

Charles University in Prague  
Faculty of Education  
Department of English Language and Literature

DIPLOMA THESIS

*Question of Immigration in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's  
Americanah and Chris Cleave's The Other Hand*

Tetyana Khazanovych

**Supervisor: PhDr. Tereza Topolovská**  
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## **Declaration**

I declare that I have worked on this thesis, *Immigration in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's Americanah and Chris Cleave's The Other Hand*, individually using only the sources listed on the Works Cited page. I declare that I have not used this diploma thesis to gain any other degree.

Prague, 11<sup>th</sup> June 2016

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Signature

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## Abstract

The aim of this thesis is to explore immigration from Nigeria to the United States and United Kingdom in contemporary Nigerian and English literature by comparing two novels, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah* and Chris Cleave's *The Other Hand*. The authors' authentic experience is described and their opinion on the pressing issues connected with immigration, such as reasons for immigration and psychological trauma associated with it are explored.

Keywords: immigration, refugees, language, gender, racism, discrimination, identity

## Abstrakt

Cílem této práce je prozkoumat imigraci z Nigérie do Spojených Států a Spojeného Království v současné nigerijské a anglické literatuře porovnáním dvou novel, *Americanah* Chimamandy Ngozi Adichie a *The Other Hand* Chrisa Cleava. Jsou poskytnuty popisy autentických zážitků autorů a také jejich názor na naléhavé problémy spojené s imigrací, jako jsou důvody imigrace, psychologické trauma s tím spojené.

Klíčová slova: imigrace, utečenci, jazyk, gender, rasismus, diskriminace, identita

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## Introduction

Over the last couple of decades the issue of immigration has become central in Nigerian literature. The theme is inspired by numerous stories of real people and one can trace the tendencies of immigration in the novels.

The theoretical part of this thesis reviews issues that are inherently connected with immigration in Nigerian writing. Three major and most common types of immigration will be studied: legal immigration, illegal immigration and asylum seekers. Further on, it lists major reasons for immigration, it briefly introduces psychological trauma caused by the experience of immigration, feminism, as role of women in Nigeria is seen in a more traditional way than in the U.S. or UK, and role of women in postcolonial Nigerian society will be examined.

In the practical part we will focus on the two novels that have been chosen to demonstrate three different types of immigration that were mentioned above, *Americanah* by a Nigerian author Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie and *The Other Hand* by an English novelist Chris Cleave, in order to compare similarities and differences in the lives of immigrants and refugees in the United States and Great Britain and also the authors' approach to the burning issue of immigration. This thesis looks at the ways in which the writers' lives and conditions they have live in influenced their novels, this in turn will determine to what extent their stories mirror the reality. The approach towards immigrants and refugees in both novels will be compared. It will be illustrated how the main characters in the novels struggle with problems that most immigrants face during legal and illegal migrations. The experience of female asylum seekers in the detention centres in the UK will be explored. The available information about such centres will be compared to fiction (Chris Cleave's *The Other Hand*).

# **I. Theoretical part**

## **1. The position of immigration within Nigerian postcolonial writing**

The different topics explored in contemporary Nigerian writing astonish the reader with their urgent authenticity. Many Nigerian writers concentrate on the experience of people who live in the country, which is very culturally complex and abounds in difficulties such as corruption, economic problems, or religious diversity. The Third Generation Nigerian Literature focuses not only on the inner issues of the state but, given the current state of affairs, the characters are often migrants, placed in situations where they search for their identity in a foreign country, which may lead to a decision of the protagonists to alter their nationality and become as British or as American as possible. Nigerian postcolonial writing focuses on what it means to be Nigerian, whether it is only possible to be Nigerian when one lives in their homeland or this is not connected with where one lives but with their way of living.

Due to the fact that Nigeria was very much influenced by colonialism, authors often raise the question of belonging. The characters that are described are often liminal and uncertain of their identity. It is not surprising, as from an early age Nigerian children are exposed to Western, especially British and American culture, reading Western books and listening to the Western music. The Western culture seems almost ubiquitous when one reads Nigerian postcolonial literature. Characters in these novels, after reading English or American books from the U.S. or Great Britain, are often left with the notion that the Western world is where they belong and tend to idealise it. This happens because they read about how people in the West travel a lot and can afford to buy things they have never even been exposed to. These countries provide them hope and a world full of possibilities.

## 2. Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie

One of the representatives of the Third Generation Nigerian Literature is a world-renowned author Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie. She deals with many pressing issues while writing including feminism, corruption, immigration, race, religion, and many other typical and global problems.

Adichie is the fifth of six children born in a family of academics. Her father used to be a professor of statistics at university and her mother was the university's first female register. Her elder sister studied medicine and currently works in the U.S. In the beginning, Adichie too followed her sister's steps but quickly realised that she had no interest in medicine and left for the U.S. to study communication and political science at Eastern Connecticut State University. She then completed a creative writing course and received her MA from John Hopkin's university in 2003. She followed in her studies and completed her second MA, this time in African Studies, at Yale University in 2008. Apart from her career as a writer, she also teaches creative writing in Nigeria and travels around the world to give interviews and lectures. She is married to a Maryland-based doctor of Nigerian origin, so she divides her time equally between the U.S. and Nigeria. Even though her life is parted between the two countries, Adichie herself says that her home is in Nigeria and she is a Nigerian citizen by choice.

Her background heavily influences her writing as her works are partly autobiographical. Many of her characters come from a similar background, with their family members being academics or doctors. The main protagonist of *Americanah*, Ifemelu, who like her, is placed in a university in the U.S. and after living there as an immigrant for many years, realises that Nigeria is where she belongs.

The difference between Adichie's and Ifemelu's lives would be the circumstances of their return. Ifemelu succeeded in moving to Nigeria and staying there independently of the U.S., whereas in her interview published in *Telegraph* Adichie compares America to "a very rich uncle who doesn't really know who you

are, but all the same you can't help being fond of him" (Calkin). Not only is she fond of it but she is financially dependent on provisions from her publishers.

The experience she had in the U.S. did not only change the way she perceived herself but in a way made it possible for her to fully embrace her identity. For example, in the States she started wearing her hair au naturel whereas in Nigeria it is still much more popular to wear straightened hair and according to Adichie's interview, "I Have Fallen in Love with My Hair," on *Sunrise* some hairdressers there do not even know how to look after natural hair. She made hair one of the central topics in her latest novel, which triggered many conversations and arguments about how significant it is to opt for straight weaves, cornrows, dreadlocks, afros, etc.

Adichie's works are poignant and challenge social conventions by pointing at current issues, such as racism, role of women in nowadays society, etc. Her characters are often faced with difficult dilemmas and have to make decisions that would define their personality<sup>1</sup>, they evolve as the story progresses and give a sense of being fully-fledged, independent beings with their virtues and vices that are not black and white, nor flat characters. By assigning certain qualities to the characters in her novels Adichie expresses her beliefs and attitudes to life. Her philosophy can be seen in her novels. For instance, in the book the author illustrates the importance of female agency by creating a female character, Ifemelu, who does not wait for a man to act but takes action herself unlike Mills and Boon books, which are mentioned in the novel, and where females bound to a man's will. Adichie alleges that she is a happy feminist and stresses that even though she is now married she wants to be addressed as "Ms Adichie". This fact is also closely connected to the idea explored in *Americanah* concerning the importance of names when it comes to grounding one's identity.

Adichie's writing has been greatly influenced by Chinua Achebe's work<sup>2</sup>. Before she started reading his books, she mostly read British and American fiction. In

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<sup>1</sup> Using Nigerian English might be perceived as one of these decisions, which does not only assert one's personality but influences the way other people perceive them.

<sup>2</sup> For instance, Chimamanda names some of her characters in *Americanah* after characters in *Things Fall Apart*, e.g. Ngozi Okonkwo.

one of her interviews she mentioned that discovering Nigerian novels has fundamentally changed her writing. She realised that books do not have to be about foreigners with strange names who drink beverages that neither she, nor people around her, had ever tasted. She began to write about contemporary Nigeria and about people she could relate to, people that truly existed in her world.

Adichie's first novel, *Purple Hibiscus*, which was longlisted for the Booker Prize, features a young 15-year-old girl from a wealthy family who struggles against her repressive father. The story is told through the main character's, Kambili's, eyes. Adichie's second novel *Half of a Yellow Sun* won her the Orange Prize and brought her a genius grant (*MacArthur Foundation*). The main topic of this novel, which depicts the tragic Biafran conflict, is personal, as her grandfather died in one of the concentration camps during the war. Among other awards Adichie received the Orange Broadband Prize for Fiction (2007) and a MacArthur Foundation Fellowship (2008) (Tunca). Her collection of short stories *The Thing Around Your Neck* could be described as snapshots of people's lives both in native Nigeria and as immigrants in the U.S. The stories feature characters from different classes, of different religious beliefs, and those of varying economical statuses, which make the stories more vivid and believable. For example, in Adichie's novel *Americanah*, immigration plays a central role. Not only the reasons for migrating differ between the individual characters but also their situations, as some are legal immigrants, and others are illegal. She also depicts psychological difficulties people face when dealing with immigration and how it further influences their lives.

Adichie's writing is quite simple, she does not make her texts unnecessarily complicated and ambiguous. In a podcast, "Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie and Zadie Smith on Race, Writing, and Relationships," on *New York Public Library* she says:

Clarity's important to me. The kind of writing that I like to read is writing that is clear. I think it's very easy to confuse something that's badly written as something that's somehow deep. [...] It's not the kind of fiction I like to read, so I guess maybe when I'm editing I'm thinking about that. I'm thinking that the sentences I really admire are sentences that are lucid.

Chimamanda's style is straightforward, it is crystal clear what the author wants to communicate to the reader. However, the clarity of syntax does not simplify the complexity of the message of the story. The situations she describes are often ambiguous and make the reader think of the possible reasons for these contemporary issues.

*Americanah*'s characters are also ambiguous. Their views on life develop throughout the book depending on the situations that they encounter in their lives. This makes the book and situations described in it even more believable to the reader.

### **3. Chris Cleave**

Chris Cleave is a contemporary novelist, who among other themes writes about Nigerian refugees in the UK. He was born in London but brought up in Cameroon. He studied psychology at Balliol College, Oxford. His debut novel *Incendiary*, which tells a story of a distraught woman who lost her son and husband in a massive suicide bomb attack, became a bestseller and prize-winner.

Chris Cleave's second novel *The Other Hand* gives readers a completely different perspective on current situation in Nigeria. This is a novel that is concerned with a refugee, it shows the reader the asylum seekers' outlook on their situation. The Other Hand's main character, Little Bee, leaves for England in fear for her life and in hope of finding safety unlike Adichie's characters, who mostly leave Nigeria because they feel like they are trapped in a country with no professional opportunities,

Some of the facts Cleave uses in *The Other Hand* are based on his short experience of working as a kitchen aid in one of these immigration detention centres, called Campsfield near Oxford. As this was a low security prison, Chris was relatively free to mingle with the inmates and talk to them during his breaks. He was horrified to realise that they were detained indefinitely, with no trial or public process, having committed no crime. Having spent some time with refugees, Chris realised they were no different from any of us, in the sense that they were simply trying to protect their families by moving from dangerous places to safer ones

(Cleave). The actions they undertook are only natural and he would probably do the same if his family were in danger. Those people in the centre were not responsible for the dangerous situation in their homeland and only wanted a peaceful life with possibilities to work and educate their children.

#### **4. Colonial influence and reasons for immigration**

Prior to analysing the life of immigrants abroad, it is necessary to understand the reasons for their leaving Nigeria and why they choose either the UK or U.S. Naturally, the choice of Nigerians to go to these countries is connected with the history of the country. Unlike people from Ivory Coast or Niger, who tend to migrate to France because they were colonised by the French, Nigerians, who were under Great Britain's colonial rule, and for whom English is a native language, feel closer to the English-speaking countries.

The relationship between Nigeria and the United Kingdom can be in a way described as a Stockholm syndrome. Nigeria, which was colonised for 60 years grew emotionally attached to the captor-country. This is explicit, if one looks at the way some Nigerians mimic the British traditions, how they are fascinated by the overseas brands, etc. Self-evidently, it is a result of what the British have transferred into the country (language, culture, religion, etc.). Nigerians are often left with the notion that the Western world is where they belong and often idealise it. In order to understand how this ambivalent relationship has formed, it is crucial to look closer at the history of it.

From 1806 to the end of the nineteenth century the British explorers, traders, missionaries had a sustaining interest in Nigeria. This is when a struggle between conventional Nigerian society and the colonialists began. This period and its influence on Nigerian society, its process is poignantly described by Chinua Achebe in his most acclaimed novel *Things Fall Apart*, where the author describes pre-colonial Nigerian society through the life of the main character Okonkwo and his family, who are typical members of that community. The main purpose of the author is to illustrate that the Igbo population had their own culture and traditions, which

were severely threatened if not ruined by the colonialism. As a consequence of being illiterate the Nigerians were thought to be barbaric but Achebe has proved this assumption wrong by means of describing everyday life of the people, the upbringing of their children and their court system. Achebe also gives the readers an insight on the religion by presenting a dialogue between one of the missionaries and the locals in order to show that the beliefs of the two societies are not that different, even though the ceremonies are. This period was important as many people converted to Christianity. This happened for many different reasons, such as dissatisfaction with the approach to women, who were frequently beaten up by their husbands or, as in the case of Okonkwo's son, a deep disappointment in the ways and beliefs of their ancestors<sup>3</sup>.

British colonial rule in Nigeria lasted from 1900 to 1960. From 1861 to 1914 Nigeria was governed by the United Kingdom through local leaders, which is also known as an "indirect rule", a well-known technique that was also used by the British in India. In their struggle to meet Nigerian claim for political power by 1951 the British divided the country into Northern, Eastern and Western regions, each with its own house of assembly. To reflect the strong tradition of tribal authority in the Northern Province there was a separate house of chiefs established for it.

The UK also had an influence on Nigeria's borders. Nigeria consists of two larger parts that are inhabited with two very different nationalities (Hausa and Igbo) that are in constant conflict with each other, mainly on the grounds of religion (Muslim and Christian). As a result, apart from English, there are three major languages in Nigeria: Yoruba, Igbo and Hausa. Due to such diversity conflicts among the citizens arise frequently:

Sectarian violence continues to be a particular problem in and around the central Nigerian city of Jos, the capital of Plateau State, which sits between

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<sup>3</sup> Okonkwo killed his son's friend, a young boy Ikemefuna, for the fear of the spirits' wrath and that the people will think him weak.

the predominately Muslim North and Christian South. Tensions among communities in this culturally diverse “Middle Belt” are both religious and ethnic, and they stem from competition over resources - land, education, government jobs - between ethnic groups classified as settlers [...], with the latter designation conveying certain political and economic benefit. (Ploch)

In her collection of short stories *The Thing Around Your Neck* Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie describes a riot, which abruptly arose in the market between Hausa and Igbo people. The riot was caused by an accident, which was taken as a deliberate offense of Islam by a Muslim. This incident shows both how a misunderstanding may lead to many deaths and how violence easily arises in people when the matter concerns their religion:

It had all started at the motopark, when a man drove over a copy of the Holy Koran that lay on the roadside, a man who happened to be Igbo and Christian. The men nearby, men who sat around all day, playing draughts, men who happened to be Muslim, pulled him out of his pickup truck, cut his head off with a machete, and carried into the market, asking others to join in the infidel had desecrated the Holy Book. (Adichie 45)

This is not an episode that was created for fiction, riots like this frequently occur on the streets of Nigeria. As Adichie points out: “[...] riots do not happen in a vacuum, that religion and ethnicity are often politicized because the ruler is safe if the hungry ruled are killing one another” (Adichie 47). Creating such distractions can be viewed as one of the instruments governments use in order to keep people’s attention away from political and economic problems.

The influence the UK has had on Nigeria, and is continuing to have today on its culture and territorial borders is immense. It is not only the language and religion

the colonialism has brought to that country but also education. The most ambivalent question is whether this influence was and continues to be beneficial.

A cunning metaphor is made by Cleave when he compares Western world and civilisation to electricity: “We did not have electricity or fresh water or sadness either, because none of these had been connected to our village yet”<sup>4</sup>. Electricity is seen as means of grabbing the resources, destroying the natural order of the village and the ways of the ancestors. Seemingly good things that were supposed to bring progress also brought death, destruction and greed for money.

Despite the commonly-held opinion that the colonialism has only brought harm to African countries by draining their recourses, intervening with their sense of identity, etc. it has also had some positive effect on countries, such as Nigeria, it introduced medical care.

While the relationship between the UK and Nigeria was grounded in colonialism, the U.S. has also made contribution to this country, even though, not directly. The relationship between Nigeria and the United States is quite different, mainly because the cultural influence America has had on Nigeria was not forced. Omnipresent American culture has gained its popularity in Nigeria, as it has in many other countries, merely by transmitting their films and music all over the world. The shared language has also played a major part in connecting the two countries.

Apart from the cultural aspect, Nigeria has also taken America’s political structure: “the inheritance of the British parliamentary system of government was jettisoned for the American presidential model” (Aribisala).

The U.S. is one of the major economic partners of Nigeria. According to United States Trade Representative it is its largest foreign investor: “The United States and Nigeria have signed a bilateral trade and investment framework agreement”. The United States also provides Nigeria with security and assistance

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<sup>4</sup> Chris Cleave, *The Other Hand*, 2009, Hodder&Stoughton Ltd, 348 [Subsequent page references preceded with *TOH* are given in parentheses in the text]

focusing on enhancing its peace-making capabilities, as Nigeria plays a significant role in peace and stable operations across Africa.

Despite the fact that Nigeria is Africa's largest producer of oil and has the second largest economy, with population of more than 170 million people, it still faces some yet unresolved problems mainly connected with corruption: "According to the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), a Nigerian law enforcement agency created in 2003 to combat corruption and fraud, billions of dollars have been expropriated by political and military leaders since oil sales began in the 1970s" (Ploch).

All these unresolved problems and conflicts that often end in public institutions' strikes, riots, economic insecurity and instability lead to the desire of Nigerians to migrate, and their choice often falls either on the UK or the U.S.

In the last decade the increase in number of immigrants from African countries in the U.S. has been drastic, the numbers went up from 364 000 to 1,2 million (Takougang, Tidjani 31). There is, of course, considerable number of reasons for this change, one of which is the fact that nowadays immigrants come to the U.S. with an intention to get a permanent residence, whereas before, they came in order to obtain education and then return to their home country.

There are many reasons for this tendency, one of which is "the failure by African states to provide economic opportunities for their citizens and the prevalence of corrupt and highly repressive regimes that have suffocated a vast range of individual freedoms" (Takougang, Tidjani 32). Some immigrants stay in the U.S. because they know that they can make more money there than at home, and that there are more possibilities for them to find well-paid jobs. Many of them send money back home to support their relatives in order to raise the level of life in the African countries.

The amount of African immigrants in the U.S. is not as high as the amount of immigrants from China, for example, so there are no particular areas such as Chinatown called after an African immigrant district. Such districts do not even exist. This is due to the fact that at the beginning immigrants from Africa would come and live in big cities, like New York, Chicago, Los Angeles, Washington D.C., Houston,

and Dallas because that is where the universities are situated (as they mainly came to the U.S. in order to acquire education). However, nowadays they begin to spread to more quiet and smaller towns, some of them live in the suburbs. As previously mentioned this a result of the fact that now people come to the U.S. in order to obtain permanent residence (Takougang, Tidjani 31).

Some diplomats who came to the U.S. after their countries gained independence, had an opportunity to not only bring their relatives to live with them, but also their friends, who later gained citizenship through various means (Takougang, Tidjani 32). It has also been simplified for the immigrants to come to the U.S. after the “pre-911 relaxation of U.S. immigration policy, [...] which made it easier for students and professionals to remain in the United States and the Diversity Visa Program in 1990” (Takougang, Tidjani 32). This relaxation may have been caused by human resource deficiency and the fact that the government does not want educated people to leave the country but identifies individual staying as an investment into future development in different areas of science.

One of the reasons why so many people want to migrate is the instilled notion that if one goes abroad and stays there, he or she succeeds in life. There is also the deeply-rooted idea of Western civilization, which is everything one may want. It provides all the possibilities, people there are valued more and have more conveniences at their disposal. This myth is reverberated by the Western media. Of course, this notion is often destroyed when the immigrants face the difficulties and injustices of the Western world, such as racism and bureaucracy.

When one talks about Nigerian immigrants in the U.S., one may say that they are the most educated amongst immigrants. The data shows that “17 percent of all Nigerians in this country held master's degrees while 4 percent had a doctorate, according to the 2006 American Community Survey conducted by the U.S. Census Bureau. In addition, 37 percent had bachelor’s degrees” (Casimir). This is due to the fact that many Nigerians look for a way to prolong their stay in the U.S. after graduating and therefore continue their education: “So many Africans pursue higher levels of education as an unintended consequence of navigating the tricky minefield of immigration” (Casimir). It is much easier to obtain a student visa than to get a

working one. Finding an employer who would want to employ a foreigner and deal with the foreign police is harder than continuing one's education.

## **5. Legal immigration**

There are various types of visas that one can obtain in order to go to the United States or Great Britain. Nevertheless, one might discern two main categories, which are immigrant and non-immigrant visas. It is important to distinguish between the two countries because of the approach they take towards immigrants. The UK embassy is very process-driven and requires a lot of documents, whereas in the U.S. embassy officers take into consideration one's gender, age, profession, the impression they make and might not even glance at the documents.

Non-immigrant visas are normally easier to obtain. There are tourist visas, student visas, business visas (the applicants of these visas are often asked to provide an evidence of cooperation between the Nigerian and American companies), visas for medical treatment, and others. There are many other types that may be quite individual (there was a case when Obama granted a Nigerian illegal immigrant who came to the U.S. to treat tumors and dreamt of becoming a doctor permanent residency (Karimi)) and are not listed on the embassy's website<sup>5</sup>.

There are four types of immigrant visas to the U.S.: adoption, fiancée, family member to follow, Diversity Visa Lottery. Apart from the documents, the applicants have to also go through the required medical examination (*Nonimmigrant Visas*).

There are different rules when applying for a visa in American and British embassies. For example, there is a list of documents one may have to provide when applying for a visa to the U.S. but, unlike in the British embassy, the American

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<sup>5</sup> As an example of individual visa, one can look at a rare case that took place in 2012 when Barack Obama signed into law a rare private bill granting a Nigerian immigrant Victor Chukwueke permanent residency in the United States. Chukwueke came to the U.S. eleven years ago to undergo treatment for massive face tumors. Chukwueke had an expired visa. His dream was to become a doctor and for that he needed permanent residency in the U.S. This gesture can not only be seen as a generous and seemingly fair help to Victor, but also as a political message that can be translated as: America is kind and just, it is a place where the dreams come true. Of course, this is an exception, most people get deported when their visa expires.

immigration services often base their decision on the impression they get from the person or current situation in the U.S. or Nigeria, rather than on the documents they provide. It is often the case that the consular officers do not even look at the documents.

Even though the UK embassy also takes political circumstances into consideration when adjudicating, their decision is mostly based on the documents the applicant has presented. The interview as such is often not important, as long as the candidate has a proof of his or her financial stability, that they have a place to stay and of the fact that the he or she will inevitably return to their home country. This may be in form of either an evidence of the fact that the person has a job or that they are at university. It is good to have family so that the officers know you will return to them. Often the applicants are asked to provide a return ticket. One should also provide the six month bank statements to show he or she has regular income and has no reason to stay in the UK after their visa is expired. People are also asked to provide evidence of their ability to cover all expenses connected to the trip (*Nonimmigrant Visas*).

## **6. Illegal immigration**

Many of the immigrants who come to the UK or the U.S. stay there illegally. It is not uncommon for a person to enter the country on the basis of tourist or student visas, and then to stay in the country after their visa has expired. Immigration minister, James Brokenshire, in an interview in *Financial Times* says:

We are making it more difficult for people to live and work in the UK illegally and creating a system that is fair to British citizens and legitimate migrants but is tough on those who flout the rules. The new Immigration Act limits benefits and services for illegal immigrants and makes it easier to remove those with no right to be here by reducing the number of appeals. It is

right that we encourage illegal immigrants to leave voluntarily and will enforce their removal if they refuse to do so. (Jackson)

In 2013 *The Economist* published an article on Illegal Immigration, where they claim that in 2012 330,000 illegal immigrants left Britain voluntarily and another 15,000 were deported. It is very hard to say how many illegal immigrants there actually are in the UK precisely, but the estimation is around 500,000. The same article in *The Economist* informs that a new immigration bill has passed its second reading in the House of Commons on October 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2013:

This will oblige landlords and doctors to check the immigration status of their tenants and patients, make it harder for illegal immigrants to obtain bank accounts and driving licences and crack down harder on sham marriages. Appeals against immigration and asylum decisions will be granted only on fundamental human-rights grounds, not procedural ones. (*Illegal Immigration*)

This bill will make it more difficult for the illegal immigrants to continue their stay in the UK. Some of them try to acquire a legal status by all means possible, they go as far as having a baby by a European citizen and then are less likely to be deported.

Illegal immigrants are hard to reach for the government because they normally live outside the formal society. It is very common for this type of immigrants to borrow or rent national insurance numbers, which they use in order to get better-paid jobs. They tend to take menial jobs and get paid low wages in cash: “Australian backpackers sometimes work in pubs and hotels; Nigerians often clean offices” (*Illegal Immigration*). Even though the money these people earn is very little, they still manage to save enough to send some of it home.

## 7. Asylum seekers, detention centres

Obtaining asylum in the United Kingdom is a very complicated process. Most people who are granted asylum can only stay in the UK for five years, which makes it difficult for the refugees to find jobs and feel secure about their future. The number of asylum seekers to the UK in 2012 reached 21,785 people. The court later overturns about half of the negative decisions.

There are several cases in which one can be granted asylum in the UK: if a person were being victimized because of his or her beliefs, if they were in constant fear of being persecuted, if their home and possessions were destroyed, if they were in fear of their family's lives (*Refugee Council*).

Stephanie Silverman's article *Immigration Detention in the UK* reveals several facts about these facilities. The number of people held in such centres increases every year: "Approximately 26,000 immigrants entered detention under Immigration Act powers in 2010, 27,000 in 2011 and 29,000 in 2012" (Silverman).

The majority of people in these centres are asylum seekers, while the rest are illegal immigrants, new arrivals, who are awaiting examination by the immigrant officer, undocumented persons, etc. "In 2012, asylum detainees accounted for about 48 % of the total immigration detainee population" (Silverman).

Another fact Silverman mentions is that "over half of immigration detainees are held for less than two months". It is important to denote that according to the article not many detainees stay in such facilities for a long time: "In 2012, about 62 % of total immigration detainees are held for less than 2 months. It is also not uncommon for detention to span two to six months. A small but consistent minority of detainees – about 5 % - are held for more than one year" (Silverman).

The facts provided in the article are, however, not complete. The author mentions: "academics, journalists and activists have been requesting further information and clarification on the nature of the statistics on immigration detention released from the Home Office and the Office of National Statistics". Unfortunately, deficits and limitations in the data still persist. For instance, information on the ethnic origins of the detainees is often inextricable. Tracking individual trajectories of

detention, release and re-detention through the statistics is a complicated process, due to presentation as separate numbers of occurrences.

## **8. Psychological trauma caused by immigration**

Almost all immigrants experience immigrant-related stress, which does not always result in traumatism (a much graver condition). This kind of stress can be related to different experiences. Even if the person who has arrived in the country, which is completely new to them, finds that their expectations have been fully met (which is rarely the case), there are still many factors that accompany immigration, which can be stressful and cause depression.

There is a process of assimilation, which is often accompanied by the stress of finding a job, housing, making friends, learning the language, getting accustomed to the legal system, the feeling of being on the margins of society: “some immigrants may experience a profound or incapacitating sense of loss, disassociation, flashbacks or nightmares about separation from the homeland or family of origin that may be consistent with the symptoms of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder” (Levers Lopez 70). There are four distinct stages of trauma that the immigrants may undergo: premigration trauma, in-transit trauma, resettlement trauma, and trauma of general postmigration living conditions.

There are, however, certain groups of immigrants that are more affected by the stress of migration. Those are particularly illegal immigrants who live in constant fear of being deported, not being able to find a stable job. There are also immigrants that are subjected to racial discrimination and find it even more difficult to assimilate. Also female immigrants often face even bigger discrimination, when it comes to finding a job, some of them become even victims of harassment or rape:

Traumatic experiences for immigrants may include sexual or physical assault, domestic violence, witnessing violence, effects of transactional sex (including HIV infection), human trafficking, combat, detention, deportation, chronic

community violence, exposure to drug-related and political violence, or any of other types of traumatic incidences. (Lopez Levers, Hyatt-Burkhat 70)

Of course, when a whole family migrates, then the stress is significantly reduced, due to the support the family members give each other: “One of the most noted mitigating factors of acculturative stress and immigration trauma is the presence of a supportive social network and a strong family unit” (Lopez Levers, Hyatt-Burkhat 70).

Some asylum seekers suffer from posttraumatic stress disorder, which is caused by an experience back at home. It is in a way similar to what soldiers experience when they return from war: “symptoms were categorized along four clusters: intrusive re-experiencing, avoidance, hyperarousal, and hypervigilance, with general symptoms of anxiety and dysphoria” (Ringel, Brandell 6).

Another group of people who suffer from postmigration trauma are children of the immigrants who are often being brought up or even born in the country where their parents have migrated. They often feel like they do not belong and find it difficult to understand why they are being treated differently. This is particularly true for black children who also face racial discrimination. Especially for teenagers it might be a problem during the time when their identity is being formulated. When coping with stress, immigrants often organize groups of support or just informative groups.

The question of identity is very important, as many people who come to a foreign country do their best in order to be taken more seriously. Many people who come from Nigeria, for instance, try to speak with an American or British accent, depending on where they are. In Nigeria English is a native language, but they have different pronunciation. Some of the immigrants try to do their best to show that they are not worse than the others, even though they come from so-called third world countries. Many of them try to excel in their studies at university, and thus show that they are worth something (Casimir).

## 9. Organizations among African immigrants

Societies and organisations are created in order to help new immigrants accommodate to their new surroundings. The purpose of societies may differ but the main idea is to help with jobs, documents, accommodation, adaptation, etc.

As immigrants from Africa face similar problems (which is partly due to the fact that Americans do not distinguish between different countries and nationalities in Africa and for them all black immigrants are simply Africans) there are many groups that are created in order to help the newly arrived to assimilate, to share experience and information about the way things are done in the U.S. or UK. They discuss what difficulties they might face, how to find a job, an accommodation, what to expect from the locals, exchange information on how to get a visa or to arrange some legal issues.

There are several types of groups that are being created. The first type is quite heterogeneous and is mostly created for a particular purpose, and when it reaches its goal, it ceases to exist. It is mainly because people who attend such gatherings are very different and sometimes do not feel like they can relate. At the beginning there is an issue that might be a problem for everyone but then when that is settled, people do not feel like there is anything left for them to discuss. Those are usually groups with general names, e.g. *The African Heritage, Inc.*, *The African Assistance Centre*, *African Immigrants and Refugees Foundation* (Takougang, Tidjani 36).

The second type is a group in which the people are less diverse. These are nation-based communities, such as *Nigerian-American Chamber of Commerce*, *Cameroon Family of Cincinnati*. Their meetings are held more regularly, sometimes the members who are impecunious are helped financially. It is also more common for such groups to exchange news from their home countries:

Groups also provide a forum where members are updated on developments back in their home countries; and receive advice on educational, employment and career opportunities, access to the healthcare system, life insurance,

investments, immigration and other forms of legal assistance. (Takougang, Tidjani 37)

The third type of organizations is ethnic-based, such as *Mwannedinambe Social Club of Nigeria*, *Ibadan Progressive Association*. People in this organizations are normally more committed and are more likely to engage into more complex financial arrangements carried out in order to execute a project aimed at improving the life of people in their home villages, for instance, award scholarships to children or the provision of pipe borne water, paved roads (Takougang, Tidjani 37).

Some of the organizations are professional, e.g. *Association of African Journalists*. African immigrants have also developed religious institutions, e.g. *Ethiopian Evangelical Church*. These churches sometimes provide “temporary shelter and financial support for new immigrants” (Takougang, Tidjani 36). These associations do not only serve in order to educate the immigrants and give them an opportunity to feel at home in a foreign country but also they are sometimes aimed at educating Americans and the Brits about their foreign friends.

Similar organizations also exist in the UK, such as *AfricaUK*, which includes information on entertainment, news, networking, business, etc. *Jislaaik*, which offers news, jobs, a dating service, etc. to South African expats (*South African Communities Abroad*).

## **10. Feminism and role of women in postcolonial Nigerian society**

Further theme that echoes the topic of Western influence upon Nigerian culture in postcolonial literature, is gender and feminism, as females are treated differently in these societies. As the novels that will be discussed in this paper predominantly deal with female immigrants, it is important to take a closer look at how the role of females in Nigerian society has been developing throughout the history and in writing.

Women have always played a major role in Nigerian society “because of their economic importance as mothers, farm cultivators and traders” (Agbese 18). Even

prior to colonialism, 90 % of women worked in trading. It is also known that when women “were prevented from being openly active, they used loopholes inherent in the structure to gain and maintain some level of power” (Agbese 18). The real question, however, is if this employment of loopholes can be called a real influence.

One of the ways Nigerian women still affect current affairs, has been manifested in 2002, when 600 tribeswomen stormed the Chevron Texaco oil company and forced it to promise jobs, electricity and other improvements to villages in Niger Delta. The means by which these women achieved their goal was to strip, as “the curse of nakedness” is a traditional way of shaming people and remains as potent as ever” (Branigan, Vidal). This method of displaying authority may seem uncivilised, as women’s impact in this situation is based on ancient myth and superstition, rather than on exhibition of their competence as negotiators.

“Colonialism brought about many changes for Igbo women. It changed women’s roles as “‘wives’ and ‘mothers’” (Nadaswaran). In her writing, Buchi Emecheta “shows how the Nigerian woman does not benefit from colonial Nigeria and has lost the place and role ascribed to her during its pre-colonial stage”. Women in contemporary Nigerian writing are portrayed as strong personalities, who are able to protect themselves, make their own living, etc. Emecheta in her novel *The Joys of Motherhood* even punishes her main protagonist, Nnu Ego, for being too conservative and traditional by letting her die alone when she has children.

Adichie considers herself a feminist and her books reflect the life of women both in Nigeria and in immigration, their experience. She gave a speech on this topic on the occasion of one of the Ted events where she explained her views on this matter and called herself a “happy African feminist”. By creating contrasting female characters, she compares their life styles and illustrates how traditional Nigerian women, whose primary goal in life is to please a man, tend to become dependent on men.

In the novels this work treats, the main protagonists are mostly strong independent women who are capable of making decisions for themselves. In Adichie’s *Americanah* the main character, Ifemelu, challenges the traditional idea of a Nigerian woman by speaking her mind and pursuing her needs and wishes instead

of obeying and pleasing her partners. Americanah's other character, Kosi, on the other hand, is an embodiment of traditional Nigerian woman, who embraces her role as mother and wife, which leads to misunderstanding between her and her husband, and eventually culminates in amenable humiliation, which she throws herself into, and divorce.

## II. Practical part

### 1. Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie: *Americanah*

My new novel is about love, race... and hair. (Adichie)

I think the immigration story that we are very familiar with, when it concerns Africa, is the story of, you know, the person who's fleeing war or poverty, and I wanted to write about a different kind of immigration, which is the kind that I'm familiar with, which is of middle-class people who are not fleeing burned villages, and who you know had ostensibly privileged lives, but who are seeking what I like to think of as choice — who want more, who think that somehow over there is more exciting, is better. For my generation it's the U.S., and I think this is probably the case for much of the world, because America just has this enormous cultural power. (Adichie)

*Americanah* is a book that explores many topics, such as race, immigration, gender, education, etc. Adichie points out certain aspects of life in the Western world that many people choose to ignore, such as inequality within the society (e.g. there are still certain expectations of women that do not apply to men) and prejudiced attitude towards black people. She does that in the novel by means of the dialogues, inner monologues or the main protagonist's blog. Her characters are often conflicted and uncertain, looking for a place where they belong. The novel also celebrates different kinds of love: love for family members, as well as romantic love. Elizabeth Day, in her review of *Americanah* in *The Guardian* says about the novel: "There are some stories that tell a great story and others that make you change the way you look at the world. Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah* is a book that manages to do both" (Day). This refers to the fact that by pointing out contemporary problems of the world, Chimamanda makes the readers think and even change about their own attitude towards these issues.

The novel is partly autobiographical, as Adichie, similarly to the main character, went to study to the U.S. Even though she did not face as many difficulties,

one can still find some similarities, e.g. when Ifemelu realises that she is black when she comes to America. In many interviews Chimamanda mentions her feelings towards a black man in the U.S. who called her “sister”. She has not been in America long and felt unpleasantly surprised with a strange man addressing her with such familiarity. It was in America where Adichie realised that being black comes with assumptions about her background, social status, etc. Her skin colour led the man to a conclusion that they share similar life experience, which in his eyes was enough reason to act familiar.

There are many flash-backs in the story and it is told in from the point of view of two main protagonists, Ifemelu and Obinze. The plot follows the lives of four major characters: Ifemelu, Obinze, Auntie Uju and Dike. All of them are immigrants, either the first, or as in the Dike’s case, second generation. Dike was born in the U.S., is an American citizen but finds it hard to identify with other Americans because his mother is from Nigeria and he has never known his father. Ifemelu, the main protagonist of the story, is a legal immigrant who goes to the U.S. to study but faces difficulties finding a job. The reader follows her development from an early age until she reaches adulthood. Ifemelu followed Auntie Uju into the U.S., who became a U.S. citizen due to the fact that she gave birth to her son, Dike, in America. After an unfortunate attempt to follow Ifemelu into the U.S. Obinze, with his mother’s help, succeeds in getting the visa to the UK but later becomes an illegal immigrant there, which makes his situation the most difficult one.

The novel describes problems immigrants face while trying to obtain a visa. It follows the newcomers during first few years and provides a commentary of how it might be difficult, not only physically but mentally, to accommodate to the new environment. In the end, there is a reunion for Ifemelu both with the homeland and with her first love, Obinze. Ifemelu finds that immigration helped her to realise where she belongs. Adichie commented on her novel during her “Tenement Talk,” on *Tenement Museum*: “I wanted this book to be about not so much leaving home but going home, and the many homes, and what home means”. Even though throughout the book one reads about immigration, in the end it comes down to finding where the protagonists belong and where they feel at home.

Intertextuality plays a significant role in the novel. It serves as an illustration of protagonists' characters by means of showing their preferences in literature. For example, Obinze's obsession with American books and films, such as *Huckleberry Finn* and *The Cosby Show*, indicates from the very beginning his longing for a world with more opportunities.

## **2. Chris Cleave: *The Other Hand***

Chris Cleave's novel *The Other Hand* is set in contemporary England and tells a story of two women, Little Bee and Sarah O'Rourke, who come from completely different backgrounds but are united by common tragedy and fears. Similarly to *Americanah*, the novel is told in ich-form. It has many flash-backs, which makes the story more intriguing by unfolding major events gradually. The usage of ich-form in both novels makes the reader more engrossed in the story, making it more intriguing as well as authentic.

The novel portrays two major characters: Sarah and Little Bee. Sarah O'Rourke is a middle-aged woman, who runs a glamorous magazine, *Nixie*. Her life's routine is disrupted when Little Bee appears in it.

Little Bee is a young girl, a refugee from Nigeria who reached England illegally and was placed in a detention centre, where she spent two years without any hope for release. She was locked there because crossing the boarder illegally in the UK is a crime. She stayed in the detention centre for such a long time because her story is the one that many illegal immigrants tell and without documents to back up their stories there is no way of knowing who is telling the truth and really faced a death threat in their home country. Similarly to other refugees, she cannot prove her story. Her village was burnt down during a war in her country. The media, however, did not cover the conflict, so no one knew it ever took place. Her sister and her parents were killed, so she had nowhere to go and no one to help her, except a British couple, Sarah and Andrew O'Rourke, whom she accidentally met at the beach the day her sister was murdered. The couple was on holiday in Nigeria, which was meant to revive their marriage after Andrew found out about Sarah's affair. During their walk

on the beach they met two men who threatened to kill two girls who were with them. The murderers gave Andrew a chance to save both Little Bee and her sister by giving him an ultimatum. Andrew would have to chop off his middle finger but he refused to do so. Sarah then showed unexpected bravery and did that instead of her husband, her sacrifice was enough to save only one of the siblings. The men let Little Bee go but her sister was taken away and murdered at a later point.

After her sister was murdered and O'Rourkes were back in their hotel, Little Bee found Andrew's wallet on the beach and used it to contact him when she got to the UK. Her re-emergence in his life caused Andrew to commit suicide, as he was depressed ever since that day in Nigeria, blaming himself for what had happened. Sarah's life acquired new dimension after her husband's suicide and Little Bee's arrival. In the week after Andrew's death a Nigerian refugee, a middle-class English woman, her son and a Home Office employee were joined in London's suburbs.

Sarah decided to leave her job, as she wanted to make a difference in the world by helping people like Little Bee. She discovers that Andrew collected a lot of material on Nigeria and was going to write a book about it.

Little Bee was deported after she demonstrates her devotion to Sarah's family by calling the police and exposing herself to them when Charlie, Sarah's son, disappears in the park.

Sarah follows Little Bee to Nigeria and tries to save her by collecting other stories, similar to hers and writing a book about it. Unfortunately, Little Bee is caught by the military men on the beach while they were collecting the stories and the novel finishes with her watching Charlie play in the sea with other kids, which gives hope that one day there will be no racial discrimination and that the attitude towards refugees can be changed.

### 3. Conception of immigration

Both Adichie and Cleave in their novels challenge the traditional definitions of words “immigrant” and “refugee”. Their redefinition of immigration is an attempt to alternate the current prejudice towards immigrants, which was formed by the media.

According to the Oxford dictionary “refugee is a person who has been forced to leave their country in order to escape war, persecution, or natural disaster” (*Oxford Dictionaries Language Matters*), these people seek safety in other countries, they seek a refuge. However, postcolonial Nigerian and English literature considerably widens this definition. For some people, a refuge is not only a physical place but inner peace. One of the main characters in Ben Okri’s novel *Dangerous Love* gives an example of being a refugee from something other than a country, a refugee from inner dissatisfaction with the state of the world around him: “Firstly this is Lagos. We are victims here, we are strangers, refugees from the poverty of the interior. And even if we were in our villages we would still be strangers. It is odd that in our own country we don’t have a home” (Okri 159). In Cleave’s *The Other Hand* Andrew finds a refuge in an eternal peace, he becomes a refugee from himself and his conscience by committing suicide because there is nowhere to escape in order to forget what he did. Sarah experiences similar sensation when she speaks of discovering her true self: “There is nowhere else to go. I have discovered the person I am and I do not like her. I am the same as Andrew. [...] Tell me, please, where is the refuge from that?” (*TOH* 154).

Similar character applies to immigration. It is not merely a quest for better conditions but above all the search for home, as the desire to migrate is partly a dissatisfaction with living conditions and a quest for a place where one would feel gratification. Boris Pasternak in *Doctor Zhivago* described home as follows: “One group of thoughts centered around Tonia, their home, and their former, settled life where everything, down to the smallest detail, had an aura of poetry and was permeated with affection and warmth” (210).

For Obinze from *Americanah* this quest started at an early age when he read American literature and considered it the only literature worth reading. He was so obsessed with America that his worship of American culture caused the dissatisfaction with his homeland and planted an idea of immigration in his head.

#### 4. The reasons for immigration

Chinua Achebe wrote: “The Igbo people have a proverb that when a man says yes his *chi* says yes also. Okonkwo said yes very strongly, so his *chi* agreed” (23). This phrase may be perceived as the embodiment of Nigerian mentality. The desire to succeed despite social background seems to underpin Nigerian thinking. This echoes American idiom: “From rags to riches”. This may be the reason why so many Nigerians nowadays migrate to the U.S., which is seen as a land of unlimited opportunities. In *Americanah* there are characters that resemble Okonkwo in that they also want to achieve more and prove themselves capable of more, in defiance of their position on the social ladder.

Two protagonists in *Americanah*, Emenike and Obinze, aspire to go to the West and change their lives. They think that they belong in the U.S. and their life in Nigeria is only temporary. They feel like they do not belong to their homeland. In the novel it becomes clear that Obinze’s generation is drawn to America much more than to the UK after one of the characters says: “‘American passport is the coolest thing,’ Kayode said. ‘I would exchange my British passport tomorrow’”<sup>6</sup>.

America becomes the first choice country for immigrants for different reasons but mainly because its population consists of the descendants of people who came there centuries ago from all over the world. At this point two concepts of American society can be explored. The first one is a concept of a “salad bowl” where people reside in the same country but at the same time remember and revere traditions of their ancestors who came to the U.S. long ago. It can be expressed in the desire of parents who migrated from Italy, for example, to teach their children Italian and

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<sup>6</sup> Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, *Americanah*, London: Fourth Estate, 2013, 273 [Subsequent page references preceded with *A* are given in parentheses in the text]

preserve their cultural heritage. The idea behind this is that Americans are different in their religious beliefs, the languages they speak, etc. but they can coexist and feel like a part of a new world, be proud of being Americans, embrace their new identity. In contrast to this concept there is another one that is called a “melting pot”, which refers to the idea that heterogeneous society that consists of immigrants from all over the world becomes more homogeneous and the cultural differences blend together and create common culture.

Obinze’s inner monologue at Emenike’s dinner party explains one of the central reasons for the characters in *Americanah* to leave Nigeria in search of a better life. The other guests who were at the party and grew up in the UK could not relate to Obinze’s thirst for another life that was happening somewhere else, e.g. in England, because they were born there and have never experienced the hunger for choice and certainty:

Alexa, and the other guests [...] all understand the fleeing from war, from the kind of poverty that crushed human souls, but they would not understand the need to escape from the oppressive lethargy of choicelessness. (A 234)

Most people think of African countries as poor, and of African people as uneducated and underprivileged, who know a lot of suffering and have no other choice but to flee from the country where they were born. Unlike in Chris Cleave’s book, no character in Chimamanda’s novel was in a situation when migrating was absolutely necessary. They are all immigrants by choice. Some of them went abroad because they had an opportunity to get an education there, like Ifemelu, for others the situation in Nigeria took an unexpected turn and it seemed like a better option to leave, like in aunty Uju’s case. Obinze simply felt like his life was on hold while he was in Nigeria:

[...] seeking out magazines and books and films and second-hand stories about America, his longing took on a minor mystical quality and America became where he was destined to be. He saw himself walking the streets of Harlem, discussing the merits of Mark Twain with his American friends,

gazing at Mount Rushmore. Days after he graduated from university, bloated with knowledge about America [...]. (A 233)

His obsession with America began at school, he knew all the American presidents, watched American television, knew details about the actors. He was preparing himself for a life there and thought that his awareness of cultural background brought him closer to the country of his dreams, helped him understand what it is like to be there, to be a part of that society. TV programs he watched and books he read made him dream of life in Manhattan. Unfortunately, the shows and books he read did not describe the life of people in Manhattan who are not that well-off, they did not prepare him for the reality but described a dream.

Both Adichie and Cleave agree that books and the media play a significant role in the lives of immigrants. In *The Other Hand* the main protagonist teaches herself to be British by reading newspapers, watching television and observing other people in England and trying to learn British traditions. It is interesting that Little Bee learnt these traditions while being in the UK, whereas Obinze learnt American ones in Nigeria, and yet none of them felt comfortable when surrounded by the British or Americans. Two conclusions may be drawn from this. Firstly, this comparison highlights how the walls of the detention centre make the refugees no closer to England than when they started their journey. Secondly, neither the Western nor the third world countries are accurately reflected in the media.

The novels show that any type of immigration is a difficult path for an immigrant where one's dreams and hopes often break. Little Bee hoped to find safety but she found prison. Obinze dreamed to find opportunities and success but was disappointed by his failure and inability to take his life into his own hands. All characters in the end come to a realisation that what they read and saw in the media did not correspond with the real world.

## 5. Attitude expressed towards immigrants and refugees

In *The Other Hand* and *Americanah* different attitudes towards immigrants and refugees are represented. The attitude towards immigrants and refugees is never univocal. Most people do not want anything to do with them, they understand that somewhere there are people who are in danger or are struggling for life but do not feel responsible for it. Andrew O'Rourke and Sarah's lover, who are holding the same views as Alexa in *Americanah*, are perfect examples of such people. While Andrew's position at the beach was quite clear, it changed with time when he started blaming himself for what happened during the holiday. He started researching the situation in Nigeria and was planning to write a book about it but he could not withstand the ghosts of his past. Even though his opinion was overturned by his experience, there is Lawrence, who again represents the majority of people who are indifferent to the position of the refugees: "It isn't my problem. I can't be responsible for all the trouble in the world" (*TOH* 267).

A different belief is held by people who think of refugees and immigrants as of means to make money:

Of course the people who really make the money are the big contractors. The ones I'm working for now, Dutch firm, they run the whole show. They run the detention centres and they run the repatriations. So they're earning either way, whether we lock you up or whether we send you back. [...] But that's how you've got to think, these days, isn't it? It's the global economy. (*TOH* 349)

These words of the man who deported Little Bee to Nigeria show his desire to justify his actions by saying that it is just a job and someone has to do it. It reminds one of a different book by Stephen King, *The Green Mile*, where the main character also justifies himself when electrifying an innocent man by thinking that he has a family to feed and it would be hard for him to find another job during the Great Depression in the U.S. This can also be compared to soldiers who carry out commands of the authorities without asking questions. People who act as executors generally soothe

themselves saying it is not their decision and they have no choice but to obey the order<sup>7</sup>.

It is also difficult for people to relate to the immigrants and refugees because they are people with no name and no story: “They only gave us enough space to write down the very saddest things that had happened to you. That was the worst part. Because if you cannot read the beautiful things that have happened in someone’s life, why should you care about their sadness?” (*TOH* 316). It becomes psychologically difficult for the people to feel empathy towards immigrants.

The most prevalent belief of why Africans seek refuge in the Western countries is held by people who do not delve into international affairs but read articles, which are written by people who give their opinions on countries they have never visited. The belief might be summarised into the following statement: “The reason you have to come over here, you Africans, is that you just aren’t capable of good government over there” (*TOH* 256).

In *The Other Hand* the indifferent and compassionate attitudes towards refugees are reflected in Sarah and Lawrence’s conversation. One of his utterances reflects modern world’s relation towards immigrants: people who come to the West to take their jobs, money, houses, women, etc.: “And don’t take it the wrong way, but so what? Save her and there’s a whole world of them behind her. A whole swarm of Little Bees, coming here to feed” (*TOH* 154). Sarah’s retort implies a more uncommon position: “Or to pollinate” (*TOH* 296). Sarah does not see immigrants or refugees as pests but as a catalyst for a possible brighter future. After all, a little girl with no family, documents or home helped her to stay on her feet during Andrew’s funeral.

Similarly, some Nigerians perceive the British as varmints: the damage colonisation has caused still affects vital organs of the government and everyday life. Nowadays the influence, however, is more mutual. The West affects Nigeria by export (“You got our gold. You got our oil.”, “There in the east, the plantations stretch up the green hillsides and vanish into the mist. The tea they grow, that

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<sup>7</sup> An experiment was carried out in the U.S. by a famous psychologist Stanley Milgram in which he found out that obedience to authority in people subverts personal conscience.

vanishes too. I think all of it is exported.” (*TOH* 161), whereas Nigeria influences the West by migrating and bringing different culture to those countries.

Chris Cleave illustrates in his book that at least some children are yet not affected by prejudice towards immigrants: “Charlie was laughing with the other children, running and playing and chasing” (*TOH* 361). Charlie’s ignorance of the prejudice towards immigrants is seen as a possible source of a fresh start for the troubled relations but also means that something happens on the way to adulthood that changes people’s attitude towards immigrants and refugees. It is the upbringing and social conventions that change children’s perception of the world and make them think in terms of political and economic gain.

Sarah comprehends that if it is not possible to escape the unfavourable circumstances, it is necessary to change them to preserve life because as one beholds in Andrew’s case, trying to ignore it or pretend that it is not your business leads to death: “You travel here and there, trying to get out from the cloud, and nothing works, and then one day you realise you’ve been carrying the weather around with you” (*TOH* 239). That is why she chooses to go to Nigeria and write about the refugees from their perspective. She wishes to show what is concealed by the media: the actual state of the country and the part that the Western countries play in it.

In *Americanah* when Obinze attends a dinner party at his friend’s, Emenike’s, a discussion on immigration arises. It is mostly white people who talk about immigration at the table (ironically, they have never had such experience and judge from afar), and they are divided into two “camps”, represented by Alexa and Mark, whose views differ largely from Sarah and Lawrence.

“[...] I’ve just got involved with this fantastic charity that’s trying to stop the UK from hiring so many African health workers,” Alexa said. “There are simply no doctors left and nurses left on that continent. [...] African doctors should stay in Africa.”

“Why shouldn’t they want to practise where there is regular electricity and regular pay?” Mark asked, [...] “I’m from Grimsby and I certainly don’t want to work in a district hospital there.” (*A* 273)

Mark (similarly to Sarah) can somehow relate to the fact that some people might go abroad in search of better conditions, while Alexa (a parallel to Lawrence), who has never in her life had a need to struggle for a place in a social hierarchy, considers it her duty as a member of a more developed country to help people in Africa but wants to have nothing to do with them personally. Her approach to immigration is that everyone should stay in their place, however, this does not apply to her or the circle of people she relates to. Mark and Alexa's views are the two main approaches towards immigrants in the Western world.

## **6. Legal and illegal immigration**

An example of a legal immigrant in *Americanah* is Auntie Uju, who obtained her visa while she was pregnant with Dike and gave birth in the U.S., which automatically made Dike an American citizen. This meant that she, as his mother, had a right to apply for an immigrant visa, as she had a family member to follow. This type of visa gives one the ability to work and study. It might be difficult to find a well-paid job or to pass exams but there is no need for violation of the law. However, in many cases legal and illegal immigration is very closely connected. Frequently legal immigrants violate the law by working when they are on tourist or student visas. Ifemelu had no problem obtaining a student visa to go to America after she had taken SATs and got a partial scholarship at university but it did not give her the right to work, which made it very difficult for her to make a living and pay the rest of the university fee. That is why Auntie Uju arranged for her to use a Social Security card and driver's licence of a different person:

Ngozi Okonkwo was at least ten years older than she was [...].

"I don't even look like her at all," Ifemelu had said when Auntie Uju gave her the card.

"All of us look alike to white people," Auntie Uju said. (A 119)

Ifemelu's concern was useless because many immigrants are known to work in America or the UK under someone else's name. There is a certain risk but people mostly get caught only if they forget to respond to the name stated on the ID that they use. In order to appease Ifemelu Auntie Uju told her of an acquaintance of hers:

Amara's cousin came last year and she doesn't have her papers yet, so he has been working with Amara's ID. [...] Her cousin is very fair and slim. They do not look alike at all. Nobody noticed. [...] Just make sure you always remember your new name. I have a friend who forget and one of her co-workers called her and called her and she was blank. Then they became suspicious and reported her to immigration. (A 121)

Obinze too had to use fake ID while he was in the UK and no one noticed that he did not look like the man in the picture (black people, Asians, Indians often look similar to the white people). Immigrants usually take menial jobs because the employers are not as thorough when it comes to checking their employees' identities.

Illegal immigration and the decision to hide or to lie to the government is a result of the inability to obtain the documents in a legal way. When Obinze applied for his visa to the U.S. and the refusal seemed unreasonable:

Obinze walked up and slid his forms underneath the glass. The man glanced at his forms and said, kindly, 'Sorry, you don't qualify. Next person!' [...] He went three more times over the next few months. Each time he was told, without a glance at his documents, 'Sorry, you don't qualify'. (A 233)

He was later told by his mother that there were fears of terrorist attacks and Americans were averse to foreign young men. This refers to the 9/11 anxiety when the U.S. was afraid the catastrophe might happen again and made it difficult for the men from the third world countries to obtain visas. It is an example of how internal affairs in the U.S. influence the embassy's policy with regard to granting entry into the U.S. His bank statements made a difference when Obinze applied for a visa years

later and had no problems obtaining it. The amount of money he had in his bank account and could presumably spend in the U.S. reflects the decision.

After having received the tourist or student visas many people try to stay in the U.S. or the UK by all means possible. This was Obinze's case. His mother helped him get a student visa by putting his name as a research assistant on her application after she was invited to an academic conference in London, which gave him a six-month visa. He then stayed three years in England as an illegal immigrant trying to get his papers.

The first thing Obinze heard from his cousin Nicholas when he came to London was a piece of advice: "If you come to England with a visa that does not allow you to work [...] the first thing to look for is not food or water, it is an NI number so you can work. Take all the jobs you can. Spend nothing. Marry an EU citizen and get your papers. Then your life can begin" (A 239). Obinze followed his advice and took menial jobs, such as cleaning toilets using fake ID. He then tried to obtain documents by marrying an EU citizen.

The process of arranging the sham marriage is well described in the novel. He first contacted dubious Angolans who gave him a deal: Obinze paid two thousand pounds and they took him to a lawyer who assured Obinze that getting married was now his only chance to become a legal immigrant. It was them who introduced him to Cleotilde, whom he was supposed to marry (they only gave her 500 pounds and took her passport, so that Obinze and her would not marry without their help). They also provided him with necessary documents to go through the marriage procedure: "It was they who provided water and gas bills, going back six months, with his name and a Newcastle address, they found a man who could arrange these documents and driving license. Obinze and Cleotilde went on a couple of dates in order to be able to answer the questions in the interview that they would need to pass in order to prove that their marriage is not a sham.

Obinze was arrested on the day of his marriage during registration. Two policemen put handcuffs on him and drove him to the police station. Obinze could prolong his stay in the UK by appealing and trying to prove that his marriage was not a sham but he would most likely be deported anyway because even the lawyer that

was assigned to him confirmed that the appeal would only make the matter longer but not change the outcome.

Chris Cleave is even bleaker in his depiction of the treatment of the refugees than Adichie. He also talks about the prolongation of the stay in England. Little Bee describes the ways for the refugees to stay in the UK for a longer period instead of being deported after a month or two by dividing them into three groups: those who look good, those who speak good English, and those who have their story backed up by the documents. This division mirrors contemporary tendencies in the modern world: beauty, documents<sup>8</sup> and education make a considerable difference in the way people view each other. She herself belongs to the second group. The girl taught herself to speak good English by watching television in order for her words to gain more weight and sound more convincing.

Obinze stayed in Dover until there were seats available on the plane to Lagos:

By the day he was led into a van one morning, a fuzz of hair, like carpet grass, had covered his entire jaw. It was not yet dawn. He was with two women and five men, all handcuffed, all bound for Nigeria, and they were marched, at Heathrow Airport, through security and immigration and onto the plane, while other passengers stared. (A 283)

People at the airport perceived them as criminals, and Obinze saw himself through their eyes.

In *The Other Hand* officers in the detention centre also see refugees as criminals. Their crime is that they cannot prove the legitimacy of their stories and so they are perceived as liars who want to take advantage of the Social Security System in the UK. Chris Cleave describes the detention centre as a prison, which coincides

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<sup>8</sup> The necessity of the presence of documents reveals the meaning of words: only that which is written is significant and valid. A cognate topic is explored in a different postcolonial novel by David Malouf, *Remembering Babylon*. When one of the main protagonists, Gemmy, decides to disappear from the settlement he does not do it until the papers on which he believes his life is written down are destroyed, for writing makes the story last and difficult to forget or alter. Unlike Chimamanda Cleave attributes to the language not only the function of assimilation but makes it of an utter importance when it comes to survival and self-preservation.

with Adichie's description in *Americanah* when Obinze spent some time in a similar centre before his deportation. Chris's fictional Black Hill Immigration Removal Centre is portrayed as a glum place. The only difference is the duration the characters stay within the centres. Obinze spent two weeks there before being deported, whereas Little Bee spent two years of her life in the centre. It is true that her situation is not as clear and the procedure could take much longer but it is also possible that Cleave aggravates conditions in the centre to add more drama into his fiction.<sup>9</sup> The duration of Little Bee's detention sounds unbelievable to the UK citizens in the novel:

'She got out of the country and came here. Then she was two years in an immigration detention centre in Essex.' 'A detention centre? Christ, what did she do?' 'Nothing. Asylum seekers, apparently they just lock them up when they arrive here.' 'For two *years*?' 'You don't believe me?' 'I don't believe *her*. Two years in detention? She must have done something.' (TOH 172)

It is difficult to believe that a fragile girl could be treated in this manner upon arrival and still be in danger after she had been released: "But you're free now. They couldn't just *come for you*, Bee. This isn't Nazi Germany. There must be some procedure we can go through. Some appeal. I can *tell* them what happened to you over there." (TOH 196) Neither Sarah nor Lawrence have ever dealt with anything like that and they struggle to understand the fact that their country, which they believe is an example of democracy and freedom, a fighter for human rights can treat people in such manner.

Little Bee describes the detention centre in the following words:

It was very bad. It is not possible to think clearly in there. You have not committed a crime, so all you can think of is, When will I be let out? But they tell you nothing. After a month, six months, you start to think, Maybe I will

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<sup>9</sup> In one of her interviews Chimamanda said that simple true stories are not as interesting for the reader, so writers often add insult to injury.

grow old in here [...] But you have to move on. [...] At five p.m. they tell you to move on and at six p.m. they lock you back in your cell. (TOH 209)

Cleave intensifies the image by using one of postcolonial literature's motifs, colours<sup>10</sup>. He describes young girls wearing yellow and pink dresses in a grey building, thus demonstrating how they do not belong there.

The Immigration Removal Centre is separated from the rest of the UK by a tall grey wall, which may also be seen as a metaphor for the differences between the third world countries and Western civilisation: people in states like Nigeria want to ameliorate their lives but a wall has been built for them to stay on the same political and economical level by the Western countries (export of oil, control over the government, etc.).

The detention centre is situated in the UK but it is not the kind of place that believes or knows to exist or associates with England. Even some refugees who stayed in the detention centre for a long time thought they still had not reached the coast of Great Britain. On the day Little Bee was released one of the girls named England as her desired destination when calling the cab: "England, yes please. Yes please thank you, I want to go to England" (TOH 19). Her mind simply could not grasp that the country where she hoped to find a refuge would become yet another prison.

Little Bee was let out of the detention centre after Yevette slept with one of the workers there. None of the girls who were let out that day had any documents, so they were not free, as one of the other refugees put it "Dere's freedom as in, *yu girls is free to go*, and den dere's freedom as in, *yu girls is free to go till we catches yu*" (TOH 73). The worker let them out of the prison but he could not give them the legal right to stay in the country, thus the girls were still under the threat of being either locked back in the detention centre or deported.

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<sup>10</sup> Colours play a major role in description of the inner worlds of the characters in many postcolonial novels, such as *Wide Sargasso Sea* by Jane Rhys (Caribbean literature) or *Clothes* by Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni (Indian literature).

## 7. Presentation of the influence of immigration on one's identity

Many immigrants upon arrival to the country of their destination go through a difficult process of changing their identity. Substitution of one identity for another is not an easy process. Some immigrants have to give up their traditions, beliefs, religion, language, and fully accept traditions of a strange country, behave as though they were brought up there. For others, who have aspired to the country of destination since an early age or those who made a conscious decision to move this process might be easier, as they made a choice and in a way were ready to accept a different identity. This process is also simplified by migrating with a fortune, proper education, knowledge of English, presence of family members in the country of destination, etc. Age plays an important role: “Unlike Auntie Uju, Ginika had come to America with the flexibility and fluidness of youth, the cultural cues had seeped into her skin [...]” (A 125). It is much easier for young people to acquire and get used to the new ways.

The problem of identity originates in the childhood when children realise that some individuals have more opportunities than the others. It is well illustrated in *Americanah* when students come back to Nigeria from the U.S. or other European countries. They evoke awe from the others: “After Kayode came back from [...] Switzerland [...], Emenike had bent down to caress Kayode’s shoes, saying ‘I want to touch them because they have touched snow’” (A 65). Students who had parents or relatives abroad and spent holidays in America or Britain were treated differently, with more respect. Even those who only went to the U.S. for a short time would try to emphasise how much the foreign country has changed them, how they learned the correct, more modern way of pronouncing words: “[...] Bisi, a girl in the form below them, who had come back from a short trip to America with odd affectations, pretending she no longer understood Yoruba, adding a slurred *r* to every English word she spoke” (A 65). By pretending she did not speak Yoruba, Bisi alienated herself from her classmates and attempted to show that she did not belong in Nigeria but was someone from a different world, which could not be understood unless visited.

It is very common for people who go abroad to lose their identity for different reasons. Some of them, like Emenike, are too eager to blend in, they become oblivious and try to show everyone around them that they now have nothing in common with their homeland. Emenike's phrase "But the Americans love us, Brits, they love the accent and the Queen and the double-decker" (A 282) together with his behaviour at dinner made it clear that he considers himself British and associates himself with an upper-class society.

Emenike's eagerness to be someone else can also be seen in the way he talks about his life, drawing attention to all the trips he and his wife went on. He separates himself from Obinze on purpose by ignoring and being indifferent to his friend's present situation making it seem as if he never faced such problems. He mentions the brands of his clothes and says Obinze must go to America, even though he knows Obinze has no money and his mind is preoccupied with trying to become a legal immigrant in the UK.

Emenike's desire to migrate was insuperable. Even when he was at school, he kept asking people who went abroad during holidays about their clothes and lied about his parents being rich and that he would go to study abroad soon:

His was the coiled, urgent restlessness of a person who believed that fate had mistakenly allotted him place below his true destiny. [...] Emenike sent news only of progress: his postgraduate work completed, his job at the housing authority, his marriage to an Englishwoman who was a solicitor in the city. (A 180)

He did not talk about his misfortunes because he wanted to prove that he belonged to the Western society and therefore there were no obstacles in his way.

The change in his attitude towards sexual minorities has indicated a change of his core values and morals. Once very aggressive towards gay men in Nigeria, he is now almost flirting with one of his guests, who is homosexual. This hypocrisy are an intrinsic part of some immigrants. Aunty Uju's boyfriend in the U.S. is another

example of such thinking. He liked equality between men and women regarding work but rejected and thought it dreadful that women in the West disobey their husbands.

These immigrants get furious when they realise that no matter how much effort they had put into being American or British, the society still rejected to see them the way they saw themselves<sup>11</sup>, mainly because they are black and there are certain stereotypes associated with race that are difficult to overturn.

In their novels, both Adichie and Cleave make a parallel between immigrants from Mexico in the U.S. and those from the Eastern Europe in the UK. Just as the Mexicans are prepared to do menial jobs in the U.S. for little money, people from the Eastern Europe are prepared to do the same in the UK: “[...] you can’t compete with the Polskis. The Poles will do a full day’s work for a kind word and a packet of fags.” (*TOH* 348) As striking as the similarities between the developing countries and their inhabitants’ desire to leave for the West may be, there is also a notable difference, which Adichie does not fail to mention in her novel. Immigrants from Eastern Europe do not experience racial discrimination, which makes it easier for them to blend in.

In the novel Adichie describes Ifemelu’s realisation of being black when she comes to America, which is very much based on the author’s experience. Before immigration Ifemelu did not think of herself as black, she was aware of her skin colour but it was not a part of who she was. In the U.S., however, there are certain stereotypes and expectations connected with race. Black people are thought of as uneducated, poor, and aggressive. In order to be taken seriously and look professional, certain unwritten rules should be followed by black people. In *Americanah* Chimamanda writes a lot about hair, which can be seen as a metaphor for changes in immigrants’ behaviour. It might be safe to assume that Adichie concentrates on hair so much because it is something people, especially women, have to deal with on daily basis. The process of relaxing the hair and problems that come with it are described in detail in the novel. Prior to a job interview Auntie Uju and Ifemelu relax their hair to look professional, they are told to do so by other fellow immigrants who had been in the U.S. longer. Ifemelu struggles with this necessity to

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<sup>11</sup> Emenike tried to catch a cab late at night but the driver pretended he was off duty and picked up two white girls down the road.

apply chemicals on her hair, making it behave in an unnatural way. She goes through a long and difficult path of accepting her natural hair and becoming a self-confident woman who does not let social conventions influence her appearance. The hair also acquires a political importance in the novel: the question arises, whether Obama would have won the elections, had his wife not relaxed her hair. Ifemelu is the only character in the book who comes to embrace her identity. In the U.S. she goes from being *Americanah* to becoming a true Nigerian woman, who is proud to wear her hair in its natural form and speak in Nigerian English. Her acceptance of her appearance may be considered the first step to discovering herself and a beginning of her journey back home.

It is not only hair and acquaintances that make Ifemelu realise her blackness, but also the media. When it comes to the main characters in the films or TV series there is usually a main white character, and his or her best black friend. This is a fair point in the book, as the reader can think of examples, e.g. *True Blood*, *Vampire Diaries*) where it is true even without having lived in the U.S.

In the novel Chimamanda also points out that even in Nigeria mixed-race people are considered more popular, like Ifemelu's friend, Ginika. Obinze's wife, Kosi, takes it as a compliment when being mistaken for mixed-race.

As Ifemelu continues to live and travel around America, she begins to notice certain unwritten rules, social conventions, behaviours that she decides to write about in a blog. The blog is a collection of general observations about how the social ladder is structured, and the relationships between people. It is mostly a blog on race and the problems connected with it. It is emphasised that there is still a lot of racism in the U.S. and many people choose to ignore this fact. In order to reveal Ifemelu's character it is necessary to mention that despite her being praised by not being afraid to speak her mind, she herself is a hypocrite. After her blog became popular, she got invited to schools and companies to give talks on race. However, after her first talk she realised that people, who invited her, have never read her blog and expected to hear how America has made a big step towards reducing racism, later she changes her strategy: "During her talks, she said: 'America has made great progress for which we should be very proud.' In her blog she wrote: *Racism should never have happened*

*and so you don't get a cookie for reducing it.*" (305) Ifemelu is in a way similar to Auntie Uju's boyfriend who only accepted certain things. She too only spoke her mind when it was beneficial.

While growing up, children of immigrants often face problems connected with finding their identity and their equivocal position within the society. Natural vivacity children possess leads to a lot of inquiries and engrossed interest in their roots. They bequest some features from their parents that they cannot observe in their classmates and it may turn them into outcasts. Their situation is the most ambivalent of all. It is especially true for black children, because even if they behave impeccably, in the eyes of the others they still look different and racism is still a problem in the Western countries. Even at school their freedom to choose their identity is limited by the regard of the teachers who treat them differently because of the colour of their skin. Dike, for example, is the only black student at school, he experiences a lot of injustice, e.g. being blamed for hacking into school's computer system when he is not even good with computers: "You have to blame the black kid first" (A 349).

Being the first generation brought up in the US, they face an ordeal other immigrants cannot identify with. It is one of the problems Dike faces in America but it would probably be even more challenging for him to deal with it in England. It is noted that America has always been more welcoming towards immigrants, as "countries in Europe were based on exclusion and not, as in America, on inclusion" (A 274).

Dike's situation is aggravated by his mother's intentional decision to lie about her relationship with his father, whom he never knew and by banishing Igbo language from their home. Such treatment and being confused about his identity led Dike to an attempt to commit suicide: "Do you remember when Dike was telling you something about "we black folk" and you told him "you are not black"? [...] You told him what he wasn't but you didn't tell him what he was. [...] His depression is because of his experience [...]" (A 380). He felt conflicted for many reasons, one of which was lack of reassurance from his mother.

The attempt at the suicide was followed by sessions with a therapist and a visit to Nigeria. The visit meant getting in touch with his roots, recollecting pieces of his

early childhood and memories of his father. This experience helped him identify with the country of his ancestors, to understand himself better and gave him an insight on what it would be like to live without being treated according to race.

Profession is an inseparable aspect of one's identity, which influences the way people view themselves. Immigrants often take jobs that they would not even consider in their homeland because they are not entrusted with serious jobs. The university diplomas from the third-world countries are not recognised and people take menial jobs in order to survive. In some cases they have to pass comparative exams in order to confirm their degree. This process is illustrated by the case of aunty Uju from *Americanah*. Being a respected doctor in Nigeria, even though her salary was often delayed, she felt like a valuable member of society, whereas in the U.S. she worked among uneducated people, doing monotonous, repetitive jobs. A qualified doctor like her had to work three jobs in order to make a living: "I was doing retail at the mall, and a research assistantship, and I even did some hours at Burger King" (A 110). These circumstances in which she found herself for several years have changed her self-esteem and respect. Aunty Uju's journey to becoming an American is arduous. In order to get the medical license she has to pass an exam, which she has already taken several times and failed: "I've never failed an exam in my life. But they weren't testing actual knowledge, they were testing our ability to answer tricky multiple-choice questions that have nothing to do with real medical knowledge" (A 109). The different system of education and testing made Uju doubt her ability to get a good job in her area.

Another aspect that points toward Aunty Uju's abandonment of her identity is how she pronounces her name differently: "'Yes, this is Uju.' She pronounced it *ypu-joo* instead of *oo-joo*. 'Is that how you pronounce your name now?' Ifemelu asked afterwards. 'It's what they call me.'" Her mispronouncing the name illustrates that she has accepted the new role that was forced upon her by the circumstances, she thinks it is easier to accept society's opinion of her and her role in it. She reached a point where she was tired of explaining who she is.

Unlike Aunty Uju, Obinze abandoned his name out of necessity as he is an illegal immigrant in the UK and faces more difficulties than others when it comes to

getting a job. In menial jobs employers do not ask for passports, it is enough to present driver's licence, which can be obtained from someone else, to get the job. He pays the owner of the licence thirty five per cent of his earnings. The use of one's name is crucial when it comes to preserving identity. Not only do the immigrants dissolve into society and adapt, but they also learn to respond to someone else's name, forget themselves, push their identities aside for the sake of not being exposed. There is a constant fear of being caught therefore making them change their behaviour and become more cautious<sup>12</sup>. Obinze tried to become invisible, draw as little attention as possible, to minimise interaction with people. This was all performed by a person who, even though he sometimes kept to himself, had many friends in Nigeria and was keen on discussing his thoughts with others, debating. For three years Obinze was forced to compromise who he was.

In *The Other Hand* names do not only give different identity but give the protagonists certain powers. Charlie views himself as a hero when calling himself Batman. Little Bee wants to mingle with the surroundings, being able to travel without being noticed. Even Sarah uses a pseudonym in her magazine, mainly because she is ashamed of the articles they publish and she does not want to take full responsibility for it and be associated with them. She distinguishes between her professional and real self. At the end of the novel when Little Bee realises she is going to be arrested and her nickname will not help her to escape, she tells Charlie her real name because she wants him to remember her by it: ““Udo means *peace*. Do you know what peace is, Charlie? [...] Peace is a time when people can tell each other their real names”” (TOH 372). The theme of names is also described in Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* when the main protagonist is being called by someone else's name and therefore her behaviour changes, she starts to believe that she is like her mother and goes mad.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Obinze once thought his co-workers have found out he had been using a fake ID when they behaved suspiciously. It turned out they wanted to congratulate him on his Birthday, the date was on his fake identity card.

<sup>13</sup> In *Wide Sargasso Sea* the main protagonist's, Antoinette's, mother, Bertha, went mad after her son's death. Later in the book Antoinette's husband begins to think that Antoinette is like her mother because her behavior is different from the other women he saw in England (she is not afraid of showing her sexuality) and starts calling her by her

## 8. Organizations among African immigrants

The characters in *Americanah* and *The Other Hand* undergo different transformations during their stay abroad. This is connected to the fact that they accommodate to the surroundings. The longer immigrants stay abroad, the more the connection to their homeland deteriorates. One of the factors is that they face problems with documents, search for jobs, usage of fake identity cards, race and so on that are unknown to people who stayed in their homeland. They feel misunderstood by their relatives and friends who are unable to give them advice or to support them either financially or psychologically. This leads to convergence with other immigrants from other countries. Societies and organisations are created in order to help new immigrants accommodate to their surroundings. The purpose of societies may differ but the main idea is to help with jobs, documents, accommodation, adaptation, etc.

One of such organisations is described in *Americanah*. It is held in a place, similar to the windowless rooms of the detention centre in *The Other Hand*. The immigrants at the meeting have three things in common: they live in a foreign country, they are from Africa, and they are students. It is emphasised that the members of African Students Associations know very little about other African countries and when asking for more details they have a tendency to mimic Americans, e.g. “You speak such good English. How bad is AIDS in your country?” (*A* 138). Immigrants sometimes feel a need to laugh at their country in a contemptuous manner in order to prove themselves they have made the right decision to leave: “[...] they themselves mocked Africa, trading stories of absurdity, of stupidity, and they felt safe to mock, because it was mockery made of longing, and of the heartbroken desire to see a place made whole again” (*A* 138).

A different, less formal group is depicted in *The Other Hand* by Yevette when Little Bee asks her if she knows anyone in London: “I got people in London. Got de

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mother's name because in his opinion her behavior is one of a mad person. In the end his actions lead to Antoinette's accepting this new identity that is forced on her and she does go mad.

half of Jamaica livin down on Cole Harbour Lane” (TOH 99). This group can be seen as an informal, diaspora-like type of organisations of immigrants that are mentioned in *Americanah*, as they occasionally take on functions, such as helping to accommodate and getting a job or documents. Helping a compatriot abroad who has cognate problems to yours builds strong relationships between refugees and illegal immigrants, as they struggle to survive together and it is easier when somebody watches over you: “[...] there is no flag for us floating people. We are millions, but we are not a nation. We cannot stay together. Maybe we get together in ones and twos, for a day or a month or even a year, but then the wind changes and carries the hope away” (TOH 115). Unlike legal groups in *Americanah*, groups formed by illegal immigrants and refugees do not last, the amount of participants is very little and they appear of perforce.

A parallel is drawn between the associations for immigrants and for returnees. The groups are created for individuals who long for something familiar. Immigrants are homesick and lack familiarity of behaviour and similar background. Returnees, on the other hand, long for the things they got used to abroad. Their meetings are aimed at discussing places in Nigeria that remind them of America, talking about many modern things (e.g. fast Internet) that Nigeria fails to provide: ““Oh, there’s this new place that opened [...]. They have the kinds of things we can eat’ Ifemelu was comfortable here, and she wished she were not” (A 409).

## 9. The motif of language

According to a research that is described in Douwe Draaisma's book *Why Life Speeds Up as You Get Older: How Memory Shapes Our Past* the development of linguistic skills coincides with people's first memories. In order for a person to be able to acquire autobiographical memory it is crucial for them to be able to use past tense, so that they can first talk about events that occurred in the past and then possibly remember them. It is obvious from the research that language enables people to store their memories, which later become a part of a person's self-awareness and perception. This leads one to a conclusion that language is a part of one's identity.

The motif of language is one of the central ones in *Americanah* and *The Other Hand*. Language is a reflection of identity in both novels. It is not surprising as "conscious and unconscious are asymmetrically co-present: the inner structure maps the outer conceptualising. This mapping is above all governed by linguistic experience" (Wright 107). This means that person's attitude to and vision of life is dependent upon language. Some people's attitude towards illegal immigrants and refugees is generated by the lack of information about them and lack of personal experience in such situations: "[...] what does one call the type of meeting where one gains an African girl and loses E, D and C? *I do not think you have a word for it in your language*" (TOH 36). The lack of word for this kind of meeting is grounded on the fact that such situations did not occur fifty years ago, so people strain to find a logical explanation or a solution for that but when they fail to do so or to comprehend how to react they imbibe other people's opinion, such as Andrew's, which is not always found on solid facts.

One of the first things Ifemelu notices when she comes to America is that some words are used and perceived differently in the U.S. compared to Nigeria. Her first tutor in the States is her old friend Ginika, who tells her that when someone calls Ifemelu "thin" it is a compliment, and that "fat" is an offensive word Ifemelu should avoid. So she banishes some of the words from her vocabulary. By doing that, she also changes the way she perceives the world, which leads to her not realising that she herself has become fat for too long. Only when the word comes to her mind does she

realise that she has gained weight, which points to the fact that the way one perceives reality can be changed by the way one uses the language.

Some words that are used in America and not used in the UK, and consequently in Nigeria, are difficult for Ifemelu to understand when she comes to the U.S. Words such as “condo” or “hot dog” confuse her as well as the frequent usage of the word “excited”, which she later learns to use herself. The employment of this word may cause Ifemelu to actually feel the excitement that she would not feel if she had not used it.

Language is not only used to describe the perception of the world by the characters but plays a major role in social relationships. The use of British English is not only significant to the immigrants in the UK, but also gives status to those who are in Nigeria. Ifemelu’s father has always longed for education, he considered himself worthy of more, more intelligent than his classmates, the proof for his eminency is the way he speaks “His was a formal, elevated English” (A 47). He also makes a remark about American English which reflects his attitude towards America and England: “I do not understand Americans. They say “job” and you think they have said “jab” [...] One finds the British manner of speaking much preferable” (A 301). He views British English as a symbol of education and good manners.

Even Obinze’s mother used British English, while her son, in his blind admiration for America, spoke with American accent, used American words: “When Obinze pronounced “schedule” with the *k* sound, his mother said: “”Ifemelunamma, please tell my son I don’t speak American. Could he say that in English?” (A 71). This is the evidence that there is something more than simply a generation gap between parents and children, they aspire to different things. In Ifemelu’s father’s and Obinze’s mother’s eyes British English is a sign of good education and status, whereas Obinze is of an opinion that American English is a sign of freedom and possibilities:

‘You look like a black American’ was his ultimate compliment, which he told her when she wore a nice dress, or when her hair was done in large braids.

Manhattan was his zenith. He often said ‘It’s not as if this is Manhattan’ or ‘Go to Manhattan and see how things are.’ (A 67)

The language is also important when it comes to the attitude Americans have towards black immigrants. When speaking to Ifemelu the woman at the registration desk for freshmen students pronounced the words with accented carefulness, separating each word and over-articulating, as if the girl had some kind of illness. This made Ifemelu shrink because English was her native language, and yet the woman thought she could not understand the simplest instruction of filling in a form. This incident made Ifemelu start learning to speak in an American accent in the following weeks. In a way she changed her identity to avoid future humiliation, as she could not bear the thought of being viewed as an uneducated immigrant from an undeveloped country. This was the beginning of her blending in with the American life, dissolving into society. Other immigrants from Africa are also aware of the importance of speaking in American accent, it is not only about accepting the American culture but about avoiding awkward situations, as illustrated by Wambui’s remark:

Very soon you will start to adopt American accent, because you don’t want customer service people on the phone to keep asking you “What? What?” You will start to admire Africans who have perfect American accents, like our brother here, Kofi. Kofi’s parents came from Ghana when he was two years old [...] His father slapped him when he got a C in a class. There is no American nonsense in that house. (A 140)

It is clear from the quotation that on the outside African immigrants are trying to blend in, but they only accept social conventions they consider necessary in order not to be taken as immigrants. In their private lives, however, they maintain the order by which they would live at home. Basically, their assimilation ends when it comes to raising children and relationships between husband and wife, there they often maintain traditions of their homeland. Even Aunty Uju when talking about her

neighbours who were from Africa told Ifemelu that they are like them: they also beat their children when they misbehave.

Ifemelu is the only character in the book who returns to Nigeria willingly after having spent fifteen years in the U.S. This decision was based on her inner discomfort and longing for home. Before she realised that she wanted to go back, she made a decision to speak in her natural accent:

Ifemelu decided to stop faking an American accent on a sunlit day in July [...] It was convincing, the accent. She had perfected, from carefully watching of friends and newscasters, the blurring of the *t*, the creamy roll of the *r*, the sentences starting with “So”, and the sliding response of “Oh really”, but the accent creaked with consciousness, it was an act of will. (*A* 173)

All these sounds took effort to make, and if she were in a stressful situation, she would start speaking Nigerian English again. This conscious decision to go back to speaking the language that was natural to her and wearing her natural hair are signs of rejecting social conventions and finding her own identity. By giving up the language, she also gave up the personality associated with it: “[...] the kind of American English [...] that made race pollsters on the telephone assume that you were white and educated” (*A* 177). This assumption connected with the language offended her as a Nigerian because speaking her natural English would make the person on the other end of the phone think she was uneducated.

Just as her decision to start practicing American English was triggered by an interaction with an American woman, so was her decision to go back to her natural accent made after she had realised that she had taken a phrase from a stranger that she spoke to on the phone about sounding totally American as a compliment. She then realised that her being grateful for being called American can in a way be interpreted as being grateful for not being Nigerian. To become fully America it would mean that she would have to give up her true identity

A parallel can be drawn here between Ifemelu's being grateful for being called American because of her accent and Kosi's being grateful for being mistaken for mixed-race. Both race and accent is something immigrants from Nigeria have to deal with when coming either to the U.S. or UK. Language, however, is something one can change, whereas skin colour for many Nigerians becomes one of the central issues when it comes to accumulating and taking on new identity. Mixed-race people in this respect have a privilege of being taken more seriously abroad.

Immigrants who return to Nigeria after many years of living in America are also expected to behave in a certain way. Even Obinze notices that Ifemelu does not have an American accent, she is not an Americanah. He assumed before their meeting that she had become like their other friends who went abroad, their accent changed, their manner of carrying themselves. The accent would probably make him feel like those years had a bigger influence on both of them. He would find it more difficult to speak to Ifemelu in that simple manner, as if all those years did not exist. However, she made an effort to preserve her natural way of speaking, it was easier for them to communicate. The language brought them closer together.

Immigrants who have tried so carefully to speak in a perfect American or English accents, sometimes started using phrases in Nigerian and adding "o" at the end of an utterance, which is very common in Nigeria, when meeting old friends from their homeland. This shared language was aimed at showing that they had not changed that much. It also serves to isolate the participants of the conversation from the society they live in and indicate that they share common knowledge, they have overcome similar obstacles, they can relate to their brothers' complications, and point at some behaviour or conventions of the English or Americans that they found unacceptable.

The switching of languages has been researched by Carmit Altman in his article which deals with crossover memories and codeswitching (Altman). The goal of the paper was to reveal to what extent bilinguals report more memories in the same language as cue words, to what extent different immigrant groups differ in reporting crossover memories and use of codeswitching. The cue words were used in order to elicit autobiographical memories. Groups of bilinguals of different age were given

cue words both in their first and second languages. It was noted that the words in the first language tended to trigger earlier memories, while words in the second language normally triggered memories from later periods, after immigration. The most noticeable functions of codeswitching are switching to indicate shifts in topic, setting and listener. Therefore Ginika's usage of Nigerian words in the conversation could have been triggered by Ifemelu (the participant), memories from earlier childhood that are connected with her (the topic) and the willingness of Ifemelu's friend to soften the cultural shock by not appearing too American (the setting).

However, the abuse or misapplication of these words and phrases can be result in a split personality. On the one hand, immigrants do everything in order to assimilate by imitating the accent, wearing appropriate clothes and hairstyle. On the other hand, they exclude themselves by rejecting American lifestyle when it comes to bringing up children or returning to their natural accent when they are among fellow immigrants. It can be explained by suggesting that immigrants can take off their protective layer only when they are in a group of other immigrants and feel safe. When they are among Americans, they do not want to differ, so they do everything in order to seem similar to everyone else, and most importantly, be taken, perceived and treated as any other American.

One of the topics explored by Altman in his research is how people who speak several languages may change their behaviour with accordance to what language they speak. For instance, Little Bee in *The Other Hand* is reserved and composed when she speaks English with Sarah but in her village when she spoke Nigerian English, she might have behaved in a more childlike manner and spoken with more affection. Learning "good English" can be interpreted as one of the aspects of Little Bee's premature grown-up behaviour.

Some immigrants, like Nicholas and Ojiugo, go even further in their assimilation, they adopt the way of bringing up children in England: "[...] in Nigeria, people teach their children fear instead of respect. We don't want them to fear us but that does not mean we take rubbish from them" (A 243). This statement was uttered as a reaction to Obinze's observation he made after watching parents' attitude and means of upbringing they undertook. He assumed that Ojiugo and her friends from

Africa who also have children let them get away with too many things because the children speak in British accents. It is as if parents admire their children for being able to pronounce words like the British do, and therefore permit them to behave in an inappropriate way. They put a lot of hope into their children's future, and may already perceive them as more educated. They might feel as if their children's language elevates them on the social ladder.

Nicholas and Ojiugo, who once were a rebellious young couple back in Nigeria, have lost their former playfulness and rebelliousness in England: "Nicholas, husband and father, homeowner in England, spoke with a soberness so forbidding that it was almost comical" (A 245). They have become a married couple who were very careful to make their children British, to protect them from the difficulties they, as immigrants, had to face. Neither Nicholas, nor Ojiugo, wished their children to speak their native language: "He spoke to them only in English, careful English, as though he thought that the Igbo he shared with their mother would infect them, perhaps make them lose their precious accents" (A 239). His wife also exaggerates the importance of their children speaking with a British accent when she speaks about her daughter with Obinze: "You see how she sounds so posh? Ha! My daughter will go places" (A 241). She assumes that the accent and education is a pledge to her children's success. Aunt Uju has a similar approach in America when it comes to Dike, she tells Ifemelu: "Please, don't speak Igbo to him. [...] Two languages might confuse him" (A 109).

The theme of education arises in the novel and is connected with the belief of the protagonists that Western education system is better than Nigerian and that the accent is a sign of being well-educated. Not only Nicholas and Ojiugo are concerned with their children going to the best school in London but Kosi in Nigeria expresses her approach to education at a party among affluent Nigerians: "Oh, yes, Sidcot Hall [...] It's already on top of my list because I know they teach British curriculum" (A 29).

Not only the importance of English language is prominent in *Americanah*, but also Igbo plays a vital role. Dike, who was born and raised in the States and has struggled with his identity for a long time, feels excluded both from his family and

American society. One of the reasons he feels like he does not belong with his family is that Aunty Uju and Ifemelu know where they come from, they have solid roots, they made a choice to go abroad. The choice he was unable to make. The connection to his family seems even looser to him, as he hears them speak Igbo, which he does not. He feels like the language is one of the things that separate him from his ancestors' homeland, from his father:

‘I wish I spoke Igbo,’ [...]

‘But you understand perfectly.’

‘I just wish I spoke.’

‘You can still learn,’ [...]

‘Yes, I guess so,’ he said, and shrugged, as though to say it was already too late. (A 451)

This piece of dialogue illustrates how much Dike misses the aspect of identifying with his people, how he struggles to relate.

Similarly to *Americanah*, language plays a major role for the characters in *The Other Hand*. It is not merely means of assimilation but Little Bee's ultimate way to survive. As it has already been mentioned in the previous part, Little Bee did not have any documents that could prove that her village was burned down, neither did she want to use her looks for the fear of being raped by men (men and women in the detention centre were kept in the same room during the day), so she decided to learn to speak good English: “If you talk like a savage who learned her English on the boat, the men are going to find you out and send you straight back home” (TOH 5).

Little Bee learned to speak good English in the detention centre from the books and newspapers. She could speak English before she came to the UK because as it has previously been remarked, English is an official language in Nigeria even though not many people in the West know this fact, so “good English” is a term which coincides with British English. Of course, people in Britain, even those who were born there, do not always speak “good English” themselves. People from certain areas speak dialects which have as many deviations from the RP pronunciation and

grammar as Nigerian English. Cleave often points out that Charlie's grammar is far from impeccable. A little boy who is only learning to use his language and who will undoubtedly be identified as English when he grows up is compared to Little Bee who despite diligent attempts to learn English and traditions of the UK will probably not be seen as a British woman by the society.

Despite her efforts to speak "good English", she is not perceived as an English woman: "It doesn't matter how you talk, does it? [...] You're a drain on resources. The point is, you don't *belong* here" (*TOH* 344). Little Bee speculates on what it means to be British but is unable to come to a conclusion. An officer in the detention centre tells her: "Well, you've got to be British, haven't you? You've got to have our values" (*TOH* 345). After analysing the facts that are listed in both *Americanah* and *The Other Hand* one may assume that being British in the eyes of British society means to be born in the UK, preferably in a family that has been there for a couple of generations, speak English and be white.

The topic of language in both novels also touches upon the motif of writing and consequently of the construction of media image. The usage of language in this case acquires a quality of proliferation of information and constructs public's opinion on particular issues. It is important to realise this because this factor plays a major role in how the immigrants and refugees are perceived and perceive themselves in return in the Western world. Many journalists daily write opinion articles about third-world countries they have never been to: "He'd (Andrew) been awake all night writing an opinion piece about the Middle East, which was a region he had never visited and had no specialist knowledge of" (*TOH* 39). So the journalists who have not done any thorough research on the topic construct the conviction of others. One can read in a newspaper or on the Internet about refugee's conditions in the detention centres but people like Chris Cleave, who expresses his thoughts through Sarah in the novel, who got personally acquainted with the immigrants view the situation differently.

More importantly, most magazines avoid covering the news about refugees for fear of losing their readers who are used to reading about mundane things, such as clothes, business, sexual relationships, etc.: "[...] we have to run the stories people

read” (TOH 288). This is why writers and journalists find it difficult to publish their pieces on current issues in the world. In both Nigeria and in England both Ifemelu and Sarah<sup>14</sup> struggle to write about things that matter and bring to the public’s attention the contemporary problems of society. It only seems possible to do this outside the magazine business. Ifemelu succeeded by creating a blog and Sarah intends to write a book.

The conclusion one may draw from the novels is that neither black people in Africa nor white people in the West want to read about the misery of others: “People’s lives are hard enough. You can see how they might not want to be reminded that everyone else’s lives are shit too” (TOH 296). Sarah’s colleague does not want to cover serious issues because she is afraid of losing the audience and her excuse for not using the opportunity she has as a successful journalist to open the readers’ eyes on how refugees are treated in their country is: “[...] it’s not too bad, what we do. Really. No one dies when we write about fashion” (TOH 293). This utterance can be interpreted as “no one gets killed directly but no one’s life gets improved either”. The main obstacle is that average people in the UK do not know about what happens in the detention centres because they are not interested in reading about it as it does not influence them directly: “I’ll get you a feature on refugees, if you really want it. But I really don’t think you understand how quickly people’s eyes will glaze over. It isn’t an issue that affects anyone’s own *life*, that’s the problem” (TOH 291). The lack of understanding of how everything is connected in the world and how the lives of people in Africa who struggle to get water may one day affect the economy of Western countries is the main reason people would glance over such articles.

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<sup>14</sup> Ifemelu finds it difficult to publish an article about something other than an event in a rich woman’s house in a Nigerian magazine, an article which she can write without even visiting the event. These articles can be compared with the ones Sarah’s friend, Clar, writes for *Nixie*: “I’ve been doing the exact same story every single month for ten years. Cosmetic surgery and sex toys I can do with my eyes closed” (TOH 293).

## 10. The question of gender

Contemporary literature is “one of the places in our culture where it is recognised that most women do not painlessly slip into their roles as women” (Rose 91). By creating Ifemelu and Little Bee Adichie and Cleave illustrate that there is more to women than their role as mothers and wives. They “revise the traditional paradigm” and restore “the female perspective” (Gardiner 629) by creating female characters whose life does not revolve around men, family and children and comparing them to submissive women, such as Kosi.

Kosi is a woman whose place in the society is defined “as a mediator between culture and nature. Women prepare food, educate (socialize) small children, keep things clean, which means that they support the culture as a field of male domination.” (Procházka 120) Kosi plays a passive role in her relationship with Obinze (even during sexual intercourse she offers herself to him, not claiming anything for herself). She was brought up in a conservative way ready to take her place as a hearth-keeper. Obinze’s affair did not come as a surprise to her, she accepts his behaviour as a temporary passion, which is not worth ruining their family. She humiliates herself by begging him on her knees not to leave. This scene serves to show how her own dignity means nothing to her compared to saving the family. She knows that the society will evaluate her according to her ability to preserve the family and not according to her own passions and desires. If one thinks about it, it is not her family that she is trying to save but the look of it. Her goal is to merely show the others that they are a well-functioning household.

In contrast, Ifemelu and her boyfriends serve as a deconstruction of “dominant male patterns of thought and social practice” (Greene, Kahn 6) and reconstruction of the female experience that used to be overlooked and deemed unimportant. Many women in Nigeria after having read the novel were angry that the main protagonist has many good men but cheats on one of her boyfriends and is a husband-snatcher. Ifemelu had an affair while being in a long-term relationship with Curt simply because she was curious and bored, her actions lead to a break-up. By depicting these situations Adichie points one’s attention at society’s approach towards an affair,

which is expected of men as something they cannot help (in Kosi and Abinze's case), and is considered a fatal mistake when it is a woman who is involved.

Aunty Uju's relationship to men has undergone a drastic change in the U.S. In contrast to her being on an allowance in Nigeria, where she could always depend on her lover to provide for her even when her payment in the hospital was delayed, the situation in the U.S. is different. Her boyfriend expects her to pay bills because he is trying to start a business. Aunty Uju finds herself in a role of provider for the family, as well as a housewife. Her whole notion of her role as a woman is staggered.

Instead of a confident young lady who looked after herself, she became a depressed woman who longed for a better life which awaits her after she would pass the exam and become a doctor in America. Her confidence has shrunk because of numerous attempts that ended in failure, she has lost her true self, which could be also seen in her appearance:

[...] the old Aunty Uju would never have worn her hair in such scruffy braids. She would never have tolerated the ingrown hair that grew like raisins on her chin, or worn trousers that gathered bulkily between her legs. America had subdued her. (A 341)

It is safe to assume that the way Aunty Uju has grown to ignore her appearance indicates that she is no longer a woman who is driven by desire to look feminine but by an ambition to prove her credibility. The core of her identity when she lived in Nigeria was her femininity and desire to satisfy her lover, whereas now when she starts dating she views men as means to have another child, she does not see them as stimulus to look after herself. She admits that they are not the kind of men she would even contemplate dating in Nigeria.

Women's standards change in the Western countries. Both aunty Uju and Ojiugo's friends are less captious when it comes to meeting men. They start seeing men they would never even look at if they were in Nigeria, they are becoming more patient towards men's behaviour, expect less from them.

Women in the U.S. and UK undergo certain changes due to the structure of the states as well as cultural differences. The divorce rate in America is much higher than in Nigeria because there are laws protecting women in these countries. Some immigrants from Nigeria, however, choose a different explanation. One of Uju's boyfriends argues that women in America become wild. When it comes to the subject of taking money from wives, he takes the side of the West: "What is wrong with a man wanting financial security from his wife? Don't women want the same thing?" (A 117). His approach to gender equality is unilateral, he only seeks advantage for himself bending his identity and beliefs from being a conservative Nigerian who thinks women should listen to their husbands to being an American who thinks men and women should work equally. Ifemelu does not run foul with him but writes about this case in her blog, thus using language as a "way of fighting male dominance" (Procházka 120). This is similar to Lucie Irigaray's approach, "she deals with the specific relationship of women to language and writing as the possibility of making the difference" (123). For a long time women's opinion was not recognised by society but thanks to writing they can spread their views without the readers realising that it is a woman who wrote it. By making their pieces of work anonymous women escape prejudiced views against their writing.

When examining gender Adichie also realises that "pluralism is necessary, which holds especially in cases of approaches dealing with literature, culture and experience of marginalised groups, like pluralism is necessary, which holds especially in cases of approaches dealing with literature, culture and experience of marginalised groups, like African American women [...] The former trend often explores the links between racism and sexism" (Procházka 120). Curt's list of girlfriends leads one in the track of assuming that he chooses a partner according to their exoticism. Thus it is not surprising that he chooses Ifemelu as an object of admiration with her authentic look. Racism in this case is expressed in a different way but it does not make it any less noticeable.

The female figures in *Americanah* and *The Other Hand* make one redefine their conception of women's role in society. Women in these novels "start to search

for their own sexual and cultural identity, rejecting the symbolical roles and subject positions created for them by male authority” (Procházka 121).

Despite Adichie’s attempts to indicate that brain and speaking one’s mind is women’s main advantage, the fact that Ifemelu cares so much about her hair and that one of the groups which has a chance of surviving in the refugee world is beautiful women indicate that women in nowadays world, despite feminists’ contribution, are still judged and valued by their appearance.

It is also important to mention that women’s contribution to the world is not measured in the same way as men’s. Cleave shows how women and their actions are not taken seriously when Sarah’s sacrifice on the beach is only enough to save one of the girls (as if Sarah herself were half human), while Andrew could have saved both by doing the exact same thing. It can be an allusion to the fact that before in Europe in order for the woman’s voice to be heard in court two women had to testify to the same thing or only one man. This situation can also be interpreted in a way that the man on the beach wanted Andrew to recognise him as superior and to obey him because that would be the only way for him to be recognised by the white society that he lived in for a couple of years and where he did not feel accepted. It is also possible that the man simply does not hold women accountable for the situation in the world, for racism or for Nigeria’s financial situation.

To sum everything up, Cleave and Adichie are trying to show a different view on women who are not entirely dependable on men but can create their own destinies. They create female characters, who can change the world by taking action.

## Conclusion

Various topics connected with immigration are explored in the theoretical part of this thesis. It unfolds the reasons for immigration and how historical events influenced the choice of countries of destination for the immigrants from Nigeria. Major issues related to immigration are listed, such as psychological trauma caused by loneliness and inability to find a good job. Means of assimilation, for example, organization of groups for immigrants are described. The ways of obtaining different types of visa are listed in order to illustrate the different approaches the U.S. and UK held when reviewing the applications and how current affairs might influence their decision.

The way Adichie and Cleave treat immigration in their novels is very elaborate. The topic of immigration is a personal one as they both have had experience in this aspect and can easily relate. The pressing issues depicted by Adichie's and Cleave's works make the reader reevaluate their attitude towards immigrants and refugees. Both similarities and differences can be found in the depiction of immigration we are presented with in *Americanah* and *The Other Hand*. Adichie's and Cleave's main characters are strong female individuals who are not dependent on men. They challenge the notion of females as passive and deny the stereotype of males as dominant. Both authors illustrate the difficulties their characters face in the Western countries, such as racial discrimination, language barrier, liminality and search for home. Other works from postcolonial literature, such as *Wide Sargasso Sea* by Jean Rhys and *Things Fall Apart* by Chinua Achebe are mentioned in order to illustrate how many of these topics are not only contemporary issues but have been explored by authors from the first and second generations of postcolonial literature.

The two novels in question are united by similar topics, for instance, reasons for immigration, attitude towards them, racial discrimination, gender and language. Both novelists observe immigrants' paths of assimilation, e.g. learning to speak in the British or American accents.

The major difference between the two novels is the reason for the protagonists' leaving their homeland. In *Americanah* the reason is more often the pursuit of characters' ambitions and search for possibilities, whereas in *The Other Hand* it is mere search for safety.

Disregarding the circumstances of the characters' stay in the U.S. and UK, all of them face the same major problem of finding their identity and relating to either their country of destination or their homeland. In both novels the protagonists return to Nigeria after their experience abroad. In *Americanah*, the journey of immigration helps the main characters to realise where they belong. The novels exhibit contemporary problems both in Nigeria and the Western countries, which social media chooses to ignore. One of such issues is racial discrimination, which is vividly described in both novels.

However, the depiction of issues in both novels might be exaggerated. For instance, Cleave's description of the detention centre is based on his personal experience in one of these centres where he worked for a very short period of time, which makes it his subjective perception of one of the centres. Chimamanda's description of illegal immigrants' lives also cannot be taken as very accurate as she has never been in such situation herself.

After having read *Americanah* and *The Other Hand* one comes to a conclusion that the journey the main protagonists undertake is a difficult one and that their aim is not merely to move to a different country but to find where they belong, a place they would feel safe and have possibilities to evolve both personally and in terms of their career.

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