No Single Stories:
Multilocal Spaces and Identities in Selected Novels
by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, Sefi Atta, Taiye Selasi, and NoViolet Bulawayo

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Introduction

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, Sefi Atta, Taiye Selasi, NoViolet Bulawayo: what do these four authors and their novels have in common? The most obvious feature is certainly their connection to the African continent in one way or another, regarding the writers' own background as well as the content and settings of their novels. Another characteristic element is their focus on migrant and diaspora experiences. These are not only restricted to life in the country of immigration but include the process of returning to their own or their parents' place of origin.

Most importantly, though, the four novels share an understanding of 'space' or 'place' which can be called 'multilocal'. The focus on place as a category of analysis is not a new idea. Bakhtin used the concept of 'chronotope' to describe the spatial/temporal frame of narratives (1981). Following Deleuze’s argumentation (2006), the spatial/temporal frame of a narrative certainly plays "a key role in the production of meaning, as the matrix of situated meaning-making, roles, identities, values, boundaries and crossings, cultural classes of discourse and tools" (Lorino). The idea of 'multilocality' is based on the assumption that personal narratives of place are not limited to conventional singular, unilateral, albeit in many cases unsatisfying, national affiliations and descriptions of belonging but can be rather described as "local performativities of place" (Stroud and Jegels 179) which are multilateral and fluid. These performativities of place affect and are highly interconnected with processes of identity formation which are equally seen as multiple, fluid, intersecting, and ambiguous in nature.

This specific understanding of space and identity formation guided the selection of the novels whose authors are often seen as belonging to a contemporary group of 'Afropolitan' writers. While I will critically discuss the term and concept which became popular after 2000, I do not believe that the four writers should be confined to any particular category—'African', 'Afropolitan', or any other—but that their novels should be read with an open mind and appreciated on the basis of their content.

In my thesis, I try to avoid the uncritical use of category names, a practice which tends to 'freeze' elements in time and space and creates artificial and limiting boundaries in thinking. However, I have to admit that I do resort to their application more often than I intended to for lack of more adequate or, at least, alternative ways and methods to express my thoughts. Despite their inadequacy, it is, in fact, often unavoidable to use the same categorizations and generalizations which we reject to be able to talk about existing 'lived' inequalities so that
hopefully, we will eventually be able to deconstruct them more successfully. Ultimately, any struggle around new forms of expressing identity, space, and so on, "inevitably confronts the fixed traditions of place and being" (based on a quote by Otsuji and Pennycook 244).

Furthermore, it is important for the reader to be aware that I am writing from a certain position which differs, probably in more than one way, from the one that the authors and characters occupy. As a young white woman, it is undoubtedly a position of relative privilege and as much as I try to be as self-reflexive and self-critical as possible, a certain Eurocentrism in my perspective will be unavoidable, as we have all been socialized within structures and systems with a long history of bias and unequal power relations. However, these structures are not supposed to be viewed in simplistic and essentialist ways and as fixed in time and space; it is more helpful to assume a perspective of intersectionality, relationality, and plurality.

Before discussing the actual novels, the history and contemporary meanings and implications of popular literary categories such as African literature and postcolonial literature are explored, in the context of concepts and tools of analysis provided by poststructuralist and postcolonial theories. Slowly, we are moving from anticolonial and rather nationalist tendencies to more global and cosmopolitan concepts with Appadurai and the Afropolitan approaches by Achille Mbembe, Taiye Selasi, and Simon Gikandi. Finally, women writers and their versions of postcolonial as well as postnational narratives are shown to take center stage in accounts of contemporary multiple, fluid, intersecting, and ambiguous spaces, identities and feelings of belonging.
I  Theoretical Concepts and Formations in Relation to 'African' and 'Postcolonial' Literature(s)

1  'African Literature(s)'? 'Postcolonial Literature(s)'?: Literary Categorizations under Debate

In your text, treat Africa as if it were one country. It is hot and dusty with rolling grasslands and huge herds of animals and tall, thin people who are starving. Or it is hot and steamy with very short people who eat primates. Don't get bogged down with precise descriptions. Africa is big: fifty-four countries, 900 million people who are too busy starving and dying and warring and emigrating to read your book. The continent is full of deserts, jungles, highlands, savannahs and many other things, but your reader doesn't care about all that, so keep your descriptions romantic and evocative and unparticular. (Wainaina "How to write about Africa")

These satirical instructions on how to write about Africa by Binyavanga Wainaina show that the representation of Africa in literature has been and continues to be highly problematic and charged with meanings and biases. Taiye Selasi observed in her opening speech at the 2013 Internationales Literaturfestival Berlin that "'African Literature' does not exist" because 'Africa' as we understand it—a single entity, a place, a people, a culture that can be known and described—is pure invention and only exists in our minds (Selasi, "African Literature Doesn't Exist" 7; Bady "African Writers"). But what does that mean for canonical authors such as Chinua Achebe, Wole Soyinka, Ngugi wa Thiong'o and many others who are widely considered—inside and outside the continent, nations, and communities—and who might also consider themselves (or might have considered themselves) as writers of African literature?

While literature produced in former French colonies and written in French usually retained the label 'francophone' (in contrast to 'French' literature), literature from the anglophone world has not been as 'successfully' and encompassingly subsumed under a comparable category. The label 'Commonwealth literature' has been rejected because of its colonial connotations. The main concern was that literature produced under this category would be seen "as an extension of English literature" or the English tradition (Izevbaye 472; Hargreaves par.9). 'Third World literatures' was repudiated on the grounds that the name reproduced hierarchies of value and power (Hargreaves 5, par. 9). 'New Literatures' implied that there is a category such as 'Old Literature' which carries more weight and value (Parry, "Institutionalization" 72). By the early 1980s, students of English had grown weary of these literary categories and the old traditions of historicist and realist criticism which did not account
for and represent their condition as (post)colonial subjects and the literatures they produced (Gikandi, "Poststructuralism" 116).

The category 'Postcolonial Literature' sounded more promising; however, it still appears to be rather unstable. It also did not remain uncontested in the literary fields. Femi Osofisan, for example, criticized the term for its role in the "grand myth of [precolonial African] Absence" (1). His claim is that since the category 'postcolonial literature' has been produced by imperialism and colonialism (even though it represents a counter-discourse), indigenous literary traditions continue to be excluded from the official literary canon (Izeybaye 472). This type of criticism is also applied with reference to decolonized nations and their literatures. According to Simon Gikandi, Homi K. Bhabha, for example, focused in particular on migrant experiences and minority identities within metropolitan cultures, while literature produced in decolonized nations and regions continues to be widely ignored ("Poststructuralism" 118).

Despite the validity of these arguments, it cannot be denied that the concept of Postcolonialism has played a crucial role in the endeavors to understand the extent and consequences of colonialism as well as neo-colonialism. Furthermore, it contributed to the continued challenging and contesting of the Eurocentric focus on national boundaries, which is particularly pronounced in more recent writings produced in or related to Africa.

For two decades, a more global view of literature seems to have been gaining more and more ground. Hargreaves argues that continued migration flows are mainly responsible for this shift of paradigm (par. 2, 14 et al.). Not only did most postcolonial writers use the language of their colonizers to critique European imperialism and domination and create their own stories, but many writers also migrated to the 'North', voluntarily or as part of a forced exile. Hargreaves recognizes a globalizing tendency in literature which has the potential to "cut across nationally defined categories, emphasizing processes of cultural mixing which open up new ethnic categories or which defy categorization altogether" (par. 14). He further describes this tendency as a "simultaneous presence in multiple spaces" which can stimulate "the emergence of new literary movements which cannot be fully understood if they are forced into conventionally defined nationally [sic] categories" (par. 24).

Even though these claims sound very promising, categories in literature are still very much in place. The category 'African literature' or 'African writer' is not a new one. In 1962, the Conference of African Writers of English Expression took place at Makerere University in Kampala, Uganda. It was convened by famous writers such as Chinua Achebe, Wole Soyinka, Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Grace Ogot, and many others. The participants of this conference tried to form a canon of 'African literature' by discussing questions such as "What constitutes African
literature?”, whether ‘African literature’ is literature written by someone based on the African continent, if it has to represent the African experience, and if it has to be written in African languages (Bady, "African Writers”; Selasi, "Stop pigeonholing African writers”). There have, however, been several points of criticism, especially concerning the composition of the members of the conference. First of all, North African writers were excluded as well as those writing in French and other languages apart from English (African languages). Secondly, only two women were present at the conference, whose contributions were almost completely omitted (Bady, "African Writers”). These points of criticism do have implications for the validity and meaning of the label ‘African literature’. Who are those 'African writers' and which criteria does someone have to fulfill to be eligible of being called an 'African writer' writing 'African literature’?

In an interview series called "African Writers in a New World" which was held in the context of a Symposium of African Writers at the University of Texas (2014), the category 'African writers' proved not to be particularly popular among the contemporary authors. When asked whether they consider themselves 'African' writers, the answers ranged from downright rejection and dislike to indifference and non-enthusiastic acceptance. An outcome of the interviews was, according to Aaron Bady, that "it's much easier to describe what being an African writer doesn't mean. It doesn't mean being born in, living in, and writing exclusively about Africa". It is, in fact, characteristic of the most well-known 'African writers' to live in the United States or Europe and their novels are often (at least partly) set in the U.S. or a European capital.

Some authors are quite indifferent about labels, such as Nigerian-American writer (another label!) Teju Cole who said, "Labels are really a game we play with whomever happens to be sitting at the table with us" and "I'm an Afropolitan pan-African Afro-pessimist, depending on who hates me on any given day" (Bady, "African Writers"). These quotes show a certain playfulness with categories and labels, but it can also be read—at least partly—as a concession to their usefulness in certain situations.

Authors such as Taiye Selasi have approached the issue of ‘African literature’ or 'African writer' from a more serious perspective. She quotes the great Chinua Achebe who pointed out in 1965 that "[a]ny attempt to define African literature in terms which overlook the complexities of the African scene at the material time is doomed to failure" (Selasi, "African Literature” 4), only to conclude from his remark that a category such as 'African literature' is always doomed to overlook the complexities of the African scene. For her, the term 'Africa' is a monolithic construct which has always been reduced to certain stereotypical depictions and representations.
and does not allow for the vast heterogeneity of writers, styles, and contents which can be subsumed under this category. She doubts that this label respects the writers' creativity. In her article for the newspaper *The Guardian* "Stop pigeonholing African writers", Selasi criticizes the media hype which is based on an ethnic label such as 'African writer'. She is wary of this commercial category because she is aware of, what she calls, "the west's tradition of essentializing African subjects" which can lead (or has already led) to a situation in which writers are judged on the basis of an assumed 'Africanness' or even rejected on the grounds of being 'insufficiently African' instead of their actual creative and literary achievements ("Stop pigeonholing").

Taiye Selasi sees three questions at the heart of the controversy on who and what is part of 'African literature'. First of all, the question of who is an African writer is problematic because many writers actually do not live on the African continent—or at least not permanently. These writers who often claim multiple identities, such as Selasi herself, defy simple categorizations such as 'African' or 'diasporan'. The second question refers to what the African writer should write about. Judging from recent reviews of works by writers such as NoViolet Bulawayo and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, there is a very thin line between not being 'authentically African' enough in your novels and writing 'poverty porn' for a Western audience (Selasi, "Stop pigeonholing"). NoViolet Bulawayo's novel *We Need New Names* was criticized for "performing Africa" in a "CNN, western-media-coverage-of-Africa" style, while Adichie's novels were accused of a "middle-class aesthetic" ("Stop pigeonholing"). The question who the writers write for points to the fact that the most widely-read African writers publish their books outside of the African continent. Selasi mentions Nigeria-based writer Adaobi Nwaubani who vented her frustration with the publishing industry in her home country in an article for the New York Times (see "African Books for Western Eyes"). Selasi argues that the problem should not be that authors publish in the West but that it is so difficult for them to publish profitably in African countries. Her point is that a great number of writers based on the African continent are thus excluded from a global readership. She cannot understand why the wish to engage a wide global audience is seen as a problem. She quotes Nigerian author Okay Ndibe who said, "In Nigeria, we grew up reading the west. The west was talking to us. Why shouldn't the west read Nigeria? Why shouldn't we talk back?" (qtd. in Selasi, "Stop pigeonholing").

In Selasi's view, categories with fixed rules of who has to write about what for who only silence voices. She calls for "more stories about more subjects, more readers in more countries" and "more writers from more countries, representing more class backgrounds" ("Stop pigeonholing"). This postulation seems to take up Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's line of
argument in her powerful TED Talk "The Danger of a Single Story" in which she deplores the lack of diverse and non-essentializing representations of Africa. According to Selasi, a way to respect the agency and artistry of writers would be to group literature on the basis of their content ("Stop pigeonholing"). The question remains, however, if replacing one label or category through another will solve the problem.

Taiye Selasi's claim that "African literature does not exist" did have repercussions. Emmanuel Iduma, a fellow writer, offered a response to Selasi's speech which he called "No Selasi, African Literature Exists". For Iduma, 'African Literature' as a category is not simplistic but enables him to "embrace the complexities of our vast Africanness". He argues, "[T]here is no danger of a single story in my admittance. I know there are multiple, even dispersive stories, but I need a term to account for that multiplicity. 'African' is my term of choice" (Iduma). He is convinced that 'African literature' can be equal to the rest of world literature, but he is also not unaware of the ideological freight the term is loaded with. Even though the term should be accepted, according to Iduma, people should also be skeptical about it. However, instead of discarding it completely, he calls for an evaluation of its meaning today and how it can be deployed in literature.

Chinua Achebe himself said in 1963 about the achievements of the above-mentioned conference on African literature, "There was [one] thing that we tried to do and failed—and that was to define 'African literature' satisfactorily. Was it the literature produced in Africa or about Africa? Could African literature be on any subject, or must it have an African theme?" (Selasi, "Stop pigeonholing"). Achebe was a fervent advocate for "hitherto untold stories, along with new ways of telling" (83). On the other hand, in a lecture he gave in 2000, he warned against assuming that "universal civilization is in place already" and being "blind to our present reality" (Achebe 91). In her work West African Literatures, Stephanie Newell points to the fact that the writers of the 1950s and 1960s were strongly involved in the anticolonial and nationalist struggles, which was reflected in their writings. She argues that the idea of 'art for art's sake', which Selasi is making a case for, is, therefore, a quite recent one (20).

There are both voices for and against the use of the category or term 'African literature'. Newell stresses her use of the plural 'literatures' to take account of the vast variety and heterogeneity of literary traditions and meanings attached to the term (7). All sides seem to be aware of the fact that the term is an invention. Some want to hold on to the concept and say that despite their awareness of its ambiguity, the writers involved will infuse it with their own meanings and that it is important to them because it enables them to "speak … from a certain experience" (Iduma). Others, such as Taiye Selasi, defy this categorization and find it limiting
due to their "simultaneous presence in multiple spaces" (Hargreaves par.24). R. Radhakrishnan already announced in 1992 that the "postcolonial reality demands multiple, nonsynchronous narratives, and not a single masterful story" (149). In accordance with this statement, it might be best, as Aaron Bady put it in his Introduction article to "African Writers in a New World", to accept in this case that "the author isn't dead, and that it's sometimes useful just to shut up and pay attention to what she has to say for herself".

2 African Literary Traditions

For a better understanding of the discourses surrounding the category 'African literature', i.e. the arguments used in favor and reasons for the skepticism and rejection of the label by some writers, it is important to take a closer look at the history and context of what is nowadays often described and categorized as 'African literature', as well as the categorizations of literature in general. As Alec G. Hargreaves explains in his essay on "Ethnic Categorizations in Literature", since modern times, the field of literary studies has been strongly based on categories and classifications defined by national boundaries (par.1). In fact, these boundaries did not so much depend on actual geographical locations as they were grounded in unequal power relationships. This point is illustrated in the random classifications and divisions of the world into 'the west' and 'the east' and 'the north' and 'the south'; these categories which are often used as indicators of unequal power relationships and distribution of wealth (usually referred to as 'developmental level') rather represent 'mental concepts' than clearly marked territories (Hargreaves, par. 1). In fact, maps, as such, do not represent neutral spaces but are loaded with narratives and biases which are based on power relationships (Newell 17).

Since the beginning of the rise of the nation-states, literary scholars in Europe have relied on national boundaries to demarcate "literary spaces" (Hargreaves, par. 4), thus supporting the formation of and actively promoting an ideology of nationalism as well as the superiority of European nation-states. The introduction of the notion 'World literature' which was first conceived by Goethe and which would later lead to the concept of 'comparative

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1 I also at times use the appellation 'the West' for locations in Europe or the United States for reasons of simplification. I do not use quotation marks but I write the term capitalized (the West) in order to move away from a geographical reading of the term and to emphasize that it is, in fact, as much a construct which is charged with meanings as is the term 'Africa'.
literature' did not remove the elitism which was associated with what was considered national literatures. Regional literatures were looked down upon and literatures from other parts of the world, such as Africa or Asia, were either regarded as non-existent or of no artistic value (Hargreaves, par. 5).

In this spirit, colonial literature was heavily Eurocentric and served in most instances as a justification and/or glorification of the colonial enterprise. The genres which were common, such as travel literature, abounded with exoticisms and derogatory stereotypes, usually written either by travel writers, people working in the colonies for the European colonial power (such as colonial administrators), or by European settlers. These types of literature had three features in common: they were written by people of European origin, they were produced in the national European languages, and their writers were usually fervent supporters of the colonial system (Hargreaves, par. 6). In his theoretical work, Nigerian writer Chinua Achebe cites as examples of such colonial discourses the writings of Joseph Conrad (with his famous novel Heart of Darkness) and Joyce Cary (Mister Johnson), an Anglo-Irishman who worked for the British Empire in Nigeria in the years following World War I (see Achebe's Home and Exile). Even though his novel is full of brutal, denigrating stereotypes and images of people of African descent, it was praised in the Time magazine in 1952 as "the best novel ever written about Africa" (qtd. in Achebe 22). Exceptions to the unquestioning stories of glorifications and justifications of the colonial enterprise did, however, exist. One author who should be mentioned as such an exception is Doris Lessing. In her novels, she wrote about life in Rhodesia, but she was critical of the white settlers' racism and claims of superiority and power (Veit-Wild and Chennells 450).

As far as African literary traditions are concerned, it is important to keep in mind that 'Africa' clearly is not a single homogenous entity—even though it is often imagined as such in Western popular culture and media—but contains a vast diversity and heterogeneity of cultures, literatures, experiences. It is, therefore, unfortunately unavoidable that the attempt to historicize its literary traditions does all those things which should be avoided: it generalizes, oversimplifies, and reduces. With the warning in place that the account of developments and aspects mentioned beneath certainly does not apply to every region and locality in the same way and at the same time, and that it is in no way complete, it will hopefully still serve the purpose of giving some first insight into the vast field of literary activities in Africa. In my account, I will mainly focus on those regions which are usually seen as 'anglophone' due to their past status as British colonies. Another important point of self-critique about this attempt of
providing a historical perspective is that it might seem as if it is an account of a chronological and linear or even evolitional development of literatures. In fact, however, a plurality of different literary traditions has always existed alongside the more canonical, internationally better-known authors of the respective time and generations (such as oral, vernacular, and popular literatures) (Newell 5).

First of all, the central role of oral literature in many African cultures (such as the Griots in West Africa) has to be mentioned. These rich oral traditions far pre-date the time of first European contact. Towards the end of the eighteenth century, mainly for commercial reasons, Africans were first introduced to English literacy by English traders. One of the first known Africans who used English for commercial transactions and records was a Calabar trader named Antera Duke. The slave-trade era produced a second type of texts in English: writings by ex-slaves and eventually Africans in exile who narrated their life, their memories of home and childhood, and their travels, and who tried to support the cause of emancipation. A prominent example is Olaudah Equiano's autobiography from the year 1789 (Izevbaye 474).  

As Simon Gikandi aptly put it, "[f]rom the eighteenth century onwards, [it has been] the colonial situation [which] shaped what it meant to be an African writer, shaped the language of African writing, and overdetermined the culture of letters in Africa" ("African literature" 379). In Gikandi's view, it is important to keep in mind that the development of what is now usually referred to as African literature has always been closely linked to the colonial situation and its institutions (379-394). The most important institutions for the development of literacy and literary productions were the Christian missions, the colonial schools, and the universities. The Christian missions were closely linked with colonial rule; in fact, they can be seen as a vanguard for the colonial mission and serving as "ideological agents" ("African Literature" 387-388). According to Gikandi, the colonial schools, which were founded by missionaries, had the strongest effect on African societies and their literary cultures due to the close link between their aspirations to convert as many people as possible to the Christian faith, the introduction of literacy, and the promotion of a 'modern' identity (390). The introduction of the printing press in the missions led to the emergence of newspapers, magazines, and other literary texts (for example, Indaba magazine in South Africa: even though it was not African-owned, most of the contributions were written by Africans) (Gikandi, "African Literature" 389; Attwell 513). African-owned newspapers played a crucial role, not only for the spread of a literary culture but also politically. It enabled the dissemination of new ideas and the networking of African intellectuals on more regional levels. Thus, news reached Africans living in the diaspora and vice versa, anti-colonial organizations were founded, and contacts to other anti-colonial
movements (e.g. in India) and race activists in the U.S. (such as W.E.B. DuBois and Marcus Garvey) were established (Newell 18).

African autonomy and agency had already been a major topic in early literary productions. For African intellectuals and writers, the 'African subject' had been "removed from history" and time in the narratives produced by representatives of or related to the Empire (Gikandi, "African literature" 381). This "synchronic narrative of European conquest and rule" which had been produced through "the power [of] textualization" ("African literature" 384) was gradually contested by African writers who produced their own narratives. Usually themselves educated in mission schools, they used the education which they had received to challenge the colonial productions and oppose colonial domination with their own stories. Gikandi stresses in his essay "African literature and the colonial factor" the role of 'modernity' and its effect on the construction of new identities (391-394). He claims that "the founders of African literature were the most Europeanized" (383), meaning that it was mainly the most privileged individuals—students and intellectuals—who would use western concepts and language, which they had been familiarized with under colonial rule in the mission schools and universities, such as 'nation', 'modernity' among others, to revolt against and contest the colonial enterprise and its institutions. In short, they imagined a "modern African nation" (392).

The first half of the twentieth century was marked by the rise of African nationalism as well as the concept of 'Pan-Africanism'. New literary categories appeared, such as 'Negro' and 'Negro-African' literature. These categories were based on the concept of 'Négritude' and were developed and supported by francophone African intellectuals and writers such as Léopold Sédar Senghor and the Martinican poet Aimé Césaire (Bady, "African Writers"). They favored a pan-regionalism over national boundaries. As far as anglophone countries are concerned, the movement was especially successful in Sierra Leone, Liberia, and particularly Ghana (still Gold Coast at that time). These countries already participated in the early pan-African congresses (Izevbaye 476).

Towards decolonization and with the rise of national independence movements, the appearance and rise of local writers were accelerated. Izevbaye stresses in his article "West African literature in English" the role of the newly founded universities in the spreading of a new postcolonial consciousness. Chinua Achebe, who is considered the 'father of African literature', was among the first intake of the University of Ibadan in 1948. In Home and Exile, he recalls that the authors who were taught were straight from the English curriculum, such as Shakespeare, Milton, Defoe, Swift, etc. Additionally, their reading list contained Joyce Cary's Mister Johnson, supposedly representing an 'African novel' but in fact full of denigrating racial
stereotypes. Achebe, who had read and thoroughly enjoyed reading English and colonial novels in high school, said about his time as a schoolboy, "I did not see myself as an African to begin with. I took sides with the … white man [who] was good and reasonable and intelligent and courageous. The savages arrayed against him were sinister and stupid or, at the most, cunning. I hated their guts" (qtd. in Izevbaye 483). His way of thinking changed at the university. Achebe and his fellow students became aware of the debasing images and representations in colonial novels such as Cary's, as well as the bias towards English literature, which made them feel alienated because they were not able to relate to these representations (Home and Exile). He explained, "In the end, I began to understand. There is such a thing as absolute power over narrative. Those who secure this privilege for themselves can arrange stories about others pretty much where, and as, they like" (Achebe 24).

While various literary activities had already been taking place, such as translations of oral literatures into written form (in local African languages as well as in English) and texts and novels written in vernacular languages, the writing of fictional novels in English is usually seen as having started in the 1950s with the Nigerian writer Amos Tutuola and his novel The Palm-Wine Drinkard which was published by Faber in London in 1952. Although criticized by some for its "peculiar English" and its roaming "from realism to magic and back again" (Achebe 44), it certainly opened up space for other writers to follow. African plays in English started to emerge even earlier. The first English-language play The Girl Who Killed to Save: Nongqawuse the Liberator was written by South African writer Herbert Isaac Ernest Dhlomo in 1935 (Attwell 515).

Probably the internationally most well-known and critically acclaimed author of the 'first generation' of African writers is Chinua Achebe with his seminal first novel Things Fall Apart, published in 1958. His novel marked the beginning of the 'African Writers Series' of the British publishing house Heinemann (Achebe 50). Another Nigerian author, Wole Soyinka, was to become the first African writer to win the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1986; and he was not to remain the only one. Other very influential writers in English of the same generation were, among so many others not mentioned here, Kenyan writer Ngugi wa Thiong'o with his novels Weep not Child (1964) and The River Between (1965), as well as Grace Ogot with her early works The Promised Land (1966) and Land without Thunder (1968) (Gikandi, "East African literature" 431-432).

The years following independence were characterized by a focus on national identity and national categories in an attempt to unify the conglomerate of ethnicities and cultures in the new post-colonial nation-states, which was also reflected in the literary productions of that time.
The themes of the novels of the 'first generation' of writers mostly deal with the effects of colonial rule and domination on African societies. A dialectic between tradition and modernity as well as Christian themes (usually combined with African beliefs) are typical of literary productions of the 1950s and 1960s (Gikandi, "African literature" 382; Izevbaye 480-481). Up to the 1980s, most literary productions were characterized by a strong literary realism.

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, a new type of literature emerged which has been labeled 'literature of disillusionment'. The writings became more cynical and satirical and reflected the disappointment with the corruption and violence spread by the post-colonial governments in Africa (Newell 22-23). At around the same time, Marxist and Socialist writers produced texts which were more optimistic and revolutionary in tone. Since the 1980s, the styles have changed more radically; many have been called 'experimental' or 'avant-garde' (Newell 23). An internationally very well-known writer who is seen as belonging to this category is British-born Nigerian author Ben Okri. He is described as the representative of African magical realism (Quayson 845). In his probably most well-known Booker Prize-winning novel The Famished Road, his recourse to African mythology and spiritual worlds as a basis of his narrative can be seen in its perfection (Quayson 846-848).
In his essay "Poststructuralism and Postcolonial Discourse", Simon Gikandi traces the development of Poststructuralism and Postcolonialism, the two influential movements which gained ground around 1960 and 1980 respectively in the (mainly Western) academia and which still inform much of academic research in the Humanities Departments, especially in the fields of literature and cultural studies. Gikandi argues that leading anticolonial intellectuals, such as Frantz Fanon, Aimé Césaire, and Léopold Sédar Senghor, were strongly influenced by Jean-Paul Sartre's existential phenomenology and humanism and its concepts of universalism, historicism, truth, the privileging of the knowing subject, and its recourse to the Hegelian 'master/slave dialectic' ("Poststructuralism" 101-103). The appeal of these theoretical notions and concepts to the anticolonial intellectuals lay in "the agency invested in the enslaved within the humanistic project" and in the opening up of spaces for the development of an "anticolonial history as a first step to what they considered to be a decolonized truth" and a consciousness that made resistance possible (103).

According to Gikandi, the movements which followed, i.e. Structuralism and Poststructuralism, can be seen "as a reaction against a European tradition of humanism" ("Poststructuralism" 100). Structuralism with its primary focus on language and structures rejected humanism's presumed ethnocentrism (110). Poststructuralism appeared when most African countries had achieved independence and is regarded as a product of or a reaction to the student movements of the 1960s and the "trauma of decolonization" (111). The most prominent representative of Poststructuralism is, without doubt, Jacques Derrida. He is seen as the 'father' of deconstruction. Textuality and the deconstruction of binaries became very important. In his work *Of Grammatology*, Derrida suggests a new kind of reading and a new way of looking at the nature of representation. Signs or words are not considered as representations of some reality or truth which can be decoded, but they are seen as always referring to other signs; thus, the meaning is always deferred ("Poststructuralism" 113-115). Derrida's claim that "There is nothing outside of the text" (*Of Grammatology* 158) can be understood in this line. For our practices of reading, this implies the necessity to look for the gaps, the 'traces' of incongruities of binaries, instead of looking for some outside reality or truth which is supposedly represented in the text (Gikandi, "Poststructuralism" 115).

Postcolonial studies or theories, which did not exist as an academic field before the late 1970s, has been described as "postmodernist in its orientation" (Parry, "Institutionalization" 66) as well as closely linked and indebted to Poststructuralism (see Gikandi). Gikandi claims that
the value of Poststructuralism for Postcolonial theory and literary criticism lies in the fact that it can represent a "method of deconstructing existing traditions of Western thought and culture and of reading literary texts differently" ("Poststructuralism" 113). Postcolonial academic R. Radhakrishnan considers the relationship between Poststructuralism and Postcolonialism to be a complementary one. In his work Diasporic Mediations, he mentions the "notion of a traveling and unfixed identity" as a common feature of both theoretical frameworks (149). He claims, however, that while the Poststructuralist approach to 'identity' is a playful one, Postcolonialism is more serious, ideally political, in its approach because there is more at stake on a political level (149). When discussing Postcolonialism or Postcolonial theories, it is important to mention that the term signifies not one but a range of discourses, which has led to a "fluid, polysemic, and ambiguous usage of the term 'postcolonial'" (Parry, "Institutionalization" 66) and also opened up space for criticism of different sorts.

Early representatives used 'post-colonial' as a strictly temporal category to describe the period following the end of European colonialism (Lazarus 2). Soon, however, the meaning of the term changed from being simply a temporal category which signaled that unequal colonial relations between former colonies and their colonizers have been overcome and assumed a wider meaning. The more contemporary meaning of 'Postcolonial theory' refers mainly to the discourses, ideologies, and intellectual formations—the responses—which have emerged to the colonial discourses and representations (see Lazarus).

Nevertheless, the 'post' in the term 'postcolonial' remains ambiguous. In 1992, Ella Shohat pointed out in her essay "Notes on the 'Post-Colonial'" that 'posts', such as in postmodernism, poststructuralism, postfeminism, and postcolonialism, share "the notion of a movement beyond" and that 'postcolonial' therefore "implies both going beyond anti-colonial nationalist theory as well as a movement beyond a specific point in history, that of colonialism and Third World nationalist struggles" (101). She criticizes, in particular, this moving beyond anticolonial struggle and activism. Radhakrishnan shares Shohat's concern mentioning that the term 'postcolonial' appears to be a "free-floating signifier" due to its detachment from political activism (157-158). However, he does not reject the concept of 'Postcolonialism' per se; he sees certain potential in its critique of nationalism and the opening up of spaces for heterogeneity and multiple identities, which might, in the long run, lead to an interrogation and deconstruction of identity as such (Radhakrishnan 158-159, xxiii).

The leading pioneer Postcolonial critics Edward W. Said, Homi K. Bhabha, and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, although different in their foci, share a main goal in their works: to dismantle and deconstruct the Eurocentric discourses and to contest the colonialist
representations of the colonial enterprise and the colonized (Parry, "Institutionalization" 67; Lazarus 10). Said, who drew heavily from Michel Foucault's concepts of knowledge and power, describes in his ground-breaking work *Orientalism* how the Orientalist discourse actually produced 'the orient' which it then claimed just to represent (see also Lazarus 10). He shows how 'Orientalism' developed to be "the enormously systematic discipline by which European culture was able to manage—and even produce—the Orient politically, sociologically, militarily, ideologically, scientifically, and imaginatively during the post-Enlightenment period" (Said, *Orientalism* 3). Other postcolonial critics such as V.Y. Mudimbe followed this train of thought with the title of his work *The Invention of Africa* (1988). Homi K. Bhabha focused not only on Western discourses and colonialist representations in his works but also on the colonial subject, especially in his essays on 'Mimicry' and 'Hybridity'. Spivak is probably best-known for her work on the 'Subaltern' in which she claims that there is no way that the subaltern (i.e. the common people, not the elite, and as an extension also women) can represent themselves, as they have already been fixed by the dominant discourse as 'objects' of representation, not 'subjects' (Lazarus 9-10). These examples show that language and discourse have gained more and more importance in postcolonial theory as world-constituting elements (Lazarus 11).

As already mentioned above, the diversity of postcolonial theories has also invited certain points of criticism. First of all, the fact that the postcolonial critics and theorists themselves are actually part of the Western world and academia which they seek to criticize in their work—even though many were born and grew up in or had at least close connections to a postcolonial nation—raised concerns over the legitimacy of their engagement. This reminds of Audre Lorde's warning of "the dangers of pretending to dismantle the master's house with the master's own tools" (Radhakrishnan xxii). Radhakrishnan, however, is not convinced by this argument. With reference to Said's concept of 'Traveling Theory' (1982), he points out that theories which were conceived in the West can indeed travel to other contexts and situations where they are appropriated in ways that can be contradictory and resist the dominant Eurocentric lens (xxi-xxii, 179). He poses the rhetorical question: "who says that poststructuralism can and should only be used by exemplary European poststructuralists?" (xxii). He does, however, also point out that there are many pitfalls in the travel of ideas and theories. With reference again to Said's model, he argues that in most cases, the transfer is one-directional, from the center to the periphery, i.e. the former colonizer to the formerly colonized countries, and that the main agency remains with the center, for example when theories and models of thought are forced on countries where they are inappropriate or when alternative
Another factor which contributed to the criticism of postcolonial theories was the critics' social class position. Kwame Anthony Appiah, cultural theorist and philosopher, scathingly called postcolonial critics "a relatively small, Western-style, Western-trained, group of writers and thinkers who mediate the trade in cultural commodities of world capitalism at the periphery" (In my Father's House 149). Another critic questions "whether, in recognition of its own class position in global capitalism, it [postcolonialism] can generate a thoroughgoing criticism of its own ideology and formulate practices of resistance against the system of which it is a product" (qtd. in Lazarus 6).

An additional point of criticism, in particular as a response to the 'linguistic turn' in postcolonial studies, refers to the privileging of discourse and textuality over material political, economic, and social conditions (Parry, "Institutionalization" 73-74). Postcolonial theory is characterized by a rejection of both Marxism and anticolonial theory. The main reasons seem to lie in an aversion to the concepts of 'nation' and 'nationalism' ("Institutionalization" 77). According to Benita Parry and other critics, this complete rejection seems unjustified considering the contributions which both Marxism as well as anticolonial theorists made to the development of the field of 'Postcolonialism' (79). Additionally, both Parry and Newell criticize the negligence of material effects of colonialism as well as neo-colonial structures, such as the activities of multinational companies on the continent, and the continued influence of western governments (Parry, "Institutionalization" 74; Newell 4). Ghanaian writer Ama Ata Aidoo summed these concerns up in the following words: "postcolonial' is not only a fiction, but a most pernicious fiction, a cover-up of a dangerous period in our people's lives. For unlike 'neocolonial', for instance, 'postcolonial' posits a notion of something finished" (qtd. in Ahmad 16). Said seems to be exempted from the critique as he is seen as working on the textual and discourse level while not denying the material conditions of domination (Parry, "Institutionalization" 69). With his notion of 'worldliness' (see Said's The World, the Text, and the Critic), he emphasizes the need for intellectuals and critics to establish relations with the world, i.e. to be aware of macropolitical conditions, so as not to work in a vacuum (Radhakrishnan xxviii, 170, 180). Neil Lazarus calls Said an "epistemological realist" (11).

Moreover, due to its fluid and ambiguous character, the term 'Postcolonialism' often seems to be overused in contexts which are not even connected to postcolonial spaces. Parry argues that "the term [is] used in connection with any discursive contest against oppression or marginalization" ("Institutionalization" 66). Such an inflationary application can entail that it
loses meaning (which is already very contested and diverse) and becomes completely arbitrary. Despite these certainly valid concerns, 'Postcolonial' currently still functions as a powerful theoretical concept in the academic world and is widely applied to describe and categorize works produced in formerly colonial contexts.
II  Postcolonial and Diaspora Literatures

In its literal sense, Postcolonial Literature would include all literary works produced after the former colonies gained independence. As we have seen, however, the temporal meaning of 'postcolonial' has lost importance in the academic fields and has been replaced by an ideological/epistemological one which focuses on discourse and representation rather than material conditions. What does that mean for the canon of Postcolonial Literature? According to Benita Parry, certain forms and contents have been privileged over others, that is, for example, 'magic realisms' over more 'realist' modes, diasporic or more cosmopolitan modes over works written in local languages as well as novelistic styles over poetry and drama ("Institutionalization" 73).

Chinua Achebe's or Ngugi wa Thiong'o's early novels are not always necessarily called 'postcolonial', even though they were clearly written after their respective countries of origin had achieved independence. One reason might be the strong association of Postcolonialism with Poststructuralism and Postmodernism with their focus on the displacing of Western discourses, the fragmentation of the subject, and the deconstruction of meaning(s) and knowledge (Quayson 828-831). In novels such as Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* and works by authors such as Ayi Kwei Armah, Wole Soyinka, Ngugi wa Thiong'o, J.M. Coetzee Ato Quayson finds 'modernist' traces. He points in particular to the themes of 'alienation' and 'loss' as well as techniques of experimentation as revealing modernist traits. In what he calls 'African Modernism', alienation and loss are expressed in feelings of anxiety and longing in the context of an overlap of modernity and tradition and a crisis of individualism versus communalism (Quayson 827-828, 837). Quayson does, however, stress the fluidity of boundaries between Modernism and Postmodernism in the context of literature (831).

The description of these African classics seems to be informed by a discourse which relies heavily on concepts and frameworks of Western thought and academic influence. It is, therefore, understandable that critics have raised concerns about this focus within a discipline which is supposed to deconstruct Western (Eurocentric) discourses and their effects. An early critic of these Western influences was Ngugi wa Thiong'o. In 1968, he demanded the abolition of the English department at the University of Nairobi and suggested instead a department of African Literature and Languages. In his work *Decolonising the Mind*, he advocates for an avoidance of English as medium of writing because he sees language as a means of mediating a certain view of the world. He demands, instead, that "things must be seen from the African perspective" (Thiong'o 94) as literature is the "collective memory bank of a people's experience
in history" (15). His arguments are reminiscent of the earlier concept of 'Négritude'. Such notions, however, have been widely rejected as romantic nativism which does not account for the great diversity and "syrnecic mixes" of artistic and literary forms and styles and claims an 'authenticity' which does not and has never existed (Quayson 826). Wole Soyinka famously said, "the tiger does not go about announcing its tigritude; it pounces" (qtd. in Quayson 826).

As far as content and style of Postcolonial literary productions are concerned, John Marx identified in his essay Postcolonial Literature and the Western Literary Canon three types of relations Postcolonial Literature assumes towards the Western canon. The first one is called "Repudiation" and is found basically in most African literary texts which can be classified as 'postcolonial' in the sense of 'anticolonial' (Marx 85-88). Marx, however, points out how difficult a complete repudiation has proven to be due to the writers' colonial past (87). Even Ngugi wa Thiong'o did not escape this influence, which can be seen in his appreciation of the "Victorian notion that literature expresses culture" (Marx 87). The second type of relationship is the "unwriting" or revision of Western forms of literature (88-92). For this purpose, certain forms first have to be appropriated, dismantled, and then rewritten (88-89). Tsitsi Dangarembga's novel Nervous Conditions (1988) is an example of this technique which in its form basically represents a 'Bildungsroman'. The third type refers to the fact that certain Postcolonial texts have entered the mainstream (for example as part of the school curricula). The problem which seems to remain, however, is that even though certain literary works have entered the market and educational institutions, they are mostly labeled according to ethnic or even racial categories, thereby foregrounding the authors' African heritage instead of their artistic or literary genius (84-85). The question is whether 'being different' will at some point seize to mean 'inferior' in some way (see King 820).

As already mentioned, one difficulty of Postcolonial theory is that it is so heterogeneous in its contents and claims. In her essay on Postcolonial African and Caribbean literature, Adele King points out that what is usually considered Postcolonial literature is mostly produced by writers who are part of diaspora communities in former colonizing countries (809). Many of these writers were born after decolonization or are already part of a second or third generation of immigrants. King does, however, also argue that these diaspora writers ought not to be seen as a homogenous group. A perspective of intersectionality is crucial in this respect. For example, there are those writers who are well integrated in a certain African diaspora community, those who consider themselves 'Black British', those who refuse to be part of any such communities, and many more others (King 810, 811, 816).
A plurality of different voices and perspectives as well as new formations has emerged. This creation of new cultural formations and identities, or the rejection of such, can certainly be seen as characteristic of many Postcolonial literary texts. Bhabha introduced the term 'hybridity' as a means to describe and account for these phenomena (see Bhabha 1994). King explains that the notions of 'home' and 'nation' have seized to be clearly-defined terms and that members of this new generation of diaspora writers do not necessarily have to choose anymore between binaries such as their 'roots' and their new 'home' or any fixed identities. In many cases, they can, in fact, be called 'transnationals' (King 810).

Similar notions can be found in Radhakrishnan's discussion of postcolonials living in the diaspora. In his work *Diasporic Mediations*, he talks in this context about the "politics of 'imaginary geographies'" which lead to different subject positions (xiv). This is an expression, on the one hand, of his general poststructuralist understanding of reality as narrative or invention, i.e. construction, but, on the other hand, also an acknowledgment of the importance of a "politics of location" (xiv), thereby rejecting simple dichotomies between 'resident' and 'diasporic' perspectives. Such dichotomies usually either assign the diaspora an 'outsider' status or a position which enables them to develop an informed counter-memory. Radhakrishnan warns against such monolithic perspectives by emphasizing the heterogeneity of resident voices as well as resident elitisms and oppressions. According to him, it is important to keep in mind, that what residents of a former colony consider 'real' is as much an invention as the reality of people who live in different locations. Radhakrishnan calls these inventions "perspectival imaginings" which are dependent on one's own positionality (177). He also criticizes, however, Poststructuralist celebrations of the diaspora as "an avant-garde lifestyle based on deterritorialization" (174). He grants them a certain 'double consciousness' with reference to Du Bois' use of the concept which he sees epitomized by ethnic hyphenations, such as African-American etc., but points out that diasporans, rather than celebrating their liminal positions, in fact, often desire "to reterritorialize" themselves and "thereby acquire a name" (175). He rejects a "glib transnationalism" (xv) in favor of different voices in multiple registers speaking from "multiple locations in response to multiple imperatives" (xiv). According to Radhakrishnan, the notions of 'location' and 'position' play a very important role in the context of postcolonial and diaspora identities, as they automatically belong to multiple, overlapping, and asymmetric worlds and discourses (148). He finds the idea that postcolonials in the diaspora are monolocational absurd (xxv). The ultimate goal, according to Radhakrishnan, is a "multilateral, multihistorical" universalism based on an equal and reciprocal relationality which acknowledges that people have multiple and very complex roots (xxvii).
Movements of people are not a new phenomenon. It is common knowledge that humans have always traveled. Stephanie Newell stresses in her work how West African populations were very mobile and in continuous movement long before the colonial encounter, not in a transnational but rather in a translocal sense (for example for trading or marriage purposes) (11-13). Together with the people, also stories and narratives traveled, whether in written or oral forms. We can, therefore, speak of "physical and cultural mobility", a "condition of trans-local mobility" (Newell 12). In his text "Migrancy, hybridity, and postcolonial literary studies", Andrew Smith suggests that the emergence and rise of capitalism led to migration on a more global scale with the outcomes of slavery and colonialism, neocolonialism, and the international division of labor (242). 'Globalization', a term nowadays widely used is seen as the epitome of transnational flows of capital, people, cultures, etc.

In Postcolonial studies, 'migrancy' appears to be celebrated as a way of overcoming or transgressing the fixity of national boundaries and of living in a "borderspace", an "in-between space", thus undermining any essentializations and totalizations which are indicated by notions such as 'nation' and 'culture' (in a separating sense) (Smith 247). Postcolonial literary studies seem to be based on "the idea that as people move, the cultural center also moves, not in any specific direction, but in a diffusing, outward spread" (245). In this context, the concepts 'diaspora' and 'hybridity' play a significant role. The term 'diaspora', which is derived from the Greek, has been conventionally used to refer to "the dispersion of the Jewish peoples in the period following the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 BC" and to "the existence thereafter of Jewish populations outside Palestine" (254). In this sense, it seems to suggest that a group of people finds itself in an exile or dislocation and waits for their return to their homeland. In the meantime, they maintain a certain unity among each other (Smith 254; King 810). For a long time, in postcolonial studies and literature, the diasporic condition has chiefly been associated with a sense of double alienation and pain. Postcolonial diasporans were strongly conceived as being in the "heartland of former colonialism" which is "full of lies and duplicities" (Radhakrishnan 174). They were further characterized by a strong longing for their homeland while at the same time hyperaware that an easy return to how things were before they left is not possible. Adele King, however, pointed out that this characterization of people in exile who are anticipating or longing for the return to some 'homeland' does not necessarily apply to contemporary diaspora communities (810).
As far as the notion of the 'African diaspora' is concerned, the slave trade with its dislocation and dispersion of Africans comes to mind. The 'négritude' movements tried to account for this dispersion by creating the idea of a unitary way of African-ness, thus bringing together the diasporas of the Caribbean, Europe, America, and the home continent (Smith 255). Paul Gilroy's book *The Black Atlantic* (1993) offers a more fluid thinking on African diasporas. According to his model, "the terrain of 'West Africa' cannot stop at the southern coastline of the region: it must be extended to include cultures, languages, and literatures from diasporic communities around the world" (Newell 14). Even though Gilroy emphasizes that African diasporic communities share a history of displacement (especially through the North Atlantic Slave Trade), he does not essentialize them but acknowledges their diversity and differences. He believes that "it is 'routes' that are shared by the African diaspora, rather than 'roots'" (Gilroy 19; Newell 15). Another theorist who is critical of simplistic notions of 'diaspora' is Stuart Hall. He calls essentializing ideas of unity based on racial or national categories fiction. In his view, cultural identities are unstable and should be regarded as a "positioning" which is fluid in character and can always be changed (Hall, "Cultural Identity" 395; Smith 255-256).

In the context of postcolonial theory, the term 'hybridity' is probably best known in connection with Homi K. Bhabha. Bhabha understands 'Hybridity' as the "creation of new transcultural forms within the contact zone produced by colonization" (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin 118). The cultural identities of both colonizers and colonized subjects are constructed in an "in-between space" which Bhabha calls the "Third Space of enunciation" (Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* 37). Andrew Smith points out that the meaning of the term 'hybridity' has actually changed from being a very negative, derogatory term connected to 'racial' intermingling. It has also been used in a more general sense in relation to assumptions of multiculturalism and diversity in the context of global migration (Smith 250-251). Bhabha, however, rejected such essentialist notions of separate cultures.

For postcolonial literary studies, 'hybridity' can mean that cultural products are regarded as 'hybrid' (Smith 245). The work of contemporary black British writers, for example, has been described as

an attempt to disrupt the narrative forged to define the dominant culture, to hybridize the discourse, to reconfigure the concept of all cultural identities as fluid and heterogeneous. Instead of seeking recognition from the dominant culture or overcoming specific instances of political injustice, the work of these writers endeavours to reconfigure these relations of dominance and resistance, to reposition both the dominant and the marginalized on the stage of cultural discourse, and to challenge static borders of national and cultural identity. (qtd. in Smith 253)
The concept of 'hybridity' has, however, also sparked some criticism. In the introductory chapter of *Contemporary Postcolonial Theory*, it is argued that while Bhabha's notion of 'hybridity' has produced an "autonomous position for the colonial within the confines of the hegemonic discourse" (Parry, "Current Problems" 40), his celebration of the concept has also "led to the privileging of migrancy and exile which ostensibly confer a greater critical edge to the migrant intellectual" (Mongia, "Introduction" 7). Radhakrishnan also warns against an uncritical use of the notion of 'hybridity'. He points out that in many cases the experiences of migrants and people living in the diaspora are characterized by a frustrated search for a political and social identity due to citizenship restraints. In contexts which are still structured by asymmetries of power, all hybridities cannot be considered equal. Many migrants strive for a collective identity to gain some political and representational strength (Radhakrishnan 161-162). When talking about hybridity, it is, therefore, important to avoid essentialisms and always apply a lens of intersectionality. Otherwise, the hybrid subject might seem "free of any gender, class or race constraints" (Mongia, "Introduction" 7).

2 'Afropolitanism' and 'Multilocality': Questions of Location and Identity in Contemporary Discourses on Africa and the Diaspora

The period towards and after gaining independence from colonialism was marked by a surge of national enthusiasm. At that time, nationalism was seen as empowering for African nations in their struggles against the colonial powers. Radhakrishnan acknowledges the fact that nationalism has had different and often somewhat ambivalent meanings and shapes in different geographical, temporal, and other contexts. The influential intellectual Frantz Fanon, whose works have greatly shaped postcolonial studies, tried to distinguish between an official nationalism which represented the interests of local elites, which he rejected, and a genuine people-driven nationalism or national consciousness (see *The Wretched of the Earth*; Radhakrishnan xxv). In today's postcolonial academia, the notion 'national' or 'nationalistic' has mostly lost its more 'positive' connotations and is more commonly associated with "agendas and discursive and cultural practices that are complicit with patriarchal privilege and dominant culture and which serve to perpetuate the exploitation of different categories of women and subaltern groups" (Ahmad 16-17).
The term 'nation' unarguably represents a very contradictory and politically contested concept if one considers locations such as Chechnya or Palestine among many others. In addition, nationality is often associated with people's 'ethnicity' or the color of their skin (Renan 8; Tunca and Ledent 5). What is more or less uncontested is that the rhetoric of nationalism is used to exclude by deploying an inside/outside dichotomy along certain artificial categories.

But what constitutes a nation? In a lecture at the Sorbonne in 1882, Ernest Renan identified certain factors which play an important role in the creation of a nation, such as the "fusion of their component populations" (10) and the act of collective forgetting of many aspects of the nation's formation (especially the violent struggles), a point which was taken up later by Bhabha as a crucial one ("DissemiNation" 310; Renan 11). In 1983, Benedict Anderson coined the concept 'Imagined Communities' to describe the social constructedness of nations. He argued that they are imagined "because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion" (Anderson 6).

The concept of 'nation', without doubt, constitutes a "powerful historical idea in the west" (Bhabha, "Introduction" 1). It does, however, also remain an ambiguous one. The notion of the 'modern nation' bespeaks, for example, both progress and regression (with its focus on traditions) and its creation is characterized "as much [by] acts of affiliation and establishment as they are moments of disavowal, displacement, exclusion, and cultural contestation" ("Introduction" 5); nations are both characterized by boundaries and by border-spaces, peripheries, hybridity, and "in-between spaces" in which people claim different and multiple identities ("Introduction" 4). Bhabha therefore emphasizes the constructedness of 'nation' and 'nationality', its narrative character: "nation as narration" ("DissemiNation" 297). The ambiguities of these national narratives can be explored in narrations on the nation if deconstructivist methods of reading are applied.

The performative character of the national discourses is visible in the acts of forgetting the history of the nations' past, especially the violence involved in its creation, and other myths of homogeneity which have to be repeated continuously. The nation as narration is therefore inherently unstable ("DissemiNation" 292-320). According to Bhabha, in subaltern and minority voices, traces of other, alternative discourses can be found, such as transnational dimensions of the nation-space (309, 312-313). As an example, he mentions poststructuralist/postmodern and postcolonial narratives of the nation such as the 'Writing back to empire' literature, arguing that "the peoples of the periphery return to rewrite the history and fiction of the metropolis" ("Introduction" 6). In his essay "DissemiNation: time, narrative, and
the margins of the modern nation", he describes the potential of 'mimicry' and the return of the postcolonial and the diasporic to the metropolis to change the history of the nation with reference to a character from Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* (319-320).

At the beginning of the 1990s, Radhakrishnan identified a split or contradiction between an epistemological rejection of nationalism and a strong "resurgence of nationalisms" all over the world, which still holds true today despite the wide-spread effects of globalization (191). The increasing globalization of the world on different levels did not eradicate the influence of nationalisms but certainly facilitated the creation of alternative and counter-narratives. Arjun Appadurai, who belongs to a group of cosmopolitan postcolonial critics which has emerged in the United States since the 1990s, tried to account for a new global cultural economy which is characterized by a great mobility on different levels and in diverse fields in an essay called "Disjunction and Difference". According to Appadurai, our globalized world should be perceived in terms of a "complex, overlapping, disjunctive order" (32), instead of referring to traditional center-periphery models.

How the global flows of people, ideas, capital, goods, media images, etc. are related to each other is explained by Appadurai in terms of '-scapes'. There are five dimensions of global flows: 'Ethnoscapes', 'mediascapes', 'technoscapes', 'financescapes', and 'ideoscapes'. These dimensions are not supposed to represent fixed categories but are fluid and "deeply perspectival constructs" (33). Together they create so-called "imagined worlds" (33). The term 'ethnoscapes' describes the global flows of people (as groups or as individuals); 'mediascapes' refers to the distribution of information and circulation of images and stories through electronic media, literature, etc., as well as people's responses to these images; 'technoscapes' and 'financescapes' are the global flows of technology and capital respectively; and 'ideoscapes' refers to the circulation of ideologies and discourses (33-36).

Elements which are brought into new societies quickly become indigenized, and people construct imagined worlds. Appadurai, however, points out that 'mediascapes' might create problems in relation to 'ideoscapes'. As an example, he names the term 'democracy', a concept which can be traced back to the Enlightenment Period but which takes on very different forms and meanings in different global contexts (36). This notion reminds of Said's 'traveling theory' model and Radhakrishnan's description of the pitfalls of the transfer of ideas and theories. An especially interesting point is how the dimension of 'ideoscapes' gets complicated by the growing number of intellectuals living in the diaspora who "continuously inject new meaning-
streams into the discourse[s]" (Appadurai 37), which might lead to the aforementioned alternative and counter-narratives.

At the beginning of the 21st century, a new term emerged to describe identities of people who feel connected to the African continent "through familial and cultural genealogies" (Gikandi, "Foreword" 9) while at the same time being very cosmopolitan in their mindset. The term 'Afropolitanism', a neologism coined by Taiye Selasi and first appearing in her article titled "Bye-Bye Babar (Or What is an Afropolitan?)", published in the LIP Magazine in 2005, entered popular culture, fashion, and art and has become part of the language of advertising and marketing in Africa and African diaspora communities (Hassan). Taiye Selasi explained the 'Afropolitan' in her article as follows:

They (read: we) are Afropolitans—the newest generation of African emigrants, coming soon or collected already at a law firm/chem lab/jazz lounge near you. You'll know us by our funny blend of London fashion, New York jargon, African ethics, and academic successes. Some of us are ethnic mixes, e.g. Ghanaian and Canadian, Nigerian and Swiss; others merely cultural mutts: American accent, European affect, African ethos. Most of us are multilingual: in addition to English and a Romantic or two, we understand some indigenous tongue and speak a few urban vernaculars. There is at least one place on The African Continent to which we tie our sense of self: be it a nation-state (Ethiopia), a city (Ibadan), or an auntie's kitchen. Then there's the G8 city or two (or three) that we know like the backs of our hands, and the various institutions that know us for our famed focus. We are Afropolitans: not citizens, but Africans of the world. ("Bye Bye Babar")

In Selasi's description, 'Afropolitans' are people of African descent who live in the diaspora, i.e. usually a metropolis in the West, and who feel connected to both one or more geographic and/or imaginary localities on the African continent and other large cities in the West. The lives of this group of people are usually characterized by an increased mobility, in terms of physically moving between different locations both on the African continent and in the West as well as in terms of identity construction. The idea behind the concept of the 'Afropolitan' seems to be to avoid the usual monolithic and highly stereotypical constructs of Africa as well as any simplifying and essentializing discussions of 'Who is an African' or 'What does it mean to be African?'. The term 'Afropolitan' is a mélange of African and Cosmopolitan, thus meaning "Africans of the World" ("Bye Bye Babar").

Selasi's position seems to suggest a cultural hybridity in the sense which Bhabha propagated in his work. Afropolitans have to negotiate their identities along at least three dimensions, namely racial, national, and cultural ones, according to Selasi, which does, however, in the end not result in them being "lost in translation" ("Bye Bye Babar"), i.e. in a
state of hopeless and desperate in-between-ness and deracination, a perspective which earlier postcolonial critics shared about the condition of people from former colonies in the diaspora. Being torn inside due to the loss of their roots, cultural anxieties, and a longing for the motherland appears to have been more characteristic of the parent generation of today's Afropolitans. In postcolonial literature, this trope was deployed in particular in the literature after independence up to the 1990s, in works such as Ama Ata Aidoo's *Our Sister Killjoy* or in Tsitsi Dangarembga's most famous novel in which the colonial encounter leaves the protagonists in 'nervous conditions' (see the title of the novel).

The concept of the 'Afropolitan' appears to represent a change in perspective as far as the relationship of the younger generations of postcolonials to the West and identity construction as such are concerned. Instead of mourning their rootlessness, they assert that they can occupy multiple "cultural spaces and relations" from which they define who they are (Eze, "We, Afropolitans" 117). Fluidity and mobility seem to be keywords regarding both locations and identities. Members of this generation might have found what Bhabha called a "third space of enunciation" (Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* 37).

With her celebratory description of 'Afropolitans' as a group of people who confidently and in many cases creatively engage "with the real, imaginary, and virtual effects of the transnational movements of goods, cultures, and peoples" (Hassan 6), Selasi's position certainly represents a clear counter-perspective to the Afropessimism or "the trope of crisis", as Simon Gikandi calls it, which has been characteristic of most of the narratives and media representations of Africa generated in the West, as well as a rejection of essentializing and stereotypical images (Gikandi, "Foreword" 9):

> What distinguishes this lot and its like (in the West and at home) is a willingness to complicate Africa—namely, to engage with, critique, and celebrate the parts of Africa that mean most to them. Perhaps what most typifies the Afropolitan consciousness is the refusal to oversimplify; the effort to understand what is ailing in Africa alongside the desire to honor what is wonderful, unique. Rather than essentialising the geographical entity, we seek to comprehend the cultural complexity; to honor the intellectual and spiritual legacy; and to sustain our parents' cultures. ("Bye Bye Babar")

Even though the term 'Afropolitan' entered the cultural arena mainly through Selasi's article and its use in popular culture and especially fashion and art, the concept had already been introduced before into the academic discourse through Achille Mbembe's work on South Africa, in particular on cosmopolitan Johannesburg (see "Writing the World from an African Metropolis" 2004). Over the past ten years, it has been reaffirmed by a range of African literary and cultural scholars and philosophical thinkers. Cameroonian philosopher and public intellectual Achille
Mbembe discussed 'Afropolitanism' in his 2007 essay with the same title in a more encompassing way than Selasi did in her article. He began with identifying three politico-intellectual paradigms which have been dominant in African discourses: firstly, a discourse based on anti-colonial nationalism; secondly, a Marxist one which informed 'African Socialisms'; and thirdly, a pan-African discourse which was based on racial and transnational solidarity ("Afropolitanism" 26). According to Mbembe, these three paradigms have become so ossified that they hardly allow for new ways of thinking about culture. In his view, the old question of "Who is African and who is not?" is still answered by resorting to "raw racial difference" (26), even though the history of Africa has been characterized by continuous movements and cultural flows. These "worlds in movement" can be seen in the forms of dispersion and immersion (26). As examples, he names the slave trade but also intermarriage and other forms of transregional exchange, as well as the presence of people from Europe, Asia, and other regions of the world who came to the African continent under diverse circumstances (26-27).

An important point which Mbembe makes is that "it is not simply that a part of African history lies somewhere else, outside Africa. It is also that a history of the rest of the world … is present on the continent" ("Afropolitanism" 28). This "interweaving of the worlds" underlies the term 'Afropolitanism' (28). Mbembe defines the term as "a way of being in the world, refusing on principle any form of victim identity" (28-29). He understands it as "a political and cultural stance in relation to the nation, to race and to the issue of difference in general" (29).

In contrast to Taiye Selasi who ties 'Afropolitanism' to the contemporary generation of people with strong connections to Africa and locates it in diasporan/Western metropolises, Mbembe asserts that African history has always been characterized by mobility, hybridity, and various cultural influences. He rejects nativist tendencies which assume the existence of some 'pure, authentic' culture as well as the dualities and oppositions established between the metropolis and the postcolonial nations which are typical of the write-back discourses of the post-independence era (Mbembe 26-30).

Kenyan scholar and critical thinker Simon Gikandi arrived at a similar definition of 'Afropolitan'. In the foreword of a notable collection of essays with the title Negotiating Afropolitanism. Essays on Borders and Spaces in Contemporary African Literature and Folklore, he calls it "a new phenomenology of Africanness" and "a way of being African in the world" (9) and describes it as follows:
To be Afropolitan is to be connected to knowable African communities, nations, and traditions; but it is also to live a life divided across cultures, languages, and states. It is to embrace and celebrate a state of Cultural hybridity—to be of Africa and of other worlds at the same time. (Gikandi, "Foreword" 9)

Gikandi's interpretation acknowledges that African identities can be "rooted in specific local geographies but [can] also [be] transcendental of them" ("Foreword" 9). Like Mbembe, he does not restrict Afropolitanism to diaspora communities but locates it on the continent which is exemplified in the essays of the book, most of which originate from African universities and bespeak "the way in which local experiences encounter global narratives" (10). Gikandi sees the disappointment with and delegitimation of the African states at the core of the rising importance of multilocality, regionalism, and transnationalism, claiming that "the vernacular and the region have become, together with the transnational, the only sites in which African futures can be guaranteed" (10). Gikandi is, however, aware that transnationalism or life in the diaspora is not always only linked to positive experiences. In many cases, it is experienced as displacement and connected with anxieties that can lead to cultural and ethnic fundamentalism and chauvinism (11).

Nigerian poet and philosopher Chielozona Eze is another scholar who has critically dealt with the concept of 'Afropolitanism' in his essays. He foregrounds its influence as a shift in African self-perceptions which he sees rooted in the economic and cultural consequences of globalization, i.e. the increased movements of goods, people, and ideas between nations and continents (Eze, "Rethinking African culture" 234-237). For him, Afropolitanism represents a "negation of the oppositional, rigid identity construction[s] in Africa" (235). His assumptions are based on poststructuralist claims that all identities are constructed and in the making, and therefore fluid and never fixed in any way. In addition, he asserts that "the constructions [of identities] are space-dependent" (244) and that in this respect, today "[I]dentity, like culture, is delocalized. Place and origin are no longer exclusive markers of identity, even if they still play vital roles in many people's self-reading" (238). Eze contrasts today's Afropolitanism with earlier international and global movements such as Pan-Africanism which was based on Marcus Garvey's slogan 'Africa for Africans' (235). He recognizes the importance of this philosophy as a stage in African liberation as well as the necessity of "challenging the colonial narrative about Africa" (236) by authors such as Chinua Achebe or Léopold Sédar Senghor. He emphasizes that the African people reinvented Africa by responding to the racist colonial narratives, with reference to Mudimbe's famous claim that 'Africa is an invention of the West' (236). What Eze finds problematic are the nativist and autochthonous assumptions of earlier postcolonial thinkers and warns of the dangers of nationalism and nativism in relation to genocides and
ethnic cleansing. For him and other contemporary scholars such as Kwame Anthony Appiah, "there is no such thing as a pristine culture or identity completely unaffected by another in today's world" (Eze, "Rethinking African culture" 239).

Eze sees the potential of the concept of 'Afropolitanism' in its openness to plurality and difference and the blurring of categorizations of people. Like Radhakrishnan, he calls for a perspective of 'relation(s)' between people instead of oppositions, which he thinks can be realized through a cosmopolitan perspective ("Rethinking African Culture" 241). Afropolitanism is not restricted to movements between the West and Africa but also applies to notions of mobility between African cities or even within an African city (Eze, "We, Afropolitans" 115). People do not even have to cross geographical borders or make physical movements to be Afropolitans; what counts is that their imaginations can travel: "one only needs to cross the psychic boundaries erected by nativism, autochthony, heritage, and other mythologies of authenticity" ("We, Afropolitans" 117; "Rethinking African culture" 241).

The emergence and rising popularity of the term 'Afropolitan' or 'Afropolitanism' has, however, not been received as enthusiastically by all cultural and literary critics but has also sparked a considerable amount of criticism. Due to its close links to the fashion industry and popular consumerist culture, it has been seen by many as a market ploy which mainly serves the interests of an elite diaspora community who is wealthy and trained at Western universities and is therefore able to travel the world (Eze, "We, Afropolitans" 114). Binyavanga Wainaina, one of the most prominent critics, downright rejected the term in his keynote speech which he delivered at a meeting of the African Studies Association UK in 2012 and proclaimed, "I'm a Pan-Africanist, not an Afropolitan". He is arguing that Afropolitanism has become a symbol of cultural commodification: "product-driven" and "potentially funded by the West" (qtd. in Bosch Santana). In his critique, Wainaina is supported by Stephanie Bosch Santana in his claim that Pan-Africanism represents a stronger basis for the cultural engagement with Africa due to its longer history and Africa-centredness. As an author and journalist, Wainaina's major concern lies with literature. In his speech, he accused the Afropolitan novel as being ultimately written for "fellow Afropolitans" and criticized the influence of the internet on the literary productions which he calls "digital pulp" (qtd. in Bosch Santana).

Wainaina and Santana were not the only people who rejected and/or severely criticized the term 'Afropolitan' as a new identity tag. Academics and bloggers such as Emma Dabiri and Marta Tveit do not identify as Afropolitans despite carrying, what, based on Selasi's description, can be considered Afropolitan traits. Dabiri does acknowledge the potential of the concept as an alternative to subscribing "to the depressingly limited identities widely perceived as being
authentic". She nevertheless rejects the term, claiming that its value regarding notions of race, identity, and other critical categories seems to be increasingly pushed aside by its focus on consumerism and commodities. It fails to address the class differences within African and diaspora communities and the "rapacious consumerism of the African elites claimed to make up the ranks of the Afropolitans" (Dabiri). Dabiri points out that while the term challenges the Afropessimistic narratives of mainstream media representations, "we still don't hear the narratives of Africans who are not privileged".

This statement points to the second major point of criticism: That despite Selasi's proclamations of complicating and de-essentializing the traditional representations of Africa and of 'What is African', Afropolitanism still represents a reductive narrative of Africa and the African diaspora which leads to stereotypes and generalizations. For some critics, it appears to become the new single story of Africa, the dominant narrative (see Tveit; Dabiri).

Not only critics but also proponents of the term 'Afropolitan' seem to be aware of its flaws and shortcomings. Eze, for example, questions why the term is 'Afropolitan' and not simply 'Cosmopolitan' ("We, Afropolitans" 116), a point which Marta Tveit raised in her rejection of the term, foregrounding its essentializing and exoticizing tendencies. A major concern of both critics as well as proponents of Selasi's concept seems to be its elitist air. Selasi stresses their (that is, Afropolitans') acute awareness of persisting systems of oppression and forms of imperialism, and other social, political, and economic ills afflicting the continent, but opponents of the concept remain doubtful about this claim (see Selasi "Bye Bye Babar"; Hassan "Rethinking Cosmopolitanism"). Salah M. Hassan points at the paradox between the group of wealthy people who call themselves 'Afropolitans' and move in and out of Africa and the larger group of people who come to Europe and the West in search of employment and better lives and suffer under draconian border controls and immigration laws and who become part of an underclass if they are allowed to stay (26). He doubts whether the term 'Afropolitan' can capture the extremely complex picture of the diaspora. Ishtiyaq Shikri (2015) found even clearer words when he called a description of travel items in The Afropolitan, a South African fashion magazine, "so far removed from the experiences of African migrants being brutally attacked by xenophobic mobs in South Africa and drowning in their thousands in the Mediterranean, as to be obscene" (qtd. in Eze, "We, Afropolitans" 114).

From yet another angle, the concept received critical attention from the perspective of an art historian. S. Okwu’odo Ogbechie discussed the concept and its implications for the art sphere in his Blog post "'Afropolitanism': Africa without Africans". He criticizes that what is called 'Contemporary African Art' in 'mainstream' (that is Western) art discourses is almost
exclusively represented by artists who reside and work in the West. He argues that "the idea that Africa is less a place than as [sic] a concept is one of the conceits of recent postcolonial discourse" (Ogbechie). For him, this moving away the discourse from the continent and presenting it as global "mask[s] obvious relationships of power" (Ogbechie) and the almost complete immobility and marginalization of African artists based in Africa. Ogbechie wishes for African artists on the continent to be recognized as valuable and equal global players in contemporary art.

Additionally to these critical voices, a range of academics and bloggers have identified with the concept of 'Afropolitanism' on different levels. It has been defended as a subculture, and the important question was raised why Africans should not have multiple subcultures. One blogger asks defiantly, "how dare Africans not simply be victims, but also shapers of globalisation and all its inherent contestations? How dare we market our cultures as well as our political transformations?" (MSAFROPOLITAN, "Can Africans have multiple subcultures"). This statement points to novelist Teju Cole's observation that the discussion of Afropolitanism makes the problem of class visible. He argues that class has been "historically displaced onto race", and Africa has been seen by the West as the "racial proletariat", the "wretched of the earth" (Bady "Afropolitan"). That is why African writing has always been political and in opposition to the West ("Afropolitan"). The new Afropolitan writers do not fit into that scheme, though.

Some rejected the oppositional stances between Afropolitanism and Pan-Africanism and proclaimed that they are proponents of both because the concepts function on different levels. Additionally, they pointed to the links of Afropolitanism and Pan-Africanism with their common international or global focus. In fact, its relations and indebtedness to earlier movements, concepts, and discourses have been pointed out by several academics who have critically engaged with the term and concept of 'Afropolitanism' (see Khonje, Ooko-Ombaka, MSAFROPOLITAN). Salah M. Hassan stresses its links to earlier generations of African diasporic writers, intellectuals, and artists such as Frantz Fanon, Léopold Sédar Senghor, and Aimé Césaire. He especially emphasizes the importance of the work of Stuart Hall, his concept of 'new ethnicities', and his efforts to remove the center/periphery dichotomy in art and culture (24). He also points out that today's Afropolitans are not only indebted to critical thinkers but also to their parents' struggles in the diaspora as they paved the way for them to be in a position from which they are able to claim alternative identities to the ones previously ascribed to them (26).
The question which therefore remains is whether the concept behind 'Afropolitanism' is really so new. At the beginning of the 1990's, Ella Shohat discussed the term 'hybridity' and pointed out that the meaning of 'hybridity' had been invoked much earlier in Latin American modernisms in terms such as 'créolité' and 'mestizaje', for example by the Brazilian modernists of the 1920s ("Notes on the 'Post-Colonial'" 108-109). She further argued that 'hybridity' just as 'postcolonialism' should be approached "in a non-universalizing, differential manner, contextualized within present neo-colonial hegemonies", i.e. in a context of "negotiating locations, identities, and positionalities in relation to the violence of neocolonialism" ("Notes on the 'Post-Colonial'" 110). Shohat's position reminds of contemporary critics of the term 'Afropolitan' who worry about its depoliticizing tendencies which might lead to a masking of inequalities.

Most of the supporters of the term and concept appear to be aware of its shortcomings but also seem to believe in its potential to challenge and critique narrow definitions of identity, nation, culture, race, and possibly other categories. Okwui Enwezor pointed out that African and Caribbean diaspora writers and artists "have laid claim to the space of the Western metropolis and reworked ideas of exile, nation, and citizenship in ways that defy any easy readings of Otherness" (qtd. in Hassan 13-14). Chielozona Eze echoes these sentiments asserting that "the colonized is no longer at the periphery" but has acquired a voice and the agency to self-articulate and self-define their identities ("Rethinking African culture" 245). While Gikandi and Eze still speak of geographical roots, the academic Alpha Abebe foregrounds the Afropolitans' transnational lives and speaks of (physical and/or ideological) routes through Africa and calls Afropolitan spaces "sites of change and contestation rather than a reflection of a fixed concept or identity". Additionally, he calls attention to the fact that 'Afropolitanism' is a grassroots web-based movement whose leaders are mainly young women of color who represent a group which has long been (and probably still is) underrepresented in the cultural and literary field.
Postcolonial and as such also African women writers have long been sidelined by male writers and the literary market in terms of distribution and recognition despite their great variety of literary productions. The recent rise of young women writers who may or may not consider themselves Afropolitans but who certainly aim to create their own stories on their own account and often reject traditional labels and categories which appear too narrow to them, has led academics to re-evaluate established accounts of postcoloniality.

Postnational Feminisms is the title of a fairly recent book by Hena Ahmad. In her work from 2010, she explores 'postnational' influences in postcolonial third world feminism(s) by discussing four novels which are considered postcolonial. These include Tsitsi Dangarembga's Nervous Conditions and Ama Ata Aidoo's Changes. Ahmad argues that the writers of these works have constructed new, alternative identities for women informed by their (the authors' and often also the characters') diasporic and/or cosmopolitan backgrounds and consciousness. In these literary creations, she discovers an anti-/postnational stance as they, she argues, "undercut cultural notions of womanhood that were politically appropriated, manipulated, and upheld by Third World nationalisms in order to create idealized imagined constructs of women" (Ahmad 3). Ahmad identifies a certain "complicity of the colonial and neocolonial societies in the oppression [and subjugation] of women" (7) as a result of their patriarchal ideologies. According to her, the tempering or even overturning of traditional national narratives of women's roles in society can be read in feminist as well as in anti-/post-national terms. The driver in this development is the writers' growing mobility, transnationalism, and cosmopolitanism. Through their as well as the characters' challenge of and resistance against traditions, new and alternative postcolonial perspectives and relationships towards feminism and nationalism are created (10-11). By employing new forms and new contents, traditional identities and roles of women characters are contested and redefined in their works. Ahmad cautions, however, against the assumption of a unified or singular 'female' vision. She points out that the authors in question differ in terms of class backgrounds, political awareness and commitment, etc. (12). What connects them is their colonial and postcolonial backgrounds as well as their questioning of patriarchal nationalist ideologies (13).
These 'postnational' feminist writers have been informed by what can be called Postcolonial feminist discourses. In earlier theoretical texts, the term 'third world women' can be found (see Chandra Mohanty). Ella Shohat also preferred the term 'third world' in her essay "Notes on the Postcolonial". Although aware that the 'three worlds theory' is indeed very problematic, Shohat is critical of the implications of the term 'postcolonial' (100). As already mentioned, in her view, 'post-colonial' implies a rupture or temporal distance from colonialism as well as a certain slipperiness and universalizing tendency, as it is often purely academic and removed from any kind of activism and geographical specificity. Shohat is strongly aware of the effects of colonialism and neocolonial structures which still unite diverse people in their struggles and resistances without essentializing them. For that reason, she calls for local and geographical specificity and contextualization when talking about "imperialized formations" ("Notes on the Post-colonial" 103, 111). Such a "politics of location" (112) and perspective which Shohat advocates for is not necessarily impossible through concepts such as 'postcolonialism', though, if (neo)colonial relations are viewed in a "non-universalizing, differential", and contextualized manner (110).

Chandra Mohanty described her understanding of 'third world feminism' or 'third world feminists' in a similar manner. She firmly rejects the essentializing and reductive tendencies of white Western feminists who tend to "freeze third world women in space, time, and history" (Mohanty 6) by creating a dichotomy between themselves (white, Western) and non-Western women. This dichotomy is based on stereotypical characterizations and monolithic constructions of third world women as being underdeveloped, oppressed, poor, illiterate, etc., which created a binary between the 'white Western, progressive' and the 'non-Western backward or traditional woman' (5-6).

Just like other 'postcolonial' scholars such as Shohat, Radhakrishnan, or Eze, Mohanty calls for a view of the world in terms of relations and intersectionality. She thinks of third world women not as a biological or cultural category but rather, in political terms, of an 'imagined community' which shares histories and struggles against sexism, racism, colonialism, imperialism, capitalism, and other forms of domination (Mohanty 4). According to Mohanty, members of this imagined community are positioned or position themselves in "oppositional

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2 Instead of talking about feminism in the singular, the plural 'feminisms' shall be used, as there is no one homogenous discourse or group of postcolonial feminists or definition of feminism as such. In this, I go d'accord with feminist academics such as Obioma Nnaemeka and Angela Miles who spoke out against the homogenization of feminisms and favor a concept of pluralism (Nnaemeka 5, 22).
political relations" (7) to these structures of domination. She stresses, however, that these women are certainly not a homogenous group and have different histories and locations (not only geographic but also social ones) (4). Whether it is the forms of domination which they encounter or the forms of resistance and opposition, everything is open to change and never fixed (13).

Mohanty points out that third world women have always engaged with feminist issues, even if they have not always accepted the label of being called feminists. Reasons for this rejection lie in the cultural imperialism of white Western feminisms which tried to define feminism strictly in terms of middle-class, white experiences and were thus in themselves racist, classist, and often also homophobic (7). Third world women's engagement with feminism can, however, be seen especially well in their writings. Mohanty tried to identify certain features which many third world feminist writings share. A point which is characteristic of these writings is a focus on "the simultaneity of oppressions as fundamental to the experiences of social and political marginality as well as the grounding of feminist politics in the histories of racism and imperialism" (Mohanty 10). Secondly, the writings often engage with the role of the state and its influence on the lives and struggles of women. Furthermore, internal struggles, differences, disputes, and contradictions within the women's organizations are also often dealt with (10). Memory is a significant tool in third world feminist writing for the acquisition of self-knowledge and the formation of self-identities. For Mohanty, the practices of remembering and writing create alternative spaces for agency, resistance, and political identities (34, 38). Third world feminist writings produce knowledge from specific locations and in a context of intersecting histories, networks, and structures of race, gender, class, colonialism, nationalism, and other categories (10-13).

Mohanty argues that strategic political identities and alliances are necessary, as she agrees with Michel Foucault that "power can really be understood only in the context of resistance" (73, 69). She strongly rejects, however, any forms of homogenization and victimization of women, which always create the illusion of being ahistorical, but instead calls for a politics of relationality, location, contextuality, and intersectionality.

The intersectionality of different oppressions along categories such as race, gender, class, sexual orientation, and others has been a key issue in the works of Black as well as African feminists. The concept of multiple intersecting oppressions which black women encounter is not new. In the 1970s and 1980s, U.S. Black Feminists, in particular, started criticizing their white feminist colleagues for an understanding of a 'global sisterhood' which was too narrow and essentializing and did not take other oppressions which black women face into account.
In fact, the so-called 'race-women' in the 19th century were already aware of the fact that African American women suffer discrimination not only from being black but also because they are women. Sojourner Truth in her famous "Ain't I a Woman?" speech which she held at the women's rights convention in Akron, Ohio, in 1851, delivered an early account of what it meant to be both black and a woman (Collins 17). Also other 'Third World' women in the United States (a term used by women of color who assumed the existence of an 'internal colony') in the history of second-wave feminism such as Vietnamese women freedom fighters and Puerto Rican Women recognized the existence of more than one system of oppression: sexism, racism, and capitalism or imperialism (Aguilar, "Tracing the roots").

Similarly, African women writers have always been aware of different social factors which influence their lives such as gender, race, class, or age. Tsitsi Dangarembga, for example, called her novel *Nervous Conditions* with reference to Frantz Fanon's famous analysis of the damage inflicted on the nation's psyche by the colonial encounter (*The Wretched of the Earth* 1961). In her novel, her characters suffer from nervous conditions due to colonialism and its consequences and aftermath, and she is very sensitive in the ways women and men as well as the poor and the bourgeoisie were affected in different ways. As Hena Ahmad points out, Fanon had already argued that "the end of colonialism did not alleviate the misery of the native disenfranchised because national liberation did not end class oppression" (Ahmad 54).

In her 1988 essay, "Multiple Jeopardy, Multiple Consciousness: The Context of a Black Feminist Ideology", Deborah King added to the concept of the 'double jeopardy', the discriminations based on race and gender (see Fran Beale 1969), class oppression and heterosexism as systems of oppression, cautioning, however, that even this concept is, in fact, still too simplistic and narrow, since black women encounter multiple oppressions (King 296-297). Patricia Hill Collins talked about such other oppressions in her works, such as age, nationality, religion, and ethnicity. Both scholars emphasize that these multiple oppressions do not function additively, but interdependently and simultaneously, thus creating an intersectionality or "matrices" of oppressions and domination (Collins xii, 12, 21).

The term 'intersectionality' was introduced by and is, therefore, most commonly associated with critical race scholar Kimberly Williams Crenshaw in 1989. In her essay "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color", she explored "the various ways in which race and gender intersect in shaping structural, political, and representational aspects of violence against women of color" (Crenshaw 1244). Despite focusing on two oppressions, she points out that multiple other factors exist which shape the social world and experiences of black women. In her article, she especially
foregrounds the structural nature of intersectionality, i.e. how oppressive or discriminating socioeconomic structures intersect in the lives of black women, as well as the impact of both feminist and antiracist politics on identity politics and the marginalization of issues of violence against women of color (Crenshaw).

Additionally, scholar Valerie Smith pointed out that a perspective of intersectionality rejects monolithic assumptions about identity and views of fixed identities. It shows that identities are discursively produced and negotiated within categories such as gender, race, class, sexuality, etc. (Smith XV, XIV). Alleged weaknesses of the concept of intersectionality are its open-endedness and its ambiguity (Aguilar, "Tracing the roots"). However, these can also be seen as its strengths because they do not allow for any overtly simplistic, essentialist, or binary thinking.

Lika Chandra Mohanty, Women's studies and African (Diaspora) Studies scholar Obioma Nnaemeka clearly assumes a perspective of intersectionality in her appraisal of 'African' concepts of feminism and women writing. In her 1998 anthology *Sisterhood, Feminisms and Power: From Africa to the Diaspora*, Nnaemeka explored feminist concepts which could be described as being 'indigenous' to the African continent. Right at the beginning, she points out that a feminist "monolithic, representative political voice" does not exist but that there is, in fact, a multiplicity of perspectives (3). In the 1980s and 1990s, feminists such as Zulu Sofola, Ama Ata Aidoo, Flora Nwapa, or Gloria C. Chukurere, for example, emphasized the long history of African women's activism against different forms of oppression (such as the 1929 Igbo Women's War, as one example among many others) and saw feminism mainly carried by African grassroots activists (Nnaemeka 13, 17). Younger feminist academics such as Olabisi Aina, however, deplored a "lack of 'feminist consciousness'" and allegiances and a gap between the few feminist-minded elites and a majority of non-feminist-conscious women (Nnaemeka 15-16). In contrast to the older and more activist African women, feminists such as Aina considered the academic elite leaders of the feminist movements.

Another alternative version of feminism with the aim of examining the lives, experiences, and struggles of African women is the concept of 'Africana womanism' which was proposed by African-American academic Clenora Hudson-Weems in the late 1980s. She criticized both the terms 'African feminism' and 'Black feminism' for being "both aligned with white, middle-class feminism" (Nnaemeka 20-21). Even though acknowledging the potential of the concept, Nnaemeka criticizes Hudson-Weems' approach as assuming a monolithic white, middle-class feminism, which, according to her, does not exist either (22). She points out that
African feminism seems to have failed to establish an identity on its own terms but only through what it opposes or resists, that is Western (especially what they perceive as radical) feminism. In contrast to Western feminism, African feminism is often seen as being more collaborative, inclusive, and accommodative. The language of African feminist engagement employs terms such as 'negotiate', 'compromise' and values complementarity and power-sharing (between the genders), whereas Western feminism is criticized for its focus on disruption, challenging, and deconstruction. Other issues which some African feminists have an issue with are the emphasis on sexuality, the exclusion of men, and the universalization of Western concepts (Nnaemeka 6-8).

These rather essentializing notions of a monolithic construct of African feminism versus a similarly monolithic construct of Western feminism are, however, later criticized by Nnaemeka when she cautions against such dichotomous views. Like Mohanty, she favors a perspective of pluralism and intersectionality by referring to Patricia Hill Collins' 'matrix of domination' which also allows for an evaluation of intra-group power relationships (Nnaemeka 19). Furthermore, Nnaemeka is critical of an exaggeration of women's power in precolonial times. She prefers a discussion of women's power in relative terms, i.e. exploring how "earlier relatively powerful positions held by women were further eroded by the introduction of new power paradigms" (19) during the colonial and postcolonial period, as well as searching for opportunities of gaining power through feminism and gender politics. According to writer Flora Nwapa, the first African woman writer who published a novel, women re-inscribing themselves in (African) literature after a long time of marginalization by male authors and the Western literary canons can certainly be considered a feminist practice (Nnaemeka 13).

Despite histories of strong and powerful women (such as Yaa Asantewaa, an Asante queen), African literature has been perceived by many women writers as an exclusively male terrain. Ghanaian writer Ama Ata Aidoo described the discrimination that women writers encounter by quoting Femi Ojo-Ade, "African literature is a male-created, male-oriented chauvinistic art. The male writer … is more fortunate than the female. His presence is taken for granted. The publisher seeks him out. Unlike the woman whose silence is also taken for granted" (qtd. in Ahmad 103). According to Aidoo, male African writers rarely choose female protagonists; in their depictions of women, they often deploy the so-called 'Mother Africa trope', which means that the women in their novels represent "symbols of the nation" (Stratton 46; Olaussen 64; Ahmad 107). This kind of nationalistic trope usually translates into traditional wife/mother/homemaker roles for women which do not allow for much space outside of these patriarchal boundaries. Zimbabwean scholar Rudo Gaidzanwa pointed out, for example, that
female characters in Zimbabwean literature of the 1970s were usually shown as 'ideal' wives and mothers (see Gaidzanwa, *Images of Women in Zimbabwean Literature*; Ahmad 77).

Ella Shohat argues that both colonialism and national resistance against it affected men and women differently (Shohat, "Post-Third-Worldist Culture" 183), which has made it indispensable that women writers participate in creating their own narratives and images, using their own voices. Postcolonial women writers such as Aidoo and Dangarembga have been dealing with colonial and neocolonial oppression as well as women's roles in society and their families in their novels and short stories. They have been questioning, challenging, subverting both colonial as well as native traditional constructs of women. Despite a certain national rootedness and anti-imperial stance, they are also very critical of the gendered nationalisms (Anne McClintock 104; Ahmad 52), i.e. hegemonic cultural practices and ideologies which are oppressive to women and which are still upheld in the independent nation-states (see Ahmad). Calling these tendencies of defying both colonial oppression as well as gender discrimination ingrained in the patriarchally structured nations as well as in the writers' own diasporic experiences both feminist and postnational seems plausible. Carol Boyce Davies even goes further by arguing that "Black women's writing … should be read as a series of boundary crossings and not as a fixed, geographical, ethnically or nationally bound category of writing" (3). Similarly to Achille Mbembe, Davis seems to imply that migration experiences and histories constitute a fundamental part of the experience of black writers and therefore enables them to transcend national or fixed boundaries in their perspectives (Ahmad 112).

Early Postcolonial (African) women writers such as Flora Nwapa and Aidoo took in their novels a clearly feminist anti-imperial stance. They wrote from the perspective of an African woman (whatever that meant in their specific contexts). Writing for them was resistance. Many younger authors have not completely abandoned that tradition, such as Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie or Sefi Atta, but have been carving out for themselves new and different ways of telling their stories. Taiye Selasi, for example, claims a more global perspective and rejects any fixed and/or singular identities, which can be seen in her concepts of Afropolitanism and Multilocality. While the protagonists in Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* are deeply affected by self-alienation and crises of identity and rootlessness due to seemingly irreconcilable influences and pressures from 'Western culture' as well as their traditional cultures, writers such as Selasi and Adichie represent more open and positive views towards multiple and often 'hybrid' identities in their novels.

On account of this 'openness', the concept of Afropolitanism is often accused of being universalizing. Aaron Bady argues in an online article that "the backlash against the Afropolitan
reveals a nostalgia for a time when African culture-work was thought to be, as such, a revolutionary act, when simply to exist, and to speak, was to resist imperial hegemony. But that time has surely passed, as the 'Afropolitan' teaches us". What Bady seems to convey is the notion that many young cultural workers who are somehow associated with Africa do not want every cultural product or achievement to be seen as an act of resistance, a mere reaction to an oppression but want to be appreciated on their own terms for their artistic skills. Interestingly, in the past years, young African women writers on the continent and in the diaspora have been very proactive in creating a market for their creative works not only through traditional channels but also through the use of online media spaces such as blogs and social media sites.
III 'Multilocality' and Multiple Identities in Literature: A Discussion of *Americanah, A Bit of Difference, Ghana Must Go*, and *We Need New Names*

The world is moving outwards and can no longer be structured in terms of the centre/periphery relation. It has to be defined in terms of a set of interesting centres, which are both different from and related to one another … if you think about where important movements are being made, sometimes they happen in the centre, but the most exciting artists are those who live simultaneously in the centre and at the periphery. (Hall, "Museums of Modern Art" 21-22)

A few years after the appearance of her essay on 'Afropolitanism' but in certain ways related to its claims, Taiye Selasi proclaimed to be a 'multilocal' in an attempt to replace "the language of nationality with the language of locality" (TED Talk). The notions of space and locality as an important feature of identity construction has also been dealt with by other contemporary thinkers and scholars in different fields. Sociologist and philosopher Henri Lefebvre understood "space as a product of historically specific material, conceptual, and quotidian practices" (Stanek 62) and Tom Hall (2009) has argued that, rather than regarding local place as a setting to be navigated through, lives are shaped by places. Hence it can be argued that places and locations are intimately interwoven with people's biographies (Hall, "Footwork" 581); local life "takes place, not just in place but with it" ("Footwork" 579).

We have seen in the critical discussions of Selasi's concept of Afropolitanism as well as Ella Shohat's critique of the false universalism of terms such as 'postcolonialism' that despite global mobility, place and locality remain important in many different ways. Geography plays a role, not necessarily as nations but as localities. These locations are, however, not to be seen as fixed entities with a stable set of meanings. Places are, like identities, constructed. People perform their personal narratives of place (Stroud and Jegels 179). These narratives are in constant movement themselves, just as the lives of people keep changing. Their identities are indeed always 'under construction'.

Selasi emphasizes the complex relationship between place and identity formation. In her TED talk, she suggests a three-step test to explore people's 'multilocality': the three R's, which is 'Rituals' (here in the sense of routines or quotidian practices), 'Relationships', and 'Restrictions'. Selasi argues that identities are formed through experiences which are shaped by one's daily rituals, one's relationships as well as one's restrictions. People's experiences happen in a context, in different geographical, social, and cultural spaces and locations. These spaces are not tied to any fixed, essentializing, and limiting categories such as nations. Aspects such
as traditions, cultural practices, memory are thus also removed from nationality or even culture and are understood as personal and/or collective constructions of the spaces which people inhabit and move in. Spaces are, however, not just constructed "through the objects and boundaries that surround us and the habitual ways we conceive of them, but also through interaction with others operating in the 'same' space" (Shohamy et al. xiv; see also Scollon & Scollon 2003). People form their identities through interactions with their environment (in terms of rituals, relationships, restrictions) which is itself structured according to certain categories such as class, race, gender, age, sexual preferences, and many more.

Even though developed with reference to her own situation as an individual who lives on different continents or moves in between them and with multiple cultural affiliations which cannot be restricted to simple national categories, Selasi's concept of 'multilocality' is applicable to a great number of people in today's world which is in a constant flow as Appadurai put it. The main contribution of the concept is that new perspectives and ways of describing identities are opened up, transcending—in fact rejecting—fixed categories such as 'nationality' or 'culture'.

The four writers whose novels are analyzed in this thesis, use a perspective of 'multilocality' to discuss issues of 'rootedness', 'home', 'belonging', and what the concept 'postcolonial' can mean for contemporary people of African descent whose lives are characterized by an increased mobility. The novels are first discussed on a more general level to give the reader an insight into the narratives and the characters. After a short overview of the narrative structure and plot, the most important characters are described in detail, in particular in relation to aspects of plurality and hybridity. After this, the texts are analyzed on the basis of Selasi's three Rs tool. In this context, a wider interpretation of the three R's is applied. Rituals transcend the meaning of daily routines to include more abstract themes and practices which seem to affect the characters' identities and which run like a thread through the narratives. The rituals, the characters' relationships towards each other and their surroundings as well as their restrictions contribute to the formation of their identities which are assumed to be 'multiple' or 'hybrid', in any case, dynamic and imbued with great plurality and complexity. Locations do not always refer to actual physical spaces but can also exist in someone's imagination or collective memory. Accordingly, multilocality or hybridity is not restricted to geographical locations but also includes other spaces and positionalities informing the characters' identities (such as class, gender, race), which will be taken into consideration through applying a lens of intersectionality.
Americanah (2013)

Americanah\(^3\), a novel of nearly 600 pages, consists of seven parts which are again divided into altogether fifty-five chapters. The most distinctive feature of the narrative structure is the changes of setting. Six parts are set in different locations in the United States with interjecting flashbacks to Nigeria, a few chapters are set in England, and the last, considerably shorter, part completely shifts to Nigeria. According to Daria Tunca and Bénédicte Ledent in their essay "The Power of a Singular Story: Narrating Africa and Its Diasporas" (2015), the part which exclusively deals with Nigeria has often been neglected by reviewers in favor of the "more fashionable global- or Western-oriented counterparts" (4).

The story is narrated from a third-person point of view and mainly focuses on the lives and perspectives of two characters, Ifemelu and Obinze, with Ifemelu clearly being the central protagonist; from the beginning, her perspective carries the reader through almost half of the book without any interruptions. In the second half, Obinze's story is told as well but always interspersed with Ifemelu's. The whole novel begins in Princeton, but through flashbacks, Ifemelu's past included. These flashbacks, however, do not always follow a chronological order; they jump between Ifemelu's youth in Nigeria (where she met Obinze) and her experiences in the United States, first in Philadelphia and later in other cities. Only when she moves back to Lagos in the last part of the book, the story unfolds in a more linear manner. Thus, it can be assumed that the flashbacks represent Ifemelu's memories of her past.

A striking feature of the book which is rather related to form but carries a lot of meaning nonetheless is the frequent use of blog entries within chapters, often concluding them. These entries, which vary in length, are written in a very different, much more informal style than the rest of the novel. As far as their content and meanings are concerned, they seem to function as sociopolitical and sociocultural (meta-)commentary. They mostly represent critical analyses of the racism and sexism which especially black women encounter in the United States as well as

\(^3\) The author Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie was born and grew up in Nigeria. After studying medicine and pharmacy for a year and a half, she migrated to the United States at the age of nineteen to study communication and later political science, creative writing, and African studies. Adichie is the author of three novels, Purple Hibiscus (2003), Half of a Yellow Sun (2006), and Americanah (2013), as well as the short story collection The Thing around Your Neck (2009), and various other texts and essays. She has received numerous awards and distinctions and divides her time between the United States and Nigeria where she has focused on teaching creative writing. Although there are striking similarities between Adichie's biography and the story of the central protagonist in Americanah, her use of a third-person narrator implies a certain self-chosen distance. Americanah is, therefore, to be treated as a work of fiction and not as an autobiography.
the complicated relationship between African Americans and black African immigrants, called 'Non-American Blacks in America'.

At the beginning of the story, Ifemelu, a young woman who lives in Princeton but who originates from Nigeria, visits a hair salon in which she ponders over her upcoming return to Lagos. In the following flashbacks, the reader learns about Ifemelu's youth in Nigeria where she meets her great love Obinze who remains her boyfriend until she finally stops communicating with him after migrating to the United States.

Ifemelu originates from a (lower) middle-class family who finds itself rather impoverished after her father loses his job. She is an only child but grows up together with her aunt Uju who is a few years older than her. Obinze is also an only child and lives with his mother, a university lecturer. He grows up in an academic, intellectual environment and develops a passionate interest in the United States, especially in American literature. Ifemelu shares this passion for books but is not as focused on America as Obinze. Together, they plan to migrate to the United States after completing their studies. Ifemelu is the first one to actually leave Nigeria as she is offered sponsorship at a university in Philadelphia. Obinze is supposed to follow at a later point. However, things do not turn out as they had planned. Ifemelu, who at the beginning stays with her aunt Uju and cousin Dike, who migrated to the United States some years before her, soon finds her expectations disappointed and suffers from depression while battling with discrimination on the job market and severe financial constraints.

Obinze, who Ifemelu stopped communicating with out of shame, fails to acquire a visa for the United States. Instead, he travels to England. After some time as an illegal immigrant, he is caught and deported by the immigration officials, just before he manages to secure his stay through a sham wedding to a U.K. citizen. Back in Nigeria after his shameful deportation, he is equally depressed but eventually builds a career as a very successful businessman. Even though he marries, he never forgets his first great love.

Ifemelu, on the other hand, manages to turn her life around when she finally finds a well-paid job as a babysitter, which helps her finance her life and studies. After a relationship with a wealthy man and a job in public relations, she falls in love with an African-American academic who teaches at Yale University. Ifemelu receives a fellowship at Princeton University, but her true passion is her blog, a lifestyle blog turned sociocultural critique entitled "Raceteenth or Various Observations About American Blacks (Those Formerly Known as Negroes) by a Non-American Black" in which she discusses racial issues affecting black people
of African origin, especially women, in the United States. She becomes so successful with her blog that she is invited to hold public talks and workshops.

Despite her obvious success in her private life and a promising career, Ifemelu decides to move back to Nigeria. In Lagos, she first works for a small women's magazine and then starts a blog in which she writes from her perspective as an 'Americanah', a Nigerian who returned from America after many years abroad. After some hesitation, she eventually links up with Obinze. Although he has a wife and a child, they both discover that they still have feelings for each other and soon rekindle their love. The story leaves the reader with an open ending as to the future of Ifemelu and Obinze's relationship.

**Ifemelu**

Ifemelu, the central protagonist, whose story is narrated in *Americanah* is a character which undergoes an enormous transformation in the course of the narrative. She is described as an assertive and very intelligent young woman. Coming from a family which is not as wealthy as most of her friends' families at the private school she attends, traveling is not part of her lifestyle as a teenager. When the opportunity arises to study in the United States, her expectations about life there seem to be rather naïve and are soon disappointed. After arriving, she feels out of place, invisible in fact, longing to "wear a new, knowing skin" (166) in order to belong. Language becomes one means of creating an 'American self'. She adopts a perfect American accent but eventually becomes aware that her way of talking is more like a performance which is forced on her and represents one aspect of the everyday individual and structural racism which surrounds her. Her new awareness emerges from her own experiences in combination with her newly awakened interest in African American literature. In her blog, she is very outspoken about the issues affecting the lives of blacks in the United States. With time, her "new American selves" (235) become more and more unsatisfying to herself.

Ifemelu eventually develops a great sense of loss and homesickness; "Borderlessness" turns into "bleakness" for her. She longs for a place where she can "sink her roots in without the constant urge to tug them out and shake off the soil" (7). Even though she is legally an American citizen, she decides to return to Nigeria, more precisely to Lagos.

Back in Lagos, Ifemelu finds the place both strange and familiar. She desperately tries to recover remnants from her past, especially through her friends, and is not sure what is "new in Lagos" and what is "new in herself" (478). She joins the Nigerpolitan Club which is a meeting-point for Nigerians who have returned from the diaspora. Even though she rejects the
arrogance of her fellow returnees who never cease to complain about the things they miss in Lagos, she nevertheless admits that she is one of them. Ifemelu is aware that she has changed in many ways. Others notice that change as well or at least assume that she is different after such a long absence. Her parents worry that she will not be able to live in Nigeria anymore and Obinze marvels at how alien she sounds when he reads her blogs. Ifemelu has become an 'Americanah'. It is clear that both she and the places have changed, as nothing is fixed in time and space. People construct the world according to their own experiences. Ifemelu acknowledges those changes both within herself as well as in the places and people she once left behind and nevertheless calls the spaces which she now inhabits 'home'.

**Obinze**

Obinze spends two and a half years abroad, in England, but under very different circumstances. He is an illegal immigrant, living in constant fear of being deported, which is what eventually happens. His experiences can be described as mainly negative, as he is forced to remain in a state of invisibility (in contrast to Ifemelu who manages to step out of that). Obinze represents a character who is very open to the world from the beginning but nevertheless undergoes a transformation. At secondary school and college, he admires foreign accents and classmates who are able to travel abroad and is obsessed with America, a fascination and enthusiasm which is frustrated when, as a wealthy man, he is finally able to actually travel there without restrictions. Through both his negative experiences as an immigrant and his travels, the Western World becomes demythologized. It seizes to hold the promise of a better life.

Obinze can be seen as representing a version of contemporary Nigeria, but he also critically reflects on its flaws (i.e. the widespread corruption, the pompous lifestyles of the newly rich with huge mansions and foreign furniture). He is part of this world, but he is also aware of its shortcomings and its artificiality. Despite his riches, which Obinze managed to acquire through dubious means after his return from the UK, he is not fully satisfied with his life. He continuously thinks about other lives he could have lived, for example as a teacher. Leaving the country does not seem to be an option for him anymore, though. Obinze's happiness appears to depend less on geographical locations than on personal relationships. His marriage does not make him happy because he finds his wife too artificial and eager to please him. When Ifemelu returns to Nigeria, a new joy re-enters his life.
Ifemelu's parents

Even though the readers do not get to know the names of Ifemelu's father and mother, the characters play an important role in the novel. The father, in particular, represents the older generation of Nigerians who were still born under colonial rule and experienced the changing regimes after independence. He is described to have worked as a middle-brow civil servant at a federal agency, but he lost his job "for refusing to call his new boss Mummy" (56), a gesture which he found absurd and exaggerated coming from a grown-up man and addressing an equally grown-up woman.

Ifemelu's father has been strongly influenced by his colonial upbringing and has developed a keen interest in education and politics. He loves reading about and analyzing the current political affairs of the country, not shying away from criticizing the government. From Ifemelu's perspective, he looks like a man who had longed for a higher education and a different, upper middle-class life, which he did not have access to, though, due to his lower class background. He takes great pride in the education and knowledge which he managed to acquire and is particularly anxious to use a very formal, elevated type of English. It can be assumed that Ifemelu benefitted from his appreciation of education. She is, however, also critical of his zeal and connects it to his colonial upbringing in a mission school:

Sometimes Ifemelu imagined him in a classroom in the fifties, an overzealous colonial subject wearing an ill-fitting school uniform of cheap cotton, jostling to impress his missionary teachers. Even his handwriting was mannered, all curves and flourishes, with a uniform elegance that looked like something printed. He had scolded Ifemelu as a child for being recalcitrant, mutinous, intransigent, words that made her little actions seem epic and almost prideworthy. But his mannered English bothered her as she got older, because it was costume, his shield against insecurity. He was haunted by what he did not have—a postgraduate degree, an upper-middle-class life—and so his affected words became his armor. She preferred it when he spoke Igbo; it was the only time he seemed unconscious of his own anxieties. (Americanah 58)

Excluded from a higher university education which would have enabled him to join the wealthy middle-class as well as unable to bow to representatives of the same elite, he feels his powerlessness even more and falls into depression. Later in the novel, though, it is mentioned that he found a new job.

While Ifemelu's father is interested in educational and political matters, her mother seems to be more concerned with the material well-being of the family. When her husband loses his job, Ifemelu's mother, who is the vice-principal at a school, becomes the sole breadwinner in the family. She is described as having joined different churches during Ifemelu's childhood and
youth. Just as Ifemelu's father tries to find solace and hope for a better life in education, Ifemelu's mother appears to use religion for that purpose.

Religion is described as being strongly structured and influenced by factors such as class and gender, which mirrors society as a whole. One of the churches which Ifemelu's mother joins is called "a church of the newly wealthy" (52). Ifemelu's mother does not belong to this milieu of people but is intrigued by the prayers for prosperity and its focus on money. It appears as if she is longing, like her husband, to belong to a different social class in society. The churches which Ifemelu's mother attends are described as having very strict rules and codes of conduct. Women and girls, in particular, are monitored rigidly in terms of clothing, thereby linking clothing to moral decency and trying to control women and girls' sexuality and lifestyles:

"I saw you wearing tight trousers last Saturday," Sister Ibinabo said to a girl, Christie, in an exaggerated whisper, low enough to pretend it was a whisper but high enough for everyone to hear … ["] Any girls that wears tight trousers wants to commit the sin of temptation. It is best to avoid it." (Americanah 61)

Other churches condemn long hair and jewelry on women. Ifemelu's mother follows the differing and contradictory rules as she changes from one church to the other in her search for salvation and prosperity. The hypocrisy involved in the rigid moral systems of some of the churches is exposed when Ifemelu challenges her mother's church by pointing out that many members have actually acquired the money which they are praised for through fraudulent means (62).

Similar to her father's case with education, for Ifemelu's mother, religion seems to assume the role of an armor or alternative identity which is supposed to shield her from a reality of financial struggles. Although she appears to firmly believe in the rigid Christian morals, she proves to be rather flexible in her beliefs when it comes to materially uplifting her life and that of her family. When Uju supports them financially with the help of the money and gifts she receives from her married boyfriend, Ifemelu's mother even prays for him and approves of Uju's relationship which according to church values would otherwise have been considered immoral:

Every morning, Ifemelu's mother prayed for The General. She would say, "Heavenly father, I command you to bless Uju's mentor. May his enemies never triumph over him!" … Her mother said the word "mentor" defiantly, a thickness in her tone, as though the force of her delivery would truly turn the General into a mentor, and also remake the world into a place where young doctors could afford Aunty Uju's new Mazda, that green, glossy, intimidatingly streamlined car. (Americanah 54)
Aunty Uju

The character of Aunty Uju is rather ambiguous. On the one hand, Uju is described as a strong-willed, independent woman with clear goals in her life. That can be seen in her determination to give birth in the United States to secure American citizenship for her child and to migrate there with her one-year-old son in order to improve their life. Even after her migration, when Ifemelu observes how bitter she is about all the obstacles which she encounters as an immigrant, her determination remains visible. She works three jobs in order to cope financially and at the same time studies for her medical exams. Her aim is clearly to succeed, no matter what it takes. She tells Ifemelu, "You are in a country that is not your own. You do what you have to do if you want to succeed" (146).

Her determination comes with a prize, though. When Ifemelu arrives in the United States, she immediately notices the changes in Aunty Uju. She is usually stressed and in a bad mood and has stopped taking as much care about her looks as she used to in Nigeria. She is eager to appear adapted, which is reflected in her behavior, especially in her way of speaking. To achieve this, she is willing to slip into a new 'self': "Aunty Uju's cell phone rang. 'Yes, this is Uju.' She pronounced it you-joo instead of oo-joo. 'Is that how you pronounce your name now?' Ifemelu asked afterwards. 'It's what they call me.' Ifemelu swallowed the words 'Well, that isn't your name'" (128). Ifemelu concludes that "America had subdued her" (135). Aunty Uju seems to have lost her dignity in her attempts to adopt a 'new American self' which is described in the following words: "Aunty Uju had covered herself like a blanket. Sometimes … it would occur to Ifemelu that Aunty Uju had deliberately left behind something of herself, something essential, in a distant and forgotten place. Obinze said it was the exaggerated gratitude that came with immigrant insecurity" (146-147).

Even though she is anxious to adapt completely to the expectations which immigrants encounter (e.g. concerning language assimilation), Aunty Uju does not manage to fit in the 'white spaces' which she inhabits as a doctor in a small Massachusetts town. Whenever Ifemelu visits her, she routinely complains about the many discriminations she has to endure. It is implied that her role does not fit properly because she did not possess the flexibility and fluidity of youth when she came to the United States, such as Ifemelu's friend Ginika, for example. Ginika migrated when she was still in High School and completely absorbed the cultural cues of American life, as Ifemelu calls them (e.g. language, way of dressing, music) (152-153).

Despite being very independent in the pursuit of her career as a doctor, Aunty Uju also has specific conceptions of her role as a woman. In Nigeria, she agreed to be the 'mistress' of a
married General in exchange for material security. The boundaries between love for financial or material gain and love for love's sake are blurred, and it is shown that there are grey areas in between (e.g. when Aunty Uju argues that she is attracted to the General's power). Even though the General expects her to be grateful to him and to follow his rules, it is strongly suggested that she nevertheless remains quite independent and never forgets about her own aspirations. She lets the General control her but only to a certain extent. There are, however, signs that she is not completely satisfied with her situation. It is implied that she is jealous of his family and that she deceives herself by claiming that she was basically his second wife. The fact that she loses everything after his death shows how precarious her relationship with him had always been.

In the United States, Aunty Uju gets anxious about finding a husband because she feels she is getting old. She settles for Bartholomew, an accountant and fellow Nigerian, even though she seems to be aware that he is well below her level of education and upbringing. Ifemelu points out to her on several occasions that in Nigeria, a man like him would not even have the courage to talk to her (144). Her age and her wish to have another child make her ignore his weaknesses, though. Bartholomew is described as a very conservative and traditionally-minded man. Aunty Uju slips into her routines of cooking for him and playing the role of the 'good' wife by agreeing to everything he says. When they get married, they move to a small town in Massachusetts because Bartholomew thinks that he will have more business opportunities there. Aunty Uju is very unhappy; she feels discriminated in this 'white space' and worries about her son Dike. Bartholomew even demands that she gives him her salary, but unlike with the General, she does not receive anything in return. Eventually, Aunty Uju decides to divorce Bartholomew and to leave their countryside home. She proves again her determination to succeed in life by not allowing a man to take complete control of her life. In the new town, she meets a doctor from Ghana who treats her "like a princess" (370). Uju joins African Doctors for Africa and volunteers to travel with them on a two-week medical mission to Sudan. This seems to suggest that she has finally been able to reconcile her different selves.

**Dike**

Dike is Aunty Uju's son. He was born in the United States and is therefore automatically an American citizen. After his father's death, when he was only one year old, his mother migrated to the United States with him where he grew up as an American teenager. Ifemelu wonders whether Dike will later, as a young adult, identify as an African American or an American
African. But he is described as a boy who, despite not having any memories of Nigeria, feels a sense of not belonging anywhere. One the one hand, he is not able to identify with African American kids because he hardly has any contact with them and because his mother tells him that he is not 'black'. On the other hand, he also feels estranged from Nigeria, as his mother never told him about her life there or his father and did not teach him to speak Igbo. When realizing Dike's dilemma, Ifemelu tells her, "You told him what he wasn't but you didn't tell him what he was" (470).

When he tries to commit suicide, Dike is diagnosed with depression. It is, however, implied that his problems are related to his feelings of alienation and in-betweenness, which, in his case, is not a state of positive hybridity in Bhabha's sense. Neither is he a happy Afropolitan; he rather feels that he does not belong anywhere. Rootlessness here becomes a negative feeling, a sense of being lost in the world. Dike's situation and sense of self improves radically when Ifemelu invites him to visit her in Nigeria. It is implied that once he gets to know his roots and origin, he is capable of developing a sense of belonging in the world, whether that is in the United States or in Nigeria.

**Bartholomew and Emenike**

Bartholomew represents a certain type of immigrant who, on the surface, is eager to appear assimilated and who overcompensates for his immigrant status but is, in fact, extremely traditional and conservative in his attitudes. This is shown in the way he treats Aunty Uju and in his expectations from a wife. Bartholomew is heavily disliked by Ifemelu who considers him to be unworthy of her aunt. It is implied that in the diaspora, women often settle for partners who are somehow below them in the social hierarchy, just because they look for familiarity. As far as Bartholomew is concerned, Ifemelu suspects a "deprived rural upbringing that he tried to compensate for with his American affectation" (141-142). His self seems to be rife with feelings of insecurity and inferiority which he tries to overcompensate for and hide with an exaggerated American accent and a blurred and outdated view of Nigeria.

Although Bartholomew has not visited Nigeria for years, he thinks that he knows exactly what society is like there (as if nothing has changed). He is connected with a version of Nigeria which he has created for himself and which is stuck in the past. Instead of visiting his country of origin or accepting updates on contemporary Nigeria, it is suggested that immigrants like him "enjoy fighting over the internet over their mythologies of home, because home was now a blurred place between here and there" (143-144). Bartholomew is described in the following
way: "He was one of those people who, in his village back home, would be called 'lost'. He went to America and got lost, his people would say. He went to America and refused to come back" (143).

The way Obinze imagined and dreamed of the United States when he was in Nigeria, Bartholomew and other diasporans dream of Nigeria. In his imagination, Bartholomew created a version of Nigeria which is fixed in time, reminding of colonial practices which deny places and people any local or temporal specificity. It can be argued that places are invented and formed according to people's desires and wishes, a reading which foregrounds the constructedness of places. They can, in fact, never be fixed in time and space but rather depend on the imaginations of people.

Emenike is similar to Bartholomew. Obinze meets his high school and university friend again in the United Kingdom. Emenike has a good job and is married to an English woman. He has always dreamed of going abroad and admired his friends in school who had that opportunity. It is implied on several occasions that Emenike's family background is economically less privileged, even though he has never admitted that to his friends. When he meets Obinze in London, the roles seem to have been reversed. Emenike, while pretending to be happy to see his old friend, behaves in a condescending, pretentious, and self-satisfied manner towards him. Obinze, however, sees through him and calls his way of acting 'British' a disguise: "He had cast home as the jungle and himself as interpreter of the jungle" (328).

Like Bartholomew, Emenike's behavior seems to represent a kind of mimicry, in a negative sense. He tries to imitate what he considers 'British behavior' and calls himself 'British', even to the extent of denying his actual background (which he already did in Nigeria, with regard to his social class background). His identity formations also seem to be informed by strong insecurities and feelings of inferiority which he tries to overcompensate for. While Bartholomew's behavior remains contradictory in his attempts to be 'American' but being at the same time, in fact, absorbed in his outdated and deeply conservative imaginations of Nigeria, Emenike appears to be eager to give up anything in his identity which links him to Nigeria.
2  *A Bit of Difference* (2013)

The novel *A Bit of Difference* by Sefi Atta⁴ consists of six chapters of different length. The story is narrated from a third-person point-of-view, but it clearly represents the perspective of the protagonist, Deola. It evolves in a linear manner as far as temporality is concerned but involves different spatial settings. The main settings are London and Lagos; to be precise, certain parts of London and Lagos, which are described quite in detail to the readers. Additionally, Deola travels to Atlanta and Abuja. A distinguishing feature of the novel is that it consists in large parts of dialogues and conversations, which make the narrative appear very dynamic. It can, therefore, be argued that the story is less driven by its plot than by the interactions between and comments about the characters. Another important feature of the novel is its tone of voice. Humor and sarcasm, even cynicism, are characteristic elements. The humor makes the characters appear more human and enables them to criticize and comment on political and social issues without slipping off into moral lecturing.

The story revolves around Deola, a 39-year old woman who was born and raised in Lagos, Nigeria, went to boarding school in England as a teenager, earned her degree at London School of Economics and has since lived in London. After working for an accountancy firm, she joined LINK, an international charity foundation, as director of internal audit. Job assignments require her to travel a lot. At the beginning of the book, she has just arrived in Atlanta, to meet up with the director of international affairs at the Atlanta branch of LINK. Her new assignment entails her traveling to Nigeria to evaluate two NGOs which the charity considers adopting into their Africa Beat HIV awareness campaign.

Deola's business trip coincides with her father's five-year-memorial service which she plans to attend after visiting the NGOs. Deola's mother and siblings, her older brother Lanre and her younger sister Jaiye, live in Lagos. Lanre is deputy managing director of Trust Bank Nigeria which their father founded, and her sister is a doctor. Both siblings are married and have two children each. During her one-week stay in Nigeria, Deola is reunited with her family, both the closer members as well as the extended ones. She also meets someone new: Wale, a businessman supplying computer hardware. He owns the hotel which Deola resides in during

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⁴ Sefi Atta was born and grew up in Lagos, Nigeria. She was educated in Nigeria, England, and the United States. After her studies and training as a chartered accountant and CPA, she studied creative writing. For her short stories, radio plays, and novels she has received a great number of awards and distinctions, such as the Wole Soyinka Prize for Literature in Africa for her debut novel *Everything Good Will Come*. Atta divides her time between Nigeria, England, and the United States.
her stay. Even though she is described as normally being rather guarded and cautious as far as men are concerned, she immediately feels attracted to him. After a one-night-stand, she regrets her impulsive behavior, though. She is scared that she might have contracted HIV, but after getting tested negative in London, her mind is put at ease again—until she finds out that she is pregnant. Even though Deola has already felt a strong wish to have a child recently and has even been contemplating artificial insemination, her pregnancy comes as a surprise for her, and she worries about the reactions of her family and Wale. She knows that for her mother it is important that she gets married, but she does not want to rush into any commitments. As a widowed father of a teenage girl, Wale finds himself in an awkward situation as well. When she finally tells him about the pregnancy, he assures her that he will support her and the child as well as he can. Even though they agree not to get married yet, Deola decides to return to Nigeria for good. She has been dissatisfied with her life in England, feeling extremely lonely. She does not feel part of the fractured Nigerian community in London and even though she has a few good friends, Subu and Bandele, two fellow Nigerians, as well as Tessa who she met at boarding school, she nevertheless feels a sense of not belonging in England and, after quitting her job, which she did not really like anyway, returns to what she perceives to be 'home'.

Deola

Deola, the main protagonist, is an extremely assertive and independent character, though not necessarily an overtly lovable one. She appears to be snooty, prejudiced, and distanced at times, but these traits actually make her character rounder and more human. She is presented as being increasingly unhappy with her life in London. She struggles with an unsatisfying career, a virtually non-existent love life, her increasing desire to have a child, as well as a strong sense of unbelonging. She feels bored and lonely in London, which causes her to suffer from sleeplessness: she usually "falls asleep at the purgatory hour, just before dawn when she is most aware of how alone and vulnerable she is" (96-97). Deola is acutely aware of the discriminations and prejudices she encounters in England as well as the white privilege which she is excluded from but tends to shield herself through either silence or sarcasm which turns into cynicism at times. She usually distances herself emotionally from her surroundings, apart to avoid confrontations.

Despite having lived in London for such a long time and affording a lifestyle which included travels to different places in the world, Deola makes it clear that 'home' for her is Nigeria, to be more precise, Lagos. She grew up in Ikoyi, a part of the city which used to be the
home of the 'colonial masters' and thereafter of the Nigerian super-rich, which her family can be considered a part of (Habila "A Bit of Difference"). An important part of the novel consists of memories of her privileged childhood and youth. Apart from the house in the city, the family owned a beach house, a house in London (Westminster) as well as a flat in Cádiz, which suggests that traveling was an important part of their life. When she returns to Lagos and visits her family, she is disappointed, though, by how dilapidated and unsafe Ikoyi has become over the years.

Deola is not a typical postcolonial character. *A Bit of Difference* clearly transcends simplistic dichotomies with regard to the 'postcolonial condition'. This can be seen in Deola's cynical attitude towards Britain's colonial past and its effects. She, for example, does not react in the expected manner to the increase of immigrants in London. She describes the guilt which she detected in the British as an "aftertaste of the sumptuous meal that was empire" (17) preventing them now to speak up against immigrants who "overrun them" and become "gang leaders" or "Islamic clerics … bragging about their rights" (18). Her cynicism and rejection of any victim-identity are even more strongly present in her evaluation of Nigeria's treatment of immigrants:

Nigerians can never be that sorry for their transgressions, so sorry that they can't say to immigrants, 'Carry your trouble and go'. Nigerians made beggars out of child refugees from Niger and impregnated their mothers. Nigerians kicked out Ghanaians when Ghanaians became too efficient, taking over jobs Nigerians couldn't do, and named a laundry bag after the mass exodus: the Ghana Must Go bag. Nigerians aren't even sorry about the civil war. They are still blaming that on the British. (A Bit of Difference 18)

Deola's views are very ambivalent. On the one hand, she can be considered quite biased in terms of national preferences and categorizations in general, but on the other hand, she rejects simplistic postcolonial models which rely on binaries. She says, for example, "… Nigerians are as prejudiced as the English, and more snobbish" (65), not excluding herself from this critique.

Deola is very much aware of the changes surrounding her, both in Lagos as well as in London. She is critical of those developments and refuses to idealize anything, including the transgressions of her home country Nigeria. Returning does not have a mythical quality for her. She makes that decision fully aware that neither place is perfect or without flaws. She even admits that every time she travels back to London, she is glad to leave Lagos, but when she is in London, she feels lonely again. Deola also knows that returning is much more difficult for her than for her parents. Whereas in their generation, returnees who studied abroad were celebrated and given high positions in the newly independent nation, when she returns, it will
be difficult for her to compete with her friends because their salaries are often higher than hers in England.

One of the most important reasons for Deola to return to Nigeria, apart from the uncountable subtle and not so subtle experiences of racism and discrimination, seems to be her longing to be among people who she shares a history with and who, she feels, love and accept her the way she is. Hence, it can be concluded that relationships are the strongest factor which in the end decide over Deola’s geographical location. She does, however, admit that she will miss London for its multicultural, or is it transcultural, environment.

Wale

Wale is described as a man who does not quite conform to the traditional expectations of a widower in Nigeria. He did not remarry, even though his relatives pressured him to do so, and raised his daughter by himself. He seems to represent a new, more present type of man and father, unlike the older generation of men who often had extramarital girlfriends and children. Like most of the characters mentioned in the novel in more detail, Wale studied abroad, in the United States. He seemed to have been comfortable with returning after completing his studies when his father died and claims that nothing he learned overseas was of use to him back in Nigeria (109), where he established himself as a businessman. He collects Nigerian art, loves reading newspapers in order to be informed about what is happening in his country, and listens to the radio to be connected "to the rest of the world" (249).

Wale acknowledges the changes which have occurred in Nigeria, for example, new forms of connectedness of the younger generation through the internet. In fact, he argues that it is not the world people in Nigeria have to connect to but that they rather need to reconnect to their regional situation and heritage (such as their local languages): "People are always saying Africa needs to catch up with the computer age. I think it is the other way round" (249). He can be seen as representing an ideal of a 'rooted cosmopolitanism and multilocality', based on Simon Gikandi’s suggestion—that is, if such labels are needed at all.

Deola’s parents

Sam Bello, Deola’s father, died five years ago. In the novel, Deola travels to his five-year-memorial service. He is described as a glamorous representative of the new 'bank generation'. Although growing up in a low-income family that lived from farming, he managed to study in
England and upon his return, benefitted, among other Nigerians of his generation, from the privatization and deregulation of the banking system. He founded Trust Bank Nigeria and became a very rich man. Despite his riches and, it is implied, unlike the younger generation, he did not spend his wealth on extravagance and ostentatious luxury goods but invested it in the education of his children. He represents a generation of Nigerians who went to the colonial capital to study and who were highly celebrated when they returned. As graduates, they were offered jobs and enjoyed all kinds of privileges. They were strongly influenced by Western education and culture, which they passed on to their children. It is mentioned, for example, that Deola had piano lessons as a child during which she played classical music and read all the English literature classics. At the same time, however, it is suggested that Deola's father was conscious of a certain cultural 'rootedness', a cultural heritage. Deola remembers how he complained that her generation did not appreciate 'juju music' and told her that she has no roots (131). He himself listened to Ray Charles, Dave Brubeck, Antonín Dvořák, Otis Redding, John Coltrane. For him, this kind of cultural hybridity seemed to have been the norm and was not considered as something exceptional or contradictory.

Deola's mother Remi studied nursing in England, but after marrying Deola's father, she stayed at home with the children. She does have money herself, though, as she owns shares in the bank her husband founded. She is described as representing a stately matriarch who has acquired quite a lot of power within the family after the demise of her husband. Remi is deeply entrenched in society's social hierarchies. She demands great respect from people, especially those who she perceives to be below her regarding their class position in society. She can be considered quite snobbish and arrogant at times, and, to a certain extent, even abusive of her employees.

Like her husband, she appears to be strongly influenced by Western education and culture, while at the same time maintaining certain local habits. She is described as a person who plays an African European by using a 'perfect English accent' when she considers it appropriate but who always insists on buying traditional food (such as pigs' feet or goat intestines), whether she is in Lagos, London, or Cádiz.

*Lanre and Jaiye*

Like Deola, her older brother Lanre studied in England, but unlike her, he returned to Nigeria and followed in his father's footsteps as the deputy director of Trust Bank Nigeria. He was quite
a playboy as a teenager and young man, which is described to have been the norm with men of his social standing. It is suggested that even as a married man and father, he acts rather immaturely at times. His wife Eno seems to know how to handle him, though. Lanre usually complains to Deola about the hardships in Nigeria but is, on the other hand, also aware of the difficulties abroad. His attitude towards both life in Nigeria as well as living abroad remains inherently ambivalent. On the one hand, he keeps saying that it would be better to leave, but on the other hand, he encourages Deola to move back to Nigeria to escape the daily racism she encounters in England.

Jaiye, Deola's younger sister, appears to differ from Deola in many ways. She is a doctor and a 'diva' at the same time. She is concerned about her looks, fashion, and a luxurious lifestyle and overlooks her husband's unfaithfulness for a long time in return for expensive presents, allowing herself to be soothed by his gifts. However, at some point in the novel, she separates from her husband and flies with friends to Jamaica.

Even though Jaiye's mother does not condone her daughter's behavior, Jaiye's strength and pride remind strongly of her own personality. Jaiye's mother-in-law, although belonging to the same generation as her own mother, has a completely different mindset. She is described to be a very traditionally-minded woman. She expects her daughters-in-law to kneel in front of her and refuses to use any other language but Yoruba. It is implied that Jaiye's husband Funsho was raised with the same traditionalist attitudes. He completely rejects women's rights.

When Jaiye throws him out of her house, her mother-in-law is outraged, and even her own mother disapproves. Deola, on the other hand, is aware that her sister is "fighting for her life" (273). Jaiye's father seems to have anticipated Funsho's behavior as he made sure that the house which he bought for Jaiye is in her name, thus empowering her to separate from her husband.

Eno

Eno, Lanre's wife, is given quite a lot of space in the novel, considering the minor role she plays in terms of plot movement. Eno's father, a Nigerian pediatrician, died when she was young. Her mother, an English woman, remained in Nigeria after her husband's death. Eno studied fine art but eventually started working in her mother's nursery. Remaining in Nigeria was not easy for Eno's mother. Her husband's family tried to grab their house and property from them, but her mother did not intend to leave. She gave up her British passport, bought a Doberman to scare
away her husband's relatives, and stayed. Deola observes during the memorial celebrations how Eno's mother is ignored by her relatives who usually place her at an expatriate table. Eno mentions to Deola that she has always felt like an outsider due to her lighter complexion and her mixed background. Even Deola's mother and sister do not fully accept Eno as a member of the family but continuously criticize her choices as being 'un-Nigerian' (143). It is suggested in *A Bit of Difference* that, even though a lighter skin color and a mixed ethnic background is considered more beautiful, it also represents a difference which marks people as outsiders.

**Bandele and Subu**

Bandele and Subu are two of Deola's closest friends in London. Bandele attended public school in England and has since lived in London. Instead of attending university, he became an author. He spent some time in a psychiatric institution, as he was suffering from depression. Bandele represents a counterpart to Deola as far as their identities and feelings of belonging are concerned. Unlike Deola, he does not identify himself as Nigerian at all and—she is convinced—if asked about his affiliations, he would call his experiences "aristocratic English because his grandfather was knighted by the Queen" (50). Back in Nigeria, he appeared effeminate to Deola, but she argues that she later found out that he was just a snob with a posh British accent (232). For Bandele, class is a much more important factor than race in England. He does not believe that racism exists there, even though he has experienced racial discrimination as well. Deola cannot understand his total rejection of his Nigerian identity and calls it a "sort of self-loathing that only an English public school can impart on a young, impressionable foreign mind" (54). Later in the novel, she discovers that Bandele is gay. The fact that he had never told her about this makes her question their relationship and her attitude towards him. Confronting him with the accusation that he should have told her before, Bandele argues that he did not dare to because she was Nigerian. He explains that Nigeria was an emotionally brutal place for him to grow up in (236).

Subu is described as being very religious, a born-again-Christian, and very ambitious and successful in her job. She studied accountancy like Deola and is now the vice president of an investment bank. Unlike Deola, Nigeria represents for her "a place to escape from" (34). When she travels, it is to places associated with money and progress such as Silicon Valley. She does not plan to move back to Nigeria but rather contemplates buying property in other places of the world, such as Shanghai. Unlike Bandele, though, she does not show the usual signs of
assimilation such as adopting an English accent. She, in fact, would never "alter the pace of her voice or her accent for anyone, not even at work" (30), which Deola admires. Subu appears to be able to live in different places of the world and to be extremely successful without feeling the pressure to change aspects of her identity. She seems to be 'rooted' in herself; her identity does not appear to be tied to a specific geographical location, a notion which is, however, undermined by her rejection of Nigeria as a country to live in.

The strength of Subu's character is her ambivalence. On the one hand, she is extremely progress- and consumer-oriented, which can be seen, for example, in her love of the newest technology and fashion. On the other hand, her extreme religiosity appears to be somewhat at odds with her predilections. Her success and membership of the church do not render her less critical of issues of discrimination or racism, though. She is, in fact, even more vocal in denouncing the detrimental effects of charity and neocolonial dependency and exploitation to Africa than Deola. Subu, nevertheless, does not consider returning to Nigeria an option. For her, having escaped from her life in Nigeria is an accomplishment which she does not question: "We're fine, we're here" (37).

*Tessa*

Tessa is Deola's friend from boarding school. She is, in fact, represented as a very likable character. In the novel, Deola and Tessa discuss Tessa's wedding plans as well as Deola's attitude towards love. Tessa offers another version of 'difference'. She is a rather unsuccessful actress who ended up doing voiceover work. It is revealed that she was an outsider at boarding school and considered Deola more popular than herself. As a pupil, she used to lie about her economically less privileged background. She also encountered discrimination in her life. Being a girl with red curly hair, it was not always easy to receive the roles she wanted. She envied other child actresses with straight blonde hair. Even though her hair problems appear to be similar to Deola's and have led to exclusion, she is still 'white'. She might have suffered from other forms of discrimination but not from racism.

Tessa's main role in the novel seems to be—despite being presented as quite a round character herself—to add a different perspective to Deola's sometimes biased views on race and nationality. When Deola tells Tessa that she would only marry a Nigerian man because they share a common history, Tessa cannot understand this attitude and asks her, "What's wrong with two histories?" (61). Deola, therefore, describes her as being not "nationalistic about love" (62). In fact, Tessa's husband-to-be is Australian and before him, she dated men with different
national backgrounds. It is suggested that the reason for her 'openness' might lie in her own family background. Tessa's father is Scottish, and her mother's family migrated to the U.K. from Italy.
3 Ghana Must Go (2013)

_Ghana Must Go_5—the title referring to the expulsion of Ghanaian refugees from Nigeria in the early 1980s, an occasion after which also a type of big plastic bag in Nigeria is named—consists of three sections of similar length. The titles of the sections (in that sequence) are 'Gone', 'Going', and 'Go' and can be interpreted as representing a cycle of movements (starting backwards). The rather fragmented storyline starts with the death scene of one of the protagonists, Kweku Sai, and after many flashbacks and memories which introduce and narrate the stories of each of the main characters leads up to the reunion of his family for his funeral. Through a jumping narrative lens, the perspectives and subjectivities of a whole range of different characters is presented (Evans). In the same way as the story jumps from one character to the other, it also jumps through various times and places, thus spanning different countries, continents, and generations. The tone of the novel is extremely poetic and uses a lot of imagery and descriptions of colors, nature, light, death, loss, abandonment. Furthermore, body-related metaphors pervade the novel to show the characters' emotional states.

_Ghana must Go_ tells the story of the Sai-Savage family, a "family without gravity" (Evans), a family which is broken and scattered throughout the world. As the novel opens, Kweku Sai, a surgeon who migrated to the United States for his studies and later returned to his country of birth Ghana, is slowly dying in the garden of his house from a heart attack. Before his death which is marked by the single word 'Silence' on the last page of the first section, Kweku wallows in memories of his past, especially of his wife Fola and his children who he abandoned sixteen years ago out of shame after losing his job. He locates when and how often his heart was broken. His second wife, Ama, sleeps in the house, oblivious of her husband's impending death. Folasadé, or short Fola, is in another house in Ghana, alone, and feels a physical pain which announces that something bad has happened to someone close to her.

After Fola learns of Kweku's death, she informs their children who live across the ocean, in the United States: Olu, their oldest son, Taiwo and Kehinde, the twins, and Sadie, the youngest child. They all live in different places, though, and do not communicate with each other on a regular basis. Olu is a surgeon like his father and is married to Ling, a Chinese-

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5 The author of the novel Taiye Selasi was born as Taiye Tuakli-Wosornu (her given name meaning 'first twin' in her mother's language Yoruba) in London and raised in Boston. She currently lives in multiple places (such as New York, New Delhi, Rome) and is constantly on the move. As author and photographer, she has written a great number of stories, essays, scripts, books and gained further visibility through exhibitions and public talks.
American woman who is a doctor as well. Taiwo, who is very gifted at writing and playing the piano, used to study law but quit the university after the exposure of a scandalous affair with the dean of her college. She is described as working as a waitress. Kehinde, a world-renowned artist, just migrated from London to New York. Sadie, who has a photographic memory, is a student at Yale. When they hear about their father's death, they fly together to Ghana to meet up with their mother for the funeral. Each of them carries their own emotional luggage full of suppressed trauma, conflicts, and grief which they finally manage to vocalize at the family reunion. It is suggested that a healing process has started which was brought about by Kweku's death, the man who has caused much of the pain.

**Kweku Sai**

Kweku is a brilliant surgeon who was born and raised in a small village in Ghana and managed to raise himself out of poverty through his great talent and academic achievements as well as through a scholarship which enabled him to study medicine in the United States. He grew up with his mother and siblings in a small house which had been specifically designed by his father who had abandoned the family a long time ago. Kweku was eager to leave his old life in Ghana behind and although he had promised his mother to return, he only did so when she had already passed away. He had always imagined a triumphant return as a father and doctor to make his mother proud of his achievements, his dreams now thwarted by his mother's untimely death.

His strong desire to escape the poverty of his childhood is represented by his obsession with wearing slippers which is discovered by his little daughter Taiwo. At first, she thinks that he loves his feet, but when she sees that they are, in fact, covered with bruises from always walking barefoot in his childhood, she concludes that he hates them.

In the United States, he met and married Fola and had four children with her. It is mentioned on several occasions in different memories that the family lived in modest conditions at the beginning of Kweku's career but gradually rose to the status of a privileged middle-class family as a result of his success as a surgeon. Kweku is described as a very neat, orderly, and accurate man who loves symmetry and sterility above all, in fact detesting the chaos and lushness of his country of origin. It is suggested that he is not only extremely talented in his profession as a surgeon but that he is also gifted at drawing which can be seen in the house which he designed for himself and which becomes his home in Ghana when he returns. This talent seems to run in the family, handed down from his father to himself as well as to his son Kehinde and Olu. He feels a continuous urge to succeed and move forward without looking
back to his former life. When he loses his job due to a case of overt racism, he cannot deal with
the shame and failure. After one year of pretending to go for work when he has been, in fact,
long out of employment, his son Kehinde incidentally discovers his father's situation. Even
though the boy promises not to tell anyone, Kweku succumbs to his feelings of shame and
inadequacy and abandons his family. After his return to Ghana, he marries again, a woman who
is completely different to Fola, his first wife and love of his life. Ama, a nurse, is described as
being very naïve and always eager to please while she is easily satisfied with life and with what
Kweku is able to offer her. Kweku finds relief in her simplicity. With Fola, it was different.
Due to his own insecurities and her sacrifices, he felt the need to always prove his worth to her:
"To be worthy of Fola, to make it worth it for Fola, he had to keep being Successful" (73).

At the age of fifty-seven, Kweku suffers a heart attack in his home in Accra, which feels
more like a final heartbreak to him after a series of other, minor, ones in the course of his life.
These other heartbreaks were mostly connected to his children (Olu's appraisal of his skills as
a doctor, Sadie's birth), his wife, and his mother's death. His son Olu cannot understand why a
surgeon like his father did not call for help when he noticed the beginning of the attack and he
concludes that "Something must have arrested him" (8). What arrested him in his dying
moments were all the memories of his life and the people he had loved, lost, and abandoned:
his father, his mother, his sister (who died from TB at the age of eleven), his wife, his children.
His past returns to him through "reverie, remembrance and re- other things (regret, remorse,
resentment, reassessment)" (21).

The description of his life is likened to a film and Kweku feels as if an invisible
cameraman has followed him and filmed his failures and heartbreaks. For him, everything,
including his life, seems to be about performance—in the sense of playing a role as well as as
a measurable achievement. Kweku is tormented by the gap between "the Man Who He Wishes
to Be and Who He Left to Become" (4). He had imagined himself as a fixed part, the center of
his family but instead was absent from their lives: "Pulled up by the roots and replaced by a
hole" (36). By his inability to admit his vulnerability, both to himself and to others, he lost what
he loved most. In his last moments before his death, he especially thinks about the two most
important women in his life, who he feels that he has failed, his mother and his first wife: "The
mother and lover, where it begins and is ending" (21).
**Folasadé Savage**

Fola lived in Lagos, Nigeria, in an upper-middle-class environment until the age of thirteen. Her mother, the daughter of a Scottish woman and a Nigerian Colonial Administrator, died during her birth. She appears like a ghost to her as she only knows her from a portrait above her father's bed. Her father, a lawyer who Fola was very close to, was killed in the course of the anti-Igbo-progroms in 1966, and Fola was taken to Ghana by her father's friend. In Accra, she stayed with his parents and finished secondary school. After that, she migrated to the United States, to Pennsylvania. She dreamed of studying law, but when she married Kweku, she agreed to sacrifice her career for the sake of his. Instead, she started selling flowers, first on the street and later she managed to open up a shop. Fola is described as a woman who is used to being abandoned. When Kweku deserts her, she does not wait for him to return but packs up her children and moves out of the house and into a smaller place. Kweku actually returns home after several weeks, only to find the house empty. Shortly before Kweku dies, she moves to Ghana after she inherits a house there from her surrogate father who had taken her to Ghana after her father's death.

Fola is described as a very elegant, sophisticated, and proud woman, befitting her name which means in English 'Wealth confers my crown' (54). On the outside, she often appears to be distanced, in particular towards her children, which can be understood as a consequence of her experiences of abandonment, but she is, in fact, a woman full of empathy for others.

**Olu**

Olu, a gifted athlete in his childhood, resembles his father in his love of symmetry and sterility. Like him, he chose a career as a physician. As far as looks are concerned, he is described as having inherited his mother's Yoruba nose and Kweku's shade of the skin. As the oldest son, it is suggested that he knew his father best. He married Ling, a Chinese-American woman and fellow doctor, in Las Vegas after he had already been living with her for many years. Olu is scared of too much closeness and is not capable of opening up to Ling. The abandonment by his father left him guarded and suspicious of love. He is terrified of endings and loss and therefore prefers "a love unbegun" (304).

Olu is the only one in his family who met his father again after he moved to Ghana. He followed his invitation but left again on the first day when he saw that his father was staying with another woman. This additional disappointment and double loss seem to have increased
the alienation he feels from love and physical and emotional contact. He is described as struggling with a stereotype of African masculinity which he sees confirmed by his father's actions: the African father who walks out on his children. Only at the family reunion after Kweku's death, a healing process seems to be possible which is suggested by the acceptance of closeness with Ling and his identity as an 'African man'.

**The twins: Taiwo and Kehinde**

Taiwo and Kehinde are the beautiful amber-eyed twins of the Sai family. They inherited their looks, and especially the color of their eyes, from their grandmother, Fola's mother, and their Scottish great-grandmother. They are described as being extremely close to each other, to the extent that—it is suggested—they can read each other's mind. In particular on Taiwo's side, their attachment to each other at times appears to assume an almost incestual quality, which leads to feelings of jealousy and possessiveness. At the end of the book, though, Kehinde realizes that he loves his assistant Sangna, and Taiwo approves of the relationship.

Taiwo, the older one of the twins, excelled at school and was very gifted at writing and playing the piano. She went to law school but quit after her affair with the married dean of her college was exposed. She is described as "insular, contented in the world in her head" (41) and somewhat aloof. She possesses a keen intuition but finds it difficult to connect with other people, even though she longs for physical contact. Her suffering from "'middle insomnia', as yet undiagnosed" (42) is also a sign of her conflicted personality. She always envies other families' houses, which at first appears to be a dissatisfaction with their slightly more modest living conditions but which is revealed as the longing for a 'home'. Taiwo never felt that her family represented a real home but an "ongoing effort", a "thing being built: A Successful Family" (123) but never reached. She thinks of her family in the context of performing roles: her father performing the role of the Provider, her mother as the Suburban Housewife, and the children in their respective roles (123). Taiwo is acutely aware of the racial and postcolonial implications in their lives and has always felt a strong sense of being 'in-between' and of not fully belonging anywhere; neither in the United States nor in Ghana.

Kehinde is described as looking like a "girl: an impossible, impossibly beautiful girl" (14-15) as a baby and later as a very handsome young man. As an internationally renowned artist, he used to work in different parts of the world. However, Kehinde has never seemed to be fully at home in this world, which his name and status as the second twin implies in Yoruba culture, and the only person he has ever appeared to really care about was his sister Taiwo. In
the novel, it is explained that he attempted to commit suicide which is usually referred to by mentioning the scars on his wrist. They seem to represent a constant reminder of his otherworldly nature and his problems with living. Kehinde—though envied for his good looks by his siblings Olu and Sadie—suffers from looking different, from not carrying a clear, visual "stamp of belonging" (166) to a People (Yoruba like Olu or Ga as Sadie), of being "neither African nor white" (172), just like his grandmother. He envies Olu and Sadie for their physical resemblance to their parents.

After her husband left, Fola sends the twins to Lagos to stay with her half-brother because she struggles financially. Her half-brother offers to pay for their school fees at the international school in Lagos, an offer which Fola accepts oblivious to the fact that he is a brutal drug lord. The twins suffer sexual abuse in their uncle's house, leading to a forced incident of incest between the siblings. They are rescued by a former colleague and friend of Fola's father and sent back to the United States. Their horrible experiences leave them so traumatized and scarred that they do not tell anyone about them, but they find it even more difficult to cope with life from that time onwards. The suppressed pain and shame causes them to avoid each other until they reunite for their father's funeral. During an emotional break-down, Taiwo finally manages to open up to her mother who she had blamed all that time, alongside her father, for the terrible things that happened to them by sending them away.

Sadie

Sadie, the youngest child, is considered the baby of the family and is, out of all the children, closest to Fola. When Kweku left them, she was still very young and therefore does not share in her siblings' memories. She remembers other things, though. How she has always felt ignored and excluded from the family, not really part of it, as well as invisible to the rest of the world. Like her siblings, she longs for a different type of family, describing her scattered one as a family without "roots spreading out underneath them, with no living grandparent, no history, a horizontal" (146). Although Sadie is very intelligent and managed to be accepted at Yale University, she is insecure and feels inferior to her siblings due to her perceived lack of visible talents (such as Olu's or Kehinde's) and beauty (like Fola's and Taiwo's). Her problems are expressed through bulimia and kleptomaniac tendencies. She most of all admires white girls, especially her friend Philae. It is suggested that her feelings for her exceed friendship. When Sadie takes ballet lessons, she suffers from being "neither long, straight, nor light" (213) like her fellow ballerinas, but in Ghana, in her father's village, she discovers that she is, in fact, a
natural dancer. Without being familiar with the steps, she impresses her whole family with her movements. This experience finally makes her feel accepted and gives her a sense of belonging.
We Need New Names consists of eighteen chapters, each of which has its own title. The structure of the novel can be best described as episodic. The story is partly set in an unknown town or city in Zimbabwe and partly in Michigan, in the United States. About half of the book is dedicated to each of the two countries, and the whole story is presented through a First-Person Narrator, a girl named Darling. Ten-year-old Darling's story unfolds through a selection of situations and events until she is about seventeen. The chapters which are set in Zimbabwe present life during a time of political unrest and rising poverty. These events are described to have led to the emigration of great numbers of people to other African countries as well as to other places in the world. The chapters set in the United States depict the struggles of Darling and her aunt Fostalina who left the country in search of a better life. The narrative contains a lot of dialogue which also introduces other characters to the reader and adds to the descriptions and character drawings. Additionally, a few chapters are interspersed between the plot episodes which sound more like social commentary from an adult's point of view and consciousness.

We Need New Names can be described as a coming-of-age story. The perspective of a child and later teenager clearly assumes the center-stage throughout the novel. Bulawayo explains her choice of a child narrator as follows: "I was … inspired by what children can stand for, by their innocence, their resilience, humanity and humor, and what they tell us about our world" (The Guardian). Coming-of-age stories with a girl as narrator and protagonist have proved to be popular with other African women writers as well, such as Adichie, Aidoo, Dangarembga, or Ellen Banda-Aaku.

As the title suggests, names play an important role throughout the novel. The most obvious ones are the names of places such as 'Paradise' and 'Budapest', the parts of town in Zimbabwe which form the setting for Darling and her friends' story. It is not clear whether these two appellations are official place names, if they are informal ones applied by the residents, or whether the children made the names up in one of the various games they played. Darling and her friends are also highly aware of other places—countries—in the world and in their games.

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6 The Zimbabwean-born author NoViolet Bulawayo who moved to Michigan at the age of eighteen is, like Adichie, Atta, and Selasi, one of a number of contemporary African women writers, in Africa as well as in the diaspora, who have produced works of literature in the past few years in which they engage with a great variety of different themes and topics and which were received very well by the international media and literary critics. Bulawayo's novel We Need New Names was shortlisted for the Man Booker Prize in 2013 as well as the Guardian First Book award. The author is a Stegner Fellow at Stanford University in California. We Need New Names actually developed out of a short story—"Hitting Budapest"—for which Bulawayo won the Caine Prize for African Writing in 2011.
they travel there. However, not all the countries are of equal interest to the children. They order them according to a hierarchy with the United States, Canada, Australia, and the larger Western European countries leading. Darling dreams of joining her aunt in America, in a place which the children call 'Destroyedmichygen' (for Detroit, Michigan).

Apart from all the place names, in some cases also character names seem to play an important descriptive role. Most of the names of the Zimbabwean characters carry meanings, such as the name of the pro-democracy activist Bornfree who is murdered by representatives of the government or Prophet Revelations Bitchington Mborro, the pastor who believes in exorcisms of demons and who willingly offers to perform them in exchange for a certain sum of money. Since it is common in African countries that children are given meaningful names, even names such as Darling and Bastard are not unusual. When Bastard, the leader of the group of children, mocks Darling for her plans to go to America, she retorts, "I know he is just saying this because he is jealous. Because he has nobody in America. Because aunt Fostalina is not his aunt. Because he is Bastard and I am Darling" (15). The names of women usually refer to their oldest child (Mother of …). In We Need New Names, these appellations can, however, also be interpreted as a reflection of their own character and experiences, such as Darling's grandmother Mother of Bones or MotherLove, a woman who is especially kind to Darling and her friends.

The narrative of We Need New Names begins with a chapter called "Hitting Budapest". In this first chapter, it is revealed that 'Budapest' is the name of a wealthy residential area in a Zimbabwean town. Darling and her friends, eleven-year-old Chipo and Bastard, ten-year-old Godknows, nine-year-old Sbho, and Stina, whose age is not mentioned, live in an area called 'Paradise' which, judging from the description, can be assumed to be a poor township. The children roam through 'Budapest' with the aim of stealing guavas from the trees of the big properties there. This 'visit' takes an unexpected turn, though, when they meet a woman in front of a gated house who says that she is from London visiting her father's country and that she wants to take photos of them. At the end of the chapter, the group finds the same woman hanging from a tree. She must have committed suicide shortly after their encounter. The children decide to take her shoes in order to exchange them for bread.

After that encounter, they discuss their dreams and plans of having a house like the mansions in 'Budapest' and their desire to move to other countries for the sake of a better life there. Sbho, for example, says that she will marry a man from 'Budapest' in order to be able to get away from 'Paradise'; Bastard first talks about owning houses all over the world but then
changes and says that he will go to South Africa because America is too far away. Darling tells her friends about her aunt Fostalina in the United States who she is planning to join.

During another guava raid in Budapest, the children observe how a group of armed men approach shouting nationalistic slogans, such as 'Africa for Africans' and 'Kill the Boer' (111). They knock on the door of a house, and when the owners, a white couple, come out, their leader hands the man an order to leave his property and the country. After a brief attempt to argue, the couple finally lets the group lead them away, seemingly feeling distressed and humiliated. The children react in different ways. While Sbho starts crying and Darling admits feeling embarrassed, especially for the woman, Bastard tells Sbho that she should not cry for the white people since they are not her relatives (120). After everyone has left, the children enter the house whose furniture has been badly demolished by the angry crowd.

One chapter is dedicated to religion. Darling is taken to a church on a hill by her grandmother Mother of Bones. She finds the mass rather boring, and when some people bring a woman for an exorcism ritual, she enjoys it even less because she feels sorry for the woman who is struggling to free herself from the pastor's and the other men's grip. Chipo, however, who expects a child after she was raped by her grandfather, an experience which left her heavily traumatized, regains her ability to speak when she sees what is happening. She tells Darling about her ordeal. The influence of the church and 'quasi-religious' rituals also play a role later in the narrative when the pastor is called to pray for Darling's sick father. Again, he diagnoses 'possession by a demon' as being responsible for the sickness. The amount of money which he is demanding for the exorcism is so high, however, that the family does not manage to pay.

The political situation in Zimbabwe is continuously referred to throughout the narrative but is more explicitly dealt with in two chapters. One shows the events of election-day through the children's perspective. They are eagerly waiting for the adults to return and when they do, they are described as shouting for change and being in a very hopeful and positive mood, celebrating all night. In another chapter, though, it turns out that the change which was hoped and longed for did not occur. In another part of the novel, Darling and her friends secretly watch the funeral of a pro-democracy fighter who was killed by the government. The reader learns how the murder happened through one of the children's role-playing games.

The second part of the book jumps to the United States. The focus of this part of the novel clearly lies on Darling's inner life, on her struggles not to lose her identity. Darling was taken to Detroit by her aunt Fostalina. Her first impressions are not positive at all. The snow and the coldness do not have any appeal to her. She concludes, "With all this snow, with the sun not
there, with the cold and dreariness, this place doesn't look like my America, doesn't even look real" (150). Her experiences in the U.S. are again told in loosely connected episodes. After some pages in which Darling's first impressions of the United States are described, a few details about the time when Darling left Zimbabwe are revealed. Aunt Fostalina came to get her, and a few days before they left, Darling's mother took her to a traditional healer who performed a ritual prayer to the ancestors to ensure a safe journey. The healer tied a string with a bone around her waist which was supposed to protect Darling from all evil in America. Unfortunately, at the airport, the metal detector rang and the security personnel removed the string from her and threw it into the bin. Even though Darling did not seem to take the healer all that seriously, she still sounds concerned when she states, "Now I have no weapon to fight evil with in America" (150). This passage sounds like a foreboding of Darling's negative first impressions of America and of what is going to come.

Apart from the bad weather, Darling also has problems with the food. Even though she admits that there is plenty of it, she finds it quite tasteless. The reason for her negative attitude mainly seems to be homesickness. She says, "There are times, though, that no matter how much food I eat, I find the food does nothing for me, like I am hungry for my country and nothing is going to fix that" (153). She especially suffers from the lack of friends. She does not bond with her cousin TK and even her relationship with her aunt seems to remain rather distant.

In one episode, Darling attends a wedding together with her aunt, uncle, and cousin. The groom is originally from Zimbabwe and his wife-to-be a white American woman. Darling is shocked when she sees how overweight the bride is. When she goes to the restroom, she overhears a conversation of two women talking about the couple. They are making fun of them and call the groom stupid for marrying such an "obese" woman, closing the conversation with "But the things people will do for these papers, my sister, I tell you" (173). After that, a white woman enters the restroom and tries to engage Darling in a conversation about Africa. When she is finally back at the table, the groom introduces the bride's son to Darling and her aunt. The boy turns out to be a spoilt brat, and when he hits Darling on her eye with his ball, she instinctively slaps him. This incident leaves everyone in shock. Only her aunt remains calm and just tells her, "Don't do it again, I always tell you, you are in America now" (184).

Two episodes revolve around Darling spending time with her two friends Kristal and Marina, one in which they are watching porn together and one in which they drive to the shopping mall. The activities seem to portray three ordinary American teenagers; their conversations, however, reveal that each one of them struggles with her respective identity.
In the last two chapters, Darling has reached the end of high school. This is indicated by her mentioning that during summer she works part-time in a supermarket—a job which she hates—in order to save some money for college. Even though she is involved in typical American teenager activities such as school balls, Darling still seems to be torn as far as her identity and feelings of belonging are concerned. When she tries to call her mother and her friend Chipo answers, the conversation with her shows that the distance—not only the physical one—has become too large to overcome. The past in which she was so close with her friends is gone and will never return. Chipo tells her that Bastard went to South Africa and Godknows to Dubai. When Darling tries to reconnect with her, Chipo rejects her efforts by telling her that she does not know anymore what is going on in the country and what real suffering is like (285).

**Darling**

The novel presents stages in Darling's process of growing-up. In the first part, she is described as a rather self-confident ten-year-old girl who does not let the boys in her group of friends push her around. She lives in a poor township in Zimbabwe and her main activities revolve around playing games with her friends and roaming the neighboring residential area for food. The children are not in school due to lack of money and all of them long to move away from Zimbabwe in order to improve their living conditions. The poverty which the children find themselves in is, however, not presented as a fixed or unchangeable condition. Darling still remembers a different life with a house and a garden and her parents both in employment. It is suggested that they were forced to stay in the shanty compound after their houses were bulldozed by the government.

From the time her father left the family to look for work in South Africa, Darling has stayed alone with her mother and her grandmother. Most of the time, she seems to play on the streets with her friends, though. When her father returns from South Africa, sick and slowly wasting away, Darling has to help her mother and grandmother to take care of him. Instead of being happy about her father's return after many years of absence, she feels completely estranged from him, and his emaciated body scares her. She thinks, "I hate you for going to that..."
South Africa and coming back sick and all bones … Die. Die now so I can go play with my friends, die now because this is not fair” (96). At first, she manages to hide her father from her friends because her mother does not allow her to tell anyone about his condition, but after a while, her friends still find out. Her mother's fears of being stigmatized prove wrong; her friends' reaction is full of compassion and empathy. They help Darling to reconcile a bit with the situation.

Darling's dreams seem to come true when her aunt Fostalina invites her to stay with her in the United States. However, life in the U.S. does not turn out as she had imagined it to be and her disappointment is even exacerbated by a strong longing for her home, especially her family and friends who she left behind. She does not seem to be able to connect with anyone in her new home; all interactions appear strangely distant.

In Zimbabwe, Darling was very close with her friends despite the hardships, but in Michigan, she does not enjoy such close relationships with other children or age-mates. At school, she is bullied until the kids find a new victim. Eventually, two friends, Marina and Kristal, are mentioned, but even their friendship feels superficial and rather pragmatic compared to the kind of strong relationship she had with her friends in Zimbabwe. Darling explains their friendship as follows: "They are my friends mostly because we live on the same street, and we're all finishing eighth grade at Washington Academy" (199). After a few years—how many is not clear—she tells her aunt that she would like to visit Zimbabwe. Fostalina, however, replies that it is not yet time and that she would not be able to re-enter the United States once she left. It is not mentioned which immigration status Darling has, but her movements are apparently restricted.

Even though Darling misses her old friends, she becomes more and more estranged to them. She admits that she stopped writing and when she calls them after some years, Chipo tells her, "But you are not the one suffering. You think watching on BBC means you know what is going on? No, you don't, my friend … it's us who stayed here feeling the real suffering" (285). At that point, it becomes clear that things will never be again the way they were for Darling, even if she returned, and that her old bonds are forever lost.

**Darling's parents and grandmother**

Darling's father is a university graduate who was forced to leave for South Africa to look for work when their house was bulldozed and they had to move to 'Paradise'. This greatly affected her mother and her grandmother. Left alone to take care of her family, Darling's mother has to
make ends meet by regularly traveling to the border to trade. Darling's grandmother Mother of Bones is described as a rather hard woman who has suffered many disappointments and hardships in life, as she belongs to a generation which had lived through different stages of Zimbabwean history: Precolonial, Colonial, and Postcolonial times. It is suggested that it is difficult for Mother of Bones to come to terms with the changes in her country. She still has a box of money under her bed, but the money is from the time before independence and has long lost its value. She tries to find solace and hope in a keen religious fervor.

One day, Darling's father returns from South Africa with "the sickness" as Darling calls it (99-100). One of her friends calls it by its name: AIDS. Darling has to help her mother and grandmother to take care of her father who is slowly wasting away. Later in the novel, it is mentioned that her father had died.

**Darling's friends in Zimbabwe**

Most of the information about the children is already disclosed at the beginning of the novel. In the first chapter, Darling and her friends tell the woman in 'Budapest', who they later find hanging from a tree, how old they are. In the next episode, the reader finds out that Chipo is expecting a baby and that she had stopped talking after falling pregnant. When she sees a woman being harassed by a priest and members of his congregation, she finds her voice again and is finally able to tell Darling about the rape by her grandfather.

Darling and her friends seem to consider Bastard, who is the oldest, to be the leader. He is clearly the cheekiest and the mouthpiece of the group who even suggests breaking into the large houses in 'Budapest' instead of only stealing guavas from the trees. It is obvious that he has little respect for anyone, especially not the rich residents of 'Budapest'. At the funeral of the pro-democracy fighter Bornfree even he has tears in his eyes, which Darling finds surprising. Despite his obvious leadership position in the group, he is repeatedly challenged, not only by the other boys but also by Darling and Sbho. Darling explains, however, that they usually do not attack him physically because he is stronger than them and a boy and that he has already beaten up everyone except Stina. Stina whose age is not revealed but who appears to be more serious and mature than the others is the only one in the group who can challenge Bastard. He seems to exert some quiet authority. Even though he does not seem to talk much, his decisions are followed.
**Darling's friends in the United States**

When Darling is fourteen, two characters are introduced as her friends in the United States: Marina with Nigerian roots whose "grandfather was a chief or something" (199), according to Darling, and Kristal whose national or ethnic background is not explicitly mentioned; it is, however, likely that she is African American judging from her description. Like Darling, they struggle with their feelings of belonging; they seem to be torn between some kind of 'Americanness' and their other identities. In one scene, for example, they start quarreling over certain features which they regard typical of their African or African-American selves and as not American enough. They mirror the stereotypes and prejudices which are prevalent in American society. Darling is chided over singing a song from her childhood which her friends call tribal, Kristal is teased over her ways of speaking English which she calls Ebonics, and Marina is reminded of the stereotype of the Nigerian who is always involved in some fraudulent business. The girls do not seem to take these accusations and stereotypes too seriously, though, and they do not seem to affect their relationship negatively.

**Aunt Fostalina and TK**

Darling's aunt Fostalina works in Michigan in a nursing home and lives in a relationship with Uncle Kojo, a man who is originally from Ghana. She left Zimbabwe after it gained independence when, as Darling puts it, "things" were "falling apart" (191, see Chinua Achebe). She is presented as a fitness freak who cares a lot about being thin and her looks in general. Her husband Uncle Kojo is not happy with her obsession, as he is of the opinion that she is too skinny for an African woman. He seems to be much more traditional in his attitudes than Fostalina and criticizes her for not behaving like an 'African wife'. Fostalina, on the other hand, is presented as a person who is torn between her wish of being American and the challenges and obstacles which are thrown in her way. Her frustration can be seen in a scene in which she tries to order a bra on the phone and which turns into an almost impossible venture when the sales lady on the other end of the line refuses to understand her English accent. Towards the end of the novel, Fostalina's relationship with Uncle Kojo breaks more and more apart, even though they do not separate. Uncle Kojo starts drinking and develops a depression as a result of his son joining the military and being sent to war. Fostalina begins an affair with a former employer.
Darling's cousin TK only plays a minor role in the narrative and is not presented in great depth. He is described as an overweight boy who was born in the United States and who does not seem to care much about his African heritage. He does not speak any African language and usually spends his time playing video games. Although living in the same house, Darling and TK do not connect, as he does not seem to be particularly friendly to her. Later in the novel, it is mentioned that he was sent to war to Afghanistan.
IV The three R's: An Intersectional Analysis of African Postcolonial Literatures

After discussing the texts separately, we now move on to a wider analysis on the basis of Taiye Selasi's 3 R model. The three R's, that is Rituals, Relationships, and Restrictions is a tool to analyze the complex nature of multiple identities, spaces, and questions of belonging. Its application has the purpose to facilitate a more structured look, a snap-shot at very dynamic and therefore elusive aspects of contemporary constructions of space and identity. Rituals, relationships, and restrictions seem to be three different categories but in fact, they are highly interwoven with each other. The reason why they are dealt with separately here is solely for purposes of analysis. Furthermore, due to their interconnectedness and overlapping nature, they cannot be analyzed in the same way. The rituals are considered the core aspect of analysis and vital for a deeper understanding of the characters' constructions of space and identities. They are therefore accorded more space but are complemented by a discussion of the characters' relationships and the restrictions which they encounter as they are considered the basis and frame for their practices.

1 Rituals

The four texts are characterized by a common and yet diverse set of recurring aspects, practices and themes ('rituals') which shape and influence the characters' lives and identities in multiple and complex ways. Some of them refer to more conventional categories of identity such as class, gender, race; others are very specific to postcolonial and African contexts. Themes such as colonialism, representations of Africa, and mimicry practices are dealt with and refer to complex experiences of hybridity and plurality. Mobility and migration and their meanings for the characters' sense of identity and belonging in today's world form the overarching theme of the novels.

Identity and belonging are matters continuously negotiated among the characters. Identities are constructed intersectionally along and across all kinds of categories, such as race, class, nationality, ethnicity, gender, age, sexual orientation, and many others. The most prominent categories in the four novels are those related to the characters' feelings of national and/or cultural belonging. The formation of identity and belonging is shown to be highly complex,
fractured, and ambiguous, even contradictory, constituting a continuous and never-ending process of positioning, negotiation, and representation.

In Americanah, Ifemelu identifies as Nigerian, Igbo as well as a Non-American Black woman, a label which only becomes meaningful for her in the United States. She argues that in the U.S. their nationalities seize to matter; instead, they become 'black'\textsuperscript{8}. When she returns to Lagos after living in the United States for fifteen years, she has to admit to herself, though, that she has also developed a variety of 'American selves'. Back in Nigeria, she is forced to re-negotiate her identity based on her change of location and context as well as her experiences.

Darling's feelings of belonging in We Need New Names are complicated owing to the fact that a return to Zimbabwe does not seem to be possible for her. Although not made explicit, she seems to negotiate her identity somewhere between adopting an American lifestyle and her longing to reconnect with her past. It is, however, suggested that she would not be able to reconnect to her life in Zimbabwe, should she return. Apart from her memories, she has become someone who relates to Zimbabwe through what she sees on BBC. Darling remembers her friend Stina's words who said that "leaving your country is like dying, and when you come back you are a lost ghost returning to earth, roaming around with a missing gaze in your eyes" (We Need New Names 160). These rather drastic words describe the dilemma which many returnees face who expect to find everything the way they left it when they migrated, only to discover the changes which occurred both in the place they left as well as within themselves.

In Ghana Must Go, identity struggles are a key issue. Kweku and Fola both left Africa after completion of high school with a scholarship in their pockets to study in the United States. Their background is, however, completely different. Fola fled from Nigeria after her father was killed. In Ghana, she attended International School and continued to lead a life of comparative privilege. Kweku, a poor boy from a small village, had to fight for the possibility to receive a higher education and to move away from Ghana. Although they both experienced their countries as something to escape from because they were "hurt" (Ghana Must Go 240) by them through war and economic hardship and do not speak about their past, their attitudes towards their heritage differs. While Kweku is described as completely 'Westernized' (198), Fola is still

\textsuperscript{8} I decided to write 'black' and 'white' in small letters and most of the time without quotation marks because the terms are always meant as social, cultural, and political constructs. A biological correlation in any form is assumed to be non-existent, which means that any ambivalence in the meaning is precluded. Therefore, no additional marker pointing to its constructedness is required.
connected to her Yoruba traditions. Even Kweku, however, eventually finds some reconciliation with his 'roots' when he moves back to Ghana and calls his second wife a bridge on which he can "walk … between worlds" (52) owing to her humble and traditional background.

Kweku and Fola's American-born children each struggle with their own identity crises. Since their parents never told them about their origins, they feel rootless. Even though they partly call themselves 'Africans', it is clear that neither Nigeria nor Ghana can be 'home' for them, nor do they find in other places what they are looking for. Only Sadie who never felt connected to Africa feels accepted in Ghana for the first time in her life. It appears that for Kweku and Fola's children, it is not the geographical location which can provide them with feelings of belonging but the relationships within the family.

In *A Bit of Difference*, the characters' feelings of belonging are constantly and most explicitly discussed. Their sense of national and/or cultural belonging does not always correspond with their geographical location. Deola has spent most of her adulthood in England, has a British passport, and actually admits that she knows London better than Lagos, but she still considers herself 'Nigerian'. From the beginning, she is described as not having any doubts about where she belongs. It is implied that there are self-perceptions about one's identity which are, however, complicated by one's geographical location as well as by attributions from other people. Deola ponders over her status overseas and descriptions such as 'resident alien' or 'Nigerian expatriate'. What is clear to her is that she does not feel 'British'. This position is challenged by Anne from the charity organization Deola works for by asking "What does British mean anyway?" (*A Bit of Difference* 11), in consideration that there is also Welsh or Scottish. This seems to be a valid point and is taken up later on in the novel regarding Nigeria. When Deola meets the directors of the NGOs which she has to evaluate, they enquire where she is exactly from (the state her father originates from) and about her ethnicity (in Deola's case it is Yoruba). Nigeria becomes a meaningless category, even Lagos as a marker of identity or origin is too big and vague to reveal a satisfying amount of information about her. Deola is seemingly uncomfortable talking about ethnic differences, which seem to her to belong to the past, but she is at the same time aware of the artificiality of a national category 'Nigeria' which ignores all other complexities and the heterogeneity of the people. This dilemma points to both the constructedness as well as the instrumentalization of all those categories, whether they refer to names of nations or ethnicities or other labels.

In London, Deola's insistence on calling herself Nigerian and on marrying a Nigerian is implied to stem from a sense of continuous discrimination in England. Later on, Deola specifies
what she meant by saying that she would only marry a Nigerian man. She clarifies that it is not the nationality per se which is important to her but that she wants to be with someone who understands her. This notion remains ambiguous, though. Why does she assume that a Nigerian will automatically understand her? Dára, the spokesperson of the Africa Beat campaign, is Nigerian, for example, but she would never think of him as a potential partner. She calls him a "bush boy", a college dropout with "questionable English" (6) and cannot understand why her colleagues at the London charity organization consider him to be beautiful. This emphasizes the fact that nationality, geographical origin, or even a common history and cultural heritage cannot be the sole factors which contribute to the formation of a sense of belonging.

In addition to categories connected to nationality and/or cultural belonging, class is equally one of the most important factors along which the characters form their identities. In all four novels, social class is mostly defined by the characters' levels of education and their financial means. The protagonists of Americanah, A Bit of Difference, and Ghana Must Go have a similar educational background and socio-economic status and can be seen as belonging to a similar milieu. Only Darling in We Need New Names comes from a less privileged background.

In A Bit of Difference, the social class of a person additionally depends and is measured by the people's ability to find the 'right' balance between being 'Westernized' in terms of mobility, education, and exposure as well as fluidity in different and in particular, what are considered, 'Western' cultural practices but still 'Nigerian enough' in their tastes and accents. Deola and her friends belong to the Nigerian upper class. Even though her father does not originally come from a wealthy family, she grew up in a pampered environment. Her generation are 'oil-boomers'; they benefitted from the oil boom. Deola and her family, like other families of the same class, were not adversely affected by the unstable political and economic conditions in Nigeria but rather profited from them. The children, such as Deola and her brother, were sent for schooling and studies abroad, preferably to England.

Families such as hers are used to having many employees in their house, who have to show their employers the highest levels of respect and whose treatment is often questionable. They are clearly regarded inferior in terms of social status, which is shown in job appellations such as 'houseboy/girl' or 'garden boy'. Deola's mother is no exception, which can be seen in the description of their 'house help' Comfort: "Whenever Comfort falls asleep in the kitchen, her mother calls Comfort lazy. Comfort wakes up at six-thirty in the morning to sweep the floor and she doesn't stop working until nine at night" (A Bit of Difference 80). After spending many years abroad, Deola argues that her attitude towards the treatment of domestic employees has
changed. One reason for this change, she claims, is that she made similar experiences like the Nigerian employees in London (such as being treated as if she was invisible or being looked down upon at work). The discriminations based on constructs of class are thus likened to those based on race.

With her friend Bandele, Deola discusses the barriers and hierarchies in Nigerian society between the haves and the have-nots. Bandele calls these barriers 'false', emphasizing thus their artificial nature, and Deola, though not questioning their existence in the same way he does, is also aware of the ambiguities and hypocrisies involved in the ways that "Nigerians constantly rank each other according to wealth, education and Westernization, with ambiguous results: this one is bush, that one is oyinbo. This one is local, that one is colonized" (157). While it is suggested in *Americanah* that these social hierarchies and boundaries are leveled due to the fact that they are all foreign in the United States, in *A Bit of Difference* they still apply in the diaspora.

Unlike Deola, not all Nigerians in England came for studies. In the 1990s, many came to work and formed communities, a "mini-Lagos" (*A Bit of Difference* 32), in less privileged parts of the city. They retained their traditions and met regularly for different functions. Subu is part of this crowd through her church membership. Deola, however, does not identify with them. It is implied that they belong to a different milieu which she does not want to associate with.

Similarly to *A Bit of Difference*, in *Americanah*, all the central characters belong to rather privileged class milieus in Nigeria. Their migration status partly changes their class status. While Ifemelu struggles financially at the beginning, she manages to maintain her status and even rises after acquiring financial stability and U.S. citizenship. Obinze, in contrast, loses his rather privileged status in England due to his precarious position as an illegal immigrant and his exclusion from the formal job market.

Interestingly, in Adichie's, Atta's as well as Selasi's novel, the impact of both race and a lower class position in the United States as well as in England are presented through security guard characters. It is mentioned that these men are often simply ignored or treated without any respect by the people working in the place which they guard. The protagonists greet them and show the often elderly men the respect which is denied to them. *Americanah*, however, adds another twist to this narrative. Ifemelu admits that she dislikes the guard because of the leering looks he gives her and the way he touches her when she greets him (423). Even though Ifemelu feels guilty for her feelings of dislike and uneasiness, this passage implies that the simultaneous
oppression through race and class does not mean that someone cannot become oppressive to other groups (here women).

_Ghana Must Go_ focuses more specifically on the immigrant situation. It is implied that there is a certain barrier which prevents the Sais, due to their immigrant status, from rising to the same privileged position as people in their neighborhood. Despite their high aspirations, their success as well as their sacrifices, the privileged 'white spaces' are not fully penetrable and accessible to them. They are described as "native[s] to brilliance but stranger[s] to privilege" (_Ghana Must Go_ 221) as a consequence of their immigrant status.

In _We Need New Names_, a completely different perspective is presented. Instead of inhabiting a position of privilege like the protagonists of the other novels who sometimes act snobbishly towards people from less privileged milieus, Darling and her friends in Zimbabwe reverse the gaze. In an encounter with a woman who stays in one of the gated mansions in the residential area, Darling points out how thin and uncombed she is and Godknows tells her that she looks like a child of fifteen. Darling is surprised that she does not seem to be insulted. She comments about her skin that it "doesn't even have a scar to show she is a living person" (9), which does not appear to be meant as a compliment. After the woman takes a whole series of pictures of the children, they run away insulting her from a distance. Darling joins in the insults because she remembers how the woman threw food in the bin. After the children have left, the woman commits suicide, to which the children react indifferently. They even take advantage of the situation by stealing her shoes. This episode shows that while the children admire the woman for her wealth, they at the same time despise her. There is no common basis on which a connection would be possible.

Similarly to class, gender pervades the novels as a factor which influences people's identities and roles in society, as well as how people see themselves and others. Both women's and men's roles are explored, but even though different forms of masculinity feature (especially in _Ghana Must Go_), the focus clearly lies on the experiences of women. Additionally, the novels question and expose Western feminist assumptions of Africa for being highly stereotypical and prejudiced in their ideas about the "African woman's perspective" (_A Bit of Difference_ 13). White women are shown as calling black women "fertility goddess[es]" (_A Bit of Difference_ 180) and as being extremely self-righteous and hypocritical in their condemnation of different cultural practices while being blind to their own oppressions. In _A Bit of Difference_, these double standards are most overtly spelt out. When there is an outcry about Dará's defense of polygamy, Deola considers it an extremely dumb statement borne out of ignorance by someone
who should not have been hyped like that in the first place. Her colleagues in the charity who are so outraged about the misogyny of his statement at the same time reject Deola's suggestions to empower women to become self-reliant and more independent, a move which calls their true interest in women's empowerment into question.

Deola as well as the other women protagonists do not deny that structural inequalities exist based on gender imbalances. Gender relations in Nigeria are, in fact, discussed extensively in *A Bit of Difference* and also feature in *Americanah* but always in context and in non-essentializing ways. They are shown to be as ambiguous and contradictory and shaped by other factors, such as people's economic position in society, their educational background, etc., as they are everywhere else. They are explored through the histories and fates of different characters, both within and outside of Nigeria.

One issue which is especially prominent in *A Bit of Difference* is the pressure, of society and family in particular, to get married. This pressure affects not only Deola but also Tessa. Both women do not consider marriage that important, but while Deola remains rather firm in her convictions, Tessa agrees to a big wedding in order to please her father-in-law. Deola, in contrast, does not let anyone push her into a role which she is not comfortable with. When she encounters attempts to pressure her into marriage, she is completely aware that "For her, there are worse situations, but none more preventable than being stuck in a job or a marriage" (84).

Both in *A Bit of Difference* as well as in *Americanah*, gender relations are characterized as being strongly influenced by concerns over financial security. Women such as Ivie, Deola's cousin, Aunty Bisi (in her youth), and Aunty Uju are not disinclined to enter relationships with 'sugar daddies' (i.e. older rich men) or as second wives to be able to afford a certain lifestyle of financial security and material comfort. Obinze's wife prefers to remain in an unloving marriage with a cheating husband to losing the comfortable lifestyle and high status she enjoys. The same can be said for Kimberly, Ifemelu's employer. She is extremely eager to please her husband even though he does not appear fully devoted to her (*Americanah* 198).

Another factor which plays a role in some characters' lives is the generational aspect. While it might not have been common for women and girls to receive a higher education or to wear trousers for work, one generation or even just a few years later these practices are shown to have changed (*A Bit of Difference*). One of Deola's aunts, for example, used to work for UNESCO and lives in Paris, whereas her older sister was kept out of school by their father because he did not believe in education for girls at that time. Gender relations are presented as not stable but under constant construction. Furthermore, while a generational gap exists in the characters' attitudes towards traditional women's roles such as getting married and having
children, these differences are not always reflected in lived reality. In *A Bit of Difference*, Deola's mother and her friends are described to have lived rather independent lives, structural inequalities notwithstanding. Younger women—despite displaying a commonly shared respect for their elders—are shown to actively defy their mothers' and aunts' traditional attitudes. When confronted with the question why she does not have any children yet, Yvie says, "I've told my mother … anyone who wants me to born *pikin* [that is: children] should volunteer her womb. None of them is paying my salary" (*A Bit of Difference* 246). Deola's sister Jaiye most openly defies the traditional roles and behaviors assigned to wives in Nigeria when she refuses to bow to her mother-in-law's traditional expectations and throws her husband out of her house.

While the characters are clearly located in patriarchal societies, women are not shown as powerless victims. They all possess agency and a certain degree of independence. It is, however, suggested that the control over their lives strongly depends on the social class the women belong to and the financial and educational capital they are able to draw from. Agency, despite the characters' low socio-economic status, is also an aspect which is highlighted in *We Need New Names*. While serious issues of abuse of women and girls are presented, women are not shown as victims. Even with limited power and influence, they defy and challenge, and they can also be complicit (as in the case of the 'loose' woman whose exorcism ordeal is cheered on by her fellow women). They undoubtedly negotiate their own spaces. Within a patriarchal framework (which prevails in all the spaces and geographical locations the characters inhabit), men and women are presented as trying to carve out spaces and benefits for themselves.

The migration experience adds further layers to the process of identity formation. In both *Americanah* as well as in *A Bit of Difference*, the two women protagonists point out that they only 'became black' when they had left Nigeria. It can also be argued that they became 'black women' outside of Nigeria. The implications of being a black woman are primarily discussed through hair politics. *Americanah* in particular deals with the issues of the policing of and discrimination against black women's hair in great detail through Ifemelu's experiences and her blog entries. Her decision to stop chemically straightening and relaxing her hair and the sharing of her experiences in her blog can be seen as an act of self-empowerment, of embracing her identity as a black woman who does not let herself be defined by racist and sexist ideologies.

Despite their strong focus on women's experiences, men's roles are also explored in all four novels. A recurrent feature are the characters' attempts to create and draw on alternative forms of masculinity for themselves, both on the African continent as well as in the diaspora. Comparisons with their fathers or father's generation are often invoked. Wale, for example,
raised his daughter alone after the death of his wife and refused to leave the parenting chores to his female relatives. Bandele left his family and openly defied his father in order to live his life and sexual preferences freely. Obinze admits that his life of luxury does not fulfill him, that he actually detests the decadence of the elites, and that he would rather be a teacher. In *We Need New Names*, Uncle Kojo represents a very traditionally-minded type of masculinity. He criticizes Fostalina for not cooking proper African meals for him and for being too thin. Their son TK, though, rejects his father's ways and calls him "Patriarchal motherfucker" (156).

*Ghana Must Go* differs from the other three novels in that it places similar importance on both female and male protagonists. Forms of masculinity are, in fact, a key issue and are explored in a much more differentiated and profound way than in the other novels. The focus lies on the impact of migration on men's identities. Kweku and Olu are torn by different kinds of expectations, stereotypes, and prejudices which are linked to their identities as African men. On the one hand, they experience the effects of the taboo for men to show any weaknesses and failures, and, on the other hand, the racist trope that 'African men are bad fathers who always leave their families' affects their lives adversely. It is suggested that Olu as a member of a younger generation is in a better position to develop a different, healthier form of masculinity which will help him to stay and cope with his insecurities and pressures than his father who was still haunted by his (colonial) past and thus used to running away. Kehinde represents a different type of masculinity. He is described as an extremely sensitive person who suffers from feeling different from his father and brother, both in looks as well as in character and career choice. Even more so than Olu, he seems to be in a state of 'in-betweenness'. The rather hopeful ending nevertheless seems to suggest that Olu and Kehinde will eventually be able to find and accept a more positive way of living their masculinities.

What is a distinguishing feature of the treatment of gender in the four novels is that, despite an overall strong focus on women's perspectives, a simplistic pitting of women against men is avoided. The narratives show that the situations are much more complex than simple dichotomies would allow for. Factors such as colonialism, migration, poverty, alienation, war, disease, etc. affect both women and men—even if not in the same way and to the same extent—and can leave people broken or lead to fractured identities and (self-)destructive actions. Furthermore, through the great diversity of characters who define their selves differently, any simplistic binary understanding of gender is undermined and a perspective of femininities and masculinities positioned along a dynamic and flexible continuum is facilitated.
The main characters in the four novels do not only form identities along conceptions of femininity or masculinity but also in the context of what it means to be a 'black woman' or a 'black man'. Race\(^9\) understood as a political category is discussed here alongside with skin color, not because they condition each other or are necessarily connected but because even skin color is, in fact, seen as a social construct which assumes political, social, and cultural meanings which transcend and are actually masked by argumentations grounded in biology, and should be discussed as such.

Skin color is a recurring topic in *Americanah*. It is injected with meaning both in Nigeria and in the United States, but the meanings and their consequences differ greatly. In Nigeria, it seems to be normal for Ifemelu and her friends to comment on different skin colors or shades of people. Her friend Ginika, for example, is called a 'half-caste' on several occasions in the book. In Nigeria, that term implies that she is lighter-skinned and thus more popular with men. It is associated with beauty and, especially for women, used as a compliment. Obinze's wife, for example, is described as deriving pleasure from often being "mistaken for mixed-race" due to her fair skin (27). When Ifemelu arrives in the United States, her friend Ginika points out, to her surprise, that it is considered offensive to use references to skin color publicly and that the term 'half-caste' is an insult. Later, in her blog entries, she reflects on this taboo, the racial hierarchies in the United States, and how they are connected to people's skin color: how dark black women are at the bottom of this hierarchy and how other ethnic minorities tend to long for, what she calls, "WASP whiteness" (254). Her outsider perspective as a Non-American Black enables her to uncover the ambiguities, contradictions, and hypocrisies of America's racial ideologies and dynamics. Through Ifemelu's observations and reflections, their constructed nature as well as their absurdities are exposed. It is shown, for example, that who is considered 'white' depends on where they are located. In one blog post titled "... What Hispanic Means", Ifemelu writes:

> Hispanic means the frequent companions of American blacks in poverty rankings, Hispanic means a slight step above American blacks in the American race ladder, Hispanic means the chocolate-skinned woman from Peru, Hispanic means the indigenous people of Mexico. Hispanic means the biracial folks from the Dominican Republic. Hispanic means the paler folks from Puerto Rico. Hispanic also means the

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\(^9\) Race is used with small letters and without quotation marks because it is always only meant as a social and political category/construct of discrimination, oppression, and exclusion of certain groups of people. The devastating consequences of this construct are, however, seen as very real.
blond, blue-eyed guy from Argentina. All you need to be is Spanish-speaking but not from Spain and violà, you're a race called Hispanic. (*Americanah* 129)

While both protagonists Ifemelu and Deola claim that they only became 'black' in the United States and England, skin color is described as a category which influences people's lives and treatment in Nigeria as well. In both novels, the high status of light skin is emphasized, but *A Bit of Difference* presents another aspect of being white or light-skinned in Nigeria. It shows through the characters of Eno and her mother how a different shade of the skin or features which are considered 'mixed-race' can also lead to social exclusion. In *Ghana Must Go*, this issue is further explored through the twins Taiwo and Kehinde who, despite being considered extraordinarily beautiful by all the people they encounter, always feel different from the rest of their family.

Issues of race and racism are omnipresent in the four novels. Obinze has various encounters with racism in the United Kingdom. He reaches the conclusion, though, that there, class is more important than race, while it is the opposite in the United States: "A white boy and a black girl who grow up in the same working-class town in this country can get together and race will be secondary, but in America, even if the white boy and black girl grow up in the same neighborhood, race would be primary" (*Americanah* 340). This observation is apparently confirmed by his friendship with a young white man who he works with at a warehouse. He later invites his friend to come and work for him in Nigeria, thus reversing the old colonial roles of the 'English master' and the 'colonized servant'.

Obinze's observation on class as a more influential category than race in England is not confirmed by Deola in *A Bit of Difference*. Racism is described as something happening on an almost daily basis and consists of many 'small' incidents. Although she is from a wealthy and privileged family and highly educated, she realizes that she cannot escape the "slow steady trickle of discrimination" (Scholes). As her brother Lanre points out to her, in England she can have a lot of advantages in terms of money, health care, and security—but at the same "it's as if someone is chipping away at your backbone every day with that racialism rubbish" (267).

Related to these conceptions of race and racism and present in all four texts is a critique of 'whiteness'. According to Ruth Frankenberg, 'whiteness' can be described as a socially constructed category which can be divided into a set of interdependent dimensions: "a location of structural advantage and race privilege; a 'standpoint' from which white people look at themselves, at others, and at society; and a set of cultural practices that are usually unmarked and unnamed" (Frankenberg 1; Mahoney 330-331). Due to the invisibility and normativity of
'whiteness', whites are usually perceived as 'individuals', free of a distinctive culture unlike people of color who are often denied any individuality and fixed in their identities as 'cultural beings'. In the four novels, a shift in vision is applied which makes 'whiteness' or 'white social and cultural practices' visible and deconstructs them in different ways. Encounters with 'whiteness' occur mainly in the context of migration as well as in the context of NGO and charity work in Africa.

The 'whiteness' involved in aid and charity has been best described by Nigerian-American writer Teju Cole. In his 2012 blog article, he coined the term 'White (Industrial) Savior Complex' for a certain type of behavior of whites towards Africa which he described as follows: "The white savior supports brutal policies in the morning, founds charities in the afternoon, and receives awards in the evening" (Cole). In the article, he explains that a whole industry exists which benefits enormously from and capitalizes on aid work and volunteering in Africa. In his opinion, the people whose interests are mainly served by this industry are the white people who use their privileges to present themselves as 'saviors' to the world (Cole).

In the novel *We Need New Names*, Darling has several encounters with 'whiteness'. In Zimbabwe, she watches the white couple who is evicted from their house and describes the white man's behavior towards the leader of the armed mob in the following words: "You can tell from his words that he despises him, despises them all, and that if he could see us up here, he would despise us as well" (118). Confronted with a large group of armed blacks, the white man, despite his minority position, still carries an attitude of privilege and assumed superiority. After the white couple has been led away, Darling and her friends use the opportunity to enter their house, eat food from the fridge, use the bathroom, and play around. She says, "I am already thinking of how many people from Paradise can live here in this big house. Maybe five families, maybe eight" (129). Even though the couple is clearly identified as (former) colonialists and is therefore not met with a lot of sympathy, the question "What exactly is an African?" (119) is raised when the white man states that he is African as well.

In Zimbabwe, another encounter with 'whiteness' is described when people from an NGO come to 'Paradise' to hand out food and goods to the residents. The children are very excited and try to please the NGO workers by smiling at them and posing for photos. The aid people seem to be especially interested in pictures which show the squalor and dirt the children live in, while the children themselves try to cover their torn trousers and imagine that they are international stars such as Paris Hilton. Darling comments on the picture-taking procedure, "They don't care that we are embarrassed by our dirt and torn clothing, that we would prefer they didn't do it; they just take the pictures anyway, take and take" (52). She is also concerned
about who will see their pictures, but when she asks, nobody answers her. In fact, the NGO workers are described as not really interested in connecting with the children, apart from giving them the gifts and taking the photos: "We are careful not to touch the NGO people, though, because we can see that even though they are giving us things, they do not want to touch us or for us to touch them" (54). This form of 'helping' is presented as very detached and self-interested and has its own strict rules which everyone has to follow. The ones in control are the Americans from the NGO and the one who is enforcing the rules for them is another NGO worker who is a black Zimbabwean. Since the American aid workers do not speak the local language, she is the one telling the children and adults receiving the aid what to do and what not to do. She yells at them, "... you think these expensive white people came all the way from overseas ipapa to see you act like baboons?" (54). It seems that through her status as an employee at the international NGO, she feels superior to the residents of the shanty town, but she still clearly regards the American workers as considerably higher on the social hierarchy. The adults in 'Paradise' are also given food, and they are described as acting as if they do not really care, looking embarrassed and disappointed. One resident, MotherLove even refuses to get her share, which can be read as an act of resistance against this type of aid.

In the United States, Darling experiences similar types of 'whiteness'. People who meet her ignore completely which country she comes from and tell her about friends or relatives who volunteered in South Africa or who traveled through Uganda. The woman she meets in the restroom at the wedding mentions the pictures which her niece took when she volunteered at an orphanage in South Africa: "And, oh, she took such awesome pictures. You should have seen those faces!" (176). This passage reminds again of the scene of the NGO workers. Issues of power and hegemony of the white gaze, the rights of ownership of one's pictures and questions of representation and constructions of an alleged reality of suffering arise.

Pitying the poor but not really aware of her own privilege as a white person and the power relations involved, Kimberly in Americanah tries to avoid racial discrimination by exoticizing 'blackness' and Africa in general. She is, nevertheless, represented as a good-hearted person who treats Ifemelu very well in her job. However, Ifemelu also encounters other versions of 'whiteness'. Laura, Kimberly's sister, approaches her on different occasions with even more simplistic and less positive stereotypes about Nigeria and Africa in general. Ifemelu does, however, have the courage to contradict and humor her, which causes her relationship with Laura to be very tense. When they are looking at a magazine with a thin white woman holding a dark-skinned African baby in her arms and Laura comments on the woman's beauty, Ifemelu
Issues of racism and white privilege are of major concern to the protagonists of the novels. Deola's increasing awareness of discrimination based on skin color and racist ideologies appears to confirm her resolution to return to Nigeria. Similarly to Ifemelu in *Americanah*, she argues that she only became aware of racism in England and that in Nigeria it is not an issue for her. Even though she notices so many incidences of everyday discrimination in her life, she attempts to ignore them, which does not work, though: "She is loath to say an incident so trivial amounted to discrimination—it wasn't that straightforward, was it?—but she thinks it anyway" (*A Bit of Difference* 17).

Deola is aware of the weight of white privilege which she will always be excluded from. Ironically, she observes that even a man with skull tattoos on his arms is safe to make an offensive remark at an American airport due to his WASP identity (1). In the charity organization she works for, she encounters a version of white privilege which she finds especially irritating. The humanitarian business reveals its 'White Savior' character to her. She is disappointed by the condescending and self-righteous manner in which they treat her and the hypocrisy they display in their views of Africa. They have adopted Africa as their cause (209) and hold the same stereotypical views about it like mainstream media. Africa is reduced to images of poverty and disease which it needs to be saved from. Her boss, Graham prides himself in travelling to different African countries (the most European countries in Africa—Kenia and South Africa—as Deola observes) but does not even attempt to pronounce a Nigerian name correctly, while he will "struggle over a Russian name, though, and might even bite off his tongue to get a French name right" (178). Deola increasingly wonders if she is working for an industry "that thrives on an Africa that panders to the West" (108). They do not seem to be in the least interested in people becoming self-reliant. She is also concerned about her position as a European-based African who has been given the task to decide over other Africans' worthiness of Western aid. She increasingly feels as if she has just been hired because she is African, alongside Dára, their spokesperson, to add some 'authenticity'. She concludes that her position is not so dissimilar to Dára's after all, as they both seem to be used by the humanitarian industry.

In *Ghana Must Go*, 'whiteness' is mainly discussed in terms of beauty standards. Sadie's obsession with white girls and the twin's feelings of rootlessness and alienation due to their strong resemblance with their great-grandmother are connected to a longer tradition of oppressive constructions and practices related to 'whiteness'. With reference to Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*, the absurdity of these beauty standards is revealed in Taiwo's evaluation of her
dreadlocks: "Dreadlocks are black white-girl hair. A Black Power solution to a Bluest Eye Problem" (138).

Despite the prevalence of racism and discrimination, the characters in the novels do not assume a victim position. In *A Bit of Difference*, the word 'Oyinbo' is used to refer to white people. It means white, Westerner, Westernized, or simply foreign. The term is not negative per se but can assume ambivalent meanings. In the novel, it can also be seen as representing a counter-strategy to the debasing views on Africa or Africans: a form of mimicry turned against the one who is emulated. 'Oyinbo' transcends its direct attachment to skin color in that it is also used to describe non-white Nigerians who behave like their 'colonial masters'. Their mannerisms and lifestyles are frowned upon because it is believed that "they only put on oyinbo airs to make other Nigerians feel inferior" (*A Bit of Difference* 151). Deola points out, though, that people often act all 'Westernized' in public, while they still retain certain practices which are associated with their culture or traditions in private: "In public, he was a salad eater; in private, he had a woman on the side who cooked his cocoyams" (152).

The above-mentioned practices and strategies to assume or counter certain identity ascriptions based on constructions of race, gender etc. show that an identity or identities are not something a person has but identity construction is an on-going process which is influenced by categories such as the ones discussed above. Identity can be considered a performance which is continuously repeated and thus appears to be stable when, in fact, the construction process is never complete: "identity is performatively constituted by the very 'expressions' that are said to be its results" (Butler 1990: 25). The four novels expose the performance character of daily practices most explicitly with reference to language use. The characters' linguistic practices and routines are prominent issues in the novels, most explicitly in *Americanah* and *A Bit of Difference*. It is shown that the language or languages the characters use and the ways in which they use them are major elements, routines, in the processes of identity formation and of performing identity.

The tying of language to identity works on different levels, which is best illustrated in *Americanah*. Different varieties of English assume specific meanings for the characters in the context of the postcolonial condition and their diaspora experiences. When Ifemelu went to high school in Nigeria, English seemed to have been the major language of communication with her friends. However, it is implied that Igbo was very important for them as well; if not so

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10 See Judith Butler's concept of 'performing gender'.
much for communication at school, it still had high symbolic value. In one passage, Ifemelu competes with Obinze in terms of who knows more proverbs in Igbo (74). In her family, both English and Igbo are used.

People's relationships to their languages seem to be very complex and ambiguous. The older generation, such as Ifemelu's father and Obinze's mother, having grown up under colonial rule, are very attached to British English as their preferred language of communication. Ifemelu's father is described as particularly anxious to use a very formal, elevated type of English which he associates with education and social mobility. Obinze's mother, a university lecturer in literatures in English ("not English literature, mind you, but literatures in English" [83]) who takes pleasure in translating Igbo into English, seems to be much more conscious of the implications of their colonial past on language use. Her attitude towards English is still strongly influenced by this past as can be seen in her passionate defense of British English against her son's preference for the American variety (86).

However, not only the older generation but also the younger one is still affected by this ambiguity. Although Ifemelu and Obinze apparently take great pride in knowing Igbo well, they, at least at the time when they are still students in Nigeria, admire 'foreign' accents because they associate them with mobility, in terms of social class but also in terms of traveling and migration ("Everyone was talking about leaving" [120]). But while their parents are still closely attached to their former colonial empire, the younger generation seems to be more open to the world in general, especially the United States.

It is, in fact, implied on several occasions in the book that Western European languages enjoy higher prestige than the other local languages which are spoken in Nigeria. This can be clearly seen in a passage about the value of different private schools (in this case a French one): "Of course they teach in French but it can only be good for the child to learn another civilized language, since she already learns English at home" (35). 'Civilized' languages are apparently English and French; other local languages are not even mentioned.

In the United States, language takes on another layer of meaning. The way immigrants speak English determines their Americanness. Ifemelu becomes aware of that when she tries to register at her university in Philadelphia. At first, she wonders why she is addressed by the registry clerk in a deliberately slow manner of speaking, only to realize that her foreign accent is heavily stigmatized:

… she realized that Cristina Tomas was speaking like that because of her, her foreign accent, and she felt for a moment like a small child, lazy-limbed and drooling.

"I speak English," she said.
"I bet you do," Cristina Tomas said. "I just don't know how well." (Americanah 163)

Feeling humiliated by this experience, Ifemelu is determined to change her accent. She perfects her new way of speaking in the course of time but eventually decides to "stop faking an American accent" (213). Her decision is triggered by a call from a telemarketer who tells her upon hearing that she is originally not from the United States that she sounded "totally American". After the call, she feels ashamed "for thanking him, for crafting his words 'You sound American' into a garland that she hung around her neck" (215). By resuming to speak in her accent, she finally "returned her voice to herself" (221). It feels for her like returning from a "vast, echoing space, because she had taken on, for too long, a pitch of voice and a way of being that was not hers" (216). Language is here clearly tied to Ifemelu's identity, as her way of speaking actually becomes a way of being.

Ifemelu's aunt Uju and her cousin Dike are also characterized in terms of their language use. Dike, having grown up in the U.S. is described as speaking "a seamless American accent" (129), while aunt Uju is struggling to sound as American as possible. Igbo, however, seems to have turned into a "language of strife" (211). Uju only speaks it with her son when she scolds him. She lets Ifemelu know upon arrival that she should not use Igbo when talking to him, as two languages would only confuse him. For Uju, to be successful in America necessitates complete linguistic assimilation. Ifemelu also encounters this attitude in a hair salon. One of the hairdressers who is originally from Senegal and who is far from mastering an American accent herself, reacts surprised that Ifemelu has not adopted the accent after having stayed in the United States for thirteen years. Ifemelu observes about these attempts of linguistic assimilation, "And with the accent emerged a new persona, apologetic and self-abasing" (133), thus linking their way of speaking to their identity, their "new American self" (231). She exposes these selves as performance, though, as something that they might be able to "shrug out of" (231) when they are in spaces which are not marked as 'American' (for example in their homes or in the company of other immigrants from Africa).

The issues of language and accents are treated similarly in A Bit of Difference and We Need New Names. Darling observes that adopting an American accent is the best way to deal with the prejudices of Americans towards foreign accents as "the problem with those who speak only English is this: they don't know how to listen; they are busy looking at your falling instead of paying attention to what you are saying" (We Need New Names 194). She cannot understand why her aunt Fostalina is not making any attempts to 'sound American' and thus avoid the humiliation of not being understood when making phone orders. Even though Darling masters
her linguistic assimilation, she points out that when she gets too excited, she starts to sound like herself (221).

In *A Bit of Difference*, accents play a decisive role and function as markers of identity. Mastering a perfect English accent, which is called "speaking phonetics" by Nigerians, is considered to be vital for success. Deola is described to play up her English accent at work "so that people might not assume she lacks intelligence" (21). This connection between being able to speak English with a British accent and the person's intelligence or their educational background is also made by Deola herself when she invokes his "questionable English" as an indicator for Dará being a "bush boy" (6). In Nigeria, however, outside her social class milieu, Deola's English accent rather works against her by making her feel like an outsider. Only when she proves to speak Yoruba can she establish a certain familiarity and trust. Thus, in the Nigerian context, language is seen as an indicator of social class background as well as a bridge to people of different milieus and educational backgrounds.

Language can also be used as a form of resistance. In *Americanah*, Ifemelu consciously drops her American accent to sound more like herself again. In *We Need New Names*, singing songs in her mother tongue becomes a means for Darling to retain some kind of connection to her roots despite all the years she has been living in the United States. And in *A Bit of Difference*, the connection of language use or accent to success is disrupted by Subu, Deola's friend, who is described as being very successful despite not changing her way of speaking.

Language is, however, not only explored in terms of accents and varieties but also regarding style and its potential to alienate and segregate people. Ifemelu who is an academic herself and develops a high awareness of issues which could be called 'postcolonial' or 'anti-racist' remains, nevertheless, closely tied to pop and mainstream culture and has an aversion against language which is too academic. She is described as a young woman who is very well familiar with American literature but at the same time as a person who likes reading fashion magazines. She is not impressed by her father's use of pompous words or intimidated by Blaine's academic background. Instead, she says, "Sometimes I feel that they [academics] live in a parallel universe of academia speaking academese instead of English and they don't really know what's happening in the real world" (*Americanah* 220). In another passage, she admits that people who use words such as 'reify' make her nervous (5-6). She prefers discussing the sociopolitical and cultural issues critically in her lifestyle blog in very informal language. This characterization of Ifemelu reminds of the critique which is often hurled at postcolonial and postmodernist scholars of working in a closed-off Western academic environment which is only
interested in theory, oblivious to the real situation on the ground. One of the blog poster's names 'Sapphic-Derrida' seems to strongly suggest such a reading.

The importance of language is also reflected in the way the novels are written. All four authors' use of English is interspersed here and there with some words or phrases in their respective African varieties, either with English translations, or in some cases, the meanings of the words or phrases are apparent from the context. The words in the African language varieties are marked and employed in a way which suggests that the novels are targeted at a global audience. Based on the way the writers have employed language in their novels, critics have accused them of writing for a Western audience. This notion does not seem to be justified, though, in consideration of the fact that the world does not exist of binaries, such as the West and the respective nation the writer originates from, but of a great diversity of places and people who might want to access these novels.

In the novels and most explicitly in *A Bit of Difference* and *Americanah*, it is suggested that language is one way of performing an identity and at the same time a strategy of either fulfilling expectations of others or disrupting them. For the characters, it matters not only *what* language they speak, but especially *how* they speak it. Both Ifemelu and Deola but also Darling in *We Need New Names* assert that the use of a different accent than the one which they have grown up with is a kind of masquerade or strategy which serves certain purposes, such as sounding 'American' or 'intelligent'. Deola explicitly calls this kind of languaging 'mimicry': "Speaking phonetics is instinctive now, but only performers enjoy mimicking. Performers and apes" (*A Bit of Difference* 21). In her harsh dismissal and rejection of 'language performance', she seems to refer to Achebe's influential postcolonial work *Things Fall Apart*: "Even to her own ears she sounds fake and she is tired of rounding her vowels. Rounding her vowels hurts her mouth. She wonders what would happen if Nigerians refused to speak phonetics for one day. Would their worlds fall apart?" (241).

With reference to Bhabha's theories, the zealously exhibited by Ifemelu's father at school and his eager use of the English language can be seen as acts of mimicry. Bhabha's concept is also evoked by the description of his elevated manners as costume. However, the mimicry does not seem to be successful in terms of benefitting enough of it to become sufficiently empowered.

Mimicry is also a recurring theme in *A Bit of Difference*. It is suggested that Africans sometimes perform the role of the 'African in need'; deception becomes a strategy of survival and resistance against (neo-)colonial practices. Deola argues that Africans "know when they
are being patronized" and that pretending to be especially naïve and vulnerable can be a strategy employed to "capitalize on [this] patronage" (192). When her colleague at the charity in London tells her about her good relationship with the director of the NGO in Nigeria, Deola observes, "… she is an oyinbo to Rita, someone Rita can easily deceive" (216). In *A Bit of Difference*, the employment of the trope of masquerade and mimicry is, however, not limited to people. In an interesting observation, Deola describes the landscape of Lagos as "passive-aggressive", stubbornly resisting urbanization and development. She calls the signs of urbanization a "façade" (102).

*Ghana Must Go* focuses on the effects of performance on a family. Their roles, such as that of the Provider, the Suburban Housewife, etc., are connected to certain expectations which derive from and are influenced by factors such as their status as an immigrant family, views of masculinity/femininity, and others. In many ways, they can be read as typical aspirations of an American middle-class family, but they are complicated through their immigration history and their colonial background. The performance aspect is most explicitly highlighted in the description of Kweku as having an invisible cameraman following him around. His life is thus perceived as a continual performance and Kweku as acting out a role which is informed by his postcolonial trauma and immigrant insecurities. The question arises, though, whether not life in general can or should be seen as a performance or a series of performances in our postmodern world.

Performance as acts of mimicry clearly refers to the characters' history of colonialism. Most particularly, the interweaving of different generations in the novels allows the readers to catch a glimpse of the countries' colonial past, together with its effects on the present. Colonialism and its consequences for the individual are most explicitly discussed in *Ghana Must Go* and *Americanah*. In *Ghana Must Go*, African parents are described as suffering from a 'postcolonial angst' which is rooted in feelings of powerlessness and insecurity (233). Their problems forming a self-affirming identity is directly linked to them being born and raised under colonialism.

In *Americanah*, Ifemelu's father is explicitly described as a 'colonial subject'. His passion for Western education and an immaculate English accent as well as his feelings of inadequacy are related to his upbringing under a colonial missionary school system. In her discussion of postcolonial literature, Hena Ahmad highlights the way the colonial education system created a highly competitive and segregative environment in which race, class, and gender functioned as factors of exclusion due to the association of western education with social upwardly mobile
success (57-58). Ifemelu's father, despite having had the privilege to attend a missionary school, only had access to this upward movement to a limited extent. His identification with Western education seems to have led to a certain self-alienation (see Ahmad 66) and feelings of insecurity which are even aggravated by the humiliation of losing his job.

In the description of Ifemelu's father, a more traditional perspective towards hybrid or multiple identities becomes visible. He is depicted as suffering from self-alienation caused by his colonial upbringing and schooling which is exacerbated by a post- or neocolonial environment that is still ruled by strong hierarchies which are structured by the possession of money and material goods, reminding of Fanon's contention that "national liberation did not end class oppression" (qtd. in Ahmad 54). However, it is implied in his description that the colonial influence is not irreversible. The father's 'Westernized' self is more like a costume or armor which he wears, but he has another identity which is revealed when he uses his Igbo language. The character of Ifemelu's father whose description reminds of popular postcolonial mimicry tropes fulfills the purpose of depicting an older generation of Nigerians in contrast to a younger one which Ifemelu and Obinze are representatives of and which has a very different, much more global, outlook on the world.

In *We Need New Names*, the character of Tshaka Zulu is a representative of an old generation who lives in the diaspora. The old man from Zimbabwe stays in a nursing home in the United States. He appears to be quite lost and confused in terms of where he is. In one scene towards the end of the novel, he is tragically shot by the police when he leaves the nursing home armed with a spear thinking that he is still in Zimbabwe during colonial times fighting for freedom against the white colonialists (269-273). As in the case of Darling's grandmother, it can be assumed that he experienced a range of political and social changes in his life, including migration. It is suggested that, unlike the younger generation, older people find it considerably harder to reconcile the different influences on their identity constructions and to overcome the trauma inflicted on them through the colonial encounter.

While the young generation in *Americanah* as well as in *Ghana Must Go* who grew up in the diaspora also seems to suffer from a certain kind of rootlessness, Deola's Nigeria-based nieces and nephews have fewer problems navigating through a world which has become more and more global. Modern technology and especially social media are described to play a major role in their relationship to both their home as well as the world around them. For them, it is normal and a part of their daily lives to combine both and boundaries between the two concepts appear to become more and more fluid. Deola marvels at how much easier it is for them to school abroad nowadays than it was for her. Homesickness is not such a big problem anymore,
as they can always be in touch with their families through the internet. Black culture as well as Western culture, most especially influences from the U.S., are omnipresent everywhere and the boundaries become more and more blurred. Even their colonial past is too far away for them to be able to relate to it. When Deola tells them stories about her childhood, they ask her what a 'colony' is. Regarding identity, they consider themselves Nigerians and they only speak English. These changes are probably what make Wale suggest that instead of the common belief in the West that people from Africa have to catch up with the rest of the world, it is rather the other way around (A Bit of Difference 249).

Migration and mobility are important routines and a key theme in all four novels. However, movements take on different meanings and directions in the characters' development. When Ifemelu and Obinze, the central characters of Americanah, are still in high school and thereafter at the university in Nigeria, everyone in their circle of friends is talking of leaving (120). It is mentioned that some of their friends already travel abroad regularly for holidays, mostly to England. Others eventually migrate due to the difficulties they encounter in a politically and economically unstable Nigeria (e.g. continuous strikes at the universities): "I have not been able to do any real research in years, because every day I am organizing strikes and talking about unpaid salary and there is no chalk in the classrooms" (77-78). While their parents still felt very attached to England, for the younger generation, America becomes a new destination of interest and longing: "American passport is the coolest thing … I would exchange my British passport tomorrow" (79). Traveling internationally, is, however, not open to everyone but only to an upper, wealthy class of Nigerians. Ifemelu does not fully belong to that class but still manages to migrate due to a sponsorship offer and the fact that her aunt already stays in the United States.

Mobility is not restricted to movements between countries or continents but also occurs and is even more common between cities and localities within countries. In Nigeria, the two main characters Ifemelu and Obinze are continuously on the move. First, Obinze shifts to Lagos because his mother is there for her sabbatical and later Ifemelu travels to Nsukka University for her studies. Nsukka is described as a completely new and different place for her. The same in-country-mobility applies to the United States. In the course of the novel, Ifemelu moves from New York to Philadelphia, to Baltimore, to New Haven, to Princeton, with visits to Massachusetts, and other places. These cities and towns are not only mentioned but described vividly in terms of landscape, color, even scent. Accra has different colors than Lagos, Philadelphia smells different from Baltimore, the landscape of Nsukka is not comparable to that of other parts of Nigeria, to live in Westminster in London does not feel the same as living in
Lewisham, and so on and so forth. The descriptions of multiple locations within countries complicate any essentialist notions of nations and simplistic comparisons of geographical space based on binary constructions.

Another layer is added to the complexity by describing certain places as 'white spaces' (such as the small town in Massachusetts which Aunty Uju moves to or the suburbs where Ifemelu works as a babysitter). Other places are, on the other hand, characterized as poor areas and thus associated with a stronger presence of immigrants. In this sense, physical locations can also take on racial/ethnic or class connotations.

For Deola and her family and friends, mobility has always been an integral part of their lives, due to their membership of a certain privileged social class in Nigeria which can afford this kind of lifestyle. Deola explains that "Of the Ikoyi crowd, she is one of the few living abroad. The rest fly in and out and educate their children overseas. In the summer, they go on family holidays to get away from the rain" (A Bit of Difference 86). Preferred new destinations are Dubai and China, thus disrupting the colonial 'children of the empire' narrative. Living abroad, as compared to flying in and out, is, in fact, not seen as positively and desirable as in Americanah. Deola explains that in her youth these kids were called 'Aways' with a rather negative connotation because they were considered arrogant.

Traveling is shown to be not something new which is only accessible to the young generation, but has, in fact, also shaped the lives of her parents and their generation of Nigerians. Furthermore, it does not only involve movements to other countries but, like in Americanah, also within the country. Travels to the hometown of Deola's father are mentioned, for example. In consideration of her father's rural background and Deola's upbringing in Lagos, these two locations can easily appear as if they are two different worlds. Spaces outside of Lagos are described as being completely unfamiliar to Deola: the muslim context of Abuja with its strict rules of conduct for women in public spaces, for example, or the underprivileged widows who are supported by the NGO Widows in Need whose life expectancy according to statistics is thirty-nine years. Despite growing up in the same country, she is not really able to relate to these contexts due to her urban upbringing and her more privileged status in society. The statistics on deaths caused by HIV/AIDS appear unreal to her. She says about the people who belong to her social class in society, "Their parents were taken down by cancer, heart attacks and strokes. Respectable diseases." (109).

In the popular mind, migration is usually considered a one-way process, especially if people travel from non-Western countries to Western ones. In Americanah and A Bit of Difference, the two central characters return to Nigeria. Ifemelu, for example, feels a "dull ache
of loss" and "homesickness" and longs to "sink her roots in" Nigerian soil (Americanah 7). The global flow of people (see Appadurai's concept of 'ethnoscapes') is shown to work in different, multiple directions, thereby breaking down not only the colonial 'heart of darkness narrative' but also equally simplistic postcolonial narratives of '(former) colonial subjects flocking to the metropolis' and myths of the 'migrant intellectual with a superior awareness of their postcolonial condition'.

Ghana Must Go features two generations of people with African roots in the United States with different experiences and initial outlooks with regard to mobility. For Kweku and Fola, mobility usually meant leaving a place and was associated with escaping from something (such as poverty or war). Their children have grown up with a different perspective on mobility. For them, it is a part of their lifestyle.

The situation for Darling and her friends in We Need New Names is more complicated. They are not able to move back and forth in the same way as the characters of the other novels do. She faces serious restrictions due to her low socioeconomic background and the unstable situation in Zimbabwe. When she migrates to the United States as a refugee, her options with regard to mobility are very limited. Her situation reminds more of the less privileged characters in the other novels (such as the hair stylists in Americanah) than the well-to-do protagonists. Darling and her friends' dreams and games involving other places around the world can, however, be read as an example of the global outlook of young people in Zimbabwe and on the African continent as such and reminds that traveling can also take place in the imagination.

In fact, all four novels show that the movement of people is not the only way traveling can be perceived. In reference to Appadurai's concept of different 'scapes', other types of flows can be identified: the flow of media images or ideas and ideologies, for example. These flows are not unidirectional but spread in different ways and directions. In many cases, they become indigenized and something new is created. In London, Deola realizes, for example, that black culture is everywhere, in all kinds of shapes. Thus, the colonial narratives of the unidirectional imposition of Western or European culture and values on the colonies and simplified views of mimicry by the colonial subjects are undermined. Furthermore, black culture is not the only influence which can be felt globally. American mainstream culture appears to be ubiquitous as well (199).

Despite the seemingly universal reach and influence of different cultural images, representations are not considered equal in capturing the complexity and heterogeneity of the respective places and societies. In fact, cultural and media representations and depictions of
Africa appear to be a particularly controversial and contended issue. NoViolet Bulawayo has been accused of reproducing stereotypical representations of Africa through her descriptions of poverty, AIDS, child pregnancy, etc. in Zimbabwe and thus creating an "African aesthetic of suffering" (Habila "We Need New Names"). In contrast, Selasi and Adichie focus in their novels on (upper) middle-class characters, which has led critics to rebuke them for ignoring the fates and struggles of the less privileged and to accuse them of writing for a Western audience. Critics talk about a 'new single story' for Africa. In fact, the opposite seems to be true. Writers such as Adichie but also others before her have actually opened up spaces for alternative narratives and characters to those found in the mainstream media representations and in popular culture where a mixture of exoticism and racism is not uncommon. All four novels deal with such stereotypical representations of Africa, not only in the media but also in the consciousness of the people the characters encounter:

And when they asked us where we were from, we exchanged glances and smiled with the shyness of child brides. They said, Africa? We nodded yes. What part of Africa? We smiled. Is it that part where vultures wait for famished children to die? We smiled. Where the life expectancy is thirty-five years? We smiled. Is it there where dissidents shove AK-47s between women's legs? We smiled. Where people run about naked? We smiled. That part where they massacred each other? We smiled. Is it where the old president rigged the election and people were tortured and killed … , there where they are dying of cholera—oh my God, yes, we've seen your country; it's been on the news. (We Need New Names, 237-238)

The characters keep tumbling across very similar ideas about Africa which mainly revolve around violence, hunger, poverty, corruption, oppression, human rights violations. The image is conveyed that Africa is unchangeably doomed through poverty, diseases, and violence, with children and women being the favorite victims of oppression, no matter which country or region. The novels also portray the often curious mixture of fascination and repulsion which characterizes representations of Africa and the idea that it requires saving from the West. Darling hears a woman say "Africa is beautiful … But isn't it terrible what's happening in the Congo?" (We Need New Names 175) and Ifemelu encounters both racism and exoticism in the home where she works as a babysitter. On the one hand, Africa is constructed as a place full of danger and suffering; on the other hand, Africans are projected as pure and unadulterated, which is admired but at the same time also looked down upon.

Additionally, in A Bit of Difference, the protagonist encounters another prejudice which is usually targeted at educated Africans in the diaspora: that their presence would contribute to a 'brain drain' in their countries of origin. Deola dismisses this accusation by pointing out that
"there are enough brains in Africa" and concludes that this argument is "a polite alternative for people who might want to say 'Go back to Africa'" (119).

The mainstream representations of Africa do not appeal to the characters in the novels because they can neither recognize nor identify with them. Their experiences and perspectives are absent. In *A Bit of Difference*, the craving for more diverse and balanced representations is expressed as follows: "What she [Deola] would give to see a boring old banker going on about capital growth, as they do in Nigeria, just for once. Why not? Don't they exist? Don't they count?" (291). In the novels, the stereotypical representations are exposed and openly rejected and, even more importantly, complexity and balance are added. The representations of the places which are located on the African continent do not have much in common with the 'poverty-porn' of many mainstream representations. While focusing mainly on family and relationships, the characters in the novels are by no means uncritical in their assessment of the spaces they inhabit. No matter whether they are in the diaspora or in an African country, they usually apply in what they experience and see a politically, economically, and socially sensitive lens, which often results in (self-)critical comments on the corruption and flamboyant lifestyle of a wealthy upper-middle-class which they themselves are part of. This also applies to *We Need New Names* even though the focus lies on less privileged characters.

In the novels, a wider range of African positionalities and subjectivities is opened up, and the characters' experiences are particularized and individualized while at the same time refusing to be regarded as exceptions. Deola, for example, in *A Bit of Difference*, calls her certainly very privileged family "not typical but … hardly unique" either (282), thus at the same time acknowledging their privilege in Nigerian society but refusing to be considered exceptional. The lack of individuality in mainstream representations and the essentializing treatment of immigrants in the diaspora is observed in *Ghana Must Go*. In the United States, the characters' stories lose their distinctiveness and individuality. They become generic ones, the people themselves "identityless" and "estranged from all context": "Surely, broad-shouldered, woolly-haired fathers of natives of hot war-torn countries got killed all the time" (107). Fola's history as a teenager who loved the Beatles and grew up in a pampered environment until the death of her father is lost once she lives in the United States and all that is left is the generic story of an orphan from a generic war-torn country. *Ghana Must Go* as well as the other novels in their own ways make a strong case for their characters' individuality and distinctiveness.
Different forms of representation and cultural practices play a very significant role in the four texts. These often appear in the form of intertextual references. Cultural practices such as reading and listening to and/or playing music seem to be an important ritual for many characters in the novels. All four texts feature numerous references to artists, especially writers and musicians. These references seem to have several purposes. First of all, they can be seen as a celebration of and tribute to African and/or black culture and art. The appreciation of literature and other forms of art are, however, not limited to black culture. In *A Bit of Difference*, the use of intertextual references is especially pronounced. Coetzee is named alongside James Baldwin as two writers Bandele especially admires. During her visit to Nigeria, Deola, for example, starts re-reading Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*, a classic which she used to love in her teenage years. She finds the characters of *Pride and Prejudice* quite similar to a Nigerian family. In the course of the novel, she discards it, though, arguing that her reality is not like a Jane Austen novel. Ifemelu in *Americanah* likes reading as a teenager but her taste in books changes in the course of the novel. When she is still in high school in Nigeria, she tells Obinze that she only likes "crime and thrillers. Sheldon, Ludlum, Archer" (72). Later, in the US, she becomes intrigued with a greater variety of literary works. Obinze is described as a great lover of American literature. Furthermore, a number of references are made to English authors such as Graham Greene as well as African American ones such as Jean Toomer and, again, James Baldwin. As far as music is concerned, a wide range of different styles is mentioned, from classical music to U.S. gangster rap. Similarly to Deola, Taiwo in *Ghana Must Go* remembers the classical composers of her piano lessons during her childhood. Apart from being very talented at playing the piano, Taiwo was drawn to Greek and Latin classics and writing.

The variety of different art forms can also be interpreted as suggesting change. This change is, however, not linear. It is strongly implied that all these different styles and cultural forms have their place in the lives of Deola and her friends, from a Fela Kuti concert to the Tate Museum to the choir of a Pentecostal Church, again pointing to the cultural hybridity of most of the characters and the spaces they inhabit.

Through the numerous references to iconic African American writers, activists, and musicians, such as Angela Davies, James Baldwin, and Toni Morrison, a sense of Pan-Africanism is expressed in the novels. It is also visible in the relationships the characters entertain in the diaspora. These relationships do not represent uncritical celebrations of a 'mythical common African identity' but are shown in their complexities which are grounded in people's different histories and backgrounds.
In *Americanah*, the networks and relationships between Africans and African Americans, on the one hand, and between Africans from different African countries who live in the United States, on the other hand, are explicitly discussed in her blog entries. The relationship between Africans and African Americans is described as a complicated one. Africans are seen as unable to fully relate to the experiences of African Americans, as they do not share in the history of slavery and the oppression rooted in its atrocities in the same way they do.

Ifemelu encounters different people from Africa in the United States: Non-American Blacks in America as she calls them to differentiate them from African Americans. Even though they often differ in their national as well as class backgrounds, she enjoys their "shared space of … Africanness" (126). At the university, she enters the African Students Association which provides an opportunity for her to share and compare similar experiences. In the hair salon, she also senses a shared Africanness, but she is aware of her privileges and her belonging to a different social class in society. The hairdressers' attempts to establish solidarity with Ifemelu are frustrated, as she rejects certain rituals which they are used to (e.g. watching Nigerian movies). Obinze also encounters a "shared space of Africanness" with the woman who he intends to marry in the United Kingdom. He does, however, also have negative experiences in this respect.

It seems to be implied that Pan-Africanism plays a role in the diaspora due to their common immigrant history and experiences of discrimination but that divisions nonetheless exist, both between African Americans and Non-American Blacks as well as among Non-American Blacks. The relationships are structured by factors such as class, region as well as gender, sexuality, and probably many others. For example, when Obinze meets a woman from Ghana at his workplace as a cleaner in the United Kingdom, the woman prefers to associate with a white woman from Poland. Furthermore, differentiations are made between immigrants from Africa and immigrants from the Caribbean.

Despite being aware of differences as the title suggests and which is also shown in Deola's self-chosen distance from another woman of Nigerian descent who was born in England, *A Bit of Difference* also points to a certain solidarity among black women, especially in the face of the crude prejudices and stereotypes they encounter on an almost daily basis. Deola wonders whether such kind of solidarity, such as showing mutual understanding by rolling eyes at each other when encountering such stereotypes, also exists among *oyinbo*, that is white, women.
In addition to the description of Pan-African relations, the state of African and/or Postcolonial Literature is reflected on. Interestingly, all four novels openly pay tribute to the 'father' of Postcolonial Literature, Chinua Achebe, and his work *Things Fall Apart.* Certain things do fall apart in Adichie's, Atta's, Selasi's, and Bulawayo's novels as well, but the four authors represent a different generation of writers with a different outlook on the world and the spaces they inhabit. They show that there is no simple and straightforward answer to Deola's question "Isn't our entire existence as Africans postcolonial?" (47).

This is best illustrated in *A Bit of Difference.* In Atta's novel, the role of African Postcolonial Literature is indeed a key theme which is discussed in a very differentiated manner. Bandele is a writer, and although he does not identify as an African, he participates in an African literary competition. He adores writers such as J.M. Coetzee but otherwise judges postcolonial literature harshly. About the winner of the competition he says, "He writes the same postcolonial crap the rest of them write" (47) and finds only derisive words for African postcolonial writers:

> Africa should be called the Sob Continent the way they carry on. It's all gloom and doom from them, and the women are worse, all that false angst. Honestly, and if I hear another poet in a headwrap bragging about the size of her ample bottom or likening her skin to the colour of a nighttime beverage, I don't know what I will do. (*A Bit of Difference* 47)

For him, the competition has the appearance of a charity event where only those writers have a chance of winning who fit a certain image of an African writer. Bandele refuses to be squeezed into a category because it feels too narrow to him. His novel is a love story, and when Deola asks him if his characters are Nigerian, he replies, "Is that relevant?" (192), hence seemingly assuming a certain universalism for his kind of literature. Deola is, however, not satisfied with his answer: "They must come from somewhere in the world. Okay, where is the story set?" (193). She rejects her friends' universal assumptions and insists on, at least, some form of localization.

*A Bit of Difference* is even more outspoken about the problematics of what is considered African literature. Deola calls African novels "too exotic for her" and feels that they are "meant for Western readers" (190). In this context, the title of the winning novel of the African literary competition is discussed by Deola and Bandele. "The Death of the African Writer" points to two different layers of meaning. First of all, it refers to the tendency to kill off African characters and the trope of African suffering in mainstream representations. On a meta-level, it can also be seen as a statement on the state of African literature as such, a state of "literary genocide" (191), reminding of the debate on the category 'African literature' or 'African writer'.

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This critical stance towards Postcolonial or African Literature is also visible in *Americanah*. Ifemelu rejects V.S. Naipaul's *A Bend in the River* for its racist representations of Africa. The bias and racism in the choices of what is considered and celebrated as postcolonial and African literature by a Western-dominated and -controlled literary market are thus revealed and rejected at the same time.

## 2 Relationships

The rituals and practices described above are not performed in a vacuum but are embedded in the complex interactions between the characters. Relationships are of utmost importance in all four novels. These relationships and interactions affect the characters' lives and identities at least to the same extent as their rituals and routines. *Americanah*—maybe partly due to its length—shows the greatest complexity as far as the number of different characters and their interactions and relations are concerned.

In *Americanah*, the two main characters Ifemelu and Obinze are in constant interaction with other characters in the novel. Ifemelu and Obinze's relationship or love story is central to the narrative as it functions as a frame and a connecting device. First of all, it connects Ifemelu to her life in Nigeria, which can be seen in the recurring references even when she is not in touch with him anymore, and serves as an explanation for her attitudes and motivations. Secondly, it enables the author to explore the issue of migration from different angles and in different locations. The novel could have also been written just with one character (Ifemelu), but with the additional experiences of Obinze, it gains more complexity. Furthermore, their relationship serves as a frame to show the characters' personal development and levels of self-awareness. The readers first encounter them together as teenagers and later, after being separated for many years and each making their own experiences in different countries and under different circumstances, again as adults.

Apart from Obinze, Ifemelu's parents connect her to Nigeria. Their relationship appears to be quite close, as she even invites them for a visit to the United States, but Ifemelu is also very critical of their weaknesses. After so many years abroad, their lives appear provincial and petty to her. Generally speaking, she seems to be slightly closer to her father than her mother because they have more in common (e.g. their interest in reading, in politics, in education). Her mother's excessive religiosity and focus on material things do not seem to be very appealing to
her. Ifemelu is also close with Obinze's mother. She admires her air of sophistication and independence. She seems to represent a kind of role model for her during her time as Obinze's girlfriend.

A very important relationship in the novel is the one between Ifemelu and Aunty Uju. Aunty Uju, who is just a few years older than Ifemelu and who remains the most important fellow Nigerian for her in the United States, for a long time represents a kind of negative example of the effects of migration on the migrant subject. In Nigeria, Aunty Uju seemed to be a close confidant for Ifemelu, as a strong-willed woman who always helped her out in difficult situations. In the United States, their relationship changes. Aunty Uju is easily irritable, which is partly attributed to her stress from working three jobs while studying at the same time and the discriminations she encounters. Whereas the relationship with her aunt becomes more distant, Ifemelu strongly bonds with Uju's son, Dike. For him, she represents a bridge and link to his mother's past.

Apart from Ifemelu's relatives, different other people influence and help shaping her life and her critical consciousness. In her job as a babysitter, she develops a relationship with Kimberly, the mother of the two children she takes care of. Ifemelu takes an immediate liking to her, even though she finds her too apologetic and eager to please at times. Kimberly is, together with her husband, involved in different charities and takes great interest in Ifemelu's Nigerian background.

Through Kimberley, Ifemelu meets Curt who she has a romantic relationship with. Curt is described to be a very wealthy man with a sunny, always optimistic nature. He offers Ifemelu a comfortable, even luxurious, lifestyle and he also helps her find her first job. After a while, however, Ifemelu starts doubting their relationship due to Curt's extremely outgoing, attention-seeking personality. The description of their relationship also suggests that a certain exoticism is involved. It is mentioned that Curt almost always had relationships with women from other ethnicities and that it was his first one with a black woman. Ifemelu, despite enjoying the comfortable lifestyle, seems to sense this tendency and eventually breaks up with him.

After living alone for a while, she meets Blaine, an African American assistant lecturer at Yale University. Blaine is an intellectual who is extremely committed to antiracist work. At first, Ifemelu, as a non-American black, feels like an outsider but through Blaine, she learns more about the African American struggle. It is, however, implied that she will nonetheless never be able to fully share in Blaine's activism and passion. Blaine, on the other hand, feels excluded from the spaces she shares with fellow Africans.
Like Ifemelu, the protagonist in *We Need New Names* has an aunt who lives in the United States. There are certain similarities in the depiction of the two women, such as their eagerness to adapt to the 'American culture' and the discriminations and frustrations which they encounter. Furthermore, both women have a son. Darling's relationship to her relatives in the United States is, however, much more distant than Ifemelu's. She does not seem to be able to connect with them at all. The same applies to her friends Marina and Kristal. All of the relationships Darling enjoys in the U.S. appear to be strangely lifeless and detached.

In Zimbabwe, in contrast, Darling and her group of friends used to share a very strong bond. At first glance, the main motivator for their close relationship seems to have been their common struggle for survival. While it is true that it is easier to survive in a group, it is slowly revealed that their relationship is, in fact, deeper than expected. This can be seen in the scene describing her friends' compassionate and extremely supportive reaction towards Darling's dying father. However, unlike in *Americanah* and *A Bit of Difference*, for Darling, relationships cannot serve as motivation to return to Zimbabwe. Her friend who remained there makes it clear to her that their relationship has irrevocably changed due to Darling's long absence.

In *A Bit of Difference*, Deola is described as very lonely in London. She is not part of the Nigerian diaspora community which is called too big and fractured. Despite having a few closer friends, Deola cannot escape her loneliness. For her, her relationships which she still entertains with her family are the strongest motivation to return to Nigeria.

In London, Deola's closer personal interactions are limited to three friends: Bandele, Subu, and Tessa. Towards other people in her daily life, such as her colleagues at work, she remains distant and rather evasive. Even her relationship with her three friends is ambivalent. Deola mentions on several occasions that she does not always want to be around them. She finds Bandele too complicated and moody at times, and Subu too much focused on religion and material things.

Deola's family with all their flaws and potential to unnerve her is the most stable factor in her life. Despite their little conflicts, she is very close to them, especially to her mother and her siblings. They appear to be the only people who Deola feels loved by the way she is. Even though Deola still needs time for herself and does not spare them from criticism, the presence of her family and relatives seem to make her feel less detached from the world and more comfortable in her own skin. When Wale enters her life, she allows herself to lower her guards a bit, even though he is a stranger to her, but, in line with her personality, it is still suggested that it will take time until she fully trusts him.
An exploration of the complex relationships between the main characters takes center stage in *Ghana Must Go*. They are shown to be strongly influenced by the characters' past experiences and sometimes even their parents' past. Kweku and Fola's histories of leaving and loss have made them extremely wary of love and commitment and it seems that their children have been adversely affected by their feelings of insecurity and self-doubt.

In the beginning, Kweku and Fola are described as a couple who love each other deeply and who understand and accept each other's idiosyncrasies and traumas. In fact, it comes as a surprise when Kweku abandons his wife and they both move on with their lives without questions or explanations and without trying to find each other. In the course of the novel, it is revealed that their love for each other did not suffice to overcome their own insecurities and traumatic histories.

Fola had sacrificed her career for Kweku and her children, but for Kweku this gesture translated into enormous pressure to fulfill her expectations and avoid disappointments by all means. In Ama, Kweku's second wife, he finds the exact opposite: a woman he does not love as much as Fola but who he also does not feel indebted to; he feels "finally sufficient" (51) with her. While Fola represented for Kweku a new beginning after overcoming and leaving behind a life in poverty and later reminded him of his failure to achieve his aspirations and fulfill the expectations he had imposed on himself, Ama reconnects him to his suppressed past. He describes her as "a product of here, hut, heat, raffia, West Africa, the perpetual past" (52).

For Fola, Kweku is another person close to her who abandons her. Her reaction to his death, however, shows that she has never stopped feeling close to him despite their separation. Fola's relocation to Ghana also seems to indicate that after many years she still unconsciously seeks Kweku's proximity even though they are not in touch with each other. Like her children, Kweku is described to be a part of her and his death literally causes her physical pain.

Olu has inherited Kweku's zeal and anxieties of failure. His father's abandonment seems to have exacerbated his insecurities to the extent of giving up on love. His relationship with Ling suffers from his rejection of emotions and appears very cold and distanced. Ling's father makes it worse by attacking him with the same stereotypes he abhors and which he sees confirmed through the actions of his own father. Only when he travels to Ghana for his father's funeral is he able to confront his grievances. It is suggested that a healing process has started which involves the beginning of a healthier relationship with Ling.

The bond between Kehinde and Taiwo is probably the closest within the family owing to the fact that they are twins and have always been somehow singled out for looking different from their parents and their siblings. It is mentioned that they can feel what the other one is
thinking without saying it aloud, but that special bond receives a heavy blow when they are sent to Nigeria to their abusive uncle. Back in the United States, they continue suffering from their traumatic experiences in Lagos, which causes them to drift apart. Like their siblings, they finally manage to confront their individual and collective pain when they reunite in Ghana. Despite their reconciliation, they also realize that they have to let other people into their lives such as their other family members and Kehinde's art manager who he discovers that he is in love with.

Sadie is the one who is, of all her children, closest to Fola. They share a special bond because she almost died as a baby. Sadie, having always felt like an outsider in the family because she has fewer memories of her father, longs for a stable, united family which provides the security and acceptance which she so desperately craves. In Ghana, she is not only reunited with her mother and her siblings, but she also finds a hidden talent (dancing) which connects her to her Ghanaian relatives.

In *Ghana Must Go*, clearly, relationships seem to be more important than aspects of location. This appears to be especially true for Kweku and Fola's children. All the relationships presented are complicated and troubled in a way but not dysfunctional. Despite the struggles, conflicts, and jealousies, the bonds within the family are very strong and prove to hold the family together as they are scattered around the world. The individual characters are hurting from past grievances, from life itself as migrants with a history of colonialism and alienation. While real healing for Kweku and Fola does not seem possible, it is suggested that their children have a chance to overcome the effects of their parents' past by creating and committing to meaningful and lasting relationships: "We learned how to love. Let them learn how to stay" (317). In *Americanah* and *A Bit of Difference*, relationships are of similar importance. They are the main drivers for the characters' actions and decisions, and they represent bridges between different people, different times as well as different places. In *We Need New Names*, the positive influence and potential of relationships are explored, but they eventually fail to empower the main characters of the novel in the face of insurmountable restrictions.
3 Restrictions

Despite the great number of rituals and relationships which function as enabling factors and motivations for the characters' multilocality, they also experience restrictions with regard to their mobility (in a physical as well as a social sense). Restrictions can be analyzed in different ways. They can relate to the obstacles to free movements (between places or within social hierarchies), or they can be connected to forced mobility, when someone is prevented from remaining. Both types of restrictions are present in all four novels. The second type is most commonly related to war, political instability, and poverty as reasons for forced migration (as in *We Need New Names* and *Ghana Must Go*). In *Americanah*, another perspective is presented through Obinze: that of a lack of prospects which can lead young people to leave their countries of origin.

As far as the freedom of movement is concerned, immigration policies represent a major obstacle for people. In *Americanah*, *A Bit of Difference*, and *Ghana Must Go*, most of the protagonists came as students to the United States or England and managed to acquire citizenship. The fates of Obinze in *Americanah* and Darling in *We Need New Names* show, however, that immigration policies can have serious implications for people's movements. Obinze's application for a U.S. visa is rejected several times when he tries to follow Ifemelu. His only choice is to travel on his mother's passport to the United Kingdom where she attends a conference. After his six months tourist visa has expired, his only option to remain there is to turn into an illegal immigrant. When he tries to attain permanent residency through a sham marriage, he is caught and deported to Nigeria. Although not explicitly mentioned, it can be assumed that Darling's immigration status, at least at the beginning, is that of an asylum seeker, which means that she cannot visit her home country.

Money, it is suggested, makes traveling much easier. Even though African nationals still require visas to travel to European countries or the United States, having a lot of money ensures that the visas will be granted. Mobility is, therefore, a privilege which is only reserved for a certain social class of people. This is made most explicit in *Americanah*. When Obinze is a wealthy man, he has no problems whatsoever to travel to the United States: "I realized I could buy America, and it lost its shine. When all I had was my passion for America, they didn't give me a visa, but with my new bank account, getting a visa was very easy" (535-536). It is further implied in this statement that once America was easily reachable for Obinze, it lost its mythical quality. Even for the other characters who live in the diaspora, the country of their dreams
becomes much less attractive and thus more realistic the longer they stay there and acquire "[a]n intimate knowledge of its ugly side" (James Baldwin; qtd. in *A Bit of Difference* 236).

Ifemelu is told on several occasions in the novel that she is privileged as an immigrant in the United States. She is surprised because she does not feel that way, but through the juxtaposition of hers and Obinze's story in the United Kingdom, as well as the fates of other, less well-to-do immigrants, we can see that this observation appears to be true. In the hair salon, when Aisha from Senegal tells her, "Last year. My father die and I don't go. Because of papers. But maybe, if Chijioke marry, when my mother die, I can go" (*Americanah* 451), Ifemelu realizes that she has certain privileges of mobility and choice which are denied to other immigrants.

There are also restrictions which are rather connected to social and psychological aspects than to material ones. Crucial factors in Deola's decision to return to Nigeria are the countless incidences of discrimination and racism she encounters on an almost daily basis in England. Similarly, all other main characters residing in the West suffer from the debilitating effects of racism which restrict them on several levels. It affects their emotional well-being but also their social mobility, including their career chances. However, not all characters find a way out of the emotional stress caused by residing in a foreign, and often hostile, country by leaving it behind. The estrangement which migrants sometimes feel after years abroad from their country of origin can constitute a factor which can prevent them from returning (such as Darling in *We Need New Names*). In a slightly different sense, this can also apply to the second generation of immigrants, such as Kweku's children who do not feel at home in their parents' countries of origin because they are themselves strangers there.

Another restriction, apart from financial and class background, which can be found in the novels is gender. In *Americanah*, when Obinze applies for a visa after graduating from university, it is suggested that it was probably rejected due to fears of terrorism. Young foreign masculinity, especially from countries outside the so-called 'Western World', is marked as potentially threatening. In *Ghana Must Go*, the male protagonists, especially Kweku and Olu struggle with their own and society's views of and attitudes towards 'African' masculinities. Kweku is torn apart by an understanding of his role as a man that does not allow him to show any weaknesses or failures and the requirements to prove his success to his family and society. Out of shame, he cannot remain with his family in the United States but returns to Ghana. Kweku's struggles also affect his son Olu in his identity construction process. Olu suffers from the prejudice that 'African men' are bad fathers who abandon their families. He does not know how to handle an identity as an 'African man' who does not want to follow in this path. Unlike
for Kweku, for Olu moving to Ghana is not an option, as the country is completely strange to him.

However, not only men but also women can encounter certain restrictions affecting their mobility in terms of realizing their full potential or constructing alternative identities for themselves through their ascribed roles as wives and mothers. In *Americanah*, Aunty Uju and Ojiugo, the wife of one of Obinze's friends in the United Kingdom, are characters who, despite being highly educated professionals, are in some ways caught up in marriages in which they are expected to make sacrifices and in which their independence is curtailed. While Aunty Uju eventually manages to free herself from that marriage, Ojiugo has settled in her role and seems to expect her children to fulfill her own aspirations. Obinze reflects on her situation:

> It puzzled him that she did not mourn all the things she could have been. Was it a quality inherent in women, or did they just learn to shield their personal regrets, to suspend their lives, subsume themselves in child care? (*Americanah* 301)

*A Bit of Difference* adds another factor which can restrict someone's mobility and choice of residence through Bandele's story: discrimination for reasons of one's sexual orientation. Bandele feels strongly alienated from Nigeria and most of his fellow Nigerians due to their negative attitudes towards homosexuality. He even conceals his relationship from Deola because she is Nigerian. When she confronts him about why he told another woman whose parents are from Nigeria but who grew up in England but not her, he says, "She's not Nigerian like you!" (236). It is strongly suggested that his negation of a Nigerian identity and his absolute refusal to travel or return there, is (at least partly) connected to experiences of discrimination based on his sexual orientation.
Conclusion: Multilocal Spaces and Identities

The four novels offer a glimpse into the contemporary African diaspora and mainly explore issues of identity, race, and belonging but always in interdependence with other categories such as class and gender. Daria Tunca and Bénédicte Ledent point out in their essay "The Power of a Singular Story: Narrating Africa and Its Diasporas" by quoting Yogita Goyal that from a historical perspective, Americanah can be "placed within a … tradition of postcolonial writing" as it "revers[es] the heart of darkness narrative, where rather than Europeans or Americans going to Africa to find themselves, an African character travels to the heart of the West, only to find darkness there" (3). This assessment of Americanah certainly also applies to the other three novels. The postcolonial aspect described by Tunca, Ledent, and Goyal places the works in line with older postcolonial novels such as Aidoo's Our Sister Killjoy in which the main protagonist Sissie travels to Europe for educational purposes only to be deeply disappointed by the adverse effects of colonialism on her fellow diasporans from Africa who adore everything European and white, and who have completely lost touch with their own culture. Whereas Aidoo's novel strongly focuses on the impact of the colonial encounter on the identities and psyches of Africans, on women in particular, based on more traditional colonizer/colonized dichotomies, Adichie and her fellow writers seem to transcend the anti- and postcolonial focus of earlier writers and add a more pluralistic, globally-oriented perspective. A similarity which the four authors share with older women writers such as Aidoo, however, is their focus on women protagonists and their perspectives. Their women characters are extremely independent, assertive, and outspoken in voicing their issues of concern. At the same time, the writers always remain sympathetic to the male characters in their novels.

By juxtaposing different generations of postcolonial characters, questions of identity and belonging in a world which is in constant movement are discussed. The great variety of characters from different generations show both the effects of colonialism as well as the growing influence of globalization on the lifestyles of people, both within and outside of Africa. Adichie is explicit about her novel's inclusion of different generations by even dedicating the book, on the one hand, to her father and, on the other hand, to the next generation. The characters in Americanah as well as in A Bit of Difference can be described as belonging to roughly three generations: the protagonists' generation (born after Nigeria gained independence), their parents' generation (born before Nigeria gained independence), and the younger generation (such as Dike or Deola's nieces and nephews).
Similarly, *Ghana Must Go* narrates the stories of an older generation (born in Nigeria and Ghana respectively, before independence) and a younger generation (born and grown up in the United States, often referred to as second generation immigrants). Bulawayo's *We Need New Names* differs from the other three novels regarding the country's historical context. Zimbabwe gained independence twenty years later than Nigeria. Similarly to the other texts, though, it also explicitly shows three generations of Zimbabweans. They are presented through Darling's description of how many homes she and the women in her family have in their heads:

There are two homes inside my head: home before Paradise, and home in Paradise; home one and home two. Home one was best … There are three homes inside Mother's and Aunt Fostalina's heads: home before independence, before I was born, when black people and white people were fighting over the country. Home after independence, when black people won the country. And then the home of things falling apart, which made Aunt Fostalina leave and come here. Home one, home two, and home three. There are four homes inside Mother of Bones's head: home before the white people came to steal the country and then there was war; home when black people got our stolen country back after independence; and then the home of now. Home one, home two, home three, home four. When somebody talks about home, you have to listen carefully so you know exactly which one the person is referring to. (*We Need New Names* 191-192)

The narratives of all four novels deal, to some extent, with the continuous tensions and struggles between traditions or elements of traditional culture and 'modern', present-day realities of (forced) migration, loss of identities, and different forms of hybridity. Even though the importance of 'roots' and a connection to one's past and heritage is a theme that is shared in some way or another by all four novels, oversimplifications, essentialisms, and nativisms are, to a large extent, avoided and, if there, questioned.

Simplistic 'colony vs. metropolis' binaries are disrupted by the authors' choice of a perspective of movement, change, and fluidity. Mobility is a key aspect which all four texts share. It is most visibly represented by movements through space, i.e. through multiple settings. The multilocality plays out not only on different continents and in different countries but also in different locations within the countries. Places are, in fact, more important than countries or nations. All four novels feature characters from a former colony who migrate to the West and decide to return in one way or the other (even if it is just in their imagination) to their place of birth or that of their parents but develop into narratives of people whose identities transcend national boundaries or cultures. Multilocality is, however, not restricted to actual movements from one geographical location to another but includes social and cultural spaces and is also reflected in a certain outlook on the world and one's place in it.
Thus, dichotomies between tradition and modernity, nationalism and cosmopolitanism, center and periphery are questioned and undermined. Linearity of time is rejected ("I don't think time is linear" [A Bit of Difference 252]); aspects of tradition as well as modernity can be found in different generations, in different times, in different places. It seems to be suggested that the contemporary world is too complex and contradictory to be reduced to any simple binaries or answers to questions of identity and belonging. 'Home' means different things to different people in the novels, and these differences all have an equal right to exist. For characters such as Deola and Ifemelu, for example, home is where they are not lonely, where they feel loved. For Bandele, it is where he feels safe and accepted the way he is. Kweku is described as a 'cosmopolitan' who re-imagines and re-shapes his home when he returns to Ghana. Kweku and Fola's children cannot relate to any geographical location as their home, so they have to find a feeling of belonging inside themselves and in the relationships within the family.

The search for some kind of 'roots' is a common theme of all four texts. A 'rooted hybridity' or "being African in the world" in Simon Gikandi's words (9) seems to be suggested as the ideal state of being for the main protagonists in the novels. Many Africans in the diaspora are, however, shown to be 'stuck' in their mythologies, either in an exaggerated idealization of the West or a romanticization of 'home'. They are somewhere in between 'here and there'. Characters such as Ifemelu, Obinze, Deola, and Wale manage to deconstruct those mythologies and create an identity for themselves which is "rooted in specific local geographies but also transcendental of them" (Gikandi, "Foreword" 9). The description of the process of return shows, however, that so-called 'roots' can never be stable but are always re-constructed and re-negotiated as "[w]e can never go back to a place and find it exactly where we left it. Something somewhere will always have changed, most of all ourselves" (Selasi, "TED Talk"). At times, the term 'routes', in fact, appears to be even more appropriate for the characters' mobile lives (compare Gilroy's Black Atlantic and Abebe's use of the term 'routes').

For Darling in We Need New Names, the formation of such a positive kind of 'rooted hybridity' is not as simple as for the above-mentioned characters. Her story shows that all hybridities cannot be considered equal (Radhakrishnan 161-162). We Need New Names emphasizes the fact that many people are forced to leave their countries due to political, social, and economic problems and are torn by their longing for their home country and the impossibility to return. This points to the restrictions to multilocality. While the protagonists of the other novels enjoy relative privilege in terms of movements, Darling's mobility is limited due to her lower socio-economic background.
Despite the novels' focus on a contemporary generation of very mobile individuals, cultural hybridity is revealed to have always been there. It is also not restricted to the diaspora but is as much part of Africa as it is of other parts of the world (see Achille Mbembe). This is shown through the dreams and naming games played by Darling and her friends in Zimbabwe as well as through Kweku's mother and sister. His mother was a woman who never left her humble life in a small Ghanaian village but who always dreamt of traveling. His sister who died young is described by Kweku as a child who defied the usual stereotypes of African children, "the seeming unimportance of their being to and in the wider world" (Ghana Must Go 27). The colonial encounter as well as the effects of globalization and mass communication have accelerated the global flows, not only of people but especially of ideas and imaginations.

The rituals, or better in this context themes, of the novels display a strong focus on a very global-minded younger generation which seems to be in the process of shedding the postcolonial angst and insecurities which still characterized the lives of their parents—both on the African continent as well as outside of it. Their experiences are, however, also shaped by a strong awareness of the inequality and racism which continue to affect Africa and people of African descent adversely. While Selasi's younger generation do not have any place to return to, the protagonists in the other novels clearly embrace African identities by their multiple attachments to certain places on the continent, whatever that means for them individually and on the basis of other categories of belonging such as class, gender, and so many others. At the same time, however, the novels seem to embrace a state of cultural hybridity and acknowledge that "there is no such thing as a pristine culture or identity completely unaffected by another" (Eze, "Rethinking African culture" 239). It is, in fact, quite possible that "We Need New Names" to express the newly constructed realities and identities in today's world.
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