Identity in Chimamanda N. Adichie's *Americanah* and Philippe Wamba's *Kinship*

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by

Ícaro Luiz Rodrigues de Melo

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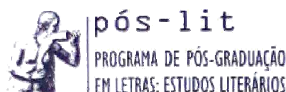

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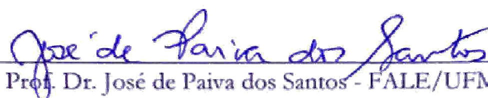

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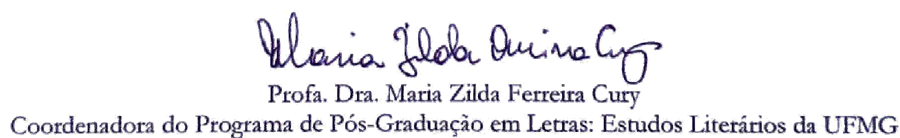

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Coordenadora do Programa de Pós-Graduação em Letras: Estudos Literários da UFMG

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Programa de Pós-Graduação em Letras: Estudos Literários
Faculdade de Letras da Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais
Av. Antônio Carlos, 6.627 - Campus Pampulha - 31270-901 - Belo Horizonte, MG
Telefone (31) 3409-5112 - www.poslit.letras.ufmg.br - e-mail: poslit@letras.ufmg.br

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I aim to persuade you that much of our contemporary thinking about identity is shaped by pictures that are in various ways unhelpful or just plain wrong (Appiah, The Lies that Bind, 2018)

Abstract

This dissertation aims at discussing the representation of identity formation and negotiation in the context of contemporary migration movements, as thematized in *Americanah*, a novel by Chimamanda N. Adichie, and the memoir *Kinship*, by Philippe Wamba. Stuart Hall (1999), Avtar Brah (2005), Homi Bhabha (1994), and Kay Deaux (2001, 2011), among others, informed and framed the analysis on identity carried out here, touching on the importance of aspects such as sense of belonging, group affiliation, and interpersonal relationships on the construction of identity. Without disregarding traditional diasporic readings and bearing in mind the constant juxtaposition of diaspora and transnationalism as concepts, the works of Glick-Schiller, et al. (1994), Peggy Levitt (1998), Levitt and Schiller (2004), and Portes, et al. (1999), among others, are adopted to highlight textual elements present in both novels (cultural practices, linguistic performance, and political engagement) that are central to the main characters' identity formation. Notably, these new, fluid, and flexible identities are not established without a period of identity crisis, be it in the form of a rite of passage, as it apparently is in *Americanah*, or a period of self-reflexivity, as *Kinship* shows. In conclusion, characters' identity negotiation between their African heritage and American citizenship, despite being a socially and psychologically demanding process, seems to have a positive side since the protagonists of both works are able to present insights on pressing social issues of their origin and host cultures. Both novels work as examples of new migratory movements while providing a revisionist analysis of the often misrepresented images of the United States and of African countries.

Keywords: Chimamanda Adichie, Philippe Wamba, *Americanah*, *Kinship*, identity, diaspora, transnationalism, migration.

Resumo

Esta dissertação visa discutir a representação de formação e negociação de identidades no contexto dos movimentos migratórios contemporâneos, tal como tematizados no romance *Americanah*, de Chimamanda N. Adichie, e na memoria *Kinship*, de Philippe Wamba. Stuart Hall (1999), Avtar Brah (2005), Homi Bhabha (1994) e Kay Deaux (2001, 2011), informaram e estruturaram a análise sobre a identidade aqui realizada além de também fornecerem base teórica para a análise de aspectos como o senso de pertencimento e relações interpessoais na construção da identidade. Sem desconsiderar as tradicionais análises do ponto de vista diaspórico e tendo em mente a constante justaposição dos conceitos diáspora e trasnacionalismo, os trabalhos de Glick-Schiller, et al. (1994), Peggy Levitt (1998), Levitt e Schiller (2004), e Portes, et al. (1999), são adotados aqui para destacar elementos textuais presentes em ambos os textos (práticas culturais, desempenho lingüístico e engajamento político) que são centrais na formação da identidade dos personagens principais. Claramente, essas novas identidades, fluidas e flexíveis, não são estabelecidas sem se passar por um período de crise de identidade, seja na forma de um rito de passagem, como aparentemente é em Americanah, ou um período de auto-reflexividade, como se mostra em Kinship. Conclui-se que negociação de identidade dos personagens entre a herança africana e a cidadania americana, apesar de ser um processo sociológico e psicologicamente exigente, parece ter um lado positivo, pois os personagens emergem do período de crise para apresentar observações sobre questões sociopoliticas e econômicas de suas culturas de origem e hospedeira. Ambos os romances funcionam como exemplos de novos movimentos migratórios, ao mesmo tempo em que fazem uma análise revisionista das imagens frequentemente distorcidas dos Estados Unidos e de países africanos.

Palavras-Chave: Chimamanda Adichie, Philippe Wamba, *Americanah*, *Kinship*, identidade, diáspora, transnacionalismo, migração.

Table of Contents

Introduction 10

Chapter One: Identity Formation: Interpersonal Relationships and Basis of Identification .. 35

1.1 Identity formation in *Americanah*: building a personal identity through family ties 37

1.2 Identity formation in *Kinship*: building a social identity self-reflection 49

Chapter Two: Identity Negotiation: Frustrated Images and Multiple Selves 62

2.1 Identity negotiation in *Americanah*: hair, language, and a fake ID card. 67

2.2 Identity negotiation in *Kinship*: racial unity, lack of interest, and suicide. 80

Conclusion 97

Works Cited 104

Introduction

> "Hail, stranger; in our house thou shalt find entertainment, and then, when thou hast tasted food, thou shalt tell of what thou hast need."
>
> (Homer, *The Odyssey*, book I)

The quote that opens this dissertation, from Homer's *Odyssey*, depicts hospitality as a virtuous and honorable act. This shows that human mobility is not a new phenomenon and, even though nation-states did not arise until late in the nineteenth century[1], registers of ancient journeys are found in narratives that portray the deeds of heroes, poets, armies, and merchants, as it appears in Plautus' *Amphytrion* and Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. Despite being virtuous and honorable, the hospitality[2] depicted in Homer's *Odyssey* was also aristocratic in the sense that only those in a closed circle of acquaintances, friendship, and familial relationships were welcomed in foreign lands. It can be said, then, that there is a duality in societies between being hospitable to strangers and maintaining values, myths, customs, language and other commonalities that constitute a nation and holds its citizens together.

Much has changed geographically and politically since ancient journeys; however, the complexities embedded in the duality between receiving foreigners and protecting one's land against external influences still pervades the construction of our societies. Nowadays this

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[1] Perspectives on the beginning of Nation-States vary. Some historians and scholars of international relations, identify the beginning of a system like nation-states in 1648 after the Peace of Westphalia was signed, ending the Thirty Years' War and asserting that each nation state has sovereignty over its territory and domestic affairs. Others, like Hobsbawm (1990 [2012]), place the establishment of Nation at the end of the nineteenth century when the nation began to be understood as a group of people with cultural practices under the same government. Bhabha (1991) also pinpoints the beginning of nation at the nineteenth century and attributes it to social historical changes such as the failure of absolutist feudal system, introduction of a common national language, and modern capitalist system with the printing press.

[2] See Judith Still (2010), especially chapter 2, for a comprehensive analysis of Derrida's concept of hospitality in relation to texts such as homer's *Odyssey* and passages of the Bible.

duality is sometimes thought of under the light of concepts such as multiculturalism and nationalism. Moreover, by being so salient in society, it is no surprise that these pressing issues of migration, identity, and community are still addressed in literary texts. For example, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah* (2013) and Philippe Wamba's *Kinship: a family's journey in Africa and America* (1999) approach the issue of human mobility in contemporary society by raising questions about identity formation and representation as their characters transit through host and home countries. Based on the themes they explore, these books were selected to comprise the literary corpus of this dissertation.

Published in 2013, Chimamanda Adichie's *Americanah* dramatizes the separation of Ifemelu and Obinze, main characters of the novel. *Americanah*'s narrative is set against a historical background that spans from the repercussions of Nigerian military regimes during the 1990s to the first years of Obama's presidential term, roughly from 2008 to 2010. In Adichie's novel, Nigerian military regimes affected universities' budgets and professors turned to strikes as a way of protesting for better salaries and teaching conditions. Consequently, the main reason for Ifemelu and Obinze's separation is Ifemelu's search for better educational and professional opportunities in the US since her own university is affected by the strikes. Ifemelu receives a partial academic scholarship to study in the United States where her aunt Uju and her cousin Dike have already established residency. Pursuing the opportunity of continuing her college education, Ifemelu leaves behind her parents and, above all, Obinze, her great love. After arriving in the United States, Ifemelu immediately begins facing identity conflicts; for example, having her hair straightened and trying to emulate an American accent in order to fit in the American cultural standards. Trying to find a job also becomes a problem, even after she had read "all the things that were suggested in a book [...] about interviewing for American jobs" (110). Certainly, these are the first

movements showing Ifemelu's attempt to integrate as best as possible into the American, or African-American, society.

Later in the story, Ifemelu starts a blog whose main concern was race relations called *Raceteenth or Curious Observations by a Non-American Black on the Subject of Blackness in America*. This blog becomes very famous and turns into her main source of income. The racial, social and cultural observations Ifemelu makes through her blog help her move towards a different phase of her identity construction – that of a comparison of her Nigerian values and beliefs with those of Americans, African-Americans, and other African nationalities and Nigerian ethnicities. Her identity formation process throughout the novel, the psychological effects caused by the identity negotiation in the various communities which she takes part, and her desire of returning to her homeland substantiate the use *Americanah* as a source for the analysis of identity tensions in a transnational setting against the late twentieth-century historical background.

Similar to Ifemelu's portrayal in *Americanah*, the author Philippe Wamba reflects on moments of his own transnational experience in his memoir, *Kinship: A Family's Journey in Africa and America* (1999) (from now on *Kinship*). Wamba was born in California in 1971 to an American mother and a Congolese father. Being born in California, grown up in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, and then moving to high school in New Mexico, it may be argued that Wamba's transnational experience gives him enough credibility to address the issue of transnational identity formation and negotiation. In *Kinship*, he explores personal stories focusing on the theme of (mis)represented images that Africans and African-Americans hold of each other. While focusing on kinship, mutual affinity, racial unity, Wamba employs the use of vignettes in his first-person narrative, alternating between events of his life and those of other Africans and African-Americans who faced similar migratory tensions. In one passage, for instance, Wamba gives an account of Kunta Kinte's experience stating that he "initially

felt race-based kinship with the black American slaves he met, but then came to see them as different from himself because of *their seeming support for his white oppressors*, and also because *their cultural practices are different from his own*" (230, stress mine). Such vignettes and Wamba's personal stories portray how the relationship between Africans and African-Americans is more complex than it is usually thought, a complexity also found in *Americanah*. Often, the gaze of one community towards the other is saturated with stereotypical ideas leading to conflicting negotiations of identity. Although racial similarities and struggles help both groups to identify with each other and feel that they belong to the same community (or social identity as blacks), there are tensions in the modalities that constitute their personal identities – such as beliefs, values, ethnicity, (dis)location – that create constant conflicts between acceptance and denial of each other.

Therefore, Adichie's *Americanah* and Wamba's *Kinship* offer textual elements that shed further light on the complexities involving the issue of identity formation and negotiation in a transnational context. An example found in both books are the ties established by migrants that simultaneously influence their country of origin as well as the country of destination. This influence can be analyzed politically and economically, on macro level, and through migrant's negotiation of cultural manifestations, on a micro level. These aspects are directly related to migrants' identity formation and their integration to or isolation from social communities. Both books use narrative resources to mirror the experiences of transnational subjects and question the issues they face in the new diasporic space as well as upon return to their homeland.

In recent years, more precisely at the end of the twentieth and beginning of the twenty-first century, new migratory movements have been kindled due to gender, political, and religious persecution increasing the number of migrants or refugees in search of new places for settlement. Along with these waves of immigration, there are also voluntary migrants who

emigrate in search of better employment and educational opportunities. As a result, various academic fields – such as migration, cultural, social, and more recently identity studies – look for more extensive research concerning the transformations caused by human mobility. These academic fields usually resort to the concept of diaspora as the perspective through which they approach human displacement, especially when such movements arise from violence, are forced, and/or a result in permanent settlement.

Expanding Walker Connor's (1986) definition of diaspora, who claims that diasporas are "that segment of a people living outside the homeland" (qtd in Safran 83), William Safran (1991) compiled what would, for many years, be considered a paradigm of diaspora as a concept. According to Safran, diasporas are "expatriate minority communities" that present an arrangement of the following features: dispersal from an original center (homeland); maintenance of a collective memory, or 'myth', of their homeland; do not feel integrated into the host country; lingering 'myth' of return; desire to reestablish and maintain continuous connection to their homeland (83-84). However, since Safran's definition of the constituting features of diaspora, the concept has evolved and has taken on a multiplicity of meanings leading Rogers Brubaker (2005) to warn against the risk of misuse of the term, which could make it a less reliable analytic concept. Hence, other definitions of diaspora emerged in an attempt to provide analytic premises and, at the same time, expand the concept's scope of analysis. James Clifford (1994), Stuart Hall (1990, 1996), and Avtar Brah (1996) are often cited as the main voices discussing diaspora[3].

James Clifford (1994), for example, observes that Safran's definition of diaspora is mainly concerned with the Jewish dispersal, sometimes called the "ideal style" of diaspora (304). According to Clifford, in one way or another, many other displaced communities would not fit Safran's diaspora standards; especially in the sense that some diasporas do not

[3] Despite not citing it explicitly, this dissertation does no disregard the significant theorization on diaspora made by Khachig Tölölyan (1996), Robin Cohen (2008 [1997]) and Paul Gilroy (1994, 2007).

regard a single land as a center of their dispersal and do not feel “a strong attachment to and desire for literal return to a well-preserved homeland” (305). Clifford’s definition of diaspora, then, is based on the correlation of travel, immigration, and border to the concept of diaspora. For example, he argues that diaspora differs from travel in the sense that it is not temporary, but is characterized by “dwelling, maintaining communities, having collective homes away from home” (308). In summary, it is possible to say that diaspora entails permanence, while travel does not. Also, diaspora differs from what Clifford calls ‘immigration’ in the sense that, according to Clifford, diasporic populations “maintain important allegiances and practical connections to a homeland or a dispersed community located elsewhere” (307). In other words, while diasporic populations’ “sense of identity is centrally defined by collective histories of displacement and violent loss [which] cannot be “cured” by merging into a new national community” (307), the populations that Clifford calls ‘immigrants’ tend to merge into the new home and place. According to him, those he calls ‘immigrants’ only display a sense of loss and nostalgia while in the process of moving to this new home and place.

In the same vein, Avtar Brah (1996), in the chapter “Diaspora, Border and Transnational Identities”, notes that the Jewish diaspora is historically regarded as the “diaspora *par excellence”* (178). Still, she warns that the Jewish diaspora is to be taken “as a point of departure rather than necessarily as ‘models’” (189) for the diasporas of the late twentieth-century. Brah claims that diaspora is “*an interpretive frame referencing the economic, political and cultural dimensions of these contemporary forms of migrancy*” (183, italics in original). According to Brah, this interpretive frame stands on two main pillars. First, in the diaspora migrants are constantly living and re-living multiple modalities. These modalities are “gender, ‘race’, class, religion, language and generation” (180). Second, these modalities are embedded in a multi-axial structure of power through which they are negotiated.

In consonance with Clifford, Stuart Hall (1990) asserts that "diaspora does not refer us to those scattered tribes whose identity can only be secured in relation to some sacred homeland to which they must at all costs return" ("Cultural Identity and Diaspora", 235). Hall's notion of diaspora is based on "the recognition of a necessary heterogeneity and diversity; by a conception of identity which lives with and through, not despite, difference; by *hybridity*" ("Cultural Identity and Diaspora", 235). This passage shows how Hall's definition of diaspora, as wells as that of Brah, is concerned with the constant process of identity formation in the diasporic place. According to him, "[d]iaspora identities are those which are constantly producing and reproducing themselves anew, through transformation and difference" ("Cultural Identity and Diaspora", 235). Hall's definition of diaspora, I believe, incorporates both Clifford's and Brah's definitions in the sense that it acknowledges that diaspora goes beyond a geographical center, that the return to a preserved homeland might be only a "homing desire", in Brah's terms, and that identities are constantly negotiated in the diasporic space.

Stuart Hall, Avtar Brah, and Clifford comprise the guiding theoretical base concerning definitions of diaspora in this dissertation and it is important to notice that these researchers often use the terms diaspora and transnationalism interchangeably. In fact, one the main voices in the field of transnational research, Thomas Faist (2010) acknowledges that diaspora and transnationalism are "two concepts [that] cannot be separated in any meaningful way" (12). He argues that to work with these concepts in separate "would be to neglect the rich panoply of definitions and meanings that constantly overlap" (12). Still, he points out conceptual limits to transnationalism and diaspora in order to differentiate both concepts based on how they have been applied throughout academic literature. According to Faist:

> [W]hile the term 'diaspora' always refers to a community or group and has been heavily used in history and literary studies, concepts such as

> transnationalism – and transnational spaces, fields and formations – refer to processes that transcend international borders and therefore appear to describe more abstract phenomena in a social science language (13).

It is possible to argue, then, that the modalities of gender, ethnicity, class, religion, language and generation, to which Brah calls attention, are these more abstract phenomena that have to be negotiated in the construction of a transnational identity, in opposition to the more concrete politics and geography negotiated through the concept of diaspora.

In addition, the concept of diaspora is often related to notions of permanence, violent or traumatic displacement, as well as return to an idealized geographical center. Peggy Levitt (1998), for example, reserves the term diaspora "for a specific kind of transnational tie involving expulsion or involuntary exile, based on a remembrance of a lost or imagined homeland that is still to be established" (928). In a similar vein, Thomas Faist argues that "[a]lthough both diaspora and transnational approaches use both concepts, there are sometimes differences in emphasis" (21) meaning that while one concept emphasize one aspect of migratory movement the other concept might put emphasis different aspects. In the case of this dissertation, the focus on voluntary migration makes the use of transnationalism together with diaspora an adequate conceptual framework to analyze Ifemelu's and Wamba's migratory movements.

Randolph S. Bourne was the first to use the term transnationalism in his article "Transnational America" (1916). In this article, he challenges the notion of the U.S. as a 'melting-pot' arguing that, at that time in the U.S., migrants' cultural practices, instead of weakened by assimilation, tend to be strengthened in an attempt to maintain the memory of the homeland together with some of their beliefs and values. Since then, transnationalism has informed the analysis of various academic fields in relation to the economic, cultural, and/or ethnic connections and networks established by migrants beyond geographical and political

borders. The transnational experience requires the constant negotiation of aspects such as language, religion, family, time, space, and locality and, as any postmodern concept would, it influences categories such as identity and community.

A summary of the historical development of transnationalism is presented by Janine Dahinden (2017) in her article "Transnationalism reloaded: the historical trajectory of a concept". She divides the evolution of transnationalism into three major phases. The first phase focused on qualitative analysis is marked by the work of Linda Basch, Nina Glick Shiller, and Christina Szanton Blanc (1994). They claimed that "migrants engaged in social, economic, and political activities" (Dahinden 1476) not only in their host country but also in their country of origin through money remittances, exchange of cultural products, and political engagement. Second, and as an answer to the need for a framework of the phenomenon, in 1999, Alejandro Portes, Luis Guarnizo, and Patricia Landolt developed a study that became a landmark on the analysis of transnationalism. They adopted a quantitative analytical approach stating that transnational activities needed to involve a significant number of people, for a consistent period of time, and that the features that constitute transnationalism should not be encompassed by pre-existing concepts (Dahinden 1477). However, according to Dahinden, the work of Portes and his associates focused only on "ways of being" transnational – activities, practices, networks – undermining the "ways of belonging" – solidarity, reciprocity, and belonging – that are central for transnationalism to take place and be sustained. As a result, a third and current phase of transnational studies emerged through the work of Peggy Levitt and Nina Glick Schiller (2004). They focused on the ways that "kinship, solidarity or collective representations of ethnicity and groupness are not given … rather, they are 'done' or 'undone' in transnational space, within and between generations, and they are closely linked to local contexts which provide constraints or resources" (Dahinden 1478). In this sense, transnationalism not only results from migration, but it is also

the outcome of structural constraints and opportunities pervading various stages of migrants' transnational experiences. It is through the work of these academics, mainly of Peggy Levitt and Glick-Schiller (2004), that the approximation of transnationalism to literary texts will be carried out in this dissertation.

In order to provide more detail concerning theorizations on transnational migration I will also review the work of Nina Glick Schiller, Linda Basch and Cristina Szanton-Blanc (1995). They propose an approach to immigration taking into account impermanent movements and claiming that "[t]ransmigrants are immigrants whose daily lives depend on multiple and constant interconnections across international borders and whose public identities are configured in relationship to more than one nation-state" ("From Immigrant to Transmigrant" 48). In this sense, the concept of transnationalism relates to the ties established across multiple nation-states' borders by immigrants as individuals or as groups on various forms and levels of institutionalization. This approach to migration acknowledges the influence of immigrants upon the space they occupy in the host country and also refutes the notion of full assimilation into the host country's culture.

As stated before, Alejandro Portes and his associates delimit "the concept of transnationalism to occupations and activities that require regular and sustained social contacts over time across national borders for their implementation" ('The Study of Transnationalism' 219). This definition implies that regular and sustained economical activities (such as commercial activities and monthly remittances) are necessary to distinguish transnationalism from other concepts. Based on Michael P. Smith and Luis E. Guarnizo's differentiation of "transnationalism from above" (which examines multinational corporations and governmental institutions) and "transnationalism from below" (which focuses on immigrants activities and noncorporate actors)[4] (qtd in Portes, 'The Study of

[4] This differentiation possibly echoes that of Caroline Brettell and James Hollifield who, referring to migration theory in general, also claims that "[o]ne broad division separates those social scientists who take a top-down

Transnationalism' 223), Portes advocates that transnational researches should focus on a 'from below' approach in order to differentiate transnationalism from other concepts and subvert "fundamental premises of capitalist globalization, namely that labour stays local, whereas capital ranges global" ("The Study of Transnationalism" 227, "Theoretical Convergences" 876). In other words, focusing on transnationalism 'from below', allows for a focus on activities of individual immigrants and show that they move across borders instead of focusing on large companies and enterprises. This dissertation approaches transnationalism 'from below', as encouraged by Portes.

Finally, Levitt and Glick Schiller (2004), in their article "Conceptualizing Simultaneity: A Transnational Social Field Perspective on Society", add to the concept the relevant notion of simultaneity. For them, transnationalism encompasses activities and routines that take place simultaneously "in a destination country and transnationally" ("Conceptualizing Simultaneity" 1003). Simultaneity is important because the transnational subject is constantly moving, even if not physically, between global, national, regional and local social realities. Another important aspect of this article is that Levitt and Schiller "suggest thinking of the transnational migrations experience as a kind of gauge which, while anchored, pivots between host land and transnational connections" ("Conceptualizing Simultaneity" 1003). This analogy of the transnational experience to a kind of gauge is relevant to this research since it indicates a third point distanced from extremities, the sending and the receiving countries. This third place is in parallel with ideas of identity formation in a transnational space where usually migrants resort to an interstitial identity that is neither fully assimilated to the host country nor entirely oblivious of the homeland. In fact, Levitt and Schiller do concede that it is possible to integrate into the host country and still maintain strong ties to the homeland in transnational settings.

'macro' approach, focusing on immigration policy or market forces, from those whose approach is bottom-up, emphasizing the experiences of the individual migrant or the immigrant family" (2).

Following the works of Basch, et al (1994), Glick-Schiller, et al. (1995), Peggy Levitt (1998), Levitt and Schiller (2004), and Portes, et al. (1999) the analysis carried out in this dissertation will use the term transnationalism to refer to migratory experiences that encompasses elements of impermanent migration, technological advancements in communication and transportation, and migrants' economic and social impact on sending and receiving countries, while the term diaspora focuses on traumatic expulsion, permanent settlement, and return to an idealized land. Despite the fact that Ifemelu's and Wamba's transnational experience does not entail expulsion or involuntary exile common to diasporic analytical approaches, the use of both concepts diaspora and transnationalism seem to be adequate for the analysis carried out here since they complement each other.

Another concept that is necessary to define and limit the scope is identity, a concept that has multiple definitions due to the wide range of fields where it is used. In the field of social psychology, for example, Kay Deaux, whose body of work encompasses identity, gender, and immigration, attempts to categorize the complexities of personal and social identities in the process of identity formation. In "Relationship between social and personal identities: Segregation or integration", Deaux, together with her coauthor Anne Reid, agree to use Social Identity when talking about "social groups or collective categories of membership" (such as mother, activist, woman, and ethnic ones such as African-American); and Personal Identity[5] "to designate the personality traits, characteristics, and behaviors that an individual uses in self-description" ("Relationships" 1084) (such as intelligent, fun, and hardworking). Throughout this dissertation, the mentions to social and personal identities follow Kay Deaux and Anne Reid's definition and categorization.

In a later article, Deaux revisits the notion of social identity as "aspects of a person that are defined in terms of his or her group memberships" ("Social Identity" 1059). Here, she

[5] In fact, specifically in this article, they use the term 'attribute' interchangeably with 'personal identity'. In later articles, however, Kay Deaux seems to adhere to personal identity and use attribute to refer to each layer, traits or elements of this personal identity.

focuses on the effects that group affiliation has on one's identity. Deaux argues that the choice between one and another group will directly influence immigrants social interactions in regards to "friendship networks, social and cultural activities, and even marriage and family" ("Social Identity" 1061). However, she adds that "to share a social identity with others does not necessarily mean that we know or interact with every other member of the designated category" ("Social Identity" 1059). In *Americanah*, for example, at the braiding salon, Ifemelu is repeatedly asked if she is related to any of the actors and actresses on Nigerian movies simply based on the fact that they share this social identity, being Nigerian. While this echoes Benedict Anderson's conceptualization of the nation-state as an imagined community, other theorists provide a conceptualization of identity from a sociological approach such as Stuart Hall (1999) and Avtar Brah (1996).

Hall notes that it is highly complex to construct notions of identity in a diasporic setting. According to him, "[i]n the diaspora situation, identities become multiple" ("Thinking the Diaspora" 2). In other words, along with the identity built upon cultural practices, beliefs, and values of the sending country; in the diasporic space, by means of transnational connections with other groups (ethnic, political, social) there emerges an identity that is equally important for migrants' social interactions in the receiving country (Hall "Thinking the Diaspora" 2-3). In a similar vein, in "Diaspora, border and transnational identities" (1996), Avtar Brah argues that "the identity of the diasporic imagined community is far from fixed or pre-given. It is constituted within the crucible of the materiality of everyday life; in the everyday stories we tell ourselves individually and collectively" (180). Brah's argument is relevant because it takes into account the everyday life and the "stories we tell ourselves" in the identity formation process. I claim that, in *Americanah*, Ifemelu's identity is established in her everyday life through her relationships with her mother, her aunt Uju and Obinze; and, in

Kinship, Wamba's identity is initially established by the stories of racial unity and pan-Africanism that gave him a romanticized view of Africa.

Another important aspect of Brah's definition of identity is the idea that current societies are far from fixed and pre-given identities. Likewise, Hall states that society has reached a chronological point in which we are "'post' any fixed or essentialist conception of identity" ("The Question of Cultural Identity" 597). The author proposes three kinds of identity subjects: 1) the Enlightenment subject, which had a core identity that determined who he or she was; 2) sociological subject; the one who constantly negotiates between the personal world and the public world. 3) post-modern subject. It may be argued that the "transnational" subject is located between the "sociological subject" and the "post-modern subject". A transnational identity has a center (a real I) or a basis of identification (Brah 123), but this identity is constantly shaped and reshaped by external influences. According to Hall, this constant negotiation, movement, and fragmentation of identity – "composed, not of a single, but of several, sometimes contradictory or unresolved, identities" ("The Question of Cultural Identity" 596) – is responsible for the emergence of what he calls "post-modern subject", those who have no fixed identity and adapt to the cultural systems in which they are inserted.

A final point that makes Hall's work relevant for the present research is the fact that he is also concerned with how the multiple forms of representation help shaping an identity. According to Hall, identities are "never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation" ("Cultural Identity and Diaspora" 222). Along with the visual and cinematic forms of representation discussed by Hall in his article, it may be said that literary representations can be used to establish or revise misrepresentations of non-Europeans as Others, as Hall puts it. Both books analyzed in this dissertation approach various forms of representation such as music, literature, food, clothing, and movies in an attempt to present a revisionist view of the African countries they represent.

Based on the definitions provided by Hall, Brah, Deaux, and others such as Kwame Appiah, and Homi Bhabha, the approach to identity adopted in this study is related to the combination of values, religious beliefs, ethnicities, and cultural practices that simultaneously work as attributes of one's personal identity as well as the social identity as aspects one shares with the community that surrounds them. In this sense, I propose a research on how characters form their identity and negotiate these aspects in relation to the communities amongst which they move.

Departing from the theoretical framework discussed above in relation to the notions of diaspora, transnationalism, identity, and representation, this dissertation aims at an analysis of characters' identity formation and negotiation in literary texts. Specifically, the argument presented here is that after establishing an initial identity in the countries they call home, Ifemelu and Wamba have to negotiate these predefined cultural practices, behaviors, and religious beliefs in order to create an identity that accommodates values of the countries and communities through which they transit. This dissertation approaches textual evidence in *Americanah* and *Kinship*, bearing in mind that, at times, fictional characters best embody and represent social issues, in this case, the shaping force of migration on characters' identity formation and negotiation. In brief, transnationalism plays a central role in Adichie's *Americanah* and in Wamba's *Kinship* triggering processes of identity formation and negotiation.

The analysis of identity formation and negotiation proposed here is framed around the following question: how characters' identities are formed and negotiated against a migratory and transnational sociopolitical background? This question can be unfolded in two more specific research goals. First, how an identity basis is established during Ifemelu's and Wamba's early childhood? This aim here is to analyze traditions, beliefs, and cultural practices that result in a set of values that will guide characters later throughout their adult

life. This first goal also accounts for the way that romanticized and idealized images are created through misrepresentations of media (books, movies, returned migrants) during the initial phase of their lives. Images such as that of a racial unity between Africans and African-Americans, of the melting pot, and of the US as a land of opportunity are questioned in both books.

The second research goal focuses on characters' experiences in the diasporic space and asks in what ways layers of characters' predefined identities are questioned when they are confronted with the real society in the diasporic space? While their idealized images of the receiving country are frustrated, they also have to negotiate language, outward appearance, hair, and engagement in sociopolitical issues in an attempt to achieve a sense of belonging or community membership in the constant fluctuation of acceptance and rejection displayed between Africans and African-Americans cultural practices. In the diasporic space their basis of identification will be questioned in various ways leading characters to a period of identity crisis. The answer for these questions will be attempted bearing in mind the theoretical basis mentioned above as well a tradition of academic research and criticism made about *Americanah* and *Kinship*.

Analyses of diasporas represented through literary texts have been carried out by various researchers. Cláudio Roberto V. Braga (2010), for example, analyzed two works of Karen Tei Yamashita, namely *Brazil-Maru* and *Circle K Cycles*, through the scope of diaspora theory. The author carried out a comparative analysis of both works focusing on diasporic features that encompass ties and interests of migrant groups as well as the individual needs of the diasporic subject.

Besides offering an extensive theoretical bibliography on literary, cultural and diaspora studies, in his PhD thesis, Braga introduces a concept that he calls diaspoetics[6]. He observed that various researches rely on examples of literary texts to support the study of diaspora, but they do not offer a definition of the features that comprise diasporic literature. According to him, diaspoetics refers to the "reading operation that enables the identification, analysis, and discussion of diasporic literary effects" (190)[7] embedded in a literary work.

In a later article, "Diáspora, Espaço e Literatura: Alguns Caminhos Teóricos" (2014), Braga, together with his co-author Gláucia Renate Gonçalves, developed the notion of 'diasporic literary space'. They brought together the work of theoreticians that discuss attachment to homeland, presence of mobility in the text, and diasporic authors who portray their travel experiences in their texts to propose twelve features that constitute the diasporic literary space. According to them, the diasporic literary:

> 1) is about communities in the diaspora, with characters representing diasporic subjects; 2) is imbricated with ideas of movement and crossings of borders, articulated to the diasporic dispersion that begins in the native land; 3) has as its theme the diasporic dispersion and factor, or factors, that caused it, often a trauma in the homeland, usually presented soon in the exhibition; 4) tends to present the plot in a non-linear way, combining the unpredictability of the external facts, occurring in the foreign land, with the psychological factors, internal to the characters and, therefore, emotional; 5) has as its predominant space the diasporic enclave, an inter-place in which the story goes, located geographically outside the native land, but brings references to it, amidst the space-cultural influences of the host country; 6) explores the conflict and

[6] For more on the concept of *Diaspoetics* see Cláudio R. V. Braga and Gláucia R. Gonçalves. "Diaspoetics in the Literature of Karen Tei Yamashita: Brazilian and Japanese Diasporas Compared." In *Diasporic Choices*, edited by Renata Seredyńska-Abou Eid, 1st ed., Inter-Disciplinary Press, 2013, pp. 77–85.

[7] From de original: "operação de leitura que possibilitou a identificação, a análise e a discussão dos efeitos literários diaspóricos"

intrigue, external or internal to the characters, arisen due to the diasporic displacement and the conviviality in the host land; 7) prioritizes a tense, recurrent climate in the diasporic condition, whether for social, moral, economic, political or psychological reasons, revolving around the diaspora's relationship with the host country and homeland; 8) it is realized through a fragmented or dispersed narrative style, stratified or superimposed in layers; 9) in discursive terms, tends to present narrators and characters that make use of a language that characterizes cultural difference in diaspora, being frequent the use of words, expressions and even whole texts in more than one language and, often, mixing and fusing the languages of the native land and the host country, constituting a hybrid linguistic conjuncture; 10) is prone to present influences from a literary tradition of origin, a "literary homeland", whose references are present in the formation of the diasporic writer, and may be noticeably marked in his work or manifest symbolically; 11) expresses a political position, since diasporic narratives usually give voice to minorities generally ignored or silenced; 12) is produced by a writer whose personal and family history is diasporic, or who opts for a diasporic lifestyle, often having an interest in writing about the native land, the host country, and above all about issues pertaining to the diasporic community itself. ("Diáspora, Espaço e Literatura" 45-46)[8]

[8] From the original: "1) versa sobre comunidades na diáspora, com personagens que representam sujeitos diaspóricos; 2) está imbricado de ideias de movimento e cruzamentos de fronteiras, articuladas à dispersão diaspórica que tem início na terra natal; 3) tem por tema a dispersão diaspórica e o fator, ou fatores, que a causaram, frequentemente um trauma na terra natal, que em geral é conhecido logo na exposição; 4) tende a apresentar o enredo de forma não-linear, combinando a imprevisibilidade de fatores externos, ocorridos na terra estrangeira, com os fatores psicológicos, internos aos personagens; 5) tem como cena principal o enclave diaspórico, um entre-lugar em que a história se passa, situado geograficamente fora da terra natal, mas que traz referências a ela, em meio a influências espaço-culturais do país hospedeiro; 6) explora o conflito e a intriga, externos ou internos às personagens, surgidos no deslocamento diaspórico e no convívio na terra hospedeira; 7) prioriza um clima tenso, recorrente na condição diaspórica, quer seja por razões sociais, morais, econômicas, políticas ou psicológicas, girando em torno da relação da diáspora com o país hospedeiro e a terra natal; 8)

Braga's PhD thesis and Braga and Gonçalves's article put forward theoretical findings about the diasporic literary space that can be applied to various points of *Americanah* and *Kinship* throughout the course of this dissertation. In fact, Braga points out that while in his PhD thesis he investigates Yamashita's representation of the Brazilian diaspora in Japan, the concept dispoetics should be applied to other forms of diaspora. By approximating the definitions of diasporic literary space and diaspoetics to diasporic experiences that differ from the ones explored in his thesis, this dissertation aims to help strengthen and validate these notions.

More recently, in a book entitled *A literatura movente de Chimamanda Adichie* (2019), Braga introduces the notion of 'cultural decolonization'. He defines cultural decolonization

> as a process intrinsic to postcoloniality, that seeks to provide repositionings that favor individuals and societies living in postcoloniality, in an effort to review, mitigate or even extinguish the oppressive effects of precepts and values inherited from colonial domination that continue to exert control over the mind, the spirit, and the imagination of those formerly colonized, even after the extinction of formal colonization (44-45)[9].

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realiza-se por meio de um estilo narrativo fragmentado ou disperso, estratificado ou superposto em camadas; 9) em termos discursivos, tende a apresentar narradores e personagens cuja linguagem caracteriza a diferença cultural na diáspora, sendo frequente o emprego de vocábulos, expressões e até textos inteiros em mais de uma língua e, muitas vezes, misturando e fundindo as línguas da terra natal e do país hospedeiro, constituindo uma conjuntura linguística híbrida; 10) está propenso a apresentar influências de uma tradição literária de origem, uma "terra natal literária", cujas referências estão presentes na formação do escritor diaspórico, e podem estar visivelmente marcadas em seu trabalho ou se manifestar simbolicamente; 11) explicita um posicionamento político, já que narrativas diaspóricas geralmente dão voz a minorias displaçadas, ignoradas e silenciadas; 12) é criado por escritores com história pessoal e familiar diaspórica, ou que optam por um estilo de vida diaspórico, tendo, com frequência, interesse em escrever sobre a terra natal, o país hospedeiro e quaisquer temas pertinentes à comunidade diaspórica em si."

[9] From the original: "defino a descolonização cultural como um processo, inerente à pós-colonialidade, no qual se buscam reposicionamentos que favoreçam indivíduos e sociedades vivendo na pós-colonialidade, no sentido de rever, amenizar ou mesmo extinguir os efeitos opressivos de precietos e valores herdados da dominação colonial, que continuam exercendo controle sobre a mente, o espórito e a imaginação do ex-colonizados, mesmo após a extinção da colonização formal" (44-45).

Braga applies the concept of cultural decolonization to Chimamanda Adichie's *Americanah* in an attempt to show how "hair, makeup, clothing, food and other forms of cultural practices" may be used as a system or mechanism of power to stifle or disregard systems of values and cultural practices that have political, sociological, and economic implications. As Thomas Sankara stated in an interview, for imperialism, cultural domination is more useful than military domination as it is "the most flexible, the least expensive, and the most effective"[10] form of domination (Jean-Philippe Rapp "Le Président Sankara" 1984).

Other studies that focus on Adichie's *Americanah* have ranged from an analysis on race and gender to culture and identity. These studies analyze Adichie's works through various theories such as African-American, Culture, Feminism, and Gender studies relying largely on Diaspora as a framework for their analysis. Sanne Janssen's (2015) concise Bachelor Thesis "Writing an Honest Novel about Race", for example, investigates how race and gender in Adichie's *Americanah* are forces that shape and affect the identity of black immigrants, and even more black female immigrants. Applying postcolonial and gender theory to analyze race and gender in *Americanah*, Janssen states that the book "offers an outside perspective on what it means to be black in America and therefore contributes to understanding the notion of race and gender in African American literature" (3). It is important to notice that Adichie is a Nigerian author who writes about the experiences of a Nigerian woman in the US. In this sense, according to Janssen, *Americanah* cannot be considered African-American literature; however, the book does point out issues regarding race and gender in the United States that can be analyzed through postcolonial and gender theory. According to Janssen, Adichie overcomes the claim found in *Americanah* (from where Janssen draws the title of her thesis) about the impossibility of writing an honest book about

[10] From the Original: "la plus souple, la moin couteuse, la plus efficace". Rapp, Jean-Philippe. "Le Président Sankara 1984." *Rts.ch*, Les Archives De La RTS, 16 Oct. 2017, www.rts.ch/archives/tv/information/temps-present/6173069-le-president-sankara.html.

race in America. Janssen concludes that the narrator in *Americanah* is capable of overcoming this obstacle due to her simultaneously insider and outsider point of view that allows her to fictionalize the US society as an observer, without the burden of being part of America's racial history.

Another relevant analysis is Carine Pereira Marques' "Narratives of Displacement in Space and Time" (2017). Her literary corpus is comprised of four novels representing different diasporic movements, among which is Adichie's *Americanah.* She analyses how space and time are relevant factors that set in motion characters' negotiation of identities and identifications. Marques observes that the specificities of each diasporic movement – such as trauma, race and religion – lead characters to reconfigure their social relations according to the weight that each layer of identity (or modalities, as defined by Brah) have on their identities in the new diasporic space. Marques concludes that in the diasporic space characters identities are "systematically contested and reconstructed through specific identity constituents with the passing of time" (169). In other words, while religion might be essential to identity reconfiguration in one space, in another, identity might be ruled by gender roles or race. This finding sustains the notion that identities are not fixed but in constant resignification (an idea present in Hall, 'Modernity' 597, and Brah, 'Cartographies' 180).

Next, Eliza de Souza Silva Araújo (2017) analyzes the formation of a diasporic consciousness in *Americanah* through the scope of cultural and gender studies questioning how current displacements affect diasporic subjects. She argues that *Americanah*'s main character, Ifemelu, builds her diasporic consciousness through the social commentaries and observations on race and gender she publishes on her blog. Araújo analyzes how Ifemelu's blog writing is central to the character's construction of a new identity, using the blog to question and cope with issues regarding race and gender in America, as well as to readapt to her homeland culture upon returning to Nigeria. Also, through her blog, Ifemelu is capable of

inserting herself into various communities claiming/feeling a sense of belonging to them or not. Araújo concludes that Ifemelu's new diasporic consciousness, not only transforms her *I*, but it also allows her to transforms the places she occupies – both in the US and Nigeria – by posing new questions, kindling new discussions, forging new relationships, and constantly searching for belonging.

While these studies on *Americanah* have examined fictional work through the scope of diaspora, as mentioned before, in the present research I intend to add to the analysis the theoretical framework of transnationalism in an attempt to contemplate the impact of migratory movements and effect of migrants' ties to the host country and homeland on identity formation and negotiation. In this sense, I intend not only to continue the academic and methodological tradition presented by the researches mentioned above regarding gender and race, but also expand on the analysis by focusing on the effect of migration on identity formation.

At this point in my research, it has not been possible to find many academic articles, dissertations, and theses on Wamba's *Kinship.* Perhaps, Wamba's premature death, at 31 years of age, in 2002, plunged much of his work into oblivion. As previously stated, *Kinship* is a memoir that, much like *Americanah*, mirrors the issues faced by transnational characters that have to negotiate their identity. Despite claiming identification as Africans the characters have to readjust their identity to the communities of African-Americans upon arrival in the US. Despite the lack of academic work on *Kinship*, there can still be found at least one interview with the author[11] and book reviews on newspapers from which at least one is worth mentioning here.

Mark Mathabane (1999), in a book review published on the Washington Post, highlights the feelings of being simultaneously bound to and repelled by Africa. According to

[11] "Kinship: Interview." *C-SPAN*, 26 Sept. 1999, www.c-span.org/video/?152490-1%2Fkinship.

Mathabane, Wamba does show a strong feeling of affiliation to Africa. However, his love for Africa "doesn't preclude objectivity or self-criticism, nor does it prevent him from honestly rendering opposing points of view" (Mathabane, "Kinship"). In other words, in *Kinship*, Wamba does not refrain from making criticism and raising questions about both sides of the Atlantic while making a revision of misrepresentations and stereotypical images of African countries and of the US. Wamba does feel that there is a relationship of kinship between Africans and African-Americans; still, there are "complexities and challenges, myths and misconceptions surrounding the often idealized relationship between black Americans and Africans" (Mathabane, "Kinship"). Departing from his personal experiences as well as those of his family, in his book, Wamba concludes that "black Americans and Africans should forge 'a meaningful and functional sense of unity' despite differences of geography, culture, and history" (Mathabane, "Kinship"). This review is relevant for the present research as it shows how Wamba is capable of making observations by being an outsider; in other words, by being a transnational subject and experiencing both sides of the Atlantic. As he himself puts it, "I was born both African and African American … My blackness has been the bridge that has linked my two identities, the commonality that my split selves share" (Wamba 9). This passage exemplifies how Wamba is capable of noticing that hybridism splits his identity but, at the same time, by experiencing both cultures, he is able to create a bridge that allows him to transit between both sides.

Apart from this introduction, the remainder of this dissertation is structured as follows: Chapter 1 deals with selected characters' identity formation. The character Ifemelu, in *Americanah,* will be analyzed in relation to her identity formation in Nigeria during her childhood and teenage years. In *Kinship*, a similar analysis will be carried out. Wamba, as the central protagonist of the memoir, at an early age moves from the United States to Tanzania and this movement gives the initial background for his interrogations regarding identity.

Ifemelu's interactions with the characters that surround her – her mother, Aunty Uju, and Obinze – allow the reader to infer layers of her identity that will be negotiated later in the diasporic space. In *Kinship*, similar to Ifemelu, Wamba's interpersonal interactions play an important role on his identity formation that range from believing in solidarity and kinship between Africans and African-Americans to noticing how both groups are set apart by misrepresentations of each other. Apparently, Wamba goes from being indifferent to the importance of identifying as an African or American to knowing how important these identity categorizations can be politically, socially and culturally and the social pressures each identity layer entails.

Chapter 2 deals primarily with the negotiation of the characters' identity traits that were pointed out in the previous chapter. As mentioned before, in the host country, or the new diasporic space, modalities of their identities will be constantly highlighted and challenged. Race, for example, only become a salient trait of Ifemelu's identity upon her arrival in the US. In this chapter, characters' sense of belonging to the host country, their relationships and their community identifications are pointed out as evidence of an attempt to establish a new identity in the new diasporic space. Features of both narratives are pointed out as ways that help characters cope with their fluid identity. Examples of these narrative resources are the hair salon and the blog in *Americanah* and, in *Kinship*, the use of vignettes. Through these vignettes, for example, Wamba relates his experiences to that of other African and African-American personalities as a way of helping him understand how others have gone through identity issues similar to those he undergoes throughout his life. Mainly, it is possible to observe how Wamba is capable to use intertextuality as way of coping and identifying with new cultural aspects he faces in his own life by relating his life events to those of Kunta Kinte, a character from Alex Haley's *Roots: The Saga of an American Family*.

Finally, the conclusion resumes and sums up the findings made through the investigation carried out here in relation to the theoretical basis reviewed in this introduction providing an overview on issues that constitute identity formation and negotiation.

Chapter One:

Identity Formation:

Interpersonal Relationships and Basis of Identification

Introduction

I who am poisoned with the blood of both,
Where shall I turn, divided to the vein?
I who have cursed
The drunken officer of British rule, how choose
Between this Africa and the English tonge I love?
Betray them both, or give back what they give?
How can I face such slaughter and be cool?
How can I turn from Africa and live?
(A Far Cry from Africa – Derek Walcott)

In Derek Walcott's *A Far Cry From Africa*, the poem that opens this chapter, the speaker presents questionings regarding the multiple layers of his identity. His questions are too hard to answer as identity is a complex combination of two conflicting heritages, languages, and tribes. In fact, postmodern society has reached a point where identity has become fragmented, fluid, and displaced, as argued by Hall and Brah. Together with the processes of colonization, decolonization, and migration, this fluid identity triggers and entails the soul-crushing identity negotiation that is the central theme of Walcott's poem.

However, such identity negotiation and resulting reconfiguration can only happen upon a "basis of identification" (Brah 123) that, according to Brah, is previously established

in relation to shared religious, linguistic, cultural and social values within a certain community. Similarly, Hall notes that the sociological subject is “formed in relation to ‘significant others’, who mediated to the subject the values, meanings, and symbols – the culture – of the worlds he/she inhabited” (275). Therefore, in this analysis of identities in a transnational context, it is necessary to present first the ways in which the characters’ basis of identifications are established in both books.

In *Americanah*, Adichie invests the characters with compelling details that allow them to mirror social concerns and raise questions regarding traditional cultural practices. The author does so through the combination of direct and indirect characterization in what can be called the exposition part of the story. Having Ifemelu as the main character and the focus of the analysis carried out here, I intend to make a close reading of the novel arguing that Ifemelu’s basis of identification is formed through her social interactions with her significant others, specifically her mother, Aunty Uju, and Obinze. By opposing Ifemelu to these and other characters, in her homeland, meaningful layers of her identity are formed. Understanding how her personality is established in the initial parts of the story might provide a better understanding of the observations she presents later concerning the US society, as indicated by various studies.

Next, In *Kinship,* Wamba resorts to the use of memoir as a narrative method to focus on incidents of his experiences as a transnational subject. Similar to Ifemelu’s, Wamba’s identity formation process is depicted through the retelling of his childhood years. Wamba’s relationship with his significant others (his familial environment) and interpersonal relationships (the groups and communities he transits through) provides an understanding of the differences between personal and social identity formation. By pondering on how his family transited between the US and Tanzania, he observes how his identity transits between African and American values, ideologies, and worldview.

In this chapter, then, I will consider the nuances and complexities involved in Ifemelu’s and Wamba’s identity formation processes. In this sense, the aim of this chapter is to focus on the representation of characters’ interpersonal relationships upon which they build their basis of identification. The layers of Ifemelu’s and Wamba’s identities are established through their relationships with other characters. This offers a basis for the observations they make later while in their respective diasporic space.

In order to carry out the analysis proposed here, this chapter is divided into two sections. The first will present Ifemelu’s identity formation process. Direct and indirect contrasts between the main and selected supporting characters allow for an analysis of Ifemelu’s identity separating it into religion, expected gender roles, and cultural practices, knowing that each of these aspects brings further levels of complexity into her identity. Similarly, the second section deals with the identity formation process in Wamba’s *Kinship* taking into consideration the use of memoir as a literary tool. The author skillfully shows aspects of identity that constitute tension while negotiating it between nations and communities, geographic and political, personal and social realms. This, I believe, prepares for the portrayal of tensions the characters will experience in the diasporic space discussed in the following chapter since an approach through a transnational perspective suggests that the networks built in the homeland should be given the same importance that those made in receiving country.

1.1 Identity formation in *Americanah*: building a personal identity through family ties

In *Americanah*, there are various instances in which Ifemelu does not refrain from speaking her mind, giving in to her impulses. A description that supports the idea of Ifemelu as someone who acts on her impulses comes from Obinze, for example. He describes Ifemelu as “the kind of person who will do something because [she] want[s] to, and not because

everyone else is doing it" (73). A second commentary regarding Ifemelu's personality is found in an interview with the Public Radio International in which Adichie declares that she "wanted to write a female character who is not necessarily easy to fall in love with. She is prickly, she is complex and I love female characters who are like that [sic]" (Werman "Race, Identity, and Good Hair")[12]. Ifemelu's personality is invested with these traits over the course of the initial part of her life and will have an effect later, in the US, where she discusses issues that are not usually discussed in that society such as "race[13], gender, and body size" (*Americanah* 7). During her teen years, Ifemelu faces problems concerning her outspoken personality in a society with strictly defined gender roles, cultural practices, and social values. Ifemelu's struggle to control her outspoken personality in Nigerian society will become evident in scenes that she interacts with her mother, Aunty Uju, and Obinze.

Ifemelu's mother is the first character against which Ifemelu's identity is defined. The author uses hair, a central symbol in the narrative, to embark in a flashback and provide Ifemelu's background to the reader. At the beginning of the third chapter, the narrator states that Ifemelu "had grown up in the shadow of her mother's hair" (49). Growing under the shadow of her mother's hair means that Ifemelu grew having it as a strong influence. Ifemelu wondered if her hair would someday "become like her mother's" (49), which is described as thick, full, and "flowing down her back like a celebration" (49). This supports the idea that this strong bond between Ifemelu and her mother affects Ifemelu's identity. In her article "Social Identity", Kay Deaux discusses the bond between mother and children. She argues that "the identity of mother implies a specific role relationship with another person, a relationship that is unique and grounded in one's own personal experience with that other

[12] Werman, Marco. "Race, Identity, and Good Hair: Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie on Her New Novel, 'Americanah'." *Public Radio International*, 23 May 2013, www.pri.org/stories/2013-05-23/race-identity-and-good-hair-chimamanda-ngozi-adichie-her-new-novel-americanah. 04:25

[13] Adichie clarifies that despite using the term race she is referring to differentiation based on skin color.

person" ('Social Identity' 2). It may be argued that the relationship between mother and daughter presented here is intensified by the hair symbolism applied in this passage.

Later, however, the reader learns that, due to religious beliefs, Ifemelu's mother decides to chop off all of her own hair and burn it together with her Catholic objects. The narrator states that Ifemelu watches stunned her mother's hair laid "on the floor like dead grass" (50). Religion becomes a central part of Ifemelu's mother's identity, but it does not play a relevant role in the formation of Ifemelu's identity. The expected relationship between mother and daughter is cut off together with her mother's hair. It is possible to notice the beginning of a distancing between Ifemelu and her mother: "the woman who was bald and blank, was not her mother, could not be her mother" (50). In this sense, it is justifiable to say that one's identity can be formed in relation to their significant others, as Hall puts it, since Ifemelu's identity is formed in contrast to that of her mother.

Ifemelu is also depicted as observant of the religious hypocrisy that took place in the churches attended by her mother. For example, Ifemelu disapproves of how Sister Ibinabo, a powerful woman in charge of the church, reproaches Christie, a young girl, for "wearing tight trousers" (61). The narrator states that "[w]hen Sister Ibinabo was talking to Christie, with that poisonous spite she claimed was religious guidance, Ifemelu had looked at her and suddenly seen something of her own mother" (62). In other words, Ibinabo and Ifemelu's mother "spread the cloak of religion" (63) over facts denying any rational point of view. This scene is set in opposition to another where Ifemelu refuses to work on making decorations for a celebration in honor of Chief Omenka, a man who got rich through fraud and invested his dirty money in the church. In this scene, Ifemelu crosses her arms saying "why should I make decorations for a thief?" (62). – her mother's answer to this criticism is "Do not judge. Leave the judging to God!" (63). To put it another way, Ibinabo and Ifemelu's mother's actions are hypocritical since they judge Christie's choice of clothes, but do not judge Chief Omenka's

fraudulent behavior. In this passage, then, religion served as an excuse to criticize Christie's behavior, but at the same time to cover for reproachable behaviors when it meant profit for the church.

Concerning Ifemelu's identity formation, it may be said that in this passage her thoughts and her speech – or rather the things she is not allowed to say – play an important role in the way her personality is built. Regarding this specific scene, her mother says that if she wanted to speak her mind, "it would be better if [Ifemelu] was a boy" (64). Aunty Uju and Ifemelu's father also support the idea that Ifemelu should not be an outspoken girl. First, Aunty Uju argues that "[Ifemelu's] problem is that she doesn't always know when to keep her mouth shut" (64); then, Ifemelu's father says that she "must refrain from [her] natural proclivity towards provocation" and that she was "known for insubordination" (63) at school. These passages present the reader with the opportunity to distinguish features of Ifemelu's identity formation by contrasting her personality through other characters descriptions. An observation that seems meaningful is that, based on textual evidence, only her mother's comment seems to overtly entail gender differentiation based on behavior. While Aunty Uju's and Ifemelu's father's comments in this passage are not so explicit, they allow the reader to infer the system of values under which the Nigerian society operates.

In her 2012 TED[14] presentation, that later became the book *We should all be Feminists,* Adichie states that "[t]he problem with gender is that it prescribes how we should be rather than recognizing how we are" (*Feminists* 16). Both characters, Ifemelu and Obinze, subvert conventional ideas of gender. While Ifemelu subverts the social expectations concerning female behavior, Obinze cooks, helps his mother, and is not intimidated by strong women, subverting the narrow view of masculinity that constrains men into being hard and tough. Also, Obinze's relationship with his mother is depicted as "free of restraint, free of the

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[14] TEDs are talks given by influential speakers on subjects of their expertise. Adichie's lecture can be found on https://www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda_ngozi_adichie_we_should_all_be_feminists?language=pt-br

fear of consequences; it did not take the familiar shape of a relationship with a parent" (85). In the referred book, Adichie states that women are raised "to believe that their being likable is very important and that this 'likable' trait is a specific thing. And that specific thing does not include showing anger or being aggressive or disagreeing too loudly" (*Feminists* 12). These socially desirable behaviors are usually imposed on women and Ifemelu tends to subvert them.

Gloria Anzaldúa points out a similar silencing tradition in Mexican culture regarding the rearing of women. In a chapter of *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* titled "How to tame a Wild Tongue" she states that *"[s]er habladora* was to be a gossip and a liar, to talk too much. *Muchachitas bien criadas*, well-bred girls don't answer back" (54, italics in original). Anzaldúa highlights the gendering of language in the sense that the negative qualities of talking back, having a big mouth, questioning, and carrying tales were "derogatory [terms] if applied to women – I've never heard them applied to men" (54). Indeed, the urge to silence women or alter their behavior according to social norms is common aspect across borders and by addressing this social issue in her novel, Adichie opens it to discussion.

In *Americanah*, then, Ifemelu's actions tend to show alternatives to what is considered socially normal and accepted gender behaviors. In this sense, gender difference is subtly presented to the reader as a point of tension in the novel, as shown by the analysis of the previous scene. Ifemelu's relationship with Aunty Uju also delves into gender differentiation and gender roles.

Aunty Uju, Ifemelu's father's sister, is another supporting character with which Ifemelu initially identifies. Uju and Ifemelu are depicted as very close. Moreover, during Ifemelu's childhood, for example, Uju is described as the person who "exerted a calming influence on her" (64). Aunty Uju, a recently graduated medicine doctor, is depicted as

someone who "did not want to leave [Nigeria]" (55) where she wanted to have her own medical clinic. It may be argued that Uju's intelligence, ambition, and entrepreneurship was a sound influence upon Ifemelu. As an outspoken woman, it is Uju who first tells Ifemelu: "you don't have to *say* everything" (65), reinforcing Ifemelu's outspoken identity trait. Still, differences concerning the perception of social norms and gender roles transform Ifemelu's and Uju's relationship.

Uju engages in a relationship as the mistress of a Nigerian general becoming totally dependent on him. Uju's relationship with The General presents a conflict between traits of her personal identity that defines her as outspoken, intelligent, and independent. It is possible to say that from this point on her social identity labeled as general mistress and financially dependent on him. This tension of Uju's layers of identity leads Ifemelu to not fully identify with Uju any longer. For example, Ifemelu was quite surprised when she learns that Aunty Uju did not have any money and that the house she lived in did not belong to her (92): "Aunty Uju is not paying one kobo to live there" (60), in the house The General prepared for Uju.

The negotiation between personal identity traits and traits that are suppressed in detriment to socially defined constraints of institutions or relationships can be understood as a loss of autonomy. While Ifemelu's mother suppresses her autonomy in order to fit religious conventions, Aunty Uju suppresses traits of her identity, mainly her independence, in order to maintain her relationship with The General. Ifemelu's disappointment with Aunty Uju's loss of autonomy may be explained by the way Uju breaks with personal values conceding to social conventions. In *We Should all be Feminists*, Adichie puts forward an idea relatable to this argument. She contests current perceptions on gender roles stating that:

> Because I am female, I'm expected to aspire to marriage. I am expected to make my life choices always keeping in mind that marriage is the most important. Marriage can be a good thing, a source of joy, love, and mutual

> support. But why do we teach girls to aspire to marriage, yet we don't teach boys to do the same? (*Feminists* 14)

In this passage, Adichie disputes the importance of marriage as a mandatory role socially imposed upon women. In *Americanah*, then, it is possible to observe that Ifemelu somehow embodies this argument that a relationship should be a source of joy, love and mutual support instead of a form of validation of female success in society. Throughout the course of *Americanah*, this topic will emerge again in the US on two separate occasions. First, it is discussed through the character Aisha who conveys this perception of marriage as mandatory of the female role. Second, Ifemelu will similarly question Aunty Uju's choice of relationships when they do not represent a source of joy, love, and mutual support.

Ifemelu's identity formation in relation to Aunty Uju, then, is constructed on two levels. On the one hand, there is an initial influence of Aunty Uju on Ifemelu. This allows projecting Uju's qualities onto Ifemelu such as independence, ambition, and assertiveness. On the other hand, there is Ifemelu's influence upon Aunty Uju. This influence is depicted after a scene in which The General does not come to visit Uju as scheduled. Uju gets angry with the cook and Ifemelu says that Uju should be angry with The General, not the cook (98). The narrator, then, states that "Ifemelu felt a small gratification to hear, later, Aunty Uju shouting on the phone" (100) with The General. According to the narrator, Ifemelu wanted to "shake [Uju] into a clear-eyed self, who would not lay her hopes on The General" (100). By questioning Aunty Uju relationships, at this point in the narrative, Ifemelu brings further complications to the novel in relation to gender roles and also allows the reader to perceive Ifemelu as being more psychologically mature and wiser than Aunty Uju.

In *Postmodern Characters: a study of characterization in British and American postmodern fiction*, Aleid Fokkema develops the idea of power relationships in terms of loss of control. Fokkema indicates that, in narratives, the descriptive language that built well-

defined characters was replaced by a discourse that focused on the struggle to maintain control. For example, the control over “the other sex, ... one’s own narrating voice ... one’s artistic talent ... or historical events and patterns” (184). While Ifemelu constantly struggles to dominate herself, her power over herself is repeatedly threatened by institutions, discourses, and socially determined values. At this point is possible to see that Ifemelu possesses a strong set of values grounding her personal identity that repels loss of autonomy in any form. Fokkema notes that the only modalities capable of “overcom[ing] the limits of subjugation of discourse” (185) is that of desire or love. This is an argument in favor of Aunty Uju since she seemed to have real feelings towards the General. The same happens when Ifemelu falls in love with Obinze, her struggle to be socially accepted is considerably diminished by her relationship with him since he accepted her the way she was.

Finally, it is necessary to consider the formation of Ifemelu’s basis of identification as evoked by her relationship with Obinze. Ifemelu goes through her final high school years and her initial university years together with Obinze. Alternating to Obinze’s point of view, the narrative presents Ifemelu’s conflicts concerning community affiliation and sense of belonging. When Obinze is introduced to Ifemelu, she is described to him as one who can argue, talk, and never agrees (73). Obinze’s answer to this description is: “I’m not interested in girls that are too nice” (73). Here, Obinze reaffirms a trait of Ifemelu’s personal identity as a defiant woman. Once again, referring to *We Should all be Feminists*, Adichie states that being intimidating should not be a negative quality for women: “I was not worried at all [about being intimidating] – it had not even occurred to me to be worried, because a man who would be intimidated by me is exactly the kind of man I would have no interest in” (*Feminists* 14). It may be argued that Ifemelu’s identity formation represents this female intimidating personality which is often socially rejected, subverting preconceived images.

In the novel, this trait of Ifemelu’s challenging personality is strengthened by two moves contrasting her with Obinze’s wife and comparing her to Obinze’s mother. Obinze hoped his wife “would ask a question or challenge him, though he knows she would not because all she wanted was to make sure the conditions of their life remained the same” (27). So, Obinze’s wife acts as a foil character for Ifemelu’s identity formation. By contrasting her personality with that of Ifemelu, the author not only is able to strengthen traits of Ifemelu’s personality but also to add a point of tension that will be important later in the novel.

Conversely, Ifemelu's identification with Obinze’s mother can be related to their similar qualities. Obinze’s mother, a university professor, is depicted as intelligent, caring, and outspoken. His mother stands against an offense by a male coworker at her job. This behavior was not expected from her as a woman and, in this sense, also subverts gender roles considered as the norm. Similarly, Ifemelu’s behavior at times does not fulfill the gender roles expected from women. In this sense, Ifemelu’s personal identity is in direct conflict with gender expectations and gender roles established by the society around her. Ifemelu also displays some insecurity when it comes to Obinze’s mother’s sophistication and intelligence as well as their mother and son relationship that differs so much from Ifemelu’s relationship with her own mother. Ifemelu “felt undeserving, unable to sink with Obinze and his mother into their atmosphere” (85). But, at the same time “she wanted to remain there with them, in their rapture, forever” (86). Their relationship is a sort of ideal relationship outside social norms that pleased Ifemelu.

Ifemelu’s difficulty to abide to social norms will be translated into a difficulty to be framed by social identities. Her struggle to fit into a group identity is, then, another aspect of her identity that is highlighted from her relationship with Obinze. Just to cite a few examples, there are at least two instances that show Ifemelu’s difficulty to feel a sense of belonging to somewhere. First, when she meets Obinze she feels that with Obinze she does not need to

pretend to be someone different: “her skin felt as though it was her right size” (73). With him, she could be her true self, while, with other people, she had resort to images of herself. For example, being considered “too much trouble” (73) is an image that pleased Ifemelu because it gave her a kind of protection against others. Second, Ifemelu states that at the university in Nigeria “there was room to hide, so much room; she did not feel as though she did not belong because there were many options for belonging” (110). Even though there were various groups that she could claim as part of her identity, she saw them as an opportunity to hide. The same feeling of not belonging had already been portrayed in relation to her high school. In the previous pages, Ifemelu had expressed that “[Obinze] fit here, in this school, much more than she did” (80). Her feeling of not belonging here is related to social class difference. By thinking that she did not fit in the school environment due to her economic condition, once again prevents her from joining this group. Through Obinze’s point of view, then, the reader notices that Ifemelu had trouble establishing a stable sense of self and felt that she did not belong to various places where her social and economic difference made her feel uncomfortable. The narrator states that “[w]henever she felt this way [not belonging], panic would slice into her at the slightest thing” (81). This passage alludes to an identity crisis as Hall puts it: “This loss of a stable 'sense of self' is sometimes called the dislocation or de-centering of the subject. This set of double displacements – de-centering individuals both from their place in the social and cultural world, and from themselves – constitutes a 'crisis of identity' for the individual” (“The Question of Cultural Identity” 597).

According to Hall, the sociological identity “bridges the gap between the ‘inside and the outside’ – between the personal and the public worlds” (“The Question of Cultural Identity” 597). For example, being religious inside and expressing this to the outside world made Ifemelu’s mother feel complete. Even though it meant turning a blind eye to the hypocrisy in the church, her social identity was established through affiliation to a group. On

the other hand, Ifemelu fails to claim her mother's religion, as well as Aunty Uju's compliance with gender roles as defining features of her identity. Also, she prefers or, at times, is led to other ways of revealing her true self either by affiliating to groups that she does not fully commit or by subscribing to images that, according to her, protect her from other people. In this sense, Ifemelu is not capable of bridging the gap between her true self (or personal identity), with what is socially expected from her, and with the images she creates to fulfill the expectations of the public world.

Hall adds that "[i]dentity thus stitches … the subject into the structure. It stabilizes both subjects and the cultural worlds they inhabit, making both reciprocally more unified and predictable" ("The Question of Cultural Identity" 598). The world Ifemelu inhabits does shape her cultural identity; it is possible to notice her cultural identity from the Nigerian proverbs she recites with Obinze, from their choice of food and fashion, and from how her father's choice of Nigerian music influences her. However, her personal identity – as inquisitive, clear-eyed, outspoken – clashes with some of the cultural practices she faces, such as religion, gender roles, and class difference. At Obinze's house, during a dinner, while trying to be "herself", Ifemelu states that she "was no longer sure what 'herself' was" (85). This center of identity is precisely what Hall argues is being displaced in postmodern days; and the postmodern characterization of Ifemelu captures this displacement through her representation in the novel.

Besides, it may be argued that Ifemelu already occupies a liminal position in her homeland. The term 'liminality' referring to a 'threshold' was first used by Arnold van Gennep, an anthropologist who, in his book *Rites of Passage*, used the term to describe the transition between social identities (e.g. child to adult). Van Gennep referred to the three phases of this transition in social structure as separation, margin, and reaggregation (Turner 166). Victor Turner argues that van Gennep used preliminal, liminal, and postliminal when

discussing space and time transitions (166). Lauren Tuiskula, in her thesis *Digital Adichie: Identity, Diaspora, and Transmedia Practice* (2017), argues that "[i]n Ifemelu's case, liminality refers to her inability to ever fully exist within any space and thus, her life spent in the in-between. Ifemelu fails to find a concrete sense of self in any of the spaces she moves through and cannot fully commit to any of the distinct identities she has the potential to embody" (Tuiskula "Digital Adichie"). Tuiskula notes the tension regarding Ifemelu's sense of belonging to some communities. Since Ifemelu does not fully identify with identity traits of her significant others, she cannot establish a relationship with them. However, it is important to note that, similar to other researches, in this passage Tuiskula is referring to Ifemelu's experiences in the US and she does not mention how Ifemelu's basis of identification, built through her relationships in Nigeria, also situates her in a liminal position regarding Nigerian social structures.

In short, Ifemelu's base of identification characterizes her as a strong, outspoken, and provocative Nigerian woman whose views might not be in harmony with social norms. In the first part of the novel, it is possible to notice how, in Nigeria, aspects such as economic status difference (Ifemelu's in contrast with that of her friends and even Obinze and his mother), academic level difference (her father and Obinze's mother), and the geographical difference (Lagos, Nsukka, "the Island") that also separate social classes and ethnicities are important aspects for Ifemelu's identity formation. The importance of these social aspects justifies the argument that her personal identity is built in constant tension with her social identity. Since her childhood, Ifemelu's personality subverts and challenges the idea of conventional female roles – as vulnerable, compliant, and docile. Instead, her choices and social observations in the following parts of *Americanah* may seem faulty and questionable but they are based on this impulsive personality that contributes to making her as realistic a character as possible.

The analysis presented in this section accounts for Ifemelu's basis of identification which I claim presents identity traits that will be developed later in the diasporic space. In the following section, I attempt to map Wamba's identity formation in *Kinship*. Wamba's identity is construed textually through the use of memoir and much like Ifemelu in *Americanah* he is situated in an in-between space that allows him to critically observe both the American and the African social structures.

1.2 Identity formation in *Kinship*: building a social identity self-reflection

The issue of representation can be seen as central throughout all of Adichie's novels, specifically in relation to the portrayal of Nigeria. Making what can be considered revisionist literature, she constantly portrays Nigeria as a developed space that despite its economic and political complexities is far from the dangerous jungle or the idyllic paradise often portrayed in literature, television, and cinema. In the case of *Kinship*, yet another level of complexity is added to the issue of representation. *Kinship* is a memoir and, therefore, it is necessary to consider the important role of self-representation as a literary resource used to confront the misrepresentations of Africa in the US and vice versa. Paul John Eakin, in his article "Self and Self-Representation Online and Off", defends the importance of self-writing in constructing identities, pointing out that "[w]hen we 'write self,' however we do it – and we do it all the time – we track the elusive and shifting traces of the person who bears our name" (12). He argues that since childhood we are prompted to tell stories about ourselves and by the time we reach adulthood we achieve a coherent narrative identity about ourselves (20).

Wamba exemplifies Eakin's argument on narrative construction of identity by stating that *Kinship* "is [his] own circular journey from an inherited expectation of racial affinity, through often troubling experiences that challenged this conviction, to a reaffirmed appreciation of the indelible historical and cultural ties that bind black people on either side of

the gaping Atlantic" (xi). In other words, Wamba goes through at least three different phases on his journey to build an identity as both African and African-American. First, his upbringing in a multicultural environment leads him to anticipate racial solidarity, a sort of kinship, between Africans and African-Americans. Later, he notices that each group has its own particularities that go beyond the misrepresenting and stereotypical images of each other that distances one group from the other. For example, images such as the orientalist view of Africa as idyllic, romantic, and mythical (7) or the view of a welcoming and solidary America. Finally, Wamba reaches a very positive conclusion that racial solidarity, reciprocity, and a sense of belonging is a necessity possible to achieve for both sides of the Atlantic.

The narrative aspect of identity construction is better summarized by Jean Quigley whose book *The Grammar of Autobiography* (2014) outlines the formal and grammatical aspects of the genre. She draws on Charlotte Linde's (1993) model of literary social identity to describe how linguistic choices and structures provide a sense of continuity, of distinctness, and of reflexivity for the self (Quigley 106). Continuity is established by the sequence of events in the narrative and it builds the sense of self through time. Distinctness allows for one to feel as unique but yet related to others. Reflexivity, in turn, is responsible for "adjusting and creating distance between self-now and self then" (107). The memoir structure allows Wamba's to describe his identity formation in retrospect. Through continuity and distinctness the narrative shows how Wamba became aware of his situation as hybrid and how it distinguishes him from other children. Through self-reflexivity he analyzes, in retrospect, how much he identifies as American or as African. In this way, there is no direct mention of his personal identity but it can be apprehended throughout the narrative how social identity plays an important role for his identity formation.

In this section, then, the main aim is to focus on this first phase of Wamba's identity formation, mapping how his personal identity is established through the use of self-writing

narrative in parallel with the influence his interpersonal relationships with his significant others has on establishing such identity. I explore the first chapters of *Kinship* in an attempt to show how his identity is built through influences of school, family, and friends. Wamba's identity formation in a transnational context between Africa and the US allows for the observation of different historical, cultural, and ethnic traits coming together to form a transnational identity. Finally, I revisit the works of Homi Bhabha and Benedict Anderson with the intention of addressing Wamba's liminality and hybridism.

Born in the United States to an African-American mother (Elaine Brown Wamba) and a Congolese father (Ernest Wamba dia Wamba) and growing up in Tanzania, Philippe Wamba's identity results from the convergence and clash of these two cultures. His identity formation process is described in the initial chapters of *Kinship* in which he reflects on his childhood in Boston and Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. In order to depict the formation of this in-between position in his memoir, Wamba first tells the story of his parents' migratory experiences to later reflect on his own experience across countries, cultures, policies and identity formation.

Wamba's parents met in 1965 at a French club meeting, at the University of Kalamazoo, the university where his mother majored in French and from where his father received an international student scholarship. In 1968, his parents moved to Congo where his father secured a job "as an adviser to the Congolese minister of social affairs" (7). Congo had become independent in 1960, giving rise to a decade of political idealism. Wamba talks of the intellectuals who moved to Africa or made life-changing visits during this decade, like W.E.B. du Bois and Malcolm X. It is with this enthusiasm that his parents moved there. However, Wamba's father soon became disillusioned with the Congolese government misuse of power and, in 1971, they return to the United States. Wamba was born in 1971, in California, while his father was pursuing "graduate study at a university outside Los Angeles"

(9). Later, they moved to the Boston Area, where they stayed from 1972 to 1979. After the traumatic death of Wamba's older brother, Remy, who died with leukemia in 1979 at the age of twelve, his family once again considers moving back to Africa, which they do after his father was offered a job as a history professor at the national university of Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. Wamba would only return to the US, in 1989, for his high school and undergraduate degree. It is possible to see the continuous circular migration that Wamba and his family went through during this short period of time that encompasses his formative years. In summary, Wamba spent his first eight years in the US, then nine years in Tanzania, and finally five more years in the US, from 1989 to 1994 during high school and college. This process of circular migration justifies Wamba's argument that he is "uniquely situated to observe and interpret the various dimensions and complexities of the tangled thicket that is African-African American relations" (9).

During Wamba's parents' movements between the US, Congo, and Tanzania, misrepresented and stereotypical images of African countries and the United States certainly affected them. His mother, for example, had an idyllic, romanticized, and mythical view of Africa, based on images of African countries as the homeland of black Americans that were largely spread throughout the United States, mainly due to the 1960s Civil Rights movement. When she moves to Congo, her view of Africa as a paradisiacal motherland is confronted with the complex reality of Congo which, for her, "was in many ways a shock" (7). The author describes that his mother was faced with a rambling, vibrant, and noisy capital instead of the idyllic countryside she expected. Wamba's father, in turn, was initially happy to go back to Congo and help to shape the political status of the country, but a few years later he decided to return to the US and continue his graduate studies. His disappointment with Congolese government's misuse of power made him feel that he could contribute more "to the nation's development ... from elsewhere" (8). These stereotypical and misrepresented images caused

not only Wamba's mother and father's disillusionment, but various other "young blacks visiting Africa to recapture their roots" (7) to experience such disillusion with the expected image of the homeland upon arrival in Africa.

In this passage about his parents, Wamba, in retrospect, introduces the topic of disillusion concerning the often spread images of Africa. Even though Wamba did not have a firs-hand experience with the disappointment caused cultural and political changes in the 1960s, since he wasn't even born at the time, his identity formation is shaped through self-reflexivity. In other words, the memoir structure allows him to reflect on this cultural and political disillusionment in retrospect. Therefore, his identity is influenced by his parent's past, exemplifying what Quigley calls self-reflexivity. In a passage that illustrates this argument, Wamba states that "[a]t eight I was really too young to suffer consciously from some of the disillusionment with which many African Americans experience their first trip to Africa (as my mother had when she first visited Congo in 1968)" (13). This passage shows that this shock with reality in opposition to misrepresented images is something that commonly takes place for migrants and it is not a recent phenomenon. Here is a connection between Wamba's self in the past and in the present, since he will also experience this clash of expectations in his identity formation process. In other words, his views on of racial unity and solidarity will change when he comes in contact with the actual racial stratification of the US society.

After delving into the migration experiences of his father and mother, Wamba goes on to reflect on the influence his father and mother had on building his imaginary of Africa and the US. Wamba asserts that he was trapped between "the television culture of [his] American mother" (11) and the "mysterious world of Africa" (11) that he learned from his father's oral stories. This supports the idea that Wamba is in an in-between space concerning the cultural representation he receives from his parents. Wamba explains that for him and his brothers it

was not remarkable that his father was from Congo and his mother from Cleveland or that "the condiment in [their] fridge was not ketchup but *pilipili*, the ferocious, finely ground, scorchingly hot red peppers ... and the fact that [his] parents spoke French to each other" (12). According to him, during his childhood, these facts represented "points of interest" rather than "any sort of identity crisis" (12). Additionally, he states that his brothers and himself "were too young and knew too little about Africa to identify as Africans" (12). As stated before, up to this point there is no mention of Wamba's personal identity; however, it is possible to see that in the microcosm of the familial environment there were no social pressures. Hence, one implication of Wamba's statement is the tension between the formation of personal and social identity. While in his familial environment there were no pressures regarding his social identity, among his friends in the social spaces he occupies he begins to notice identity questionings. Here the difference between self-identifying and being ascribed an identity as African or American becomes apparent.

After a few months in Tanzania, Wamba begins considering the tensions and the complications inherent to his identity formation. Aspects such as clothing, language, history, and music represented subtle signifiers that constituted points of identity tension for Wamba upon his arrival in Tanzania. The author recalls situations related to these aspects that eventually made him aware of his in-between position. First, he describes a situation that took place when, together with his mother and brothers, he was walking through a poorer neighborhood outside the university campus where his family lived, in Dar es Salaam, and other children saw their "American sneakers and jeans and the other subtle signifiers of [their] Americaness" (13) and called them *wazungu*, a word that "referred to non-Africans in general, and to white people in particular" (13). In order to not be "'exposed' as a foreigner again" (13), Wamba states that he made adjustments in his clothing and knowledge of Kiswahili, the local language. As a result of this event, he ponders "why did they see us as outsiders when

we were blacks returned from America to our rightful homeland?" (13). Even though the children in this passage are not Wamba's significant others, or relatives, they represent interpersonal relationships that, in a way, shape Wamba's identity.

Another situation, this time related to music, takes place in his third-grade class, "which was conducted primarily in Kiswahili" (13). Wamba writes that on one of his classes a teacher "used the spiritual 'Swing Low, Sweet Chariot' as part of an English lesson" (13) a song that his classmates joked and laughed at the unfamiliar sounds. Since this song is meaningful for African-Americans due to its significance to enslaved Africans who sang it during their enslavement, Wamba recalls that he was offended by lack of reverence with which his African classmates treated the song. Lastly, regarding history, Wamba points out the relevance of Zanzibar, "a small and beautiful island off Tanzania's coast, where slaves from the mainland had been held in caves before being exported to the Middle East and Europe" (14). Regarding the historical importance of the island, Wamba ponders if Tanzanians saw the caves in the island

> as a blood-drenched pit where their abducted kin had been held against their will, or an ancient ruin where distant and vaguely recalled historical dramas had unfolded long ago, a dullish tourist attraction like the tomb of some nineteenth-century white missionary? And did they see my family as the descendants of their enslaved ancestors, or as just another group of tourists, exploitable sources of income? Or, even more sinisterly, where they themselves descended from an African family that had participated in and benefited from the slave trade? Did they therefore see the caves as a perhaps unpleasant, but nonetheless profitable, monument to an important economic engine of history? (14).

Here, history is understood not only as a part of national identity, but also as the collective memory of shared deeds that provides a sense of origin of one's values and feelings. Knowledge of previous generations' historical accomplishments helps to create a feeling of belonging and identification with the nation; however, Wamba's doubts convey an uncertainty regarding this shared history. He notes that these three situations regarding clothing, language and music, and history were minor events that prevented him to "fully transform [himself] into a complete Tanzanian" (13) raising initial questionings about his dual identity as African and African-American.

However, a decisive experience that shaped Wamba's identification towards Africa and ended up demystifying the romantic view he built in his first two years in Tanzania took place in 1981. Wamba's father was arrested at the airport while going on a family vacation from Tanzania to Zaire, the country where Wamba's grandparents lived. His father was accused of writing subversive essays that were critical of the Zairean regime. Even though Wamba was used to Africa's political complexities, he did not expect that "it was common for black-led governments across Africa to jail or even kill anyone critical of their policies" (17). He adds that the "place [was] inhabited by evil and dangerous men—black men, at that—who had imprisoned and beaten my father and easily could have chosen to kill him" (17). From these passages, it is possible to observe his emphasis on the skin color of those in power. Although Wamba does not say so directly, he apparently expected a different treatment or a different type of government among people of the same skin color. This assumption is perhaps linked to the stories of the tribal political organization he heard from his father. It is also possible to infer that he expected racial solidarity in African countries, a treatment he would not expect from authorities elsewhere. He concludes this passage saying that at this point his "naive romance with Africa was over" (17). In making this comment, Wamba is arguing that if time allowed for an initial accommodation of his Tanzanian identity, this

situation made him aware of the lack of affinity among people of the same color, cementing questions about racial unity and even the idea of pan-Africanism itself. By reflecting upon these past events, Wamba's identity in the present is altered, which is another example of self-reflexivity. The experience of his father's arrest affected Wamba's identity formation in the sense that he distanced himself from identifying himself as African.

If these incidents distanced Wamba from seeing himself as African, his identity formation became even more complex when back in the US a black American does not recognize him as being one of them. Wamba affirms that the words "you're not one of us" (18) puzzled him throughout his entire life were. He heard these words from an African-American friend meaning that he did not belong to the African-American community. As Wamba observes in the following passage, there is a significant sense of disorientation when the expected identification with the other group is frustrated:

> Blacks all over the world often assume or expect to share enough with blacks elsewhere to build a significant sense of unity, and such unity is understood to be essential in confronting and combating international racism. This is such a powerful expectation that emotions tend to run high when we discuss it, and few dare to critique it. And we often feel devastated or strangely disoriented and indignant when our expectations go unfulfilled (18).

While the author does not mention it directly, what he is referring to when he talks about shared experiences among blacks is the collective memory of shared deeds, historical events, and achievements of personalities that build this sense of unity between blacks all over the world. Part of the group identity is constructed upon mutual knowledge of these symbolic events that give people a sense of the origin of their values and feelings. Partaking in each other's cultural, social, political, and economic issues helps to create a sense of belonging.

When Wamba notices that both sides, Africans and African-Americans, are superficially engaged in this sense of common struggle he feels disoriented and indignant.

The idea of disorientation is addressed by Homi Bhabha in his introduction to the *Location of Culture* where he states that at the end of the century "we find ourselves in the moment of transit where space and time cross to produce complex figures of difference and identity, past and present, inside and outside, inclusion and exclusion. For there is a sense of disorientation, a disturbance of direction, in the 'beyond'" (1). For Bhabha, the beyond is the space in-between the end of a century and the beginning of a new one. This *fin-de-siècle* is a moment that blurs the limits of definitions such as "difference and identity, past and present, inside and outside" (Bhabha 1) and creates a simultaneous here and there. Since Wamba is neither inside nor outside cultures, he inhabits and embodies Bhabha's beyond, a here and there that causes his sense of disorientation. According to Bhabha, being in the beyond requires awareness of what he calls 'subject positions', and can be understood as identity traits such as "race, gender, generation, institutional location, geopolitical locale, sexual orientation" (1) that became defining parts of the subject in the modern world. In Wamba's case, by not being attached to a single culture, he is required to be fully aware of the American and the African cultural intricacies that give emphasis or minimize certain aspects of his subject position. For example, Wamba admits that, despite his disillusionment, during his childhood, he identified more strongly with his African side. This identification entails a foregrounding of certain identity traits that constitute his subject positioning. Later, he adds that he "often felt stuck in the middle, both African and American" (18) demanding a negotiation of both identities. Similar to Ifemelu in *Americanah*, however, Wamba describes himself as unable to bridge the gap between his two social identities ("The Question of Cultural Identity" 597). He does not feel that he fits to only one of the cultures he transits through and does not stabilize his self with the cultural practices of the worlds he inhabits

("The Question of Cultural Identity" 597). Moreover, in making this comment, Wamba shows himself aware of his hybridity. For this reason, Wamba's experience may be understood as two extremes of a continuum or, even more, as a multi-axial configuration of cultures since his migratory experiences encompasses more than two countries.

Under such circumstances, Wamba's identity formation process, similar to Ifemelu, also reflects the liminal space as posited by Bhabha[15]. As stated before, this liminal position opens a new point of view and allows for subversion and change of established cultural practices. Previous research on liminality and Cuban-Americans identity has pointed out that "the liminal position, rather than being a temporal transitory stage, becomes an integral part of the group identity" (Colona and Grenier 44). These researchers draw on Victor Turner's (1969) observations on liminality and subscribe to the idea that liminality is produced by the "separation from, or suspension of, the objective structures of society, such as rank, class, kinship ties, and gender" (43). Clearly, in the case of Cuban-Americans, there are specificities such as laws, policies, and geopolitical forces that mandatorily make their liminal position permanent. However, in the case of the migratory movements studied in this dissertation, of Africans and African-Americans, other social structures take place in order to make this liminal position lasting. Aspects of identity that have psychological relevance, for example, such as the sense of belonging, group affiliation, the color line, and social identity might play an important role on the permanence of liminality or force the characters to adopt a liminal position as a way of coping with their identity tension. Also, some policies might make liminality permanent. Kay Deaux (2011) gives the example of an education policy, the House Bill 2281 enacted in Arizona in May 2010, that prohibits courses and classes that ''advocate

[15] It is important to bear in mind that Bhabha developed the notion of liminal space in relation to postcolonial literature. Still, I believe that it is possible to approximate the concept of liminal space to other forms of representation and even more to forms of literature that address migration as their main theme. Can Wamba, born in the US, be writing postcolonial literature? In turn, while the narrative in *Americanah* can be considered a postcolonial text, it cannot be considered African-American literature. Among various reasons that support this argument, Elisa Araujo (58) points out that *Americanah* is written by a Nigerian author about the Nigerian diaspora. The hybridity of both texts is one of the features that compose what Braga and Gonçalves call diasporic literary space.

ethnic solidarity instead of the treatment of pupils as individuals'' (qtd in Deaux "Immigrant Frame" 71). In this example, ethnic solidarity and sense of national belonging is reproached through a policy at the school level making the migrant feeling of otherness and liminality permanent.

Wamba concludes that the lack of mutual affinity, unity, and sense of belonging between Africans and African-Americans is due to the misrepresentations that ill informs both sides. In his words, "[i]n confronting conflicts, attitudes, and misunderstandings like these, I had come into an appreciation of the complexity of African-American relations and into a realization of the misperceptions that often informed them" (22). Ignorance, stereotyping, and misapprehensions dominate the representations on both sides. According to Wamba, African-Americans would usually hold an orientalist view of Africa, and Africans would usually regard African-Americans as lazy and drug addicts, which is a consequence of lack of job opportunities.

The lack of mutual trust and affinity can be related to the notion of national identity. This idea may be better understood through Benedict Anderson's (1990) conceptualization of 'imagined communities'. Anderson observes that nations can have their own identity based on a set of cultural practices and behaviors. In *Americanah*, for example, the narrator presents various aspects of American identity such as food, hair, and mainly language – more specifically words and issues one is not supposed to say or discuss in the US – as a set of aspects that comprise what it means to be American[16]. In *Kinship*, these sets of cultural practices are, as stated before, misaligned since their imaginary of each other is based on stereotypical images. Quoting from Ernest Renan's essay "Qu'est-ce qu'une nation?", Anderson points out that in order for members of modern nations achieve a sense of communion they have to have many things in common as well as forget many things (6). For

[16] The American identity is also addressed in Kay Deaux's "An Immigrant Frame for American Identity." *Applied Developmental Science*, vol. 15, no. 2, 2011, pp. 70–72. *EBSCOhost*, doi:10.1080/10888691.2011.560807.

this reason, Africans and African Americans cannot achieve a sense that they constitute a single imagined community. Wamba argues that many black Americans, on the one hand, have not forgotten that their ancestors were sold by Africans into slavery and, on the other hand, Africans do not feel that they have much in common socially and historically with black Americans.

In conclusion, self-writing moves between the narrative and the self-analysis, be it presented through memoir or through blog writing inside a work of fiction. It is in this point that it is possible to approximate both the novel and the memoir that comprise the literary corpus in this dissertation. Both Wamba and Ifemelu resort to writing to cope with their in-between identities. While Wamba resorts to the structure of memoir that situates him in a point of view distanced from his past allowing a critical view in retrospect of the societies he analyzes, Ifemelu uses the blog to evaluate her experiences in the US and to present criticism on the social structures of her past and present.

In both books, *Americanah* and *Kinship*, cultural practices such as food, hair, clothing, and political positioning signify specific aspects of identity. Through these symbols it is possible to infer the authors'/characters' proximity or distance from their American or homeland identity. In this chapter, the trajectories of their identity development through their initial years were sketched from their childhood until the early adult years. The influences, both positive and negative, that form their basis of identification were outlined in an attempt to provide evidence that their in-between position in relation to the societies they transit through were established during these formative years. Hybridity, double-consciousness, and liminality are positions that will be intensified, foregrounded, and highlighted upon their settlement in the receiving country, as I intend to elaborate in the following chapter.

Chapter Two:

Identity Negotiation: Frustrated Images and Multiple Selves

Introduction

"Keep, ancient lands, your storied pomp!" cries she
With silent lips. Give me your tired, your poor,
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.
Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me,
I lift my lamp beside the golden door!
(The New Colossus – Emma Lazarus – Engraved at the pedestal of the Statue of Liberty)

The New Colossus, by Emma Lazarus, is a sonnet that has currently been evoked in defense of the narrative that the United States was built upon the premise of diversity and inclusion. In an article entitled "The Story Behind the Poem on the Statue of Liberty", Walt Hunter argues that to read the poem only as a call for diversity and inclusion is to perform a reductionist interpretation in times when migratory movements and nationalism have grown exponentially. He adds that to accept this interpretation is to "to ignore the poem's own radical imagination of hospitality" (Hunter)[17]. Written in 1883 with the aim of raising funds to build the Statue of Liberty, the poem is historically situated between two major events. The first event is the Chinese Exclusion Act that, in 1882, became the first federal law enacted restricting immigration of a specific group into the US. The second event is the Berlin Conference of 1884 that "divided the African continent into colonies" (Hunter). So, this poem

[17] Hunter, Walt. "The Story Behind the Poem on the Statue of Liberty." *The Atlantic*, 16 Jan. 2018, https://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2018/01/the-story-behind-the-poem-on-the-statue-of-liberty/550553/.

is embedded with concerns and criticisms that extend beyond the invitation for hospitality and diversity that is apparent on a first reading. For example, by resorting to poetry in the Petrarchan sonnet form, which according to Hunter was commonly used to convey epic and heroic deeds, Emma Lazarus refutes the nationalist and colonialist European ideologies of the time. In other words, the poem form that was used to praise nationalistic deeds and ideals was not only learned by the colonized but also used as a welcoming beacon to foreigners.

Nevertheless, it is with “silent lips” that the “mother of exiles” cries for the immigrants she invites to compose the nation. This silent invitation anticipates an invisibility of the immigrant in the face of the prevalent colonialist injustices. Hunter concludes his article stating that the poem aims to refuse this silence that creates an invisibility of the migrants who in so many ways contribute to the building of the United States as a nation.

In a similar way, the books that comprise the literary corpus of this dissertation address this duality embedded in United States’ immigration images: on the one hand, there are the idealized images of a welcoming ‘the land of opportunity’, of the ‘American dream’, and of the ‘melting pot’; and, on the other hand, there are structures that separate or prevent immigrants from achieving these idealized images of the US. Different from the immigrants that Lazarus’ poem addresses as poor, tired, and huddled, the new migratory movements depicted by the novels studied here focus on those who emigrate in search of work and study opportunities. Specifically, in the present dissertation, the idea of a new African diaspora emerges as a notion that encompasses the movements of the protagonists in *Americanah* and *Kinship*. This new African diaspora does not necessarily entail persecution, violence, and exile. Rather, both books are concerned with voicing migrants’ issues regarding the sense of belonging and the reshaping of their identities in the receiving country while simultaneously calling attention to the stereotypes that both groups, Africans and African-Americans, hold against each other.

In this sense, the migratory movements in *Americanah* and *Kinship* differ slightly from classic models of diaspora, essentially diverging from diasporic journeys that were usually associated with violence and with permanent settlement (Brah 179). Also, their movements are not made permanent by legal restrictions or threats to their lives. Ifemelu's and Wamba's journeys are motivated by educational opportunities and they are sustained by networks of relatives, friends, and professional opportunities. In *Americanah,* the consecutive strikes of Nigerian universities encouraged Ifemelu's migration to the US. Even though it may be argued that this movement was forced by political unrest, their displacement is different from those who are exiled or suffer from any type of persecution. Ifemelu, for example, despite the political hardships she was facing in Nigeria at that time, repeatedly wonders if she should stay in her country and finish college education: "Maybe I should stay and finish here" ('Americanah' 123).

Kinship, in turn, conveys Wamba's return to the US, in order to pursue his high school and college education, as a personal choice in search of better opportunities instead of being the result of expulsion or involuntary exile. Similar to the migratory movement of his father, Wamba states that he was not "immediately eager to leave Tanzania" (207) and after considering enrolling in the University of Dar res Salaam his father and mother advised him to "take advantage of [his] American citizenship and avail [himself] of the ample educational opportunities the United States had to offer" (207). Clearly, then, his migration was not motivated by traumatic events but by a pursuit of better opportunities.

Then, this new kind of migratory movement is marked by the displacement of skilled Africans that immigrate into the United States in search of better life opportunities. In 2010, John A. Arthur wrote, in his book *African diaspora identities: negotiating culture in transnational migration*, that

> The identities of the Africans that emerge show a people who are yearning for opportunities and total incorporation into global and world affairs. The identities manifested are not played out via the spectacle of victimhood and helplessness as others have often depicted about the region. Rather, we see a cadre of immigrants who are committed to excellence in education, family, individual and collective empowerment through self-improvement, responsibility, and personal growth and enrichment. (xii)

In his evaluation of migration, Arthur indicates this new kind of migratory movement that, in *Americanah*, can be observed through the characters Ginika and Aunty Uju, among other characters. When Ifemelu arrives in the US, Ginika is already established and close to finish college, she has secured an internship position at a law firm. Uju, in turn, besides working three jobs to maintain herself and her son, Dike, is taking exams to practice medicine in the US.

In a similar vein, Sylviane A. Diouf, in her article "The New African Diaspora"[18], agrees with this point of view and provides a panorama of the historical development of these new types of African migratory movements. She points out that since the end of the nineteenth-century Christian missions sent students to historically black colleges and universities in the US. She adds that, more recently, in the early twentieth century, there was also the movement of students who received scholarships or paid for their own way– e.g. Nnamdi Azikiwe and Kwame Nkrumah, first presidents of Nigeria and Ghana, respectively. A book review of *Kinship* published in The New York Times corroborates these findings by pointing out that a new and growing kind of migratory movement has been taking place recently. Randy Kennedy, author of the book review in question, states that American higher education works "as a kind of finishing school for the foreign elite – many of whom return

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[18] Diouf, Sylviane. "The New African Diaspora." *In Motion: The African American Migration Experience.* AAME, 2005. http://www.inmotionaame.org/texts/viewer.cfm?id=13_000T&page=1

home to become leaders in politics, business, diplomacy, the military, even in armed insurrection" (Kennedy "His Father")[19]. It is possible to observe that, to an extent, Wamba and Ifemelu are examples of this new kind of migratory movement.

In *Americanah*, the narrator summarizes this new kind of migratory movement in a passage where Obinze ponder over his migrant situation

> [The guests] understood the fleeing from war, from the kind of poverty that crushed human souls, but they would not understand the need to escape from the ominous lethargy of choicelessness. They would not understand why people like him, who were raised well-fed and watered but mired in dissatisfaction ... were now resolved to do dangerous things, illegal things, so as to leave, none of them starving, or raped ... but merely hungry for choice and certainty. (341)

Possibly, this quote best describes the need for emigration from a place that offers no choice and no perspective of the future for its inhabitants. It is under this choicelesness that Obinze and Ifemelu endure various situations in their respective receiving countries in order to have a better perspective of future. As Obinze's mother puts it, "Nigeria is chasing away its best resources" (123), here alluding to issues related to brain drain in the country at that time.

Similarly, in *Kinship*, Wamba says that "to many, my being 'African' seemed to mean that I would not know how to speak English, that I had never been in a car, and that by coming to the United States I had escaped a life afflicted by war, poverty and famine" (214). However, this was not the motivation behind Wamba's migration and he adds that he "became fascinated by these seeming contradictions" (214) between the images that African-Americans held of Africa and the current reality of a continent that has many ways developed

[19] Kennedy, Randy. "His Father Is a Rebel Leader . . ." *The New York Times*, The New York Times, 29 Aug. 1999, www.nytimes.com/1999/08/29/magazine/his-father-is-a-rebel-leader.html.

industrially and residentially with countries and cities such as Lagos in Nigeria and Dar es Salaam in Tanzania.

Having these new kinds of migration in mind, this chapter will focus on the ways that immigrants, represented by Ifemelu and Wamba, negotiate their basis of identification (as discussed in the previous chapter) in the receiving country. The first section focuses on *Americanah* and the processes through which layers of Ifemelu's identity are questioned and foregrounded. Also, I will point out how Ifemelu overcomes each identity test she undergoes throughout the reconfiguration process. The second section will focus on Wamba's identity negotiation as well as the contact points between *Americanah* and *Kinship* such as the identity crisis that results from identity deconstruction, the attempt to build a sense of belonging through group affiliation, and the double consciousness produced by the contact with white Americans. By discussing these points where both novels present similarities and differences, I claim that these processes of identity negotiation and its consequent reconfiguration occur in parallel with the development of Ifemelu's and Wamba's new points of view in relation to the receiving country – perspectives that are free of idealized and romanticized images of the receiving country. The creation of new identities that encompass the systems of values of both the sending and receiving cultures lead the characters to a place of hybridity and creativity.

2.1 Identity negotiation in *Americanah*: hair, language, and a fake ID card.

In *Americanah*, the Nigerian economic and political hardships prompt Ifemelu and other characters to migrate. Diouf points out difficulties such as "mounting debts, sluggish growth, exploding demography, and high unemployment" ("New African Diaspora") as triggers of migration. These triggers are found in *Americanah* as we learn from the narrative that lecturers at Nigerian universities were constantly resorting to strikes in protest for better salaries. At a certain point, the narrator states that "students [in Nigeria] hoped for short strikes, because they could not hope to have no strike at all" (120). On chapter 8, for example,

the narrator presents two examples of this kind of emigration: Emenike, Obinze's friend, who immigrated to England, and one unnamed girl who was at the final year of her course, but was willing to "start from the beginning in America" (120) in the hopes that she could finish her course without strikes. The migratory movement of these characters supports Diouf's argument of a new African diaspora whose main aim is the search for better life and academic opportunities. However, many of these migrants hold idealistic and romanticized views of their destination countries. During Ifemelu's "triumphant ritual that signaled the start of a new life overseas: the division of personal property among friends" (122), the narrator conveys Ifemelu's friends' thoughts regarding America.

Ifemelu and her friends imagine how their new life would be in the US (*Americanah* 78, 123). It is possible to observe that their idealistic and romanticized idea of the destination country is usually based on images created by partial representations in books, magazines, television, or movies. Obinze, for example, embodies this romanticized view of the US based on the books he read: "Obinze will only read American books" (84). He is repeatedly described as "drunk with American ambitions" (33), "besotted with America" (84), and as the one who knew all about American culture.

Another example of the US idealized as a welcoming country comes from Ifemelu's friend, Ranyinudo, whose emigration was also encouraged by universities' strikes. She had her visa "rejected at the embassy by a black American" (120). In this passage, the focus on the skin color of the agent who rejected Ranyinudo's visa request not only refutes the image of a land that receives everyone but also alludes to a possible tension between black Americans and Africans; or, as described in *Kinship*, the failure of the racial solidarity between both groups. Obinze ponders over how having money made this legal technicality that is getting a visa way easier. He notices that being wealthy made many things easier and getting a visa was only one of them: "He had been refused a visa years ago … but with his new bank statements,

he easily got a visa" (33). Both Obinze and Ranyinudo had their journeys blocked by legal restraints which, to an extent, change their perspectives on America as a welcoming country. It is precisely the failure to fulfill these idealistic images that Ifemelu will deal with upon her arrival in the US.

Ifemelu's idealized image of the US is described in relation to a television show: "She saw herself in a house from *The Cosby Show*, in a school with students holding notebooks miraculously free of wear and crease" (122). Notably, television representations tend to center on positive representations of wealth and success often ignoring societies' harsh realities. Hence, Ifemelu's unrealistic expectations significantly differ from the environment she comes across upon arrival. After arriving in the US during a heat wave that already differed for her expectations, on her way from the airport to Aunty Uju's flat, Ifemelu observes "buildings and cars and signboards, all them matte, disappointingly matte; in the landscape of her imagination, the mundane things in America were covered in a high-shine gloss" (127). This disappointment results from the clash of the images she had of the America with the US she encountered. In fact, during this first summer in the US, Ifemelu keeps waiting for what she calls 'real America', that of the television commercials and of university campuses and big white houses. These images are constructed through misrepresentations of what she knew as an American identity through television, stereotypical images of returned Nigerians, and from what Obinze called proper books: American literature books that represented a partial reality of the US.

The cultural influence depicted through these characters partially echoes Peggy Levitt's (1998) notion of 'social remittances'. She defined social remittances as "the ideas, behaviors, identities, and social capital that flow from receiving- to sending-country communities" (927) through exchange of cultural repertoire, media, and returned migrants. These ideas influence and foster cultural development in both sending and receiving

countries. However, there is a minor negative level of social remittances that Peggy Levitt and Deepak Lamba-Nieves acknowledge in their later article titled *Social Remittances Revisited* (2011), stating that social remittances might not always be positive (3) since individualistic and materialistic customs are also transmitted together with positive practices such as demands for rights and political organization. Levitt and Lamba-Nieves are correct when they say that individualistic and materialistic practices are part of the social remittances migrants bring to their home countries. Besides these individualistic and materialistic behaviors, I believe that a minor part of social remittances might also be responsible for the propagation of stereotypes. This may be partially related to the criticism Adichie makes to returned migrants' she calls "Americanah", migrants who "come back from a short trip to America with odd affectations, pretending [they] no longer understood Yoruba, adding a slurred *r* to every English word [they] spoke" (78 italics in original). These returned migrants tend to report over romanticized images of the US, in this case, reinforcing misrepresentations spread through other media.

However, upon arrival in the US, the shattering of Ifemelu's misconceived images takes place alongside her identity reconfiguration in a spectrum that goes from the deconstruction of her Nigerian identity, passing through an attempt of assimilation[20] into the US culture, to, finally, creating an identity that integrates cultural aspects of sending and receiving countries and moving between them with ease.

After a summer waiting to come in contact with "the real America" (137, 139, 147, 149), when she finally does so, Ifemelu's Nigerian identity will be constantly questioned. In

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[20] It is necessary to define and differentiate assimilation and integration due to the relevance these concepts have for post-colonial, cultural, and African-American studies. In this dissertation, follows the definition given in the article Assimilation vs Integration of the Cardiff University. **Assimilation** is understood as the process whereby outsiders, immigrants, or subordinate groups become indistinguishable within the dominant host society, eventually conforming to the existing cultural norms of society. In contrast, **integration** involves adding to the existing culture which in turn transforms and enhances society.
https://sites.cardiff.ac.uk/islamukcentre/rera/online-teaching-resources/muslims-in-britain-online-course/module-4-contemporary-debates/assimilation-vs-integration/

order to fit into the real US, Ifemelu begins to incorporate identity attributes that somehow efface her core identity. Among the layers of Ifemelu's identity, outward appearance, linguistic variation, and legal identity are three aspects that become evident as Ifemelu interacts with the host society. As Homi Bhabha observes in the introduction to *Nation and Narration* (1990), the cultural ambivalence of the nation suggests that the "representation of social life" differs from "the discipline of social polity" (Bhabha 2). In other words, social life establishes cultural limits that differ from those established by legal and geographical boundaries.

First, Ifemelu's identity was challenged when she had to use the "Social Security card and driver's license that belonged to Ngozi Okonkwo" (148). Her identity, then, becomes fragmented as this legal change drastically replaces her own identity. During job interviews, Ifemelu constantly struggles to remember that she is impersonating Ngozi Okonkwo, somebody who, according to her, did not even physically resemble her. So, while Ifemelu is a documented immigrant on a student visa, her social life demands different features such as a driver's license and a Social Security card that allows her to work. Despite looking superficial, these legal demands affect Ifemelu in deeply psychological ways regarding her sense of belonging. Adichie strengthens Ifemelu's identity fragmentation in the narrative by contrasting Ifemelu's fake Social Security card with a scene where she gets excited about a credit card she receives "with her name correctly spelled and elegantly italicized" because it "made her a little less invisible, a little more present. Somebody knew her" (162). This simple acknowledgment of her identity is a source of validation and comfort to her.

A second aspect against which Ifemelu's identity is challenged is language. Her knowledge of English is questioned when she goes to register for her classes at the university. The narrator states that "[Ifemelu] had spoken English all her life, led the debating society in secondary school, and always thought the American twang inchoate" (164) and even so

having her knowledge of English questioned by an American troubled her. In other words, she became confused about language, an essential constituent of identity. In *Black Skins*, *White Masks*, Frantz Fanon addresses the black man's internalized inferiority complex that overwhelms the colonized when confronted with the colonizer. He inquires "whether it is possible for the black man to overcome his feeling of insignificance, to rid his life of the compulsive quality that makes it so like the behavior of the phobic" (35). In an attempt to overcome the inferiority that Ifemelu felt regarding her knowledge of the American version of English she "began to practice an American accent" (164).

Alongside Ifemelu's hunger to learn an American accent and "to understand everything about America, to *wear a new skin right away*" (166, emphasis mine), she also attempts to consume cultural products such as "support a team at the Super Bowl, understand what a Twinkie was and what sports 'lockouts' meant" (166). In this passage, it is possible to observe that Ifemelu's new skin is comprised not only of the American accent but also of cultural nuances that she was not previously aware. Fanon argues that the importance of language for the identity of the colonized rests on the fact that "[t]o speak means to be in a position to use a certain syntax, to grasp the morphology of this or that language, but it means above all to assume a culture, to support the weight of a civilization (8). Ifemelu becomes aware of the US cultural weight and historical continuity through reading several American literature books "and as she read, America's mythologies began to take on meaning, America's tribalisms – race, ideology, and region – became clear" (167). What the narrator calls American tribalisms can be understood as these new values Ifemelu is supposed to know in order to acquire an American identity or achieve group affiliation. American tribalisms may also be related to the various social identities that she claims affiliation to or are ascribed to her.

Identity negotiation in relation to language is an issue that pervades the whole novel and is constantly exposed. For example, Ifemelu's friend, Ginika, had been living in the US for a long time and had acquired an American accent, but spoke to Ifemelu with a Nigerian accent when they first met in the US. The narrator highlights how Ginika's effort to speak with a Nigerian accent was based on her wish to show that she had not been changed by the host country culture. In a different scene, Ifemelu notices that Aunty Uju spoke with a "nasal, sliding accent" whenever "she spoke to white Americans, in the presence of white Americans, in the hearing of white Americans" (133) and the narrator adds that "with the accent emerged a new persona, apologetic and self-abasing" (133). Language is also shown relevant in the way Aunty Uju used Igbo to reproach Dike and "Ifemelu worried that it would become for him the language of strife" (212), meaning that he would associate the Igbo language, and consequently culture, to negative experiences.

However, after an experience through the telephone, Ifemelu decides to stop "faking an American accent" (213). The telemarketer trying to change her long-distance contract compliments her on her accent saying that she sounded totally American (215). Even though she considers having mastered the American accent a victory, "her fleeting victory had left in its wake a vast, echoing space, because she had taken on, for too long, a pitch of voice and a way of being that was not hers" (216). Claudio Braga & Glaucia Gonçalves, drawing on Jacob M. Landau, observe that "anxiety regarding language is at the core of diaspora studies" ("Fictional Representations of Contemporary Diasporas" 190). They argue that along with allowing one to adjust to the receiving society, language can also limit and control one's voice. By deciding to stop faking an accent she frees herself from the limitations and socially desirable controlling behaviors. Also, she reclaims the linguistic aspect of her identity taking pleasure in "the newness of her own voice" (221). With her new voice, her strong opinions come back and, in a minor and subtle passage, Ifemelu even criticizes academic speech

calling it "academese" (220), a kind of English that did not make sense. This comment is deemed as a strong opinion by Blaine, a Yale professor who was riding the train with Ifemelu. She answers that she does not "know how to have any other kind" (220) of opinion.

Another issue that Ifemelu's endeavor to learn an American accent evokes is Homi Bhabha's notion of mimicry and mockery. While she attempts to mimic American behavior she also mocks American's overuse of the word "excited" and of expressions such as "[a] couple days" concluding that "these Americans cannot speak English" (165). In addition, Bhabha's notion of mimicry entails the idea of a mastery that can never be achieved since it is a faulty repetition of a behavior. Ifemelu's American accent can never grant her a full American identity and the narrator states that in moments of stress or emotion as in "woken up from a deep sleep during an earthquake" (216) she would not be able to sustain an accent that did not represent her true Self. Bhabha also argues that mimicry always produces slippages and excesses that differentiate the colonized subject from the colonizer. And, in this sense, after regaining her own voice, Ifemelu was ready to "put on her Mr. Agbo Voice" (216) – a teacher who during her secondary school drilled students with "overcareful pronunciations" (216) of British English words through recordings of BBC cassette tapes – if her Nigerian accent prompted somebody to treat her as "an idiot" (216). Such mockery is intensified by the affectation of "haughty foreigner[s]" (216) that Ifemelu intended to use in her speech, if threatened, exposing the difference of English variations, in this case the British accent undermining the American accent, thereby calling into question the American identity in the presence of its British colonizer. Ifemelu, then, moves from a "*mimicry* – a difference that is almost nothing but not quite – to *menace* – a difference that is almost total but not quite" (131, italics in original). In other words, instead of simply imitating, her mimicry becomes a menace to the colonial discourse. As Bhabha puts it "Mimicry does not merely destroy narcissistic authority through the repetitious slippage of difference and desire. It is the

process of the *fixation* of the colonial as a form of cross-classificatory, discriminatory knowledge within an interdictory discourse, and therefore necessarily raises the question of the *authorization* of colonial representations" (129).

The final aspect analyzed here in relation to Ifemelu's identity negotiation is hair. Hair marks major changes in the narrative and is one of the aspects of Ifemelu's identity that was questioned. After overcoming her issues with language and legal identity, Ifemelu is confronted with the need to remove her braids and straighten her hair before going to a job interview. This time, the identity effect was immediate. The narrator states that "she did not recognize herself" (251). This scene, somehow, resembles the scene of Ifemelu's mother burning her own hair. Ifemelu states that she needed to look professional to the job interview and "professional means straight" (252). But her Kenyan friend from African Students Association, Wambui, compares hair relaxing to being in prison (257) stating that not being allowed to enjoy everyday activities in order to avoid sweating, wind, and rain cages and rules the person. Wambui recommends an online community where Ifemelu would "find inspiration" (259) and solace among other women who "were done pretending that their hair was what it was not" (263). In a sense, Ifemelu's hair change can also be understood as a journey that, once again, tests her character in the narrative. She moves from accepting socially imposed and expected behaviors that bring anxieties and insecurities concerning hair to falling "in love with her hair" that is described as "dense and spongy and glorious" (264).

Therefore, language, hair, and legal identity are some of the challenges that work on the fragmentation of Ifemelu's identity and, as the narrative shows, she overcame each of them. After having aspects of her Nigerian identity questioned, after entering and exiting instances of integration and assimilation, Ifemelu's identity reconfiguration will move from inhabiting the liminal space to a hybrid identity that aims to reconcile her Nigerian traditions with the US cultural practices.

Still, before embarking on a journey to come to terms with her new identity that embraces the values and systems of different cultural sources, American and African, Ifemelu suffers an identity crisis when her core values are tested. A comprehensive analysis of the demanding psychological effects of identity negotiation exceed the scope of this dissertation. Therefore, for now, it is sufficient to say that all the microaggressions Ifemelu suffers in relation to her language, her outward appearance, and her name contribute to the aggravation of her inferiority complex. Fanon points out that "[a]ffect is exacerbated in the Negro, he is full of rage because he feels small, he suffers from an inadequacy in all human communication, and all these factors chain him with an unbearable insularity" (35). So, when Ifemelu's identity is confronted with these challenges her doubts and anxieties trigger a cycle of negative feelings that Ifemelu refuses to see as depression.

In the narrative, the point that initiates Ifemelu's identity crisis is represented by a situation in which Ifemelu faces difficulties to pay her rent and part of her tuition forcing her to accept a job as "female personal assistant for [a] busy sports coach in Ardmore" (176). Therefore, in addition to her identity being challenged in various ways, accepting this job, I believe, represents a turning point in the narrative. Certainly, her decision does not result from a single moment; rather, it is the result of various situations – linguistic prejudice, struggle to pay the rent, and feeling socially displaced – that pushed her choice in a certain direction. The narrator, however, states that she was not forced to make the choice of going there (190), but this choice surely goes against her traditional Nigerian customs.

Steven Hitlin's article "Values as the core of personal identity" shows how values play an important role on the establishment of personal identity. He draws on Shalom Schwartz to define values as the "desirable transsituational goals, varying in importance, that serve as guiding principles in the life of a person or other social entity" (qtd in Hitlin 119). According to Hitlin, it is through the negotiation of values that personal identity comes in contact with

social identity. While he maintains that holding specific values does not dictate certain behaviors, Hitlin argues that values serve as guiding principles of decisions when an individual is in conflict (119). Ifemelu acted on impulse, which is a prominent feature of her identity. However, her core values, built in contrast with her mother and Uju and together with Obinze, are challenged and lead her to profoundly regret the decision of accepting this job afterwards.

Tensions are established when categories change or clash, and I would argue that at this point there is a change on the source of Ifemelu's suffering. In Nigeria, when someone or the society told Ifemelu how she should behave, she suffered from ideas of inadequacy; however, after moving to the US, she is the only one responsible for the consequences of her impulsiveness. Robert McKee, a Fulbright Scholar and creative writing professor, suggests in his book *Story: Substance, Structure Style and the Principles of Screenwriting*, that pressure is essential to test a character. He argues that when characters make choices under pressure they reveal their nature (101). And after making this choice and passing through a period of depression, Ifemelu emerges with her new voice, her new job as a babysitter, and a relationship with Blaine.

This episode evokes, in many ways, the three phases typical of a rite of passage as described by Van Gennep: "separation, margin (or *limen,* signifying "threshold" in Latin), and reaggregation" (qtd in Victor Turner 94). The narrative depicts the situation that causes Ifemelu's initial shock with social rules and her subsequent separation from society; then, the period in which Ifemelu spent at the margin when would "lay in bed and read books and thought of nothing" (192); and, finally, her reintegration into the US social structure with the help of her friend Ginika to secure a job and establish herself.

However, Victor Turner, who applied van Gennep's concept of liminality to modern societies, as well as Homi Bhabha, point out that this liminal crisis also represents an

opportunity for creativity. They concede, in their respective works, that emerging out of the liminal space comes a period of creativity. Victor Turner, for example, sees the margin period of liminality "as a time and place of withdrawal from normal modes of social action, it can be seen as potentially a period of scrutinization of the central values and axioms of the culture in which it occurs" (Turner 167). For Ifemelu, this period of examination of values and axioms takes place at this point in the narrative. It is during this period that she negotiates the cultural values that she imagined with the real social structure she faced with.

In turn, Homi Bhabha defines liminality in his introduction to *The Location of Culture* describing the term as the "interstices" where "the intersubjective and collective experiences of nationess, community interest, or cultural value are negotiated" (2). In addition, in an interview with Johnathan Rutherford, while discussing the Third Space, Bhabha argues that "I try to place myself in that position of liminality, in that productive space of the construction of culture as difference, in the spirit of alterity or otherness" ("The Third Space" 209). In this sense, Ifemelu's identity negotiation is resulting in an identity that does not belong to any fixed space and will allow her to make observations on the society around her documenting the construction of culture as difference while she experiences it through her blog posts.

Raising questions about pressing issues such as race, identity, and gender, Ifemelu's blog results from this period of identity negotiation. The blog works as both a tool through which she learns about the American tribalisms, labels, and steps of the American social ladder and as a point of catharsis providing healing and reconciliation with this new transnational identity. The readers of Ifemelu's blog describe her unique personality as an "irreverent, hectoring, funny and thought-provoking voice" (5) through which she discusses key issues of the US society. These identity attributes given by her blog community reflect those of her personal identity, which as I argued in the previous chapter, establish her as smart, outspoken, and independent.

In an earlier part of the novel, the narrator points to Aunty Uju's boyfriend, Bartholomew, whose blog interactions were described as an online community where he could appease his longing for Nigeria (143). According to the narrator the blog was where some Nigerians would "fight on the Internet over their *mythologies of home*, because home was now a blurred place between here and there, and at least online they could ignore the awareness of how inconsequential they had become" (143-144, emphasis mine). In a similar way, Ifemelu observations about US mythologies posted on her blog will function as a community, even if virtual, where she can aggregate people who share similar opinions and beliefs about social realities. Another example of this virtual community can be seen when Ifemelu was insecure about her hair and Wambui recommended an online natural hair community where she would "find inspiration" and solace (259).

In the initial pages of the novel, the narrator talks about the "two hundred and seventy-four comments" (5) her last post had gathered and the "month by month" (5) growing readership that accompanied Ifemelu's observations. Returning to Paul John Eakin's article "Self and Self-Representation Online and Off", it is possible to understand how online self-representation complements the offline self-experience. Eakin argues that even though the online environment grants a level of anonymity, the rules for constructing identity in social networking websites, and in the case of *Americanah* blog posts, does not differ much of other self-writing media such as the diary and autobiographies. At the center of this identity construction is narrative, the notion that the collection of one's acts, in retrospect, constitutes identity.

Eakin's argument that "identity and its representation are mutually interdependent" (17-18), supports the idea that Ifemelu's writing can work as a way of reconciling her forcibly fragmented identity as she observes the cultural powers in place that lead to her identity fragmentation. In posts such as "Understanding America for the Non-American Black: What

Hispanic Means" (129), "Understanding America for the Non-American Black: American Tribalism" (227), and "Understanding America for the Non-American Black: What Do WASPs Aspire To?" (253), among others, Ifemelu addresses the complexities of ethnicity and race operating in the US. These posts, to a degree, help Ifemelu understand her own condition as a non-American Black. For example, these blogs culminate with her acceptance that in the US all those who are not white are ascribed the label of being black – "To My Fellow Non-American Blacks: In America, You Are Black, Baby" (273) – and explaining the intricacies of language in maintaining such labels – "Understanding America for the Non-American Black: A Few Explanations of What Things Really Mean" (435).

Finally, Eakin states that "we construct our selves whenever we engage in self-narration online or off, the qualities of identity and the properties of its representation are two different faces of a single phenomenon of self-experience" (18). In this sense, Ifemelu's online activity allows her to build a community through which she reconciles multiple sides of her identity: online and offline, black American and African, being excluded and achieving a sense of belonging through the blogging community. Despite the fact that many readers refused her ideas, she was part of a community where she could express herself and discuss issues that she deemed relevant. Ifemelu also achieves an identity that refuses these labels inhabiting the third space from where she makes observations of social structures of the US and, eventually, of Nigeria after she returns.

2.2 Identity negotiation in *Kinship*: racial unity, lack of interest, and suicide.

In his article "Autobiografia, Apropriações e Subversões: a Literatura Negra Abolicionista nos Estados Unidos Oitocentistas", Jose de Paiva dos Santos (2011) analyzes how Frederick Douglass and Harriet Jacobs are able to subvert the sociopolitical and theological discourse of their time in their autobiographies. Autobiographical narratives,

according to Santos, are important not only because they offer a didactic criticism about the situation of enslaved blacks in the 1800s, but also because they function as a place for the "(re)writing of a 'subject' instead of an enslaved 'object'" (3) Hence, Santos proposes a structural and content analysis of the appropriation, subversion, and signification mechanisms that Douglass and Jacobs used in their autobiographical narratives in order to “redefine and re-insert the black in the history of nineteenth-century United States” (4).

Even though Wamba, the protagonist in *Kinship*, did not experience slavery directly, a textual and structural analysis of his memoir also helps to understand how self-writing texts can be used to represent the struggle of a certain time. His memoir addresses and raises awareness about the social, cultural, and political contexts of the US and African countries that in many cases include the outcomes of slavery. In his memoir, Wamba discusses the images created by pan-Africanist, Afrocentric, and back-to-Africa movements of the end of the 1960s that sometimes may be misrepresenting of Africa as the rightful homeland of African-Americans and of the US as a welcoming land to migrants. The revision of these misconstrued images along with the clash between the inherited African and American cultural practices is the basis upon which Wamba will develop his journey observing both cultures. Wamba highlights the misrepresented, idealized, and romanticized images that Africans and African Americans have of each other as the key point of their separation. Nevertheless, he also indicates that the struggles against racism might act as a point of departure for kinship, racial solidarity, and bonding between both groups.

Similar to the issues related to identity, sense of belonging, and double consciousness presented in *Americanah*, Wamba’s *Kinship* also depicts questionings related to the sociopolitical and cultural clash between the US, Tanzania, and Congo. Wamba’s idealized images of the US and his observations of the system of values and cultural practices of African countries and of the US turn out to be in consonance with Ifemelu’s observations in

various passages. Wamba points to a process of identification, alienation, and eventual assimilation to the host country culture that remains strong until today despite the fact that "the circumstances under which Africans travel to America have changed significantly" (231). Throughout this process, his initial expectations of identification, kinship, solidarity and pan-African union between black Americans and Africans will be challenged and frustrated, resulting in an identity crisis that in many ways resembles that of Ifemelu. However, instead of the assimilation that he describes as the third step of migrants accommodation into the host culture, Wamba apparently develops a hybrid and creative identity. As he himself puts it, "[m]ine was not a wholly American or wholly Tanzanian perspective; rather it reflected the influence of different traditions" (111). This removed perspective works in a way similar to the way it works in *Americanah*, preparing Wamba to face the issues of a transnational world stripped of idealized views of the sending and receiving countries.

In this section, I will also attempt to address the differences and similarities of both books that comprise my subject of study, having Wamba's *Kinship* as a point of departure to explore common circumstances portrayed in both novels. Specifically, this section is framed around the following questions: How does lack of kinship, recognition, and interest of African-Americans regarding African sociopolitical issues plunge Wamba into a period of identity crisis? How do experiences with racism act as a bond between Africans and African-Americans against a white society? How does writing help Wamba to come to terms with his dual identity, turning his identity crisis into a sort of cultural hybridity that produces creative social observations?

To establish a parallel between Wamba's identity negotiation processes with the one presented in *Americanah*, discussed in the previous section, his identity will be analyzed in parallel with that of Dike, Ifemelu's cousin. While Dike was born in Nigeria and raised in the

US, Wamba was born in the US and raised in Tanzania, which provides both with similar identity negotiation processes. Despite this inversion of place of birth and place of upbringing, Dike and Wamba go through similar, if not identical, struggles while growing up and suffering an excess of indetermination concerning their identities. Wamba resorts to the use of vignettes as a way of coming to terms with this identity indetermination that, according to him, is not new. For example, he refers to the experiences of personalities such as Kunta Kinte and Ota Benga claiming that "more recent African experiences with African Americans are sometimes as confounding as were those of their predecessors in centuries past" (231). Despite the fact that mutual identification, community membership, and misrepresentation of both groups are enduring issues, Wamba remains optimistic arguing that the contact between Africans and African-Americans frequently results in positive ties between them.

After attempting to establish a basis of identification as African during his childhood years in Tanzania, Wamba's identity questionings are intensified when he returns to the United States for his high school and college years. During his high school at an international school in Montezuma, New Mexico, he found a group of students composed of "an assortment of Kenyans, South Africans, Swazis, Jamaicans, Ugandans, Sierra Leoneans, Senegalese, Bahamians, Antilleans, and black Americans" (214) all together in a group that, according to Wamba, self-identified simply as 'Africans' and that provided comfort through the sense of belonging and group membership. Then, at Harvard University, Wamba found solace at the Harvard African Students Association, a group that "included maybe twenty Africans from all over the continent" (219). According to him, in these groups, he could reflect on the "common threads that ran through African culture" (213) and mainly share apprehensions about the distancing between Africans and African-Americans.

Wamba's yearning for group membership shows how community affiliation is relevant to one's identity. These communities, whether they are ethnic, political, or cultural

organizations, provide a sense of belonging and values upon which the self is established. In an essay entitled "Of Other Spaces" (1967), Foucault advances the notion of heterotopias as "places that do exist and that are formed in the very founding of society" (Foucault "Of Other Spaces, Heterotopias"). According to him, these heterotopias are "a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites … are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted. Places of this kind are outside of all places, even though it may be possible to indicate their location in reality" (Foucault "Of Other Spaces, Heterotopias").

Foucault proposes six principles that constitute these heterotopias. From these six relevant principles, I chose to focus on the sixth one that Foucault calls heterotopia of compensation. This kind of heterotopia creates a separate space that is perfect, meticulous, and well arranged in contrast with the messy, ill constructed and jumbled outside space (Foucault "Of Other Spaces, Heterotopias"). In *Kinship*, Wamba's international high school resembled this kind of heterotopia, being a "close and comfortable little community … [an] idyllic microcosm [that] bore little resemblance to the 'real' world outside" (210). In the same way, the students' associations he affiliated in college provided a group membership that eased the process of identity negotiation.

Here is a first point of contact between the two books that comprise the corpus of analysis of this dissertation. In *Kinship*, Wamba points out that there are lingering differences between Africans and African-Americans. He illustrates this concern with the Black Students Association (BSA) and the Harvard African Students Association (HASA) that "seemed to address completely separate agendas" (220). While HASA was concerned with African history and socio-political issues that were taking place in Africa at the time, BSA focused on the "celebration of African-American heritage" (220) and was concerned with US racial issues. This division into two groups, and the lack of interest in each other's affairs, often

bothered Wamba -- since he had an "inherited expectation of racial affinity" (xi) that was frustrated by this division.

Similarly, in *Americanah*, Ifemelu goes through a quest for affiliation to student associations at her university. A Tanzanian student, Mwombeki, tells Ifemelu that the main difference between Black Student Union (BSU) and African Students Association (ASA) rested in the fact that African-Americans attended BSU while Africans attended ASA. Eventually, Ifemelu decides to join the African Students Association where, like Wamba, she identified with other African students who had gone through the same troubles she had when coming to the US (173). Later, Ifemelu's concern with which association her cousin Dike would join also mirrors this split between Africans and African-Americans. She "wondered which [student association] he would go to in college, whether ASA or BSU, and what he would be considered, whether American African or African American. He would have to choose what he was, or rather, what he was would be chosen for him" (173). Despite being raised in the US and surrounded by an American environment since a very early age, in the social realm Dike was not regarded as American. He was born in Africa and, in the US, he was in constant contact with Nigerian values and language through his mother, Uju. Consequently, Ifemelu is right in her concern that he would have to choose between his identities or it would be chosen for him. In other words, the personal identity that one claims, as an American for example, does not always match the social identity ascribed to them by others, in Dike's case African.

In Wamba's case, various points throughout his memoir indicate that he more strongly identifies as African. In one instance he affirms that he "emerged from [high school] with a stronger sense of what it meant to be African more than being American, and a strong identification with the seven formative years [he] had spent living in Tanzania" (216). Together with his choice of a membership to the African students association in detriment of

the Black students association, this passage supports the idea of him having an identity that veers towards his African heritage. Also, since he has an identity that is apparently established, it could be argued that Wamba would not go through a period of identity crisis. However, after coming into contact with African-Americans, his frustration and disappointment concerning the lack of engagement of black Americans in African social, political, and economic issues initiate his questionings regarding identity driving him into a state of depression.

The concerns that culminate in Wamba's depressive state can be related to ideas of lack of recognition, psychological trauma, and double consciousness. In *Kinship* the frail affinities between Africans and African-Americans, often a result of misrepresented images of both groups, makes the lack of social recognition the first problem that afflicts Wamba's identity. The groups of African-Americans through which Wamba transited failed to provide him with a similar sense of belonging and identification as the groups of Africans did. First, Wamba felt that he was too different from African-Americans at Harvard's Black Students Association. Then, he attempted to join the gospel choir with its Kiswahili name, Ashanti clothes, and South African repertoire. Wamba's opinion in relation to these groups is that their knowledge of the African cultural expressions they used were superficial and artificial. Finally, at the university, the African-American students usually sat together at one table. While sitting with them Wamba "began to wonder what [he] really had in common with these people besides [his] race, and whether race was such a valid unifier after all" (18). All these groups fail, in a way or another, to provide the sense of "welcoming community" (17) that Wamba longed, or idealized, to find in the US. Kay Deaux, a social psychologist, argues that to share a social identity means that some categories of that social identity are shared between its members. Deaux also points out that "events that are relevant to the group as a whole also have significance for the individual member" ("Social Identity" 2). Considering this, it might

be argued that Pan-Africanist propaganda and back-to-Africa movements led some Africans and black Americans to see Africa and the US as two sides of an extended group.

In Wamba's case, his initial pan-Africanist point of view led him to expect shared social identity with Americans as well as expect that social issues that are relevant for Africans would be of interest for African-Americans. However, in passages such "my experiences with the African Americans I met in Los Angeles had often been somewhat confounding" (216) referring to the stereotypical views that African-Americans held of Africa and Africans; and "HASA members seemed slightly more inclined to participate in BSA events than the other way around" (220) show that there is a split between the groups of Africans and African-Americans. Wamba notes that this lack of recognition of one group towards the other often disturbed him.

Besides the differences between both groups, Kay Deaux argument that the "dominant theme of American national identity … speaks not to group accomplishment but rather to rugged individualism and self-determination" ("Immigrant Frame" 71) may also explain Wamba's struggle to make black Americans interested in Africans sociopolitical issues. According to Deaux, this individualistic aspect of American national identity is often an obstacle faced by immigrants when they try to claim this identity as theirs. This individualism prevented Americans from seeing Africans as part of a larger community as well as Africans that struggle to understand Americans' lack of group formation.

The second issue that affects Wamba's identity is what Frantz Fanon calls psychological trauma due to this contact with racism. Race works on two levels in *Kinship*: on a first level, it works as a bond between African-Americans and Africans; but, on a second level, racism creates psychological injury due to repeated repressive and devaluating experiences. First, Wamba asserts that experiences with instances of racism often brought both groups together. He repeatedly points to race as a unifier of Africans and African-

Americans, such as the fight against apartheid or the unrest after the charges against four police officers, who beat Rodney King in 1991, were cleared. During his high school, for example, he states that "experiences with American racism … went a long way toward strengthening racial solidarity among the black students" (211). In this sense, he explains how racism acts as a unifying bond between groups:

> I think experiences with [racism] served to pull our campus clique closer together. A bond usually develops between people who feel that they are under siege, and though we all felt comfortable among our peers on campus (even if some white students who had never before met black people curiously asked to touch our hair), the apparent hostility of America at large highlighted the importance of supporting one another (212).

According to Wamba, these experiences with racism fostered racial unity among blacks of various national and ethnic origins. However, by acting as "frequent reminders of the seemingly precarious position of blacks in America" (220), the same experiences with racism tend to intensify the psychological trauma that blacks feel by being outcasts in society.

Hence, recurrent experiences with racism also give place to psychological trauma in the sense described by Frantz Fanon in *Black Skin, White Masks*. Fanon, makes an assessment of how the family structure resembles that of the nation. He argues that "the family is a miniature of the nation" (109) and that one emerges from the familial environment expecting the same rules to be applied in the social space. Still, in the case of black children, Fanon adds that "a normal Negro child, having grown up within a normal family, will become abnormal on the slightest contact with the white world" (111). Wamba, for example, emerges from an African heritage that probably did not see race as a social category, and from groups of African students in high school and college that protected him from the racial reality of the US. In this sense, Wamba gets puzzled when he comes in contact with "the depth and scope

of American racial attitudes" (220). When Wamba comes in contact with the white society and racism, he suffers this psychological trauma negotiating his identity between being African, African-American and non-white. The portrayal of experiences with racism is a second point where both narratives, *Kinship* and *Americanah*, once again converge.

In *Americanah*, when Aunty Uju and Dike move to Massachusetts, Dike begins to show signs of an identity crisis, mainly at school where Dike was exposed to white Americans. The narrator states that after Uju and Dike moved to Massachusetts Dike developed "a weariness too heavy for a child" (211). At school, Dike is the only noticeable black kid since, according to Uju, "the other child is a half-caste, and so fair that if you look from afar you will not even know that he is black" (212). This difference not only singled him out among the other children, but it also triggered questions regarding his identity. In a school essay, Dike expresses some of his uncertainties regarding his identity. Aunty Uju reports them to Ifemelu: "How can he say he does not know what he is? Since when is he conflicted? And even that his name is difficult?" (269).

Later in the narrative, Dike ends up attempting suicide. Drawing on Freud's idea that "every neurosis has its origins in specific *erlebnisse* [life experiences]" (Fanon 112) Fanon argues that these experiences are repressed from the consciousness of the patient, but they continue to exist in the unconscious and eventually arise back into consciousness in disguise. In fact, Ifemelu asserts that "his depression is because of his experience" (470) since he is in an in-between place, between being born African and raised among black Americans. Dike disguises or represses the pain he felt in these experiences through jokes. He tells that "his friends would say, 'Hey, Dike, got some weed?'" implying that he would sell drugs because he is black and "he told her about the pastor at church, a white woman, who had said hello to all the other kids but when she came to him, she said, 'What's up, bro?'" (433). While Dike reported these events in a playful way, he is aware of the weight of racial difference in the

US. Ifemelu wondered how all his jokes, and laughter about his experiences with racism seemingly shielded him from racial conflict while "underneath, there might have been growing a pea plant of trauma" (471). Dike's questionings regarding identity result from moving to a place where they were the only black people (270) but also by not being considered black American, as Ifemelu points out to Uju: "You told him what he wasn't [black] but you didn't tell him what he was" (470). It is possible to argue that this identity indetermination results in Dike's conflicting mental state.

Therefore, in the case of Wamba and Dike, then, another level of complexity regarding identity negotiation is added since, as transnational subjects, they not only have to negotiate between their African and American identities, but they also have to negotiate between being African-American in a white society that surrounds them. Avtar Brah's work on the multi-axial configuration of power, then, supports the analysis of these multiple levels of negotiation. Brah argues that diaspora[21] is a concept embedded in a "multi-axial performative conception of power" which "highlights the ways in which a group constituted as a 'minority' along one dimension of differentiation may be constructed as a 'majority' along another" (186). In other words, a group that is considered a minority in a certain context may perform as a majority in other. This argument is important because although African-Americans incorporate and sometimes appropriate aspects of African culture, they may at times, reject, isolate or exclude Africans. A similar performative power can be observed between different African ethnic groups in the sense that one ethnic group may, at times, perform a position of power in relation to another group.

[21] It is important to note that although Brah uses the term diaspora, she acknowledges that the late twentieth-century is a time in which diasporas are inserted in a transnational moment. Her definition of diaspora as "*an interpretive frame referencing the economic, political and cultural dimensions of these contemporary forms of migrancy*" (183, italics in original) comes close to that of transnationalism which allows for an analysis of the relationships established between the characters in the novels object of this study.

Their identity negotiation between black and white echoes Du Bois conceptualization of the veil and double consciousness that is the final layer in which Wamba's identity is questioned. The veil, as a metaphor for race and racism, was developed by Du Bois as a prevailing phenomenon that results from the constant oppression and undermining of blacks in the US against a predominantly white society. In *The Souls of Black Folk*, Du Bois states that African-Americans are "born with a veil, and gifted with second-sight in this American world,—a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world" (5). From this quotation, some researchers see at least three main aspects that constitute the notion of the veil (Winant 2004; Savory 1972). First, to be born with a veil means that being born with a darker skin differentiates African-Americans from white Americans. Second, this difference prevents the world (certainly meaning white Americans) to grant African-Americans a true self as Americans. And a third aspect that can be inferred from this passage is the difficulty that African-Americans have in relation to seeing themselves outside of the frames and labels established by white America. It is possible to observe these three aspects through the characters of Wamba and Dike while both struggle to reconcile their identity as African and as American, having to see the society around them through this veil.

Du Bois' elaborates his concept of the veil into his definition of double consciousness as follows: "this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity" (5). Moreover, in fact Wamba does assert that, at Harvard, he "often felt an obligation to prove [himself]" he adds that "I felt that in addition to having to perform so as to pass, I had to show that I and other blacks had a right to be there" (223). This unrest concerning his identity is yet another level in Wamba's identity negotiation.

On the third chapter of *Kinship*, Wamba paraphrases W.E.B. Du Bois' definition of double consciousness as "the psychological challenge of reconciling an African heritage with a European upbringing and education" (82). This aspect of the peculiar sensation that is the double consciousness certainly haunts Wamba's identity. Later in his memoir, Wamba concedes that his "upbringing in Tanzania and that of African Americans from U.S. cities and suburbs seemed an obstacle to empathy" (218). Although Wamba does not say so directly, apparently he is referring to the cultural values that differed in both societies. For example, he addresses the cultural values embedded in language arguing that "Swahili culture … places a strong emphasis on respect for elders and on the social hierarchy of age, a stress largely absent from contemporary American culture" (110). In this sense, it is difficult to create a unified identity that encompasses both African and American set of values, behaviors, and cultural practices. Similar to Dike, then, the multiple layers of Wamba's identity constantly compels him to negotiate between his American citizenship and his Tanzanian upbringing. Levitt and Schiller (2004) see "the transnational migration experience as a kind of gauge which, while anchored, pivots between host land and transnational connections" (1003). Guided by this analogy, it is possible to say that while Wamba, and, to an extent, Dike have their identities anchored in a core set of traditions and heritage, they constantly pivot between identifying as Africans and as Americans.

Returning to Du Bois' conception of the veil, it is important to note that he also ascribed a positive aspect to the veil which consists of a "second-sight in this American world" (5). Later in *Souls*, Du Bois acknowledges that the Negro, while moving through the civil, political, and economic questions that he calls "problems of their inner life" (151), must also live in constant negotiation with the white society. All these preoccupations entail "a time of intense ethical ferment, of religious heart searching and intellectual unrest" (151). As mentioned, this period of psychological unrest can be observed through the characters of

Ifemelu and Dike, in *Americanah* and Wamba, in *Kinship.* However, after this time of self-reflexivity, this second-sight is what allows them to observe the American society. In Wamba's case, by observing the societies that surround him he concludes that fortunately

> The legacy of contact between Africans and African Americans is certainly more than just one of misunderstanding and conflict. Instead, history reveals that far more often than they have clashed, Africans and African Americans have reached out to one another with fascination, purpose, and a spirit of hopeful kinship. ... The psychological ties that bind all black people to Africa are invisible and difficult to even define. But they have played a defining role for the past three hundred years of black history (34-35).

Wamba achieves this conclusion after a period of self-reflexivity that is a common feature of self-writing. Memoirs, the literary structure of *Kinship*, tend to focus on reflections and feelings about a specific life event and around a central theme. In Lejeune's *On Autobiography*, together with his definition of autobiography he puts forward the idea that, even though the author, narrator, and protagonist of the autobiography are identical, there is a slight distancing between author and protagonist.

Keeping in view with Lejeune's notion that there is a slight distancing between the protagonist and the author, Jean Quigley, in *The Grammar of Autobiography*, states that autobiographical narratives emerge from the sense of a core self "that constitutes a third point of orientation" (106). That is to say that, this sense of self is a detached point in the narrative line that allows the author to transit between past and present. She adds that the "[s]elf is the vantage point from which the autobiography is told" (106). This third point of orientation entails "a relation but not necessarily a complete identity between the self then and the self

now" (106)[22] allowing the author to reflect upon events of the past that justify present positioning. That is to say, then, that Wamba's past experiences between Dar es Salaam and Boston put him in this vantage point where he is capable of observing his past life and how it affects present events.

Then, a third point where *Kinship* and *Americanah* come into contact, and the final point analyzed here, is the use of writing as a way of coming out of the period of identity crisis. Writing works in both novels as a coping mechanism. In Wamba's case, as discussed before, the literary structure of memoir functions as a way of self-reflection (by organizing ideas, values, and conceptions of both cultures), continuity of identity (by providing an identity constructed along time), and individualization (by showing how he is different from others giving him a sense of distinctiveness). In *Americanah*, Ifemelu's blog helps her and Dike to cope with their identity fragmentation and building a sense of understanding and belonging through group affiliation, even if this group is virtually constructed. Shortly after his suicide attempt Dike mentions Ifemelu's blog in passage meaning that the money Ifemelu made with the blog provided a life somehow free of preoccupations. And later Dike volunteers to moderate the comments on Ifemelu's blogs, which, along with his visit to Lagos brought somehow a coherence to his process of identity formation.

Kinship, in turn, being a product of self-writing itself, allows Wamba to evaluate his past, and through these past events, concatenate an identity that distinguishes himself from Americans and African-Americans while simultaneously encompassing values, cultural practices of both. For example, in retrospect, Wamba comments that "[i]n those difficult early

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[22] This distancing between author and protagonist – be it temporal, linguistic, or psychologic – is acknowledged by various other authors. Quoting Georges Gusdorf, for instance, Linda Anderson observes that "Autobiography … requires a man to take a distance with regard to himself in order to constitute himself in the focus of his special unity and identity across time" (qtd in Anderson 2001 5). In turn, Paul John Eakin argues that "autobiography is a re-enactment in language of the development of the self" (1974 213). Later, Eakin reinforces that he sees "a mor comprehensive conception of the autobiographical act as both a re-enactment and extension of earlier phases of identity formation." (Eakin 226)

undergraduate years [he] sometimes yielded to depression and thought often and wistfully of [his] family and friends back in Tanzania" (225). In this passage, Wamba evaluates how his struggle with racism, financial difficulties, and the lack of a "comfortable and familiar feeling of understanding and belonging that took the edge of homesickness" (219) gradually depressed him. Both narratives, then, allow characters to come to terms with their new interstitial identity, be it the fast-changing, short, and online structure of the blog, as in *Americanah*, or the intimate, long, and printed structure of the memoir.

Identity, then, is never full and complete. Even though the transnational subject looks for a sense of belonging and establishing the core of their self, achieving a coherent identity might be a deep and ongoing challenge. In fact, the fluidity of identity for transnational subjects is precisely what both books that comprise the object of this dissertation indicate so far. In this chapter, the identity negotiation of both protagonists was analyzed in terms of how their identities were questioned be it through the devaluation of their African heritage or through failure to establish a sense of belonging.

In fact, Howard Winant, in "Dialectics of the Veil", explains that the color line or the veil represents "a profound social structure that has been built up for centuries" accounting for how race and racism have "shaped our identities and social organization" (5). Winant also points out that the veil can be understood "as operating simultaneously at the 'micro-' level of identity, experience, the divisions and struggles within the racialized self; and at the 'macro-' level of the social whole, the collectivity, the state, history, the nation" (6). Seeing that Du Bois' concept of the veil, articulated in 1903, is still in effect in the US society, the struggles of characters analyzed in this chapter on a micro level of individual identity can be expanded as a representation of the struggles faced by migrants in their diasporic spaces. Finally, I attempted to show that after this period of identity crisis and liminality there is a period of creativity from which the characters analyzed emerge to creative social observations.

The transnational migrant is situated at the border which is a simultaneous experience of displacement and creativity. It is displacing because it challenges those who live between borders to constantly negotiate their system of values and cultural practices. And it is creative because precisely this exchange of values that allows for the creation of new perspectives.

Conclusion

> I aim to persuade you that much of our contemporary thinking about identity is shaped by pictures that are in various ways unhelpful or just plain wrong (Appiah, *The Lies that Bind*, 2018)

In this conclusion I return to Kwame Antony Appiah's words from the epigraph of this dissertation. Closing a circle, his words open this section because they somehow summarize the tone of the books that comprise the literary corpus of this dissertation. Both Adichie and Wamba embark on a revisionist project through their writings that, on the one hand, challenge images of the United States as a welcoming land of opportunity, the American dream, and the melting pot; and, on the other hand they refute orientalist, reductionist and essentialist views of African countries and its people. All these misrepresented images can be understood, in the words of Appiah, as unhelpful or just plain wrong, often times fostering negative stereotypes.

The major thrust of this dissertation has been the analysis of identity formation and negotiation against a transnational sociopolitical background. To this end, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's novel *Americanah* and Philip Wamba's memoir *Kinship*: a Family's Journey in Africa and America were selected for their outstanding representation of protagonists who transit through an identity spectrum between African and American. Their journey through identity formation (during their formative years) and identity negotiation (during their adulthood), together with their migratory movements, embody a wide range of identity issues and questionings that are profitable for the analysis carried out in this dissertation.

This study was originally conceived through the analytic lens of diaspora. However, the particularities that the migratory movements portrayed in *Americanah* and *Kinship* have in relation to previous movements demanded an approach that along with the concept of

diaspora focused on the interconnection between sending and receiving countries. Therefore, transnational studies such as those of Glick-Schiller, et al. (1994), Peggy Levitt (1998), Levitt and Schiller (2004), and Portes, et al. (1999), among others, informed this dissertation in terms of transnational migratory movements, sociopolitical processes that simultaneously take place in the country of origin and destination, and identity adaptability. Concerning the analysis of identity formation and negotiation, the ideas of Stuart Hall (1999), Avtar Brah (2005), Homi Bhabha (1994), and Kay Deaux (2001, 2011), served the purpose of limiting the scope of the concept and provided a theoretical basis on aspects such as sense of belonging, group affiliation, and interpersonal relationships on the construction and negotiation of identity.

The main question that guided this research was framed as follows: how characters' identities are formed and negotiated against a migratory and transnational sociopolitical background? In the first chapter, where identity formation was addressed, it became apparent that, in *Americanah*, Ifemelu's identity is formed mainly through her relationships with her significant others. Through the contrast with her mother, Aunty Uju, and Obinze her personal identity is established as outspoken, witty, smart, and independent. In *Kinship*, despite the fact that Wamba was too young to be concerned with identity issues, as he asserts it, it may be argued that identity negotiation is not always a conscious process. Also, through self-reflexivity he observes that the uniqueness of his multi-layered identity was built through the combination of the influences from his Congolese father and his American mother as well as by means of interpersonal relationships with friends and people he met all through his migratory movements.

In the second chapter, I addressed the negotiation of the identity discussed in the previous chapter. At this point, in both narratives, it is possible to observe the differentiation between personal and social identity become more salient as the protagonists face the reality

of the diasporic space. After arriving in the receiving country, both characters embark on a period of identity crisis that resulted from having their personal and social identities challenged. However, the reasons that plunge each of them into this period of crisis are different. Ifemelu's identity crisis resulted from multiple questionings directed at layers of her personal identity such as language (having her knowledge of English questioned), outward appearance (in the sense of inadequacy of her hair for job interviews), and effacement of her legal identity (pretending to be someone else is a tension point for Ifemelu's individuality). In turn, Wamba was raised under the influence of images of racial solidarity, and pan-Africanism that led him to expect strong kinship between Africans and African-Americans. When these deeply rooted images of racial unity that constituted Wamba's social identity were frustrated (through experiences with racism he faced in the US), he was afflicted with a depressive state, which is understood in this dissertation as identity crisis.

After this period of identity crisis it is commonly acknowledged among theoreticians that subjects usually emerge into a period hybridity. Homi Bhabha (1994) and Salman Rushdie (2010), for example, point out that migration becomes a phenomenon through which hybridity becomes more visible, since it blends multiple cultures, economic systems, and policies. In this sense, Homi Bhabha's notions of liminality, cultural hybridism, and third space were proven essential to understand the meanings built throughout the narratives of both books. It is possible to observe how Homi Bhabha's conceptualization of the 'beyond' as a space "'in-between' spaces [that] provide the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood – singular or communal – that initiate new signs of identity" (*Location of Culture* 2) is embedded and portrayed through the lives of both protagonists.

In turn, in *Imaginary Homelands*, Salman Rushdie talks about the Latin origin of the term 'translation' in the sense of bearing meanings across (17). And, while some meanings are lost in this process of translation between cultures, Rushdie argues that something is also

gained. He, then, elaborates the idea of a stereoscopic vision as a "kind of double perspective" of those who "are at one and the same time insiders and outsiders in this society" (19). The stereoscopic view is not only present in the life of the authors Adichie and Wamba, but it is also represented through their protagonists analyzed in this dissertation.

This hybridity is often in parallel with creativity, since it is a removed point of view that allows this double perspective of the society. As Ifemelu and Wamba emerge from their period of identity crisis, then, they resort to writing as a bridge that connects both extremes of their identity spectrum. In *Americanah* the use of the blog and in *Kinship* the use of memoir and vignettes work as tools to organize the confronting structures of their cross-border identities as well as put forward criticism on the situations they observe in the societies of the sending and receiving countries. Positioned as hybrids, the characters are able to simultaneously consider cultural practices of the old and the new worlds, as well as offer insight on pressing issues of the sending and receiving countries' social structures.

Another form of hybridity is seen on the literary structures of both novels. In *Americanah*, alongside the novel structure, there are instances of blog posts, emails, and references and allusions to other novels that allow an informed reader to infer a sort of metafiction that constantly conscious of its fictional status, which might intensify the realism and absurdity of the real racialized situations the novel describes. For example, the metafiction can be seen in passages were she comments on books "packed with things … with emotions skimmed over, and each sentence stylishly aware of its own stylishness" (14) to characters' constant preoccupation with what books other characters liked. Wamba, on the other hand, supports the recollections and reflections he makes in his memoir with vignettes that encompasses lives of personalities, and a writing tone that, at times, resembles a journalistic report. For example, when he reports racially charged incidents between white

cops and African-Americans in the US. These ruptures in the narratives and literary structure show the hybridity of the books themselves.

Various points raised in this research are consistent with the academic tradition of Cultural, African-American, and Postcolonial studies on identity as well as previous findings on *Americanah* and *Kinship* reviewed in the introduction of this dissertation. Among the goals achieved through this dissertation it is important to mention the interdisciplinary approach of the research that meets Brettel and Hollified request for more interdisciplinary studies on migration (23). Secondly, through this interdisciplinary focus, this research also accomplished the intention proposed by the line of research of this graduate program by studying the links between literature, history, and cultural memory through the analysis of fictionalized experiences and social structures. Finally, my reading of *Americanah* and *Kinship* endorses Braga and Goncalves' diaspoetics concept. Several of the twelve categories that comprise diasporic literary texts are found in *Americanah* and *Kinship*. Both texts, for example, present a non-linear structure that mirrors the unpredictability of factual and psychological events on the diasporic space; the narratives also explore characters' internal and external conflicts triggered by the displacement experienced by characters; and, finally, both texts are structured in a fragmented or dispersed narrative style, just to name a few examples.

Finally, the study on identity carried out here is far from exhaustive, due to the complexities of the concept itself. Therefore, I believe that both books are still open to substantial research not only on identity but also approaches departing from other concepts. For example, further studies on Colorism seem to be appropriate and relevant to understand race relations not only in the US but also in Nigeria. Among its many definitions , Deborah Gabriel argues that "Colourism, shadism, skin tone bias, pigmentocracy and the colour complex, are just a few of the terms used to describe the system of privilege and discrimination based on the degree of lightness in the colour of a person's skin" (11).

Throughout the whole *Americanah* Adichie subtly presents passages that depict the difference of skin tone. For example in passages such as “Obinze’s wife was mixed-race” (27); Ginika was “caramel skin” (67) and half-caste; and Aunty Uju “Avoided the sun and used creams ... so that her complexion became lighter” (89). Among various other instances, even though there is a slight critique to the use of bleaching lotions, Adichie presents this topic mostly without positive or negative comments allowing the reader to think about this as racial aspect.

Another interesting approach to the corpus of analysis of this research can be found through the brain drain. The historical background that contributed for many students to emigrate from Africa raises questionings about the issue brain drain. Theories on this topic are found and in articles such as Kyle Brown’s “Africa’s loss in the brain drain” (2002), Luc Ngwé’s “African Brain Drain: Is There an Alternative?” (2018), and, fictionally, there is Obinze’s mother’s comment on brain drain.

A final possible approach cited here seems to be through Benedict Anderson’s notion of imagined communities. Throughout *Americanah* it is possible to observe how Anderson’s imagined communities were expanded as a result of technological advances in communication and transportation. Anderson spoke of imagined community built upon a shared knowledge (specifically printed newspapers). Nowadays the sharing of news through internet, as it is the case of Ifemelu’s blog, happens in a faster and direct way. In *Kinship*, the concept is relevant to the analysis of how this shared knowledge can be misrepresented with stereotypical images – such as Orientalism for African countries or land of opportunity for the US – preventing, among other things, the mutual identification of Africans and African-Americans.

In conclusion, in a time which migration has become such a controversial phenomenon it is necessary to get to know the voices of migrants even if through fictionalized

representations of characters or an autobiographical protagonist. The authors skillfully addressed questions that will remain at the fickle borders of nations, states, and identities.

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