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Regina Fatima Oliveira de Sá

Engaging with Africa: a study of Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah*

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2019

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Dissertação apresentada, como requisito parcial para obtenção do título de Mestre, ao Programa de Pós-Graduação em Letras, da Universidade do Estado do Rio de Janeiro. Área de concentração: Estudos de Literatura.

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Many Negroes will not find themselves in what follows.
This is equally true of many whites.
But the fact that I feel a foreigner in the worlds of the schizophrenic
or the sexual cripple in no way diminishes their reality.
Frantz Fanon, Black Skin White Masks

ABSTRACT

SÁ, Regina Fatima Oliveira de. *Engaging with Africa*: a study of Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's Americanah. 2019. 103 f. Dissertação (Mestrado em Letras) - Instituto de Letras, Universidade do Estado do Rio de Janeiro, Rio de Janeiro, 2019.

This work aims to analyze Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's novel *Americanah*, one of the representatives of the third generation of Nigerian writers. The novel reaches prominence not only for presenting numerous themes and perspectives but also for combating stereotypes, or 'single stories', in Adichie's words, as it amplifies the possibilities of stories about Africa and Diasporic Nigerians. This dissertation uses Mikhail Bakhtin's concepts to demonstrate how intertextuality, dialogism, Otherness and multivocality can be observed in Adichie's text, especially in the space of irony. To explore irony as a stylistic and sociocultural aspect of the novel, this dissertation finds theoretical and methodological support in the works of Linda Hutcheon and Claire Colebrook. In this sense, this dissertation cuts through the Postcolonial Literature stamp in order to think of Adichie's polyphonic novel as an invitation to a different form of engagement with Africa. Texts by Frantz Fanon, Edward W. Said, Homi Bhabha, Aimé Césaire, Abdul Jan Mohamed, Achille Mbembé, Ngũgĩ Wa Thiong'o, Jemie Chinweizu, Onwuchekwa Jemie, Ihechukwu Madubuike, Olatunji Ogunyemi and Chinua Achebe contribute to elaborate the themes addressed by Adichie in the novel.

Keywords: Adichie. Irony. Dialogism.

RESUMO

SÁ, Regina Fatima Oliveira de. *Engaging with Africa:* a study of Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's Americanah. 2019. 103 f. Dissertação (Mestrado em Letras) - Instituto de Letras, Universidade do Estado do Rio de Janeiro, Rio de Janeiro, 2019.

Este trabalho tem por objetivo analisar o romance *Americanah* de Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, uma das representantes da terceira geração de escritoras nigerianas. O romance destaca-se por não só apresentar inúmeros temas e perspectivas mas por também combater os estereótipos, ou as 'estórias únicas', como formulou Adichie, pois amplia as possibilidades de estórias sobre a África e os nigerianos diaspóricos. Esta dissertação utiliza os conceitos de Mikhail Bakhtin para demonstrar como a intertextualidade, dialogismo, alteridade e polifonia podem ser observados no texto de Adichie, especialmente no espaço da ironia. Para explorar a ironia enquanto aspecto estilístico e sociopolítico, este trabalho encontra suporte teórico e metodológico nas obras de Linda Hutcheon e Claire Colebrook. Neste sentido, esta dissertação esgarça o selo de "literatura pós-colonial" para pensar o romance polifônico de Adichie como um convite para um outro modo de engajamento com a África. Textos de Frantz Fanon, Edward W. Said, Homi Bhabha, Aimé Césaire, Abdul Jan Mohamed, Achille Mbembé, Ngũgĩ Wa Thiong'o, Jemie Chinweizu, Onwuchekwa Jemie, Ihechukwu Madubuike, Olatunji Ogunyemi e Chinua Achebe contribuem para elaborar as temáticas abordadas por Adichie no romance.

Palavras-chave: Adichie. Ironia. Dialogismo.

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INTRODUCTION

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's book *Americanah* was my first contact with Nigeria. The contemporaneity of this novel was what impressed me the most. Adichie's political engagement against racism and sexism was responsible for my strong identification. I had lived in the United States and experienced many of the same trials and tribulations of being a foreigner in America; I could see myself reflected in the story, even though I am not black. As I read, I found myself observing a reality, which at times was familiar to me, but also shockingly different. In my second reading of this novel, the fierce criticism being made of America, so strongly identified in my first reading, slowly sounded different. By that time, I had seen Adichie in many interviews and had noted her very firm, elegant stance. I had heard her laughter. This made me read the novel under a different light and, suddenly, I perceived Adichie's fascinating irony and was captured by Adichie's plural perspectives.

As one reads Adichie's love story *Americanah*, one cannot ignore social criticism as a subtext. As Emily Raboteau posits, "*Americanah* is social satire masquerading as romantic comedy. There is mocking, but not without love"[1]. Social criticism makes us look at our society and question its values. Social criticism that comes in the form of fiction is even better, since it introduces different realities to the reader without generating defense mechanisms that occur when one faces other genres. To be lectured on, to be shown scientific reports, to hear the cry of manifestations in the streets, may not be as easy to confront. As Adichie herself said, "I think because I'm a novelist, I come from the point of view of storytelling and I'm keen with stories. I think storytelling is the most effective way to communicate."[2]

How much about the author does the reader need to know to understand the novel *Americanah*? Is it possible for one to be innocent of its power when one buys the novel, because it has been recommended by a friend or due to the many prizes it has won, and not wish to engage with Africa during its reading? Or better, could it be read just as a love story? Can a love story provoke deeper thought? Yes, the reader may have bought the book and not have been aware that *Americanah* is written by a woman, a feminist and a Nigerian. The reader may not have seen the TED talks that popularized Adichie as a feminist, though "The

[1] Emily Raboteau, *The Washington Post*, June 10, 2013

[2] https://qz.com/quartzy/1133732/chimamanda-ngozi-adichie-talks-about-feminism-and-raising-her-daughter-ina-gendered-world/

Danger of a Single Story" sits in the top 25 most viewed talks of all times.[3] The reader may ignore Adichie's past intellectual achievements and biography as a student of medicine and pharmacy in Nigeria, communication at Drexel, political science in Eastern Connecticut State University. Adichie has also obtained a Master's Degree in creative writing at Johns Hopkins University, continued her studies at Princeton, received another MA in African Studies from Yale University and was granted a fellowship for advanced studies at Harvard University.[4] Is any of this information relevant for the reader of *Americanah*? Does this information only contribute to the certainty that Adichie spent a good part of her life in the United States and has obviously experienced racism and sexism like those presented in the narrative of her book? Or are there other ways that the author's biography affects the writing and helps fortify the novel's effectiveness? Can one separate a literary work from the life of its creator?

On the other hand, if the reader is familiar with Adichie's personal life, he/she may be curious to determine how much of the story is autobiographical and how this has affected what she writes and how she writes. The question could be: how much of this is true? For one, Adichie has avowed that, as a writer, it is essential that she tell her story truthfully. "And I think that's a difficult thing to do, to be truly truthful, because it's only natural to be concerned about offending people, or possible consequences"[5] she added in an interview for Zadie Smith for the NYPL podcast.

In the same interview, Adichie begins to speak about the importance of being truthful in her writing. Clarity is an important issue for Adichie. She associates this with important feminist issues. "I think that what our society teaches young girls (…) is this idea that likability is an essential part of the space you occupy in the world."[6] Adichie compares woman's habit of twisting oneself into shapes to make oneself likable to the same expectation one may have with her writing. To this Adichie adds: "If you start off thinking about being likable you're not going to tell your story honestly. Because you're going to be so concerned with not offending. And that's going to ruin your story." [7] Coherence is a strong characteristic of Adichie. Her writing is lucid and her fiction portrays reality. There is always the impression that the novel is telling the reader something that the world needs said. If there is

[3] https://i-d.vice.com/en_uk/article/wjkbzz/the-powerful-words-of-chimamanda-ngozi-adichie
[4] The Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie Website www.cerep.ulg.ac.be/adichie/cnabio.html
[5] https://www.pressreader.com/
[6] https://www.pressreader.com/
[7] https://www.pressreader.com/

a moral judgment, it is lost amongst the great quantity of stories, with different perspectives, being presented. Adichie's narrative is plural. It is never a single story.

Maybe because Adichie believes in plurality, she rejects tags placed on her writing. Labels like "black" or "African" used to describe the type of book she writes are not value free. Adichie prefers to be identified as a realistic fiction writer.

In 2017, during an interview with writer and friend Dave Eggers, Adichie spoke of her new phase as a writer. After writing about Nigeria´s past with *Purple Hibiscus* set in the period of the military coup and *Half a Yellow Sun* during the Biafra War, Adichie decided to be contemporary and to write a love story about a diasporic couple. Adichie told Eggers that she was "no longer the dutiful daughter of literature". [8] She claimed now she was "having fun, discarding the rules and increasingly blurring the boundaries between fiction and memoir." [9] However, Adichie clarifies any doubt that may exist about these boundaries by saying: "of course you put yourself into your fiction, your fiction is you."

The practical aspect of Adichie's fiction is that it will help the reader reflect on innumerable contemporary themes, experience new realities by way of the characters of the novel and experiment with Otherness. The reader will be engaged with Others' reality and this will enable the reader to see the world from new perspectives and consequently innovate in his/her approaches to personal situations.

In the 477 pages of *Americanah*, Adichie tells the story of a couple that parts ways to live abroad. Ifemelu goes to the United States and Obinze, her boyfriend, to England. As the reader follows the narrative of these two characters, Adichie presents the reality not only of being black in America, but also of being black in England and being African black. Ironically, Ifemelu, the main character, had never experienced racism until she arrived in America. Being a Nigerian black in America is different from being an African-American black since this confronts American black representation. Ifemelu meets other Africans, from countries other than Nigeria, with their distinct cultures, backgrounds and life stories. Adichie presents the different identity crises experienced by various diasporic individuals, as they develop defense mechanisms to survive, but also the double voice that results from living inbetween places and never fully adapting or completely forgetting where one came from. At the end of the novel, Ifemelu has the experience of achieving the American Dream (having a job and an American boyfriend), but still decides to return home to Nigeria. Arriving in

[8] www.theguardian.com/books/2018/apr/28/chimamanda-ngozi-adichie-feminism-racism-sexism-gender-metoo
[9] www.theguardian.com/books/2018/apr/28/chimamanda-ngozi-adichie-feminism-racism-sexism-gender-metoo

Nigeria, she is confronted with the reality that she will never fit in, because now she is an 'Americanah', a slang word used for a Nigerian who has been changed by living abroad.

As I have stated, plurality and diversity are everywhere in the novel. For instance, people in *Americanah* are described as alluding to their skin color in various shades of blackness: "sable", "gingerbread", "caramel" or even "an undertone of blueberries" (ADICHIE, 2014, p.341). Readers may not be accustomed to hearing these adjectives in relation to skin color, but that strikes a familiar ring at the same time. IBGE's *Suplemento da Pesquisa Mensal de Emprego de julho de 1998* listed 143 variations of skin color in Brazil. This is due to the Brazilian population's spontaneous answers to a survey question about their 'race', in which they had to identify with a term that they themselves came up with to answer an open-ended question about how the interviewee identified the color of his/her skin. In other words, many of the people being interviewed did not see themselves as "blacks" or "whites", therefore, they came up with a term that they felt described themselves better. Some of the most well-known terms were: *jambo, marrom-canela, meia-branca, meio-termo, mel, moreno-café-com-leite, clarinha, castanho, marrom bombom* and *cor do pecado* (SILVEIRA, 2006, p.87). Many of them allude to sumptuous food categories in the same way that gingerbread, caramel and blueberries are used in the novel.

As we elaborate on this example, we begin to think about the many times that our culture appears to be very similar to distant lands. As I read *Americanah,* many questions of this sort came to mind. How similar are we to Americans and Africans? Immediately a paradoxical thought comes to mind: what do I really know about Africa? Or even: Am I perceiving Africa with the same eyes of the conquerors of the past, and the tourists of the present, namely an exotic Africa? Also, if we do linger on the thoughts about similarities and differences, we may find ourselves thinking: do I truly have the right to identify myself with the characters of the novel just because I have been a foreigner in America and have gone through some of the same diasporic situations described in the narrative? Can a white person (as myself) and a black one (as Adichie and her characters) be part of the same 'Othering' of a model that makes Europe and North America the epicenters of the world and casts Africans, Latins and all other minorities towards their margins? This questioning leads to still other types of questions: where exactly does the West end and the 'rest of us' begin? On the other hand, one can also start thinking about the status of migrants with questions like: if you have bridged the gap, left the frontiers, headed to the center, mingled with the natives there, will you ever really feel like one of them? Can you ever become unAfrican? The reader can also find himself/herself thinking about Adichie and her relation to what she writes by asking: in

Americanah, does the reader have the impression that the author, Adichie, has moved on and left behind her Nigerian background?

Questions abound. The reader could easily find himself/herself thinking: if I *do not* identify with the characters, or with the author's subtext, does that determine that the reality, exposed in the novel, is inaccurate or stereotyped? Then, one starts thinking about how important is reader response. Is it possible to push aside the stories being told as being part of fiction, and thus not reflect reality? As if one were to say, "It's just a story." On the other hand, if I *do* identify with the novel, does it make the values, contained in its pages, a declaration of truth? In other words, is it possible for Adichie to create a story along the novel's almost 500 pages without any of her values, personal stories, and experiences of reality seeping through? Next the reader may ask himself/herself: If Adichie's world transcends the novel, can this be beneficial?

Dan Izevbaye, professor at Bowen University, Iwo, Nigeria, states that a "writer need not be always as direct as this artist in bearing witness to his experience. But authorial presence, even if it is mediated through narrative surrogates, is essential to the moral conception of the experience that is being narrated" (IZEVBAYE, 1990, p.28). Aware of this one could ask next: does Adichie perceive her writing as having a moral obligation and thus assume responsibility for her "Africanness"? Do readers expect this mediation? Should a work of art, as *Americanah*, have this practical function? Can the result of reading a novel augment the moral conception of the African experience for foreign readers?

Actually, Adichie includes this discussion in her novel. Ifemelu has various boyfriends in the novel. Blaine, for example, is an Afro-American college professor. The narrator describes him as being a man that only "cooked organic vegetables", a man of "careful disciplines" that "ran every morning and flossed every night" (ADICHIE, 2014, p.310-311). In chapter 34, Blaine gives Ifemelu this advice about her writing: "Remember people are not reading you as entertainment, they're reading you as cultural commentary. That's a real responsibility. There are kids writing college essays about your blog"[10]. Does making the reader reflect upon the reason for reading any work of literature, and more specifically this novel, in some way subvert the theme, genre and objective of *Americanah*? Can this reflection change the way the novel is read? Can this type of reflection, which creates subversion, help question certain labels and borders of African literature? Is Adichie inscribing the role of the author in the creation of an imagined community, Africa, in which all people can contribute to

[10] p.312

its formation by perpetuating certain images and vernaculars, as proclaimed by Benedict Anderson? [11] Is this playful game of writing about the writer, in one's own writing, a way of subverting? Can this practice be seen as a form of criticizing and undermining the usual way things are seen or done? Or is this just a simple humorous approach in narrative without any greater objective?

A few pages later, there is a discussion between Ifemelu and Blaine about divorce in America and Ifemelu shares that she does not understand the "unbending, unambiguous honesties that Americans required in relationships" (ADICHIE, 2014, p.320). Blaine asks her why she feels this way and she answers "It's different for me and I think it's because I'm from the Third World (…) To be a child of the Third World is to be aware of the many different constituencies you have and how honesty and truth must always depend on context" [12]. Though the narrator states that Ifemelu felt very clever to have thought of this explanation, which is humorous, Blaine shook his head and said: "That is so lazy, to use the Third World like that"[13]. Labels, as third world, are introduced in the novel in an ordinary discussion between a couple. Adichie introduces an academic discussion in a romantic exchange between Ifemelu and Blaine. An odd place, maybe, for such a subject to come up that results in catching the reader off guard and provoking a reflection where one could not expect. In one short romantic passage there is not only exchange, intimacy, representation, defiance, but also a sophisticated discussion about the third-world that reminds us of other important discussions related to postcolonial literature, African literature and many other definitions attributed to forms of classification regarding different theories and different groups. Can all these perspectives be attributed to Adichie's talent in elaborating the passage?

In order to delve into the reasons for multiple interpretations of the same passage of a novel, we can recall the French linguist, sociologist, writer, and philosopher, Roland Barthes. He was one of the first to call attention to the network created in literature that expands the possibilities of combination and selection of signs creating many more possibilities of interpretation. Though he posits the death of the author, thus removing from the author the major responsibility with the message of the text, he does recognize the multiplicity present in discourse. His claim that the text can be "read without its father's guarantee" maybe due to the fact that cultural codes will guarantee this in historical contexts. His affirmation that "the

[11] ANDERSON, Benedict, "Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism" London: Verso, 1983.
[12] *Ibid*
[13] *Ibid*

restoration of the intertext paradoxically abolishes inheritance" is epoch-making (BARTHES, 1989, p.61). In this sense, Barthes indicates that the author is seen as "a guest". Though authors can inscribe themselves as characters, or appear in the subtext, they are "a figure in the carpet" perceived but not in a "privileged way". Rather, Barthes stipulates the author is perceived in the ludic dimension of the text (BARTHES, 1989, p.61). It is not that Barthes does not consider the influence of the author's ideas, it is more that he interprets all texts as intertexts due to the many influences they present. In other words, no text is created in a void.

Even though texts speak to one another, for they are not created in a vacuum, their interpretation depends on the discursive community one belongs to. The community in turn determines what information one has access to, and thus there are as many interpretations as there are communities. Back to our last example in *Americanah*, one of the possibilities of interpretation of the passage is: Blaine being a college professor believes his opinion on such matters is more qualified, since Ifemelu is only a blogger. Ifemelu uses the "third-worldism" in her argument to justify her position. The narrator states that Ifemelu felt clever, as if this were a sophisticated position for her to defend. Blaine calls her position lazy. These two qualifiers have opposing values. This passage reminded me of the discussion of these labels in the academic world of literature: third world, postcolonial, global, etc.

Aijaz Ahmad, an Indian professor at the UC Irvine School of Humanities, and Arif Dirlik, Turkish historian who taught at Duke University for 30 years, are critical of such labels. Dirlik, sarcastically claims that "Postcolonial theory happened when third world intellectuals arrived in first-world academe" (Dirlik, p.294 *apud* NAYAR, 2010, p.30), which seems to be in synchrony with Adichie's recent polemic answer when asked about Postcolonial theory. "Postcolonial theory? I don't know what it means. I think it is something that professors made up because they needed to get jobs." [14]

Clarification is necessary here since Dirlik and Adichie's comments need to be read taking into consideration the complexity of the issue. Though many discussions related to colonized countries and their literature have come about in recent years and seem to call for an umbrella term to be used to indicate similar realities, theories and theorists, the term postcolonial is questioned not only by its critics but also by theorists who consider themselves postcolonial. The discussions englobe questions like: What national literatures or authors can be included? Does this term indicate that only native writers in the colonized country are qualified to be called postcolonial? Does the term only denote works written after

[14] www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/chimamanda-adichie-burden-representation-180204094739657.ht

independence or also those written during colonization? Is the term accurate since it implies that colonialism is over (others have adopted the term neo-imperialism to indicate a different period/type of "colonization")? Does this term crystalize a perspective that serves to marginalize the views of native people and thus does more harm than good? Thus, Dirlik and Adichie's stance, on the issue, not only reflect the many questioning that the term evokes, but also does not necessarily discredit the need to acknowledge the importance of the studies in this field.

The dinner party scene in Americanah may help us have another glimpse at this introductory discussion. Nathan, one of the dinner guests, is a "literature professor, neurotic and blinky behind his glasses, who Blaine once said was the only person at Yale that he trusted completely" (ADICHIE, 2014, p.323). He wants to know if Ifemelu is making money with her *blog* and Ifemelu answers that most of the money is going back home to her "hungry relatives". Nathan replies: "It must be good to have that. (…) To know where you're from. Ancestors going way back, that kind of thing" [15]. The reader, as Adichie, is left confused. Could this be another stereotypical vision of Africans that believe all Africans live in large tribal communities? Ifemelu looks at Nathan and feels uncomfortable. "She was not sure what his eyes held" [16]. As a reader I perceived that there were enormous differences among the visitors sitting at that table. Differences that could make Nathan envious of Ifemelu's supposedly large family, or the realization that he did not know his ancestors and felt cut off. Nathan may have no idea who his ancestors were due to peculiarities related to different forms of immigration in the US. However, on the other hand, it could just be that odd remark that people make when they have no idea how to interact with someone, especially when one is very different from oneself. Nathan's impulse to theorize, in any case, is here presented as an inaccurate assumption of Ifemelu's experience.

Another character, Shan, Blaine's sister, is the type that fills a room. The narrator observes that Shan flirted with everyone, hugged too closely and her compliments were so extravagant that they seemed insincere (ADICHIE, 2014, p.333). During the same dinner party, she tells the group about the book she is writing, "this book is a memoir, right? It's about tons of stuff growing up in this all-white town, being the only black kid in my prep school, my mom's passing, all that stuff"[17]. Next, she confides that her editor read the manuscript and said, "we have to make sure the book transcends race, so that it's not just

[15] *Ibid*. p.327
[16] *Ibid*. p.328
[17] *Ibid*, p. 334

about race"[18]. Shan concludes that "race is a brew best served mild, tempered with other liquids, otherwise white folk can't swallow it" [19]. This passage presents still another reflection about writing. Almost like a Matryoshka Russian doll that surprises you with more and more issues, one inside the other, the novel reveals unexpected complexity. The reader begins to wonder what type of writer Shan is. Growing up in all-white town and being always amongst whites, her life story is very different from Ifemelu's. Thus, Ifemelu must be a completely different black writer.

In the next passage, Shan is discussing the ideology of writing, especially fiction, and states, "if a character is not familiar, then that character becomes unbelievable. (…) You can't even read American fiction to get a sense of how actual life is lived these days" ((ADICHIE, 2014, p.336). She concludes: "You read American fiction to learn about dysfunctional white folk doing things that are weird to normal white folks"[20]. What is being said in between the lines here? The reader senses that such an uncommon remark must be referring to some inside story or recent event.

Another way to interpret this is by considering what Stuart Hall called "positively marked" as passages that signify because they point to a relation to what is absent, unmarked, unspoken and unsayable: "meaning is relational within an ideological system of presences and absences" (HALL, 1985, *apud*, HUCKIN, 2002, p.348). Thomas Huckin, linguist and professor at the University of Utah, adopts the definition of textual silences, based on Gricean and Leechian principles, which is characterized by "the omission of some piece of information that is pertinent to the topic at hand" (HUCKIN, 2002, p.348). Huckin defines *presuppositional silence* as "those that serve communicative efficiency by not stating what the speaker/writer apparently assumes to be common knowledge." [21] This does not mean that silence is "innocent or non-manipulative."[22]Alternatively, maybe the "dysfunctional white folk" passage would be better defined as an example of *discreet silence*, which is the type used to "avoid stating sensitive information."[23] If the author does not state it in the open, the reader cannot feel offended by such information. One could interpret that Adichie was being

[18] *Ibid*
[19] *Ibid*
[20] *Ibid*
[21] *Ibid*
[22] *Ibid*, p.350
[23] *Ibid*, p.348

discreet or subtle, since, as Huckin would conclude, "tactfulness is called for in cases in which knowledge shared by writer and reader is potentially embarrassing to the reader." [24]

If one is familiar with the "Black Lives Matter" movement, one knows that it was created with the mission to "build local power" and "intervene in violence inflicted on Black communities"[25]. Moreover, the reader may be aware that there is a common belief that crime is committed more by blacks and minorities than by whites. This is an erroneous belief, a stereotype. The "dysfunctional white folk" may allude to those white boys or men in school shootings, shootings in malls and, recently, the firing in synagogues in New York. Only whites commit mass violence. Dr. Stanton Peele confirms that mass violence is a "privileged white" phenomenon. Peele mentions *Newsweek* article that wondered if "white men commit mass shootings out of a sense of entitlement."[26] Therefore, can Adichie, subtly, be bringing up the 'dysfuncional white folk" subject up as a way of questioning our conceptions related to violence and its stereotypes? Could Adichie also be stating that when violence is committed by a white person, the term dysfunctional excuses the act? This goes to show that Adichie, as a writer, presenting a narrative that takes place at a dinner party is able to posit several reflections including one that contrasts *real* fiction and *fictional* reality in the same space.

In the novel, the group is still sitting around the table when Shan decides to discuss Ifemelu's role as a legitimate representative of a certain reality. She says:

> You know why Ifemelu can write that blog, by the way?(…)Because she's African. She's writing from the outside. She doesn't really feel all the stuff she's writing about. It's all quaint and curious to her. So she can write it and get all these accolades and get invited to give talks. If she were African-American, she'd just be labelled angry and shunned (ADICHIE, 2014, p.326).

Hence, in this passage we are made aware that there are many disputes amongst black characters. It is not because one in black in America that one will embrace as equal all other blacks. There is a complexity of black representation and identification in *Americanah* that helps construct the many stories of Africans and blacks.

The journalist Alex Clark of *The Guardian* thinks about Adichie's intentions as a writer in her third novel as he questions "how many layers of history and culture it takes to construct a national, or racial, or personal identity, and how contingent that identity is on its immediate surroundings".[27] Thus, in Clark's perspective Adichie contributes with the

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[24] *Ibid*

[25] https://blacklivesmatter.com/about/

[26] https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/addiction-in-society/201710/how-are-african-americans-doing-iviolence-and-segregation

[27] https://www.theguardian.com/books/2013/apr/11/americanah-chimamanda-ngozi-adichie-review

construction of Nigerian identity. However, though the novel is a very Nigerian sort of love story, it can also be found at bookstores in Rio de Janeiro in the American Literature section, as I did, which shows how writers like Adichie have fluid market identities that are in synchrony with her refutation of any form of label.

As already stated in this dissertation, Adichie rejects tags based on race like "black" and "African" associated to her work because she believes that they are not "value-free' and come with "baggage".[28] As she explains the risk of labels, she gives examples:

> a black writer who wrote about Africa would be placed on the 'ethnic' shelf in many bookstores in the US and UK, 'ethnic' in this sense subtly suggests not being quite on a par with 'mainstream' writing. A white writer, such as the Polish Ryszard Kapuscinski would not be on that 'ethnic' shelf. He would be considered 'mainstream' although he would be writing on the same subject as the black writer. The point is that it would be preferable if categorizations were based on the writing rather than on the writer.[29]

For certain, one of Adichie's talents is her ability to fuse reality and fiction into highly personal stories about multiple perceptions of race and ethnicity fading boundaries.

To that end, this dissertation initially stems from the many quaint interrogations that have come to mind and have evolved to broader and denser investigations which came about mainly due to the multivocal quality of Adichie's writing, as I have shown in this introductory analysis of some of the many characters in *Americanah*. Instead of applying postcolonial theory to the novel, which would have meant some sort of domestication of Adichie's different voices in *Americanah* into a cohesive framework, I have chosen instead to argue that it is precisely her sense of irony towards the very issues she raises that makes this a remarkable work of contemporary fiction. Therefore, *Engaging with Africa: a Study of Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's Americanah* is a peregrination into an unknown fictional territory of various possibilities with the intention of finding a path to coming closer to understanding Others and their world. In a certain way, it is also a form of stretching outwards in search of reaching inwards to come to a better comprehension of contemporary issues.

In the first chapter of this dissertation, I wish to contextualize Adichie's scene in contemporary culture by analyzing reviews written on *Americanah*, Adichie's essays, TED talks, and interviews. This will show how the novel has come to occupy the center stage of a worldwide awakening to new perceptions of Africa and of the Other. The novel's themes of racism, agency, media coverage, home and other diasporic concerns and behaviors (in relation to other Africans and non-Africans) will be elaborated. Adichie's use of irony to demonstrate

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[28] http://www.cerep.ulg.ac.be/adichie/cnainterview.html
[29] http://www.cerep.ulg.ac.be/adichie/cnainterview.html

multivocality will be introduced. Examples of stereotypes found in the novel and related to Africa will be analyzed and compared to epoch-making texts written by Frantz Fanon, Edward W. Said, Homi Bhabha, Aimé Césaire, Abdul Jan Mohamed, Achille Mbembé, Ngũgĩ Wa Thiong'o, Jemie Chinweizu, Onwuchekwa Jemie, Ihechukwu Madubuike, Olatunji Ogunyemi and Chinua Achebe. All the while, the nature of this dissertation as a "Study" will be revealed in its collection of basic data about Africa – from geographical to linguistic information. This is important in order to reveal how rudimentary our knowledge of Africa as a continent is, even when we study theories that supposedly specialize in its cultural manifestations. Didacticism here serves as social and academic commentary.

In the second chapter, I will explore the Bakhtinian concepts that inform his definition of dialogism as that which reflects, produces and informs our exchanges with Others. By scrutinizing Bakhtin's thoughts on Outsideness, we will be able to realize that all consciousness comes from the outside world in the form of Other words and perceptions. In this sense, this entire dissertation is framed by Bakhtin's lessons and how they are recognizable in *Americanah*. A critique of binarism and stereotypes will also be touched upon due to its impact on *Americanah* as a novel.

In chapter three, I intend to explore the scene of irony, starting with an incident involving Adichie during a ceremony in France that will lead us to think about what makes something ironic or not. A short historical review will be made of the term irony (from Platonic to Romantic irony) to better understand the complexity behind the term and how it occurs as part of the communication process introducing intent, discursive communities and challenging shared common ground and conventions. At the end of the chapter, various examples from *Americanah* will be explored and irony will be presented as a form of subverting our common beliefs about ourselves and Others.

By the end of this dissertation, I hope that I will have shed light on contemporary social issues that help us better comprehend the questions raised by Adichie in her novel and that relate so closely with our quests for identities, however frail they may be.

1 CHIMAMANDA NGOZI ADICHIE'S SCENE IN CONTEMPORARY CULTURE: ENGAGING WITH AFRICA

Most of the reviews state that *Americanah* is honest, brave, empathetic, moving and warm. Dave Eggers defines Adichie's work as an example of "searing social acuity."[30] Elizabeth Day begins her review of *Americanah* for *The Guardian* saying that "there are some novels that tell a great story and others that make you change the way you look at the world. […] *Americanah* is a book that manages to do both."[31] Adichie speaks about the reality of Africa, the Western world's perception of this continent, but also about the North American and English societies.

The great reception of the novel, in the U.S., came as a surprise to Adichie. In an interview with Candice Carty-William, for *i-D magazine*, Adichie admitted: "I really did think that it probably wouldn't do very well, because *Americanah* isn't very interested in being subtle about race". And she continues: "I've been amused by how many non-black people have said it was an education. They're like 'Really? So that's what happens?' And I'm like 'Yes!''[32]

In an interview given to Stephen Moss, Adichie affirms that "Africa is seen as the place where the Westerner goes to sort out his morality issues. We see it in films and in lots of books about Africa, and it's very troubling to me."[33] Adichie adds that Madonna adopting an African child is viewed as if she were saving Africa. In Adichie's opinion, we need to do more than go to Africa and adopt a child or show pictures of children with flies in their eyes. She claims this simplifies Africa. Adichie claims that we need to engage with Africa more.

In 2006, in *The Washington Post*, Adichie refers to Madonna's adoption one more time. "And so I was wearing my 'African' lenses as I watched Madonna on television, cautiously, earnestly explaining the media circus around her adoption."[34] Adichie explains that she did not think it was her place to wonder what Madonna's motivations for adopting David Banda were. During the television coverage, Adichie watched David's biological father express how grateful he felt for Madonna giving David a "better life." Adichie claims that at that moment she noticed the "stark power differential" and felt very sad to see how Africa

[30] www.theguardian.com/books/2013/apr/15/americanah-chimamanda-ngozi-adichie-review
[31] www.theguardian.com/books/2013/apr/15/americanah-chimamanda-ngozi-adichie-review
[32] https://i-d.vice.com/en_uk/article/wjkbzz/the-powerful-words-of-chimamanda-ngozi-adichie
[33] Stephen Moss, www.theguardian.com/books/2007/jun/08/orangeprizeforfiction2007.orangeprizeforfiction
[34] http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/11/12/AR2006111200943.html?noredirect=on

seemed terribly dispensable. Adichie explains that what really matters to her is not Madonna's motivation or "her supposed flouting of Malawian adoption laws."[35] Rather, Adichie is bothered with the notion that Madonna thinks she has helped Africa by adopting David Banda. This creates the illusion that to help Africa is to adopt Africa's children.

In other words, the problem here is the removal of agency from the people of a whole continent. If Africa is understood as "the poor and needy," Africans will be stripped of any humanity, dignity and transformed into objects where pity is deposited. A distorted image created in the minds of those sitting in a comfortable living room, watching the lives of others on television, thousands of kilometers away. Lives simplified as their reality is removed from any context, romanticized, so that the viewer, in the far away land, will think they can fully understand what they are seeing. Small chunks of information, given to the audience in bite sizes, fills the viewer with comforting feelings simple enough to keep them seated dumbfounded in awe until the next commercial break. In the next commercial break, a product will be presented for consumption in the expectation of ridding the viewer of the strange uneasiness created in the news.

Adichie admits that she believes that if she were not African, watching the coverage of Africa in the media, she would probably think that Africa was "a place of magnificent wild animals in which black Africans exist as tour guides, or as a place desperately poor people who kill or are killed by one another for little or no reason."[36] To speak of racism, one could choose a moralistic- accusational tone of authority as if preaching to an audience. This is common, though not subtle, but never used by Adichie. In the passage above, for instance, Adichie slants her text by putting herself, a black woman, in the position of villain as she claims that she would also have a racist perception of Africa if she were not African, as if the media had produced a scene that demanded this inevitable response. By doing so, she concomitantly forgives and blames the Western world. She urges for change by producing laughter.

The same approach is used by Adichie in her Ted Talk, "The Danger of a Single Story" when Adichie tells a personal story of her trip to Mexico. She says, "I, too, am as guilty in the question of the single story… I realized that I had been so immersed in the media coverage of Mexicans, that they had become one thing in my mind: the abject immigrant" [08:20]. Karen Hua, in her B.A. thesis *Beyond the Single Story: A Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis of Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie*, uses Thomas Huckin's linguistic theory and

[35] http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/11/12/AR2006111200943.html
[36] http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/11/12/AR2006111200943.html

interprets Adichie's choices. "Using the active voice and first person 'I,' Adichie takes full responsibility for her own actions. Instead of pinning Western society or Caucasians as the culprit, she pinpoints instances of ignorance on her own" (HUA, 2016, p.9). For Hua the fact that Adichie "acknowledges her own flaws allows her to be perceived as the prevailing voice of reason."[37] Though I find this analysis interesting, I interpret this as a form of creating empathy with the reader and demonstrating that one can put oneself in the other's shoes to try to understand the world we live in, but still making a point.

Though Adichie seems to understand the foreigner's gaze, in *Americanah* she presents similar situations. Once more, we see Adichie inscribing a reality only to subvert it the next moment. When Ifemelu starts working as a babysitter, she begins to have much contact with Kimberly, the mother of the children. Kimberly is unintentionally patronizing, but caring. She has the habit of calling every black person "beautiful" all of the time. When Ifemelu notices this, she tells Kimberly just to say "black". As she explains to Kimberly, not every black person is beautiful. Ifemelu, as a Nigerian, does not have a problem with saying that someone is black. In America, because of cultural reasons, white people are more careful in using the word black to describe someone. One day Kimberly's sister comes to the house and shows Ifemelu a magazine.

> "Look at this, Ifemelu," she said. "It isn't Nigeria, but it's close. I know celebrities can be flighty but she seems to be doing good work."
> Ifemelu and Kimberly looked at the page together: a thin white woman, smiling at the camera, holding a dark-skinned African baby in her arms, and all around her, little dark-skinned African children were spread out like a rug. Kimberly made a sound, ahmmm, as though she was unsure how to feel.
> "She's stunning too," Laura said.
> "Yes, she is," Ifemelu said. "And she's just as skinny as the kids, only that her skinniness is by choice and theirs is not by choice." A pop of loud laughter burst out from Laura. "You are funny! I love how sassy you are!"(ADICHIE, 2014, p.162)

Similarly to Madonna's story of adoption, the celebrity, in the novel, has the same intention, to show how charitable she is. Kimberly's sister, Laura, acknowledges the good deed. What is ironic is that Laura senses that something if off, because she calls the celebrity "flighty", but at the same time says she is stunning in the picture. The reader imagines that, aesthetically, this is a well-composed photograph and that the woman must be of an extraordinary beauty. This makes the whole situation more ironic. A beautiful, slim, celebrity surrounded by the very poor and starving. The narrator pushes the irony further explaining that the children were spread out like a rug, an object and not human beings. At the end of this passage, Laura finds Ifemelu's remark funny and calls her sassy. To be "sassy" is to use

[37] *Ibid*, p.9

sarcasm in a funny way, but it can also mean rude and showing no respect, ill bred. Adichie is able to bring together sophistication, beauty, poorness and racism into the same picture. One that we have seen only too many times.

In the following paragraph, Kimberly tells Ifemelu that she is sorry for how her sister expressed herself and tells Ifemelu that she thinks "It's the kind of word that's used for certain people and not for others"(ADICHIE, 2014, p.162). Later on in the chapter, Kimberly gives a party and introduces Ifemelu to the guests as her babysitter and friend. Immediately one of the male guests says, "You're so beautiful," smiling, his teeth jarringly white. "African women are gorgeous, especially Ethiopians."[38] The reader is led to believe that in this awkward conversation the man was trying to be friendly and thought he was paying Ifemelu a compliment. In reality, he was tactless. The overly enthusiastic manner of speaking only emphasized the stereotypical approach to African women. The irony is made clearer as he adds "Especially Ethiopians." In the passage the foreigner is portrayed stereotypically as he groups together 54 distinct nationalities that make up the African continent. The act of trying to complement a Nigerian by mentioning Ethiopian women's beauty illustrates this.

In the U.S., there is a great concern in being politically correct. In *Americanah* there is another passage that illustrates this. Ginika, Ifemelu's high school friend who has been living in the U.S. for a longer time, introduces Ifemelu to the American culture. The two girls are at a shopping mall and they speak to a clerk trying to identify the salesperson that had helped them earlier. It had been a black salesperson. When they leave the store, Ifemelu asked Ginika why the clerk had not asked them, "Was it the black girl or the white girl?" [39]which would have made the identification easier. Ifemelu tells Ginika that she was waiting for the clerk to ask her if the salesperson had two eyes or two legs because he had made all sorts of questions always avoiding identifying the salesperson's race. Ginika laughs and informs Ifemelu that "Because this is America. You're supposed to pretend that you don't notice certain things."[40]. In the U.S., to identify someone as black may be considered racist.

Back to Kimberly's dinner party, the conversation revolved around Ifemelu and Africa. Each guest has a wonderful experience to share about Africa. A couple spoke about their safari in Tanzania. "We had a wonderful tour guide and we're now paying for his first daughter's education." [41]Two other women bragged about their donations to a wonderful

[38] *Ibid*, p.169
[39] *Ibid*, p.127
[40] *Ibid*
[41] *Ibid*. p.169.

charity in Malawi that builds wells, a wonderful orphanage in Botswana, a wonderful microfinance cooperative in Kenya. The narrator marks the actions with the word "wonderful" as if none of these places could be anything but "wonderful" in the romantic image created by these tourists while in Africa. If this behavior has been naturalized amongst the readers to the point that the absurdity of the stories were not noticed, the narrator quickly adds Ifemelu's reaction: "she gazed at them" (ADICHIE, 2014, p.169). Ifemelu did not smile, or nod, or agree, or even comment. She only looked at them for a long period. The narrator continues speaking of the situation in relation to Ifemelu, "There was a certain luxury to charity that she could not identify with and did not have. To take 'charity' for granted, to revel in this charity towards people whom one did not know—perhaps it came from having had yesterday and having today and expecting to have tomorrow." [42]

Adichie having lived in the U.S. for 15 years, intermittently, has the ability of seeing Nigeria from a distance. Possibly, from this double consciousness, she is able to have a clearer perspective of the issues concerning Nigeria, the United States and England. Being thus, Adichie naturally writes using this double-sidedness and engages with both. In between the lines, the reader notices the ambiguities of the society exposed in *Americanah*. The reader starts to notice a subtext and perceives that there is the need for some reflection. The contrast created in the juxtapositioning of the various characters, stresses the different points of view. Though this plurality is enriching, it can also generate some conflict. At times, the Other in the novel shows us that we are limited and that there is a lot we do not know. This is eased by Adichie's humored style. Humor arises once the reader reconciles the incongruity between what the text says and what is implied or goes unsaid, as we will see this in the next chapters.

In Adichie's article for *The Washington Post*, she places herself in this position of foreigner. "If I were not African, I wonder whether it would be clear to me that Africa is a place where the people do not need limp gifts of fish but sturdy fishing rods and fair access to the pond."[43] She continues reflecting on Africa and wonders if the world knows that "corrupt African countries are also full of fiercely honest people and that violent conflicts are about resource control in an environment of (sometimes artificial) scarcity." [44]

To Elizabeth Day from *The Guardian*, Adichie elaborates,

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[42] *Ibid*

[43] www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/11/12/AR2006111200943.html

[44] www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/11/12/AR2006111200943.html

> We have a long history of Africa being seen in ways that are not very complimentary, and in America […] being seen as an African writer comes with baggage that we don't necessarily care for. Americans think African writers will write about the exotic, about wildlife, poverty, maybe Aids. They come to Africa and African books with certain expectations. I was told by a professor at Johns Hopkins University that he didn't believe my first book [*Purple Hibiscus*, published in 2003] because it was too familiar to him. In other words, I was writing about middle-class Africans who had cars and who weren't starving to death, and therefore to him it wasn't authentically African. [45]

In an interview given to Stephen Moss in 2007, Adichie comments on media coverage of Africa. She gives an example of a common interview format: the CNN crew would line up Congolese people as a backdrop and interview a Belgian, identified as a Congo expert, up front as part of the coverage of some activity happening in the Congo. Adichie finds this kind of media coverage "exhausting". She sums up her thoughts by asking, "Wouldn't it be wonderful if I could become the voice explaining America or England to the world [?]" And concludes, "It would never happen." [46]

Ironically, in 2013, with the first publication of *Americanah*, this is exactly what happens. An African shows America to the world. *The New York Times* commented on the feat as "*Americanah* examines blackness in America, Nigeria and Britain," with the "accuracy of Adichie's observations […] It never feels false." [47] The British online newspaper *Independent* claims that *Americanah* is "Ostensibly a novel that shows us America from the outside, it also reveals something of Nigeria from the inside."[48][49]

Before going further, it is necessary to clarify why I have chosen to use the term Africa, so often, instead of Nigeria. It seems that it would be more correct to speak of Mali,

Cameroon, Rwanda, Togo, Egypt, Kenya, Sudan, Ghana, Madagascar, Mali, Senegal, and Zambia educating people as to the many countries that constitute Africa. After all, this is a common criticism; people tend to group together the 54 independent states, with all their diversity, as if there were no distinctions.

In Adichie's TED talk "The Danger of a Single Story", Adichie speaks of her personal experience and how she began to see herself also as an African, not only a Nigerian. As a new student at Drexel University, she had her first experience of encountering the underrepresentation of her own people. Adichie's roommate was surprised that Adichie did not listen to tribal music and that her English was fluent [04:01]. Adichie states: "My

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[45] ww.theguardian.com/books/2013/apr/15/americanah-chimamanda-ngozi-adichie-review
[46] www.theguardian.com/books/2007/jun/08/orangeprizeforfiction2007.orangeprizeforfiction
[47] www.nytimes.com/2013/06/09/books/review/americanah-by-chimamanda-ngozi-adichie.html
[48] https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/books/reviews/americanah-by-chimamanda-ngozi-adichie-
[49] html

roommate had a single story of Africa: a single story of catastrophe. In this single story, there was no possibility of Africans being similar to her in any way [04:37].”[50] If one can only feel pity for the Other, there is no possibility of empathy.

In 1952 Frantz Fanon had already shared a similar story in his book *Black Skin White Masks*. Fanon was born in Martinique and thus spoke French as well as Antillean Creole.

Still white Europeans were frequently surprised and did not expect this black man to speak French fluently. As Fanon himself stated, “What I am asserting is that the European has a fixed concept of the Negro, and there is nothing more exasperating than to be asked: “How long have you been in France? You speak French so well” (FANON, 1986, p.23).

Adichie during the same TED talk posits, “I must say that before I went to the U.S., I didn't consciously identify as African. But in the U.S., whenever Africa came up, people turned to me. Never mind that I knew nothing about places like Namibia [05:09].”[31] She does confide that she learned to embrace this new identity and she now thinks of herself as African. Adichie shares another anecdotal moment: “I still get quite irritable when Africa is referred to as a country, the most recent example being (…) in which there was an announcement on the Virgin American Airlines flight about the charity work in ‘India, Africa and other countries.’”[51]

A passage in *Americanah’s* opening chapter illustrates this. Ifemelu, who lives in Princeton, has gone to Trenton, a nearby town, to have her hair braided at Mariama African Hair Braiding salon for her return to Nigeria. At this salon, there are only African employees. She fans herself with a magazine, and says, “It’s so hot.” The narrator states that at least, **these** women would not say to her “You’re hot? But you’re from Africa!” (ADICHE, 2014, p.15, my emphasis). How can this passage be interpreted? Why would the Senegalese and Mali employees of the salon not question why Ifemelu was feeling so much heat? Are these employees, also being African, more empathic? Could this passage be alluding to the stereotype response that many non-Africans receive from foreigners? Is it a rule that someone coming from a country close to the equator should never feel hot living in the U.S.? Could the logic behind the foreigner’s reaction be something like, “But you are used to the heat. You come from Brazil, Nigeria, etc,” as if coming from one of these countries disables someone from feeling heat in a country like the U.S. ?

[50] https://www.ted.com/search?q=The+danger+of+a+single+story
[51] https://www.ted.com/search?q=The+danger+of+a+single+story

Most probably, the Nigerian (or Brazilian) reader will identify with this passage and understand its context, even if he/she has not experienced it in real life. Even if the reader has not heard this said to him/her, because one has not lived abroad or traveled to a cold country, one has enough cultural information to be able to jump the gap between what is said and what is not, but only insinuated in the narrator's words. If the reader is an American, maybe he/she will have a harder time understanding what is being said between the lines and thus the passage may not mean anything to him/her. Does Adichie, using the term "Africa" instead of the name of the country, make a difference in how the passage will be read? Would the stereotype be as clear if she had said "But you´re from Mali!" When a writer chooses to exaggerate a stereotype, the reader has a bigger chance of making irony clear. There is never any guarantee that the passage will be interpreted ironically or even that the intention of the writer was this. Still, judging from my response to the passage, there is the possibility of the reader thinking, "What is the writer insinuating here?" On the other hand, the reader may think, "There is something a little odd here. Should I be reading this in a different way?" Or still, "If I were to adopt another point of view, to try to read this as an African, would this help me understand this passage? "

Further clarification is needed here, what I mean by ironic is not the traditional definition of irony as antiphrasis: saying the opposite of what one means. This definition of irony perceives irony as purely a rhetorical device. This is the definition we first learn at school. A common example would be a situation where one is staring out the window, at the rain, and says "What a lovely day!" Instead, I will adopt Linda Hutcheon's definition of irony. She states irony is a "semantically complex process of relating, differentiating, and combining said and unsaid meanings - and doing so with an evaluative edge" (HUTCHEON, 1995, p.89). In other words, irony is very complex and calls attention to how the reader relies on knowledge shared by a certain group of people, discursive community, to interpret discourse. Therefore, there is a vital relationship between the ironist, interpreter and the context for irony to happen. If the reader does not share a common context, the text will be read without an understanding of what is being insinuated in the subtext. Thus, if one perceives irony, one has made a reading, which includes an evaluation, a judgement, of the passage. Hutcheon claims that this evaluation always has an "edge". This implies a social and political interpretation of the text and "happens in the tricky, unpredictable space between expression an understanding."[52] This response provokes, also, an emotional response.

[52] *Ibid,* p.i

Though my main point is not to explain the differences between the various types of irony or to try to synthesize the different types, I will explore these aspects more in the third chapter. For now, I wish to analyze various passages of Adichie's novel, since this is a way to interpret the many responses to *Americanah* and relate it to contemporary culture and Africa. All texts can be interpreted in a variety of ways, but a text that is written on the edge of irony will increase the chances of multiple readings. A Nigerian will have one interpretation, a Nigerian living in the United States, another, a Brazilian still another and an American a fourth interpretation because these readers belong to different discursive communities, for example. The different life experiences and knowledges many times are influenced, purely, by geography, but there is an edge bordering all of these geographical differences.

In *Americanah*, again at the Mariama African Hair Braiding salon, Aisha, the hairbraider, is now "watching Ifemelu in the mirror, as though deciding whether to believe her or not" (ADICHIE, 2014, p.15). Ifemelu had said something that did not match Aisha's information about Yoruba and Igbo, two Nigerian ethnic groups. Aisha was not Igbo, and she was quoting her sister who was also not Igbo. The sister had said something about getting married to Yoruba and Igbo men. Ifemelu, being Igbo, had a different opinion. Thus, Aisha watched Ifemelu attentively trying to decide whom to believe. Trying to prove that Aisha's sister could be misinformed, Ifemelu askes Aisha where her sister was living:

> "Where is she?"
> "In Africa."
> "Where? In Senegal?"
> "Benin."
> "Why do you say Africa instead of just saying the country you mean?" Ifemelu asked.
> Aisha clucked. "You don't know America. You say Senegal and American people, they say, Where is that? My friend from Burkina Faso, they ask her, your country in Latin America?" Aisha resumed twisting, a sly smile on her face, and then asked, as if Ifemelu could not possibly understand how things were done here, "How long you in America?" (ADICHIE, 2014, p.15)

In this passage, we are presented with a situation so common, among migrants, that it is almost an anecdote. Many foreigners would not know where Nigeria, Mali, Senegal are located, much less the countries Sierra Leone, Guinea-Bissau, Lesotho, Mauritius, Eswatini and Seychelles. The irony of it is that the conversation is occurring between two Africans that surely know their countries. In other words, the notion that it may be necessary to speak to a foreigner this way, saying "Africa" instead of the name of the country, is common knowledge amongst Africans, but that two Africans would speak this way, is ironic.

The narrator indicates that Aisha chuckled and asked Ifemelu how long she had been in America. There is much information in the subtext. For one, there is an insinuation that any foreigner would know that Americans have little knowledge about the geography of the world. This is a stereotype, but a common one in relation to Americans. Though I do not want to reinforce stereotypes, and we will look at this further in my dissertation, it is a common belief and is part of our imaginary. In addition, there is another way of interpreting this passage. You may not know this if you have not been in America very long or are not accustomed to American ways. Thus, when Aisha asks Ifemelu how long she has been living in the U.S. she is insinuating that maybe she is accurate about her African information, but not quite knowledgeable about Americans.

Another passage speaks of the bond between the salon employees, from different countries, all Africans. The employees are from Mali and Senegal and have the following conversation after the only American customer leaves. Once more, among only Africans, they return to their African *personae.*

> After she left, Mariama said, "Very small girl and already she has two children."
> "Oh oh oh, these people," Halima said. "When a girl is thirteen already she knows all the positions. Never in Afrique!" "Never!" Mariama agreed.
> They looked at Ifemelu for her agreement, her approval. They expected it, in this shared space of their Africanness, but Ifemelu said nothing and turned a page of her novel. They would, she was sure, talk about her after she left. That Nigerian girl, she feels very important because of Princeton. Look at her food bar, she does not eat real food anymore. They would laugh with derision, but only a mild derision, because she was still their African sister, even if she had briefly lost her way. (ADICHIE, 2014, p.103)

There is an expected behavior from Ifemelu because she is African. When she does not interact with the others, the narrator insinuates that she must think highly of herself for being at Princeton. The narrator goes further by commenting on the fact that Ifemelu ate a food bar. One reads in between the lines that 'food bar' is American food and symbolizes a style of living where people are always on the go and do not have time to have proper sit down meals, as well as an excessive preoccupation with their weight and health.

Fanon spoke about this bond when he says, "The black man has two dimensions. One with his fellows, the other with the white man. A Negro behaves differently with a white man and with another Negro. That this self-division is a direct result of colonialist subjugation is beyond question …" (FANON, 1986, p.17).

In another passage, also in the hair-braiding salon, Halima, one of the employees, greets Ifemelu who has just arrived. She smiled at Ifemelu, "a smile that, in this warm

knowingness, said welcome to a fellow African; she would not smile at an American in the same way" (ADICHIE, 2014, p.11).

Adichie complicates the dimensions Fanon describes when, in the end of the novel, Ranyinudo, Ifemelu's Nigerian friend from adolescence, speaks to Ifemelu who has recently returned to live in Nigeria. Ranyinudo says: "Talking to your new boss like that, ha! If you had not come from America, she would have fired you immediately."[53] In this passage Ifemelu's Nigerian friend insinuates that there is a certain tolerance with people who have spent time in America. Almost as if there were different classes of Nigerians. It also indicates that Nigerians are accustomed to Americanahs (the way returnees are called). They perceive that they have been exposed to another reality that has affected the way they behave.

There are many different types of Nigerians in the novel. Aunt Uju, having moved to America, has a new boyfriend, Bartholomew. The narrator describes Bartholomew as "the exaggerated caricature that he was, with his back-shaft haircut unchanged since he came to America thirty years ago and his false, overheated moralities. He was one of those people who, in his village back home, would be called 'lost'" (ADICHIE, 2014, p.116). The narrator explains that "lost" was said of Nigerians that *went to America and got lost*. Nigerians that refused to come back. At one point Bartholomew comments, "A girl in Nigeria will never wear that kind of dress (…) Look at that. This country has no moral compass," [54] and Ifemelu reacts by saying, "Girls in Nigeria wear dresses much shorter than that o" – Nigerians add an "o" at the end of phrases for emphasis or to demonstrate excitement. Ifemelu continues, "In secondary school, some of us changed in our friends' houses so our parents wouldn't know" (*Ibid*).

Here Adichie is introducing us to another type of Nigerian, a Nigerian with "overheated moralities". What is ironic in this passage is Bartholomew being called "lost" and justifying this with the following definition: Nigerians that "went to America and got lost". This is contrary to the common belief that someone that lives in a foreign land, especially in America the Promised Land, with allegedly many opportunities to expand one's mind, would be lost exactly for adopting an American mentality. Fanon uses a similar expression when he posits, "In every country of the world there are climbers, those who think they've arrived.

And opposite them there are those who keep the notion of their origins" (FANON, 2008, p.20).

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[53] *Ibid,* p. 393
[54] *Ibid*

In the two examples, we are exposed to two different types of Nigerians that Adichie describes. One is the Americanah, returnee from America, tarnished by his years away that affected her memory and cognition, the other the Nigerian who lives in the U.S. and is critical of everything as if he were not there by choice. Adichie introduces the reader to Nigerians but makes sure we understand that there is no typical Nigerian.

Alex Clark, in *The Guardian*, makes an analysis of Adichie's talent for complicating any form of totalitarian discourse. He begins commenting on Adichie's "subtly provocative exploration of oppression and the idea of home"[55] amongst other reflections. He complements that Adichie's talent "is to make those questions seem as if they cannot be contained by neat, orderly language, and instead to animate them, to embed them in messy, difficult lives that are filled with idiosyncrasy and complication and compromise."

The "idiosyncrasy and complication" that Alex Clark refers to can be illustrated by the fact that there are multitudes of characters in *Americanah*. Ifemelu, for instances, the Nigerian scholar who has many different lovers, seems to be doubled especially by one of her boyfriends, the previously discussed Afro-American college professor, Blaine. The narrator describes Blaine in the following terms:

> He looked tall. A man with skin the color of gingerbread and the kind of lean, proportioned body that was perfect for a uniform, any uniform. She knew right away that he was African-American, not Caribbean, not African, not a child of immigrants from either place. She had not always been able to tell (…)But the longer she spent in America, the better she had become at distinguishing, sometimes from looks and gait, but mostly from bearing and demeanor, that fine-grained mark that culture stamps on people. She felt confident about Blaine: he was a descendant of the black men and women who had been in America for hundreds of years. (ADICHIE, 2014, p.176)

Blaine seems to represent the American black, in the novel, and contrasts with Obinze's Africaness. As the novel unwinds we are exposed to Ifemelu's many facets as she related to the different types. At one point she is enamored by Blaine, however, with time, she feels something missing. "Yet there was a cement in her soul. It had been there for a while, an early morning disease of fatigue, a bleakness and borderlessness. It brought with it amorphous longings, shapeless desires, brief imaginary glints of other lives she could be living…" (ADICHIE, 2014, p.6). In another passage the omniscient narrator states, "…her relationship with him was like being content in a house but always sitting by the window and looking out."[56] Paradoxically this love story starts and ends many times. Ifemelu has many different relationships in the novel, but it begins and ends with Obinze, in Nigeria.

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[55] https://www.theguardian.com/books/2013/apr/11/americanah-chimamanda-ngozi-adichie-review

[56] *Ibid*, p.7

Clark is also correct in noting that Adichie's text about oppression and home "cannot be contained by neat, orderly language." Since life is not "neat and orderly", language does not have to be and we will explore the choices Adichie has made in *Americanah* in relation to language further on. For now, let us just think of its importance in representation. Fanon speaks of meeting a Russian and German who speak French badly. With gestures, they are able to communicate with each other and help the foreigner obtain the information he needs. Fanon posits, "I can hardly forget that he has a language of his own, a country, and that perhaps he is a lawyer or an engineer there. In any case, he is foreign to my group, and his standards must be different" (FANON, 1986, p.21). In the next paragraph, Fanon speaks of the robbed identity of negroes. Fanon concludes, "When it comes to the case of the Negro, nothing of the kind. He has no culture, no civilization, no "long historical past." [57]Fanon claims that this is the reason for the striving of contemporary Negroes: "to prove the existence of a black civilization to the white world at all costs" (FANON, 1986, p.21).

Adichie's narrator does not only describe the blacks in this opinionated way, she also gives interesting descriptions of white folks. Chapter 14 begins with the description of Cristina Tomas with her "rinsed-out look, her washy blue eyes, faded hair, and pallid skin

(…) Cristina Tomas wearing whitish tights that made her legs look like death" (ADICHIE, 2014, p.133). As soon as the reader is introduced to Cristina, sitting at the front desk welcoming new freshmen to Princeton, there is a dialogue between her and Ifemelu.

> "Good afternoon. Is this the right place for registration?" Ifemelu asked Cristina Tomas, whose name she did not then know.
> "Yes. Now. Are. You. An. International. Student?"
> "Yes."
> "You. Will. First. Need. To. Get. A. Letter. From. The. International. Students. Office."
> Ifemelu half smiled in sympathy, because Cristina Tomas had to have some sort of illness that made her speak so slowly, lips scrunching and puckering, as she gave directions to the international students office. But when Ifemelu returned with the letter, Cristina Tomas said, "I. Need. You. To. Fill. Out. A. Couple. Of. Forms. Do. You. Understand. How. To. Fill. These. Out?" and she realized that Cristina Tomas was speaking like that because of her, her foreign accent, and she felt for a moment like as a small child, lazy-limbed and drooling (ADICHIE, 2014, p.133)

[57] *Ibid*

This is another stereotypical behavior that many times also takes place with the elderly, the blind and foreigners. The person thinks that because the person is old he automatically has a hearing problem; or because the person is blind that he also is hearing impaired; or that being a foreigner one needs to talk to him/her like one talks to children, very slowly and very didactically. The narrator speaks of a situation that is so common that most of us will say "I've been there!" or will remember seeing this happen with someone else. Adichie reminds us that all of us need to improve our intercommunication in some way.

Fanon himself has commented on the same case. "A white man addressing a Negro behaves exactly like an adult with a child and starts smirking, whispering, patronizing, cozening" (FANON, 1986, p.19). Fanon explains, "It is not one white man I have watched, but hundreds; and I have not limited my investigation to any one class but, if I may claim an essentially objective position, I have made a point of observing such behavior in physicians, policemen, employers" (FANON, 1986, p.19).

If we are aware that there is room for improvement, we will seek to know more about the Other. In order to engage with Africa, we must seek to know it better. Though the following are very basic facts, they make us reflect on how little we know about this continent. Africa's 30,200,000 km² compared with Latin America's 17,840.000 km² of extension[58], makes Latin America almost half the size. The largest country being Algeria, occupying 7% of the continent's territory and the smallest nation being Seychelles with its 115 islands known to most because of its luxurious beaches that attract many tourists. Mark Fischetti, senior editor of Scientific American, says that Africa is bigger than "China, India, the contiguous USA and most of Europe-combined."[59] This may come as a surprise since flat maps distort the size of countries and continents that make us underestimate the size of those closes to the equator. In my opinion, also, Africa is perceived as "smaller" due to the world's disregard with what happens in that part of the planet.

In addition, we must acquaint ourselves with the many scholars, from different academic backgrounds, from all over the world, that have pursued the need to rethink concepts related to the politics of 'Otherness'. As Chinua Achebe comments, "It is a great irony of history and geography (…) that Africa, whose land mass is closer than any other to the mainland of Europe, should come to occupy in the European psychological disposition, the farthest point of otherness, should indeed become Europe's very antithesis." [60]

[58] https://mapfight.appspot.com/africa-vs-south.america/africa-south-america-size-comparison
[59] https://blogs.scientificamerican.com/observations/africa-is-way-bigger-than-you-think/
[60] https://www.theguardian.com/books/2000/nov/18/fiction.reviews1

For this reason, I have taken upon myself to concentrate on scholars that are not European. It is necessary to understand a little about these scholar's contributions if we want to know more about Africa. Starting with Frantz Fanon, from Martinique. He explores the concept of colonial dynamics that speaks of the white man's perception of the black man. This form of perceiving, which Fanon calls the white man's gaze, perpetuates the image made of black people as if objectified and creates a norm. This norm, gaze, traps black people in the white imagination of what black people are, socially and culturally (Cf Fanon, 1986 and 2008). Aimé Césaire, also born in Martinique, but considered an Igbo of Nigerian descent, quotes Gobineau in *Discourse on Colonialism* and reminds us that "the only history is white" (CÉSAIRE, 1972, p.20).

Edward W. Said, born in Palestine, critiques Western texts for representing the East through stereotypical images and clichés as an exotic and inferior Other. Said, in the introduction of *Orientalism*, states that his hope in writing his book is to "to illustrate the formidable structure of cultural domination and, specifically for formerly colonized peoples, the dangers and temptations of employing this structure upon themselves or upon others" (SAID, 1978, p.33). In this sense, Homi Bhabha, an Indian scholar, speaks of the "mimicry and mockery" that occur in the process of the civilizing mission of the other where a displacing gaze occurs as part of the discursive process. Due to the ambivalence of mimicry, the colonial subject is "partial, incomplete and virtual" (BHABHA, 1984, p.127).

Abdul Jan Mohamed, a Kenyan English professor at Berkeley, speaks of the Manichean allegory in literary works drawing on Frantz Fanon "Manichean delirium" which split the world into good and evil (JANMOHAMED, 1985, p. 59). Jan Mohamed establishes a different framework for exploring the literary productions of African writers, since most "African literary criticism has been concerned with placing the works of African writers in a cultural and social context, and with examining the writer's contribution to that context" (COYLE et al, 2003, p. 1133)

Achille Mbembé, a Cameroonian philosopher, theorizes the collection of discourses and practices that equate Blackness with the nonhuman creating oppression. Mbembé's translator, Laurent Dubois, explains Mbembé's use of the term "blackness" which, to him, came to "represent difference in this raw manifestation – somatic, affective, aesthetic, imaginary." (MBEMBÉ, 2017, p.xi). And at the same time Whiteness became "the mark of a certain mode of Western presence in the world, a certain figure of brutality and cruelty, a singular form of predation with an unequaled capacity for the subjection and exploitation of

foreign peoples."[61] Mbembé calls attention to the works of British historian Paul Gilroy as part of a "polyglot internationalism" in which there was a rethinking of history and an exchange of ideas that "circulated within a vast global network, producing the modern Black imaginary" (MBEMBÉ, 2017, p.30).

For Sarah Nuttall, a professor at the University of Witwatersrand, and Achille Mbembé "Africa as a name, as an idea, and as an object of academic and public discourse has been, and remains, fraught" (MBEMBÉ; NUTTALL, 2004, p. 348). They claim Africa is described as "an object *apart from the world*" or as an "incomplete example of something else." [62] The concern with current perceptions of Africa "ends up epitomizing the intractable, the mute, the abject, or the other worldly" (MBEMBÉ; NUTTALL *apud* BIGON, KATZ, 2014, p. 190). Mbembé and Nuttall remind us that what "binds societies, made up of multiple assemblages and disjunctive syntheses, is some kind of artifice they come to believe in" (MBEMBÉ; NUTTALL, *op. cit.*, p.349). In their opinion, Africa "has not yet become or will never be definite" and thus is an "epistemological abyss." [63]

All of these writers herald the difficulties in understanding the Other that mark the present crisis of representation affecting human sciences in general. In this sense, these postcolonial predecessors of Adichie have been helping generations of readers to engage with Africa more. Adichie's work allows us to update this engagement, to take it to the edge of our world and to find means of inhabiting this border.

Scott Taylor, the African Studies Program director at Georgetown University, makes this new mode of engagement with Africa clear in an interview on Adichie's contributions as a contemporary writer. He comments: "One of the things I found most compelling about *Americanah* was not its unfamiliarity, but its familiarity."[64] Zadie Smith, in the interview "Between the Lines", also speaks about her experience as a reader of migrant narratives and the originality of *Americanah* in breaking with the stereotypical story of the migrants. Smith calls attention to Adichie's characters, which in Adichie's words are "raised well, fed and watered, but mired in dissatisfaction"[65], and shares that her experience matches Ifemelu and Obinze's. Smith says, "I was so happy when they just went home. So many migrant narratives just go in that direction [points with arm away, in another direction], but the reality (at least of the migrants that I know) is that they DO go home."

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[61] *Ibid*, p. 45-46
[62] *Ibid*, p. 348
[63] *Ibid*
[64] Scott Taylor's article: www.georgetown.edu/news/chimamanda-ngozi-adichie-lecture.html
[65] Zadie Smith's interview: www.youtube.com/watch?v=LkeCun9aljY

In my search to understand Adiche and contemporary Africa**,** I needed to understand her choice of language for writing her novels. According to Ignatius Iornenge Usar, in the *Academia* article "Major Languages", there are 527 official languages in Nigeria but 3 are most dominant (Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba).[66] Of those 527, "only 514 are living languages, 2 are second languages without mother-tongue speakers and 11 have no known speakers."[67] Today most urban areas accept English as their *lingua franca* "although many of the rural areas stick to their regional languages such as Hausa, Igbo, Yoruba Edo, Efik, Fulani, Idoma, Ijaw and Kanuri."[68] The fact that there is such diversity may be surprising. Some of these languages have been spoken for 4,000 years[69] in the same location. The Niger-Congo is one of the "world's largest language families and the largest in Africa in terms of geographical area, number of speakers and number of distinct languages. Excluding northern Africa and the Horn of Africa, about 85% of the population of Africa speak a Niger-congo language."[70]

Fanon speaks of the Africans and their different ways of showing affiliation. He states that "to speak a language is to take on a world, a culture" (FANON, 1986, p.25). In 1952, when Fanon wrote this he believed that the Antilles Negro who goes home from France expresses himself in dialect if he wants to make it plain that nothing has changed. People use their own language to show a sense of belonging.

Adichie plays with the different ways language and accent can indicate nationality, social class and degree of assimilation of the new culture. Language is inextricably bound to identity. In the novel, Obinze's friend, Emenike, jests with his wife while speaking to Obinze but loud enough for his wife to hear "You know these oyinbo people don't behave like us" (ADICHIE, 2014, p.264). Obinze knew he was joking because he had a "muted awe in his tone, that it was mockery colored by respect, mockery of what he believed, despite himself, to be inherently superior."[71] During this exchange Obinze remembers how in secondary school another friend had often said about Emenike "He can read all the books he wants but the bush is still in his blood."[72] We can only imagine that the "bush" was perceived by Emenike's use of the language. Ifemelu and Obinze, as a couple, speak in Igbo. This habit of theirs shows not only that they share a common story and culture, but also shows intimacy. By contrast,

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[66] http://www.academia.edu/7743824/MAJOR_LANGUAGES
[67] http://www.academia.edu/7743824/MAJOR_LANGUAGES
[68] http://www.african-ls.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/about-nigerian-languages.pdf
[69] https://www.britannica.com/place/Nigeria/Languages
[70] http://www.african-ls.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/about-nigerian-languages.pdf
[71] *Ibid*, p.264
[72] *Ibid*

Aunt Uju, once in America, does not allow her son, Dike, to speak Igbo fearing he will be seen as an African. Aunt Uju insists in only speaking American English demonstrating a good adaptation to the new home. A passage of the novel tells of an incident that occurs in a supermarket as Dike puts a carton of cereal in the cart and Aunt Uju reprimands him "with the nasal, sliding accent she put on when she spoke to white Americans, in the presence of white Americans, in the hearing of white Americans. Poohreet-back. And with the accent emerged a new persona, apologetic and self-abasing." [73] Ifemelu laments that Dike is not receiving incentive to speak Igbo; she knows that with time he will forget the Igbo he spoke. On the other hand, Ifemelu also mocks the Nigerians' use of English in expressions like "I'm pressed" or "I want to ease myself" instead of using an expression stating that they "would like to go to the bathroom"[74], restroom or toilet .

In countries where a variety of languages exists harmoniously, there is a common phenomenon, a simplified version of a language, or various languages, which have developed as a means of communication between different cultural groups: pidgin. The fact that pidgin lacks a standardization among mother tongue speakers, makes it unofficial to some. Even thus, Nigerian pidgin, an English-based Creole, is spoken as a lingua franca across Nigeria by about "30 million speakers" and all of the "250 ethnic groups in Nigeria" use pidgin with variations and additions. [75]

Yinka Ibukun, in *The Guardian*, explains that, "long considered the language of the uneducated, Nigerian Pidgin English, with its oscillating tones and playful imagery, is now spoken by Nigerians of every age, social class and regional origin."[76] Ibukun continues in the same article, "Nigerian Pidgin first emerged nearly 600 years ago, when trade with Europe was first established in the Niger Delta, and is now estimated to be used by 50 million people, and with variants spoken in Ghana, Liberia and Sierra Leone."

Frantz Fanon spoke of how the mastery of the colonizer's language, especially in the past, was important: "I must take great pains with my speech, because I shall be more or less judged by it. With great contempt, they will say of me, "He doesn't even know how to speak French" (FANON, 1986, p.11). Fanon complements: "In any group of young men in the Antilles, the one who expresses himself well, who has mastered the language, is inordinately feared; keep an eye on that one, he is almost white. In France one says, "He talks like a

[73] *Ibid*, p.108
[74] *Ibid*, p. 405
[75] http://www.african-ls.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/about-nigerian-languages.pdf
[76] https://www.theguardian.com/education/2010/nov/09/nigeria-pidgin-learning-english-ibukun

book." In Martinique, "He talks like a white man."[77] So many of these examples find echo in *Americanah*. In a passage at the hair-braiding salon, the narrator describes the place as "full of Francophone West African women braiders, one of whom would be the owner and speak the best English and answer the phone and be deferred to by the others" (ADICHIE, 2014, p.9). The narrator also comments on how the conversation was always loud and swift "in French or Wolof or Malinke, and when they spoke English to customers, it was broken, curious, as though they had not quite eased into language before taking on slangy Americanism." [78] The narrator recalls another braider in Philadelphia that had said to Ifemelu, "Amma like, Oh Gad, Az someh" and that only after many repetitions Ifemelu had understood her saying, "I'm like, Oh God, I was so mad." [79]

Bernard Caron, a French linguist and secretary of the Akademi, a project set up with French government to promote research along with other Nigerian colleagues, prefers to call the new language "Naija Languej"[80] since the term Pidgin has a negative connotation. The nomenclature was once called "Broken English", "Gutter language'', and even ''Rotten English''[81]. Poet and promoter of Naija Languej, Eriata Oribhabor, in an article of the Jalada, a pan-African writers' collective, states her opinion: "if reference materials and guides for the use of those interested in the language, scholars and speakers alike"[82] exist, there is no reason for Nigeria's unofficial lingua franca not to be officialized.

Though this subject is interesting, because it denotes a political and intellectual positioning and belongs to the discussion about the use of language, I choose to use the term code-switching which is used by linguistics, social psychologist and identity researchers to refer to the use of English and Nigerian mixed in the same language.

Code-switching is a behavior governed by certain linguistic and socio-psychological rules. Until recently code-switching was considered "internal mental confusion, the inability to separate two languages sufficiently to warrant the description of true bilingualism" (LIPSKI 1982, p.191 *apud* OBIAMALU; MBAGWU, 2008, p.32). For those that believe in the "correctionist" approach, code-switching will be the equivalent to "broken English", ignorance in relation to grammar rules, and "home speech" being responsible for their "bad

[77] *Ibid*, p.11
[78] *Ibid*
[79] *Ibid*
[80] In the conference on Naijá (2009), it was agreed to substitute the term Nigerian Pidgin with Naija Language which proposes a standard orthography and the term has no derogatory connotation.
[81] https://jaladaafrica.org/2016/05/30/lingua-franca-from-nigerian-pidgin-to-naija-languej-by-eriata-oribhabor/
[82] https://jaladaafrica.org/2016/05/30/lingua-franca-from-nigerian-pidgin-to-naija-languej-by-eriata-oribhabor/

habits" that prevent them from using English correctly; the "contrastivist" approach, on the other hand, emphasized the importance of language plurality.

Code-switching is universal and its increase "is evidently one of the most noticeable features of the situations in which New Englishes are emerging" (CRYSTAL, 2003, p.164). In *Americanah*, it can be interpreted as symbolizing the hybrid Nigerian. The use of codeswitching by the characters in the novel may produce interesting thoughts by readers foreign to this culture. Some of the reflections may be: what happened to formal English? Why have Nigerians appropriated English in this fashion? Is linguistic purism, still, a possibility in today's world? What other countries approach English in a similar way? In today's world, can code-switching still be perceived as a form of rebellion? David Crystal, an Irish specialist on language and linguistics with over 100 books published on the subject, claims that "There is no linguistic subject more prone to emotional rhetoric or wild exaggeration that (sic) the future of the English language."[83] His research confirms that half of the population of Nigeria uses pidgin or creole English as a second language (CRYSTAL, 2003, p.52) which corresponded roughly to 60 million people in 2002.[84] In Crystal's opinion, hybrid trends and varieties of English "raise all kinds of theoretical and pedagogical questions, several of which began to be addressed during the 1990s."[85] Salman Rushdie, a British Indian novelist adds:

> I don't think it is always necessary to take up the anti-colonial – or is it postcolonial? – cudgels against English. What seems to me to be happening is that those peoples who were once colonized by the language are now rapidly remaking it, domesticating it, becoming more and more relaxed about the way they use it. Assisted by the English language's enormous flexibility and size, they are carving out large territories for themselves within its front (RUSHDIE *apud*.,CRYSTAL, 2003, p.184).

Differently from Crystal, Virginia Onumajuru's research as a professor at the University of Port Harcourt in Nigeria indicates that "every Nigerian speaker (literate, semiliterate and non-literate) is involved in the phenomena of code-switching and code-mixing of English and the native language" (ONUMAJURU *apud* OBIAMALU, MBAGWU, 2008, p.28). Ogbonna Ndubuisi Anyanwu, professor at the University of Uyo in Nigeria, has different data. He claims, "code-switching is more predominant among the Igbo people than any other ethnic group in Nigeria." [86] Scholars Greg O. Obiamalu and Davidson U. Mbagwu,

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[83] www.davidcrystal.com/?filied=-4008
[84] *Ibid*, p.64
[85] *Ibid*, p.182-183
[86] *Ibid*

from Nnamdi Azikiwe Univeristy in Awka, Nigeria, research other variations of code-switching. They posit that words like "mark" and "table" have been borrowed, and assimilated into Igbo, because there were no equivalent words for them. On the other hand, there are also cases that the English words are used by most people, even though an equivalent exists in Igbo such as "car" and "red". Then there is the third type of code-switching in which the word is easily available in Igbo (like "critize", "turn", "water" and "wine") but the speaker chooses to use the English word.[87]

In Obiamalu and Mbagwu's study, there are various reasons for Nigerians to codeswitch. For one, the use of English is considered prestigious. Code-switching can also occur because the concept or expression does not have a suitable equivalence in Igbo. In addition, many Igbo-English bilinguals have become accustomed (even if subconsciously) to speak this way. Cultural subalternity is also attributed as a cause, since Nigerians are noted for valuing things that are foreign, and thus adopting words in English to show prestige. Obiamalu and Mbagwu affirm, "When compared with the Yoruba and the Hausa, it seems that the Igbo man is not proud of his language and culture." [88]However, in Obiamalu and Mbagwu's research conclusion, they state that code-switching "is rooted in the Igbo man's philosophy of life which includes receptivity to change, love for new things and readiness to explore."[89]

In *Americanah,* the Nigerian characters add an "o" at the end of their utterance for emphasis. Examples include the following: "I hope he did not get his mother's fighting genes o" (ADICHIE, 2014, p.56). Another example, as Ifemelu imagines The General, Aunt Uju's boyfriend, holding his future baby, Dike, in his arms is: "Dike's arms around his neck, his face lit up, his front teeth jutting out as he smiled, saying, 'He looks like me o, but thank God he took his mother's teeth." [90]

An example of code-switching in the novel is the use of Nigerian words that have equivalence in English. "Okada" is used in the text without a translation. The passage states that Ifemelu "…hailed an okada and jumped on the back and told the motorcyclist that she was going to town. (…) Obinze got on the next okada and was soon speeding behind her."[91] The reader is confused for a moment thinking what "okada" may mean, but from the context

[87] *Ibid* p. 29-30
[88] *Ibid* p. 35
[89] *Ibid* p. 37
[90] *Ibid* p. 86

[91] *Ibid* p. 94-95

one can deduce that it is a mode of transportation that one "gets on" and "speeds off". Therefore, the reader eliminates buses, cars, donkeys and bicycles and concludes that it must be a motorcycle.

When Adichie chooses to use the word "okada", it is not to confuse the reader and leave him/her with the sensation that his/her vocabulary is scarce, but rather it is to present the ways of speaking of the Other and to allow us to engage with this difference. In a way, this is another way of subverting the notion that English is the center of all worlds and languages. In addition, it is possible that in the reader's country there are no "motor taxis", motorcycles like taxis. In the discomfort of meeting the new word, okada, it is possible that one will need to imagine a reality that one does not know - not only a linguistic reality but also a material one. Motorcycle taxis are typical of poor countries like Brazil, Cambodia, India and Thailand, and can symbolize, in the novel, this different reality that is not present in the richer countries of Europe and North America. Therefore, code-switching can be viewed as positive since it augments possibilities, not only of forms of expression, cultural resources, but also the realization that one can adopt different cultural identities depending on the context.

Sometimes the code-switching appears in the novel simply to insert a common expression in Nigerian. For example, the passage, " 'Ifem, kedu?' Aunty Uju said. Aunty Uju called too often to ask if she had found a job" (ADICHIE, 2014, p.141). Kedu means "how are you". Another passage introduces the word "kwa" which is just a way of expressing doubt. "Classics, kwa? I just like crime and thrillers."[92] Also, "I ga-asikwa", which means "it can't be possible," literally, or the equivalent to "I can't believe what you are saying" in the passage: "The Yoruba man is there helping his brother, but you Igbo people? I ga-asikwa. Look at you now quoting me this price."[93]

Blaine, has an American accent and sounds, white and educated as he speaks but he also speaks Ebonics, "a dialect of American English spoken by a large proportion of African Americans"[94]. In a conversation with a security guard, Blaine explains that he had noticed that "younger black folk don't really do code-switching any more. The middle-class kids can't speak Ebonics and the inner-city kids speak only Ebonics and they don't have the fluidity that my generation has"(ADICHIE, 2014, p.342). Could it be that Ebonics is the American version of pidgin?

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[92] *Ibid* p. 60
[93] *Ibid* p. 456
[94] Enclyclopaedia Britannica www.britannica.com/topic/Ebonics

Another interesting aspect related to language, which is found in the novel, is the different connotations certain words have in one country and not in the other. For instance, in Nigeria, the words 'Negro' or 'half-caste' are used freely, in the United States they are considered discriminatory. Ginika, Ifemelu's High School friend from Nigeria who moved to America, explains to Ifemelu some differences in language as soon as Ifemelu arrived in the United States. She shared with her friend, "Can you imagine 'half-caste' is a bad word here? […] I was telling them […] how all the boys were chasing me because I was half-caste, and they said I was dissing myself. So now I say biracial, and I'm supposed to be offended when somebody says half-caste."[95] Thus, the choices made in selecting one word or another reflect the values and culture of that person and place.

Besides code-switching, Adichie also introduces Nigerian proverbs in her text. In the passage of the novel that portrays Ifemelu's high school days, she is with her first love, Obinze. They are exchanging information about their young and comparing stories. At one point Obinze asks Ifemelu how often she goes back to her ancestors' village and she tells him that every Christmas. He answers that he goes at least five times a year. At this Ifemelu starts a playful dispute stating that she knows more Igbo than him:

> "How often do you go to your village?"
> "Every Christmas."
> "Just once a year! I go very often with my mother, at least five times a year."
> "But I bet I speak Igbo better than you."
> "Impossible," he said, and switched to Igbo. "Ama m atu inu. I even know proverbs."
> "Yes. The basic one everybody knows. A frog does not run in the afternoon for nothing."
> "No. I know serious proverbs. Akota ife ka ubi, e lee oba. If something bigger than the farm is dug up, the barn is sold."
> "Ah, you want to try me?" she asked, laughing. " Acho afu adi ako n'akpa dibia. The medicine man's bag has all kinds of things."
> "Not bad," he said. " E gbuo dike n'ogu uno, e luo na ogu agu, e lote ya. If you kill a warrior in a local fight, you'll remember him when fighting enemies."
> They traded proverbs. She could say only two more before she gave up, with him still raring to go.
> "How do you know all that?" she asked, impressed. "Many guys won't even speak Igbo, not to mention knowing proverbs."
> "I just listen when my uncles talk. I think my dad would have liked that."
> (ADICHIE, 2014: 61-62)

Adichie's use of these devices produce certain effects. Linda Yahannos, in her dissertation, calls attention to how Adichie "blends Igbo and Nigerian English without apologizing" (YAHANNOS, 2012, p. 24). Yahannos states that Adichie does not use italics, provide definition, translation or include a glossary at the end of the book, as Achebe Chinua

[95] *Ibid,* p.123-124

did in his books. In other words, Adichie chooses not to carry heavy on the colors, and she prefers to adopt a more natural approach that does not assume that the reader is unfamiliar. This seems to be a common approach used by the Third Generation of Nigerian writers.

Western scholars tend to categorize African literature according to the European languages in which they were written (e.g., Anglophone, Lusophone, and Francophone), and African scholars prefer to categorize the writing according to the region from which the author of the work came from or the period of time the publication occurred. This seems like an obvious intent to try to disassociate Nigerian literature from colonial standards.

Nigeria's literary canon is frequently divided into three moments: the first generation authors are those who lived during the colonization of Nigeria; the second generation authors lived during, and shortly after, the Nigeria-Biafra War (1966-1970); and the third generation authors are those that published in the 1980s. The contemporary authors were born in postcolonial and sometimes even post-civil war Nigeria.

In this sense, Yahannes posits that, "Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie belongs to the third generation of African writers who are taking strides into a new generation of postcolonial African literature that is not only uncommitted and less political but also one that is through problematizing hybridity" (YAHANNOS, 2012, p. 63). Although there are characteristics in Adichie's writing that pertain to the literature of this group, it is not a unanimous opinion amongst scholars. Similarly with other Third Generation Nigerian writers, Adichie has chosen to write about contemporary Nigeria, but she is not "less political" because of this.

Heather Hewett, a professor at the State University of New York, analyzes Adichie's literature and posits: "while her fiction reveals various influences on Nigerian writers, particularly from the first generation, it also resounds with a wide range of texts, from Nigeria, other African nations, and throughout the black Atlantic" (HEWETT, 2005, p. 75). Hewett does not see Adichie as a member of the Third Generation of Nigerian writers. She affirms that Adichie's text reflects a more global approach. She states: "this transnational intertextuality suggests the presence of a heterogeneous, diasporic dimension within contemporary Nigerian literature – a dimension present within many national literatures of the postmodern, globalized world" *(Ibid)*. As problematic as it may be to determine the literary canon, it also serves a useful purpose of identifying characteristics of the different periods as well as noticing attempts of changes in Nigerian literature.

Writers like Chinua Achebe, Cyprian Ekwensi, Buchi Emecheta, Flora Nwapa, Elechi Amadi note that there is liberal Igboization of the new Nigerian Literature. Adichie is a representative of this new group. As Yahannes posits, "Adichian aesthetics points the way to

the future of literature in Africa" (YOHANNES, 2012, p.65). Yohannes' dissertation confirms that the Igbo forms serve important functions as motivators, introducers and affirmers in Adichie's novel.

Patrycja Kozieł, from the University of Warsaw, proposes a similar understanding. "Adichie employs the pattern of using single phrases in Igbo, apparently to suggest and reinforce the contextual meaning, affirming the articulation, introducing, giving it more strength and emphasis" (KOZIEL, 2015, p.105). It is Kozieł's interpretation that Adichie created her own variety of multilingual communication in the text, which might be a reflection of the habits of thought and speech patterns of the many Igbo speakers from United States, who use code-switching or second language inclusions." [96] Koziel explains that this is important for identity formation, since it gives voice to Nigerian migrants; Adichie creates representation that is not only local but also global embracing the

U.S., England and Nigeria in the same text. Thus, her readers are exposed to "hybrid space where there are connections with the global trends without giving up their traditions"[97]

Herbert Igboanusi, from the University of Ibadan, Nigeria, is also of the same opinion as Yohannos and Koziel. He states that Igbo English writers manifest themselves "in experimentation in language, in recreating distinct Igbo discourse in English, and in stylistic innovations" (IGBOANUSI, 2001, p. 54). He comments that this, which was categorized as "ethnic literary tradition", has transformed African literature. In other words, all of African literature, today, is characterized by this "linguistic diffusion and cultural diversity."[98]

In the interview with Women's Caucus of the African Literature Association in 2008, Adichie explains her reasons for choosing both the English and Igbo language in her novel.

> I come from a generation of Nigerians who constantly negotiate two languages and sometimes three, if you include Pidgin. For the Igbo in particular, ours is the EngliIgbo generation and so to somehow claim that Igbo alone can capture our experience is to limit it. Globalization has affected us in profound ways.[99]

Adichie explains that besides her being educated in English at school, due to Nigeria's colonization, there are differences in the language. In the interview Adichie posits, "Sometimes we talk about English in Africa as if Africans have no agency, as if there is not a distinct form of English spoken in Anglophone African countries" and she continues "my

[96] *Ibid,* p.106
[97] *Ibid*
[98] *Ibid,* p.53
[99] http://www.iun.edu/~minaua/interviews/interview_chimamanda_ngozi_adichie.pdf

English-speaking is rooted in a Nigerian experience and not in a British or American or Australian one. I have taken ownership of English." [100]

There may be another reason for Adichie's choice of English as the language in which she would write her novels: her admiration for Chinua Achebe. Chinua Achebe's contribution to literature is renowned. He is considered, by many, as the father of modern African literature. Nelson Mandela said Achebe had "brought Africa to the rest of the world" and claimed he was "the writer in whose company the prison walls came down". [101] He is the author, coauthor and editor of some seventeen books, among them, five novels. He is the recipient of some twenty-five honorary doctorates from universities around the world. In 1958, Achebe published *Things Fall Apart* and changed the perception the world had of Africa "a perception that until then had been based solely on the views of white colonialists, views that were at best anthropological, at worst, to adopt Achebe's famous savaging of Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, 'thoroughgoingly racist'."[102] In Achebe's interview to Ed Pilkington, *The Guardian*, Achebe speaks of his 1975 essay, which analyzed *Heart of Darkness*, and counted the number of words, in the novel, spoken by an African. He claims that there were only six in its 88 pages. Note that the 88 pages of the novella take place in Africa.

In Achebe's novel, *Things Fall Apart*, the story about Africa was told by an African. It is "a story that only someone who went through it could be trusted to give. It was insisting to be told by the owner of the story, not by others, no matter how well-meaning or competent."[103] Achebe decided to write the novel in English and explained, "I feel that the English language will be able to carry the weight of my African experience. But it will have to be a new English, still in full communion with its ancestral home but altered to suit its new African surroundings."[104]

Ngũgĩ Wa Thiong'o, a Kenyan writer, believes "language to be the means of the spiritual subjugation" (THIONG'O *apud* ASHCROFT; GRIFFITHS; TIFFIN, 2006, p.265) and illustrates this with a story of his childhood. He remembers sitting around the fireside every night and listening to stories told repeatedly by mostly adults. Depending on who was telling the story, it was made more alive and dramatic with the use of different words, images

[100] http://www.iun.edu/~minaua/interviews/interview_chimamanda_ngozi_adichie.pdf
[101] https://www.theguardian.com/culture/2010/dec/13/chinua-achebe-life-in-writing
[102] https://www.theguardian.com/books/2007/jul/10/chinuaachebe
[103] https://www.theguardian.com/books/2007/jul/10/chinuaachebe
[104] https://www.theguardian.com/culture/2010/dec/13/chinua-achebe-life-in-writing

and voice inflexions, but it always seemed fresh to the listeners.[105] He states that language, through images and symbols, gave them a view of the world. "We therefore learnt to value words for their meaning and nuances. Language was not a mere string of words. It had a suggestive power well beyond the immediate and lexial meaning."[106] Thiong'o claims that when he started attending school the harmony was broken since the language of his education was no longer the language of his culture. "In Kenya, English became more than a language: it was the language, and all the others had to bow before it in deference.(…) Thus one of the most humiliating experiences was to be caught speaking Gĩkũyũ".[107] Thiong'o tells that the student found speaking Gĩkũyũ, language of the Bantu family, in the vicinity of the school, would be inflicted with corporal punishment. Thiong'o posits:

> Values are the basis of people's identity, their sense of particularity as members of the human race. All this carried by language. Language as culture is the collective memory bank of the people's experience in history (…) Language carries culture, and culture carries, particularly through oratory and literature, the entire body of values by which we come to perceive ourselves and our place in the world (THIONG'O, 2004, pg 14-15)

Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o is of the opinion that one should not use English. He states:

> Language is a fundamental site of struggle for postcolonial discourse because the colonial process itself begins in language. The control over language by the imperial centre - whether achieved by displacing native languages, by installing itself as a ' standard' against other variants which are constituted as 'impurities', of by planting the language of empire in a new place - remains the most potent instrument of cultural control (ASHCROFT; GRIFFITHS; TIFFIN, 2006, p.261).

Achebe, in response to this, says, "while Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o now believes it is *either/or*, I have always thought it was *both*…"(Achebe, *apud* ASHCROFT; GRIFFITHS; TIFFIN, 2006 p. 268, emphasis in the original). In Achebe's perception, there is no need to exclude neither the native language nor English. He reflects on the reasons that conspired to place English in the position of national language and affirms, "The reason is that these nations were created in the first place by the intervention of the British, which, I hasten to add, is not saying that the peoples comprising these nations were invented by the British." Achebe expands on this highly polemic stance by saying, "The country which we know as Nigeria today began not so very long ago as the arbitrary creation of the British."[108] Achebe is still more controversial as he adds: "Let us give the devil his due: colonialism in Africa

[105] *Ibid*
[106] *Ibid*
[107] *Ibid*

[108] https://theafricanbookreview.com/2014/05/15/achebe-essay/

disrupted many things, but it did create big political units where there were small, scattered ones before (…) Today it is one country." [109]

Coexistence of languages is possible. Actually, Achebe claims there are gains for using English in Nigeria. First, one must admit what has conspired to place English in this position of national language, but one also must look at the benefits. For him, "speaking about African unity is that when we get together we have a manageable number of languages with which to communicate - English, French, and Arabic."[110] English is responsible for bringing the continent together. Therefore, Achebe asserts that besides English being a world language, he does not write in English because of this. He explains: "as long as Nigeria wishes to exist as a nation it has no choice in the foreseeable future but to hold its more than two hundred component nationalities together through an alien language, English" (Achebe, 2009, p.100).

Though it may appear that Achebe values the English language and people above all, Achebe is extremely loyal to his culture. Actually, he was the first Nigerian writer to innovate by including the Igbo language in his texts through proverbs, metaphors and speech rhythms, thus establishing a style. One that Adichie chose to copy.

As a writer, scholar and professor at Bard College, Achebe condemns the racist trope that places Africa as a "setting and backdrop which eliminates the African as human factor" and portrays "Africa as a metaphysical battlefield devoid of all recognizable humanity […]."[111] Consolidating this legacy, Caryl Phillips interviewed Chinua Achebe for *The Guardian*, and presented him as the "father of African literature in the English language and undoubtedly one of the most important writers of the second half of the 20th century."[112]

As we question the use of language in African literature, we begin to think in a broader scope. What is African Literature? Can Adichie's *Americanah* be considered part of African Literature and English/American literature? Adichie is Nigerian and writes about Nigeria and the Nigerian migrant. Is this sufficient to sustain an understanding of her work as African, even though the novel was written in English? Not that labels, categories, are the focus of this dissertation, but still these reflections help us rethink important issues.

Adichie herself expands my questions in an interview to William Skidelsky, in *The Guardian:* "For me the story is about the larger question of who determines what an African

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[109] https://theafricanbookreview.com/2014/05/15/achebe-essay/
[110] https://theafricanbookreview.com/2014/05/15/achebe-essay/
[111] www.theguardian.com/books/2000/nov/18/fiction.chinuaachebe
[112] www.carylphillips.com/out-of-africa.html

story is." [113] Adichie goes on to give various examples of how non-Africans have closed ideas of what is and is not African. In the interview she gave examples of things she heard at workshops from non-Africans as being non-African: childless couple visiting a witchdoctor, gay characters and inner city violence. She speaks of an experience at one of the workshops of African writers that was "completely organised by the British, then this person who has his own ideas…imposes them on these young, very impressionable people." [114] She continues, telling Skidelsky, that she remembered feeling helpless and very disappointed with academia. Adichie concludes that she believes this to be "the result of 200 years of history: we can sit here and be told what our story is."

Jemie Chinweizu, Onwuchekwa Jemie and Ihechukwu Madubuike, three scholars, poets, professors and journalists who wrote the book *Decolonization of African Literature*, a classic of modern African literary criticism, state: "there is a long list of charges usually levelled against the African novel by its Western critics, and authoritatively echoed by their African adherents" (CHINWEIZU; JEMIE; MADUBUIKE, 1983, p.191). They claim that there is a "literary tourist mentality addicted to a nouveaumania whose easily jaded sensibilities cry out for new supplies of exotica."[115] They also attribute criticism as a perception of "underhanded efforts to defend the Western imperialist, pro-bourgeois status quo in the cultural domain."[116] The scholars also observe that some novels also suffer from "inadequate description or inadequate characterization, motivation psychology, and depth, or from unrealistic and awkward dialogue."[117] Still other critics reprimand novels for being "autobiographical or preoccupied with culture conflict or unnecessarily fascinated with the African past." [118]There is also the criticism that novels can be too didactic or have not enough of the right kind of "ideological matter." The critics that believe that novels may be too journalistic or anthropological generally believe there is not enough "local color."[119]

Besides all the criticism exposed above, Chinweizu, Jemie and Madubuike allege that it is easy to define what African literature is. It includes all "works done for African audiences, by Africans, and in African languages, whether these works are oral or written."[120]

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[113] www.theguardian.com/books/2009/apr/05/chimamanda-ngozi-adichie-interview
[114] www.theguardian.com/books/2009/apr/05/chimamanda-ngozi-adichie-interview
[115] *Ibid*
[116] *Ibid*
[117] *Ibid*

[118] *Ibid*
[119] *Ibid*
[120] *Ibid,* p.194

One may question, "where does Adichie's work stand since it is written in English?" It is their opinion that :

> works done by African but in non-African languages, and works done by non-Africans in African languages, would be those for which some legitimate doubt might be raised about their inclusion or exclusion from the canon of works of African literature, and it is for them that some decision procedure would have to be established" (*Ibid*).

Does this mean that there can be "legitimate doubt" about Chinua Achebe's work as African? On the other hand, can Achebe's work also be considered part of the English language canon? It is not my intention to expose all the complexities related to this issue here, though it is of undeniable interest. One cannot ignore Adichie's *oeuvre* in English with its international appeal, and not reflect on this. Chinweizu, Jemie and Madubuike establish that African literature will take the following into consideration:

> (l)the primary audience for whom the work is done;(2)the cultural and national consciousness expressed in the work, whether through the author´s voice or through the characters and their consciousness, habits, comportment, and diction;(3)the nationality of the writer, whether by birth or naturalization- a matter that a passport can decide; and (4) the language in which the work is done. (CHINWEIZU; JEMIE; MADUBUIKE, 1983, p.195)

As the triad of African Literature, Chinweizu, Jemie and Madubuike explain that "just because an African or Afro-American plays a piano- a European invention-does not at all mean that the highlife or jazz he produces on it is European music, which therefore should be judged by the same standards as European music."[121]. This poses another question: could writing in a foreign language be another way of "smuggling" European norms and values and subverting these very norms and values in a new linguistic community? I believe the answer to this question is yes, especially after analyzing the internal bombardment of English that Adichie produced in *Americanah* as we have discussed in our engagement with the use of language in her novel.

In a letter to Adichie's editor, Achebe writes:

> We do not usually associate wisdom with beginners, but here is a new writer endowed with the gift of ancient storytellers. Adichie knows what is at stake, and what to do about it. She is fearless or she would not have taken on the intimidating horror of Nigeria's civil war. Adichie came almost fully made. [122]

[121] *Ibid,* p.196

[122]https://www.premiumtimesng.com/entertainment/108378-chinua-achebe-at-82-we-remember-differentlyby-chimamanda-ngozi-adichie.html

Also, Adichie recycles Achebe's words, which are in turn recycled from "The Second Coming", by William Butler Yeats. Possibly in homage to Achebe's influence and writing, but also in a personal loyalty to that which is African. These passages echo Achebe's 1958 novel, *Things Fall Apart*, and are found in two of Adichie's works,

> There is a sense of things falling apart that year, the year I was seventeen - things getting worse, slipping away to a place you could never reach out to bring them back (ADICHIE, "Light Skin", 2003a, p. 59)
> Things started to fall apart at home when my brother, Jaja, did not go to communion and Papa flung his heavy missal across the room and broke the figurines of the étagère (ADICHIE, *Purple Hibiscus*, 2003b, p. 3).
> Everything came tumbling down (ADICHIE, *Purple Hibiscus*, 2003b, p. 257)

Adichie also mentions *Things Fall Apart* in *Americanah.* Kelsey, the American customer in the African braiding salon, begins to talk to Ifemelu and says that she will be traveling to Congo, Kenya and Tanzania in the fall. She tells Ifemelu that she has been reading books to get ready for the trip. She mentioned that she was rereading *Things Fall Apart* but thought it was "quaint." She confides that it did not help her understand modern Africa. Next, Kesley states that she had read *Bend in the River* and thought this book was very honest. Ifemelu just snorts at that comment and says nothing. The narrator then tells us Ifemelu's thoughts, "She did not think the novel was about Africa at all. It was about Europe, or the longing for Europe" and the narrator continues explaining the Indian man born African of the novel who "felt so wounded, so diminished, by not having been born European (…) that he turned his imagined personal insufficiencies into an impatient contempt for Africa."[123] Kelsey is characterized as "aggressively friendly" [124] and makes some stereotypical remarks about Mariana's business such as "but you couldn't even have this business back in your country, right? Isn't it wonderful that you get to come to the US and now your kids can have a better life?" (ADICHIE, 2014, p.189).

This passage shows that Achebe helps Adichie engage readers not only with multifaceted African representations in *Americanah*, through the discursive communities of Africa she learns in her affiliation to Achebe's works, but also that he as a popular author in the world of *Americanah* makes readers aware of stereotyped ideas of Africa. Since it is common for people to refer to stereotypes on a daily basis, I found it interesting to check the Internet and see how the subject is treated by websites specializing in American business and education in order to elaborate on what is popularly understood as a stereotypical view of U.S. citizens.

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[123] *Ibid*, p.189-190

[124] *Ibid*, p.189

Businessinsider.com states that common stereotypes for Americans are: rich, overly patriotic, can only speak English, are ignorant about the world, entitled, do not understand soccer[125]. Another site, www.edupass.org, alerts that one should not believe all the stereotypes one hears, "even the ones that are true in general may not be true about specific individuals or a large segment of the population."[126] Even those that are true? This makes it seem like there are two types of stereotypes, true and false ones. Though I find this passage inaccurate and confusing, and thus one that does not adequately define stereotypes, I include it here because it is a good example of how most people interpret this subject. The site www.edupass.org is financed by FinAid. Being an "org" it is a top-level domain and commonly used by schools, open-source projects, communities, etc. Mark Kantrowitz is responsible for the webpage. Kantrowitz promotes himself as the leading national expert on student financial aid, FARSA, college scholarships and student loans out of Chicago, on twitter. I noticed that he contributes to Forbes magazine site.

For https://www.edupass.org stereotypes of Americans, also, include: boastful and arrogant, insensitive, lazy, loud and obnoxious, racist, rude and immature, "think they know everything", uninformed about politics, and "think every country should imitate the US". [127] Such meanings are derived from academic studies that clarify and explain this social mode of engagement with difference. The term "stereotype" was introduced by Lippmann (1922) "to refer to the typical picture that comes to mind when thinking about a particular social group" (DOVIDIO et al, 2010, p.7). "Stereotypes systematically affect how people perceive, process information about, and respond to, group members. They are transmitted through socialization, the media, and language and discourse."[128] There are three broad approaches to stereotypes in the social sciences: the economic approach, the sociological approach and the social cognition approach.

Phleps (1972) and Arrow (1973), representatives of the economic approach, see stereotypes as manifestations of statistical discrimination based on "rational formation of beliefs about a group member in terms of the aggregate distribution of group traits" (BORDALO et al, 2016, p. 1753). The problem with this theory is that most stereotypes are not rational. The sociological approach considers, "stereotypes as fundamentally incorrect

[125] https://www.businessinsider.com/stereotypes-of-americans-usa-2018-6#americans-are-obsessed-with-work-6
[126] https://www.edupass.org/culture/stereotypes.phtml
[127] https://www.edupass.org/culture/stereotypes.phtml
[128] *Ibid*, p.8

and derogatory generalizations of group traits." [129] Early theorists such as Adorno, Frenkel-Brunswik and Levinson focused on individual differences, and associated prejudice with psychopathology (DOVIDIO, op. cit., p. 4). Later in the 1970s and 1980s, Fiske and Taylor were part of a group that studied how cognitive processes lead to stereotyping and prejudice. At the same time European researchers, Tajfel and Turner amongst others, studied group processes and social identities in relation to bias.[130]

In the 1980s, the social psychology approach gained ground. It "views social stereotypes as special cases of cognitive schemas or theories" (BORDALO, op. cit., p. 1753). These theorists define stereotypes as "intuitive generalizations that individuals routinely use in their everyday life, and entail savings on cognitive resources" (BORDALO, op. cit., p. 1753). In other words, people generalize and stereotype in order to process information due to cognitive limitations. Hilton and Hippel (1996) claimed stereotypes are

> mental representations of real differences between groups [. . .] allowing easier and more efficient processing of information. Stereotypes are selective, however, in that they are localized around group features that are the most distinctive, that provide the greatest differentiation between groups, and that show the least within-group variation. [131] (*Ibid*, p. 1755)

While Bordalo, Coffman, Gennaioli and Shleifer claim that many stereotypes are inaccurate, they confirm that others are flattering to the group in question rather than pejorative. They illustrate this with an example: Asians are good at math. Other examples given by Bordalo et al. are, "Dutch are tall" and "Swedes are blond", though there are many exceptions, these two examples prove that generalizations many times are based on a perception that includes a great number of cases. One must note, "representativeness suggests that the reason people stereotype the Irish as red-headed is that red hair is more common among the Irish than among other groups, even though it is not that common in absolute terms" (BORDALO, et al, p.1756).

Bordalo's research paper shows two critical properties: 1) stereotypes amplify systematic differences between groups, even if these differences are in reality very small; 2) stereotypes are context dependent. The assessment of a given target group depends on the reference group to which it is compared.[132] In the case of social groups that have been historically mistreated, such as racial and ethnic minorities, Bordalo states that they continue

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[129] *Ibid*
[130] *Ibid*
[131] *Ibid*, p.1755

[132] *Ibid*, p.1755

to suffer through bad stereotyping, perhaps because the groups in power want to perpetuate false beliefs about them. Therefore, the stereotypes against blacks, as an example of the "bad stereotyping," are rooted in the history of slavery and continuing discrimination. We can conclude, thus, that while the above research may shed light on many important issues, they leave many questions unanswered.

Adichie herself has expanded on the subject in an interview with Parul Sehgal at Tin House when she stated that she does not start out writing to challenge stereotypes. She explains that this can be a dangerous starting point and adds that "fiction that starts off that way often ends up being contrived, burdened by its mission."[68] During the interview, Adichie concludes: "simply writing in an emotionally truthful way automatically challenges the single story because it humanizes and complicates."

In Adichie's TED talk "The Danger of the Single Story", she brings to our attention that Blacks suffer more with stereotypes since there are fewer stories, books, films written where black people are represented in diverse ways. Ironically, the stereotype of a white woman, Kelsey, already mentioned in this dissertation, is also present in the novel. I interpreted that not as retaliation at whites, but as a way of provoking reflection about the different types of people we encounter along the way. For it is a common opinion that Adichie tells the story of Ifemelu and Obinze without an accusatory or apologetic tone. Instead, she uses her wry sense of humor as if to say: this is what it is. It is as if the novel were saying "this is the real world" and make of it what you wish. Kelsey's is only another story within a story. Adichie is a writer and seems not to be concerned with being fair or likeable, but to provoke thought about larger ideological concepts in simple domestic issues.

Indeed, stories, the stuff of literature, are major intertextual devices for Adichie to promote our engagement with Africa on a more profound level. In *Americanah*, she returns many times to one of her favorite themes: books and literature. She mentions authors that speak of Africa. She weaves these subjects into her narrative and presents readers with her thoughts about various books, even if only as a subtext. Adichie returns to many themes. She frequently plays homage to Achebe keeping him alive in the contemporary novel. In this way, Adichie not only creates thematic cohesion, returning to her favorite subjects and expanding on them in the subtext, but by repeating her themes she reinforces her Africanness contributing with the representation of her people and their collective memory and, at the same time, she creates a braided textuality that is composed by differing views of life.

This is clearly seen in the way Adichie revisits and updates Achebe's themes. If *Purple Hibiscus* (2003) echoes Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, Adichie's story is told from a

woman's perspective and does not take place in colonial times, but in post-independent Nigeria. Adichie herself wrote about Achebe in an article that she titled "We remember differently,"[133] in a clear allusion to the many themes written by both. The article tells of Achebe's great influence for her life. Though Adichie lived, as a child, in the house that had been Achebe's on the university campus at Nsukka, they had met few times. Adichie uses "appropriation" and "inversion" of the works of other authors, and especially Achebe, which is a common strategy found in the works of African women writers (HEWETT, 2005, p. 80).

Adichie has been compared to Chinua Achebe for being from the same tribe in Nigeria, having similar writing styles and achieving success in African literature. In Phillips's interview, Achebe refers to a lecture he gave in which he speaks of Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* which is clearly in synchrony with Ifemelu's position regarding Kelsey's remark in the African braiding salon scene we discussed. Achebe finds that Conrad presents to the reader an Africa which is the "antithesis of Europe and therefore of civilization, a place where man's vaunted intelligence and refinement are finally mocked by triumphant bestiality" (BLOOM, 2008, p. 74). Achebe addresses the form with which Conrad treats Africa by asking: '[w]hat is the point in that book? Art is not intended to put people down. If so, then art would ultimately discredit itself."[134] He stated, in this interview, that he encountered many scholars and students that tried to justify their obviously racist position. Achebe claims that it is common to hear arguments in defense of Conrad as if Africa were only a setting chosen by the author to show the mindset of his main character, Mr. Kurtz. Achebe asks, "Can nobody see the preposterous and perverse arrogance in thus reducing Africa to the role of props for the break-up of one petty European mind?" (LYNN, 2017, p.26). In the interview, Achebe claims that he is not fooled by this narrative and by those that claim that the "complex polyphony of the storytelling is Conrad's way of trying to deliberately distance himself from the views of his characters."[135] In the same article, Achebe states that if Conrad's intention was to contrast the moral of the narrator with the characters, it was "wasted because he neglects to hint, clearly and adequately, at an alternative frame of reference by which we may judge the actions and opinions of his characters."[136]

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[133] www.premiumtimesng.com/entertainment/108378-chinua-achebe-at-82-we-remember-differently-bychimamanda-ngozi-adichie.html

[134] https://www.theguardian.com/books/2003/feb/22/classics.chinuaachebe

[135] https://www.theguardian.com/books/2003/feb/22/classics.chinuaachebe

[136] https://www.theguardian.com/books/2003/feb/22/classics.chinuaachebe

In summary, Adichie uses many of the same forms and continues many of the discussions framed by the writers that preceded her. Adichie's use of Igbo not only gives visibility to Africa's diversity, enriches Adichie's novel with layers of cultural data, promotes identification with her Nigerian reader (who sees himself/herself reflected in the pages of the novel), but also exposes any reader to the notion of Otherness, which is the ultimate mode of engagement with African that the writer propels. Adichie's Igbo appears in her stories as code-switching or second language inclusions, demonstrating a speech pattern used by Igbo speakers in Nigeria, but also in the United States. Thus, Adichie uses language to symbolize not only diversity, in the different forms of expression amongst the characters in her novel, but also unity. Nigerians being represented this way reinforce the fact that they may be migrants, with hybrid ways, but that the modern Nigerian also interconnects Nigerian traditions with global influences. Thus, above all, Adichie shows that through this unity they may find multiplicity in the world, that they too can be an addition to the myriad of existences that compose one's becoming-other.

Since I am not African, interpreting someone else's culture is a challenge. Ludwig Wittgenstein, Austrian-British philosopher, states:

> We . . . say of some people that they are transparent to us. It is, however, important as regards this observation that one human being can be a complete enigma to another. We learn this when we come into a strange country with entirely strange traditions; and, what is more, even given a mastery of the country's language. We do not understand the people. (And not because of not knowing what they are saying to themselves.) We cannot find our feet with them. (WITTGENSTEIN *apud* GEERTZ, 1973, p.13)

Clifford Geertz, an American anthropologist, posits another reflection about this type of perception. He claims that "understanding a people's culture exposes their normalness without reducing their particularity" (GEERTZ, 1973, p.14). Trying to understand the Other may render their world more accessible and dissolve their opacity, but at the same time the more one interacts with Others the more you are aware of their singularities. When we encounter an other, how do we engage with his/her difference? How do we communicate? Through stereotypes of through our becoming-this-other? What are the complications of this "engagement"?

Undoubtedly, African scholars are concerned with forms of representation of Africa. Olatunji Ogunyemi, a scholar of diaspora journalism, is principally concerned with representation of Africans and how this is affected by the internet. He states that "the dominant perspective on the representation of Africa in the Western media claims that Western media coverage is biased and crisis oriented, and the liberal perspective claims that

the coverage of Africa is not as negative." [137] His research at the University of Lincoln in the United Kingdom and in Bowen University in Nigeria shows that "there is growing evidence of the articulation of geopolitical and sociocultural issues from African perspectives on the Internet."[138]

The scholar Chima Anyadike, specialist on the African novel and professor at Obafemi Awolowo University in Nigeria, calls our attention to the notion that "in fiction, more than in life, we expect not mere correspondence to life, but also consistency and completeness" (ANYADIKE, 1990, p.75). We can only understand the story being told if it provides us with the consistent view upon which to rest out own eyes - one that is complete in the sense that it allows meaning to defer and to differ. Anyadike affirms that it is the process of empathy which makes it possible for us to interpret fictional worlds and "engage in the mind of the reader, the world of everyday, thus enlarging that mind and imparting to it, disciplines so useful for the successful and mutually beneficial encounters and identifications with others" (ANYADIKE, 1990, p.75). Anyadike thus infers that literature sends readers into infinite processes of becoming-other in these literary encounters.

Adichie's books do indeed create comprehension, promote identification and generate a sense of cohesive multiplicity. Adichie's novel, *Americanah,* has been published in 30 languages. Thus, we can say that it is promoting reflection about Africa amongst a variety of people.

When Homi Bhabha wrote the forward to Frantz Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks,* he commented that "the question of identification is never the affirmation of a pre-given identity, never a self-fulfilling prophecy—it is always the production of an 'image' of identity and the transformation of the subject in assuming that image" (BHABHA *apud* in FANON, 1986, p.xvi). In other words, one can only identify with a given representation in the "differentiating order of Otherness" (*Ibid*), in the space in between my idea of myself and my idea of the Other and also the ambivalence between what the subject infers and the image it chooses to adopt. For Bhabha, the image "marks the site of an ambivalence" (BHABHA, 1994, p.73) for it "makes present something that is absent."[139] Representation, for Bhabha, is always "spatially split since it is the representation of a time that is always elsewhere, a repetition"

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[137] www.researchgate.net/publication/254111220_Representation_of_Africa_Online_Sourcing_Practice_and_Frames_of_Reference, abstract, p.457

[138] www.researchgate.net/publication/254111220_Representation_of_Africa_Online_Sourcing_Practice_and_Frames_of_Reference, abstract, p.457

[139] *Ibid*

(*Ibid)*. Therefore, images are ambivalent by nature and the contact with numerous types, as in the novel *Americanah*, generates many possibilities in the reader´s choices. As the reader tries to relate to what is being said he/she returns to the "image of identity which bears the mark of splitting in that 'Other' place from which it comes."[140] Bhabha claims that for Fanon, like for Lacan, the production of an image (identity) has a primary moment in the desire of the look and the limits of language. Thus, any sense of uncertainty which is present surrounding the self "threatens its dismemberment"[141] and it is this dismemberment of the single story – the single identity, the single self – that Adichie achieves.

Thus, as we come to the end of this chapter about Adichie's invitation for an intense engagement with Africa, we have reflected on many aspects with the certainty that we are nowhere close to understanding the Other. In an interview with Trevor Noah for Pen America, Adichie explains the Other that she wanted to write about:

> the type of African immigration I'm familiar with. Because I think the narrative that's common in the Western world about African immigrants is that they are fleeing poverty, war and catastrophe. Those stories are important but they never feel familiar to me because it is not the story I know. I wanted to write about the people who are not dying. Who are caught in any war but that are dreaming of more. And for whom more is America actually. […] And also about the African that in his home country is well, he even has a job but makes the choice to leave, and suddenly he is washing toilets in London and what that is and how it shapes your relationship with your peers.[142]

When Adichie exposes the necessity she feels for sharing a Nigeria that is contemporary and does not speak of war and catastrophe, she is choosing to tell a different story. In her TED talk, "The Danger of a Single Story," Adichie speaks of the stereotypical story of Africa that we all have been exposed to. She posits that it is not true that these stories do not exist. Stories that speak of stereotypical characters also tell true stories. What is important to note is that they are not the ***only*** stories. Adichie tells us that there are other stories to be told, other facets of Africa to be shared. In her TED talk she confirms this stating: "The single story creates stereotypes, and the problem with stereotypes is not that they are untrue, but that they are incomplete. They make one story become the only story [12:45]" [143]The real problem with stereotypes is that these are the only stories being told when there are so many other stories that help construct the complex web which gives depth and substance to things. Adichie, in other words, is speaking of the necessity to show the

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[140] *Ibid*

[141] *Ibid*

[142] www.youtube.com/watch?v=LkeCun9aljY

[143] https://www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda_adichie_the_danger_of_a_single_story/transcript

space of “difference and otherness, or the space of the adversarial, within such a system of ‘disposal’ (…which is) never entirely on the outside or implacably oppositional” (BHABHA, 2001, p. 80).

Homi K. Bhabha explains that this place of difference makes the reader aware of the boundaries between one and the Other. This is the space where there is a “pressure, and a presence, that acts constantly, if unevenly, along the entire boundary of authorization” a space that on the surface he calls the “disposal-as-bestowal and disposition-as-inclination” (BHABHA, 2004, p.156). As in postcolonial literature, Adichie’s novel also places pressure on the boundaries between local and foreign, black and white, self and Other. There is always a power play in a dispute for what can be represented as true and what cannot. Can a Nigerian go to America without the reason being to flee poverty? For the exception to be accepted, the Black stories to be able to be told and understood, there needs to be a “reversal of the process of domination through disavowal” (BHABHA, 2006, p. 34). For the different, Other, to be accepted, the “mimetic and narcissistic demands” of power must be reinserted in strategies of identification which subvert the gaze. As Bhabha states a “negative transparency” must be made out of the duality, or ambivalence, present in the space where power is enacted. Adichie, as a Nigerian writer, bargaining with the boundaries imposed by her being a foreigner and an artist, seeks to create this negative of the photograph. This space is one of ambivalence, of uncertainty, where Adichie has the opportunity to turn the discursive condition of dominance into something else. For this to happen, Adichie must insert and validate the use of the rules of recognition, to create a fertile ground that unsettles, destabilizes and overturns. In other words, Adichie must first inscribe to be able to, later, subvert. In this subversion, we find ourselves becoming ever more enticed by her world, becoming-other, without ever claiming ownership to the singular otherness that her multilayered stories expose.

2 DIALOGISM AND OTHER BAKHTINIAN CONCEPTS AS KEYS TO READING *AMERICANAH*

The multiplicity of themes, characters and perspectives found in Adichie's novel *Americanah* led me to the concept of *Otherness*. For it is in the Other, be it the people themselves or the living context of exchange in the words and expressions of Others, their cultural world defined by time and place, that we are able to understand ourselves and the world we live in. Thus what is different, not us, is the starting point to understand ourselves. In other words, the binary 'familiar/unfamiliar' is where the dialogue between you and the Other occurs. Under this light, Mikhail Mikhailovich Bakhtin's theory will help us understand Adichie's text.

It is important to highlight some aspects in reference to Bakhtin's theories. For one, there is controversy as to what extent other intellectuals, known as Bakhtin's collaborators, have contributed to his many different works. For this reason, it is accepted practice to give authorships, of all works, to "Bakhtin's circle" or "school" (VICE, 1997, p.8). In addition, Bakhtin wrote in Russian, and, therefore, all of his works are mediated not only by his "circle" but by translators as well. Though he was born in 1895, and had his first work published in 1929, his ideas only reached the Western world after 1960. Not only are there many differences amongst the many translations, but there are also many academics that have become commentators of or specialists in Bakhtin and have made his work more accessible to us. Some of these commentators are: Clark-Holquist and Tzvetan Todorov, Julia Kristeva and, in Brazil, Beth Brait. Sometimes this may be a problem because it is unclear whose ideas are really exposed, Bakhtin's or his commentators, as Karine Zbinden states in her book *Baktin between East and West: Cross-cultural Transmission* (ZBINDEN, 2006, p. 93).

My interest in Chimamanda Adichie's world, one that I was not acquainted with and, therefore, belonged to a distant Other, brought me to Bakhtin's concept of "outsideness" (or "exotopy" as Tzvetan Todorov coined it) and made me realize my misconception about how to relate to the *Other*. It was my belief that to understand another culture one should try to adopt the new culture's point of view, thus to see the new world through "their" eyes. Though Bakhtin agrees that this is a necessary moment in the process of understanding, he complements: "But if understanding were exhausted in this moment, it would have been no more than a single duplication, and would have brought nothing new or enriching"

(BAKHTIN *apud* TODOROV, 1984, p. 109). Bakhtin expands on this, as Todorov comments: "*Creative understanding* does not renounce its self, its place in time, its culture; it does not forget anything"[144] (TODOROV, 1984, p. 109). Thus, "understanding cannot be interpreted as empathy" (or as said in Russian *vchustvovanie*) "and the setting of the self in another place (loss of one´s place)" (*Ibid).* This is the principle of exotopy: outsideness. Marília Amorim explains Bakhtin's outsideness as being "fundamental ao trabalho de criação e de objectivação(...) A criação estética expressa a diferença e a tensão entre dois olhares, entre dois pontos de vista" (AMORIM, 2016, p. 96). After all, as Todorov formulates, it is "only in the eyes of an *other* culture that the alien culture reveals itself more completely and more deeply" *(Ibid*, p.109-110). Since "outsideness" is essential for true perception "a man's real external aspect can be seen and understood only by other persons, thanks to their spatial exotopy, and thanks to the fact that they are other."[145]

Expanding on Bakhtin's exotopy, Beth Brait unpacks Bakhtin's formulation: "eu só posso imaginar-me, por inteiro, sob o olhar do outro" (BAKHTIN apud BRAIT, 2005, p. 22). Thus, it is important that the other be preserved in its integrity. Following this reasoning, there is no justification for one trying to fuse with the other, as Todorov expounds: "Let him [the other] rather stay on the outside because from there he can know and see what I cannot see or know from my vantage point, and he can thus enrich essentially the event of my life" (TODOROV, 1984, p.108). This understanding produces an ethical - as well as an aesthetic stance towards the other and towards one's own existence, since

> It is only in another human being that I find an aesthetically (and ethically) convincing experience of human finitude, of a marked-off empirical objectivity […]. Only another human being can give me the appearance of being consubstantial with the external world. [146]

For Bakhtin all that becomes consciousness comes from the outside world. He exemplifies speaking of the subject, still a fetus, being formed in the womb of another, the mother, and later our consciousness awakening "surrounded by the consciousness of others" (BAKHTIN *apud* TODOROV, 1984, p. 96). At this time, one hears his or her own name being uttered by others; we perceive what our name *is* firstly by an Other's speech. Todorov

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[144] Author´s emphasis
[145] *Ibid*
[146] *Ibid*, p.95

expands on this: “At first I am conscious of myself only through others: they give me the words, the forms, and the tonality that constitute my first image of myself.”[147]

After all, as Bakhtin formulates, it is the “passing through the mouths of others (from the mother, etc.) with their intonation, their affective tonality, and their values” that we are formed little by little (BAKHTIN *apud* TODOROV, 1984, p, 96). Todorov expands on this: “At first I am conscious of myself only through others: they give me the words, the forms, and the tonality that constitute my first image of myself” (TODOROV, 1984, p.96). The child grows but still the O*ther* continues to play the important part in his/her formation:

> I achieve self-consciousness, I become myself only by revealing myself to another, through another and with another’s help […] Man has no internal sovereign territory; he is all and always on the boundary; looking within himself, he looks in the eyes of the other or through the eyes of the other… I cannot do without the other; I cannot become myself without the other; I must find myself in the other, finding the other in me (n mutual reflections and perception). Justification cannot be justification of oneself, confession cannot be confession to oneself. I receive my name from the other, and the is name exists for the other (to name oneself is to engage in usurpation) [148].

Sartre, also, speaks of Otherness, as he writes about the Jews, in his book *Anti-Semite and Jew* (1948). He states that the Jews “more than any other minority group (…) are ‘perfectly assimilable’ into the surrounding culture” (SARTRE, 1976, p.xiii-xiv), thus, “the Jew is one whom other men consider a Jew: that is the simple truth from which we must start. . . . It is the anti-Semite who makes the Jew.”[149] Sartre claims, “there is a disgust for the Jew, just as there is a disgust for the Chinese or the Negro among certain people.”[150]In his book, Sartre investigates where the hate for the Jews comes from. He believes it is related to power as he says, “Any anti-Semite is therefore, in varying degree, the enemy of constituted authority. He wishes to be the disciplined member of an undisciplined group; he adores order, but a social order.”[151] Though Sartre explores various hypothesis, he concludes, “We begin to understand that anti-Semitism is more than a mere ‘opinion’ about the Jews and that it involves the entire personality of the anti-Semite.”[152] In other words, what constitutes the Jew is the non-Jew. If the non-Jew were not anti-Semite, there would be no stigma with the Jews and they would be assimilated and blended in with the other white people.

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147 *Ibid*
148 *Ibid*
149 *Ibid*, p.69
150 *Ibid*, p.6-7
151 *Ibid*, p.22
152 *Ibid*, p.23

In dialogue with Sartre's above text, Frantz Fanon also compares being Jewish and being Black in *Black Skin, White Masks*,

> The Jewishness of the Jew, however, can go unnoticed. He is not integrally what he is. We can but hope and wait. His acts and behavior are the determining factor. He is a white man, and apart from some debatable features, he can pass undetected. He belongs to the race that has never practiced cannibalism. What a strange idea, to eat one's father! Serves them right; they shouldn't be black. (FANON, 2008, p. 95)

Adichie's novel *Americanah* also explores the topic of Otherness. Ifemelu echoes Sartre's and Fanon's thoughts as she blogs about the visiting professor Hunk. The professor hears a Jewish person say "blacks have not suffered like the Jews" (ADICHIE, 2014, p. 205) to which the professor answered, "come on, is this the oppression Olympics?" Ifemelu´s blog continues,

> But there IS an oppression olympics going on. American racial minorities— blacks, Hispanics, Asians, and Jews—all get shit from white folks, different kinds of shit, but shit still. Each secretly believes that it gets the worst shit. So, no, there is no United League of the Oppressed. However, all the others think they're better than blacks because, well, they're not black (ADICHIE, 2014, p. 205).

In other words, can the oppression of the Jews help us understand the oppression of the blacks? Though we need not compete to see who is worthy of receiving the medal of most oppressed, is the comparison of any use? Can we better understand one type of oppression by looking at the other? And if we can put the different oppressed groups in a "ladder of the oppressed", would blacks be at the bottom? Do we agree that the black woman, thus, would be at the very bottom of the bottom?

In Ifemelu's blog titled "To My Fellow Non-American Blacks, in America, You are Black, Baby" Ifemelu warns Non-American Blacks that when they made the choice to come to America, they become black. She gives the blog reader the following advice: "Stop arguing. Stop saying I'm Jamaican or I'm Ghanaian. America doesn't care. So what if you weren't black in your country? You're in America now." [153]

Adichie herself reads from *Americanah* in an interview, to Terry Gross on National Public Radio. "We all have our moments of initiation into the society of former negroes. Mine was in a class in undergrad, when I was asked to give the black perspective, only I had no idea what that was. So I just made something up." [154] Later in the interview, Adichie shares her own experience of "becoming black" as she arrived in America. "I remember when I first came to the U.S., I really didn't consciously think of myself as black because I didn't have to. I thought of myself as Igbo, which is my ethnicity." Adichie remembers other occasions, as she gradually took in the fact that she was black, "there's a moment when I had just arrived,

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[153] *Ibid*, p.320

[154] https://www.npr.org/templates/transcript/transcript.php?storyId=195598496

(…) and I was in Brooklyn, and this African-American man called me sister. And I remember reacting almost viscerally and thinking no, I am not your sister."[155]

Adichie's personal history in America is similar to Ifemelu's, her main character. Blackness is an acquired condition that grows on you as you arrive in the U.S. and are introduced to racism. It takes the exposure to many instances of Otherness, and the gaze of the Other, for one to comprehend how society in America will perceive you and treat you. It does not matter that you do not perceive yourself this way.

Adichie expands on the different types of "being black" as she shares another observation on the same interview to Terry Gross. "[T]here's a certain, a certain [sic] privilege to not being African-American in certain circles in the U.S., being black but not African-American."[156] In another part of the interview, Adichie speaks about an incident that happened with her and she used it in her novel where an African-American classmate was very annoyed because someone had said something about watermelons. Adichie did not understand that the watermelon comment was supposed to be racist, so she did not share the classmate's rage, which was disappointing to her African-American colleague. Adichie's conclusion, during the interview, was that "race is such a strange construct because you learn - you have to learn what it means to be black in America. So you have to learn that watermelon is supposed to be offensive."

Thus, Adichie installs the concept "In America You Are Black" in one passage and deconstructs this further in her interview, as she speaks about "being black" but not African-American. This is part of Adichie's style and occurs many times in the novel. In my opinion, this is not done inadvertently. It is not a contradiction. It is Adichie's way of expanding, presenting complexity and thus subverting the stereotypes related to race. She presents a common situation, makes the listener/reader identify with it, and then presents another oppositional common story.

Taking this a step further, I could say that *Americanah*, this fictional love story, feels very true and the reader is presented to various realities and confronted with an "Africanness" that he/she may not know. The reader's world is suddenly, as stated by Todorov, essentially "enriched" with "convincing experience of human finitude" (TODOROV, 1984, p.96). For it is the Other that presents us our limits and that is essential in making us whole.

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[155] https://www.npr.org/templates/transcript/transcript.php?storyId=195598496
[156] https://www.npr.org/templates/transcript/transcript.php?storyId=195598496

The pluralism presented in a novel is created through the various characters and their different backgrounds and stories, but there are still more layers to be added to this perception. Bakhtin states that discourse has two voices with two different intentions, meanings and expressions. One is the direct intention of the character that speaks and the other is the "refracted intention of the author" (BAKHTIN, 1981, p.324). To recognize this double-voicedness one may not rely solely on "linguistic and stylistic profile of the languages involved"; one must have a "profound understanding of each language's socio-ideological meaning and an exact knowledge of the social distribution and ordering" or the author's voice will not be perceived.[157] As we will expand in the next chapter, I interpret this double-voicedness as responsible for the irony in Adichie's novel and as that which enables her novel to be read from different points of view as one belongs to one or more discursive communities.

One of Bakhtin's other key concepts is heteroglossia: an understanding of the dialogue of languages as it exists in a given era and is present in a "special type of doublevoiced discourse" ((BAKHTIN, 1981, p.324-325). Expanding on the term, Bakhtin formulates the following:

> At any given time, in any given place, there will be a set of conditions - social, historical, meteorological, physiological - that will ensure that a word uttered in that place and at that time will have a meaning different than it would have under any other conditions; all utterances are heteroglot in that they are functions of a matrix of forces practically impossible to recoup, and therefore impossible to resolve (BAKHTIN, 1981, p.428).

Adichie's novel explores the complex black subjectivity of characters living in Nigeria, England and America as if a heteroglossia of forces collided with each other presenting to the reader the diversity of the contemporary world. One example of heteroglossia in the novel is the use of the word "fat". While Ifemelu was waiting for the New Jersey Transit the narrator states, "she was struck by how mostly slim white people got off at the stops in Manhattan and, as the train went further into Brooklyn, the people left were mostly black and fat" (ADICHIE, 2014, p. 5). The narrator continues, "She had not thought of them as 'fat,' though. She had thought of them as 'big,' because one of the first things her friend Ginika told her was that "fat" in America was a bad word, heaving with moral judgment like 'stupid' or 'bastard,' and not a mere description like 'short' or 'tall'."[158] When Bakhtin speaks of heteroglossia, according to Sue Vice in her book *Introducing Bakhtin*, he is stating that not only are there many "professional" languages but that they are also stratified

[157] *Ibid,* p.417
[158] *Ibid,* p.5

into generic, period-bound and others (VICE, 1997, p. 21). Therefore, when language is used in a novel, it immediately opposes the "linguistic center of the verbal-ideological like of the nation and the epoch." [159]

In other words, language in texts presents specific points of view of the world and, because of these oppositional stances, they "mutually supplement one another, contradict one another and be [sic] interrelated dialogically."[160] Reading Bakhtin, Vice affirms that double-voicedness is constructed not only through characters, but also through stylization, skaz (a mode of narration that imitates the oral speech of an individualized narrator), irony, comic discourse or parody.[161] Or, as Beth Brait explains in the introduction to *Bakhtin: conceitos-chave*, "o discurso escrito é de certa maneira parte integrante de uma discussão ideológica em grande escala: ele responde a alguma coisa, refuta, confirma, antecipa as respostas e objeções potenciais, procura apoio, etc. " (BRAIT, 2005, p.7).

This makes us return to Adichie's novel and question ourselves. What does this contemporary story refute? What perceptions does it confirm? What answers does this diasporic story formulate? What objections will an American, Brazilian and Nigerian reader come up with?

In the glossary of Bakhtin's book *Dialogic Imagination*, dialogism is defined as "the characteristic epistemological mode of a world dominated by heteroglossia. Everything means, is understood, as a part of a greater whole - there is a constant interaction between meanings, all of which have the potential of conditioning others" (BAKHTIN, 1981, p. 426). At the moment of utterance, meanings will be negotiated. This way the "dialogic imperative" ensures that there is always more than one voice or way of interpreting the text. The "language world" relative to any of its current inhabitants, ensures that there can be no actual monologue. "One may, like a primitive tribe that knows only its own limits, be deluded into thinking there is one language"[162] or if you are "grammarians, certain political figures and normative framers of 'literary languages,' seek a sophisticated way to achieve a unitary language" (*Ibid*). But, "In both cases the unitariness is relative to the overpowering force of heteroglossia, and thus dialogism" (*Ibid).*

Todorov, in his book *Mikhail Bakhtin: the Dialogical Principle*, claims that Bakhtin used the term *dialogism* to "designate the relation of every utterance to other utterances"

[159] *Ibid*, p. 21
[160] *Ibid*
[161] *Ibid*
[162] *Ibid*

(TODOROV, 1984, p. 60). However, he finds the term "loaded with such an embarrassing multiplicity of meanings" that he prefers to use Julia Kristeva's "intertextuality," for the more broader sense, and the term "dialogism" for the more specific instance of "exchange of responses by two speakers" or "Bakhtin's conception of human personality."[163]

Todorov elaborates more on this intertextual (or Bakhtin's *dialogical*) aspects of utterances. He states that "every representation of language puts us in contact with its utterer; to make us 'conscious' of what language is, is to have us identify who speaks within it,"[164] besides the fact that "no utterance is devoid of the intertextual dimension." [165] Todorov adds: "Not only have words always already been used and carry within themselves the traces of preceding usage, but 'things' themselves have been touched, at least in one of their previous states, by other discourses that one cannot fail to encounter" (TODOROV, 1984, p.63).

Bakhtin, himself, adds another aspect to the discourse found in the genre novel. He says, "In the novel, language does not merely represent: it is itself an object of representation. Novelist discourse is always self-critical" (BAKHTIN *apud* Todorov, 1984, p.66). Another question is proposed then: what is the self-critical discourse of *Americanah*?

In *M. M. Bakhtin: Speech genres and other late essay,* Bakhtin returns to the concept of the subject commenting on Structuralism. Bakhtin criticizes Structuralism for it only having one subject, the subject of the research itself. He concludes that Structuralism, in this way, transforms all things into concepts, with different degrees of abstraction, but concepts. He claims that "the subject can never become a concept (he himself speaks and responds). Contextual meaning is personalistic; it always includes a question, an address, and the anticipation of a response" (BAKHTIN, 1986, p.169-170). Bakhtin reiterates his notion that language is dialogical clarifying that "this personalism is not psychological, but semantic." [166]

This positioning brings to mind Barthes's *Death of the Author* and Foucault's *What is an Author?* and the latter's concept of "author function" which also problematizes the rule of the author's disappearance. The divide between author and text reflects a possibility of emphasizing *meaning* instead of *intention* in a text. Repercussions like Jacques Derrida's *The Deaths of Roland Barthes* and Seán Burke's *The Death and Return of the Author*, illustrate

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[163] *Ibid*
[164] *Ibid*
[165] *Ibid*, p.62
[166] *Ibid*

that there are no longer “ideal meanings”. Deconstruction brings about a radical change as it opened the text to an unlimited variety of interpretations. Sean Burke explains:

> What is put to question is the absolutely determinative hegemony of intention over the communicative act. Intention is to be recognized, and respected, but on the condition that we accept that its structures will not be fully and ideally homogeneous with what is said or written, that is not always and everywhere completely adequate to the communicative act.[…]Intention is within signification, and as a powerful and necessary agency, but it does not command this space in the manner of an organizing *telos*, or transcendental subjectivity. (BURKE *apud* COMPAGNO, 2012, p. 43.)

The American New Criticism with its notion of “intentional fallacy” and the denial of the author precede the French critics, Roland Barthes and Jacques Derrida, introducing a second phase of theorization. Barthes claims there is no need for a “master of meaning”, since literary value has the capacity to stimulate thoughts in the reader. “The birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the Author’” (BARTHES *apud* COMPAGNO, 2012, p.41). Dario Compagno explains Derrida’s belief that there are no private intentions in the game of signification as he gives an example of Derrida’s logic: “whenever we say or write the word ‘house’ we let our listener or reader access a net of links (deferments), connecting in a heterogeneous way memories, references and past uses” (COMPAGNO, 2012, p.42). Therefore, “we cannot isolate an ideal dimension of meaning that excludes all contingent references, leaving only pure thought.” [167] Compagno concludes that this positioning is a deferral of the transcendental subject, a split between the sovereign *cogito* and impenetrable unthought.

For Bakhtin, though, the author must be understood as a participant in the event of writing. The author is the authoritative guide for the reader in that event, though a passive figure (BAKHTIN, 1990, p.207-208). It is the author that introduces potentiality of language with the intention of a consciously artistic hybrid text. The hybrid text is one that presents two social languages within the limits of a single utterance, an encounter, within the arena of an utterance, between two different linguistic consciousnesses (BAKHTIN, 1981, pp.358- 59). Beyond the novel’s double-voiced and double-accented (as in rhetoric) nature, it is also double-languaged for it is the product of two socio-linguistic consciousnesses. Hybridization [*gibridizaciia*] is the presence, within a single utterance, of two (or more) different linguistic consciousnesses that can be widely separated in time and social space. “Along with

[167] *Ibid*

dialogization of languages and pure dialogues, this is a major device for creating language-images in the novel." [168]

For Bakhtin the different conciousnesses form the dialogical nature of the subject:

> I am conscious of myself and I become myself only while revealing myself for another, through another, and with the help of another. [...] Not that which takes place within, but that which takes place on the boundary between one's own and someone else's consciousness, on the threshold (BAKHTIN, 1984, p. 287).

Americanah, thus, is a multiplication of potentialities. The reader is not only introduced to the hybridity naturally presented in a text, as explained by Bakhtin, but also to a diversity of black issues that reduplicate sensations and share information. According to Simon Gikandi, a Kenyan literary scholar, this is a common trait of Afropolitanism, the African citizen of the world. For him to be African is "to be of Africa and of other worlds at the same time" (GIKANDI *apud* Murphy, 2016, p. 193).

Bakhtin's reference to this "boundary between one's own and someone else's consciousness" brings other terms to mind, such as "double-consciousness". Though it is a concept strongly associated with postcolonial theory, Cultural Studies and African-American studies, there is something that comes to play with Bakhtin's dialogical nature. It is as if it were an exaggerated, hyperactive state of dialogical consciousness. One in which a person is only able to see the world, and oneself, as if through the eyes of "the other". This sensation, though common to citizens of colonized countries and minorities, may also be experienced by the reader of Adichie's novel. The play between familiar and non-familiar situations lived by the characters in England and America aligned with the access to an unknown world, Nigeria, creates a strangeness that makes one experiment new sensations, "otherness".

The term "double consciousness" was first used by W.E.B. DuBois as "the state of having to see one self and one's history through the eyes of the empire" (DUBOIS *apud* EGBUNIKE, 2017, p.21). It is also the title of Paul Gilroy's book *The Black Atlantic: modernity and Double Consciousness*. Another completely different term, "vestigial thinking", coined by Ella Shohat and Robert Stam, also speaks of another type of doubleconsciousness left over from colonial times. Eurocentrism is an "ideological substratum common to colonialist, imperialist, and racist discourse. Eurocentrism is a form of vestigial thinking, which permeates and structures contemporary practices and representations, even after the formal end of colonialism" (SHOHAT; STAM, 1994, p.2).

[168] *Ibid,* p.429

Rose A. Sackeyfio speaks about this notion of double consciousness in Americanah. She postulates:

> Americanah is a masterfully crafted web of Nigerian immigrant experiences that spans Nigeria, the United States and United Kingdom. Adichie displays penetrating insight and multiple perspectives through the skillful use of point of view to convey the complexities and contradictions in the lives of new African diaspora subjects, marginalized by their difference […] In telling the immigrant story, Adichie has interwoven the diverse, lucid and carefully nuanced perceptions of race, class and gender dynamics, and relationships among African American and African immigrants. (SACKEYFIO, 2017, p.10-11)

Another key concept developed by the Bakhtin's circle is "Dialogism". This is the quality of utterances. For our purposes here, we will define utterances as speech acts that engage socially, understanding that "speech can exist in reality only in the form of concrete utterances of individual speaking people, speech subjects, and outside this form it cannot exist" (BAKHTIN, 1986, p.71). Thus, speech does not exist by itself, but only in relation to other speech acts and to others. As Bakhtin formulates, "only the mythical Adam, who approached a virginal and as yet verbally unqualified world with the first word, could really have escaped from start to finish this dialogic inter-orientation with the alien word that occurs in the object" (BAKHTIN, 1981, p.279).

As a result of the work done by all these stratifying forces in language, there are no "neutral" words and forms. There are no words and forms that can belong to "no one". Language has been completely taken over, shot through with intentions and accents. For any individual, language is not an abstract system of normative forms but rather a concrete heteroglot conception of the world.

> All words have the "taste" of a profession, a genre, a tendency, a party, a particular work, a particular person, a generation, an age group, the day and hour. Each word tastes of the context and contexts in which it has lived its socially charged life; all words and forms are populated by intentions. Contextual overtones, generic, tendentious, individualistic are inevitable in the word. (BAKHTIN, 1981, p. 293)

Chimamanda Adichie in *Americanah* presents this coexistence and conflict in various levels. An attempt to learn about Nigeria's history will help create the background for a better understanding of this. Nigeria was a colony of Britain until 1960. Today it still suffers the consequences of having been a colony for so many years (1885-1960). Discourse is made up of statements by which the world is interpreted and dominant groups use discourse to impose specific knowledges and values as truths onto other groups. Colonial discourse organizes social existence in its many forms of reproduction. As the British colonized Nigeria, many forms of enforcing the British ideals and values were created and many of them are confronted by Adichie in *Americanah.*

Analyzing the Foucauldian notion of discontinuity in discursive structures, Sara Mills explains that, once discursive formations are established, they are difficult to "shift or modify, although their contradictions are constantly confronted and exposed by the desires and will of individuals" (MILLS, 1995, p.75). Mills observes that "Foucault cannot admit that the actions of individuals fundamentally shape and modify discursive formations, despite their resisting institutional structures."[169]. Mills then comments on how pressing this notion is for postcolonial writers, for whom "discursive remnants of the colonial context are still in evidence." [170]Discourse, according to Mills, "tends to lumber on through time, being activated in circumstances where their use is anachronistic." [171] Here, she is alluding to the well-known power disputes that carry on many years after the colonial period has ended: imperialism and neocolonialism. Mills has a point as she argues that certain "discursive structures begin to decline or disappear only when they are challenged sufficiently by other discourses."

[172]One of these discourses is related to the imposition of writing and other inscriptive arts over the oral and the performative arts. As Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin explain, the colonizers arrived with their written tradition and immediately imposed their own forms of expression over the ones native to the land, which invariably would be the oral practice, "as well as over other kinds of signifying practices such as sculpture, painting, carving, weaving, ceramics - the whole body of material inscription beyond the written" (ASHCROFT; GRIFFITHS; TIFFIN, 2001, p.44). This is a classic example of privileging according to the three scholars. During colonial times in Nigeria, the Colonial Literature Bureau followed the policies of "indirect rule" of the British administration in West Africa that allowed Hausa, a Chadic language, as a language of expression, but other traditional religious forms were discouraged. "Short fictional narratives were actively promoted. This was seen as consistent with the colonial policy of 'modernization' which resulted in the supplanting of local cultural practices by imported European ones."[173] The novel was another European genre that was introduced dictating the adoption of this 'new' format over the local oral tradition.

Oral tradition may seem to Westerners as a "tribal form of expression" which does not help register (for it is not written) the past of a nation. Egbunike explains that the oral tradition is a "site for revision and ownership of the narrative" and continues:

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[169] *Ibid*
[170] *Ibid*, p. 75-76
[171] *Ibid*, p. 73
[172] *Ibid*, p. 75-76
[173] *Ibid*, p. 45

> Multiple narrative accounts in circulation created a sense of plurality to the history. In each rearticulation of the past, adjustments could be made, a word choices (sic) altered. History was not singular or immutable; the past was not fixed or perpetual, but instead subject to a constant reimagining that characterized the act of retelling "and also" negotiation of heterogeneous ideas was a composite feature in the dissemination, reception and modification of the oral story (EGBUNIKE, 2017, p.17).

British concepts of literature and history stood in direct opposition to Igbo's. European historians regarded it as what they interpreted as a corpus of ascertained facts. Differently from the European culture, the Igbo tradition of Nigeria recognized the "existence of more than one 'truth' and this anti-essentialist worldview encountered the rigidity of early twentieth century print culture, in which concepts of 'eternal truths' were rooted in the seeing permanence of the written text" (EGBUNIKE, 2017, p. 17-18). Nana Wilson-Tagoe concurs that the "contemporary African novel of history struggles against nineteenth-century European historicism with its view of history as objective and scientific, its separation of historical and fictional discourse and its unitary chronology for representing all histories" (*Ibid,* p.19).

Binarism is another concept that might be questioned under these lenses. Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, in their book *Postcolonial Studies: The Key Concepts*, explain the binary system. The authors posit that the binary systems are a problem since they "suppress ambiguous or interstitial spaces between the opposed categories" which results in eliminating "any overlapping region that may appear, say, between the categories man/woman, child/adult or friend/alien" (ASHCROFT; GRIFFITHS; TIFFIN, 2005, p.19). Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin also note how this affects contemporary post-structuralism and feminist theories. They state that the "violent hierarchy", such as man over woman man over woman, birth over death, white over black, "exists to confirm that dominance. This means that any activity or state that does not fit the binary opposition will become subject to repression or ritual." [174]

Further, Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin convey how this relates to colonialism. "Colonialism could only exist at all by postulating that there existed a binary opposition into which the world was divided."[175] The establishment of an empire depended on this hierarchical relationship "in which the colonized existed as the other of the colonizing culture. Thus the idea of the savage could occur only if there was a concept of the civilized to oppose

[174] *Ibid,* p.19
[175] *Ibid,* p.30

it" (ASHCROFT; GRIFFITHS; TIFFIN, 2005, p. 30). The same authors in *Key concepts in Postcolonial Studies* explain that this created a "geography of difference" and laid it out in a "metaphorical landscape", in a sort of map, "the fixity of power." [176]

The historian Hayden White has a critical point of view about the influence of history in creating these fixed representations. Interestingly, White is attentive to speech acts as analyzed by history. He starts by explaining how he perceives discourse: "historical discourse […] features a double representation: of the object of its interest and of the historian's thought about this object" (WHITE, 2000, p. 392). White explains that history cannot operate the "other functions which modern linguistics identifies as the different functions of the speech event."[177] Some of the functions he enumerates in his article are: "expressive (of author's values and interests); conative (of audiences' emotions, interests, prejudices); metalinguistic (seeking to clarify and justify its own terminology and explanatory procedures)" as well as "phatic (establishing communication channels with specific and possible audiences) and poetic (by which structure is transformed into sequence)."[178] While observing the relation between historiography and literatures, White states that, "specifically historical representation of specifically historical processes must take the form of a narrativization."[179] Earlier, White had already spoken about the shift in history as a "literary art" to that of a science when he claimed, "historiography took shape as a distinct scholarly discipline in the West in the nineteenth century against a background of a profound hostility to all forms of myth" (WHITE, *apud* AUER, 2012, p. 6). Thus, this was a period when it became conventional to identify truth as fact and to regard fiction as the opposite of truth. White concludes positing that "thus was born the dream of a historical discourse that would consist of nothing but factually accurate statements about a realm of events […] observable in principle" (WHITE, 1978, p. 123-4).

Carl Jung is associated with the study of stereotypes mentioned by Izabel Brandão, in the book *Intelectuais das Africas*. It is well known that Jung found inspiration in spiritual writings that made his lifework turn towards the studies of the interplay between East and West. He claimed that the rational thinking of the individual in Western culture makes beings live in a vacuum separated from his/her fellows. On the other hand, the East sees human beings as a part of a family and a group. For this reason, they live in a mystical interpretation

[176] *Ibid,* p.36
[177] *Ibid,* p.392
[178] *Ibid*
[179] *Ibid,* p.393

of each other. Brandão quotes Jung to affirm that stereotypes are created because we anticipate our understanding of others and thus create a type of shadow of the real. Brandão goes on to assert, "This shadow represents all that we have of negative that we project onto the other, our neighbor," thus, the other becomes our enemy. Jung explains that this is due to the human characteristic of intolerance with others. Brandão also writes about Adichie's novel and sees it as a possibility of constructing something more positive among people (BRANDÃO, 2018, p.347).

As an African academic, Adichie is acquainted with the critical and theoretical questions we have posed so far and the function of representation. She herself wrote an academic paper in 2010, *The Role of Literature in Modern Africa*, which states that:

> [W]e are a people conditioned by our history and by our place in the modern world to look toward 'somewhere else' for validation, to see ourselves as inhabitant of the periphery. I am not merely referring to political expressions like "Third World", but to the phenomenon of being outside the centre in ways more subtle than mere politics, in ways metaphysical and psychological. (ADICHIE *apud* EGBUNIKE, 2017, p.15)

Thus, we can interpret a novel about Nigerians and Nigeria as always bearing the mark of imperial power. In such a novel the imposition on the Nigerian people which reflected a representational scheme of thinking, under the guise of scientific and civilizational thought, is still integrated into today's Africa. *Americanah* also shows these marks of the imperial power of the past and the peripheral attitude of the present.

This is connected to Bakhtin's differentiation between dialogical and monological novels. In a dialogical novel, beyond the fact that characters carry out their particular points-of-view, they also interact with one another in such a way that there is not one ideology controlling the narrative. If *Americanah* were monological there would be an overbearing discourse. It would have been written with an ideological subtext trying to convince the reader of one perspective, the defense of one ideology. *Americanah's* value is exactly the opposite. As Jennifer Reese states, *Americanah* is "so smart about so many subjects that to call it a novel about being black in the 21st century doesn't even begin to convey its luxurious heft and scope."[180] Reese gives her readers other options: "it could be read as an exuberant comedy of manners about the foibles of Senegalese salon workers, pretentious African-American bohemians, Old Money Boston liberals, and artsy white lesbians who wear ugly thrift store dresses."[181]

[180] www.npr.org/2013/05/22/183997348/a-different-kind-of-immigrant-experience-in-americanah
[181] www.npr.org/2013/05/22/183997348/a-different-kind-of-immigrant-experience-in-americanah

In dialogical novels a "potential dialogue is embedded in them, one as yet unfolded, a concentrated dialogue of two voices, two world views, two languages" (BAKHTIN, 1981, p. 324-325). Bakhtin explains that it is in this rich soil of double-voicedness that the novel finds its energy:

> [I]ts dialogized ambiguity, not from individual dissonances, misunderstandings or contradictions however tragic, however firmly grounded in individual destinies, in the novel, this double-voicedness sinks its roots deep into a fundamental, sociolinguistic speech diversity and multi-languagedness (BAKHTIN, 1981, pp.325-326).

Adichie in *Americanah* presents diversity and multi-languages. She shows diversity playing one character against the other with their distinct and oppositional qualities. Ifemelu also has her own difficulty with adaptation in the U.S. with her Nigerian accent that is "British". At first, she tries hard to perfect her American accent only to be complimented for sounding so much like an "American" and making her reject the compliment. Ifemelu reflects on this being a type of betrayal and decides to return to the former accent that she learned at school, in Nigeria. In the novel, Obinze Maduewesi's mother is a university professor, intelligent and instructed but plainspoken. On the other hand, Ifemelu's father is a verbose man who always wanted to go to graduate school but had to work instead. He is pompous, uses big words, and admires everything that is British maybe to hide the shame of not obtaining higher education and his low self-esteem for having lost his job.

Bakhtin has been credited to recognize, more than others, the novel as a forever-new product (BAKHTIN, 1981, p. xxvii). When Bakhtin speaks of the "varied and opposing voices" of a novel, he states that the novel is not "a unitary, completely finished off, indubitably adequate language - it is represented precisely as a living mix of varied and opposing voices [raznorecivost]."[182] For the purpose of this dissertation, what is interesting to perceive is the choice of "genre" in helping tell the story of a great number of characters (mostly black) to a worldwide public, which allows Adichie to develop the multiplicity of voices essential for dialogism and double-voicedness to be heard in so many different lands.[183]

The multilingual dialogic nature of the novel is historically fertile ground for a Nigerian writer. Nigeria, under the British Empire, incorporated many symbols as part of their culture. Adichie herself mentions the importance of Christmas with snow, bagels, ginger beer, and apples with a certain frequency in her TED talks and interviews. For example, in her most

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[182] *Ibid*, p.xxviii

[183] https://www.amazon.com.br/Americanah-Chimamanda-Ngozi-Adichie/.../030745592

viewed Ted Talk, "The Danger of a Single Story"[184] Adichie speaks of the importance of this for her as a child: "I wrote exactly the kinds of stories I was reading: All my characters were white and blue-eyed, they played in the snow, they ate apples" [00.27 min.]. Later she says: "My characters also drank a lot of ginger beer, because the characters in the British books I read they drank ginger beer. Never mind that I had no idea what ginger beer was." [01:14 min.]. Adichie comes to a conclusion:

> What this demonstrates, I think, is how impressionable and vulnerable we are in the face of a story, particularly as children. Because all I had read were books in which characters were foreign, I had become convinced that books by their very nature had to have foreigners in them and had to be about things with which I could not personally identify.[185][1:32 min.].

Adichie credits Chinua Achebe and Camara Laya, Nigerian writers, for breaking this pattern and opening up the world for her. As she read their books, she says she went through a mental shift in her perception of literature. "I realized that people like me, girls with skin the color of chocolate, whose kinky hair could not form ponytails, could also exist in literature. I started to write about things I recognized" [2:15 min.]. Towards the end of her presentation, she says: "All of these stories make me who I am. But to insist on only these negative stories is to flatten my experience and to overlook the many other stories that formed me [12:57 min.]. "The consequence of the single story is this", Adichie adds, "it robs people of dignity. It makes our recognition of our equal humanity difficult. It emphasizes how we are different rather than how we are similar" [13:45 min.].

Adichie's contrasting of the familiar and unfamiliar can also be observed in the variety of geographical details presented in the novel. For Adichie's American and Nigerian readers, the novel presents geographical details about Princeton, Trenton hair salons, Lago's shopping malls and restaurants. The smells also present another layer of reality: Philadelphia's musty smell of history, New Haven smelling of neglect and Baltimore of brine, Brooklyn streets smelling of sun-warmed garbage, but Princeton smelling of nothing (ADICHIE, 2014, p.3). The rich descriptions of America and Nigeria, and a little of London, make readers feel less of a stranger. If they do not know these places, they feel like a tourist. Either way it is a trip between reality and fiction, fantasy and the real world, the familiar and the unfamiliar.. In a 2012 Commonwealth Lecture, "Connecting Cultures", Adiche partially explains that her joy in writing comes from her "spending a large amount of time in the

[184] www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda_adichie_the_danger_of_a_single_story/transcript
[185] www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda_adichie_the_danger_of_a_single_story/transcript

spaces between the imaginary and the concrete" [13:20 min.].[186] It is in the same lecture that Adichie comments on the importance of Englishness when she reaffirms that it has made her, in part, who she is.

Portraying the current possibilities for the contemporary Nigerian, with all its new appeals, without losing sight of the recent past as an English colony, Adichie's novel takes part in and expands the now widely applied postcolonial label. Thus, duality is again present in many aspects: Nigeria versus British Empire; colonial and postcolonial *versus* contemporary; British-Nigerian *versus* Nigerian. The colonization of Nigeria affected every aspect of life, especially since its independence is so recent, 1960, and following its independence, the country suffered a coup, a counter-coup and a civil war, Biafra. Adichie's generation has parents who lived as members of the British Empire.

This situation created a series of losses. Adiche comments on the effects of colonialism: "[It] cannot be limited to those things we can measure. The losses are more nuanced: the loss of language and stories; the loss of a way of being and way of thinking; the loss of dignity and the loss that comes when succeeding generations inherit those losses"[187].

It is under this light that we should listen to Adichie's TED talk:

> Stories matter. Many stories matter. Stories have been used to dispossess and to malign, but stories can also be used to empower and to humanize. Stories can break the dignity of a people, but stories can also repair that broken dignity. [17:36 min.][188]

In her multistoried tale of love and loss, Adichie's novel brings the American black, African Black and White American into dialogue. In this "living mix", as Bakhtin states, many aspects come together: familiar and unfamiliar, fiction and reality, English and Igbo, text and subtext. Through her characters Adiche presents varied points-of-view, escaping from the dangers of a single story, and, thus, there is fertile ground for another aspect: irony.

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[186] https://commonwealthfoundation.com/resource/commonwealth-lecture-2012-2/

[187] https://commonwealthfoundation.com/resource/commonwealth-lecture-2012-2/

[188] https://www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda_adichie_the_danger_of_a_single_story/transcript

3 THE SCENE OF IRONY IN *AMERICANAH*

An incident occurred during *La Nuit des Idée,* a cultural event promoted by the Institut Français, early in 2018. Adichie had been invited by France's Foreign Ministry to appear as a guest of honor in their annual festival. During the ceremony, Adichie was interviewed by the French journalist Caroline Broué and was asked if there were bookshops in Nigeria. There was a strong reaction from the public in the audience and an elegant, but firm, response from the interviewee. Adichie said: "you know I think it reflects very poorly on French people that you've had to ask me that question. I think surely…I mean it's 2018."[189] Adichie, in her response, also stated that her books were read in Nigeria and studied in schools, not just in Nigeria, but also across Africa.

Broué's question caused enormous repercussion and generated many headlines in newspapers, websites, tweets and posts on Facebook. Taken out of context, it is difficult to understand what Broué's intention was. Alison Flood's article in *The Guardian* expands on this and shares Adichie's reflection: "It was about giving legitimacy to a deliberate, entitled, tiresome, sweeping, base ignorance about Africa. And I do not have the patience for that."[90] Adichie herself spoke about the incident on her Facebook page, stating: "I do not expect a French person to know almost everything about Nigeria. I don't know almost everything about France", and she continues "But to be asked to 'tell French people that you have bookshops in Nigeria because they don't know' is to cater to a willfully retrograde idea – that Africa is so apart, so pathologically 'different', that a non-African cannot make reasonable assumptions about life there."[190]

Later, Adichie makes another post on Facebook with a plea that the French journalist "not be publicly pilloried" for her question. Adichie had come to the conclusion that Broué "was trying to be ironic", to enlighten by "impersonating the ignorant"[191]. The fact that Broué had not exhibited any irony until that point in the interview, and that there were no typical markers of irony, made it impossible for Adichie (and the audience) to recognize the irony introduced by the question. One comment on Facebook stated the possibility of Broué's lack of fluency in English as the reason for her not being able to express herself adequately. I

[189] https://edition.cnn.com/2018/01/26/africa/chimamanda-adichie-clapback-nigeria/index.html
[190] www.theguardian.com/books/2018/jan/30/interviewer-asks-chimamanda-ngozi-adichie-are-there-bookshopsin-nigeria
[191] www.bbc.com/news/blogs-trending-42859282

believe something else may have helped the miscommunication. Adichie frequently is humorous in her public presentations. This can also be observed in her writing style. This may have inspired the journalist, in a similar way, to try to make the meeting light and witty.

This proves that irony has a cutting edge. It is important to note irony's social and political aspects that question, legitimize and undercut interests insinuated in discourse. Irony occurs in a space between expression and understanding, since it involves the author and reader, both responsible for irony's production. As Linda Hutcheon would say in *Irony's Edge* (2003), irony has a critical sharpness due to its semantic complexity and contextual parameters. There are many things to consider when we choose to use irony. Whom are we talking to? Will our audience grasp our intent? Are there markers, which we could use, that would make it easier to signal what is being said as ironic? Does the reader/audience need more information to be on common grounds in order to understand the statement being uttered as ironic?

Broué's full follow-up question to Adichie was,

> When you talk about Nigeria in France, unfortunately there is not much said about Nigeria, but when people talk about Nigeria it's about Boko Haram, it's about violence, it's about security (…) I should like you to tell us something about Nigeria which is different, talk about it differently, and that is why I'm saying are there bookshops? Of course I imagine there are.[192]

Reading Broué, can one perceive that she was setting the stage for Adichie to speak of Nigeria? Broué prepared the way for Adichie to speak, to her audience, about "something different." Would the context, Adichie being the guest of honor, out rule the possibility that Broué was being hostile and make the receptor of the discourse look for another way to interpret this passage? Was Broué's lack of fluency in English responsible for her expressing herself badly and being misinterpreted as rude or ignorant?

This part of the interview received much attention from the press, but another part of the same interview, just as polemic, received very little coverage. It is in this interview that, upon being asked what she thought of postcolonial theory, Adichie formulated the following answer: "Postcolonial theory? I don't know what it means. I think it is something that professors made up because they needed to get jobs."[193]

Shailja Patel, a Kenyan poet, playwright, and political activist, commented on this in the African Literature website brittlepaper.com, part of *The Guardian Books Network*. She acknowledges Adichie's talent, "Chimamanda the novelist is a genius. Her accomplishments

[192] www.theguardian.com/books/2018/jan/30/interviewer-asks-chimamanda-ngozi-adichie-are-there-bookshopsin-nigeria

[193] www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/chimamanda-adichie-burden-representation-180204094739657.html

are stellar, her fame merited", but is critical of Adichie's remark about postcolonial theory. She says that "the recognition and rewarding of her gifts wasn't a happy accident. The labours and struggles of many scholars, past and present, carved out the spaces where her voice could land."[194]

Grace A. Musila, a professor at Stellenbosch University, South Africa, wrote a more complete coverage of the incident for *Aljazeera*. She claims that "perhaps both Adichie and Broué were being humorous. But humour is rarely innocent. Humour is to aggression what a half-slip is to a transparent skirt. It lends aggression decorum."[195] Musila, in her article, interprets Adichie's quip about postcolonial theory as revealing her low regard for academics.

In my research, I have found Adichie's writing labeled in differing ways. Amazon, in the "Amazon Author Rank", rates it as "literary" and "historical".[196] Others posit that *Americanah* is an "epic love story" (*The Oprah Magazine*) and "intergenerational epic" (Dave Eggers). As we have already stated, other scholars indicate Adichie is a representative of Afropolitanism. Still, others believe she is a member of Nigeria's third generation of writers. And of course, many scholars see Adichie's novels as works of Postcolonialism, too. Regardless of the label one wishes to associate with Adichie's writing, it is interesting to observe how Adichie's narrative allows the literary to precede the theoretical. Above all, the narrative is a work of literature that stands above any theory applied to it. The novel is a sample of art. Thus, Adichie's remark about the existence of one more school of theory, Postcolonialism, seems to indicate that nothing exceeds the grandeur of the accomplishment of imagination in process: art. Moreover, and very interestingly, there is a clear positioning of "professors" as parts of the capitalist machinery that regulates contemporary academia: they "needed to get jobs", to get tenured, and thus to occupy the space of high-profile 'theorists'. After all, postcolonial theory is produced within Anglophone Eurocentric universities and they have standardized a mode of seeing the former colonies of the very places from which they write. Therefore, Chimamanda Adichie's irony here is doubly refusing the literary and the human to be framed by exterior values, which opens her work to the many possibilities of an ever-differing future.

Hence, we can understand that there are many reasons for Adichie's reluctance in being labeled as a writer that practices a certain 'theory'. Kwame Anthony Appiah,

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[194] https://brittlepaper.com/2018/02/shailja-patel-molara-wood-reply-chimamanda-adichies-commentspostcolonial-theory/

[195] www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/chimamanda-adichie-burden-representation-180204094739657.html

[196] www.amazon.com/Americanah-Chimamanda-Ngozi-Adichie/dp/0307455920

Britishborn Ghanaian-American philosopher, cultural theorist and novelist, has described Postcolonialism as “the condition of what we might ungenerously call a comprador intelligentsia: of a relatively small (…) group of writers and thinkers who mediate the trade in cultural commodities of world capitalism at the periphery” (APPIAH, 1992, p.149). His criticism is that the term is “organized by and around a global class that shares the fairly homogenous…intellectual formation of the…university-educated” (MARX, J., 2004, p. 92). He states that the stamp of postcolonial is rendered by elite institutions and for this reason creates a relation between the universities in London, New York and Nairobi and thus becomes a sign of complicity and part of an academic culture. Though John Marx alerts that postcolonial literature has been isolated in academia, he does not negate its widespread effects (MARX, J., 2004, p.92).

Moreover, there is always a risk when searching for a label, or category, even though it is useful in trying to understand the different characteristics of a text. One must keep in mind that fiction is the site of fluid borders. Appiah calls attention to the necessity of us perceiving the difficulty in understanding forms of aesthetic expression that fuse and diffuse language, genres and cultures. “What is necessary to read novels across gaps of space, time, and experience is the capacity to follow a narrative and conjure a world” (APPIAH, 2016, p.224). Bala Venkat Mani, a German professor at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, U.S., alerts that the nation’s aesthetic modes of expression are in dialogue with the modes of representation of other nations. Mani claims that “artistic production perpetually questions, challenges, indeed resists nation-states’ attempts to control and to delineate the indigenous and the foreign” (MANI, 2007, p.181*)*. In other words, the forms of art of one nation are in dialogue with the aesthetic modes of expression of other nations creating a cosmopolitan literariness, the existence of global literature.

Returning to Mikhail Bakhtin’s theories, one sees that Bakhtin believed the most ethical form of narration to be the double-voiced discourse, as we have established. In this kind of discourse there are two or more ideological positions shared without any of them being in control. A double-voiced discourse (or dialogical discourse) presents a number of concrete specifics in such a way that the reader is unable to come to any single conclusion without considering other cohesive positions as possible. This is due to the fact that the text presents several points of view with equal emphasis.

Dialogical discourse forces the reader to work harder, since there is always the need of the reader to adopt a perspective, even if only momentarily. The interpreter of the discourse must respond to each situation that is encountered by making choices, many of them ethical.

Thus, in a text where the multiplicity of points of view are constant, readers exercise this process of having to relate to various opposing points and having to make choices for themselves. This occurs because the authorial position of the text is not doing this for them, the readers. Considering that the novel is the chosen genre, the sheer length of the text will permit that the reader to assemble much information in his or her quest. The reader will be exposed to a variety of particularities, contrasting values and individual perspectives in which there is a sense of plurality and not a dominant, didactic voice. In other words, instead of a totalizing discourse, the novel creates scenes of meanings, and this is a fertile ground for irony. The novel as form is congenial with writers who wish to expose an open-ended string of fragments. This is the scene of irony. This scene, namely the search for a medium that is able to work this open-ended string of fragments, is introduced by Bakhtin as conducive to an artistic prose model that is ironically interpolated by different speeches ("Epic and Novel", 1941)

Bakhtin (1941) believes that this artistic prose model stems from Socratic dialogues. However, Claire Colebrook, an Australian cultural theorist and also professor at Pennsylvania State University, warns us that seeing Socrates as the origin of irony is problematic due to the fact that "the awareness of Socrates and Socratic irony was virtually absent from medieval and Renaissance works on irony and rhetoric" (COLEBROOK, 2004, p.7). In any case, she affirms that Plato's Socratic dialogues employ "irony" both as a complex figure of speech and as a means for the creation of an enigmatic personality.[197] She explains that, until the Renaissance, irony was considered part of rhetoric and listed as a type of allegory. In the Middle Ages, rhetoric was used, basically, for religious sermons and writing. Thus, irony was still seen only as a way of effective speaking.

Though Socratic irony was habitual, due to the fact that it was used as a form of argument, it did not play a fundamental role in defining literature at that time, nor literary awareness.[198] It was only in the nineteenth century that Socratic irony was interpreted in a different way as to refer to the "capacity to remain distant and different from what is said in general."[199]. It is with Friedrich Schlegel that irony is associated with reflection and an artistic meta-reflection: the attitude that creates, in a work of art, one's own existence, a philosophical reflection. It is with Schlegel that Socrates is incorporated, reinterpreted and placed inside a

[197] *Ibid*, p.6
[198] *Ibid*, p.8
[199] *Ibid*

romantic framework where he is to be associated with philosophical reflection in questioning the limits of art (MEDEIROS, 2014, n.p.).

While irony marks the works of many Jena Romantics, Schlegel was the one who formulated an idea of irony as the expression of paradoxical viewpoints. In his words, "irony is the form of paradox. Paradox is everything simultaneously good and great"' (SCHLEGEL *apud* COLEBROOK, 2004, p.53-54). Under the understanding that paradoxical coexistence was a mark of true art, the Romantics turned to Socrates and Shakespeare in order to learn how to disappear behind their characters, positions and masks (COLEBROOK, 2004, p. 73). Shakespeare, the most exemplary of such a form of irony, epitomized the absent author for the German Romantics.

Constantino Luz de Medeiros is of the opinion that there is a misinterpretation in relation to Romantic Irony, which was believed to be attributed to the artist's sole purpose of exposing his subjectivity. He believes that Hegel's critique of Schlegel produces this incorrect concept creating the idea of superiority as if this mystical truth were unobtainable (MEDEIROS, 2014, n.p.). After all, as Bernadette Meyler explains, the greatest question in relation to irony has always been "how strongly irony must be linked to personal intention and the necessity for speech to supply its source" (MEYLER, 1997, p.107).

My interest is precisely in this aspect of irony. For the purpose of my dissertation what is of more importance is to understand how irony benefits the molding of individual subjectivities. Roby McCallum, like Bakhtin, feels that "an individual's subjectivity is formed through the selective appropriation and assimilation of the discourse of others" (MCCALLUM, *adpud*. CADDEN, 2000, p.147). For McCallum, dialogic texts represent voices as equal. Although, as Sir Edmund Chambers alerts, "there is room for many kinds and degrees of misunderstanding, misfire, and fizzle, as well as of understanding and complicity" (CHAMBERS, *adpud*., HUTCHEON, 1995, p. 14).

Returning to Bakhtin and dialogical discourse, we start from the notion that "everything must be reflected in everything else, all things must illuminate one another dialogically" (BAKHTIN, *apud* MUMFORD, 1989, p. 22). We observe that key Bakhtinian concepts like "heteroglossia", "double-discourse", "polyphony" and "dialogism" all speak of ambivalence and thus remind us of irony in some form, and in his "Notes Made in 1970-71", one of his final texts, Bakhtin refers to the issue repeatedly.

Meyler claims that Paul de Man demonstrates the limitation of Bakhtin's social conception of dialogism, and alerts to the dangers of reducing this concept to a metalinguistic structure that would limit the concept purely to a relation of language to society and culture.

Another limitation appointed by De Man is the concept of "outsideness" of authors in relation to the voices of characters produced by them (exotopy) which he understands to be the recognition of a hermeneutic dialogue. Conciliating De Man and Bakhtin, Meyler states that the "only effective political reading of Bakhtin can be achieved through eliminating the customary sense of the social in the term dialogism, and additionally extracting the form from the entire realm of the personal" (MEYLER, 1997, p.106). In her opinion, what Bakhtin adds to the concept of irony is the idea of lack of one authority in a dialogic text and the idea of an initial individual intention on the part of the author being responsible for all the possibilities of interpretation.

In other words, irony presents a complex interpretational act on the part of the reader, since one needs to consider semantic and evaluative dimensions, as well as make judgment about the writer's not necessarily available intent. Irony happens as part of a communication process. As Linda Hutcheon formulates, it is "not a static rhetorical tool to be deployed, but itself comes into being in the relations between meanings, but also between people and utterances and, sometimes, between meanings, but also between intentions and interpretations" (HUTCHEON, 1995, p.13). Hutcheon expands on this, with some reservation, by saying that "irony is the intentional transmission of both information and evaluative attitude other than what is explicitly presented."[200]

Hutcheon's interest in irony is for its political aspect. She relates irony to power and communication. In her own words, irony "unavoidably involves touchy issues such as exclusion and inclusion, intervention and evasion" and she complements that she is not interested in Socratic irony or romantic irony, nor on the "epistemological, ethical or experiential paradox of appearance versus reality."[201] These aspects Hutcheon relates to the works of Kierkegaard, Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, Marx, Deconstructive Aesthetics as well as American New Criticism. Hutcheon is interested in irony's relation to discursive communities and in the role of intention and attribution of meaning that makes irony possible. Since her focus is primarily on the use of irony in discourse, her main concern is this "scene" of irony – the encounter between different actors in a given discursive community.

As she affirms, irony is "a social and political scene" that is related (like in Bakhtin) to discursive communities, contextual framing and markers (HUTCHEON, 1995, p.4). Thus, Linda Hutcheon named her book *Irony's Edge*, an appropriate title for a book that has the

[200] *Ibid*, p.11
[201] *Ibid*, p.2

intention of elaborating on the tricky and unpredictable social and political space of irony in discourse that needs to be interpreted to be understood.

Hutcheon warns us that "not very many of these ironies are particularly 'funny' ones which is one of the misconceptions that theorists of irony always have to contend with." [202]Irony and humor are different. Her interest is in the mode of the "unsaid, the unheard, the unseen." [203] In other words, irony is found in what is not said. It is insinuated, but is not written out explicitly and needs to be understood in the subtext.

Irony has certainly been called the "child of Janus, god of beginnings, and without doubt the most ill-behaved of all literary tropes" (HUTCHEON, 1995, p.9). Hutcheon claims that this is the century of irony, in the footsteps of Jacques Derrida and Kenneth Burk. Hutcheon observes various types of irony, such as situational irony (irony of fate, cosmic irony, etc.). She notes structural ironies can make people take sides depending on whose interest is at stake.[204]. Thus, Hutcheon affirms that irony has often been used much more to reinforce established attitudes and much less to subvert the *status quo*, which makes the term "transideological" surface in Hutcheon's book. Therefore, irony functions in the service of a wide range of political positions, and surprisingly, it legitimizes much more often than it criticizes.

Hutcheon also calls attention to irony's indirection that complicates matters since there are questions about who the participants in the social scene are: the intending 'ironist'; intended audiences; the one that gets it and the one that does not get the irony. However, not only this, there are also the ironies which are "intended but which remain unperceived and there are those unintended but that are interpreted as such."[205] And in fiction irony, irony is still more unstable.

Colebrook states that "greater stress has been placed on irony that is undecidable and on modes of irony that challenge just how shared, common and stable our conventions and assumptions are" (COLEBROOK, 2004, p.18). And, pursuing this understanding, she quotes Hardwerk in order to affirm that irony can be read as a different ethical stance when it "prompts us to look at the communal nature of language" (HANDWERK *apud* COLEBROOK, 2004, p.20).

Bearing these concepts in mind, I will now return to *Americanah,* in order to see how Adichie enacts the scene of irony in her novel. As we established with Bakhtin, Adichie's

[202]*Ibid*, p.4
[203] *Ibid*, p.9
[204] *Ibid*
[205] *Ibid*, p.11

novel creates space for various readings to co-exist. It is this dialogical multiplicity that permits various readings to co-exist.

Let us take a closer look at the narrator of *Americanah*. The narrator, like the novel, is very ambivalent and ironic. Though it could be considered a third person narrator, due to the fact that it does not take part in the story, it is very opinionated about most things. As Valentina Scarsini affirms,

> narrative structure is quite complex since it is based on numerous analepses, shifting of settings and focalizations: by adopting a third person narrating voice, Adichie namely manages to easily shift from one point of view to another, offering thus more than one distinct perspective and giving voice both to female and male characters in the different cultural and social *scenario*s by them experienced.(SCARSINI, 2017, p.9)

Let us return to the opening scene of *Americanah:*

> Princeton, in the summer, smelled of nothing, and although Ifemelu liked the tranquil greenness of the many trees, the clean streets and stately homes, the delicately overpriced shops, and the quiet, abiding air of earned grace, it was this, the lack of a smell, that most appealed to her, perhaps because the other American cities she knew well had all smelled distinctly. Philadelphia had the musty scent of history. New Haven smelled of neglect. Baltimore smelled of brine, and Brooklyn of sun-warmed garbage. But Princeton had no smell (ADICHIE, 2014, p. 3)

How can Adichie's choice of making Ifemelu, the main character in the novel, study at Princeton be interpreted in this contest? I would risk saying that all American readers of Adichie's novel know that Princeton is one of the Ivy League universities of the United States. Actually, Princeton and Harvard are the top two U.S. Ivy schools in the QS World University Rankings[206] of 2018, ahead of Yale and other Ivy League institutions. Princeton ranks within the overall top 15 universities globally.

Researching about Princeton, I found that W. E. B. DuBois was a staff member. He was quoted at the 10th anniversary conference of the Association of Black Princeton Alumni in 1977 as saying, "We have never had any colored students here, though there is nothing in the University statutes to prevent their admission." He continues and concludes: "It is possible, however, in our proximity to the South and the large number of Southern students here, that Negro students would find Princeton less comfortable than some other institutions". [207]

The Princeton admission's page indicates that the number of African-American Students is currently at 8 percent.

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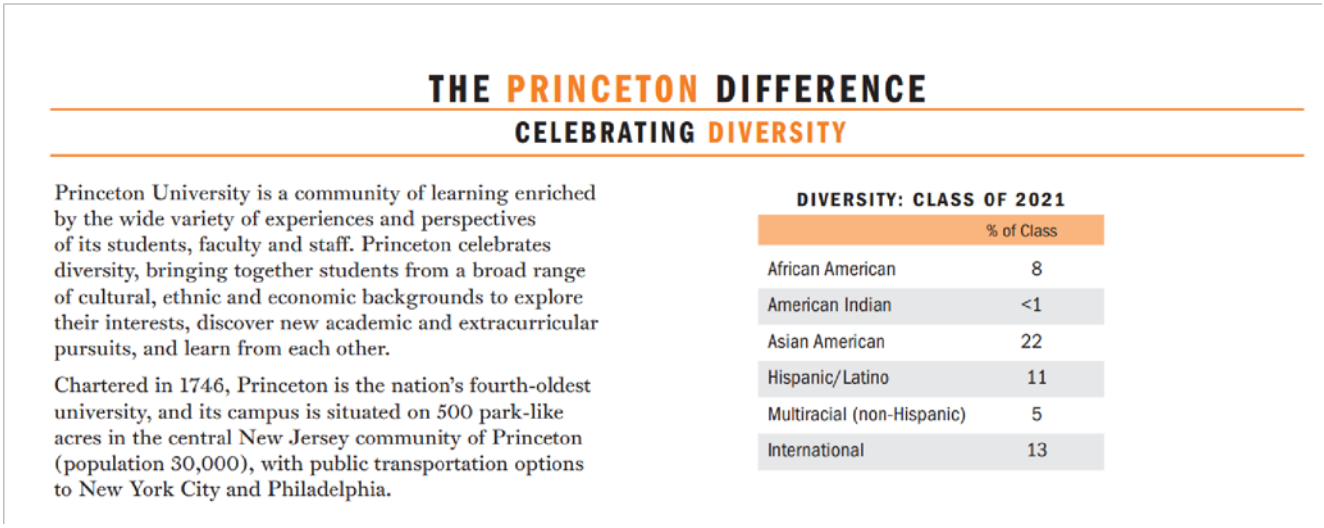
[206] www.topuniversities.com/student-info/choosing-university/top-ivy-league-schools-princeton-vs-harvard

[207] https://libguides.princeton.edu/c.php?g=84056&p=544526

Illustration 1 - Data about Diversity at Princeton amongst Students from the Class of 2021



THE PRINCETON DIFFERENCE

CELEBRATING DIVERSITY

Princeton University is a community of learning enriched by the wide variety of experiences and perspectives of its students, faculty and staff. Princeton celebrates diversity, bringing together students from a broad range of cultural, ethnic and economic backgrounds to explore their interests, discover new academic and extracurricular pursuits, and learn from each other.

Chartered in 1746, Princeton is the nation's fourth-oldest university, and its campus is situated on 500 park-like acres in the central New Jersey community of Princeton (population 30,000), with public transportation options to New York City and Philadelphia.

DIVERSITY: CLASS OF 2021

	% of Class
African American	8
American Indian	<1
Asian American	22
Hispanic/Latino	11
Multiracial (non-Hispanic)	5
International	13

Source:https://admission.princeton.edu/sites/default/files/Princeton%20Admission%20Guidance%20Counselors%20Pro file%2017-18.pdf

To have a better idea and a comparison, I chose another college in the Midwest, University of Kansas. I chose this university because it is not in the Ivy League and because it is a State University. And also, since KU is my alma mater, I could investigate the numbers with former BA classmates.

Illustration 2- Undergraduate Ethnic Diversity Breakdown at the University of Kansas

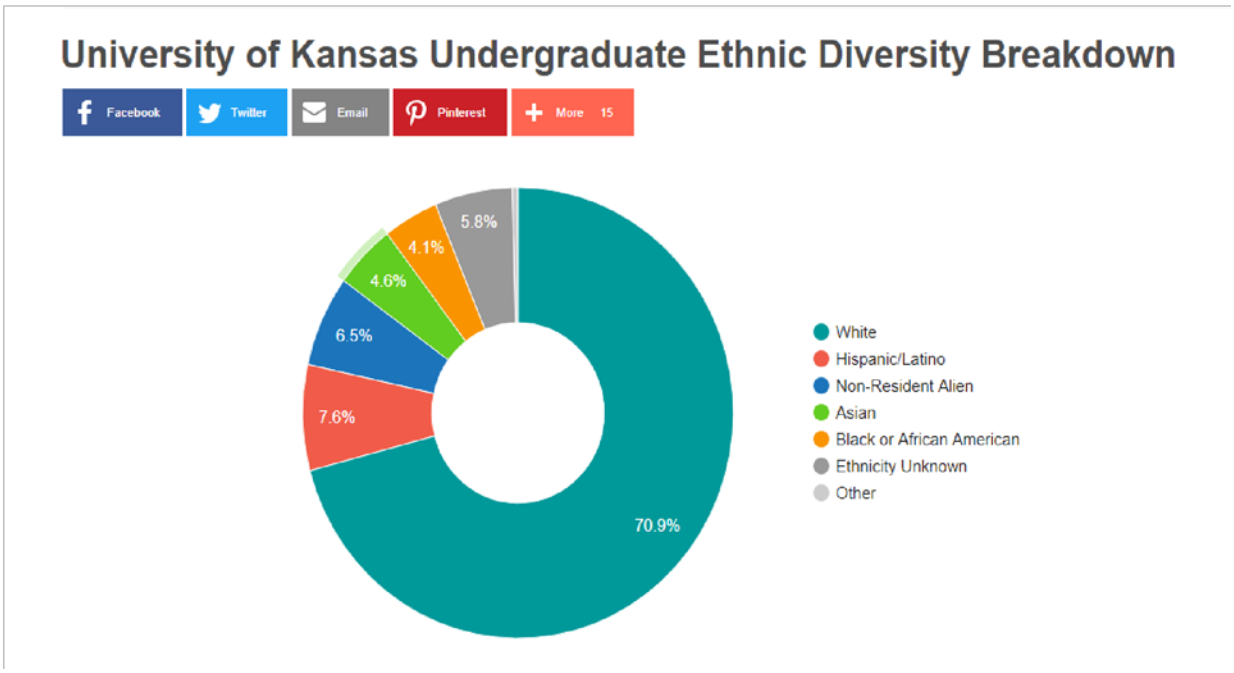
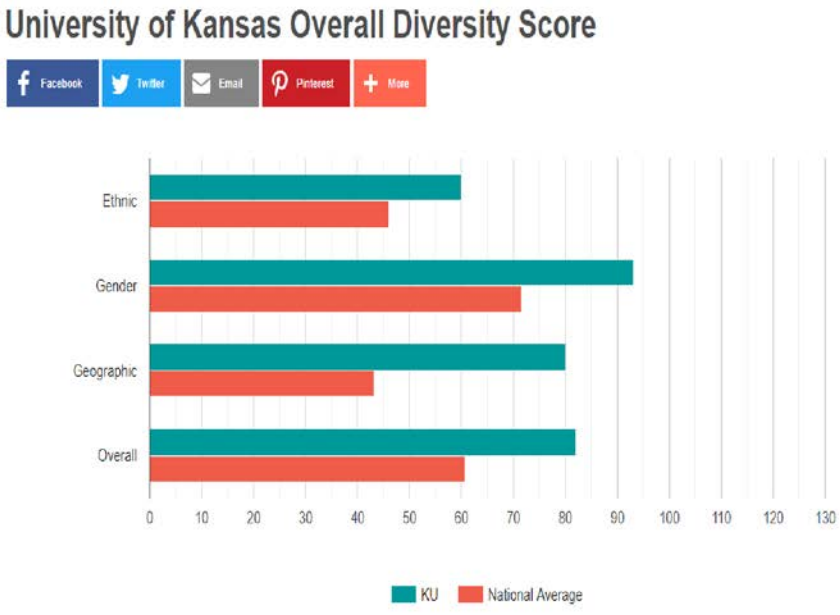


Illustration 3 - University of Kansas Diversity Data



Diversity Measure	KU	National Average
Ethnic Diversity	60	45.94
Gender Diversity	93	71.52
Geographic Diversity	80	43.10
Overall Diversity	82	60.66

Source for illustrations 2 & 3: www.collegefactual.com/colleges/university-of-kansas/student-life/diversity/

A difficulty is posed in the comparison of the universities since data for both schools have different categories for blacks and Afro-Americans, and also Hispanics and Latins, on top of other categories such as Multiracial (non-Hispanic) and International, Non-resident Aliens and Ethnicity unknown. Therefore, it seems that both universities, Princeton and University of Kansas, have less blacks enrolled than the corresponding estimated 12.3% percent of the population.[208] To understand American reality, I researched if there were universities that could be considered enclaves of African American, and there are. Historically Black colleges and universities appear in the chart below:

[208] https://news.gallup.com/poll/4435/public-overestimates-us-black-hispanic-populations.aspx

Illustration 4 - Racial Diversity at historically black colleges and universities (HBCU)

Racial Diversity at HBCUs today[24] School year 2016-2017

College name	State	Percentage	
		African American	non-African American
Bluefield State College[25]	West Virginia	8.41	91.59
West Virginia State University[26]	West Virginia	7.58	92.42
Kentucky State University[27]	Kentucky	46.3	53.7
Delaware State University[28]	Delaware	64.17	35.83
Lincoln University (Pennsylvania)[29]	Pennsylvania	83.89	16.11
University of the District of Columbia[30]	District of Columbia	59	41
Elizabeth City State University[31]	North Carolina	75.86	24.14
Fayetteville State University[32]	North Carolina	60	40
Winston Salem State University[33]	North Carolina	70.76	29.24
Xavier University of Louisiana[34]	Louisiana	69.94	30.06
North Carolina A&T State University[35]	North Carolina	80	20

Source: en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Historically_black_colleges_and_universities

My objective is not to determine how the opening passage of *Americanah* should or should not be interpreted. Rather, my intention is to conduct a survey in order to investigate the material reality of different ethnicities, nationalities, and other communities in relation to

Ifemelu's reality, namely a Nigerian black woman in an Ivy League University. In this sense, I wish to illustrate that, as Linda Hutcheon has stated in relation to the scene of irony, different discursive communities will have different interpretations of the novel because they will relate to novel with different personal and cultural experiences.

I asked two American friends if Princeton had a reputation in relation to race issues.

Leslie Seiger, professor at San Diego Mesa College, answered:

> Off the top of my head: Princeton, like all the Ivies and a few others, is elite. Harvard and Yale seem to have a bit more prestige, but maybe more among the general public. My guess is that all the ivies try to have some representation of underrepresented students and offer scholarships to support that. So, I would not find it odd that a black person would be at Princeton, but it would be rare. Blacks make up about 13% of the population in the US, but more are poor so I'd say 8% is pretty good.

I asked another friend, Carla Zubiate, a teacher at Dyer Street Elementary, if she associated Princeton with being a university that has a reputation for being more difficult for Afro-Americans to attend. This is what she told me, "Not that I know of. It is known to be the most culturally southern of the Ivy League due to its having a large southern student body pre Civil War. I'm not sure what it's like today. I haven't heard anything specifically directed at Princeton."

Obviously, a Brazilian, Nigerian, Swedish, French, Italian, Russian reader may know that Princeton is an elite university, but the chances are fewer. Therefore, a reader from any of the 36 countries in which the book was published may not associate the fact that Ifemelu went to Princeton with any other information other than the fact that it is a university, or even a prestigious university.

Analyzing the novel and considering the reception in different discursive communities, one can think of the Nigerians being represented as top academics in *Americanah*. Is the story told about a Nigerian receiving a scholarship to study at Princeton, in this case Ifemelu, something that Nigerian readers will identify with because it is very common? Or is this a way to subvert stereotypical representations of Nigerians? Will American readers be surprised to hear that so many Nigerian students are top scholars? How does this affect the representation of Africans in relation to Afro-Americans? In any case, the fact that Ifimelu's mere existence in that campus is edged by so many socio-political signifying possibilities shows that Adichie opens the novel by enacting the scene of irony.

The 2016 Open Doors Report on International Educational Exchange put out by the Nigerian embassy and consulate in the United States indicates that, during the 2015-2016 school year, there were 10,674 Nigerians studying in the United States. This makes of Nigeria the country in Africa with the biggest number of students in the U.S. Overall, in the United States, Nigerians are the 14th nationality to contribute as a source of international students. [209]

Now, suppose you do know that Princeton is an elite university, how would you interpret the fact that for Ifemelu Princeton smelled of nothing? The first paragraph of the novel ends:

> She liked the campus, grave with knowledge, the Gothic buildings with their vine-laced walls, and the way everything transformed, in the half-light of night, into a ghostly scene. She liked, most of all, that in this place of affluent ease, she could pretend to be someone else, someone specially admitted into a hallowed American club, someone adorned with certainty (ADICHIE, 2014, p.3).

[209] https://ng.usembassy.gov/nigerian-students-u-s-12-4-10674/

Princeton, according to the narrator, was perceived as a place of “affluent ease” which made the main character feel “adorned with certainty.” I had never before read a novel which started the story placing the main character, a black woman, feeling adorned with certainty that all was well and would always be well.

Chimamanda Adichie herself attended Princeton University. Obviously the writer may have chosen Princeton since she is more familiar with this campus and town. The reader starts getting used to the idea that the novel is set in Princeton, but the narrator tells us Ifemelu needs to go to Trenton, a nearby poorer town known for having a large black population. Suddenly Princeton is not enough. Ifemelu needs to leave her “affluent ease” to look for an African hair-braiding salon in another town. Therefore, in the very first pages of the novel, the reader perceives that Ifemelu is not only Princeton, but also Lagos, in Nigeria, and in the meantime, also, Trenton.

Linda Hutcheon states that irony is "not necessarily [constituted] only by an *either/or* substitution of opposites but by *both* the said *and* the unsaid working together to create something new” (HUTCHEON, 1995, p. 63, emphasis in the original). One could say then, that Ifemelu ironically represents the American way of life she observes and the Nigerian affiliations and tries to reconstruct her Nigeria by visiting Trenton until the end of the novel, when she definitely no longer needs the hair braiding at Trenton and returns to her homeland, Nigeria. When she returns to Nigeria, Ifemelu will take America along with her. Ifemelu is a hybrid citizen of the world, a modern Afropolitan that shares bits and pieces of all the places she has been to. As Fanon wrote, “the black man [sic] who has lived in France for a length of time returns radically changed. To express it in genetic terms, his phenotype undergoes a definitive, an absolute mutation” (FANON, 1986, p.18).

Nevertheless, this is not said in the novel. Nowhere in the novel is there an existential crisis, a longing for Nigeria. There is a longing to be with Obinze, but that is part of a love story that never ended and not a cry of a migrant longing for home. Therefore, I risk saying that Adichie consciously feels that not all needs to be said. As Hutcheon posits, “the semantic ‘solution’ of irony would then hold in suspension the said plus something *other than* and *in addition to* it that remained unsaid” (Hutcheon, 1995, p. 63*)*. Creating, thus, “an **inclusive** pleasure of irony similar to that claimed for jokes and puns (GREIMAS 1986, p 71 *apud* HUTCHEON, 1995, p.63).

Equating Princeton to elite and Trenton to poverty is simplistic, stereotypical, and needs to be analyzed – not because stereotypes “are untrue”, as we learned with Adichie, but

because they are "incomplete".[210] Steven M. Richman, in his book *Reconsidering Trenton: the small city in the Post-Industrial Age,* states that "there is with all stereotypes, a kernel of truth" (RICHMAN, 2011, p. 185). In his book he explains that Trenton is associated with "a history of anti-intellectualism as part of the American narrative that goes hand-in-glove with a distrust, if not hostility, to the city" (RICHMAN, 2011, p.185). Richman makes an analysis that Trenton, like many other cities, "have not succeeded in reinventing themselves or otherwise adapting to the post-industrial, post-World War II world" *(Ibid*). For many people, "Trenton, Newark and Camden embody not only negative images of New Jersey, but also the worst of urban decay" (*Ibid*, p. 8). The Census Bureau reports in the 2000 census that Trenton has a population 32.5 percent white and 52.1 percent black *(Ibid*, p. 28). Trenton, in *Americanah,* is connected to this historical dimension of the city:

> But she did not like that she had to go to Trenton to braid her hair. It was unreasonable to expect a braiding salon in Princeton—the few black locals she had seen were so light-skinned and lank-haired she could not imagine them wearing braids—and yet as she waited at Princeton Junction station for the train, on an afternoon ablaze with heat, she wondered why there *was* no place where she could braid her hair (ADICHIE, 2014, p.3, emphasis in the original).

In the very first pages of the novel, by describing Princeton and alluding to Trenton as an escape, which is at the same time a return to some form of Africa, Adichie installs the subversive ironies that will mark the novel. In the first paragraph, she speaks of the American dream, the privileged story of someone living in a prestigious campus. In the following paragraph, the reader is told that something was missing from the clean, septic Princeton that smelled of nothing. Questions that may come to mind, as the reader notices that Princeton does not suffice is: What is missing? Why does Ifemelu need to go to Trenton? Why isn't there an African hair-braiding salon in Princeton? Aren't there enough blacks who want their hair braided in Princeton? Are the blacks that live in Princeton the type that do not braid their hair? Why is Ifemelu living in a town where there are no African hair-braiding salons?

Later in the novel, the University of Princeton comes up again. In another passage at Mariama African Hair Braiding salon, Aisha, the hair-braider, in small talk is trying to figure out who her client is. She asks Ifemelu how long she has been in the United States. Ifemelu answers:

> "Fifteen years," she said.
> "Fifteen? That long time." A new respect slipped into Aisha's eyes.
> "You live here in Trenton?"
> "I live in Princeton."
> "Princeton." Aisha paused. "You student?"

[210] https://www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda_adichie_the_danger_of_a_single_story/transcript

> "I've just finished a fellowship," she said, knowing that Aisha would not understand what a fellowship was, and in the rare moment that Aisha looked intimidated, Ifemelu felt a perverse pleasure. Yes, Princeton. Yes, the sort of place that Aisha could only imagine, the sort of place that would never have signs that said QUICK TAX REFUND; people in Princeton did not need quick tax refunds (ADICHIE, 2014, p.16).

In the beginning of the novel, we have the feeling that Ifemelu fits in at the hairbraiding salon, since she is an African. They speak of the same subjects: Nigerian soap operas; similar expectations in living the American dream; technicalities of black hair; differences between Yoruba and Igbo. Besides so many things in common, there were differences, such as Ifemelu's academic life and the life of Africans striving in hair-braiding salons. Princeton here is a metaphor for success in America.

In another passage of *Americanah*, shared Africanness occurs as

> Nigerians, Ugandans, Kenyans, Ghanaians, South Africans, Tanzanians, Zimbabweans, one Congolese, one Guinean sat around eating, talking, fueling spirits, and their different accents formed meshes of solacing sounds. They mimicked what Americans told them. And they themselves mocked Africa, trading stories of absurdity, of stupidity, and they felt safe to mock. . . . Ifemelu felt a gentle, swaying sense of renewal. Here, she did not have to explain herself. (ADICHIE, 2014, p.171)

Another example of installing irony to subvert some form of representation happens when Ifemelu, on a train, decides to talk to the "dreadlocked white man who sat next to her (…) his hair like old twine ropes that ended in a blond fuzz, his tattered shirt worn with enough piety to convince her that he was a social warrior and might make a good guest blogger."[211]

She expected that he would be sympathetic with the black cause, instead he answers, "race is totally overhyped these days, black people need to get over themselves, it's all about class now, the haves and the have-nots."[212]. As a result, he inspired Ifemelu's opening line in her post titled "Not All Dreadlocked White American Guys Are Down."[213] To heighten the impact, in the same paragraph, Adichie tells the reaction of the man from Ohio who was obviously over weight for he "squeezed next to her on a flight." She characterizes him wearing "boxy suit and contrast collar" and for this reason, the narrator assumes he is a middle manager. Here again we perceive a stereotype related to form of dressing and certain jobs. Since a middle manager is not a senior function in a firm, but also is not part of the lower (junior) levels of an organization, they are commonly the first to be let go in

[211] *Ibid*, p.4
[212] *Ibid*
[213] *Ibid*

downsizing or outsourcing. There is a stereotype associated with these managers that associate them with being non-effective, costly and underperforming due to the belief that the function is out-dated and unnecessary in modern flat organizations that promote better communication and become more competitive and innovative by skipping middle management.

For this reason, maybe, Ifemelu expects the man from Ohio to be reserved or say something like "the only race that matters is the human race," but instead he asked her, "Ever write about adoption? Nobody wants black babies in this country, and I don't mean biracial, I mean black. Even the black families don't want them" (ADICHIE, 2014, p.4) The narrator neither describes Ifemelu's reaction nor claims that she had become surprised when questioned. The narrator takes it one step further and tells us, "He told her that he and his wife had adopted a black child and their neighbors looked at them as though they had chosen to become martyrs for a dubious cause."[214]. The narrator only tells us that Ifemelu wrote a blog entry with the title "Badly-Dressed White Middle Managers from Ohio Are Not Always What You Think."[215] The narrator puts an extra punch in it when it observes that this blog received the highest number of comments for that month.

To be able to get the full benefit of Adichie's contrasting stories that places the (probably tall) dreadlocked white man face to face with the chubby (probably middle aged) manager from Ohio in a boxy suit, the reader needs to know these types. If the reader has no idea what dreadlocks are, or what type of people usually wear them, the reader will not picture this young man as an alternative type, very easy going, who likes reggae and smokes weed. A type of person one would naturally image would be nonjudgmental and open to questions related to race. On the other hand, a middle-aged manager from Ohio typically produces an image of someone unsophisticated, with a thick accent, who may live close to farmland, and in *Americanah* this stereotype is subverted. Irony here works in what is unsaid.

Therefore, it is clear that Linda Hutcheon's conception of irony has distanced itself from figures of speech and approached a larger territory that englobes both author intentions and reader interpretations. Irony's edge is a more democratic ground where there is no correct or single possibility, a terrain where what must be considered are all the possibilities, as well as both the author's and the reader's thought, values and perspectives. Hutcheon's irony has an edge since the meanings present themselves with their different political and social aspects

[214] *Ibid*, p.5
[215] *Ibid*

made possible due to semantic complexity and contextual parameters of language and text. Irony bridges gaps, introduces potentialities, surprises with new perspectives and celebrates diversity and plurality. The space of irony is present in any form of art where dialogue is viable and difference is inherent.

Thus, Adichie's dialogical novel is written at the edge of irony. In her writing, irony destabilizes stereotypes and deconstructs the single story that the Western world has repeatedly assigned to Africa. Her characters compose a cosmopolitan land that brings together the most colorful and varied dispositions and types, without ever losing touch with their unequal positions in the fabric of society. As a reader, one cannot help but engage with the different Africas that Adiche writes – and more, one understands that a vibrant cultural exchange is one that allows difference to be difference, without ever foregoing some common ground.

CONCLUSION

It has been a great satisfaction to have had the opportunity to engage with Africa through the narrative of this brilliant author, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, a representative of the third-generation of Nigerian writers. Dr. Oluwole Coker, professor at Obafemi Awolowo University in Ile-Ife, Nigeria, defines the new third-generation writer from Nigeria as one responsible for writing in an "amalgam of intertextuality", for expanding "diaspora consciousness", and for giving socio-historical depth to the "refractive aesthetics" of gender and feminist texts.[216]

Hence, my world has been broadened by the experience of learning with Nigeria, and this has given me the opportunity to rethink my own culture and the world we live in. Through Adichie's writing, I have been exposed to a great number of ideas and have read texts from different parts of the world. I have observed that even though their foreignness constitutes an insurmountable difference, through texts we momentarily come together to create a common fabric of literature and knowledge. Also, I have become more aware that gender and feminist movements have come hand in hand with the quests of minorities. Thus, I have come to value, even more, the feminist issues as now I perceive common traits with other forms of segregation and power. At the same time, I have become aware of the many issues concerning the migrant, those that leave their home to venture to new lands. A profound respect has been gained since I have walked in the shoes of Adichie's characters and have come to understand a bit more their predicaments. Moreover, I have been able to increase my knowledge about Others and better comprehend the social and historical elements that have made necessary that the African Other remain united and dedicated to their cause.

My research has made me become more conscientious of the fact that we do not always hear what is being said by Others. Most of the times an infinitude of meanings are present in the space between what is suggested and what is understood, since we always interpret legitimizing and undercutting and taking into consideration our point of view and preferences.

As I studied Adichie's use of irony, I understood that irony can be interpreted, more profoundly, nota as a humorous form of speaking, or a simple rhetorical device, but as the space for the said and unsaid permitting, thus, many lawyers of signification to be present

[216] https://guardian.ng/art/theorising-third-generation-nigerian-novels/

simultaneously side by side. This has made me aware that texts are dialogical and that we must encourage that the different voices be heard. I have come to understand that all signification, in a text, is reflected from everything around it and that our subjectivity is constituted by the Other. It is clear to me now that when we wish to understand, we select. Though the selection is only possible due to the existence of the Other, our understanding of Others is always a simplification. Thus, it is important to be aware of how we function in order to widen our perception and understanding by searching the various stories being told.

As an English teacher, Africa has shown me that the language I teach, in my classes, has many variations. Each version has its characteristics and history and needs to be respected. All variations of English are legitimate and more needs to be done, in the teaching of English, to expose students to this plurality, especially in our Brazilian society that equates a “perfect accent” with an idealized superiority. We must not ignore the fact that English is not only a language of various countries, a medium of different cultures, but a symbol of power and struggle.

I am pleased to have been introduced to texts written by scholars who are not European and American. Frantz Fanon, Edward W. Said, Homi Bhabha, Aimé Césaire, Abdul Jan Mohamed, Achille Mbembé, Ngũgĩ Wa Thiong'o, Jemie Chinweizu, Onwuchekwa Jemie, Ihechukwu Madubuike, Olatunji Ogunyemi and Chinua Achebe have become my day to day interlocutors. As well as being enlightening, they have shown me other worlds I did not know and new perspectives. Even though I was the one who went in their direction, all my learning is still much more to their credit than mine.

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