

## African Women in Search of Global Identity: An Exploration of Afropolitanism in Chimamanda Adichie's Works

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### Abstract

Many variants of feminism have been branded over time and that has given feminism a multiple identity. One of the new revelations of feminism in recent times is Afropolitanism, a branch of African feminism that deals with the story of African women in the West trying to assume the status of world citizens to de-emphasize their origins. What is the nature of Afropolitanism? What is the link between Feminism and Afropolitanism? To what extent do Adichie's characters show the attributes of Afropolitans? This paper illuminates the concepts of feminism and Afropolitanism and the latter's traits in Adichie's characters in *Americanah* and *The Thing Around Your Neck*. It deals with Diaspora issues and the way African women in literary fictions try to stem the effects of global maladies like African patriarchy, Western racism and sexism. The paper further discusses social awareness and feminist tendencies displayed by the characters. It ends by noting that feminism which assumes the dimension of Afropolitanism in Adichie's works is a becoming trend rather than a fixed norm.

Keywords: Afropolitanism, African women, Chimamanda Adichie

### Introduction

Chimamanda Adichie is a female African author who is widely known and read in contemporary African literature. Her writings as vehicle of expression for the yearnings of the African woman are well received in literary circles all over the world. This particular feat has ultimately led to her meteoric rise to fame and brought her to the centre of global interest, especially since such writings are full of ancillary power of feminine activism and advocacy. Adichie's use of the recent concept of Afropolitanism to shed new light on the literary portrayal of African women living in the Diaspora has added glamour to her achievements as a prolific writer. She deploys this concept as a tool in the creation of fictions such as *Americanah*, and five of her short stories in *The Thing around your neck*. These short stories include "Imitation", "The Arrangers of marriage", "On Monday of Last week", "The Shivering" and "The Thing around your neck". We shall use the concept of Afropolitanism as defined by Taiye Selasi, Achille Mbembe and others to analyze these works and show how Adichie tries to situate her characters, who have escaped from patriarchal practices at the homeland, in the global context in order to

insulate them from crisis of identity, discrimination and racism in the West while they are there in search of better opportunities for their self-actualization.

### What is Afropolitan Feminism?

This paper defines "Afropolitan feminism" as:

- A type of feminism that combines the usual feminist attributes with Afropolitan ideals.
- Portrayal of feminist characters that also possess Afropolitan characteristics.
- Portrayal of African feminist characters born in the Diaspora or who have left the homeland to the imperial centre in search of a better life.

Feminist literature as we know it, usually treats the themes of the quest for equality between men and women, portrayal of the oppression and suppression of women in a patriarchal society as well as the portrayal of female characters who have risen above the stereotype. On the other hand, Afropolitanism or Afropolitan feminism portrays women who live in the Diaspora, grappling with identity formation and who decide not to be confined to a particular geographical area; so they move out from the centre of oppression in search of greener pastures in the Diaspora. Afropolitan feminism therefore imbues

women with positive mental attitude through mode of dressing, education, venturing into unconventional careers and liberation from both physical and mental “confinement”.

This study to this extent describes Afropolitan feminism as that in which the African woman is comfortable and at home anywhere in the world whilst refusing to take on an identity of a victim. Afropolitan feminism does not get fixated on the injustice and violence inflicted on women in a patriarchal society, but rather provides the African woman the optimism and confidence required to assert her subjectivity. The Afropolitan feminist accepts herself the way she is. She is confident in who she is irrespective of gender, race, occupation and colour. The ability of the African woman to relinquish all feeling of inferiority complex, overcome issues of race and gender, the ability to flourish and prosper in any geographical location and refuse being stereotyped are major features of Afropolitan feminism. The afropolitan feminist is not confined or limited to a particular geographical space. Ndiaye (2005) rightly asserts that “From an Afropolitanist standpoint, women’s participation in Africa’s development is not limited to the continent itself, but rather it extends to the world, by highlighting the actions accomplished by women to build, manage and sustain the world based on their own individual African values and cultures”.

#### **Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical framework for this paper is feminism, Afropolitanism and Diaspora theories. Feminism advocates equal rights for women and creates a model of ideal womanhood. According to Rosemarie Tong, feminist theory attempts to describe women’s oppression, to explain its causes and consequences and prescribe strategies for women’s liberation. Others like Jane Flax reiterates that feminist theory has several purposes - understanding the power differential between men and women, understanding women’s oppression—how it evolved, how it changes over time, how it is related to other forms of oppression and how to overcome oppression. There are many branches of feminism – liberal feminism, radical feminism, eco-feminism, amazon feminism, social feminism, African feminism among others.

Modern feminism also known as the “first wave” of modern feminism can be traced back to as early as 1792 with Mary Wollstonecraft’s *Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1792). In her work, she posits that women and men should enjoy the same social, legal, and intellectual equality. These early feminist activists, Wollstonecraft, Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony were mostly preoccupied with the issue of granting suffrage rights to women. Other feminists like Virginia Woolf, in *Room of One’s Own* (1929), criticize the stereotyping of women in male authored novels. Woolf not only condemned the negative portrayal of women but created a new model for female identity (Gregory 2007).

The “second wave” of Feminism, started in the 1960s, and could boast of writers like Simone de Beauvoir, Germaine Greer, and Kate Millet among others. In her book, *The Second Sex* (1949), Beauvoir laments the plights of women and notes that “we are all brought up in a world defined by men, where women are defined as the “other” or not being normal (maleness being the norm)” She further asserts that “one is not born, one becomes a woman,” Germaine Greer in *The Female Eunuch*, like De Beauvoir, argues that there is no natural distinction between the sexes. For Kate Millet, the problem was fundamentally political. Also like De Beauvoir, she argued against the concept of “biologism,” which is the idea that gender difference is “natural.” Millet criticized cultural programming, especially the infantilization of women.

African women are not left out in feminist writings and activism. African women writing started in the 1970s with the main objective of dismissing the unattractive representations of womanhood in the novels of their male counterparts. African feminists seek to develop a feminist perspective that will reflect the African woman’s realities. Omolara Ogundipe Lesslie advocates a form of feminism which she called STIWA (Social Transformation Involving Women in Africa). Catherine Acholonu prefers Motherism, while Admora Ezeigbo came up with Snail sense feminism. Others like Buchi Emecheta, C. O. Ogunyemi and Ama Ata Aidoo endorse Alice walker’s Womanism. Filomina Chioma Steady’s African feminism advocates

autonomy and co-operation of women; importance of nature over culture; children, multiple mothering and kinship. She maintains that African feminist literature concerns itself with the liberty of all African people.

In spite of the various forms and branches of feminism, what all of them have in common is an interest in exposing patriarchal forms of power as the cause of the unequal and subordinate status of women all over the world. According to Mill in his book *The Subjection of Women* (1869) "All women are brought up from the very earliest years in the belief that their ideal of character is the very opposite to that of men; not self-will, and government by self-control, but submission and yielding to the control of others" (quoted in Blackwell P. 106). It is the above notion that feminist literatures seek to correct.

Even though there are many strands of feminism, this paper is going to be explored with the theoretical lens of African feminism which according to Salami (2012) explores African feminism by discussing themes such as patriarchy as a "traditional system that values men more than women, that uses law and tradition, force, ritual, customs, education, language and labour to keep women governed by men in both public and private life". It also highlights problems of race, sexuality, tradition, chief among which are: polygamy, abusive widowhood practices, genital mutilation, witch-hunting and woman's lack of access to property and power in a traditional African society. Other themes of African feminism include "discrimination, stereotyping, objectification, (especially sexual objectification) and oppression".

The theme of Afropolitanism will be explored using Taiye Selasi's essay-"Bye Bye Barber" or "Who is an Afropolitan" as a yardstick. Selasi made up that term when she got tired of explaining and being apologetic about her multiple national background. In order to assert her identity, she opted to become a citizen of the world, not confined to a particular geographical area. Afropolitanism gives a sense of belonging to emigrants battling with identity crises. Contrary to some writers like Wainana who believe that Afropolitanism is mainly related to fashion, dance style and art, this study will show that Afropolitanism is more relevant as a literary

discourse. The main characteristics of Afropolitanism are:

I. The novels are set in Diaspora and the characters also live in Diaspora, they are Cultural Hybrids with multiple nationalities and a tendency to feel at home wherever they are.

II. Dress sense- a combination of African and European fashion to assert their multicultural identity. There is a strong correlation between mode of dressing and freedom.

III. They have unconventional careers, freedom of expression and education

IV. African bond i.e. having at least one African country to call home in spite of being a citizen of the world, Identity formation and a call for experts to come back to Africa to build it. We will also draw from Achilles Mbembe's and Alpha Abebe's definitions as well as other proponents of Afropolitanism. Abebe considers Afropolitanism as a contemporary response to "Afro-pessimism", which generally masks class differences and inequities within the African Diaspora, and regularly challenges gender roles and representations. Mbembe on the other hand defines Afropolitanism as an aesthetic, and a particular poetic of the world. He describes it as a way of being in the world and refusing on principle any form of victim identity.

The theory of Diaspora will also be used to analyze this work, since the authors live in Diaspora and the selected novels are set in Diaspora. One of the early scholars to establish the main criteria for Diaspora theory is William Safran. In his article "Diasporas in Modern Societies: Myths of Homeland and Return". In this essay, he suggested certain criteria for theorizing Diaspora. According to him, in order to qualify as Diaspora, there must be a dispersal from a specific original "centre" to two or more "peripheral" or foreign region; retention of a collective memory, vision, or myth about the original homeland—its physical location, history, and achievements; non- acceptance by their host society and therefore feeling of alienation and insulation from it; regarding the ancestral homeland as the true, ideal home and as the place to which they or their descendants would (or should) eventually return-when conditions are appropriate; belief in the commitment to its safety and prosperity.

### **Afropolitan Concepts in Adichie's Works**

We continue to explore Afropolitanism to bring out its quintessential features, but not without demonstrating how Chimamanda Adichie aptly exploited them in order to illuminate her characters and finally put across her message in a succinct manner. However, the critique of the concepts and issues at stake are accomplished under the following headings, to which we have made innuendoes in the theoretical framework: Cosmopolitan Individuals, Fashion as a Means of self-Assertion, African bond and Rejection of Victimhood Identity. This section of the paper to this end discusses in details the different concepts that have emerged in the works of the author and shows how they are linked to Afropolitanism.

#### **i). Cosmopolitan Individuals**

Cosmopolitanism is an important attribute of Afropolitanism. Taiye Selasi (2005) uses the term "Afropolitan" to refer to cosmopolitans of African origin. In "Bye – Bye Barbar", she refers to "Afropolitans as not citizens of the world, but Africans of the world." The Afropolitan individual is usually an African who migrates to the imperial centre in search of greener pastures. According to Selasi in "Bye-Bye Barber", "It isn't hard to trace our genealogy. Starting in the 60's, the young, gifted and broke left Africa in pursuit of higher education and happiness abroad". She continues that:

Some three decades later this scattered tribe of pharmacists, physicists, physicians (and the odd polygamist) has set up camp around the globe. The caricatures are familiar. The Nigerian physics professor with faux-Coogi sweater; the Kenyan marathonist with long legs and rolled r's; the heavysset Gambian braiding hair in a house that smells of burnt Kanekalon.

"Some of us were bred on African shores then shipped to the West for higher education; others born in much colder climates and sent home for cultural re-indoctrination". The above definitions constitute major features of the novels and short stories used for this study. In these novels and short stories, the Main female characters are portrayed as cosmopolitan individuals. After one

disappointment or the other in their countries of origin, these characters leave the homeland for the Diaspora in search of a better life. The protagonists are Diasporic subjects because their movement involves "a traversal of the boundaries demarcating nation and Diaspora" ((Franz 2015:622). The reasons for the movement of the characters vary from lack of jobs in the homeland, inequality of sexes which push female characters to seek a better condition of life in foreign countries, better university opportunities as result of incessant strike of lecturers and escape from extreme patriarchal practices. The women hope to find a better life in the Diaspora through marriage, even if it is an arranged one. Macheso (2015) reiterates that "Africans, both at home and abroad, perceive cultural diversity and globalization as alternative means of identity and belonging beyond the narrow confines of the nation-state. As such, the 21<sup>st</sup> century African is no longer one who cares about nationalism but rather a cosmopolitan individual". According to Selasi, "what is manifest is the extent to which the modern adolescent African is tasked to forge a sense of self from widely disparate sources". Education is also a major component of Afropolitanism

The novel *Americanah* is set in Nigeria, the United States and England. The female characters are made up of metropolitan middle-class characters, academics, the educated and uneducated, rural and traditionalist characters. In the novel, it is usually the educated middle-class characters who move away from Nigeria to the Diaspora for various reasons. The West is presented as a place of escape for Africans who are desperate for better educational and socio-economic opportunities as well as escape from patriarchal oppressions. In *Americanah* the protagonist Ifemelu emigrates from her home country, Nigeria, to the United States; literally moving from one culture to the other. She moves because of the incessant strike actions embarked on by university lecturers. This is caused by the political situation in Nigeria where the government fails to honour agreements between them and lecturers. This causes students like Ifemelu to seek better educational opportunities abroad. She represents members of the educated Nigerian middle class who leave their homelands

because they dream of having better educational opportunities in the United States. (Adichie *Americanah* Ch.8). In the case of Ifemelu's aunt Uju, a former lover of a General of the Nigerian military regime, she moves to the United States to give birth to their child and also to escape victimization from the General's relations who at his death dispossessed her of everything the General bought for her including her house. Uju also nurses the intention of continuing the medical education she started back in Nigeria. She also hopes to find part-time work and start her clinic one day. (Adichie *Americanah* Ch.3). Other characters like Yinka go to England often and live in Ikoyi and speak with a British accent. Ginika is also respected in school because she has "the air of away". Mariama, the owner of African Hair Braiding and her sister are immigrants from Mali, and Aisha is from Senegal. These ones belong to lower socio-economic group.

In the short story collection, *The Thing Around your neck*, the female characters are all cosmopolitan individuals who have emigrated to the U.S.A. "Imitation" is the story of a Nigerian family; (Obiora and Nkem) who decides to leave their country, Nigeria, for Philadelphia in the United States. The attraction of this family towards the United States is to access better medical services, better education for their children, and also acquire the prestige associated with living abroad. America to Nkem is a land of opportunity. We are told that one of the things she has come to love about America is the abundance of unreasonable hope (P.26). Akunna, in "The Thing Around Your Neck" travels to America because she won the American lottery. Before she travelled, she and her relations had a false conception of life in America. They erroneously believe that everybody who lives in America is rich and comfortable. In Nigeria "you thought everybody in America had a car; and your uncles and aunts and cousins thought so too. Right after you won the American visa lottery, they told you: In a month, you will have a big car, soon, a big house". "In the The Arrangers of Marriage", Ofodile migrates to America for his medical studies. Chinaza moves to America to begin a new life with her husband Ofodile. Her movement from Nigeria into an arranged marriage in America is motivated by the hope of

escaping her life of domestic servitude in the house of her Aunt and Uncle. Like most immigrants, Chinaza is lured by the American Dream' "I imagined a smooth driveway snaking between cucumber coloured lawns, a door leading into a hallway, walls with sedate paintings." (TTAN: 167). Her aunt and uncle also buy into the American dream. This makes them persuade her to agree to an arranged marriage: "a doctor in America! It is like we won a lottery for you!"(TTAN: 170) "On Monday of last week" is the story Kamara, a Nigerian immigrant to the USA. Both Kamara and her husband are University graduates who like many others have moved to America for greener pastures. In "The Shivering" Ukamaka leaves Nigeria to the US for Post graduate studies

#### ii). Self-Assertion through Fashion

Fashion sense is a strong and pertinent characteristic of Afropolitanism. Dressing is very intrinsically connected to identity formation. In Selasi's essay she affirms that

The women show off enormous afros, tiny t-shirts, gaps in teeth; the men those incredible torsos unique to and common on African coastlines. The whole scene speaks of the Cultural Hybrid: kente cloth worn over low-waisted jeans; 'African Lady' over Ludacris bass lines....You'll know us by our funny blend of London fashion..." (Selasi Bye-Bye Babar).

We deduce from the above that in order to forge a sense of identity, the Afropolitans wear a combination of African (kente cloth) and European fashion (low-waisted jeans) to drive home their multiple identities. Opponents of Afropolitanism usually base their perception of Afropolitanism as frivolous and trivial based on the above lines. In academic discourse fashion and dressing have been found to be very pertinent to identify formation. To buttress this point, Kawamura reiterates that:

...fashion is an inherent part of human social interaction and not the creation of an elite group of designers, producers, or marketers. Because of its basis in individual social comparison, fashion cannot be

controlled without underlining its ultimate purpose, which is the expression of individual identity. If self-identity were never in doubt and social comparison never took place, there would be no demand for fashion, and there would be no need or opportunity for style change (Kawamura 2004:28)

Svendsen Lars (2006) in *Fashion: a Philosophy* highlights the importance of fashion. He observes that:

since the Renaissance. It has conquered an increasing number of modern man's fields of activity and has become almost 'second nature' to us. So an understanding of fashion ought to contribute to an understanding of ourselves and the way we act. Despite this, fashion has been virtually ignored by philosophers, possibly because it was thought that this, the most superficial of all phenomena, could hardly be a worthy object of study for so 'profound' a discipline as philosophy. But if philosophy is to be a discipline that contributes to our self understanding, and if fashion really has been - and is - as influential as I claim, it ought to be taken seriously as an object of philosophical investigation (Svendsen 7).

We therefore agree that fashion and dressing are serious subject matters used by individuals to make non verbal statements about their feelings at any point in time. According to Barnard Malcolm, there are many different languages of dress, each having its own vocabulary and grammar. He asserts that clothes are the equivalent of words and may be combined into 'sentences' (Barnard: 29).

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, the authors used for this study has affirmed her belief that fashion is a serious affair; she describes it as a means of conveying a political statement as well as portraying culture. Adichie, an accomplished and world acclaimed author, is a lady that loves fashion and she has this to say:

I decided to use fashion as a kind of political statement. Which is to say that I made the choice to wear mostly Nigerian designers to public events, because obviously, I want to support an industry that's full of talent, but also to make a case for how fashion can tell a story, fashion and culture are intertwined in very interesting ways."

(<http://www.konbini.com/ng/lifestyle/chimamanda-adichie-says-uses-fashion-politicalstatement/>)

In the novels and short stories in analysis, we observe that when the female characters begin their journey to self-discovery, there is often a change in their mode of dressing and personal appearance. Mode of dressing thus provides an avenue for the main characters to break away from patriarchal and societal norms. It is an expression of rebellion, of freedom and self self-assertion. Fashion acts as a means of expression and resistance to patriarchal systems and racism. According to Dominic Thomas in 'Fashion Matters...' (2003), "clothing provides the occasion for the subversion of established modes and the rejection of the dictates of accepted norms" (Thomas 954). He also affirms that it constitutes the creation of a particular form of resistance through the creation of an oppositional, counter hegemonic culture. (Thomas 958). Julia Twigg in (J. Powell and T. Gilbert 2009) asserts that identity and dress are intimately linked. She affirms that clothes display, express and shape identity, imbuing it with a direct material reality. She further describes fashion as a useful lens through which to explore the possibly changing ways in which older identities are constituted in modern culture. Wilson (1992:13) describes fashion as one of the ways through which women have been able to achieve self-expression.

Female characters in the works of the authors use dressing and fashion to express their rebellion and resistance against an oppressive system. In "Imitation" on hearing about her husband's infidelity back home and after her initial shock, Nkem decides to be assertive in the relationship and to rebel against her husband. Her first reaction is to change everything that Obiora loves about her beginning with her appearance.

She cuts her long hair which Obiora loves (TTAN: 28), she refuses to trim her pubic hair (TTAN:38)

In “Arrangers of Marriage”, Chinaza travels to the USA to live with her new husband Ofodile. The latter has embraced America in a negative way; he strips himself and his wife of their Nigerian identity and heritage. He changes their Igbo names to English ones- his name from Ofodile Udenwa to Dave Bell and Chinaza’s name becomes Agatha Bell. When Chinaza decides to break away from her oppressive and loveless marriage, when she decides to reassume her identity, the first thing she does is to discard the English wears her husband bought for her in favour of her traditional African wears: “that evening while he showered, I put only the clothes he hadn't bought me, two embroidered boubous and one caftan, all Auntie Ada’s cast-offs, in a plastic suitcase I had brought from Nigeria and went to Nia’s apartment” (TTAN 184). Hair, an aspect of fashion, is also very much linked to Afropolitanism, Selasi (2005) affirms: that “the women show off enormous afros”- as such, natural hair is a very important element in Adichie’s notion/concept of identity formation. Chinaza admires Nia’s natural hair, according to her, “it was not just her hair, held up on top of her head in a natural Afro puff, that I found beautiful, though, it was her skin the color of roasted groundnuts...” (TTAN 181)

In *Americanah*, Ifemelu starts her journey to self-recovery by rejecting perm hair and deciding to go back to wearing her natural hair. This decision is significant to Ifemelu's identity. Natural hair is often associated with cultural nationalism and pride in Black beauty. Hair also has a strong impact on identity and self perception. Ifemelu's father said that it was a "crown of glory"(Americana: 41). Body image and self-esteem is extremely connected to Ifemelu's hair. In the hair braiding salon, Aisha, Ifemelu's hairdresser, asks Ifemelu why she does not have relaxer, Ifemelu responds by saying that she likes her hair the way that God made it. "(Americana: 12). In an interview with Kate Kellaway in the guardian on Sunday 7 April 2013, Adichie affirms that: “Hair is hair – yet also about larger questions: self-acceptance, insecurity and what the world tells you is beautiful. For many black

women, the idea of wearing their hair naturally is unbearable”. Thus Ifemalu reverting to her natural hair is significant, it means she has come to terms with her personality and identity as black; she has acquired the confidence and willingness to be an African living in the United States, instead of an African transformed into an American. In “If You Don’t like Their Story, Write Your Own: Chimamanda Adichie’s *Americanah* and the New Postcolonial Literature” (1984:12), do Espirito Santo reiterates that “coarse hair is a symbol of black resistance when women accept their bodies and ancestry.” She further states that in “*Americanah*, hair – which bears an important role in relation to women and vanity – works as a symbol of strength and assumes a significant role against racism” (1984:12).

To Adichie’s female characters, natural hair is intricately connected to their identity In ‘Monday of last week’ Tracy wears dreadlocks in line with her profession as an artist (TTAN 79), while Kamara, a Nigerian “had her hair braided in the Senegalese place in south street...” (TTAN 80) In “The Thing around your neck”, wearing African hair is of so much importance that Akunna’s aunty “had to drive an hour to find a hair salon that did African hair”. Akunna herself also wears braids not minding that the whites gawped at her hair, wondering whether her hair stands up or falls down when she takes out the braids. (TTAN:116) Nia in “Arrangers of marriage,” owns a hair salon.

**iii). Bond to the homeland/African Tie** Afropolitans maintain a strong bond to their homeland Africa even though they are dispersed across the globe. They usually have a strong desire to maintain a part of their culture even in the Diaspora. This is in line with Selasi’s description of the Afropolitan in her essay. According to Selasi “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”. (Paragraph 3). She further states that the Afropolitan whether in the West or at home is distinguished by:

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. (Paragraph 7)

As a result, "the Afropolitan must form an identity along at least three dimensions: national, racial, and cultural – with subtle tensions in between." (Paragraph 9) In his own definition, Gikandi (cited in Wawrzinek & Makokha, 2011, p. 79) affirms that to be Afropolitan means being connected to knowable African communities, nations, and traditions and to live a life divided across cultures, languages and states. It is also, according to him, embracing and celebrating a state of cultural hybridity as well as being of Africa and of other worlds at the same time. Eze (2014) reasoning along the same line asserts that an Afropolitan is that human being on the African continent or of African descent who has realized that her identity can no longer be explained in purist, essentialist, and oppositional terms or by reference only to Africa (2014: 240). In the novels and short stories under study, Tie and bond to the home land is expressed in a number of ways: language, native food, and dressing. Also of great importance is maintaining communication with people at home and making constant allusion to the homeland, whether positive or negative.

Selasi (2005:7) states that the Afropolitan is typified by the effort to understand what is ailing in Africa alongside the desire to honor what is wonderful and unique. In *Americanah*, the African students in Philadelphia in order to keep up their tie with the homeland form the African Students Association (ASA). This is an association regrouping students from various African countries: Nigerians, Ugandans, Kenyans, Ghanaians, South Africans, Tanzanians, Zimbabweans and Congolese. They congregate to discuss:

"what ails Africa." ...and they themselves mocked Africa trading stories of absurdity, of stupidity, and they felt safe to mock, because it is mockery born of longing, and of the heartbroken desire to see a place made whole again." Among fellow Africans, Ifemelu feels at home: "here, Ifemelu felt a gentle, swaying sense of renewal. Here, she did not have to explain herself. (*Americanah*: 139).

The Afropolitan seeks "to comprehend the cultural complexity; to honor the intellectual and spiritual legacy; and to sustain our parents' cultures (Paragraph 7). In the novels and short stories under study, the parents' cultures are sustained through speaking the mother tongue and eating native food even in the Diaspora. Ifemelu speaks Igbo to his nephew even though Aunt Uju does not approve of that. (*Americanah*: 109). In "The Thing around Your Neck", Akunna's uncle's wife calls her 'Nwanne'. "They spoke Igbo and ate "garri" for lunch and it was like home" (TTAN: 116). Akunna visits the African store with her white boyfriend, she cooks "onugbu" soup and ate "gari" (TTAN: 123.)" In "Imitation", they talk of "jiakwukwo" instead of yam portage (TTAN: 33). They use "onugbu" to cook soup. "In "The Arrangers of Marriage", Chinaza travels to America with Nigerian food stuff like 'egusi', 'ongbu', and 'uziza seeds'. (TTAN:168). (TTAN:182) Chinaza refuses to let go of her Nigerian heritage- her language and her culture. When her husband bans her from speaking Igbo, she resorts to speaking the language to herself. "We spoke only English now; he did not know that I spoke Igbo to myself while I cooked, and that I had taught Nia how to say "I am hungry" and "see you tomorrow" in Igbo (TTAN:182) .

In *Americanah*, Ifemelu has to travel all the way from Princeton to Trenton in order to braid her hair. (*Americanah*: P.3). Mariama's African Hair Braiding salon provides jobs for African women. Braiding the African hair enables the African woman to maintain her Africaness even while living in the Diaspora. Mariama has appropriated the Diasporic space to start a hair salon business of her own. This gives her a solid footing and independence in the Diaspora. . (*Americanah*: 9).

Africans who visit Mariama's hair salon watch Nigerian movies to keep in touch with the homeland (*Americanah*: 10). Ifemelu goes as far as convincing other black women about the merits of wearing their hair natural (*Americanah*: 12). Most of the African women in the novel wear braids; the same style is made by Ifemelu, Auntie Uju, Ginika, (*Americanah*: 139) and Dorothy the Ugandan girl. This enables them show that they are still proudly African while living in America (*Americanah*: 104). "On Monday of Last Week", Kamara's walks "around her home with only her "abada" wrapper tied loosely around her knotted under her arm" as if she were in Nigeria (TTAN: 86).

The female characters in the novels and short stories live in the Diaspora but are in constant communication with people back home. They also make constant allusion to the homeland, whether positive or negative. In *Americanah*, Ifemelu keeps in touch with her friend Ranyinudo who lives in Lagos throughout her stay in the USA. Ranyinudo gives positive reports about Nigeria to Ifemelu that encouraged her to return home. She talks about: the new sprawling modern mall in Lagos, told her that Lagos is full of American returnees...." (*Americanah*: 14). Ifemelu keeps in touch with her boyfriend Obinze (*Americanah*: 132)

Ifemelu communicates with her parents; she even sends money home for them to move to a better accommodation (*Americanah*: 201). In "Imitation", Nkem lives in America but she and her husband collect African art, they are interested in the history behind the Benin masks. (TTAN :23). "She has come to look forward to the art pieces, touching them, imagining the originals, imaging the lives behind them" (TTAN: 25). Nkem makes Constant allusion to the home land, she remembers how her mother used to rub yam peels on her skin if she wastes the yam by peeling too closely (TTAN: 32). In "Imitation", Nkem "misses home, her friends, the cadence of Igbo and Yoruba and pidgin English spoken around her...." ...she misses the "Lagos sun that glares down even when it rains. She had sometimes thought about moving back home...." (TTAN: 37). Towards the end of the story, Nkem realizes that only the movement back to Nigeria can save her marriage, she tells her husband that

they will be moving back to Lagos at the end of the school year. She tells her husband they have to find a school for their children in Lagos (TTAN:41). In "The Shivering" (TTAN:142.) Even though Ukamaka lives in America, she is in constant touch with Nigerian news and her people back home. The story begins with Ukamaka keeping abreast of the events in Nigeria following the plane crash where one hundred and seventeen people perished (TTAN: 142). Ukamaka is in communication with her mother in Nigeria (TTAN: 147).

Ifemelu is successful in America with a successful blog that is yielding money and a steady boyfriend; she still decides to return to Nigeria. This is in line with the Afropolitanism; the Afropolitans usually return home to help build his country (*Americanah*: 6). In "The Shivering" Ukamaka plans to move back after graduate school to work with an NGO in Lagos (TTAN: 157). Auntie Uju joins the African Doctors for Africa who were volunteering to go on two-week medical missions to Africa in an effort to plough back into Africa (*Americanah*: 299).

### Conclusion

This paper has undertaken the task of reviewing the theme of feminism in general and explored the new face of feminism known as Afropolitanism, a concept introduced by Taiye Selasi in her pioneering article entitled "Bye-Bye Barbar". Moreover, it has thrown open once more the debate on feminism in order to trace the origins of Afropolitanism, bringing back to reckon names that constitute the pantheon of the feminist movement such as the three Ws of Mary Wollstonecraft, Virginia Woolf, Alice Walker and Simone De Beauvoir. And we could not have failed to stress the contributions of African female writers and critics to feminism in its multivalent forms such as Stiwanism, Eco-feminism, Snail feminism and Motherism plus so many others, Afropolitanism being the latest, remains African feminism in exile. These proliferations are testimonies to the tempo of feminist polemics all over the world, especially in Africa where patriarchal domination is immense and have assigned more task of mental and physical liberation to women with greater disposition to rhetorical, intellectual, economic

and political power. These qualities are evident in Adichie's female characters such as Ifemelu, Auntie Uju, Mariama, Chinaza, Akunna, Ukamaka, Kainene and others; and their behaviour, similarities and unity of purpose suggest a common goal of affirming their feminine agenda. Besides, Adichie's approach to Afropolitanism and its use to x-ray the vision of these ambitious women herald an attempt to deploy semiotic properties inherent the Afropolitanism. For instance, the use of fashion to portray protest against ill-treatment and a disposition to freedom is a perfect example of non-verbal statement and so also is the Afro natural hair which displays a new state of the mind, self-rediscovery, on the part of these women imbued with high level of social

awareness and feminist emancipation. This paper has moreover shown that Afropolitanism is a departure from Africa, but with a clause, as shown by the characters. This clause entails the fact that it only possible within the geographical sphere, not in the cultural sphere. That could explain why majority of the characters still retains their African names, except Chinaza. they also speak their native tongues and eat African food in America and England. To this end, they see themselves as cultural exports to the West instead of victims of cultural alienation. All in all, from Feminism to Afropolitanism, African female authors and critics such as Taiye Selasi and Chimamanda Adichie have demonstrated more clearly than ever that their struggle toward total emancipation is full of dynamism.

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