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# To Bloom in America: Raising Black Awareness in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s *Americanah* (2013) and NoViolet Bulawayo’s *We Need New Names* (2013)

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To my friends, who were always by my side when things were difficult and made me realize I could do it even when I thought differently.

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# To Bloom in America: Raising Black Awareness in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah* (2013) and NoViolet Bulawayo's *We Need New Names* (2013)

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Identidade, diáspora, globalização, cultura, cosmopolitismo

RESUMO: Esta dissertação visa analisar o neologismo Afropolitanismo e o modo como este é desafiado por obras de literatura africana contemporânea através da desconstrução do conceito de "Africanos do mundo", popularizado por Taiye Selasi, e através da reformulação das suas características. Assim, os romances *Americanah* (2013) de Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie e *We Need New Names* (2013) de NoViolet Bulawayo foram as obras escolhidas para esta análise, uma vez que são retratos ficcionais de mobilidade contemporânea Africana que apresentam diferentes perspetivas deste conceito. Ao analisar o percurso de vida das personagens, Ifemelu e Darling, este estudo pretende apresentar outras interpretações do Afropolitanismo que são mais adequadas para descrever os romances em questão. Esta análise irá então tentar compreender não só como é que a identidade das protagonistas foi formada ao fazerem parte da diáspora Africana, mas também como é que um choque cultural influenciou o seu processo de desenvolvimento.

KEYWORDS: Identity, diaspora, globalization, culture, cosmopolitanism

ABSTRACT: This dissertation aims to analyze the neologism Afropolitanism and how it is challenged by contemporary African novels, deconstructing Taiye Selasi's popularized concept of "Africans of the world" and reformulating its characteristics. Therefore, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah* (2013) and NoViolet Bulawayo's

*We Need New Names* (2013) were the novels chosen for this analysis, since both are fictional portraits of African contemporary mobility which present different perspectives of this concept. Through an analysis of the characters', Ifemelu and Darling, life journey, this study will present other interpretations of Afropolitanism that are considered more suitable to describe the novels in question. This analysis will try to understand not only how the protagonists' identity was constructed as being part of the African diaspora but also how a cultural shock had an impact on their process of maturation.

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# INTRODUCTION

In the end of the 20th century the dominant image of Africa in postcolonial literature was held by the "malady of Afro-pessimism" (Gikandi 9) which emerged during the political and economic unrest of the 80s and 90s. This discourse suggested that the African continent and Africans would forever be conditioned by economic stagnation and political corruption. Against this trend, a new generation of African academics have tried to filter these negative and stereotyped images to create an alternative view of African identity formation. At a time when the African continent was changing due to independence processes and the end of the Cold War an increased mobility of Africans was noticeable. In the brink of a globalized era, a reinvented concept of cosmopolitanism emerged, coinciding with what Balakrishnan describes as "the new wave of optimism generated by media on Africa" (Balakrishnan 1).

However, African scholars believed this new cosmopolitanism to be a representation of a White hegemonic mobility and thus felt an urgent need for the creation of a concept that could correspond to the postcolonial framework of Africans' mobility. Initially, the neologism Afropolitanism emerged during the early 21st century to describe a generation of Africans who were born outside of Africa but has now evolved into a new concept of Africanness. After Taiye Selasi's article "Bye Bye Babar" (2005), this new descriptor has been adopted to give Africans new ways of understanding how to be in a world where identity is "both rooted in specific local geographies but also transcendental of them" (Gikandi 9). Therefore, to be Afropolitan is to become a cultural hybrid whose life embraces multiple languages and social landscapes.

Although the life experiences associated with Afropolitanism, as proposed by Selasi, lead to believe that it is only applicable for a certain type of migrant, a well-educated, qualified and socially integrated group of people who are specially defined by their versatility, open-mindedness and overall acknowledgement of the world's current configurations and constant movement, this interpretation is not the most prominent nor influential approach shaping the discussion of this issue. Achille Mbembe's concept of the circulation of worlds offers a much more flexible and open reading of the concept, presenting two perspectives on mobility and identity formation which are induced by different reasons. Firstly, there is the fact that Africa should be considered a place that draws the attention of different people who decide to settle in various African countries, meaning that identity formation is a continuous process in which individuals feel a sense of belonging to more than one place. Secondly, he points to the fact that the African continent is also acknowledged as a place of departure and these departures are motivated by two different reasons which are set in distinct periods of time. The first reason was the slave trade, meaning that this was not a voluntary departure, being rather painful and humiliating for those who were forced to leave. The second and most recent type of migration is voluntary and based on a variety of motivations, namely the need for better living conditions, a better job, a better education, etc. This new generation of migrants claim a new way of being in the world and "reveal the complexity shaping their identity with regard to both their roots and cross-cultural mode of being" (Kasanda 191). Therefore, the emergence of the idea of Afropolitanism was meant to better describe these hybrid individuals of the late 20th and early 21st century which would later on be depicted in new African narratives.

The most acclaimed narratives that portray the stories of this new generation belong to Anglophone African authors such as Teju Cole, Taiye Selasi, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, NoViolet Bulawayo, etc. They are frequently labeled as Afropolitans since they share similar life experiences of the African diaspora. However, not all writers accept this descriptor. This introduces a new issue to be discussed in this dissertation which analyzes the way African authors relate to the neologism and how they interpret it. Adichie, for example, who rejects Selasi's reading of the term, made clear, when being interviewed by the French magazine *Le Point*, in 2015, that she did not want to be associated with the term.

> I am tired of this word. I am African. There are two things that seem curious to me: first are Africans so outside of the general history of humanity that they must be designated by a particular word when they travel or are found in the capitals of the world? The second thing is that history (sadly not well known) shows that cosmopolitanism doesn't date from yesterday: many African kings from the West coast sent their children to study in Europe. And much later, the generation of my father traveled a lot, there have been numerous waves of people coming back in the 1960's, and who have not stopped moving. They define themselves as Africans. (Adichie 2015)[1]

The point Adichie is trying to make is that Africans' history of constant mobility should not be any indicator of a new phenomenon arising or that these individuals should be termed and grouped separately from those who stay back in the continent. This is in fact a recurrent dilemma in the academic discourse. Binyavanga Wainaina, another African author, also shares the same opinion as Adichie, considering that Afropolitanism is a commodity and thus any novel written according to its framework would only follow the same formula of someone living in miserable living conditions and desperately wanting to leave Africa.

Having these debates in mind, this dissertation will focus on how two contemporary African novels namely *Americanah* (2013) by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie and *We Need New Names* (2013) of NoViolet Bulawayo expose this new generation of Africans as mobile subjects in a globalized world but also how they try to break the elitist pattern set by "Bye Bye Babar". Taking as a departing point the initial articulations of Afropolitanism and also its subsequent interpretations in the African academic discourse, the objective is to study both novels separately by analyzing the protagonists' process of psychological and identity development, invoking as well the paradigms of the *Bildungsroman* or novel of formation, another concept that will be briefly discussed during the first chapter. The main purpose of this dissertation is to understand how *Americanah* and *We Need New Names* perceive the concept of Afropolitanism through the narrativization of two diasporic identities and whether the novels may in fact be considered Afropolitan.

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[1] Translation by Stephanie Bosch Santana in Bosch Santana, Stephanie. "Exorcizing the Future: Afropolitanism's Spectral Origins." *Journal of African Cultural Studies*, vol. 28, no. 1, 2016, p. 122.

Before the analysis of the novels, it is important to provide a contextualization on other movements, prior to Afropolitanism, that also helped raise Black awareness and construct a new framework for African identity. The first chapter of this dissertation, *"Africans of the world": perspectives on Afropolitan consciousness"*, will discuss some fundamental Black movements in the Anglophone and Francophone world. Firstly, in the section "*Raising Black Awareness: was Pan-Africanism the right label?"* the movement with the longest history, Pan-Africanism, will be discussed, illustrating how the movement was formed and how it contributed to a sense of African unity and pride. This section will also analyze the movement created by Marcus Garvey, namely Garveyism, explaining how he introduced a more radical version of Pan-Africanism by promising to build a strong and independent Africa and establishing a safe place for the African diaspora to come back to. In "*The self-affirmation of black people: the New Negro and Négritude"* two movements will be discussed, one from the Anglophone and the other from the Francophone world. The former will analyze the New Negro movement which became popular in the 20th century in Harlem, New York, when the Black community faced the problem of the color line and thus felt the need to reinvent and redefine their identity. The latter is a movement founded in Paris which essentially discussed how accepting the term *Nègre*, a demeaning term, was a sign of cultural pride and a harsh critique to racial prejudice and white hegemony. The core of this chapter will focus on a detailed discussion on Afropolitanism in the section "*Essentials of an Afropolitan: defining an "African of the world""* in which a comparison between the two main intellectuals that initially promoted the neologism, Taiye Selasi and Achille Mbembe, will be made. However, these two interpretations will be the starting point to other readings of the concept which will also be analyzed, namely from Minna Salami, Marta Tveit, Emma Dabiri, Chielozona Eze, Simon Gikandi and Binyavanga Wainaina, in order to prove how Afropolitanism is a rather flexible concept.

Finally, because both novels present two very different processes of formation marked by the protagonists' age gap this chapter will also examine the concept of *Bildung* and of *Bildungsroman*. While in *Americanah* the protagonist is already a mature 18-year-old girl going off to college in the US, *We Need New Names* introduces as its heroine a 10-year-old child. Therefore, considering that Ifemelu, the protagonist in Adichie's novel, had already matured while in Nigeria, when she moves to the US she goes through a (re)learning process of her identity because she must understand how to be a Black woman in a Western society. Contrastingly, a 10-year-old Darling goes through a learning process in which everything is new to her. Her formation whilst in America essentially deals with the negotiation of two places and two distinct meanings of belonging that fragment the character's identity. Therefore, in *"Afropolitanism and the Black Bildungsroman: the journey of life in African and African American fiction"* a brief background of the traditional novel of formation will be presented, leading up to one of its modern variations which is more characteristic of the postcolonial period: the Black *Bildungsroman*. This alternative of the classic genre generally documents the life of a character who goes through several obstacles on a quest for identity which is one of the main motifs of both novels discussed in this dissertation.

After this contextualization, the second chapter *"Americanah: a maturity story dissecting the question of race in the US"* will proceed with a close reading of the novel, listing some of the main experiences of the protagonist throughout the narrative and separating them into three different processes of learning, namely *"Learning to be Black"*, *"(Re)learning to be African"* and *"Learning to be Afropolitan"*. All these phases will help understand how they shaped the character's process of identity formation as an immigrant and possibly as an African of the world.

The third chapter, "*We Need New Names: a quest for survival in a utopic America"*, will interpret Bulawayo's novel through the same process as Adichie's, that is, by chronicling the heroine's life journey into two distinct periods: before and after migrating to the US. In *"How Darling left"* and *"How Darling arrived"*, the main themes of the novel, such as migration, displacement and disillusionment will be taken into consideration. Bulawayo's novel is noticeably different than Adichie's since it has been accused of being a "poverty-porn" novel for stereotyping a negative image of the African continent and of Africans that is frequently and extensively consumed by Western readers. However, the fairness of this accusation will be discussed in detail in order to ascertain the real intentions of the author in invoking this type of narrative.

The conclusion of the dissertation will establish a comparison between the novels, examining the differences and similarities between Ifemelu and Darling's life journeys and process of maturation and the impact it had on their quest for self-identity. These observations will be fundamental to understand how Afropolitanism is applied in these narratives and how it is interpreted by their authors, thus coming to the final resolution on whether this concept is at the core of both novels.

# I. “Africans of the world”: perspectives on Afropolitan consciousness

## 1.1. Introduction

This chapter will discuss the topic of raising Black awareness and the many ways it materialized throughout the centuries. Some of the most important and influential Black movements in the Anglophone and Francophone world will be analyzed and compared to the one this dissertation focuses on: Afropolitanism.

The first movement to be discussed is Pan-Africanism, the one with the longest and more influential history, dating as far back as the 18th century, when slavery was still a reality and Africans yearned to return to their homeland, thus creating a sense of universal longing which would later materialize as a movement of unity and brotherhood that would never fade until this day, providing the groundwork for other movements to develop on. Therefore, in the section “*Raising Black Awareness: was Pan-Africanism the right label?*” the purpose of the discussion is to show how Pan-Africanism was founded and how much it contributed to the global African diaspora, taking into consideration that this movement has suffered several mutations over the years and might have lost some of its influence in the academic discourse. Having examined the circumstances that gave life to the movement, its main concepts will be problematized, because, to a large extent, there were in fact numerous versions of Pan-Africanism that, despite having different interpretations, shared the same end: establishing Africa as the home for all its people; a sense of unity and solidarity; taking pride in African culture and identity and, finally, regenerating the continent.

It is important to add that, apart from Afropolitanism, all the movements in this chapter overlap in terms of time periods. The section “*Garvey and Garveyism: a movement for the masses*”, for instance, portrays the movement organized by Marcus

Garvey which resembles Pan-Africanism in a much more radical version. The method to analyze this movement will consist of establishing the circumstances that led to its formation and realizing how the movement failed for being too unrealistic. Promising to build a strong and liberate Africa and establishing there a haven for every African in the world, it is clear that Garvey's agenda could never be fulfilled. However, this analysis considers that Garveyism was not in vain and should not be overshadowed by other movements that may have taken a bigger role in the history of African Diaspora, because it influenced many activists later on through the Black Power movements, for example.

In the section "*The self-affirmation of black people: the New Negro and Négritude*", two movements from the Anglophone and Francophone world will be discussed, the New Negro and *Négritude*, respectively. In the 20th century, from Harlem, New York, to Paris, France, the Black community was facing a problem that was rather global: the color line. By the end of World War I, many people of color who fought for the American flag returned to a country where racial inequality still stood, thus feeling the need to be reborn in terms of cultural and identity affirmation and to achieve true citizenship. In Paris, being *Nègre* and accepting the term itself sent a very strong message to those who not only used physical violence to exacerbate the color line, but also used verbal violence. Embracing this demeaning term stated that racial prejudice and hierarchy were the ones that made it offensive thus transcending the differences that have been created throughout time.

It is in the section "*Essentials of an Afropolitan: defining an "African of the world*" that the main theme of the dissertation will be analyzed. Afropolitanism is a cultural trend set in the late 20th century that gave voice to a younger generation of Africans and African descendants attempting to redeem and rethink African consciousness and identity around the globe. This premise, being initially focused on the concept of a generation of Africans born outside of Africa but who were still connected through tradition and lineage, has certainly evolved into a phenomenon. As a concept it is intersectional to geography, identity, culture, gender and race and also rejects the idea of bounding the African identity to a specific geographic location. Being Afropolitan is to embrace cultural hybridity, to belong everywhere and to Africa at the same time.

In the section "*Afropolitanism in a cosmopolitan setting*" it will be explained how the term cosmopolitanism has evolved into the neologism Afropolitanism. Furthermore, a comparison between the original concept and the newer one will be established, in order to analyze both similarities and differences. Over the last decades, due to a significant migratory flow mainly caused by globalization, Africans have tried to understand how intersected mobilities and the notion of "citizen of the world" might be connected. Also, Du Bois' concept of double consciousness will be revisited since it is a common feeling for an Afropolitan, that is, to feel torn between two or more places at the same time. Furthermore, some African postcolonial writers will be considered and studied such as Kwame Appiah, Emma Dabiri and Taiye Selasi.

Taking into consideration that *Americanah* and *We Need New Names* focus on the experience of displacement of two young girls who evolve, grow up and even reinvent themselves, it is important to introduce the concept of *Bildung* or process of self-cultivation, focusing on the literary genre that better applies to these novels: the Black *Bildungsroman*. Therefore, in the section "*Afropolitanism and* the *Black Bildungsroman: the journey of life in African and African American fiction*" a brief contextualization of the traditional novel will be presented in order to understand how the Black *Bildungsroman* is a reinvention of the original formula.

Despite some differences, this recent variation, like the classic genre, represents the inner and physical growth of the self. However, the narratives discuss the human condition by portraying several social themes such as multiculturalism, interculturality or basic human rights. This genre documents a quest for an identity and by doing so incites the reader to question contemporaneity and the difficult processes through which an individual must go through in order to evolve and be transformed.

## 1.2 Raising Black Awareness: was Pan-Africanism the right label?

### 1.2.1. Historicizing the Pan-Africanist spirit and its challenges

In the 18th century, when 12 million Africans had been forcibly transported to a New World that would only give them a life of subjugation, harsh labor, and poverty, a need for change became evident. As generations of enslaved African descendants were being born and raised in a life of servitude, the dream of freedom would have to wait for at least a century longer when, by the end of the Civil War (1861-1865), the United States Constitution started to change by employing three new amendments that would finally mean a new start.

Firstly, it should be made clear that in the beginning of the 19th century, before the Civil War and when slavery was still a reality, the abolitionist movement had two factions: the conservatives and the radicals. The former, although being in favor of abolishing slavery, considered colonization to be the right solution for former slaves who should return to their origins. This perspective could be considered vaguely racist since it implied that these former slaves were not welcomed to stay. In contrast, the liberals believed that they had the right to live in the American continent and to be a part of society. In spite of this predicament as to where slaves should go when their time of servitude came to an end, the majority believed they should return to Africa. That is why in 1816 the American Colonization Society (ACS) wanted to create an African colony for a mass repatriation of freed slaves, since the scenario of Black and White people cohabitating freely was too unrealistic.

This colony, the nation of Liberia today, was secured by the ACS[2] in 1821, thus establishing a haven for Africans to come back to. According to *Slaves to Racism: An Unbroken Chain from America to Liberia* (2008) it is estimated that the Association transported about 12,000 African Americans to Liberia from 1822 to 1867, of which approximately 4,500 were born free; 350 purchased their freedom; and 6,000 were former slaves. Although the majority was going to a place they had never known[3], others stepped freely into the ships, confident they would "regain mastery of their lives" (Aje 30). As abolitionism was growing stronger in the 1830s, the ACS started to support the end of slavery while also promoting Liberia[4].

In the aftermath of the Civil War, in 1865, the 13th Amendment formally abolished slavery. In 1868, the 14th Amendment addressed the issue of citizenship and, finally, in 1870, the 15th Amendment granted former slaves the right to vote. These three laws were fundamental in the period that followed the American Civil War, the Reconstruction Era (1865-1877), in which there was an effort to fight against racial inequality however difficult it was for the southern states who were being overpowered by the presence of northern militants. During this period, the first instinct of these recently freed slaves was to find their long lost relatives, whom they had never met or from whom they were separated for years. For a while there was a sense of hope and belief in progress, but as northern troops retreated from the South and the Reconstruction period started to fade, these people were forced to find a new life far away from the South to save their newly achieved citizenship. Without the control of the North, white supremacists soon reestablished the old order by using brutal and public violence in response to the new political rights that former slaves had been granted.

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[2] Africa's western coast was firstly explored by the Portuguese, especially with Pedro de Sintra who had reached the coast in 1461. This region was called by following explorers as Grand Cape Mount, Cape Mesurado and Cape Palmas. The area which would later on become Liberia was initially known as Grain or Pepper Coast due to the fact that pepper grains were the main currency for trade. Later, in the 19th century, when the ACS was already proposing to return former slaves to the continent, the Grain Coast became a suitable place for this process to take place. In 1818, the ACS visited this region and found no European settlers, thus signing an agreement with local native chiefs granting the society possession of Cape Mesurado which is located on the coast of Liberia and near the capital of Monrovia.

[3] Given the fact that most freed slaves were completely unaware of life in Liberia, emigrating was in fact a risk not many thought was worth taking. Before departing, colonists tried to get as much information they could about Liberia. There were even speeches given by ACS agents who had been there already or traded correspondence between those who had settled.

[4] It is important to note that Liberia was not the only place African Americans could migrate to. There was also interest in going to Haiti and even Canada. After the Civil War, about 6,000 migrants went to Haiti and 20,000 left America for Canada. (Aje 36)

However, in some African American social circles an idealized image of a sovereign Africa and of Africans united by ancestry emerged as an alternative. This idea was never originally embraced by African American abolitionists who were not familiarized with the African continent and rather wanted to stay in America and be assured of their equal rights in order to live peacefully. Nevertheless, Pan-Africanism's groundwork starts with these early experiences of sending people back to Africa, such as the situation of Liberia. This utopia of return began to take shape in the work of a minority of scholars such as Edward Wilmot Blyden[5] (1832-1912) and Alexander

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[5] Blyden was a diplomat, a politician, and a writer, born in Saint Thomas, Danish Antilles, and raised by free and educated parents. In 1850, he moved to the New World to study theology, but no American university admitted him due to racial discrimination.

Crummell[6] (1819-1898), in the mid-19th century, who proposed the idea of an undivided African culture and identity as a response to the continent's European colonization and exploitation. This would become the backbone of the movement known as Pan-Africanism. This movement had its first appearances in the Black intellectual discourse at the Chicago Congress in 1893, the first Pan-African Conference in 1900 and the first Pan-African Congress in 1919, in which W.E.B. Du Bois (1868-1963) participated as a delegate. In all these reunions and others that happened through nearly half a century, various scholars and political leaders would discuss Africa's current situation, in order to achieve their main goal: continental liberation from European colonization. In a broader sense, it is believed by many theorists, such as Aminah Wallace, that Pan-Africanism is a result of the struggles that the first descendants of African slaves went through. These descendants would lead to the formation of the African diaspora. Millions of Africans were forcibly transported to the New World and new nations were established where Africans were a significant minority or even a majority. Anti-African racism, mainly supported by the Ku Klux Klan, became a reality in which these Africans were denied basic human rights such as the right to vote, good education and safe housing. There are many alternative interpretations of Pan-Africanism in the intellectual discourse. Some scholars, as Enoh explains, see it as a racial movement concerned with the ambitions of all Black people; others consider it a fight for the independence of African countries south of the Sahara; while for others this simply means African unity and solidarity (Enoh 85). Therefore, there are many different interpretations which approach all kinds of areas such as politics, economics, identity, culture and even religion. Despite these alternative readings, the general opinion believed that Pan-Africanism:

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[6] Alexander Crummell trained for the priesthood, becoming an Episcopal priest. He studied moral philosophy at Cambridge University and took a bachelor's degree at Queen's College at Cambridge. As a supporter of the anti-slavery movement, he subsequently went to Liberia taking a position as a professor of English and moral philosophy at Liberia College. However, some challenges led him to return to the States after the Civil War.

> . . . can be traced to the era of the European slave trade when enslaved Africans, whether en route to or already in the New World, grieved and longed to unite with their kin on the African continent. This implies that the origin of Pan-Africanism is related to the activities of African descendants in the diaspora (Esedebe 45-46)

Regardless of this agreement, it is important to bring to this discussion the vision of those known as the forefathers of Pan-Africanism namely Edward Blyden and W.E.B Du Bois. Despite sharing different perspectives from Blyden about the right future for Africans, Du Bois was also in favor of achieving freedom from any kind of oppression.

Concerning Blyden's point of view on this matter, he has frequently been accused of lack of coherence and being contradictory with his perspectives. In 1851, Blyden had migrated to Liberia and he believed that it was vital and beneficial to have a connection with African origins. Even though the American Colonization Society's project had been set in motion, Blyden[7] already believed that returning to the continent was an opportunity to create a sovereign and powerful Black state, to educate their indigenous 'brothers'[8] and rid "their ancestral homeland from supposed savagery and darkness" (Bassey 42). He became a strong supporter of racial pride and defender of the return of the diaspora to the continent, advocating that "as long as there are Christian Negroes in this land who may do a civilizing work in Africa, and who desire to go thither, so long will this colonization enterprise be a necessary and beneficent agency" (Blyden 46). Although he completely rejected the inferiority of the Black individual, he defended "racial differentiation" (Henriksen 283) which established that all races were different but equal. Blyden's perspective becomes incoherent when he stated that the colonization enterprise was an "effective" (Blyden 43) act of civilization and advantageous for the continent.

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[7] One of his major works is *A Vindication of the Negro Race* (1857).

[8] Americo-Liberians only represented 5% of the population in Liberia. Despite being short in numbers, with the help of settlers they developed a West-based political system, thus having control over the natives.

> Among the agencies proposed for carrying on the work of civilisation in Africa, none has proved so effective as the American Colonisation enterprise. People who talk of the civilising and elevating influence of mere trade on that continent, do so because they are unacquainted with the facts. Nor can missionaries alone do this work. (. . .) We say, also, send the missionary to every tribe and every village. Multiply throughout the country the evangelizing agencies. Line the banks of the rivers with the preachers of righteousness—penetrate the jungles with those holy pioneers— crown the mountain-tops with your churches, and fill the valleys with your schools. No single agency is sufficient to cope with the multifarious needs of the mighty work. But the indispensable agency is the Colony. Groups of Christian and civilized settlers must, in every instance bring up the rear, if the results of your work are to be widespread, beneficial and enduring. (Blyden 43)

Although Blyden had ideologically supported the colonization enterprise, it does not mean that his ideas were aligned with the general conservative opinion. Even though the abolitionist movement started with such narrow-minded ideas, it certainly evolved into progressive ones. Therefore, Blyden might have looked to the colonization project and the return to Africa as an opportunity to change the continent for the better. It is also fundamental to clarify that at that time the African continent was idealized. Former slaves did not remember where they had come from, what they were originally called, the language they spoke or what the idea of nation even was. The continent itself was frequently mistaken for a whole country, completely ignoring all the cultural and religious differences that existed.

As for the African diaspora, many Africans in Europe had learned much about the West but nothing of their native lands which led to a complete assimilation of the receiving culture. Many well-educated Africans began to see themselves as Europeans. Therefore, the colonialist project was harmful to the Africans' sense of self: "The slavery of the mind is far more destructive than that of the body" (Blyden 13). In order to preserve African culture and heritage, Blyden considered that the intrinsic qualities which he termed "African personality" were fundamental in expressing the singularity of the continental identity which was related to the ideology of African nationalism, a political movement that valued the collective as a single sovereign nation.

Blyden's perspectives were shared by other intellectuals, namely Alexander Crummell (1818-1898). He also believed that African regeneration should come from civilized African Christians of the diaspora and considered Liberia an "exemplary black nation" (Henriksen 3); thus becoming a strong advocate of its development as a nation. Crummell not only believed that the "regeneration of Africa in general must come from outside" (Adi 14), but also that Africans had characteristics that would raise the race's inferiority to a state of prominence. In 1897, when he left Liberia, he founded the American Negro Academy which was the first organization in America to encourage African Americans to pursuit academic careers.

Overall, Blyden considered that Black people around the world were a single nation who should be as proud as he was to be Black. These ideas led to the Black cultural renaissance of the mid-20th century which "awakened African consciousness in America" (Henriksen 284) and helped not only African Americans but also Africans to become self-aware of their racial identity and ethnic culture. Blyden's main objective was not only to preserve Africans' heritage, but also to link Africans from all localities and achieve global unification.

The second influential voice of this discussion is that of W.E.B. Du Bois, a distinguished intellectual who belonged to one of the most important Black cultural movements, the Harlem Renaissance, in which he considered the union between art and literature a tool to achieve racial equality and give notice to African American creativity. After publishing a collection of essays entitled *The Souls of Black Folk*

(1903), in 1909, Du Bois becomes a founding member of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), an American organization fighting for the abolition of segregation and racial discrimination. In 1919, Du Bois co-organized the First Pan-African Congress in Paris, which gathered delegates from Europe, Africa, the Caribbean and the United States. In the aforementioned collection of essays, Du Bois acknowledged that the discriminatory barrier between Black and White people was undoubtedly the problem of the 20th century. The "color-line" (Du Bois 32), as he termed it, caused repercussions to the Black individual's self-awareness, making him feel as an outsider who knows himself through the perception of others.

> After the Egyptian and Indian, the Greek and Roman, the Teuton and Mongolian, the Negro is a sort of seventh son, born with a veil, and gifted with second-sight* in this American world,—a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world. It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his two-ness,—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder. (Du Bois 8)

This sense of "two-ness" certainly implied that it should be possible to be a part of two cultures at the same time. This feeling is but a spark of something that would expand in the late 20th and early 21st century with Afropolitanism. The new way for Africans to be in the world is to constantly feel torn between two or more cultures, traditions and most of all identities. However, Du Bois describes these feelings as "unreconciled strivings" (Du Bois 8) whereas a true Afropolitan must embrace and accept this condition. He acknowledged that this struggle "[was] not only of intense and living interest to us but forms an epoch in the history of mankind" (Du Bois 79). Such epoch focused on defining race as a group of individuals who shared a set of characteristics (language, culture, tradition, etc.) that brought them together whether voluntarily or not (Du Bois 80-81). Concerning the “Negro” race, as he termed it, Du Bois defended that it was destined to great accomplishments in the fields of science, literature, art, philosophy and so on. However, the intellectual made it clear that “Negroes” (Du Bois 83) should not allow themselves to be psychologically and culturally absorbed by White Americans, for the sake of “Pan-Negroism” (Du Bois 83), a concept which was already being taken into consideration by the philosopher. Therefore, in the spirit of unity and brotherhood, Du Bois proudly stated:

> That if in America it is to be proven for the first time in the modern world that not only Negroes are capable of evolving individual men like Toussaint, the Saviour, but are a nation stored with wonderful possibilities of culture, then their destiny is not a servile imitation of Anglo-Saxon culture, but a stalwart originality which shall unswervingly follow Negro ideals. (Du Bois 83)

In search of this originality, the African American still struggles with the duality that haunts him, the self-questioning of whose side must he belong to and why must he belong anywhere in the first place. According to Du Bois, these dilemmas led to irresolution, a state of idleness and a waste of bright minds whose talent was solely used “to do the bidding of the race” (Du Bois 84). Consequently, he claimed that the Black race could only protect and conserve itself through “race organization, by race solidarity, by race unity” (Du Bois 84); three main points which would later on be consistently defended in the Pan-African Congresses. According to Du Bois, the First Pan-African Conference of 1900, in London, was the first time “Pan-Africanism” was ever used; however, years before, in 1893, the Chicago Congress had already applied the term.

Regarding Du Bois and Blyden’s perspectives, it is known that the former expressed an admiration for Blyden’s work, praising him as “the prophet of the renaissance of the Negro race” (Du Bois 7). Du Bois’ later convictions were in favor of an anti-colonial nationalism, which denied exterior domination. He defended that the worth of the nation belonged solely to the nation, although he knew that some were deeply underdeveloped and in urgent need for modernization. Some contemporary readers might glimpse some inconsistency in his beliefs. Although he was an advocate of Black nations' liberation, Du Bois was clearly influenced by his Western education by discrediting the colonial ideology while also acknowledging that colonials "needed to meet the Western standards of modernity" (Kendhammer 58). Although Blyden was one of the first patrons to present the Pan-Africanist ideology to the intellectual discourse, it was W.E.B. Du Bois who certainly laid the foundations of the movement. Despite having supported Pan-Africanism since its first congress, the scholar had already been fighting for Pan-Negroism in 1897.

Overall, the concept of Pan-Africanism has changed a lot over time, suffering various mutations that seemed to achieve a common goal, nonetheless. Some consider it a movement of educated and Westernized Black leaders, an elite determined to end the colonization of Africa, but who did not reject the benefits it had on the motherland. Others acknowledge it as a racial movement that urged to respond to the concerns of people of color around the globe. Furthermore, it could also mean unity in the political sense of consolidating the African continent or rehabilitating the African past to build a strong and proud future.

### 1.2.2. Garvey and Garveyism: a movement for the masses

Marcus Mosiah Garvey (1887-1940), born in Jamaica, was one of the most important African American radical activists in the history of the African diaspora in America, during World War I. At the age of 25, Garvey had lived in London for two years where he met many other Black students and intellectuals who, like him, wanted to become more involved in the political sphere. This metropolitan city had become a common stage for international conventions, such as the first Pan-African Conference in 1900, organized by delegates representing black communities from the United States, the West Indies and England. Garvey was of course influenced by Pan-Africanism and as soon as he returned to Jamaica, in 1914, he founded the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) in order to achieve unity, liberation, raise racial awareness and establish a Black-ruled government in Africa fueled by the famous motto 'One God! One Aim! One Destiny'.

When the UNIA failed in Jamaica, Garvey decided to go to the United States, in 1916, where he found a large group of Black followers who trusted him to be the one who would restore their racial pride. Garvey immediately started establishing branches of the UNIA on the main black neighborhoods of the North and setting its main headquarters in New York, specifically in Harlem, the Black capital of America and the ultimate symbol of social, cultural and political diversity. During 1918, the UNIA started printing its own newspaper, the *Negro World*, which would become a valuable tool for preaching Garvey's anti-colonial message: "Africa for the Africans". In 1919, the UNIA's members were close to 2 million, although there is no actual record of these memberships. Around that time, Garvey and his followers had launched not only the Black Star Line project which would establish trade between Africans in American and other parts of the world, but also the Negro Factories Association which would encourage Africans to achieve economic independence.

It is safe to say that Garveyism became one of the largest political movements in the 20th century. Recruiting members in America at this time could not have been difficult. As World War I ended, in 1918, African Americans returned and moved North looking for jobs and a better life but faced a bad economy and a violent racial oppression[9]. As Black communities were starting to grow, the lack of employment certainly caused hostility between races, which frequently ended up in riots. Disillusioned about achieving freedom and equality in America, many saw a leader in Garvey. For him, freedom could only be achieved in Africa, since black people were stronger in numbers in comparison to the white colonizers. Garvey discusses this perspective, in 1919, in his Jamaican newspaper *The Blackman*.

> We are determined to solve our own problem by redeeming our Motherland Africa from the hands of alien exploiters and found there a Government, a nation of our own, strong enough to lend protection to the members of our race scattered all over the world, and to compel the respect of the nations and races of the earth. (qtd. Lawler 46)

Garvey's words of encouragement were, in a way, unrealistic, because the creation of an African nation or a United States of Africa was something very hard to achieve. Taking into consideration that Garvey did not present actual measures to fulfill this dream of sorts, the "Back to Africa" movement could be considered inconsistent. Considering, for example, African Americans, already born and raised in America, this return to the motherland could not in fact be termed as an actual return but rather as a settlement, since they had never been to Africa. It could certainly be quite difficult trying to connect with a place you only know by hearsay or education. This is to say that although many followed Garvey blindly, others may have seen a lot of loopholes in his plans.

On that note, it is no secret that Garvey had opponents, including of his own race. One of his biggest opponents was W.E.B. Du Bois. Both activists attacked each other through their own newspapers. While the NAACP's agenda was of racial cooperation, the UNIA's encouraged segregation. Du Bois, for instance, did not agree with the "Back to Africa" concept, believing that African Americans belonged in America and were essential in its development. As mentioned earlier, Garvey's younger years in London, the main stage for the Pan-African conferences, were decisive in his future as an activist in the United States. Pan-Africanism was in fact already established by the time Garvey began to form his own movement and his agenda was always considered more radical than that of the Pan-African black elite. It is important to note that although Garveyism had millions of followers, the majority belonged to the masses, illiterate and uncapable of seeing past Garvey's unrealistic plans and radical beliefs. The Pan-Africanists, however, were supported by the intellectuals, thus having a more moderate approach to the problem of the color line. Contrary to Garveyism, Pan-Africanism's agenda worked alongside the imperialist one. The truth is that Pan-Africanism always accepted the colonialism framework, believing that it brought something good to the black community, such as education by western standards. Also, Pan-Africanists were mainly concerned with changing the American society and affirming their presence in it. Migrating to the African continent, according to them, would only satisfy white supremacists who did not welcome the Black community in America. Despite not being too much realistic, Garveyism's premise of a sovereign Black nation provided a contrary concept of nationalism than that developed by its rival. Garvey stated that Africa was powerful enough to become self-reliant. In a speech published in *The Negro World*, he tried to clarify that he did not want a mass migration to Africa per se.

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[9] This period was known as the "Red Summer" in which thousands of black veterans returning from the battlefield suffered brutal attacks and discrimination. White supremacists were feeling threatened by a huge migratory flow to the northern cities caused by the Great Migration. In 1919, in Arkansas, for example, there were approximately 25 riots, 97 recorded lynchings and a three-day-long massacre.

> Understand this African program well. I am not saying that all the Negroes of the United States should go to Africa; I am not saying that all the Negroes of the West Indies should go back to Africa, But I say this: That some serious attempt must be made to build up a government and nation sufficiently strong to protect the Negro or your future in the United States

> will not be worth a snap of the finger ... Without an independent Africa – without a powerful Africa you are lost. (qtd. Lewis 480)

It is fundamental to explain how Garvey's perspective on the concept of nation and nationalism could be unrealistic. The colonization enterprise had in fact created some African nations at the time, which Garvey was not aware and neither were Africans from many other countries. Considering that he never set foot in Africa, he could not have known that there were different cultures, languages, traditions that already existed before the White settlers arrived. The African continent was never homogeneous and it still is not to this day. Many Africans had a localist perspective and were unaware of the existence of other countries since they could rarely travel. Therefore, for Garvey to preach this idea of a great African nation completely disregarding the vastness and diversity of the continent, it meant that his perspective was quite shortsighted due to his lack of knowledge about the continent he called home. Therefore, the "Back to Africa" movement did not mean relocating all African descendants to the homeland, but rather trying to organize Africa by giving it power in order to become an independent black nation and build a home worth coming back to. Garveyism restored the lost hope and self-worth of many. Overall, his plans were in fact farfetched, but his legacy lived on. Eventually, many African nations became free and independent, meaning that Garvey's philosophy did cause an impact. During the 60s, the offspring of the Garveyites became activists fighting for the Black Power movement and Civil Rights. They were young black Americans who were dissatisfied and tried to revive many of the ideas their parents had followed. "Black Power" was the motto of these people, advocating separatism and self-reliance once more. One example of these offspring is Malcolm X, a leading spokesman of the Black separatist organization called the Nation of Islam[10], founded by Wallace Fard in the 1930s.

Despite Garveyism being fundamental in this long-lasting rallying of the Black community, other movements, in the early 20th century, started to contribute to this trend, such as the New Negro which took place in the 20s, in Harlem, New York, and, in the Francophone world, *Négritude*, involving the term "Negro" as an open statement for describing Africans and those of African descent. The next section will thus analyze both movements, respectively.

### 1.3. The self-affirmation of black people: the New Negro and *Négritude*

By the time W.E.B. Du Bois had published *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903) it was considered one of the "earliest expressions of Negritude" (Jack 31-32) in which he demanded a change of mentality concerning the image of inferiority black people were subjected to in an all-White-America. It also became a solid foundation for the "New Negro" cultural movement, during the Harlem Renaissance, which promoted a Black identity that American culture had never allowed so far. The term "New Negro" was first used by Hubert Harrison (1883-1927) with the publication, in 1917, of the *New Negro* magazine and later on with the publication of Alain Locke's *The New Negro* (1925). Hubert Harrison established the Liberty League of Negro Americans and was the editor of *The Voice* (1917), the first newspaper of the New Negro Movement in Harlem.

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[10] Some African Americans felt more connected to Islam than Christianity, since it was considered the white man's religion. They read the Koran, worshipped Allah as their true God and accepted Mohammed as their leader. Although the Nation of Islam was founded in the 30s, Wallace Fard had previously been a member of another movement called the Moorish Science Temple of America, founded by Drew Ali, in 1913, New Jersey. This religious and national organization was based on the belief that African Americans were descendants of the Moors. This means that prior to Fard's movement, others were already trying to find out what came before Christianity.

It is important to clarify that this cultural and literary movement consisted, according to David Levering Lewis, of three main periods: the Bohemian Renaissance (1917-1923), the era of the Talented Tenth (1924-1926), and the Negro Renaissance (1926-1935). Firstly, the Bohemian Renaissance was mainly dominated by White authors who were radicals and were appealed by the African American way of life. The second period still depended on the collaboration between White allies, sometimes known as "Negrotarians", and those known as the Talented Tenth[11], presided by Black civil rights leaders such as Du Bois and Charles Spurgeon Johnson, leader of the National Urban League (NUL). This phase was optimistic about what could be achieved through art. The last period, the Negro Renaissance, was established by a much younger generation of artists who rebelled against the standards of the previous generation. These young rebels considered the second generation to be elitist and ashamed of the Black community's reality. These younger writers[12] of the renaissance included Claude McKay, Wallace Thurman and Langston Hughes.

Alain Locke's[13] *The New Negro*[14] (1925), a vast collection of essays, poetry, plays, music and art by White and Black artists, was a response of the younger generation which alerted to a cultural revolution about to happen not only in New York[15] but around the world as well. Locke defended Black art to be the expression of the artists' individuality and rejected it as way of advertising Black experience for the sake of a social cause. Du Bois and Locke's perspectives did not go hand in hand. Du Bois, for instance, considered that arts could help advertise racial equality and break negative stereotypes once and for all. Therefore, art was a tool to represent the African American in his best behavior. In contrast, Locke was a part of the younger generation who rejected the snobbery and elitism of a much more privileged generation. He believed that art should have no restraints nor filters. Therefore, *The New Negro* was a way to give voice to these young authors who wanted to portray life as it was.

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[11] This term was created by Du Bois and was first mentioned in an article published in *The Negro Problem* in 1903. Du Bois' premise is based on the higher education of African Americans who needed a classical education in order to reach their maximum potential.

[12] They were also known as the "fire generation" due to the *FIRE!!* Magazine in which they all published among many others. However, this magazine had only one issue since its headquarters burned down, forcing the entire project to be shut down.

[13] Locke did not contribute to this collection and was only its main editor. He was recognized for his interpretations of African American art and literature.

[14] *The New Negro* was based on the contents of the 1925 edition of *Survey Graphic*. An edition especially dedicated to the Harlem district and with an emphasis on the arts, which was quite uncommon for this kind of magazine.

Needless to say that the "New Negro" took over the "Old Negro", another concept Locke mentions in the collection. The Old Negro was the "formula" (Locke 28) of the Negro in the South, defenseless, captive, condemned, a social burden overall. Once the Great Migration allowed him to move elsewhere, the so-called "Negro problem" became nation-wide and unsectionalized and thus "in the very process of being transplanted, the Negro [was] becoming transformed" (Locke 30) into something new. However, the movement was not entirely successful. It failed by not taking actual measures that would improve both economically and socially the lives of African Americans and also for avoiding White condescendence, since the movement "was soon 'colonized' by white society and became fashionable among white intellectuals" (Jack 32) who took interest in Black literature that was different from the stereotype.

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[15] After World War I, the Great Migration led around 500,000 African Americans from the South to the North, West and Midwest cities, in search of a better life, to confront racial prejudice and create a black culture that would leave a mark in the world. Harlem was one of those cities and this new sense of aesthetic was reflected everywhere, in magazines, newspapers, theaters, music, etc.

In the late 20s, in Paris, a similar movement would start to rise. Cultural, nonetheless, the ideology which would be known as *Négritude* or Negritude emerged from the uprising of a small group of Black intellectuals against French colonialism and racism. This expression of revolt was influenced by the encounter of three Black students who belonged to different French colonies. Aimé Césaire[16] (1913-2008), from Martinique, Léopold Sédar Senghor (1912-1978), from Senegal, and Léon-Gontram Damas[17] (1906-2001), from Guiana.

Although it was never a formal organization, this cultural project started with heated discussions between friends and colleagues who were also a part of the diaspora and shared the same interest for Africa. "Negritude was not simply a set of disembodied theories about colonialism and Africanity" (Wilder 151). Its main objective was to reject assimilation and for Black people to become activists to retaliate against the negative stereotypes induced by Western society and in so doing celebrating their culture and racial identity. Senghor, Césaire and Damas soon became the hosts of many of these discussions. They gathered in cafés, dance halls, restaurants. Just like Harlem in the 20s, Paris was also a city full of African descendants from various places thus creating a self-conscious Black community who shared the same experiences of racialization.

The Negritude movement was influenced by the Harlem Renaissance and by Du Bois' campaign of celebrating Black identity in North American society. In effect, Negritude shared the same ideology. In these discussions, in Paris, they met many Black

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[16] Aimé Césaire and Léon Damas had already met before coming to Paris in 1931. They were classmates in Fort-de-France, in Martinique, where they both graduated from Victor Schoelcher High School.

[17] Once in Paris, Damas wanted to study Law while Césaire had been accepted at Lycée Louis Le Grand to study for the admission test to the prestigious École Normale Supérieure. Upon his arrival at the Lycée, he met Senghor who had already been a student at Louis le Grand for three years.

American writers, such as Langston Hughes (1902-1967) or Claude McKay (1889-1948). Senghor and his friends had even heard of Alain Locke's collection of essays and were very impressed with it. However, certain perspectives of Locke created some sort of tension. Despite supporting the creation of a brotherhood and promoting a sense of unity, Locke also viewed cultural assimilation as a way of "transforming America, not escaping it" (Wilder 176).

In 1935, the group of Black intellectuals had their first and only publication in *L'Étudiant Noir* which constituted a way for them to openly present their opinions as they saw fit. The term *Négritude* is never mentioned in this issue and does not appear until Aimé Césaire coined the term in his work *Cahier d'un Retour au Pays Natal* (1939) or *Notebook of a Return to the Native Land*. In *L'Étudiant Noir*, however, Césaire's article *Nègreries*[18] (1935) caught a lot of attention. He rejected cultural assimilation which he thought was the expression of utmost stupidity and a delusion that could never be fully achieved since it ignored the racial differences and the inevitable racism. Therefore, Césaire calls Black youth to action, to go against the colonizers and fight back the urge to assimilate. In *Discourse on Colonialism* (1950), Césaire's perspective is much more consolidated on these topics. Colonialism is harmful to both the settler and the native, it in fact:

> . . . dehumanizes even the most civilized man; that colonial activity, colonial enterprise, colonial conquest, which is based on contempt for the native and justified by that contempt, inevitably tends to change him who undertakes it; that the colonizer, who in order to ease his conscience gets into the habit of seeing the other man as an animal, accustoms himself to treating him like an animal, and tends objectively to transform himself into an animal. It is this result, this boomerang effect of colonization that I wanted to point out. (Césaire 41)

It is this "boomerang effect" that ultimately turns the civilized man into a cruel animal and therefore into a racist, considering the other animal (the native) as inferior.

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[18] A neologism combining *nègres* and *reveries* which could be interpreted as black illusions or dreams.

With this hierarchy established the only relationship there could be is of domination and submission. According to Césaire, the worst aspect of all is that colonialism is a false front for progress and an unfulfilled promise. Instead of helping to achieve something, it only drains the community of their essence. Therefore, Negritude "was really a resistance to the politics of assimilation" (Césaire 88).  According to Césaire, the origin of the true meaning of Negritude started in Haiti, where the history of emancipation of many Africans became an inspiration. The Republic of Haiti was originally populated by the Arawak/Taino indigenous communities. As they were disappearing, African slaves were brought to this colony. The Haitian Revolution (1791-1804) had a significant dimension, turning into a war for liberation. Slavery was officially abolished in Saint-Domingue in 1793 and Toussaint Louverture, a former slave and one of the leaders of the revolution, was appointed Governor-General. Haiti's independence represented a defiance against colonialism and racialism.

Among the three friends, Damas was the only one that did not write for *L'Étudiant Noir* but was involved in the editorial part. According to him, "this new journal was a self-conscious attempt not only to address a Pan African community of colonial students in France but to call one into being" (Damas 59). The fact that in 1919 the first Pan-African Congress was held in Paris was already enough reason for another African-based ideology to take form. An ideology that essentially claimed a system of human values, the right for Black people to have their own culture and community and not be ridiculed. Overall, Negritude meant accepting Blackness.

After analyzing these two movements, it is now time to introduce and study the main theme of this dissertation, Afropolitanism, which in the 21st century introduces a new concept of African identity in relation to the globalized and cosmopolitan world we live in today.

## 1.4. Essentials of an Afropolitan: defining an "African of the world"

The neologism Afropolitanism was first conceived to describe a migratory flow of the early 21st century which led to a new generation of Africans who were born outside the African continent or simply left it behind but were still connected to their roots. Eventually, this term evolves into a phenomenon of the century, a way of being African in the world. To be Afropolitan was to be connected to the continent, to its traditions, but at the same time be able to live amongst different communities. This new personality praises "a state of cultural hybridity – to be of Africa and of other worlds at the same time" (Gikandi 9-10).

In relation to this way of being, this African exodus was not to be perceived as a loss but as a "cultural bonus" (Gikandi 9-10), deconstructing the preconceived idea of a singular and unique African identity. The term Afropolitanism was first presented by Taiye Tuakli-Wosornu, better known as Taiye Selasi, a British American writer of Ghanaian and Nigerian descent, in an article published in *LIP Magazine* entitled "Bye-Bye Babar" or "What is an Afropolitan?" (2005), to which she replies that they are "Africans of the world" (Selasi n.p.). Her use of the term refers to the migratory flow of Africans to the West around the 60s and 70s who, nowadays, are parents to this new generation of Afropolitans who at a younger age had "to forge a sense of self from wildly disparate sources" (Selasi n.p.). The author provides a concept of interconnectedness, a state of geographical detachment, which means to belong anywhere and nowhere at the same time. However, this notion only applies to a Black elite of African emigrants, a new generation of individuals who were either born outside of Africa or left their home in pursuit of a better life. The Afropolitan is polished, well-educated, an art-lover, a music *connoisseur*, therefore, a versatile self.

> 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. . . (Selasi n.p.)

Although this scenario described by Selasi sounds promising, she recognizes that the Afropolitan has to deal with a lot of pressure resulting from his/her origins and his/her new life in the West. Many are either ashamed of their ancestry, of being connected to a place that only bears negative connotations or ashamed of losing touch with their homeland and being too connected to the receiving culture. This individual has difficulty in consolidating his/her identity which constantly struggles with the duality that shapes it. Therefore, Selasi states that the Afropolitan is often "lost in transnation" (Selasi n.p.). A duality which also concerns the historical dilemma of Blackness, that is, to claim it as being part of one's personality or not. In the article, Selasi clarifies that race is a political matter and is in no way related to mere color of skin (Selasi n.p.), meaning that each individual perspective on race is shaped by the political forces of any place. Therefore, Afropolitanism is to be in accordance with a universal sense of Africanness and not of Blackness per se.

In 2015, ten years after "Bye-Bye Babar", Taiye Selasi gave a TED Talk entitled *Don't ask where I'm from, ask me where I'm local* in which she explains that no one's identity belongs to a fixed place and has ties to a single country. People are made of life experiences which can occur on various points of the world. Therefore, the author, replacing the language of nationality with the language of locality, concludes that "all of us are multi, multi-local, multi-layered" (Selasi n.p.) and experiences are what define us. During her talk, she mentions her famous article, which encouraged a never-ending debate, justifying herself as to why such a word is so important to her. It is so because it defines her. In being multi-local, her identity takes rise on the various local experiences that define her. Therefore, during her TED talk, she states that she wrote that article because she:

> . . . felt shut out from various identities: American, British, Kenya and Nigerian, no one ever seems to be satisfied by my claims of being one or the other or a combination of the four and so I thought to myself 'well there must be some alternatives that I'm missing' and Afropolitanism was my way of conceiving of that alternative. (Selasi n.p.)

Although Selasi's interpretation caused quite a stir in the cultural discourse, there is another interpretation of Afropolitanism which belongs to Joseph Achille Mbembe, a philosopher and intellectual who, two years after "Bye Bye Babar", wrote an article entitled "Afropolitanism"[19]. His main premise is the "circulation of the worlds" (Mbembe 2007), which defends a borderless circulation of every individual and culture and scrutinizes the synonymity between the African continent and Black people. Although many Black people are African that does not mean that all Africans are Black and vice versa. Mbembe says so himself: "Black people do not have an exclusivity to African citizenship by virtue of the color of their skin" (Mbembe n.p.).

The mobility implied in this circulation of worlds, according to Mbembe, has been a part of African history for centuries, going back to a time before the colonization of the continent when the nomadic communities would always be on the move. It was this constant movement that led to the formation of countless African identities and cultures.

> In fact, African pre-colonial history was, most of the time, a process of people constantly moving across the continent. It is a process of cultures in collision, locked into the maelstrom of wars, invasions, migrations, mixed marriages, diverse religions that one makes his own, techniques that are

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[19] This article was first published online on the French magazine *Africultures*, in 2005. Two years later it appears in the Johannesburg Art Gallery's catalogue "Africa Remix: Contemporary Art of a Continent". In 2010, an expanded version of this essay is published in *Sortir de la grande nuit: Essai sur l'Afrique décolonisée* or *Getting out of the big night: Essay on a decolonized Africa* [my translation].

> exchanged, and goods that are distributed. The cultural history of the continent can barely be understood outside the paradigm of homelessness, mobility and displacement (Mbembe n.p.)[20].

Even during the colonial period and the consequent foundation of borders, this outlook endured and was able to establish cities such as Dakar, Nairobi and Johannesburg which turned into cosmopolitan microcosmos. The postcolonial period is in fact the one Mbembe most analyses. In order to understand Afropolitanism he tries to set an historical contextualization of when that term came to exist and under what circumstances. Although the precolonial period is of extreme importance due to the mobility that characterized it, the postcolonial history is fundamental to the neologism. Mbembe starts by establishing two main moments in this period. The first moment, a nationalist one, describes the process of decolonization and independence which would soon lead to postcolonialism. The second moment encompasses the last quarter of the 20th century and is defined by transnationalism which resulted in the creation of a consolidated diaspora. It is in this context that Afropolitanism appears, in this "imbrication of here and elsewhere, the presence of the elsewhere in the here and vice versa" (Mbembe 229). In Mbembe's vision, Afropolitanism also transcends racial borders, just as Selasi defends on her perspective.

In retrospect, these two points of view must be analyzed separately. Despite certain similarities, both intellectuals start off with different approaches to Afropolitanism. On the one hand, Selasi not only believes that Afropolitanism is a new phenomenon which can be traced back to postcolonialism of the late 20th century, but her perspective also explores an elitist and urban group of young African migrants who are "culturally hybrid, socially and professionally integrated" (Kasanda 381-382) in major cosmopolitan cities. Overall, being Afropolitan is a label that any African living in the West will automatically bear (Makhoka 16-17). He/she is an ideal citizen, described as:

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[20] Translation by Albert Kasanda in "Afropolitanism as a Critique of Conventional Narratives of African Identity and Emancipation" (Kasanda, 382).

> . . . the newest generation of African emigrants . . . You will know us by our funny blend of London fashion, New York jargon, African ethics, and academic successes. Some of us are ethnic mixes . . . others merely cultural mutts: Most of us are multilingual . . . There is at least one place on the African Continent to which we tie our sense of self . . . 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 famed focus. We are Afropolitans: not citizens, but Africans of the world (Selasi n.p.)

Selasi's choice of words to describe Afropolitans as "cultural mutts" could be considered offensive and demeaning to those who share a similar life experience, taking into consideration that it is a group to which the author is also a part of. Furthermore, it can be acknowledged that Selasi creates, in a way, a certain category that is not universal to all Africans, deducing that most Afropolitans understand fashion, are successful intellectuals and belong to a Black elite.

On the other hand, Mbembe's perspective is to be understood on a much deeper level. Afropolitanism is related with how Africans relate with the world, it is a hybrid identity and not merely a social status. Having into consideration both formulations, Selasi's is clearly a lesser theory, in light of its narrow-minded and "person-centered emphasis" (Toivanen 193-194). Mbembe's vision, for instance, is based on historical grounds, designating the processes of mobility and cultural fusion which have been shaping African communities and identities for centuries. Although the question of mobility is a fundamental piece of both approaches, they are treated differently. For Selasi, mobility implies actual movement and migration from the African continent which entails the formation of a diaspora and thus promotes a "concept of globalization that erases Africans who live on the continent from its purview" (Ogbechie 2008). Mbembe's concept of mobility does not imply physical movement away from Africa. As a matter of fact, he states that mobility must be understood in terms of immersion, which means movement inside the continent, and of dispersion, which alludes to the African diaspora. Nevertheless, he focuses mostly on the process of immersion, believing that Afropolitanism is a "form of manifesting cosmopolitanism in Africa" (Makhoka 18-19), standing for a more modest form of cosmopolitanism compared to the one Selasi promotes.

Selasi's and Mbembe's approaches generated a major controversy between intellectuals who eventually started to present their own analysis of the term, such as Simon Gikandi, Chielozona Eze, Marta Tveit, Minna Salami, Emma Dabiri and many more. As the further discussion will show, some find it a useful concept to describe a phenomenon that is unavoidably happening worldwide and believe it to be an adequate concept to use. Others do not support it, considering incoherent to only apply it to a privileged and restricted social class. While Selasi believes that Afropolitanism brings a brand-new "urbane African and Afro-diasporic sensibility" (Skinner 5), Tveit and Dabiri and other critics rather believe that Afropolitanism is nothing more than another idea for cosmopolitan consumption.

Salami[21], for instance, presents her own version of Afropolitanism through a feminist scope, focusing on how African women, from within and outside the diaspora, have contributed to this way of life. Similar to Mbembe, she believes in the circulation of worlds and takes the continent's history into consideration, in order to understand why cosmopolitanism is present.

> It is true that Afropolitanism has roots in cosmopolitanism, which in return has roots in the west. But even if conceived in the west, the cosmopolitan idea does not apply to western cities alone. In fact, Africa, with its history of migrations, and home to countries containing hundreds of different ethnicities, has some of the world's oldest cosmopolitan cities. From historical cities such as Djenne and Timbuktu to modern day Addis Ababa or Lagos, it is not simply the presence of white westerners that

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[21] A Nigerian-Finnish writer and intellectual also known as Ms.Afropolitan, who has established herself as a strong influence through her blog (https://www.msafropolitan.com/).

> makes these cities cosmopolitan but rather the presence – and coexistence – of Africans from other parts of the continent as well as migrants from Asia, the Middle East and elsewhere. (Salami n.p.)

Salami believes in global citizenship and not in Selasi's slogan "Africans of the world" (Selasi n.p.). She believes that Afropolitanism was already a concept in the late 20th century, however masked as Pan-Africanism. Overall, Afropolitanism is a "glocal" (Salami n.p.) space, in which worldwide African citizens and citizens from the continent itself struggle for social, cultural and political change. Salami also expresses her concern with labels, trying to think of Afropolitanism as transcending racial borders, ethnicity, nationality, such as Mbembe did. Although all these aspects are a part of human existence, it does not mean they must define Africans entirely.

Tveit[22] provides a much more analytic and harsh position in her article "The Afropolitan Must Go" (2013), in which she clearly states that Selasi describes the Afropolitans with the "tone of a *National Geographic* documentary" (Tveit n.p.). Tveit confesses her anger and disappointment towards the term and all the debate around it. According to her, it is a useless term that instead of uniting all Africans it rather separates them from the rest of the world. "How can that be constructive?" (Tveit n.p.), she asks. The first problem she lists has to do with group identity and the implicit connection between all Black people, considering it dangerous, "exclusive, elitist and self-aggrandizing" (Tveit n.p.). Furthermore, Tveit believes it is also wrong to assume every black individual has consistent knowledge of African culture and interest for it. Tveit is among those who do not have an inherent connection to the African continent.

> I do not have a drum beating inside me. The motherland is not calling me home. "We" are not a one-love tribe, yearning for the distant shores of Africa, or indigo or whatever one imagines the African continent as these days. "We" are a random sample in a huge pool of disembedded, modernized, traveling global citizens who each carry with us a personal, unique jumble of cultural inputs and influences from a range of places. In

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[22] A freelance writer, content creator and master in African Studies.

> other words, we are like most people. And the most equity-promoting, barrier-breaking, racism-fighting thing "we" can do is see ourselves as just that — part of the noble and most ancient tribe…of Most People. (Tveit n.p.)

Dabiri[23] in her article "Why I'm Not An Afropolitan" (2014) establishes that Afropolitanism's main concerns, race and identity, are being replaced in lieu of consumerism (Dabiri n.p.), insinuating the aforementioned life experience Selasi is so devoted to. Dabiri confesses that initially her reaction to the neologism was one of curiosity, because she felt the need to find a word that described her dual nationhood (Irish and Nigerian) other than "mixed-raced" (Dabiri n.p.). Therefore, the alternative looked promising but soon the author realized that the supremacy of globalization and consumption rapidly formed the so-called African elite. These "African flavoured versions of Western convention and form" (Dabiri n.p.) do not mean progress and it is, in fact, dangerous to fall in such a dormant state of being that lacks authenticity.

> Personally, I need to position myself with a more radical, counter-cultural movement. For me Afropolitanism is too polite, corporate, glossy – it reeks of sponsorship and big business with all the attendant limitations [having] consumed so much of black American culture, there is now a demand for more authentic, virgin, black culture to consume. Demand turns to the continent where a fresh source is ripe for the picking (Dabiri n.p.)

The African continent is indeed attracted by the West, through all the mechanisms of information at their disposal today (newspapers, blogs, tweets, youtube, etc) which present us a perspective of social and economic evolution that does not correspond to the truth. Afropolitanism is surely what fuels this misread information that leads to "Africa Rising narratives" (Dabiri n.p.) which try not only to ensure

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[23] Irish-Nigerian broadcaster, professor at the School of Oriental and African Studies at the University of London and author of the book *Don't Touch My Hair* (2019).

African success, but also to “drown out the voices of a majority who remain denied basic life chances” (Dabiri n.p.).

Eze[24] also agrees that the term is “troubling” (Eze n.p.). In “Rethinking African culture and identity: the Afropolitan model” (2014), Eze attempts to analyze Afropolitanism as a hyperculture which has evolved at an overwhelming rate. The change in Africans’ self-perception only came about, according to the author, after the Cold War and the beginning of globalization, when “identity is no longer shaped exclusively by geography or blood, or culture understood in oppositional terms. On the contrary, identity is now ‘relational’” (Eze 235). Therefore, in the 21st century, many Africans are multi-ethnic, “Afri-hyphenated” (Eze 235) or simply “cultural mutts”, in Selasi’s words, meaning that their identity has already been affected by another culture, a reality which is not strange nowadays.

Although Afropolitanism was imagined as a new African postcolonial identity, many scholars, including Eze, believe that it is merely a new word for an old concept: cosmopolitanism; a term which will later be examined. One of the many flaws of the term is exactly the differentiation between being cosmopolitan and Afropolitan since both mean the same thing after all. Despite the elitist connotations this term carries, Eze establishes his definition of Afropolitan as an African or an individual of African descent whose identity cannot be solely associated to Africa (Eze 240) and is in constant development. Therefore, Afropolitans belong to a community which is “polychromatic, polymorphic, diverse, and open” (Eze 245).

Eze shares his opinion on the subject once again, a year later, in the article “We, Afropolitans” (2015), in which he questions the value and need of such a word to explain Africanness. According to him, this term is misunderstood in the sense that

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[24] Professor of African and African American Literature at the Northeastern Illinois University.

Africans' fortunate ability to travel around the globe should go beyond actual physical movement because:

> . . . the truth is that spatial mobility is only symptomatic of our interior mobility. Indeed, what really counts is this interior mobility, that is, how negotiable our relation to the world is. One does not need to have crossed geographical boundaries to be Afropolitan; one only needs to cross the psychic boundaries erected by nativism, autochthony, heritage and other mythologies of authenticity. (Eze 116-117)

Very much like Dabiri, Eze argues that Africans' hybridity and duality should be considered as multiple parts that complement each other to form a whole. This perspective is very similar to Mbembe's circulation of worlds and his approach to the term which establishes a concept of openness and unattachment to a particular place. Simon Gikandi, Kenyan Literature Professor, also shares a similar perspective on an introductory chapter to *Negotiating Afropolitanism: essays on borders and spaces in contemporary African literature and folklore* (2011), in an attempt to read Afropolitanism in a different way from its original form.

Simon Gikandi's[25] perspective might be the most positive of all. He sees Afropolitanism as a response to Afro-pessimism, a predominant concept during the 80s and 90s which alluded to the political and economic crisis in Africa and created a negative mold of the continent that the West frequently advertised. Therefore, a younger generation of Africans wanted to "rethink African knowledge outside the trope of crisis" (Gikandi 9). At a time when cultural hybridity resulted into troubled selves with psychological problems and anxieties, today's Afropolitanism celebrated this life experience as a "cultural bonus" (Gikandi 10) for any African crossing the line of idiom, culture and geography. For Gikandi, to be Afropolitan is not only to belong in a specific place, but to be able to transcend it, because “humans are not circumscribed by these places” (Eze 240). Although transnationalism will always burden Africans abroad with a sense of displacement, the point of creating new narratives about African migration and Afropolitans is to depict how they can overcome these difficulties.

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[25] Simon Gikandi was born in Nyeri, Kenya. He is a faculty member at Princeton University and his major fields of study are Anglophone literatures and cultures of Africa, India, the Caribbean, the African diaspora, the black Atlantic, etc.

Binyavanga Wainaina[26] is another important reference in this ongoing debate. For Wainaina, the “black African elites” (Wainaina n.p.) are a “kind of identity which bears no responsibility” (Wainaina n.p.). This points once more to the conclusion that Selasi’s vision consists of a mere “commodity” (Wainaina n.p.), an empty concept, a social status which does not take into consideration any social or political change. In an interview, Wainaina states that nowadays everyone is comfortable with cosmopolitanism. His disagreement on Afropolitanism was openly discussed in his speech “I am a Pan-Africanist, not an Afropolitan” at a conference of the African Studies Association of the United Kingdom (ASAUK), in 2012, in which he attempted “to rid African literary and cultural studies of the ghost of Afropolitanism” (Santana n.p.) and claimed the Pan-African movement as being the right one to create a borderless and free continent.

All things considered, Selasi might be right when it comes to everyone’s local experiences and how they can indeed shape a person’s attitude towards a global world. However, it is important to note that in order to become an Afropolitan according to her patterns, these experiences are not enough, because although they may be enriching, wealth is more important. Taking Selasi’s experiences as an example, she was born in London and raised in Brookline, Massachusetts, coming from a family of academics. She graduated from Yale with a Bachelor of Arts in American Studies and holds a postgraduate degree in International Relations from Oxford University. Her local experiences were advantageous and allowed her to be a part of these modern African urbanites. However, trying to avoid the same elitist premise she used in her definition of Afropolitanism, it is certain that not all Afropolitans have the same opportunities, but that surely does not make them less Afropolitan, meaning the only or the main aspect they share is the act of moving abroad and the process of adjustment they are submitted to. Mbembe, for instance, studied in France during the 80s where he earned his Ph.D. from the Panthéon-Sorbonne University[27]. However fortunate his life journey may have been, age is an important factor that distinguishes him from Taiye Tuakli-Wosornu. With 20 years of age difference, Mbembe belongs to a generation which struggled directly with colonialism. It was in the 70s that movements of decolonization began to consolidate and so Mbembe's local experience is also affected by this ever-lasting battle. As a result, his academic journey is mainly rooted in historical grounds in order to understand otherness, to transcend racial borders and to justify the reliance on and exploitation of the West. That is why his perspective on Afropolitanism is so open-minded and fluid in a way that leads us to understand his need to go beyond status, beyond race, beyond borders. It contemplates not only a well-educated class but also those who are marginalized, those who try or are forced to (re)invent themselves. According to Ryan Skinner[28] in "Why Afropolitanism Matters" (2017), AbdouMaliq Simone[29] and Daniel Reed[30] argue that the essence of Afropolitanism is to:

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[26] Kenyan author and winner of the Caine Prize for African Writing in 2002.

> . . . encourage us to think with and learn from those whose global mobility is not solely bound to the commercial, intellectual, and aesthetic cultures of European metropoles; rather, it should highlight those who routinely target other sites of socioeconomic and cultural practice, from diasporic

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[27] Where he later became assistant professor at Columbia University for a few years. During the 90s, he returned to Africa, first to Dakar and then to Johannesburg where he lectures at Witwatersrand University since 2001.

[28] Musical anthropologist who studies contemporary Africa and its diaspora.

[29] Urbanist and professor of sociology.

[30] Associate professor at Indiana University.

> enclaves in the United States to southeast Asian entrepôts (Reed 2016; Simone 2010), as well as global crossroads and cities within Africa itself (Simone 2004) (Skinner 16)

### 1.5. Afropolitanism in a cosmopolitan setting

When it comes to the study of African cosmopolitanism, it is certainly an opposite concept to the "legacy of the African 'tribe' seen as politically primitive, ahistorical and self-perpetuating, determinedly local" (Balakrishnan 2-3), which means everything cosmopolitanism rejects. These communities remain culturally immutable; their characteristics passed on from one generation to the other. However enduring they may be, Africa is well-known for its multiethnicity, taking for example cities like Dakar, Nairobi or Johannesburg, that were molded by urbanization, migration and globalization. According to Balakrishnan, the early 21st century was marked by the "cosmopolitan turn" (Balakrishnan 4-5), in which anthropologists and philosophers shared different perspectives on the definition of cosmopolitanism. While anthropologists such as Arjun Appadurai or Ulf Hannerz stated that multiracial communities, enhanced by globalization, led to an inevitable universalism, philosophers, during the 1990s, considered globalization to be the means to achieve a "true cosmopolitan ethics, an ethic of responsibility that did not distinguish between people of one's own nation and those from another" (Balakrishnan 4-5).

Over the last decades, postcolonial writers of the African diaspora have tried to establish a connection between migration and cosmopolitanism and everything it implies such as the hybridization and multiplicity of identities and cultures. However, a common dilemma has been raised concerning the intersection of diaspora and cosmopolitanism in which diaspora has been considered either "inherently cosmopolitan" (Dharwadker 125) or "intrinsically anticosmopolitan" (Dharwadker 125). According to Du Bois, a diasporic identity often deals with a double consciousness, a constant feeling of belonging to more than one place and a fear of relinquishing either one, the homeland or the new home. Therefore, this kind of identity would be classified nowadays as hybrid. Taking for example the African American, Du Bois explains that this double consciousness means “he would not Africanize America” and that “he would not bleach his Negro soul in a flood of white Americanism (…) He simply wishes to make it possible for a man to be both a Negro and an American” (Du Bois 9) and, therefore, stand firmly between two cultures.

Another important concept that both diaspora and cosmopolitanism can be related to is mobility which has become a recurrent theme in cultural studies. The 21st century has been characterized so far with large-scale movements of people around the globe, be it tourists, students, migrants, workers and so on. These intersecting mobilities have created, through globalization, a wide network of social and cultural lives, thus establishing a community of “citizens of the world” or “cosmopolitans” whose loyalty to the homeland is frequently questioned due to the rootlessness supposedly inherent to them. The term deterritorialization can also be associated with these feelings of belonging to more than one place, however relative they might be due to countless different experiences of migrancy today. Kwame Anthony Appiah, for instance, argues that two visions of cosmopolitanism are possible: a rooted cosmopolitanism or cosmopolitan patriotism. Regarding the latter, the philosopher argues that the cosmopolitan patriot “can entertain the possibility of a world in which everyone is a rooted cosmopolitan, attached to a home of his or her own, with its own cultural particularities, but taking pleasure from the presence of other, different, places that are home to other, different, people” (Appiah 618).

In *Cosmopolitanism: ethics in a world of strangers* (2006), Appiah explains how cosmopolitanism is difficult to disregard, due to the “global tribe” we live in today (Appiah 13). He starts by contextualizing the term, which dates back:

> . . . to the Cynics of the fourth century B.C., who first coined the expression cosmopolitan, "citizen of the cosmos". The formulation was meant to be paradoxical, and reflected the general Cynic skepticism toward custom and tradition. A citizen - a polite - belonged to a particular polis, a city to which he or she owed loyalty. The cosmos referred to the world, not in the sense of the earth, but in the sense of the universe. Talk of cosmopolitanism, originally signaled, then, a rejection of the conventional view that every civilized person belonged to a community among communities. (Appiah 11)

In a way, every single individual belongs to the cosmos, a bigger community which comes first than all those other communities carefully and distinctly outlined from one another. However, “cosmopolitanism isn’t hard work; repudiating it is” (Appiah 25). Today, this term has gained other meanings which are best suited for the world’s current situation. According to the scholar, the “global tribe” (Appiah 10) we live in has, in fact, weakened some of the cultural borders that have existed for centuries. The phenomenon that is globalization poses a clear threat to those borders, since it promotes homogeneity. However, Appiah does not consider this to be a total disadvantage, at least to Third World countries that have developed greatly to what concerns health, education or basic life conditions. “So why do people in these places sometimes feel that their identity is threatened? Because the world, their world, is changing, and some of them don't like it.” (Appiah 171-172). He gives his own personal experience, as a man who has grown up in Ghana but has not lived there for more than thirty years. Du Bois’ concept of double consciousness comes to mind once more.

> Like many, I return there from time to time, to visit family and friends. And, again like many, when I am there I feel both that I do and that I don't belong. At moments like the one at the palace, I know what is happening, and people know who I am. So, in one sense, I fit in. Nothing surprises me.

> I know how to behave. On the other hand, there are things in Kumasi that remind me constantly that this is no longer where I live. I find I am irritated, for example, by the slow pace of things, by the unreliability of services. (Appiah 155-156)

Overall, Appiah seems to imply that it is okay to not stay in the homeland and that the natural and inevitable circulation of people will eventually lead to migration. In the past, these migratory flows were “deplored” (Appiah 618) because they were often involuntary “but what can be hateful, can be celebrated when it flows from the free decisions of individuals or of groups” (Appiah 618).

In African studies, the interest in cosmopolitanism began with several scholars such as Appiah, Achille Mbembe, Walter Mignolo, Homi Bhabha and many others who began analyzing and creating a new African ethics of globalization and transnational migration. Therefore, through Selasi and Mbembe, Afropolitanism became a useful concept for scholars to explain numerous phenomenona such as Africans becoming citizens of the world and African cultures and ethnicities merging with many others from around the globe in an African metropolis. According to Balakrishnan, however advantageous these new phenomena might be for the continent, all cosmopolitan cities in Africa carry a heavy background of suffering from colonial rule. According to Gehrmann, “Afropolitanism can be described as a form of cosmopolitanism with African roots” (Gehrmann 1), to which mobility is one of its key concepts. A notion of constant movement which can be either physical or digital (across the cyberspace) which strongly characterizes the Afropolitans’ way of life. However, it is a fact that many Africans who are categorized as Afropolitans do not accept this descriptor. Emma Dabiri, for example, who considers Afropolitanism to be a commodity, states that her life experiences qualify her as the ultimate stereotype of what an Afropolitan should be, as if there were certain requirements one must possess. Although Dabiri’s political statement is similar to Minna Salami's persona, MsAfropolitan, in the cyberspace, the latter considers the neologism to be an evolution from Afropessimism, as she clearly states in "Can Africans have multiple subcultures? A response to "Exorcising Afropolitanism" (2013). Dabiri, on the other hand, in "Why I'm not an Afropolitan" (2014) writes that:

> The danger of Afropolitanism becoming the voice of Africa can be linked to the criticisms levelled against second wave feminists who failed to identify their privilege as white and middle class while claiming to speak for all women. Because while we may all be Africans, there is a huge gap between my African experience and my father's houseboys. […] The problem is not that Afropolitans are privileged per se – rather it is that at a time when poverty remains endemic for millions, the narratives of a privileged few telling us how great everything is, how much opportunity and potential is available may drown out the voices of a majority who remain denied basic life chances. (Dabiri 2014)

The recurrent reproaches towards Afropolitanism surface once more, namely its commodity and elitism.

Appiah's *Cosmopolitanism: ethics in a world of strangers* (2006) almost coincides with the emergence of Afropolitanism and with how Appiah rewrites cosmopolitanism. His idea of a true cosmopolitan describes someone who respects pluralism, who has an innate curiosity and a capacity to adapt across cultures. All these virtues are also important components of Afropolitanism, even those which are not perceived as a virtue, such as the cosmopolitans' lack of stillness which is often perceived as an elitist type of travelling. However similar these two concepts might be, Taiye Selasi is able to distinguish the Afropolitan from a cosmopolitan for the sole reason that the former has a connection to its roots that cannot easily fade.

> What distinguishes this lot (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 essentializing the geographical entity, we seek to comprehend the cultural complexity; to honor the intellectual and spiritual legacy; and to sustain our parents′ cultures. (Selasi n.p.)

### 1.6. Afropolitanism and the Black *Bildungsroman*: the journey of life in African and African American fiction

Taking into consideration that the novels that will be analyzed present two distinct processes of maturation and stories of becoming, it is important to discuss the differences between the coming-of-age novels that were influenced by the German *Bildungsroman* and the contemporary narratives that have grown apart from tradition.

On the second half of the 18th century, a new subgenre of the novel emerged, the *Bildungsroman*, focused on the process of change, either physical, psychological, or moral, of the main character. This term was coined by Karl von Morgenstern (1770-1852), in 1810, during a lecture called *Ueber das Wesen des Bildungsroman*[31] (1819). However, it is believed that Wilhelm Dilthey was the one that introduced this neologism to the intellectual discourse in his biography of Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Leben Schleiermachers* (1870), due to the fact that his studies were more influential in the academia. In this biography, Dilthey classified as *Bildung* the novels that agreed with a tradition that started with Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship* or *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre*[32] (1777-1785) which told the story of a young man:

> "who enters into life in a blissful state of ignorance, seeks related souls, experiences friendship and love, struggles with the hard realities of the world and thus armed with a variety of experiences, matures, finds himself and his mission in the world" (qtd. Hardin 14)

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[31] This translates to "On the Nature of the Bildungsroman".

[32] The story of Wilhelm Meister is divided into eight books.

Dilthey agreed that Goethe's novel was a "legitimate course" (Dilthey n.p.) of a hero's development thus recommending it to young readers who were in need of guidance and reassurance about reaching adulthood.

Therefore, according to Dilthey, the genre described the development of the hero's life through all phases, taking into consideration that these were frequently obstacles and conflicts the character should overcome in order to evolve and mature harmoniously. This genre prioritized the hero's formation which resulted from his interaction with the world, or the interrelation between social and psychological forces which determined the direction of his self-development. This relation between the self and society was revealed not by reporting every aspect of the character's life, but by events and experiences which had a particular influence in his formation, since according to Jost:

> . . . in the adventure novel, events test, punish, or reward the hero; in the apprenticeship novel, they mark him, mature him, or form him in a definite way, and finally crystallize his character . . . The genre, therefore, must be defined as the representation of the interaction between the self and the world, with special reference to the presence of the education of the self. (Jost 136)

In accordance with this definition, *Bildungsroman* is perceived as a story of formation of a character up to the moment when he ceases to be self-centered and becomes society-centered, thus beginning to shape his true self.

Morgenstern, in addition, emphasized its educational function to both the hero and the reader by asserting that "it represents the beginning of the hero's *Bildung* and his development to a certain phase of progress, but also because that same representation promotes spiritual-esthetical Bildung of the reader like no other novel genre" (Morgenstern, 15-16). It is important to clarify that what was important in this subgenre was not the growing-up process but rather the maturing one, which means the hero's *Bildung* was mostly a qualitative rather than a quantitative process. Among German scholars there was much debate about what precisely constituted a *Bildungsroman* and they were unable to reach a consensus on the meaning of the term. It is in fact a concept that has been prone to misunderstandings due to its several meanings in German.

For instance, *Bildung* can be interpreted as a developmental process and also as a collective name for the cultural and spiritual values of a specific people or social stratum in a given historical epoch and "by extension the achievement of learning that same body of knowledge and acceptance of the value system it implies" (Hardin 11-12). Therefore, the translation from one language to another can be a problem, since "any generalization about the '*Bildungsroman'* as a genre is apt to be bedeviled by the variant meaning of the word '*Bildung'* in German" (Witte 87). Scholars such as Melitta have also attempted to demonstrate how the term *Bildungsroman* was closely related to other similar terms. In *Der deutsche Entwicklungsroman bis zu Goethes "Wilhelm Meister"*[33] (1926), she claimed that a very similar term was *Entwicklungsroman* or novel of development. Compared to the former, it has a wider scope of meaning which characterizes novels that essentially portray the confrontation of the main character with his surroundings and the consequent process of maturation, mainly spiritual and psychological, which was a result of the hero's reflection on his life experiences. Another term closely related to *Bildungsroman* was *Erziehungsroman* or pedagogical novel, a more didactic genre which, through a similar process of maturation, was concerned with the hero's acquisition of new values and lessons by the end of his life journey, although both types did not intend to reach that goal but rather obtain the character's moral growth. Bildungsroman lied between these concepts "not as narrowly pedagogic as the one . . . and not so merely transitional as the other – being about the early childhood-to-young-adulthood stages of life" (Jeffers 49). In this regard, it is evident that there is no unity and consensus in the employment of the term.

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[33] This translates to *The German development novel up to Goethe's "Wilhelm Meister"*.

Outside the German intellectual sphere, other national and cultural variants of the *Bildungsroman* emerged with time, based on different social and historical factors. After *Bildung* was conceived in the late 18th century, the English and American literary discourse also adopted the concept, although they sustained it in different ways. Initially, the term was not devised as a European type of novel, but rather laid claim to a German tradition with philosophical roots in the Classical Romantic age of *Humanitätsphilosophie* (Philosophy of Humanity). While German writers such as Goethe and Friedrich Schiller focused on the hero's cultivation regardless of the "responsibility for the national culture" (Jeffers 35), English writers such as Thomas Carlyle[34], John Stuart Mill[35], Matthew Arnold[36], and Walter Pater[37] believed that the process of cultivation depended not only on the self but with his surroundings and with whomever he shared a social environment.

The American Bildungsroman was set further apart from these two variants. This type of novel emerges as being independent from the European tradition and being strongly characterized by individualism and originality. The American variant does not focus on an optimistic and successful process of development, but rather presents an inclination to criticize society and the nation, given the fact that the young protagonists' "disquiet about growing up and the disillusionment that often results from their journey to maturity signifies wider anxieties about the nation's prospects and principles" (Graham 118), although the idea of a triumphant journey towards self-realization is always embodied in these protagonists. Franco Moretti, in *The Way of the World* (1987), argued that the process of youth development, during the 19th century, was meant to help readers understand modernity. In the American variant, "the experience of young protagonists tends to heighten, rather than dispel" (Graham 120) what Brigid Lowe termed "the anxieties of a modern age" (Lowe 406).

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[34] Goethe's influence on Carlyle was visible in his translation of *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship* into English, in 1824, or with his novel *Sartor Resartus* (1833-34).

[35] John Stuart Mill theorizes the process of formation of the self in his philosophical essay *On Liberty* (1859).

[36] Matthew Arnold analyzes this concept in *Culture and Anarchy* (1869).

[37] The concept of Bildung is evident in Pater's "The Child in the House" (1845).

While the classic novel of development plans the entire progress of the protagonist which has to be concluded "with an epiphany that brings insight" (Graham 120), this emphasis on resolution is not so present in the American *Bildungsroman*, "indicating a preference for prolonged emerging over categorical endings: a process of *becoming*, rather than defined *being*" (Graham 120). Some examples of American *Bildungsromane* are Henry James' *Roderick Hudson* (1875), *The Portrait of a Lady* (1881), *What Maisie Knew* (1897), Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* or Horatio Alger's *Ragged Dick* (1868).

To conclude, this genre is not considered today as an exclusively German genre, although such a statement was not uncommon in Goethe's era. It is evident that this is not a genre with a defined structure, because it can be influenced by other factors related to ideology, theme, or content, thus appearing "not as a categorical aesthetic form, but as an historical form deriving from specific and limited historical conditions in the understanding of the world and the self" (Martini 24).

After the analysis of the classic genre's background, it is fundamental to analyze how the formula is reinvented within African and African American literature. Considering that the traditional *Bildungsroman* "is alleged to put forth a model of individualistic development and ultimate sociopolitical integration" (Austen 214), this classic form was “inimical to both the collectivist values of Africans and their understanding of both themselves and their position” (Austen 214) in the modern globalization. Novels such as Camara Laye’s *L’enfant noir* (1953) or Wole Soyinka’s *Aké: The Years of Childhood* (1981) were some examples that seemed to follow the patterns of the Bildungsroman by presenting the coming-of-age story of a first-person narrator. However, the traditional Bildungsroman, when applied to non-European narratives, became “both tempting and highly contentious” (Austen 215).

African American narratives, for instance, channeled their attention towards the self and its relation with heritage and culture. Contemporary black authors have felt the need to “identify the traditions of their race by defining people individually, thus capturing a collective experience that is unique in terms of its circumstances of history and geography” (Leseur 2). In *Ten is the Age of Darkness: the black bildungsroman* (1995), Leseur claims that the genre cannot be compared to the traditional European model since they diverge in terms of content, form and, most importantly, historical and sociological contexts.

The Black *Bildungsroman* tends to be autobiographical which can only be confirmed by cross referencing with the authors’ biographies and experiences. The plot usually presents a character who “rejects the constraints of home and sets out on a journey through the world, obtaining guides who represent different worldviews” (Leseur 18) and facing several obstacles. Leseur also clarifies that African American children, contrary to white children, have not evolved in the same way due to many social constraints and oppression. As these hardships lessened, African American authors felt “a new kind of literature had to be written as an affirmation . . . to tell their stories; their plots . . .” (Leseur 21).

Even though African American *Bildungsroman* usually tells the story of a male protagonist[38], this dissertation will focus on female protagonists which, in comparison, tend to have a more problematic path of formation. Most Black *Bildungsroman* that feature women[39] focus on portraying their struggle against society and its complexities, namely gender definition, self-awareness concerning sexuality or racial identity. In short, the heroine tries to "discover, direct, and re-create the self in the midst of hostile racial, sexual, and other forms of societal oppression, producing a literature not confined to the 'usual' *Bildung* model" (Leseur 101).

Despite this difference concerning gender, the Black *Bildungsroman*, overall, stands apart from the traditional genre in the sense that the latter, according to Rogério Miguel Puga, frequently works as an identification program with the social order and with society's system of values by representing an assimilation of such conduits, while the former is far from this classic pattern since its objective is to represent the process of self-realization and differentiation of the individual concerning society and from that outcome identifying or not with the norms imposed on him (Puga 18-19). Therefore, these narratives present characters who are capable of distancing themselves critically from others and opposing them.

### 1.7. Conclusion

Overall, throughout the centuries, there have been many ways of raising Black awareness, starting with Pan-Africanism which is the movement that bears the longest history and left the biggest mark. In a time where free people of color had the right to citizenship and were violently attacked for demanding their basic human rights, the Black community needed a movement such as Pan-Africanism in which solidarity, unity and idealism prevailed. However, some of the visions present in the African American intellectual *corpus* were not in agreement and this disharmony might have undermined the groundwork of this movement. From Blyden's agreement with the colonization enterprise to Du Bois' idea of suppressing the African identity for the sake of a full American one, to Garvey's unrealistic vision of a mass repatriation and resettlement to the African continent, all these intellectuals, despite sharing the basic guidelines for achieving the same goals, were not in agreement as to the means necessary to reach them. Their main objective was of course to achieve a sense of accomplishment towards the African American community for conquering a way for them to feel unbroken, at home and, most of all, equal. Nonetheless, Pan-Africanism triggered many other movements that fought and still fight for that very same outcome. However, its contradictions and often lack of coherence can determine that Pan-Africanism is not the right label for raising awareness, although it certainly was a first step towards it.

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[38] Examples such as James Baldwin's *Go Tell It on the Mountain* (1953) or Claude Brown's *Man Child in the Promised Land* (1965).

[39] Examples such as Paule Marshall's *Brown Girl, Brownstones* (1960) or Gwendolyn Brooks' *Maud Martha* (1953).

Regarding the Francophone perspective, the *Négritude* movement introduced an important element to the discourse of raising Black awareness which is a feeling of pride towards the word *Nègre*; a word that always bore a negative meaning to any people of color. So, it is by embracing that very same term and claiming it with dignity that the community evolved to a higher self-perspective and self-acceptance.

Lastly, Afropolitanism is indeed a multivalent and intersectional concept that has not, however, matured enough. When Selasi introduced the "Africans of the world" vision online, its impact did in fact reach further than she might have expected. From 2005 onwards, Afropolitanism began to mean all sorts of itineraries, namely the reinvention of a marginalized group, its claim on society, the establishment of a refuge for eager travelers who wished to either know the world or leave home, etc. Just like Pan-Africanism, this recent movement also bears some inconsistencies and dilemmas. Selasi’s perspective, for instance, is highly criticized for its elitism and narrow-mindedness and for the fact that she believes that Afropolitanism is not a political movement related to skin color but rather to raise a sense of Africanness. This interpretation led other intellectuals such as Mbembe to contribute to the debate and provide their own readings on the matter. He, on the other hand, focuses on the migratory flow and the consequent endless mobility which he believes to be an important element of African identity and culture. While Selasi’s reading leads to believe that Afropolitanism is a social status of an urban and highly sophisticated African elite, Mbembe’s perspective relies on a choice. A choice of relating with the world and carrying the mark of a hybrid identity.

Overall, Mbembe’s interpretation certainly had a much deeper level of understanding and a wider scope. As mentioned previously, he believed mobility should not be understood only as moving away from the continent, but also from within, since Africa is by itself a very heterogeneous continent. From both these perspectives onwards, many scholars have provided their own reading of the matter and thus new insights. One of these approaches, for instance, has a very negative perspective on the subject. Marta Tveit, for example, believes Afropolitanism to be separating rather than uniting the African community, criticizing Selasi’s notion of exclusivity and sense of connection that Tveit defends should not be implicit from the start. This feeling of disappointment becomes recurrent amongst many postcolonial writers who do not consider themselves as Afropolitan and do not want to hold that title whatsoever, since nowadays it is strongly connected to globalization, consumerism, and rapid acculturation. Therefore, it is quite understandable how these authors do not want to be related to a troubling term that promotes a lifestyle they might have but do not want it advertised or pointed out.

Concerning Du Bois' concept of "two-ness", for example, it is important to take into consideration that Africa has been affected by other cultures for centuries, which means that this idea of a split identity is not unknown territory in the 21st century. This struggle has been real for a very long time, but today it has only gotten accentuated by globalization. To conclude, Afropolitanism could become the right label, considering that it should maintain a much more open-minded and fluid interpretation that goes beyond race, status and borders, in order to understand what kind of work Afropolitans could do to improve a general understanding of Africans in the world today.

Taking into consideration the aforementioned perspectives, it is fundamental to apply them to the literary discourse to which Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah* and NoViolet Bulawayo's *We Need New Names* will be the main examples as contemporary African novels that have been considered Afropolitan. Therefore, the main purpose of analyzing both novels is to understand if this descriptor is applicable or not.

## II. *Americanah*: a maturity story dissecting the question of race in the US

### 2.1. Introduction

This chapter discusses Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's novel *Americanah* and its various themes namely migration, identity, otherness, racism, etc. It also questions whether this novel may be considered an Afropolitan narrative, considering the importance of this new generation of Africans which is increasing today in a globalized era and has become fundamental to discussions about African identity.

Adichie's novel will be analyzed in detail by chronicling Ifemelu's life experience in the United States and analyzing her process of transformation and how it intersects with some issues, namely Blackness, foreignness, race and gender. Also, understanding this process will show how migration narratives such as this one expose American stereotypes of Africans and African Americans through a "distinctively Nigerian iteration of middle-class mobility" (Hallemeier 235) and the navigations of selfhood that come through facing it. *Americanah* is constructed as a third person narrative which is divided into chapters with the perspectives of both main characters, Ifemelu and Obinze. In addition, the novel also works on different levels of discourse, such as the fictional one constructed by the narrator, the discourse of the own protagonist while chronicling past experiences and, lastly, the discourse of Ifemelu's blog entries, in which the reader may connect even more with the character.

Following the analysis of the protagonist's life journey and learning processes, the debate will concentrate on whether this novel may be considered an Afropolitan narrative and how does the construction of Ifemelu's narrative perceives and deconstructs this concept.

## 2.2. *Americanah*: chronicles of an African Black woman in the West

In the late 20th century, social and economic changes that affected all nations opened the frontiers that were set by an imperialist and binary vision of the world. A vision which has now been fragmented and transformed into multiculturalism. In this context, it is important to recognize that the process of decolonization from the European dominion demanded to be analyzed by studying the colonial period and its consequences in the postcolonial era, such as a major migratory flow of Africans to the United States. Unlike previous migrations of African people to America, these happened voluntarily, due to the fact that most immigrants were in search for a better job, a better education, a better life overall. The world was not ruled by political empires anymore, and these former colonies were finally independent. Subsequently, in the next century, there would certainly be a focus on analyzing the new experiences of these African migrants, transforming the modes of Immigrant Narratives and Ethnic or Postcolonial Literature. Ava Landry states exactly this idea of a new African migration.

> While foreign black migration has occurred throughout history, significant voluntary African immigration is a relatively new phenomenon, one that did not have a significant impact until the mid-1970s (Anderson, "African"). Economic crises, natural disasters, civil wars, corruption, authoritarian governments, and military coups all prompted mass African immigration into the United States (Johnson 81). Due to these conditions, it is important to qualify the term "voluntary" migration, which, in the context of this argument, refers to postcolonial African migration outside of the transatlantic slave trade. (Landry 130)

Therefore, contemporary African literature portrays the realities of African writers through various forms, such as diaspora, otherness, displacement, exile or identity. These fictions have suffered a deterritorialization since they have been written not only inside but outside the continent and the authors themselves are a result of transculturalism. Therefore, their goal is to expose and analyze the global city in which we live in and the challenges immigrants face. One of the novels that explores the idea of complex otherness is Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's[40] *Americanah* (2013), a novel that offers insight on cultural oppositions, on the self and its quest for identity, demonstrating at the same time how African immigrants define that same identity in a space where migrants are marginalized.

Recent literary criticism has considered Adichie a member of the third generation of Nigerian writers, a generation concerned with "nomadism, exile, displacement, and deracination" (Adesanmi and Dunton 16). This new generation of Nigerian writers represents the African continent and its local and cosmopolitan life mainly for Western consumption. For Sandra Ponzanesi, this phenomenon is a global marketing strategy of exoticism where "writers become 'brand names' contributing to a cosmopolitan culture of distinction, through which the consumption of postcolonial products is not just a sign of exoticism but also of worldliness and intercultural sophistication" (Ponzanesi 4).

Until the 60s, Nigeria was a domain of the British empire. After its independence, it mostly became a democratic country although there have been military coups. During the 1980s and 1990s Nigeria was one of the countries affected by the migratory flow mentioned earlier, heading mostly towards the West. *Americanah*'s theme essentially portrays this contemporary migration through the story of its female protagonist Ifemelu[41] and of her childhood sweetheart, Obinze, and other Nigerians who were in desperate need for more choices than those Nigeria offered in the 90s in an attempt to escape "the oppressive lethargy of choicelessness" (Adichie 276).

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[40] Before *Americanah*, Adichie was already considered a promising Nigerian writer. Adichie decided to attend college and graduate in the U.S. which means she has followed a different path from other authors who have developed their career in Nigeria. Her career began at a young age, being awarded the O. Henry Prize in 2003. *Purple Hibiscus* (2003), her first novel, was amongst the nominees for the Orange Prize for Fiction and for the Booker Prize. In 2007, she won the Orange with her second novel, *Half of a Yellow Sun*.

[41] The name of the character may sometimes be shortened to Ifem which is currently used throughout the novel.

The two main characters, Ifemelu and Obinze, both shared a similar background; they were born in Lagos, came from middle-class urban families and were well educated. Their background already suggested an investment on Afropolitanism, at least to what concerned their education. However, as both characters get separated and lead completely different lives, their process of maturation and learning also diverge entirely. Therefore, the objective is to analyze these processes, focusing mainly on Ifem's narrative but also contrasting it with Obinze's and understanding the "different ways of being black, that is, [the many] permutations of blackness" (Adichie n.p.).

At a time when Nigeria was under a dictatorship rule, many Nigerians tried to flee the country and Ifemelu and Obinze were no exception, especially because they were being deprived of access to education. Although the young couple decided to move to the United States to attend college, only Ifemelu managed to get a student visa while Obinze was denied of one. Despite promising to reunite with her in America, Obinze was never able to get there and eventually migrated to the United Kingdom where his visa expired and he became an illegal immigrant. As Ifemelu learned how to be a Black African woman in the US, she distanced herself from home and consequently from Obinze. Almost a decade later, Ifemelu decided to go back to Nigeria and realized she was not the same person as she was when she had left. She tried to revive her relationship with Obinze who had returned to Lagos many years before and had become a wealthy businessman. Despite the fact that they had gone through different experiences and learning processes during so many years apart, the former couple felt they still shared some part of their identity, untouched by their lives abroad.

### 2.2.1. Learning to be Black

As Ifem moved to the US at the age of 18[42] she instantly realized she would have to deal with several issues established mainly for being a Black woman in a dominant patriarchal white society: “I came from a country where race was not an issue; I did not think of myself as black and I only became black when I came to America” (Adichie 290).

In *Racial Formation in the United States* (2015), Michael Omi and Howard Winant define race as a “concept that signifies and symbolizes social conflicts and interests by referring to different types of human bodies” (Omi and Winant 110), thus “race-making can also be understood as a process of ‘othering’ . . . Classifying people as other and making use of various perceived attributes in order to do so is a universal phenomenon that also classifies those who do the classifying” (Omi and Winant 105).

As previously mentioned, Adichie’s novel analyses the construction of what Landry calls an “ethnicized Other” (Landry 127). As African immigrants arrive to America or any other country they must learn how to deal with the label “Black”, a foreign concept to them which “is not universal, but instead is historically situated and culturally constructed, something always imposed on them by external forces” (McMann 201), thus establishing an initial cultural shock.

Kalervo Oberg, in “Cultural Shock: Adjustments to New Cultural Environments” (1960), studies how the process of adjustment for African immigrants comes in different stages: tourist/honeymoon, resistance, dissonance, and acceptance (Oberg 178). The first stage is typically short because Africans become aware of what Blackness means and where is their place within the US racial system. After the tourist/honeymoon stage, according to Oberg, immigrants who stay permanently or for long periods of time go through a new phase that implies feelings of denial and hostility. As time goes by, immigrants start to realize that the host country is noticeably different than the motherland, especially as they are almost compelled to assume a completely new and foreign racial identity due to their skin color without understanding the cultural and historical background that has led to such social categories. Lastly, Oberg refers to a third and final stage which is characterized by "dissonance" (Oberg 178). As the process of cultural adaptation is at a much more advanced state, immigrants begin to reconnect with some traditions and cultural practices of their homeland while at the same time undervaluing the social practices of the host country. Applying Oberg's scheme to *Americanah* one may argue if Ifemelu goes through all these stages.

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[42] Taking into consideration that Ifemelu moves to US to study at a university it may be assumed that she must be around 18 years old.

Initially, the first stage is represented through some initial incidents and experiences of racial discrimination, which can be distinguished by various forms based on race, gender, language, interracial relationships, etc. Language is the first kind of discrimination she encounters. As a foreign undergraduate student, Ifem went on her first day to the university's administration office and the girl she talked to started speaking very slowly to her as if Ifem did not understand English at all. When she explained to her, in a very eloquent manner, that she did understand her English, Ifem was taken by surprise by the woman's reaction.

> 'I speak English,' she said. 'I bet you do,' Cristina Tomas said. 'I just don't know how *well*.' Ifemelu shrank. In that strained, still second when her eyes met Cristina Toma's before she took the forms, she shrank. She shrank like a dried leaf. She had spoken English all her life, led the debating society in secondary school, and always thought the American twang inchoate; she should not have cowered and shrunk, but she did. And in the following weeks, as autumn's coolness descended, she began to practice an American accent (Adichie 133-134)

This first incident made Ifem want to reject all she had learned in order to adapt into American standards, thus feeling compelled to change her accent to a genuine

American one which initiates the process of assimilation. This scene proves how language "becomes racialized and based on one's national identity; language is a marker of difference signifying one's outsider status, and changes in one's language are indicative of changes to oneself" (Taylor 74). Three years later, she had already perfected it and during a phone call with a telemarketer Ifem is congratulated on her accent which made her feel conflicted and ashamed.

> Only after she hung up did she begin to feel the stain of a burgeoning shame spreading all over her, for thanking him, for crafting his words "You sound American" into a garland that she hung around her neck. Why was it a compliment, an accomplishment, to sound American? (Adichie 175)

This incident marks the stage of denial Oberg talks about, as Ifem felt confused and ashamed for that compliment which meant the process of cultural assimilation was being successful. Therefore, Ifem decides to return to her native accent.

Another incident concerning language is related to Ifem's initial unawareness to racist and offensive expressions and how they are carefully averted in American society. During a class, in which the movie *Roots*[43] was playing, an African American student questioned why the word "nigger" had been censored throughout the entire movie. During the class debate, Ifemelu remembered that she had already watched it in Nigeria, at Obinze's house, and recalled how his mother had left the room crying and how "she had felt lacking, watching Obinze's mother, and wishing that she, too, could cry" (Adichie 137). In response to the student's statement, Ifemelu intervened: "I don't think it's always hurtful. I think it depends on the intent and also on who is using it" (Adichie 138).

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[43] This movie tells the story of Kunta Kinte, who was taken from his home, Gambia, at the age of seventeen and sold as a slave. The plot also tells the story of seven generations of Kinte's descendants in America.

At this point in the novel, Ifemelu did not understand how being Black in America had meaning and how African Americans carried the weight of a past she had never known. Nonetheless, further in the story, Ifemelu realizes how Africans have to bear that same weight when they come to America in a gesture of solitude. This time Ifem has already learned how language can trigger a certain behavior that should be expected from all Black community.

> And here's the deal with becoming black: You must show that you are offended when such words as "watermelon" or "tar baby" are used in jokes, even if you don't know what the hell is being talked about—and since you are a Non-American Black, the chances are that you won't know. (In undergrad a white classmate asks if I like watermelon, I say yes, and another classmate says, Oh my God that is so racist, and I'm confused. "Wait, how?") (Adichie 220)

Incidents such as these clearly show that "even when the novel is not talking about race, the conversation is always circulating around the racialized identities of the characters" (McMann 210).

Another one of Ifemelu's initial struggles concerns her difficult financial situation by not being able to find a job since her international student visa did not allow for students to work besides work-study on campus. Between paying her tuition and her rent, Ifemelu tried applying to be a waitress, a babysitter, a housekeeper but with no success for months. She started to feel frustrated and did not understand what she could be doing wrong. As Hislop rightly claims:

> What is so crushing for Ifemelu to accept is that there is no reason for her not to have a job, at least no reason that she can imagine . . . Most of her experiences of unemployment could be markedly improved if she were a citizen. As a citizen, Ifemelu would have more control over her options. (Hislop 13)

Ifemelu applied for such jobs only because they regularly paid in cash and made it difficult for employers to get caught for hiring undocumented immigrants. Therefore, "there is a severe domino effect between Ifemelu's emotional state, her unemployment, and her citizenship status" (Hislop 13). Eventually, Ifem's friend Ginika, who was also from Nigeria but had migrated to the US years before, managed to find her a job as a babysitter for a wealthy white family.

It is at this point that Ifemelu starts a relationship with her employer's brother, Curt, a young and successful white man, who helps her get a green card and allows her to finally reach financial and emotional stability. It is this moment in her life that she is most assimilated into American culture.

> Her laugh was so vibrant, shoulders shaking, chest heaving, it was the laugh of a woman who, when she laughed, really laughed. Sometimes when they were alone and she laughed, he would say teasingly 'That's what got me' (Adichie 191)

With Curt, Ifemelu felt she had transcended either culturally and socially and felt "she became, in her mind, a woman free of knots and cares" (Adichie 196). She had a new identity and had "slipped out of her old skin" (Adichie 200), leaving behind a life of trauma. Curt did in fact help Ifemelu in many aspects, namely by helping her find a job in public relations which helped her get a green card. Ifem's relationship with this man was mostly characterized by his almost repellent optimism that frequently troubled her: "There was something in him, lighter than ego but darker than insecurity that needed constant buffing, polishing, waxing" (Adichie 207). Curt's personality began hurting Ifemelu because despite not pretending "that being black and being white were the same in America" (Adichie 291), he was "completely tone-deaf" (Adichie 291) to her daily incidents with racism, thus initiating "an awakening of sorts in Ifemelu to her blackness as she now navigates the American world as a black woman" (Hislop 18).

Although this interracial relationship appeared to be perfect at the start since she finally was economically stable and was socially integrated, Ifemelu started to realize she had very little independence and that Curt saw her as an accessory and an exotic adventure. At one point, she cheated on Curt and confessed to him she had had an impulsive one-night stand and he was disgusted with the fact that she had been with a White man, as if the man had been Black it would not have posed a threat to him. During an e-mail exchange with a colleague from university, Wambui, a young Kenyan woman and someone Ifemelu looked up to, she gave the idea that Ifem should create a blog: “This is so raw and true. More people should read.” (Adichie 295). Therefore, Ifemelu took advantage of her thoughts about Curt and created a blog entitled “Raceteenth, or Various Observations About American Blacks (Those Formerly Known as Negroes) By a Non-American Black” to share her pain, ease her loneliness and give voice to some strong political and social statements. The fact that the blog coincides with Ifem’s breakup, a crucial moment of racial awareness, means that the blog is the elaboration of that same awareness. Ifemelu’s first post offers the “simplest solution to the problem of race in America: Romantic love” (Adichie 296). According to her, because “American society is set up to make it [romantic love] even rarer between American Black and American White, the problem of race in America will never be solved” (Adichie 296).

Overall, these blog posts develop into chronicles of daily racist incidents, either experienced or witnessed by Ifemelu which “serve as a kind of narrative rupture, set apart from the rest of the text” (McMann 209). She launched her blog anonymously to create a safe space for sharing. The presentation of these posts changes throughout the novel, gaining more and more importance. Throughout the narrative, the blog is only slightly mentioned but as the plot progresses it gets separated from the normal text and begins appearing with a different layout and font. Although Ifem wanted her blog to be a space of cultural debate and to express and share opinions she was unable to address publicly as herself soon she learned that the internet could also be a space for insults and hostility. Ifemelu felt deeply distressed by several comments that turned her readers "in her mind, [into] a judgmental angry mob waiting for her" (Adichie 306).

The blog is thus a vehicle for Ifem's process of learning how to become black and to "deliberately [defamiliarize] American habits of responding to race, describing each as strange and artificial" (Levine 594) and a strategy to make the reader feel uncomfortable with the evidence of racist experiences. In one of her blog posts she thought about how Blackness was constructed by Whites and other minority groups.

> American racial minorities – Blacks, Hispanics, Asians, and Jews – all get shit from white folks, different kinds of shit, but shit still . . . However, all the others think they're better than blacks because, well, they're not black . . . Many minorities have a conflicted longing for WASP whiteness . . . They probably don't like pale skin but they certainly like walking into a store without some security dude following them (Adichie 205)

This clearly shows how Ifem started to realize how Blackness was a status that held the lowest position in the social ladder as other racial minority groups, who also experienced "shit from white folks" (Adichie 205), preferred to maintain a social distance from Black people. With this post, she implied that, in the United States, Black people were treated aggressively and were considered as symmetrically opposed to Whites. Ifem also mentioned a "conflicted longing for WASP whiteness" (Adichie 205), referring to the benefits whiteness can offer, such as being able to lead a normal life without judgement. In *Americanah*, it is also clear how migrants remain at the periphery of mainstream societies. In another entry entitled "Understanding America for the Non-American Black: American Tribalism", Ifemelu stated that the "American Black is always on the bottom, and what's in the middle depends on time and place" (Adichie 184).

Other incidents that dwell on the meaning of Blackness appear when characters have to explain African migration to outsiders whose knowledge on the matter is limited. For example, Kimberly, her employer and Curt's sister, asked Ifemelu why so many Nigerians left during the 80s and 90s: “Ginika said you left Nigeria because college professors are always on strike there?” (Adichie 147). Aunty Uju, Ifem’s aunt, at a time frustrated with talking about her country, replied: “Why do I have to take this rubbish? I blame Buhari[44] and Babangida[45] and Abacha[46], because they destroyed Nigeria” (Adichie 218). For some migrants, the awareness of the dire situation in the continent and the fact migration aggravates such situation can bring up a feeling of guilt, depersonalization, irresponsibility or even betrayal for the motherland.

Ifemelu’s next long-term relationship is with Blaine, an assistant professor at Yale. This relationship continues to analyze the issue of racialization of romantic love in the US, this time by portraying a relationship between an African American and an African. With Blaine, Ifemelu felt she did not have to ignore her Blackness anymore. However, Blaine and his inner circle were activists who were constantly addressing racial injustice, “they looked at the world in an impractical, luminous earnestness that moved her, but never convinced her” (Adichie 314). Ifemelu thought “his positions were firm, so thought-through and fully realized in his own mind that he sometimes seemed surprised that she, too, had not arrived at them herself” (Adichie 313). As a woman starting to experience what was like to be Black in the United States, Ifemelu retaliated: “I came from a country where race was not an issue; I did not think of myself as black and I only became black when I came to America” (Adichie 290). This was a point Ifemelu made constantly when Blaine accused her of not feeling as mistreated as he felt by the racial system. It is true that British colonialism in the 19th century affected

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[44] Muhammadu Buhari (1942) is a Nigerian politician and president of Nigeria since 2015.

[45] Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida (1941) is a Nigerian general and statesman who served as military President of Nigeria from 1985 to 1993. He played an important role in several military coups in Nigeria.

[46] Sani Abacha (1943 –1998) was a Nigerian military general who served as the military head of state of Nigeria from 1993 until his death in 1998.

Nigeria and the way racism was constructed, but for a country where most of its population was and is Black, the experience of racism is not so tangible as it is in the United States. When a protest was being held on behalf of a Black employee at the university campus, Ifemelu preferred to attend a university picnic rather than being present and active in the protest. Ifem and Blaine fought since he was expecting “intraracial solidarity” (Ndaka 8) from her. He used a “subtle accusation . . . about her Africanness; she was not sufficiently furious because she was African, not African American” (Adichie 345). Ifemelu eventually understood the distinction between African Americans and Africans which consisted of different paths in history. While African Americans descended from African slaves, Africans like Ifemelu came willingly to the US and do not carry the same burden an African American like Blaine does. His advocacy for racial justice and his experience growing up Black in America did not prepare him for a relationship with someone who did not share the same background as him.

It is important to note that it was not the relationship with Blaine that made Ifemelu begin to realize the differences between Africans and African Americans. This awareness started when Ifem was told that the university had two distinct students’ associations, namely the African Students Association, which was the one she was advised to attend, and the Black Student Union, mainly frequented by African American students.

> Try and make friends with our African-American brothers and sisters in a spirit of true pan-Africanism. But make sure you remain friends with fellow Africans, as this will help you keep your perspective. Always attend African Students Association meetings, but if you must, you can also try the Black Student Union. Please note that in general, African Americans go to the Black Student Union and Africans go to the African Students Association. (Adichie 140)

The fact that she had to choose which one she had to attend confused Ifem at the start. She eventually decided to go to the African Students Association and in her first meeting she shared her Africanness while listening to other African students who actually felt the same as she did.

> Nigerians, Ugandans, Kenyans, Ghanaians, South Africans, Tanzanians, Zimbabweans, one Congolese, one Guinean sat around eating, talking, fueling spirits, and their different accents formed meshes of solacing sounds. They mimicked what Americans told them. And they themselves mocked Africa, trading stories of absurdity, of stupidity, and they felt safe to mock. . . . Ifemelu felt a gentle, swaying sense of renewal. Here, she did not have to explain herself. (Adichie 139)

Going back to the relationship with Blaine, it is with him that Ifemelu also goes through gender humiliation. His condescending attitude towards her became evident when they discussed literature, stating that Ifemelu "with a little more time and a little more wisdom, would come to accept that the novels he liked were superior, novels written by young and youngish men" (Adichie 11). Blaine did not hide his belief that men had the best intellect and even promoted their brilliance. Since Blaine was raised in a patriarchal society, he followed this particular mindset where men were naturally more intelligent than women which gave him the right to constantly correct Ifemelu's thoughts on anything. Therefore, Ifemelu felt she was not respected due to her gender. Concerning her blog, for example, Blaine frequently commented on Ifemelu's entries. Although she claimed that "[she didn't] want to explain, [she wanted] to observe" (Adichie 312), Blaine remarked that she should be more cautious: "Remember people are not reading you as entertainment, they're reading you as cultural commentary. That's a real responsibility" (Adichie 312). At this point in the novel these blog entries appear more and more frequently and at the end of every chapter.

Although Blaine and Ifem's relationship lasted for a while, by the end they were holding onto their common interest for politics. In 2008, America was going through an historical moment: a Black man, Barack Obama, was running for president. Obama was the symbol of hope for the Black community, the symbol of transculturalism, of change in a white supremacist society, he was also a descendant of colonized people, which made him into one of her. Following his election campaign only brought the couple closer together: "On the day Barack Obama became the nominee of the Democratic Party, Ifemelu and Blaine made love, for the first time in weeks, and Obama was there with them, like an unspoken prayer, a third emotional presence" (Adichie 356). According to Ifem, the announcement of his victory was only a step closer to actual change: "Barack Obama's voice rose and fell, his face solemn, and around him the large and resplendent crowd of the hopeful. Ifemelu watched, mesmerized. And there was, at the moment, nothing that was more beautiful to her than America" (Adichie 361).

Comparing Ifemelu's relationships, on the one hand, Curt made her suspend her Blackness and forget about race altogether, since as a White man he never had to deal with racial issues. On the other hand, although Blaine was an activist who did not suppress his or others' Black identity, he judged Ifemelu for not fighting back against issues that were not a part of her identity. Overall, both relationships raised Ifemelu's awareness on race and made her realize how there are such conflicting perspectives in the US.

Another form of racial discrimination Ifem was a victim of concerns her intersection between Blackness and gender which in America contributed to the fragmentation of her identity. When Ifemelu was still living in Nigeria, she embraced her femininity. At that time, she was certainly influenced by Obinze's mother[47] who believed in gender equality and became a role model to her. Obinze's mother refused to be subjected to Nigeria's cultural traditions and expectations of a woman and constantly encouraged Ifemelu to always express herself freely in order to become a strong and independent woman. This was a version of femininity that Ifem's parents did not approve because they expected their daughter to become a religious and submissive wife as expected in a patriarchal society. This oppression by patriarchism is evident both in Nigeria and America, as Ifem struggles with her relationships in the US.

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[47] The name of the character is not provided throughout the entire novel.

In opposition, by exposing the story of Obinze the novel deliberately calls attention to the other possibility of finding a Black identity. Despite the fact that Ifemelu was struggling with integrating into American society, Obinze's experience of migration presents a much more negative perspective. He did not leave Nigeria as easily and safely as Ifemelu did and to the destination he intended. As an avid reader of American literature, he believed the US was the ultimate goal: "I read American books because America is the future" (Adichie 70). The biggest contrast between these characters concerns their position in the hostland. While Ifemelu began her blog about race and aimed to become as visible as possible, Obinze, already living in the UK as an illegal immigrant, was forced to become invisible and pass unnoticed because otherwise he would have to return to Lagos. As previously mentioned, the only thing in common between these characters is their early life in Nigeria where they both belonged to privileged families, were well educated and sophisticated. The presence of Obinze's story does, in fact, serve a purpose which is to deconstruct the illusion that Afropolitanism consists only of stories of success such as Ifem's.

To become invisible, Obinze was forced to take a false identity under the name Vincent and by using someone's health insure to find work. However, he wished to change his situation and become legal. In order to do that, Obinze was tricked into paying two thousand pounds to a group of three Angolans for an arranged marriage with a Portuguese woman named Cleotilde which would grant him the visa he so eagerly wished for. Arranged marriages with European citizens are a very common solution for migrants who want to legalize their situation in the hostland.

> They walked so quickly, these people, as though they had an urgent destination, a purpose to their lives, while he did not. His eyes would follow them, with a lost longing, and he would think: *You can work, you are legal, you are visible, and you don't even know how fortunate you are* (Adichie 227)

However, before this "contract" became official, Obinze is arrested and deported which meant his invisibility had not been enough.

> A policeman clamped handcuffs around his wrists. He felt himself watching the scene from far away, watching himself walk to the police car outside, and sank into the too-soft seat in the back (Adichie 278)

He was immediately aware of how it felt to be excluded from society, which established several issues regarding identity. With this traumatic experience, *Americanah* clearly calls attention to traumas that Ifemelu, for instance, did not have to go through. Another important scene is the image of several immigrants awaiting deportation and "staring at the ceiling as though retracing the journey of how [they] had ended up at a holding facility in Manchester Airport" (Adichie 280). While also in detention, Obinze "felt raw, skinned, the outer layers of himself stripped off" (Adichie 281).

### 2.2.2. (Re)learning to be African

After thirteen years in the United States and at the age of 31, Ifem had a stable life. Her blog was a success and, in fact, she quit her job to work full-time on it. *Raceteenth*'s big community of followers allowed Ifemelu to give public speeches on various universities and other venues. However, she felt the blog had developed into something she could no longer control.

> The blog had unveiled itself and shed its milk teeth; by turns, it surprised her, pleased her, left her behind . . . Now that she was asked to speak at

> roundtables and panels . . . always identified simply as The Blogger, she felt subsumed by her blog . . . (Adichie 306)

Everything was finally going well, her career looked promising, and she had reached a stage of acceptance concerning her Black identity. However, "there was something wrong with her. She did not know what it was but there was something wrong with her. A hunger, a restlessness. An incomplete knowledge of herself. The sense of something farther away, beyond her reach" (Adichie 290). This lack of self-understanding is clearly a result of her fragmented identity which had suppressed throughout the years the woman she had been in Nigeria. Therefore, she felt that her new self dominated her oldest one and as she realized that her identity broke once again. Although her new life was good, it did not allow her to be entirely herself and thus she was not able to find a middle ground. After all this time, Ifemelu's disillusionment with the Western lifestyle began to grow while she developed a more idealistic view of Nigeria thus "experiencing a yearning so acute it morphs into homesickness" (Phiri 14).

> Nigerian websites, Nigerian profiles on Facebook, Nigerian blogs, and each click brought yet another story of a young person who had recently moved back home, clothed in American or British degrees, to start an investment company, a music production business, a fashion label, a magazine, a fast-food franchise. She looked at photographs of these men and women and felt the dull ache of loss, as though they had pried open her hand and taken something of hers. They were living her life. Nigeria became where she was supposed to be, the only place she could sink her roots in without the constant urge to tug them out and shake off the soil. (Adichie 6)

Nigeria, from a distance, started to replace America as the new dreamland. Therefore, she decided to move back to Lagos. Her last days in the US were emphasized by a constant sadness and "an anxious Afropolitan longing for a secure place of belonging, or for a sense of re-rootedness" (Knudsen and Rahbek 121):

> . . . and yet there was cement in her soul. It had been there for a while, an early morning disease of fatigue, a bleakness and borderlessness. It brought with it amorphous longings, shapeless desires, brief imaginary glints of other lives she could be living, that over the months melded into a

> piercing homesickness . . . Nigeria became where she was supposed to be, the only place she could sink her roots in without the constant urge to tug them out and shake off the soil. (Adichie 6)

At this point, Ifemelu abruptly stops blog writing when her nephew Dike attempts to commit suicide, which also delays her departure for Nigeria. As Ifemelu is coping with the situation, the entries disappear at the end of the chapters.

After some time, Ifemelu started to arrange everything for her return and decided to do a final act of accepting her Africanness: through her hair. In fact, one of the most painful things Ifem had to change about herself in the US were her looks because "black hair is subject to scrutiny because if left natural, it is politicized, and if treated or straightened, it is often done so to tame tresses into a more Western – and less threatening – idea of beauty" (McMann 208). Back in Nigeria, she wore braids and long extensions but in America she was warned that her hairstyle would not help her find a job and so she decided to straighten it. Even her Aunty Uju was already conformed with this reality: "I have to take my braids out for my interviews and relax my hair . . . If you have braids, they will think you are unprofessional" (Adichie 119). During Ifemelu's childhood she had already straightened it a few times with the help of her aunt. In America, she first decided to do it herself, applying hair relaxers bought from drugstores, which turned out to be a bad decision. Finally, she went to the hairdresser, who managed to do it right, although her scalp felt like it was burning. However, it was from the moment Ifem stepped out of the salon that her pain sharpened. She felt depressed, melancholic, as if a close relative had just died. The narrator does, in fact, provide the image of death, a kind of loss of her African identity. Taming her hair was completely against nature: "She left the salon almost mournfully; while the hairdresser had flat-ironed the ends, the smell of burning, of something organic dying which should not have died" (Adichie 203). The drastic change of her looks had severe consequences to her hair: her scalp was full of scabs and pus and she began losing big amounts of hair. Ifem was forced to cut it extremely short which only aggravated her low self-esteem and made her so unhappy and ashamed she did not leave her house for days.

As a result of this terrible experience, Ifem decided to go natural again and to allow her hair to grow as it should. For that to happen, she cut all unhealthy parts of her hair which is normally called the “big chop”. This step was fundamental, since hair played an important role in the novel and was commonly seen as a political statement. For instance, when Ifemelu showed up at work with her short Afro she was asked by one of her colleagues: “Does it mean anything? Like something political?” (Adichie 211). Although Ifem had decided to grow her natural hair, she did not know how to care for it. Therefore, a friend suggested her a website called *happilykinkynappy.com* in which other Black women with natural hair shared their experiences and advice. Being a part of this community helped Ifemelu understand her hair better, embrace it and, overall, accept her African identity.

> Others wrote responses, posting thumbs-up signs, telling her how much they liked the photo she had put up. She had never talked about God so much. Posting on the website was like giving testimony in church; the echoing roar of approval revived her. On an unremarkable day in early spring . . . she looked in the mirror, sank her fingers into her hair, dense and spongy and glorious, and could not imagine it any other way. That simply, she fell in love with her hair. (Adichie 213)

Chronologically, the narrative begins at the end of Ifemelu’s life journey as she was already on her scholarship at Princeton and had already decided to move back to Lagos. Before returning, she wanted to get her hair braided but doing this final act was not easy for her since she could not find salons capable of braiding her hair. She had to go on a one-hour train trip to find an African hair salon. This clearly shows the kind of marginalization Black women had to go through just to take care of their looks and how there is still so much misconception regarding African hair care.

Still in this subject, Ifem also became aware of how the American beauty industry discriminated the Black community. When she was with her first lover, Curt, who "[failed] to understand his inherited privilege as a heterosexual white male" (McCoy 284), suggested to Ifemelu that *Essence* magazine was "racially skewed" (Adichie 296) because only Black women were featured in its content. Frustrated with this remark, Ifemelu took Curt to a bookstore and asked him to count through several mainstream beauty magazines and find how many black women there were, coming to the conclusion that there were no more than three or four. Satisfied for being right yet frustrated for Curt's complete unawareness she added:

> . . .three black women in maybe two thousand pages of women's magazines, and all of them are biracial or racially ambiguous, so they could also be Indian or Puerto Rican or something. Not one of them is dark. Not one of them looks like me, so I can't get clues for makeup from these magazines. (Adichie 295)

In fact, this was one of the final incidents that led to her breaking up the relationship with Curt and, consequently, starting her blog.

While doing her hair at Malian Mariama's hair salon, Ifem realized how it was a place of cultural diversity and of transnational solidarity, as all the employees were from different African countries but had one thing in common: hair. Contrary to the students' associations, the salon did not separate but rather brought Black people together for a common interest. In this case, the main focus is not sharing experiences between being African or African American but as being Black women with natural kinky hair. By sharing this aspect of their Africanness it is clear how this intersection between Blackness and femininity created a space of belonging and a kind of temporary community.

Ironically, on that day, a young white woman, Kelsey, came to also get her hair braided like the actress Bo Derrick which "constitutes a signifier of the western exoticist appropriation of Black hairstyle" (Cruz-Gutiérrez 7). This scene at the salon is very important, because Ifemelu started to understand her African identity in a space strongly delimited by transculturalism. The different languages that were being spoken simultaneously clearly showed how these African migrants working at the salon wanted to integrate into western culture.

> The conversations were loud and swift, in French or Wolof or Malinke, and when they spoke English to customer, it was broken, curious, as though they had not quite eased into the language itself before taking on a slangy Americanism. The words came out half-completed (Adichie 9)

Ifemelu even recalled a particular scene where a Guinean braider had said to her "Amma like, Oh Gad, Az someh" which she did not understand at first and later on realized she meant to say "I'm like, Oh God, I was so mad" (Adichie 9). The topic of the accent is very important in *Americanah* as previously discussed on the first section when Ifemelu realized that the American accent meant losing her own identity. As years went by, she realized that her accent, which she had perfected, "had left in its wake a vast echoing space [because it was] a pitch of voice and a way of being that was not hers" (Adichie 175). This epiphany is crucial in Ifem's process of recovering her identity.

### 2.2.3. Learning to be Afropolitan

When Ifemelu finally moved back to Lagos, she realized she had returned to a place she did not recognize anymore, however it was not the place that had changed but rather her. She felt like an outsider and saw everything through a different perspective.

> Lagos assaulted her; the sun-dazed haste, the yellow buses full of squashed limbs, the sweating hawkers racing after cars . . . and the heaps of rubbish that rose on the roadsides like a taunt. . . One morning, a man's body lay on Awolowo Road . . . [S]he had the dizzying sensation of falling, falling into the new person she had become, falling into the strange familiar. Had it always been like this or had it changed so much in her absence? . . . Ifemelu stared out of the window, half listening, thinking how unpretty

> Lagos was, roads infested with potholes, houses springing up unplanned like weeds. (Adichie 385)

Ifemelu had both a sense of strangeness and familiarity, having forgotten or even repressed how life was back home. However, even in Lagos she continued to ignore the reality whilst she drove in an air-conditioned car, worked in an air-conditioned office and even isolated herself in her air-conditioned house. Despite that she still missed "low-fat soy milk, NPR[48], fast internet and good customer service" (Adichie 408) which meant that although she had learned how to become African again, she could never be only that because her identity had been too much assimilated. Therefore, she had become an *Americanah*; a name her old friends called her and which meant "an amalgamation of both cultures" (Landry 144).

Despite her strong personality, Ifem was "Americanized" and was able to blend into the American way of life. In order to help her be reinserted into Lagos' society, Ifemelu visited the Nigerpolitan Club, in which "self-absorbed and alienated returnees" (Ndaka 13) met and shared experiences and opinions about being back home. However, she did not enjoy sharing these experiences and felt distant from the rest of the returnees who she believed were too much sophisticated and artificial.

> . . . people drinking champagne in paper cups, at the poolside of a home in Osborne Estate, chic people, all dripping with savoir faire, each nursing a selfstyled quirkiness ‐ a ginger-coloured Afro, a T-shirt with a graphic of Thomas Sankara, oversize handmade earrings that hung like pieces of modern art. Their voices burred with foreign accents. *You can't find a decent smoothie in this city! Oh my God, were you at that conference? What this country needs is an active civil society*. (Adichie 407)

These Nigerpolitans are, of course, a direct reference to the new generation of sophisticated and intellectual African migrants, the Afropolitans, to whom Ifemelu also belonged. However, despite the fact that during these meetings she agreed with most of what was discussed, she felt uncomfortable for consenting and feeling the same dissatisfaction and misplacement as the others. This prompts Ifem to restart blog writing to reflect upon these emotions. Considering that Ifemelu felt that as soon as she “got off the plane in Lagos [she] stopped being black.” (Adichie 476) and given the different circumstances, she started a new blog entitled “The Small Redemption of Lagos”, in which she did not talk about race whatsoever, but what she experienced and saw in Lagos. Nonetheless, blog writing in America was different than in Nigeria since there was almost no distance between Ifem as a person and Ifem as a blogger and her circle of readers was much more restrict. This becomes clear when Ifemelu, inspired by her friend Ranyinudo’s life, whose husband was the source of income in their household, writes an entry about “Young Women in Lagos with Unknown Sources of Wealth” (Adichie 422). When her friend realized she was the character Ifem was referring to on the post, she accused Ifemelu of acting superior: “How is it different from you and the rich white guy in America? . . . You need to stop this nonsense. Stop feeling so superior” (Adichie 423). This only distanced the two personas Ifemelu embodied and made it difficult for her to only observe her surroundings and comment on them.

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[48] National Public Radio.

Ifemelu and Obinze reconnected in their hometown, but she refused to become his mistress and did not accept the fact he could not leave his wife for the sake of their rekindled passion. This romantic drama clearly put Ifemelu’s blog writing into another structure, becoming more emotional as they set each other apart for a short period of time. At that time, Ifemelu imagined each post could be a way to talk with Obinze: “She wrote her blog posts wondering what he would make of them” (Adichie 474). According to Serena Guarracino:

> The main character’s return to blogging shows that the novel’s critique to the modes of cultural production in the global, internet driven market is not all-encompassing; on the contrary, the interaction of different modes of writing expands on the complex relations among different experiences, and

> also an awareness of the wider debate on Afropolitanism as one of the main global discourses on African and African-American cultural production today. (Guarracino 19-21)

Although *Americanah* follows a popular line of immigrant narrativization in which stories of success are featured, Adichie also presents another path through Obinze's story which does not represent an experience of privilege but rather of humiliation. While in Lagos, amongst Ifemelu's blog entries on fashion, her relationship or the Nigerpolitan club, she also demonstrates how she was not able to distance herself from the life she had in the US and all the things she was already used to: "We are just one step away from this life in a slum, all of us who live air-conditioned middle-class lives, she wrote, and wondered if Obinze would agree" (Adichie 475).

Overall, back in Lagos Ifemelu struggled with accepting her own cultural hybridity, especially when that acceptance meant that America had successfully divided her. Nonetheless, being in Nigeria helped her transcend the racial border by not having to worry about being a Black woman in an all-Black community and restarting blog writing allowed her to understand the disparities between the obvious binary Africa vs West, and by (re)discovering Lagos she (re)discovered herself. Understanding that she belonged both to Africa and America and that her once-cohesive identity would forever be fragmented was her way of finally spinning "herself fully into being" (Adichie 475).

At this point in the narrative, it is clear how Ifemelu has undergone two distinct learning processes. Firstly, it must be taken into consideration that Ifem left Nigeria as a young adult who had already gone through a process of formation and maturation in Lagos, conditioned by its culture and traditions. Therefore, moving to another country at the age of 18 meant that she had to (re)learn and (re)shape her identity. The first learning process occurred in the US, where she had to understand what it meant to be Black and acknowledge the differences between Africans and African Americans. The second learning process happened during her return to Lagos where she learned how to live as an "amalgamation" of two cultures, that is, being American and African.

Ifemelu's coming-of-age narrative concludes, recalling Graham's words, "with an epiphany that brings insight" (Graham 120) which is characteristic of the classic novel of development. Nonetheless, the narrativization of Ifemelu's life journey also coincides with the American *Bildungsroman* because "the experience of young protagonists tends to heighten, rather than dispel" (Graham 120) what Brigid Lowe termed "the anxieties of a modern age". In Ifemelu's own individualistic development she rejects the constraints of home and sets out on a journey to face many obstacles. However, as mentioned by Leseur in the first chapter, the hardships of the New World and the heroine's struggle against society leads to a process of self-realization and differentiation of the individual.

### 2.3. Conclusion

Overall, *Americanah* analyzes different issues that are related to trauma, exclusion or fragmentation, namely migration and the notion of otherness. All these aspects resonate within a broader concept that delves into the subject of transcultural identity in a globalized world which is Afropolitanism, already discussed in detail on chapter I. As previously mentioned, at least four to five different interpretations of this cultural trend were identified, namely Selasi's elitist concept of Africans of the world, Mbembe's free circulation of worlds, Dabiri's reading of how Afropolitanism is in "collusion with consumerism" (Dabiri 104), Salami's concept of a "glocal" (Salami n.p.) space, Eze's analysis of Afropolitanism as an hyperculture, to name a few.

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, an author who had a middle-class and westernized education and moves freely and fluidly between the West and America, has been frequently considered an Afropolitan, although it is a term she rejects entirely.

> I am tired of this word. I am African. There are two things that seem curious to me: first are Africans so outside of the general history of humanity that they must be designated by a particular word when they travel or are found in the capitals of the world? The second thing is that history (sadly not well known) shows that cosmopolitanism doesn′t date from yesterday: many African kings from the West coast sent their children to study in Europe. And much later, the generation of my father traveled a lot, there have been numerous waves of people coming back in the 1960′s, and who have not stopped moving. They define themselves as Africans. (qtd. in Santana 122)

It is true, and Mbembe and Eze also confirm this idea, that Africans have a tendency to be in constant movement and to travel a lot, especially in the postcolonial period. *Americanah* clarifies how Africans are drawn to Western culture not only for its better education but also for political and social reasons that are unattainable in the African continent. Obinze, for example, left Nigeria because he could not bear "the oppressive lethargy of choicelessness [and was] hungry for choice and certainty [and was] conditioned from birth to look somewhere else, eternally convinced that real lives happened in that somewhere else" (Adichie 276). Obinze moved to the UK on a visitor's visa that eventually expired and was deported alongside many other Africans who were in the same situation and knew "they would come back and do it over again because they had nothing to lose" (Adichie 281).

Although Adichie seems to give the idea that Afropolitanism consists of a group of distinct Africans who allowed themselves to be assimilated into Western culture and had the opportunity to enjoy its benefits thus affecting and fragmenting their identity, the novel presents Obinze's story, although in a shorter narrative, to confirm that being Afropolitan does not necessarily mean success. The fact that the narratives of Ifemelu and Obinze, being one of success and the other of failure, respectively, present different approaches of what it means to be an Afropolitan, shows how the novel does not follow blindly Selasi's elitist and most popular version of the term. While both represent at the beginning an educated class of Nigerians who feel the urge to leave home in search for better opportunities, Ifemelu's status as an Afropolitan, on the one hand, may resemble, at the start, Selasi's idea of "Africans of the World" since she had completely been assimilated into American society and thus belonged to a privileged elite of Black intellectuals. However, as she (re)learns to be African and decides to return home, she seems to have rejected this concept as it can be evidenced by her discomfort during the Nigerpolitan meetings. This rejection could also allude to Adichie's own personal rejection of the term and how she does not consider herself a part of the Black elite thus trying to reflect that in the protagonist.

Back in Lagos, Ifemelu learns how to be an amalgamation of both her African and American identity and this may be closely related to Mbembe's reading of the phenomenon, that is celebrating a fluid circulation of cultural spaces and accepting the fact that Africans are a part of the world. Obinze, on the other hand, seems to represent the failure of this cultural trend since his experience as an illegal immigrant in the United Kingdom meant that he could not afford to have the same opportunities Ifemelu had. It remains unclear throughout the novel if Obinze went through similar learning processes and had his identity deeply merged with the English mainstream society as it happened to Ifemelu in the US. Nonetheless, Adichie's intent was surely to prove that *Americanah* is not, as Dabiri claims, an "Africa Rising [narrative]" (Dabiri n.p.) that only ensures success and "[drowns] out the voices of a majority who remain denied basic life chances" (Dabiri n.p.) because Obinze's story proves the opposite.

It is clear that the Afropolitan status is still a rough concept, susceptible to many different interpretations that can hardly pinpoint an exact definition of the term. Overall, concerning the novel, it should be noted that not all the interpretations of the term can be analyzed individually because some are interrelated and should be taken into consideration as a whole. *Americanah* is an Afropolitan novel and its relation to the concept is closely associated with Mbembe and Eze's interpretations, due to the fact that both consider that Afropolitanism consists of how Africans relate with the world and that nowadays a hybrid identity is "no longer shaped exclusively by the geography or blood . . . on the contrary, identity is now 'relational'" (Eze 235). Therefore, the novel tries to stray from the restrict path many postcolonial African novels choose to follow for the sake of consumerism and success by presenting two stories that normalize the concept of being "Afri-hyphenated" (Eze 235) and establish the idea that an African identity should not be solely related to Africa but to the world.

# III. *We Need New Names*: a quest for survival in a utopic America

## 3.1. Introduction

This chapter analyzes NoViolet Bulawayo's *We Need New Names* and its various motifs such as migration, abjection, citizenship, disillusionment, dislocation, identity, among others. The discussion of the narrative aims to understand how *We Need New Names* reinvents Afropolitanism through the dystopic perspective of an underprivileged child who belongs to the other side of the successful Afropolitans, the neglected. With an essentially tragic panorama, Bulawayo presents a stereotyped image of the African continent and how it is frequently represented by the West in order to criticize such misconception.

The analysis will be organized in two parts, concentrated on the two types of mobility which concern different periods of time. Nonetheless, both sections represent a kind of disillusionment. Firstly, in "How Darling left" the main character is a 10-year-old child living in her neighborhood, Paradise (Zimbabwe), where she dealt with extreme poverty, hunger and political dictatorship and dreamt about leaving for America and fulfilling the ultimate American dream. This section will study the ongoing events that led to Darling's departure and motivated her to leave her family and friends behind. Secondly, in "How Darling arrived" the main character is already a teenager struggling with the shock between dream and reality and trying to adjust to a new lifestyle. In this phase of the character's life, other problems arise namely oppressive racism, poor life conditions, illegal migrant status and a sense of unbelonging with both the hostland and homeland.

Following the analysis of the protagonist's life journey, the final discussion will concentrate on how Bulawayo subverts the popular concept of Afropolitanism and reconceptualizes it through the narrativization of Darling's immigrant story. Taking into consideration that *We Need New Names* is a coming-of-age novel, the analysis will also revisit some of the notions presented in Chapter I about the Black *Bildungsroman* in order to understand Darling's process of formation.

## 3.2. *We Need New Names* as a novel of dislocation, disillusionment and precarious mobilities

### 3.2.1. "How Darling left"

*We Need New Names* is a novel of formation that focuses on themes such as government abuse, migration, social and political conflict and displacement through the perspective of a ten-year-old child, Darling Nonkululeko Nkala, who lives in a precarious neighborhood and whose life chronicles are told in a picaresque tone through episodic scenes that reveal marginality and inequality. NoViolet Bulawayo[49] grew up in Zimbabwe and considers herself as being part of the "born free generation" of the 1980s, which is a designation associated with Zimbabweans who were born in 1980, the year Zimbabwe gained independence from the UK. She moved to the US after high school and studied creative writing at Cornell University. In 2011, she won the Caine Prize for her short story *Hitting Budapest*, which is the opening chapter of *We Need New Names*.

The picaresque novel is often defined as "the adventurous story of a rogue's life, usually told in the first person . . . an episodic account of wanderings, adversity, and ingenious role-playing [which] incorporates a satiric view of society" (Alter 8). Other important elements included in this genre are the lack of a linear plot, the presence of first-person narration, frequent use of satire and abundance of grotesque images. In postcolonial narratives, the picaresque genre addresses the issue of global capitalism and precarity. Another motif of the genre is the representation of bodily abjection and scatology which appeals once more to a grotesque vision. The protagonist's journey in a picaresque novel is not associated with social mobility, but rather with a sense of wandering. This concept replaces "the *Bildungsroman* idea of a consistent development in time with a contingent meandering through space. This undirected straying, often at the margins of society, has been interpreted as being in stark contrast to the regulated movement of bodies" (Elze 53).

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[49] The author was born Elisabeth Tshele but changed her name to NoViolet Bulawayo when she moved to America. According to the author, NoViolet meant "with Violet" in her native language, Ndebele, in memory of her deceased mother. Bulawayo referred to the second largest city in Zimbabwe where the author spent most of her childhood.

The influence of the picaresque genre in postcolonial African literature is related to a need to redefine identity in a globalized setting. Regarding Afropolitan narratives, the presence of picaresque motifs in these fictions provides new readings on privilege. One of the most frequent critiques on Afropolitanism is its focus on elitism. Therefore, according to Emma Dabiri, the problem lies in the fact that "we still do not hear the narratives of Africans who are not privileged" (Dabiri 105). For that reason, *We Need New Names* introduces picaresque traits to "complicate ideas of success and privilege" (Cobo-Piñero 5) and to draw attention to the failure of underdeveloped ex-colonies by presenting a group of poor Zimbabwean children and how one of them, Darling, had the opportunity to move to the US. With a first-person narrator, the novel is divided into two sections: before and after migrating to America.

Firstly, the reader is introduced to the voice of ten-year-old Darling who chronicles all the adventures of her group of friends who lived in a Zimbabwean slum which they ironically called Paradise and which depicts issues such as abject poverty, extreme hunger, AIDS, sexual abuse, etc. Bulawayo's choice to name an underprivileged village Paradise was surely intentional as it evokes a desire for that neighborhood to evolve. However, Darling, as a very observant child, provides a different image of her home as if challenging the reader to see past the negative aspects and to see beauty.

> Paradise is all tin and stretches out in the sun like a wet sheepskin nailed on the ground to dry; the shacks are the muddy color of dirty puddles after the rains. The shacks themselves are terrible but from up here, they seem much better, almost beautiful even, it's like I'm looking at a painting. (Bulawayo 34)

Darling's high position at a hilltop allows her to see Paradise through a different perspective and instills a strange sense of home despite the brutal conditions and flaws of the neighborhood. Comparing Paradise to a work of art is surely a way to challenge what a Western audience would see as a land of desolation. This slum had been constructed after the independence war with the UK and was followed by thirty years of Robert Mugabe's[50] dictatorship. Darling was a victim of the Operation Murambatsiva or Operation Restore Order which was a government campaign that started in 2005 to forcibly clear precarious regions of Zimbabwe by destroying several houses under the pretense of fighting poverty. Although Mugabe is not openly mentioned throughout the novel, his dictatorship is undeniably related to the events. This means *We Need New Names* could be considered a portrayal of the exercise of power and its consequences. During the 70s, Zimbabwe was fighting for its independence from the British rule and in the 80s it became independent. However, this freedom did not mean the country would evolve socially, politically, and economically rather it continued to recede. Therefore, Bulawayo portrays how Zimbabweans were betrayed by a dictator's leadership during the last thirty years which leads to the motif of disillusionment.

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[50] Mugabe was Prime Minister of Zimbabwe from 1980 to 1987 and then President from 1987 to 2017.

Bulawayo has shown how political disillusionment can lead to despair and how this often leads to forcing communities to escape in fear. The hardships of living in Paradise due to this disillusionment clearly triggered Darling and some of her friends to leave Zimbabwe.

To pass the time, Darling and her friends used to go to the closest rich neighborhood, Budapest, which was mostly populated by white people. To satiate their hunger, the children used to steal guavas from their neighbors: “there are guavas to steal in Budapest, and right now I’d rather die for guavas. We didn’t eat this morning and my stomach feels like somebody just took a shovel and dug everything out” (Bulawayo 1). These children’s hunger and desperate need for nourishment already exemplify how the picaresque novel often uses such natural scenes as a vehicle for critique by uncovering the evident social disparity. Furthermore, the children’s situation is often portrayed in a humoristic tone and with a recurrent use of strong and realistic images of excrement. In the same chapter, Darling describes how they had defecated after having stolen the guavas and eaten in disproportionate amounts.

> By the time we get back to Paradise the guavas are finished and our stomachs are so full we are almost crawling. We stop to defecate in the bush because we have eaten too much. Plus it is best to do it before it gets too dark. (Bulawayo 15)

In postcolonial writing, scatology, namely the presence of excrement, can “redress a history of debasement by displaying the failures of development and the contradictions of colonial discourse and, moreover, by disrupting inherited associations of excrement with colonized or nonwestern populations” (Esty 30). Awareness of the arrogant scale of colonial thieving and entitlement in the unnamed country is seen through Darling’s own experience of stealing guavas to appease her gnawing hunger.

> If you are stealing something it’s better if it’s small and hideable or something you can eat quickly and be done with, like guavas. That way, people can’t see you with the thing to be reminded that you are a shameless thief and that you stole it from them, so I don’t know what the white people were trying to do, stealing not just a tiny piece, but a whole country. (Bulawayo 20)

This clearly shows how the economic and political rift remains visible in Africa, as the white suburb of Budapest still shows discernable traces of colonialism.

After Darling, her friends and respective families had been victims of the brutal operation of Mugabe that brought them to the poor neighborhood of Paradise, the protagonist was still frightened and traumatized, having nightmares with the sound of bulldozers destroying their homes: “I try to push it away and push it away but the dreams keep coming and coming” (Bulawayo 65). Metaphorically, the bulldozer is the symbol of dictatorial power which leaves both children and adults defenseless and shocked with its monstrosity.

> I hear the adults saying, Why, why, why, what have we done, what have we done, what have we done? Then the lorries come carrying the police with those guns and baton sticks and we run and hide inside the houses, but it’s no use hiding because the bulldozers start bulldozing and bulldozing and we are screaming and screaming”. (Bulawayo 65)

Bulawayo presents Paradise as a “microcosm of a postcolonial nation that is battered by years characterized by a gross abuse of power” (Mapanzure 43). The title of the novel seems to be a call for change of the figures in power and of those who were responsible for the crisis and brutality. Again, the presence of Zimbabwe’s political context emerges indirectly through subtle references, such as the villain of the novel, who the reader understands is a strong political figure that appears on the news “raising his fists . . . saying how our country is a black man’s home and would never be a colony again” (Bulawayo 192). This kind of speech has been associated with Mugabe’s by many perceptive readers. *We Need Names* thus criticizes the persistence of old and powerful names, such as Mugabe’s, and implicitly pleas for the emergence of new political figures that can put an end to such poverty and unhappiness.

This strong appeal for change is evident, for instance, in one of Darling’s friends, Bornfree, whose excitement and ingenuous belief end up costing him his life. The people of Paradise were, in fact, urged to bring change into their lives by a new opposition movement called “Change people”. Many believe this to be a direct reference to the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC), Mugabe’s main opposition, led by Morgan Tsvangirai who advised his supporters to vote in national elections and contribute to a new political power. Bornfree becomes a strong supporter of this activist movement and unfortunately is killed by Mugabe’s militants. Although Bulawayo never details this character’s murder, the reader witnesses Darling and her friends’ re-enactment of this moment. Bornfree’s death scared the community of Paradise and lowered their expectations for change, realizing the high cost of dreaming about new names: “the waiting did not end and the change did not happen. And then those men came for Bornfree. That did it, that made the adults stop talking about change. It was like the voting and the partying and everything that had happened had not ever happened” (Bulawayo 135).

In general, *We Need Names* is a critique of postcolonial Zimbabwean dictatorship through which childhood is the main vehicle of its exposure. Darling is a very sensitive and conscious girl who understands how the world and mainly her country should be organized. In an article published in *The Guardian*, Bulawayo explains how children are essential in her plot.

> My protagonist, Darling, was inspired by a photograph of this kid sitting on the rubble that was his bulldozed home after the Zimbabwean government carried out Operation Murambatsvina, a clean-up campaign in 2005 that saw some people in informal settlements lose their homes. As I looked at image after haunting image, I became obsessed with where the people would go, what their stories were, and how these stories would

> develop – and more importantly what would happen to the kid in the first picture I saw. The writing project essentially became about finding out. The country was the backdrop, and of course it was at a time when it was unravelling due to failure of leadership. Still, I was also inspired by what children can stand for, by their innocence, their resilience, humanity and humour, and what they tell us about our world. I think this is where *We Need New Names* gets it pulse. (Bulawayo n.p.)

In her narrative, children and young adults are the social commentators of life through a playful and humorous perspective which may be used as a survival mode to the harsh reality they are exposed to. Consequently, the narrative is imbued with honesty from the perspective of a child who had no ulterior motive but to tell the story of her life and her surroundings as she perceived and understood it. Although her perspective may be limited "in terms of knowledge, experience, and understanding [it] can offer an effective mode for the critique of social and political issues" (Wilkinson 124).

A good example of this critique is the "Country-Game" Darling and her group used to play. Essentially, the game consisted of drawing imaginary maps on the ground with all the countries they knew and which they had to fight over for, because everyone "wants to be the US, and Britain and Canada and Australia and Switzerland and France and Italy and Sweden and Germany and Russia and Greece. These are the country-countries" (Bulawayo 49). Those who lost this imaginary political fight would have "to settle for countries like Dubai and South Africa and Botswana and Tanzania. These are not country-countries, but at least life is better than here" (Bulawayo 49). Through this innocent yet insightful game, it is clear that these children already understood how all these countries belonged to a hierarchy and that their country was at the bottom of it.

The presence of Western influence is evident even before Darling migrates to the US, which implies she already had some knowledge, although naïve and idealized, of America. In fact, the first half of the novel is largely engaged with all kinds of atrocities and sufferings that, in a way, are related to the West. For example, Chipo, one of Darling's friends, who was raped and impregnated by her own grandfather, was so traumatized that she was unable to talk for months. Chipo only regained her speech after witnessing another woman being sexually abused, although this time by the town's priest Prophet Revelation Bitchington Mborro who molested this woman in front of an entire congregation, including the woman's husband. The prophet claimed he was performing an exorcism. Being present to such a scene enabled Chipo to vocalize her own experience to Darling: "he did that to me. My grandfather was there and got on me and pinned me down like that and he clamped a hand over my mouth and was heavy like a mountain" (Bulawayo 42-43). Later in the narrative, in a chapter called "We Need New Names", Chipo decided she did not want to be in her "condition" (pregnant) no longer and asked her friends for help. As children, they did not understand entirely Chipo's situation, referring to her pregnancy as something in "her stomach" or a "bulge" (Bulawayo 80). Neither her or her friends knew how to help and the reader is presented with a powerful image of these children scavenging for things to help, namely a rusty clothes hanger which alludes to the performance of illegal abortions that are very common in developing countries. To help them play their role as doctors who are going to help a patient, the children feel they needed new names and thus got inspired by the American television show *ER (Emergency Room).* Forgiveness became Dr.Cutter, Darling was Dr.Roz and Sbho became Dr.Bullet. Interpreting these American characters helped them feel confident and secure about this highly dangerous procedure and, in a way, mask the harshness of the situation. Fortunately, the dangerous operation was interrupted.

The presence of the West is also evident in the regular visits of Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO) that brought gifts to the children and offered "what is characterized as superficial help and patronizing sympathy" (Ndlovu 4). In fact, the NGO were described as cold and unsympathetic. Darling says: "We are careful not to touch the NGO people…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" (Bulawayo 54). Bulawayo's criticism of these American organizations is clearly implied. Therefore, Darling and her friends' abject poverty becomes an object of curiosity to these organizations: "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. We don't complain because after the picture-taking comes the giving of gifts" (Bulawayo 54). This is an example of how children, especially Darling, felt inferior, exploited and insulted. These photographs would surely be used by Western media in order to perpetuate a stereotyped image of Africa. In addition to this, controlling how African cultures are represented also means that the West is able to maintain his image as a savior.

Another traumatizing scene happens at the end of the first chapter, "Hitting Budapest", in which the children stumble upon the dead body of a young woman who had hanged herself, most likely because she had been suffering from AIDS. This distressing and realistic scene portrays this group of children who are shocked at first but are soon thrilled by the shoes the woman wore since it could help them buy a loaf of bread they desperately hungered for.

> We all turn around and follow Bastard back into the bush, the dizzying smell of Lobels bread all around us now, and then we are rushing, then we are running, then we are running and laughing and laughing and laughing. (Bulawayo 18)

This clearly shows that Bulawayo is constantly hinting her discontentment towards her country of origin, unmasking a dysfunctional postcolonial African government that has led their country to extremely difficult conditions. In addition to this, Bulawayo’s extensive use of scatological expressions throughout the novel are clearly a critique of the state’s incapacity which is condemned by mere children and the reference to their home, their country and anything as “kaka”.

It is important to note that Bulawayo’s novel is extensively discussed by the academic world and a common reading of the novel is that it confirms some stereotyped images of Africa that are perpetuated by the West. *We Need New Names* is frequently considered “poverty porn” which “is used as a moralistically derogatory term because of anxieties that an appearance of social consciousness is thought to mask an unseemly enjoyment of others’ suffering” (Stobie 8). The novel does, in fact, describe many images of precarity. During the first part of the novel, in Paradise, precarity is presented through the depiction of poverty, hunger, murder, suicide, disease, etc. On the second part, after Darling’s departure to America, she still deals with precarity in many forms, namely through the effects of migration, poverty, difficult assimilation and racism. Wainaina has also commented on the novel and considered that its main objective is to be “pitied, worshiped or dominated” (qtd. in Motahane and Makombe 5).

Helon Habila, in a critical review of Bulawayo’s novel, suggests that it ticks a “checklist made from the morning’s news on Africa”, thus writing about the continent “not in a real tragic sense, more in a CNN, western-media-coverage-of-Africa, poverty-porn sense” where “child soldiers, genocide, child prostitution, female genital mutilation, political violence, police brutality, dictatorships, predatory preachers, dead bodies on the roadside” (Habila n.p.) are represented. The fact that the author overwhelms the reader with such scenarios leads to, according to Habila, a “desensitization” (Habila n.p.) of the images being described. Furthermore, the critic also states that this abundance of negative symbols almost implies a “palpable anxiety to cover every ‘African’ topic” (Habila n.p.). The review suggests that this writing style has possibly fallen into a “Caine-prize aesthetic[51]” (Habila n.p.) which consists of a formula that publishers and editors have begun to perpetuate and reinforce since that particular writing style has led to success.

In “African Books for Western Eyes”, a 2014 review written by the Nigerian novelist Adaobi Tricia Nwaubani, it is also remarked that African novels are still primarily targeted for Western readers and that “success for an African writer still depends on the West” (Nwaubani n.p.). The author supports her claim by further indicating that there is almost no access to publication or distribution of African literature to the continent thus questioning: “Why else have brutality and depravity been the core of many celebrated African stories?” (Nwaubani n.p.).

However, it can also be argued that these stereotyped images of suffering and poverty may be deliberately used by the author who, according to Rangarirayi Mapanzure, tries to “subvert those very markets that thrive on stereotypical notions of the black other” (Mapanzure 48). In Mapanzure’s article “When Old Names Refuse to Go: Myths, Power, and Subversion in NoViolet Bulawayo’s We Need New Names” (2019), the core argument consists of the fact that the author is aware of the impact these notions have on the Western reader and so consciously tries to subvert and satirize the “reader’s voyeuristic fascination with the black other” (Mapanzure 48). Therefore, the objective is to destabilize the Western reader and his pre-conceived ideas on the African continent which are a part of Habila’s checklist. According to the author, the process of deconstruction is conveyed through childhood innocence and bluntness through which difficult scenarios are exposed with no restraint or censorship. Overall, Mapanzure’s interpretation leads to believe that *We Need New Names* belongs to a generation of counter-narratives “that unmask the inherent fragility of established myths” (Mapanzure 49).

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[51] NoViolet Bulawayo has won a Caine prize for her short story “Hitting Budapest” which was later on extended into *We Need New Names*.

In the article “Taking Pictures: The Economy of Affect and Postcolonial Performativity in NoViolet Bulawayo’s *We Need New Names*”, James Arnett also shares Mapanzure’s perspective, questioning some academic critics’ opinion that the novel performs poverty. The author admits that African literature has, generally, the Western reader in mind, but argues that “it becomes clear over the course of the novel that Bulawayo’s critique of the developed world’s appetite for images of suffering is a funhouse mirror that shatters stereotypes . . .” (Arnett 151). The way the novel handles extreme poverty in African countries is a good example of how Bulawayo disrupts these stereotypes by presenting resilient and lively children who contrast with a rather too well-known image of undernourished children. Therefore, the novel presents another perspective on this controversial matter, by showing a comical group of friends on an organized mission to satiate their hunger. The fact that these children had to turn to thievery to eat something is very serious. However, in choosing to alleviate this matter the author gets to capture the readers’ attention because it shows how the novel diverges from other postcolonial narratives that focus on poverty-porn. Therefore, *We Need New Names* is a novel that does not solely serve the Westerners’ need for postcolonial consumption.

Overall, there are several questions to be asked regarding Bulawayo’s true intentions when depicting the African continent. Firstly, and according to Habila’s and Nwaubani’s points of view, Bulawayo may have used a common formula that Western publishers have normalized as a path to success. Secondly, the author may have consciously used this format to satirize and deconstruct Western concepts on the African continent, as Mapanzure and Arnett stated.

For the purpose of the present discussion the idea that *We Need New Names* problematizes these concepts seems to hold and although Bulawayo chooses to represent the precarious situation of Zimbabwe she does so not to perpetuate negative ideas about the African continent but to make a social commentary about them. It must be taken into consideration that Bulawayo is portraying historical events that happened in her country, such as Mugabe's dictatorship which caused the suffering of many people for more than 30 years. In light of this interpretation, all the negative representations are nothing more than an accurate representation of reality that could not have been described lightly. A stereotyped Africa only emerges critically and strategically in the second part of the novel when Darling realizes how Americans have so many misconceptions about the continent. The fact that these negative pre-conceived notions of Africa are present only through American characters emphasizes Bulawayo's intention of deconstructing them. In this case, it is clear that Bulawayo is criticizing such offensive thinking from Western communities. However, while in Paradise (Zimbabwe), all the images described are related to that particular place and that particular community with no relation to any other African country.

Although, superficially, *We Need New Names* appears to be another attempt at recycling negative African stereotypes, a deeper meaning lies beneath. She exposes a dysfunctional African government through a dystopic scenario that corresponds to reality. Using children as narrators was also a deliberate choice since it is through their brutal honesty that Bulawayo illustrates how Mugabe's dictatorship had serious consequences on the community and how the West perceives the African continent.

The theme of spatial mobility is introduced in the novel through the community's almost obsession with migration, although many believed that migrant labor could lead to terrible illnesses. For instance, Darling's father who had moved to

Johannesburg returns home with AIDS, while her cousin Makhosi is diagnosed with lung disease from diamond digging in South African mines. Darling fantasized with migrating to the US, calling it by her own term: “My America”. The protagonist was clearly influenced by the American dream of success, prosperity and social status.

> When I go to live with aunt Fostalina, that’s the kind of car I’ll drive . . . I just know, because of this feeling in my bones, that the car is waiting for me in America, so I yell, My Lamborgini, Lamborgini, Lamborgini Reventón! (Bulawayo 111)

Darling’s fantasy represents what Simon Gikandi determines as “the first type of Afropolitan” (Gikandi 49), someone who invokes America while still in Africa and pictures themselves as Afropolitan. What makes Bulawayo’s novel even more complex is that Darling, unprivileged and idealistic, does in fact travel abroad, although under uneasy conditions. In fact, for this low social class, “getting to America was harder than crawling through the anus of a needle” (Bulawayo 240). To obtain their passports, people had to go through desperate actions that would grant them a better life abroad: “they begged, lied, groveled, promised, charmed, bribed” (Bulawayo 240). Darling goes to America, Godknows to Dubai, Bastard goes to South Africa and Sbho travels around the world with a theater crew. However, at least for the protagonist, this departure although willful was sorrowful: “Then something shifts inside me and I start to feel disappointed, and then angry at our leaders for making it all happen, for ruining everything” (Bulawayo 287).

Although the novel is divided into two parts, *We Need New Names* also provides three interludes which are not narrated by Darling’s voice and are written in the first or third person plural, alluding to the community of Paradise and their struggles as they were forced to abandon their country and save themselves from a dictatorship. The first chapter of these small episodes is entitled “How They Appeared”, which refers to those who live in Paradise and how they were forced to live there due to Mugabe's operation. Secondly, "How They Left" portrays how some of these people decided to migrate either inside or outside the continent to escape the poor conditions they were living in. Lastly, "How They Lived" demonstrates the lives of those who left for the West, specifically America. Although the main objective is to present a migrant experience through the individualization of Darling's own voice, this sporadic change is clearly an appeal to all immigrants trying to reclaim their story.

As Mugabe held his dictatorial leadership with the election in 2008, perpetuating economic instability and fear, people were forced to leave and search for a better place. In "How They Left", Bulawayo alludes to this major exodus of Zimbabweans that occurred during the 80s by imploring the reader to "look at them" (Bulawayo 147) as people were forced to leave in order to live better. Even though this departure, just like Darling's, is hopeful, this chapter already anticipates the hardships "they" will encounter.

> Those with nothing are crossing borders. Those with strength are crossing borders. Those with ambition are crossing borders. Those with hopes are crossing borders. Those with loss are crossing borders. Those in pain are crossing borders. Moving, running, emigrating, deserting, walking, quitting, flying, fleeing – to all over, to countries near and far, to countries unheard of, to countries whose names they cannot pronounce. They are leaving in droves. Look at them leaving in droves despite knowing they will be welcomed with restraint in those strange lands because they do not belong, knowing they will have to sit on one buttock because they must not sit comfortably lest they be asked to rise and leave… (Bulawayo 148).

The repeated idea of "crossing borders" works almost as a refrain and as a link to the actual crossing Darling performs on the second part of the novel. The concept of the border is a recurrent motif during the novel, starting in the first chapter where Darling and her group of friends had to cross from Paradise to the wealthy neighborhood in Budapest to steal guavas. Furthermore, this chapter portrays a sense of tragedy for those who have lost “all psychological and cultural support for being whole” (Ndlovu 9) and felt displaced either at home or in the hostland, thus connecting Darling’s abject poverty and her relocation to America where her dream was shattered by a strange weather, strange people and a strange land. The 2008 elections in Zimbabwe occurred shortly before Darling is sent to live with her Aunt Fostalina and Uncle Kojo in Detroit, Michigan, or as she termed it, “Destroyedmichygen”. In this period, America is going through the Great Recession, which means that, ironically, Darling leaves an economically unstable country to enter another one going through an economic crisis. This may be a reference to how Darling’s ideals will be destroyed in this city, since she leaves Paradise as a very impressionable teenager who is eager to know “her America”.

### 3.2.2. “How Darling arrived”

When Darling arrives in the US at the age of 15 or 16[52] she is confronted with an unfamiliar setting that changes entirely her concept of home and identity, thus complicating her attempts to redefine herself. One of the major changes was the hostile cold weather which contrasted deeply with the warm temperatures of Zimbabwe. The climate made Darling feel unwelcome and uncapable of feeling at home in America. While looking at the snow-covered yard, Darling realized that “this here is not my country, I don’t know whose it is” (Bulawayo 149). Using an all-white scenario is very significant in this scene since it indicates that Darling will be immersed by white supremacy, metaphorically represented by the snow. Therefore, the snow is a “greedy monster . . . like it's telling you, with its snow, that you should go back to where you came from" (Bulawayo 148). In addition to this, Darling becomes aware of the disjunction between her idealized image of America and reality: "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" (Bulawayo 150). At this point in the novel, Darling's process of maturation already hints to be one of disillusionment.

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[52] In the beginning of the novel, Darling is 10 years old and moves to the US in the winter of 2008. However, it is unclear what year it is when she is living in Paradise but taking into consideration that she is a teenager in high school when she is in America, it may be assumed that the novel’s timeline starts around 2002 or 2003.

The neighborhood where Darling lived with her aunt was described by her as being dark and frightening and overall embarrassing enough to hide it in the letters she sent home: "I left out these things, and a lot more, because they embarrassed me, because they made America not feel like My America, the one that I had always dreamed of back in Paradise" (Bulawayo 190). As Darling realized that "her America" was as much of a "kaka place" as Zimbabwe, a sense of nostalgia reeled in, making her feel torn between "the one part that is yearning for [her] friends; the other does not know how to connect with them anymore, as if they are people [she has] never met" (Bulawayo 212). Darling certainly did not want her loved ones in Paradise, who had nothing more than an idealistic image of America, to know how the American dream was a façade. In "How They Lived" there is a confirmation that other immigrants also hid the truth from their families, those who were left behind, who begged them repeatedly for financial aid.

> They had long ceased to be providers for us, we were now their parents. Our extended families sent requests and we worked, worked like donkeys, worked like slaves, worked like madmen. When we hesitate, they said, you are in America where everybody has money, we see it all on Tv, please don't deny us. (Bulawayo 247)

The problem lies with the fact that immigrants, finally experiencing the hardships of migration, could not be honest with themselves and acknowledge those difficulties and that surely had to be extended to their families. Consequently, they continued to ‘feed’ the dream and the belief America was the ideal haven for immigrants: “we went everywhere and took pictures and sent them home showing off a country that would never be ours” (Bulawayo 245).

Darling could only find some sense of belonging when Aunt Fostalina’s friends, who were also from Darling’s native country, came to visit. Their connection was instant since they shared the same roots. By listening to African music and cooking African food, Darling was able to reconnect with her culture, create a sort of family and redefine herself and who she is in the diaspora. This realization is a turning point in the protagonist’s development, since she begins to understand that despite being in America she missed her origins and felt good when her Africanness was revived.

Chronologically, Darling was now a teenager going to school and working “low paying jobs. Back breaking jobs. Jobs that gnawed at the bones of our dignity, devoured the meat, tongued the marrow” (Bulawayo 246). Slowly, Darling’s dream started to fade: “. . . this is not what I came to America for” (Bulawayo 263). The American dream was indeed appealing to all Paradise’s younger generation who did not fight for their country’s independence but were now left with a failing country that was the result of revolution.

Back in Paradise, Darling’s idea that she might once return home after being in America was something that was always envisaged. At a time when Darling and her friends were in Budapest scavenging for guavas and dreaming about getting out of Paradise, she confessed to her friends that she was to live with her aunt in America and, probably to ease her friends’ sadness, guaranteed that “it won’t be long, you’ll see” (Bulawayo 16) which may also suggest that Darling intended on coming back. Bastard replied: “America is too far, you midget… what if you go there and find it’s a kaka place and get stuck and can't come back?" (Bulawayo 16). Ironically, this is exactly what happens with Darling in the end.

For many immigrants, false hope of achieving the American dream begins much before they leave their home. It is certainly through globalization and cultural imperialism that idealistic images of the US and its economic prosperity and opportunity are spread through the world. Therefore, immigrant narratives demonstrate how unrealistic these expectations are and how in a post-arrival shock there can be negative consequences on both the immigrant and those back home who depend on the assurances of a dream. Despite this initial shock, immigrants still believe they can at least indulge in American excess, focusing on capitalist values. In "How They Lived", Bulawayo describes immigrants' enjoying American standards of overindulgence.

> At McDonalds, we devoured Big Macs and wolfed down fries and guzzled supersize Cokes. At Burger King we worshipped Whoppers. At KFC we mauled bucket chicken. We went to Chinese buffets and ate all we could inhale – fried rice, chicken, beef, shrimp, and as for the things whose names we could not read, we simply pointed and said, We want *that*…. If only our country could see us in America, see us eat like kings in a land that was not ours. (Bulawayo 241)

A sense of pride is evident in this scene as if endorsing this kind of excess would mean gaining the American standard of success in owning and having plenty. Ironically, this overindulgence does not mean wealth since it occurs in the cheapest ways, with food corporations[53]. Famous brands such as these are known for representing the worst kind of American excess. However, for immigrants sharing the brands symbolized a sign of success.

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[53] This idea of excess resembles Darling and her friends overeating stolen guavas from Budapest. Although these two scenarios also contrast, the desperate consumption of food and the illusion of satisfaction relates them. Darling's experience of poverty and lack of nourishment leads inevitably to excess when she has the opportunity to satiate her hunger. As for the immigrants in the US, the lack of money will surely lead to the choice of eating cheap and unhealthy food that also gives a satiating feeling.

Darling begins to realize and assimilate the American way of life as she starts acting like any other typical teenager her age, passing time in the mall with friends, for instance, which stands as a critique for consumerism and opulence. One day, Darling was surprised in the mall's parking lot by the car she so eagerly dreamt of in Zimbabwe: "right there, next to a black van, I see my car. I don't even hesitate, I run to it, yelling, My Lamborghini, Lamborghini, Lamborghini Reventón!" (Bulawayo 224). Her friends then revealed to her the price of the car and Darling got even more frustrated: "I'll never own it, and if I can't own it, does it mean I'm poor, and if so, what is America for, then?" (Bulawayo 225). This epiphany about America clearly contrasts with Selasi's Afropolitan definition of success.

> [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 when you see us by our funny blend of London fashion, New York jargon, Africa ethics, and academic success. (Selasi n.p.)

Darling did not belong to this new generation of successful African immigrants. From the start, the heroine struggles with integrating into society, specially in her school where she is confronted with the unavoidable issue of racism. Darling was frequently teased by her colleagues about her name, her accent, her hair and even her clothes.

> When you are being teased about something, at first you try to fix it so the teasing can stop but then those crazy kids teased me about everything, even the things I couldn't change, and it kept going and going so that in the end I just felt wrong in my skin, in my body, in my clothes, in my language, in my head, everything (Bulawayo 165)

Unfortunately, this mockery only stopped when a new student joined the class, Tom, "with these crooked teeth and long, greasy hair and these large glasses and this sad stutter" (Bulawayo 166) who became the class's main target. As they called the boy "freak", Darling felt curious as to why they "said it like they wanted to puncture their bottom lips with their teeth when they said the *f* part" (Bulawayo 166) and so she googled the word in search for its meaning: "there were a lot of American words and things I was still learning" (Bulawayo 166). At this point in the novel, Darling's learning process is still on an early stage, and she is still trying to get over the shock of having her American dream completely shattered. However, facing obstacles such as these at school is crucial to her formation and to her understanding of what it means to be Black in America.

Darling also feels that she is living in a country that is not hers and this feeling is aggravated by many incidents of cultural shock. One of which concerns the difference of traditions and culture. For example, at Dumi's wedding, one of Aunt Fostalina's exes, there was a young boy named Mandla who was playing with a ball that he kept throwing at random guests. Eventually, the child hit a white old woman in the chest and Darling "stops breathing" (Bulawayo 181), but the woman did not punish nor reprehend the child. When the ball hit Darling in the eye, "[she] quickly grabs the little brat, [goes] *pha-pha-pha* with quick slaps and raps his head with [her] knuckles, twice" (Bulawayo 183). This punishment was a natural behavior for Darling, however she does not understand why the other guests kept staring at her in disapproval while others, African guests, kept reassuring them "not to fear. This is just how we handle unruly children in our culture" (Bulawayo 183).

Another shock for Darling was realizing how there was so much misconception of the Western community about Africa. Dumi's wedding, once again, exemplifies that issue. During the ceremony, a woman approached Darling and asked her to "just say something in your language . . . anything, really" (Bulawayo 174) to which Darling conceded. However, with a superficial enthusiasm, the woman replied: "Isn't it beautiful?" (Bulawayo 174); and continued: "Africa is beautiful . . . But isn't it terrible what’s happening in the Congo? Just awful” (Bulawayo 175). This uninvested interest and misconception were clearly an attempt to atone for the suffering of others.

> Jesus, the rapes, and all those killings! . . . I mean, I can’t even – I can’t even process it. And all those poor women and children. I was watching CNN last night and there was a little girl who was just – just too cute, she says. Her eyes start to mist and she looks down. (Bulawayo 175-176)

Her reference to these crimes against humanity were so unspecific as if the problems of postcolonial countries were identical across the continent, although the woman thought Darling was Congolese and thus understood what she was referring to. This lack of knowledge was even more offensive and implied a western superiority disguised as empathy. In addition to this, the woman praised her niece who was “going to Rwanda to help . . . She’s in the Peace Corps, you know, they are doing great things for Africa” (Bulawayo 176). This self-congratulatory speech about her niece’s active role in humanitarian aid once again alludes to an act of superiority where the woman had no direct relation but felt as if she herself had helped.

At the local grocery store where Darling worked, she felt constantly frustrated by her boss Jim who, in a way, represents the West’s ignorance and pre-conceived notions of the continent. She felt offended as he consistently talked of Africa as if it was one country, even though she had already explained to him “it’s a continent with fifty-some countries other than my own, I haven’t really been to the rest of it to say what is what” (Bulawayo 255). This proves how Bulawayo is deliberately criticizing the general misconception about Africans and the continent. In the third and final interlude, “How They Lived”, this issue is also presented.

> Where the life expectancy is thirty-five years? We smiled. Is it there where dissidents shove AK-47’s between women’s legs? We smile. That part where they massacred each other? We smiled. Is it where the old president rigged the election and people were tortured and killed and a whole bunch of them in prison and all, where they are dying of cholera-oh my God, yes, we’ve seen your country, it’s been on the news” (Bulawayo 239-240)

The smile is of course of annoyance and not of understanding, signifying the tired feeling of having to explain repeatedly that what happens in some African countries does not happen in the entire continent and what is reported by the western media should not turn into a pre-conceived idea of who Africans are.

Eliot, another one of Darling's bosses at her housekeeping job, was a man fascinated with the African continent and who "has traveled all over Africa but all he can ever tell you about the countries he has visited are the animals and parks he has seen" (Bulawayo 269). His interest in Africa resembled that of "an old-style colonial" (Arnett 158) and Darling later realized that it also extended to a certain obsession of the African female body, to which Aunt Fostalina was a perfect categorization of it, according to Eliot. However, what infuriated Darling even more was Eliot's daughter, Kate, who had an eating disorder and was starving herself on purpose to look beautiful for her boyfriend. This knowledge made the protagonist feel extremely offended for such futile problems.

> Look around you, and you have all these riches that you don't even need; upstairs, your bed is fit for a king; you go to Cornell, where you can be anything you want; you don't even have to clean up after yourself because I'm doing it for you, right now; you have a dog whose wardrobe I couldn't afford; and, what's more, you're here, living in your own country of birth, so what exactly is your real problem?" (Bulawayo 270)

Coming from a place where food is scarce and starving is not a choice but inevitable, she could not comprehend how someone would not eat for the sake of physical appearance. Food is, in fact, an important and recurring motif in *We Need New Names*. Before leaving for America, Darling was convinced that she would "be eating real food" (Bulawayo 10), since she was going to a country of abundance. The idea of hunger may have multiple interpretations to justify one of the many reasons of Darling's departure. It is evident that it means physiological hunger, but it also might mean a hunger for a new home, a new place, a new life.

However, this hunger is replaced by a nostalgia and a feeling of homesickness as Darling sees her American dream become demystified. Although food is not an issue in the US, Darling confesses 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" (Bulawayo 153). Therefore, she begins to remember herself in Paradise "where we are hungry but we are together and we are at home and everything is sweeter than dessert" (Bulawayo 206). Furthermore, when Darling was talking with Chipo over the phone she got a "strange ache in [her] heart when Chipo tells her that Sbho is outside eating a guava" (Bulawayo 209). This aching nostalgia leads Darling to feel empty, lost and almost envying those who remained back home. In addition to this, when Darling mentions above that Kate "[is] here, living in [her] own country of birth, so what exactly is [her] real problem?" (Bulawayo 270) she means that it is a privilege she feels she has been deprived of. This corroborates the idea that Darling's departure was in a way forced by the brutal conditions Paradise offered. Although the idealistic image of America eased the pain of abandoning her home, the demystification of that image only aggravated Darling's nostalgia and sense of abandonment. At one point, Darling's feelings make reference to Du Bois' notion of double consciousness, a common feeling of the latest generation of African immigrants: "It's hard to explain, this feeling; it's like there's two of me" (Bulawayo 210). The fact that contemporaneity is marked by constant mobility means that the meaning of home is now fragmented thus collapsing the concept of identity which is not constructed by an affiliation with a single place anymore. This issue introduces a new framework for understanding how transnational subjects such as Darling construct a new identity in this new setting and acquire a "diasporic consciousness" (Zhou 186). This feeling of two-ness is another milestone in Darling's process of maturation, considering that she has already realized that she does not belong solely to one place and will, from now on, struggle with wanting to return and to stay. Bulawayo tries to demonstrate how this consciousness is a challenge many migrants face. Darling, for example, when finally settled in the US, found it difficult to maintain a connection with those she had left behind in Paradise and everything that made her feel at home. This difficulty was aggravated by feelings of melancholia and nostalgia as she realized the hostland, although better than where she came from, did not have her friends and without them she felt incomplete. Therefore, she is confronted with the reality of displacement that is very common in diasporic consciousness.

In fact, Darling's narrative follows a similar pattern from other immigrants who feature American migration narratives. William Boelhower, for example, states that all migration narratives, particularly concerning America, provide the same single story, constructed "on the Utopian foundations, the ideal rhetoric, of American culture" (Boelhower 6). Despite the homogeneity revealed by these narratives, the scholar clarifies that the collective experience of the immigrants has many variants that can result in different plots. Nonetheless, all these individual variants are "nothing but homeomorphic transformations of a single microtext" (Boelhower 7).

Regarding the "basic fabula" (Boelhower 7) from which immigrant narratives derive from, the main idea consists of imagining or idealizing a New World, "for the dream function motivates much of the fabula's creative tension and modulates its complexity" (Boelhower 8). The American Dream thus plays an important role in the protagonist's mind and his or her vision will depend on the impact the Old World has had. Essentially, if the reality provided by the Old World is negative then dreaming about the New World will only become stronger. As soon as the protagonist crosses the dream threshold, if the idealization of the New World proves to be true then the memory of the Old World will start to fade. On the contrary, if the New World is not as idealized by the protagonist, then memories from the Old World will frequently appear.

Taking this into consideration, it is important to understand how Darling's narrative relates to this fabula. Initially, the harsh conditions in which Darling lives in Paradise force her to dream about the New World and her need to depart only grows stronger as the story progresses. When she arrives to the US and begins to realize the dream did not match reality, Darling is overwhelmed by feelings of disappointment that make her miss, in a way, the Old World and the life she left behind.

Overall, Darling's story does not differ from the collective immigrant experience. However, her narrative may have fallen into this pattern because Darling's lack of experience and information in Africa conditioned her illusions of America. Just like the previous generation of immigrants who crossed the ocean to the unknown, Darling goes to a similar process when she moves to America. Although her story is set on a time where access to information is generally available, her conditions on Paradise did not offer her the possibility to know America. If she had learned how the dream differed from reality, maybe she would not have wanted to go to the US and her story would have been much different.

Despite the fact that Darling had difficulty in assimilating into American society, she tried to learn how to fit in. Language is of course one of the most important motifs in the novel and the protagonist, balancing between her mother tongue, Ndebele, and English, tries to perfect her American accent since she arrived in her New World.

> . . . the TV has taught me just how to do it. It's pretty easy; all you have to do is watch Dora the Explorer, The Simpsons, SpongeBob, Scooby-Doo, and then you move on to That's So Raven, Glee, Friends, Golden Girls, and so on, just listening and imitating the accents . . . I also have my list of American words that I keep under the tongue like talismans, ready to use: pretty good, pain in the ass, for real, awesome, totally, skinny, dude,

> freaking, bizarre, psyched, messed up, like, tripping, motherfucker, clearance, allowance, douche bag, you're welcome, acting up, yikes. (Bulawayo 194)

As Darling began to sound American, as she intended, her mastery of the accent was soon criticized by the family members and friends she regularly contacted by phone or Skype since it represented a disconnection to her roots. Both her mother: "He-he-he, so you are trying to sound white now!" (Bulawayo 204); and her friends: "that stupid accent that you were not even born with, that doesn't even suit you" (Bulawayo 286) judged Darling's assimilation. In Paradise, Darling rarely spoke English and only did so with foreign people, for instance, when she talked on the phone to a wealthy British family whose house had been pillaged in Budapest. As she was talking over the phone, her friends were noticeably jealous: "everybody is looking at me like I'm something" (Bulawayo 131). When on the other end of the line a man started speaking Nbedele Darling first laughed but felt "disappointed because [she] wanted to keep speaking in English" (Bulawayo 131). Darling's use of the English language became mandatory as she moved to "Destroyedmichigen" and her fluency increased.

Aunt Fostalina, who had been living in America for longer, got frustrated with her niece for becoming more proficient than her. One particular incident exemplifies the barrier between these two characters. One time Fostalina was trying to explain, over the phone, to a Victoria's Secret salesgirl what type of bra she wanted to order and was not being understood. The main conflict of this scene lies in a mere linguistic misunderstanding. Fostalina, furious and humiliated, tried to make her accent clear: "angel, angel, angel, Aunt Fostalina says, raising her voice even louder" (Bulawayo 196). Despite finding this scene funny, Darling intervened: "I silently mouth *–enjel. Enjel*" (Bulawayo 197); which of course affected her aunt's pride. As the salesgirl remained disengaged and bored, Darling realized that "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" (Bulawayo 196). Darling ended up feeling sorry for her aunt's shame as she kept "dragging out the word like she is raking gravel" and watching her "knotted face" (Bulawayo 197). Overall, after taking so long to pronounce one word, Fostalina's goal was not to purchase the item anymore, but to be understood. The problem with language and translation is also evident with other characters such as Darling's uncle Kojo who also experienced this sense of two-ness much more strongly. Every time he had the chance to speak "in his language that nobody understands" (Bulawayo 152), he felt like his Africanness resurfaced for a moment and those short moments meant everything to him. According to Darling, "the problem with English is that by the time you get to say the words out loud and have them sound right . . . something strange has happened to you" (Bulawayo 193).

Just like their niece, both Fostalina and Kojo had a hard time balancing a fragmented identity. Fostalina, on the one hand, was obsessed with her figure, trying to erase the physical shape that was a part of her African identity and shaping it into an American one by exercising in front of the TV but at the same time eating compulsively. Aunt Kojo's degeneration and state of depression and alcoholism, caused by his son's decision to join the US army and fight in Afghanistan, made him numb to his fragmented identity, having only lucid moments when he was reconnected with his African roots. For this older generation the concept of home is divided into three parts: "home before independence, before I was born . . . home after independence . . . and then the home of things falling apart, which made Aunt Fostalina leave and come [to America]" (Bulawayo 193). For Darling there are two homes: "two homes inside my head: home before Paradise and home in Paradise, home one and home two" (Bulawayo 193). Since she was still adapting to life in the US and due to the shock between what was real and what was idealized, Darling could not consider America her third home, not yet at least. In *Americanah*, Ifemelu struggled with a sense of belonging that limited her ability to assimilate into American culture thus leading her to return to Nigeria. Darling also wants to return to the familiarity of her native country but is forced to accept America when her visitor's visa expires. Darling's image of the homeland grew stronger even though she knew that returning to Zimbabwe meant never coming back to the US[54].

In America, Darling had difficulty connecting with her group of friends in Paradise and she experienced a certain disconnection: "it's hard to explain, this feeling; it's like there's two of me. One part is yearning for my friends; the other doesn't know how to connect with them anymore, as if they are people I've never met" (Bulawayo 210). This feeling of two-ness already reveals how Darling's attempts to (re)identify herself in America are influenced by this double consciousness. As she tried to keep in touch with her friends back in Paradise, she was left with the dilemma of either telling the truth about America, where everything was cold and harsh, a place where the "bang-bang-bang of gunshots" (Bulawayo 190) kept her inside the house or maintain the dream alive. Eventually, she disconnected from her friends in Paradise just as Ifemelu did with Obinze shortly after arriving to America. However, on a last attempt of keeping in touch with home, Darling called Chipo, who kept Darling up to date as to what was happening in their country. Darling, missing home and trying to feel closer to her friend, replied: "I know it's bad, she starts off…what they have done to our country…last week I saw on BBC – to which Chipo responds sharply, You are not the one suffering. You think watching it on BBC means you know what is going on?" (Bulawayo 287). Darling was immediately hit with the realization that she had become like one of the CNN and BBC reporters that often appeared in Paradise, completely unaware of the situation and whom she mocked at the beginning of the novel. After Chipo's reprimand, Darling claimed that "it's [her] country too" (Bulawayo 288). However, Chipo striked again.

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[54] Considering that Darling's visitor's visa had expired and she was now residing illegally in the United States, if she ever returned to Paradise, coming back to America would mean violating the federal immigration laws that clearly state that those who entered legally but remained after the expiration of their entry visa would be committing a crime.

> Really, it's your country, are you sure?...Why did you run off to America, Darling Nonkululeko Nkala, huh? …If it's your country, you have to love it to live in it and not leave it…and you have the guts to tell me, in that stupid accent you were not even born with, that doesn't even suit you, that this is your country? (Bulawayo 288)

In this epiphanic moment, Darling felt fractured by realizing how distant she was from home, if she could still call it that and how assimilated she already was. Her response to Chipo was through anger: "She throws the computer and sends it sailing towards the wall" (Bulawayo 289), ending any attempt of reconciliation. This crucial moment shows how Darling's concept of home has become fractured. While feeling frustrated, Darling's memory is triggered by the news of Bin Laden's death which leads her to remember a moment in Paradise with her friends in which they had made spears out of branches and pretended to hunt for Bin Laden, a stray dog, to collect a fictional reward. This game was interrupted by an accident in which a truck full of Lobel's bread ran over the dog and killed it. This final scene thus connects fiction with real international political conflict which is then 'crushed' by fresh African bread. "This final recollection metaphorically encapsulates the failed promise of a new beginning after killing Bin Laden, a shared enemy in Zimbabwe and the US" (Cobo-Piñero 10). This image of the bread was strategically used since the first chapter ended with the same "dizzying smell of Lobel's bread" (Bulawayo 18), which made Darling and her friends completely disregard a dead woman hanging from a tree except for the shoes she was wearing because it would grant them more than the bread's alluring scent.

The novel certainly leaves many questions unanswered such as if Darling would later become a socially committed Afropolitan. Although she is in the country she wanted to be it was not as she had dreamt it. Therefore, she does not feel at home in America and starts missing not Paradise but her friends which means that the feeling of belonging comes from the community and not from the place itself. What happens to this character after that is open to multiple possibilities. What the reader is sure of is that Darling, being aware that life as an immigrant is difficult, will try to figure out what her next step in America should be. The novel's ending becomes even more interesting since it ended similarly to how it began, with Darling's split attention on both death and a loaf of bread.

### 3.3. Conclusion

After a thorough reading of *We Need New Names* it can be asserted that the novel highlights the way contemporary African fiction is essentially a cultural production which can hardly disassociate itself from stereotypical representations of Africa. Bulawayo, however, introduces a different idea on this matter since the narrative is focused on a specific country of Africa and all the negative images portrayed represent a tragic reality that happened specifically in Zimbabwe. Therefore, it may even be narrow-minded to assume that Bulawayo's novel fits the formula of contemporary postcolonial narratives. Notwithstanding, the novel triggers an important debate on this issue considering that Bulawayo criticizes the pre-conceived notions the West has about the continent and how it is wrong to perpetuate such images of the African continent.

In addition to this, *We Need New Names* is a powerful novel by portraying the hardships of underprivileged postcolonial subjects and the sacrifices they had to make in order to flee their country and its precarious life conditions. However, these sacrifices did not compensate for the idealized conception of economic and emotional stability the hostland should offer but could not. In Paradise, Darling has an incontrollable desire to flee and migrate to developed countries but, ironically, once she leaves, she feels an intense feeling of displacement.

Considering Darling's journey of maturation, it is important to understand that as a Black teenager in America her *bildung* essentially implied a negotiation between two places, two different meanings of belonging. The fact that her ideal about the New World did not correspond to the truth was also crucial in her coming-of-age since Darling had to learn how to be in Western society and how to relate with it. As previously discussed in the first chapter, most Black Bildungsroman that feature female protagonists focus on portraying their struggle against society and its complexities. Revisiting Leseur and Graham's words, the heroine thus tries to "discover, direct, and re-create the self" (Leseur 101) throughout a path that does not focus on success, but rather on a tendency to criticize society (Graham 118).

Darling's journey does not come to a resolution or an epiphany, a common trait amongst American *Bildungsromane*, but is left open, indicating, according to Graham, "a preference for prolonged emerging over categorical endings: a process of *becoming*, rather than defined *being*" (Graham 120). What the reader is left with is the realization that Darling will grow up with a fragmented identity and a feeling of two-ness that will hardly ever fade.

Although it is true that in an era of postcolonial globalization there has been record of an increase of Africans' mobility, Selasi's interpretation of Afropolitanism neglects those less privileged mobile subjects who represent a "mote in the eye of cosmopolitanism" (Gikandi 23) by being "victims of modernity, failed by capitalism's upward mobility, and bereft of these comforts and customs of national belonging" (Pollock et al. 6) Indeed, in a world in which mobility continues to be unevenly distributed, those who are not considered class-privileged cosmopolitans are defined as "threatening, transgressive, and abject" (Cresswell 178). In postcolonial studies, abject mobilities include the illegal migration of those who have "been jettisoned, forced out into a life of displacement" (Nyers 1073). Therefore, Bulawayo's way of dealing with abject subjects is to understand how it takes into account less privileged forms of mobility.

Overall, *We Need New Names* rethinks the concept of Afropolitanism by presenting a protagonist who is not like the characters in *Americanah* or *Ghana Must Go* or other contemporary postcolonial novels that favor elitism. She does not belong to the middle or upper class elite and her experience of migration is not at all successful. Therefore, she is the opposite of what an Afropolitan is generally defined as. However, there is the realization that Darling's story is not a single story. As previously mentioned, the book also presents three interludes, which provide insight about those who arrived in Paradise and eventually left for other countries. While the first two interludes, "How They Appeared" and "How They Left" are in the third person plural, the final one, "How They Lived" is written on the first person plural, thus implying a collective experience of which Darling is a part of. This realization is more perceptible when these immigrants meet "others".

> The others spoke languages we didn't know, worshipped different gods, ate what we would not dare touch. But like us, they had left their homelands behind. They flipped open their wallets to show us faded photographs of mothers whose faces bore the same creases of worry as our very own mothers, siblings bleak-eyed with dreams unfulfilled like those of our own, fathers forlorn and defeated like ours. We had never seen their

> countries but we knew about everything in those pictures; we were not altogether strangers. (Bulawayo 243)

It is through this contact that an alternate Afropolitanism is created, essentially, by a feeling of familiarity, of solidarity, of sharing the same suffering and the same dream of migration. This realization hints at Chielozona Eze's interpretation of Afropolitanism as a phenomenon that welcomes "a new, more nuance understanding of identity" (Eze 235), focused on hybridity rather than elitist trends. According to the author, identity and culture are delocalized concepts, considering that globalization and transculturation have transformed the world into a global village. For Eze, this interconnection is positive, because:

> the African is contaminated in the sense that she is not culturally or biologically pure. And this is good. The African is a mutt. To acknowledge her muttness is to concede the presence of the other in her life and to be ready to enter into an I-Thou relationship with this other, to make way for dialogue (Eze 239)

In Eze's perspective, an Afropolitan is someone whose "identity can no longer be explained in purist, essentialist, and oppositional terms or by reference only to Africa" (Eze 239). Ultimately, his/her existence "is always hyphenated" (Eze 245). This double identity is evident in Darling, when she is already living in America and assimilates some of the Western culture through her proficiency in the English language and her easy absorption of American pop culture and the lifestyle of a typical teenager. However, this process is not entirely successful because she feels unmotivated by her shattered American dream. Realizing the hardships of an immigrant has made the heroine feel a sense of displacement and unbelonging which is demonstrated through an intense nostalgia and melancholia. In addition to this, as Darling overstays her period on a visitor's visa she is now living as an illegal immigrant and returning to Paradise would mean she would not be able to come back to the United States. This feeling of emptiness is surely not directed towards the physical place but rather the relationships she had built within the community of Paradise which made her happier than she was in America. Nonetheless, this overwhelming feeling of homesickness may be soothed by the lifestyle Darling currently has in America which although it may not be the best according to Western standards still is a better life than the life she had back home.

Bulawayo does, in fact, leave unanswered the question of which option is best for an immigrant who is trying to change her life, feel whole and with her identity intact: to leave home or to stay. Considering the highly dangerous and unstable political power of Darling's country, if she had chosen to stay in Paradise she would have probably suffered from either an unsatiable hunger or from Mugabe's militant forces. Escaping to America or any other place was not a more reliable option because although the life conditions were better the abject immigrant had to give up his undamaged identity and fragment it in order to earn a living. Therefore, both scenarios require the renunciation of something.

As initially mentioned, the novel presents some traits of the picaresque genre in order to problematize and interrogate the Afropolitan identity and its narrativization. To subvert popular narratives of successful Afropolitans, this genre brings to light those who are frequently in the shadows thus creating a new meaning for the Afropolitan experience. This new concept is focused on the realities of precarity in a postcolonial setting. Through the powerful voice of an underprivileged child, Bulawayo's reconceptualization of the term essentially conveys the idea that African migrants can also share an experience of trauma, failure and disillusionment. Therefore, *We Need New Names* reinvents Afropolitanism by presenting a character who struggles with an anxiety "of being African and cosmopolitan" (Gikandi 49) and fails to live as a citizen of the world (Gikandi 49).

# CONCLUSION

Cosmopolitanism has introduced to the world the concept of the educated mobile citizen who travels fluidly and carefree throughout the world, unrestricted by cultural and national borders. This Westernized interpretation of the mobile subject has become an important topic of discussion in the era of globalization. Intellectuals such as Taiye Selasi and Achille Mbembe, among many others who followed, have tried to present a concept that introduces a new citizen of the world capable of intersecting concepts of race, ethnicity and nationality; thus creating the idea of Afropolitanism.

Selasi's reading of the term, as already discussed, is perceived as not being so different from the traditional and elitist concept of cosmopolitanism, except for the fact that, according to the author, this new generation of postcolonial cosmopolitans are "beautiful, brown-skinned people" (Selasi n.p.). Although the era of globalization has generated an increase of Africans' mobility, Selasi's reading of cosmopolitanism disregards less privileged forms of mobility which represent "a mote in the eye of cosmopolitanism" (Gikandi 23) by "being victims of modernity, failed by capitalism's upward mobility, and bereft of these comforts and customs of national belonging" (Pollock & al. 6), excluding the "rejects of failed states" (Gikandi 23) from the category of those who can afford fluidity across borders.

Reviewing the four main movements that were discussed in the first chapter namely Pan-Africanism, *Négritude*, the New Negro and Garveyism it is important to note that their main correlation was not only the belief that Africans and their descendants worldwide shared the same history, same cultural heritage and, overall, the same destiny, but also the hope to achieve a "common identity, solidarity, security and oneness with each other and with Africa" (Wallace 71) for a cultural revitalization and much deserved dignity.

Concerning Pan-Africanism and Garveyism, even though both movements showed results as a socio and cultural movement, they did not achieve all their objectives as a political one. Considering that the Pan-Africanist discourse had essentially been reconsidered and recreated several times through the course of almost a century, it is evident that at the end of the 20th century it became crucial to consolidate the movement due to the appearance of new discourses which challenged static notions of Blackness such as Afropolitanism, globalization, transnationalism, multiracialism and many others. Mbembe even established that traditional Pan-Africanism had become "ossified" (Mbembe 2005) and "increasingly less encompassing" (Mbembe 2005) with Africans' current lifestyle. Therefore, he acknowledged the latter as:

> a stylistic, an aesthetic and a certain poetics of the world. It is a way of being in the world that refuses, in principle, any form of victim identity - which does not mean that it is not aware of the injustices and violence that the law of the world has inflicted on this continent and its people. It is also a political and cultural stance with respect to the nation, race and the question of difference in general. To the extent that our states are pure inventions (recent, moreover), they have, strictly speaking, nothing in their essence that obliges us to worship them - which does not mean that we are indifferent to their fate. (Mbembe 2005)

It is certainly implied that the Afropolitanism discourse does have similarities to its predecessor. However, there are various opinions concerning the relation between the two discourses. On the one hand, there are those who establish no correlation whatsoever between them and claim they are in fact mutually exclusive, like Mbembe, for example, while on the other hand, it is commonly accepted that Pan-Africanism and Afropolitanism can complement each other and are in sync, as Minna Salami defends by stating that "Afropolitanism, pan-Africanism and diaspora are therefore synergetic" (Salami 2015).

Regarding both ideologies, while the former is a more political matter in the sense that it fought against social oppression and domination, the latter relates to the search for an identity and a connection to the continent which Africans who live across the world struggle with finding. In that sense, Afropolitanism does promote unity but it is more a sense of solidarity that only "individuals who share similar international experiences but who maintain 'an idea of Africa' at the center of their experiences" (Khonje n.p.) can relate to. Based on this premise, Afropolitanism refers to a way of Africans and those of African origin to understand themselves "as being part of the world rather than being apart" (Mbembe and Balakrishnan 29).

The issue of race is also extremely relevant to this debate. According to Mbembe, both movements can be distinguished due to the fact that Pan-Africanism, by promoting racial unity, was taken for a racial ideology that led to a wrong stereotype: 'All Africans are Black'. There are Africans who are not Black and Black individuals who do not have any connection to Africa. Afropolitanism, in contrast, tries to transcend racial borders, recognizing multiple origins and establishing that heritage is "a bit more than just biological or racial" (Mbembe and Balakrishnan 30). Therefore, current African discourse on identity consists of cultural diversity and multiplicity. The fact that Pan-Africanism "[speaks] of this continent only in mode of black people solidarity becomes untenable" (Mbembe 2005).

As initially determined in the introduction, the main purpose of this dissertation is to understand how *Americanah* and *We Need New Names* perceive the concept of Afropolitanism through the narrativization of two diasporic identities and whether the novels may be considered Afropolitan. Despite the fact that the protagonists' process of psychological and identity development was analyzed separately, it is now important to proceed to a comparison between the main characters, Ifemelu and Darling, to answer this interrogation. Assessing their similarities and differences will be fundamental to comprehend if there are more interpretations of Afropolitanism and if both novels can relate to them.

Firstly, the main difference between the two characters concerns their age gap. Ifemelu's life journey begins when she is already a mature 18-year-old girl prepared to attend university and considering that she has lived for thirteen years in the United States, she is a mature woman in her 30s when she decides to return to Nigeria. In opposition, Darling is ten years old in the beginning of the novel and is most likely around 15 or 16 years old when she is in America. This difference in age is fundamental because it influences their journey and process of maturation. On the one hand, since Ifemelu had already matured in Lagos and gone through various learning processes, when she moves to the US she must learn how to be a Black woman in a Western society. However, this character goes through two more learning processes, namely (re)learning to be African, when, for example, Ifem decides not to perfect her American accent anymore and especially when she accepts her natural kinky hair; and learning to be Afropolitan, which happens when Ifem returns to Lagos and realizes her identity would inevitably be both African and American from now on. On the other hand, Darling is a very impressionable child and everything is new to her. In America, she must deal with the negotiation of two places, America and Paradise, and two distinct meanings of belonging that fragment her identity. Considering that Darling's story lacks closure, her formation is still an ongoing process.

Secondly, their background is also important because it influences not only the characters' reason to leave their homeland, but also how the process of integrating into the hostland is treated. Ifemelu belonged to an urban middle-class family and led an ordinary life. Lagos, however, was going through a time of political unrest and all education facilities were being shut down on strike. This made Ifemelu urge to leave her city in search for a better life and a better education overall, thus departing for America on a student's visa. In contrast, Darling lived in terrible and unhuman conditions of extreme poverty before moving to America. These conditions and the political dictatorship ruling over the country were more than enough reasons for Darling to start fantasizing about other places. Regarding this issue, it is important to add that Ifemelu does not have such unrealistic images of America and how her life as a migrant would be. This alludes once again to her maturity and awareness of how the world works. Darling, for instance, dreams constantly and idealizes how her life in America would be, feeling confident about the successful life she would lead. This naivete is of course expected of a child who had nothing else to hold on but dreams.

Concerning the first impression when arriving in the hostland, Ifemelu is instantly overwhelmed by how her looks, accent and color of her skin are judged by a white-oriented society which compel her to change and adapt to the standards of this society by straightening her kinky hair and practicing a flawless American accent. This process of assimilation happens at a much deeper level than Darling and it is important to note how Ifem decides to return to her older self later in the plot. Darling's first impression when arriving to Detroit, Michigan is of shock with the weather. The sharp coldness and the never-ending snow made Darling feel unwelcome to this foreign land. Nonetheless, she is also a victim of racial stratification and oppression, mainly concerning her appearance and accent as well. However, this character's process of assimilation is not so deeply rooted into her identity as Ifemelu which is to be expected considering that she is still too young.

In the hostland, these characters feel and behave differently regarding their connection with home. After a traumatic experience of sexual abuse, Ifemelu feels depressed and abandoned in the US and cuts all ties with Lagos, specially with her childhood lover, Obinze, to whom she had promised to maintain a long-distance relationship. After years of repressing everything concerning her homeland, Ifemelu is struck by a “yearning so acute it morphs into homesickness” (Phiri 14) and that feeling is what makes her return. Darling, for instance, is frequently trying to be in touch with her friends and family in Paradise. However, Darling feels constantly sad that her idealized life in America has been shattered and does not want anyone back home to know she was not being successful. This shame and aching homesickness clearly weigh down on this character despite the fact that her life in the US is considerably better than the extreme poverty Paradise offered. When her friends complained to her about how things were still bad in their neighborhood, Darling felt strange to those problems, since she only had access to them through Western media which aggravated her sense of unbelonging to her roots. In addition to this, Darling realized that returning to Paradise might never be an option, although she wanted to, but considering her status as an illegal immigrant she would be banished from coming back to the US ever again. Overall, at some point in *Americanah* and *We Need New Names* both characters feel torn between their homeland and hostland and are overwhelmed by a double-consciousness. Ifemelu is the only one that does in fact return to her origins while Darling’s fate is left open at the end of the narrative, leaving it to the reader to decide if she might someday return or not.

Accused of being a “poverty-porn” novel, *We Need New Names* is of course very different than *Americanah* since Bulawayo purposely invokes negative stereotypes of the African continent and of Africans in order to deconstruct and expose other postcolonial narratives that recycle these pre-conceived images for the sake of Western consumption. Adichie, in contrast, presents an Africa that offers insight on cultural hybridity and identity, demonstrating how African immigrants who search for and define that same identity in a space where they are marginalized learn how to accept a double consciousness. Nonetheless, much like Bulawayo, *Americanah* also applies intentionally a stereotype in order to make a critique. Although Ifemelu began rejecting some aspects of the American way of life, she belonged to a Black elite of intellectuals that certainly matched Selasi's description of polished and well-mannered Afropolitans. In Lagos, Adichie once again introduces this stereotype when Ifemelu attends the Nigerpolitan club meetings, which made her feel uncomfortable for agreeing and also judging what other returnees felt about coming back home. By showing these meetings, Adichie was clearly criticizing the idea of "Africans of the world" that she was associated to and which she completely rejected. The refusal of this label is also evident through Obinze, whose story deconstructs the illusion that Afropolitanism consists only of stories of success such as Ifem's. The fact that Ifemelu and Obinze's narratives, being one of success and the other of failure, present different interpretations of what it means to be an Afropolitan shows how Adichie does not believe in an elitist and limited version of the term. Bulawayo also rethinks the concept of Afropolitanism by not presenting a story of success. Although Darling's narrative is the main plot, those who are presented in the three interludes also went through difficulties in their journey as immigrants. Being the opposite of what Afropolitans generally are defined as, *We Need New Names* creates an alternate descriptor based on collective experiences of sharing the hardships of a migrant's life.

In general, Afropolitanism is intersectional to geography, identity, culture, gender and race, rejecting any bond between the African identity and a specific location, thus deconstructing the preconceived notion of a singular identity. Revisiting what was analyzed on chapter I, being Afropolitan means embracing cultural hybridity, belonging everywhere and to Africa at the same time. Although Afropolitanism is a multivalent concept it certainly has not consolidated enough. However, considering all the interpretations that were analyzed in this dissertation, it can be asserted that there is more than one viable reading of *Americanah* and *We Need New Names*. Essentially, both novels portray personalities that combine the "here and elsewhere, the presence of the elsewhere in the here and vice versa" (Mbembe 229). Mbembe's perspective, for example, is applicable to both narratives since it perceives this concept as a lifestyle, a way to relate with the world and as a fundamental piece in designating the processes of mobility and cultural fusion which have been shaping African communities and identities. His concept of a free and fluid circulation of worlds suits the protagonists' narratives because they are indeed living in a global village where national barriers are becoming more diluted and easier to cross. Concerning Mbembe's aforementioned quote, Minna Salami's approach can also be relatable in the sense that she believes Afropolitanism to be a "glocal" (Salami n.p.) space, thus interrelating an Afropolitan's global identity with his/her local self. Chielozona Eze's reading may be the most pertinent to this debate, considering that he believes identity to be "relational" (Eze 235) and that many Africans are "Afri-hyphenated" (Eze 235) nowadays. In his point of view, an Afropolitan's identity is not only bound to Africa and is in constant development. Just like Ifemelu needed to accept that she was an amalgamation of two cultures, an Americanah, to span "herself into being" (Adichie 586), Eze determined that Africans' hybridity and dual personality should be considered as multiple parts that complement each other to form a whole. Darling, however, has not fully understood that her existence is also hyphenated because she is still going through a developing stage. Nonetheless, her split identity becomes evident when she begins missing home but at the same time enjoys her life in the US. Lastly, Gikandi's viewpoint reinforces the idea that this young generation of Africans is not circumscribed by any specific place, although it implies an ongoing negotiation that can lead to a troubled self. To conclude, the analysis of the two novels suggests that a wider interpretation of Afropolitanism, as defended by Mbembe, Eze, Salami and Gikandi, allows them to be encompassed within the descriptor because they have created new narratives that depict contemporary African mobility in order to show how Afropolitans manage a fragmented identity and try to take advantage of creating cultural bridges across the world.

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