Afropolitanism: through the Looking-Glass

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Abstract: The contemporary term 'Afropolitanism' continues to gain attention and raise controversy. It remains undecided if it is a mere theory, a cultural and artistic movement, a label, or an exclusive identity. This paper aims to offer a theoretical presentation of Afropolitanism and its different cultural and anthropological facets. It brings to the surface the voices of proponents who see the promise of 'the movement' and the shouts of dissent who reduce it to a mere fad. This paper also compares Afropolitanism to Pan-Africanism and Afropessimism to further examine the role and influence of Afropolitanism on African culture and identity.

Keywords*:* Afropolitanism, Afropolitan identity, Cosmopolitanism, Pan-Africanism, relational identity.

ملخص: يستمر مصطلح "الأفروبوليتانية" المعاصر في جذب الانتباه وإثارة الجدل. يبقى غير محسوم إذا كان مجرد نظرية أم حركة ثقافية و فنية أم تسمية أم هوية حصرية. يهدف هذا المقال إلى تقديم تعريف نظري للأفروبوليتانية وجوانبها الثقافية والأنثروبولوجية المختلفة. يعرض هذا المقال أصوات المؤيدين الذين يرون الجانب الواعد "للحركة" وصيحات المعارضة التي تختزلها إلى مجرد بدعة. كما يقارن هذه المقال الأفروبوليتانية مع البان آفريكانية والتشاؤم الإفريقي للنظر أكثر في دور وتأثير الأفروبوليتانية على الثقافة والهوية الأفريقية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الأفروبوليتانية ، الهوية الأفروبولية ، الكوزموبوليتانية ، الإنتماء الإفريقي ، التشاؤم الافريقي ، الهوية العلائقية.

-Introduction:

Globalization and the intense transnational ties created by the flows of people across boundaries made the African condition a topic of growing interest to engage anew with issues of belonging and identity. African people leading transnational and diasporic lives are moving seamlessly between allegiances without judgment. They are questioning and reconstructing the parochial perceptions of African identity. The reality is no longer restricted to the political and cultural borders of a community; realities are now a mélange of inter-melded cultures of neighbouring communities, or communities overseas. These realities urged migrant Africans to seek a label that manages to identify them outside the limitations of a cliquish identity. Afropolitanism, which espouses African origins with cosmopolitan pertinence, is a fitting example of the changing landscape, nature and social relations in the 21st Century. Afropolitanism has been prompted by the desire of transnational Africans who live across societies, cultures, and languages. Africans who aspire to identify themselves with an alternative identity that maintains and celebrates the links to African locales and concurrently embraces the diversity of the world cultures.

The process through which people construct their identities influences how they perceive others and how they relate to them. Crossing national boundaries is more than ever a global reality and it either permits people to expand their horizons, or it further stiffens their fundamentalism as a way to preserve their cultures from external threats. This presents Afropolitanism as a stimulating, polemical and appealing topic of research to Africans and non-Africans, on and off the continent. It negotiates the deconstruction of a 'depressingly' limited identity, broadly perceived as being authentic, and the reconstruction of an Afropolitan identity that copes with the intense transnational ties and movements. Afropolitanism, according to its proponents, offers an alternative terminology to express the position of African people who enjoy multiple allegiances and refrain from describing themselves as half anything. It is a modern identification for those who live outside the continent but remain relatively committed to the cultural politics of their own native nations.

The image of Africa and the world perception of the continent at large has for a long time been limitedly associated with poverty, disease, aid dependency and economic stagnation. The artistic and literary works created during the previous decades further accentuated this image. The generation of Afropolitans is seeking to show Africa outside the stereotypical tropes. Their inclusive vision is an endeavour to position the continent in a global context as they assert that it is an accurate solution to cope with globality. This change, of course, is dictated by the globalized and transnational reality to produce African art that would depict the complexity and exuberance of the continent to a global audience. Afropolitan art and literature portray the local experiences intermingled with global narratives

and the capacity of the African artist or intellectual to dwell artistically and aesthetically on the cultural traffic.

It has yet to be decided if Afropolitanism is a movement, a sub-culture, a mere sensibility or a fad, for it is attracting opponents and proponents alike. In order to understand the depth and breadth of Afropolitanism, this paper aims to provide a theoretical presentation o Afropolitanism. The paper covers the voices of dissent and the arguments of the enthusiasts to spot the deficiencies that debilitate Afropolitanism and to draw attention to its potential. To achieve a clear understanding of the theory, this paper highlights the fundamental questions surrounding Afropolitanism, and attempts to offer answers to the most persistent questions regarding the relation of Afropolitanism to other famed concepts and movements such as Pan-Africanism, cosmopolitanism, Afro-pessimism and Africanness.

I. Afropolitanism: A Theoretical Framework

Since the coinage of the term in 2005, Afropolitanism has received an upper status. Conferences, cultural and literary events, art exhibitions and fashion shows are devoted to tackling the concept in proliferation as it received tremendous attention, appeal, and of course, criticism. These events boost the popularization of the term among Africans and Westerners alike and help Africans perceive the transformation of their identity vis-à-vis themselves and the world.   The point of departure of this paper is stating some major definitions of Afropolitanism to capture its facets.

1- **What is Afropolitanism?** Taiye Selasi, a British-born American-educated Ghanaian-Nigerian author first coined the term Afropolitanism in 2005 in her requisite text "Bye Bye Babar", or "What is an Afropolitan?" For the *LIP Magazine*. The text was an attempt to explain her complex identity and that of transnational Africans who embrace their diasporic allegiances along with their native African origins. It defines Afropolitanism as a rubric made and embraced by the transnational elitist Afro-hyphenated intelligentsia to identify themselves within the global community defying past and present identity limitations; it is their way of being an African of the world. Achille *Mbembe,* the Cameroonian philosopher, political theorist, and public intellectual, states that celebrating the African together with the "Other" and embracing differences is what categorically underlies Afropolitanism:

> Awareness of the interweaving of the here and there, the presence of the elsewhere in the here and vice versa, the relativisation of primary roots and memberships and the way of embracing, with full knowledge of the facts, strangeness, foreignness and remoteness, the ability to recognize one's face in that of a foreigner and make the most of the traces of

remoteness in closeness, to domesticate the unfamiliar, to work with what seem to be opposites it is this cultural, historical and aesthetic sensitivity that underlies the term 'Afropolitanism' (qt in Eze, 2014).

The perception of the intermixed hybrid African identity is already inherent in postcolonial studies to refute the Western claims of a pristine identity. This background made Afropolitanism more valuable as it proved that it describes something that exists and has already been tackled under different names; "Afropolitanism splits itself into a term that is both old and new. This is a term that has probably existed in Africa for a long time, expressed in the vocabulary of the hundreds of languages and dialects across the continent, or preserved in the memories of forgotten and living griots" (Makokha, 2011). It also helped to extend the potential of Afropolitanism as the theory that celebrates mixed identities. Afropolitanism implies a sense of belonging to the metropolis; it gradually becomes the language of fashion and marketing of African contemporary art in the West. Mbembe also believes that the paradigms of African literature, philosophy and art are so ossified and institutionalized that they become useless in an increasingly mobile and transient world; thus, he believes in the promising potential of Afropolitanism to present Africa with an alternative solution to cope with globality (qt in Eze, 2014).

Taiye Selasi's description of Afropolitans highlights the subtle relations and allegiances diasporic Africans celebrate; they are citizens of the world rather than any particular place:

> You'll know us when you see 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/Jamaican, Nigerian/Swiss; others are cultural mutts: American accents, European affect, African ethos. Most of us are multilingual: In addition to English and a Romantic language or two, we understand some indigenous language and speak a few urban vernaculars. […] We are Afropolitans – not citizens but Africans of the world (Selasi, 2005).

Selasi's description is simply put, yet it encapsulates the fundamental characteristics that shape an Afropolitan identity. Afropolitans are a group Afro-hyphenated intelligentsia who maintain their attachment to the African continent while they concurrently dwell on Western routes. Afropolitanism would serve as a label for people who refuse to define themselves within the character limits set by society; they embrace a rather global citizenship with African roots. They choose to celebrate the complex diversity and defy the reduction of perception to enjoy the multi-affiliations they gained while leading transnational lives.

Simon Gikandi, the Kenyan literature professor and postcolonial scholar, believes that Afropolitanism, with its set of updated tools, transnational links and technological, cultural and artistic knowledge, provides a 21st Century vocabulary to discuss African progress. He asserts that Afropolitanism has the sufficient

potential to present the continent with modern equipment to fight underdevelopment through the revitalization of academia: "Afropolitanism constitutes a significant attempt to rethink African knowledge outside of the trope of crisis" (qt in Selami, 2014). The proponents of the concept believe that it is a promise to bring the 'Dark Continent' closer to the global arena and provide a new vision of Africa. Afropolitans are described as a 'Savvy cohort' whose technological tools, Western education, global conversance and free mobility across borders would supply the required assistance to uplift Africa from underdevelopment (Kigotho, 2016). They further embolden Afropolitans' role in the rejuvenation of African universities and mobilization of financial assistance through monetary remittances. Afropolitanism is also a promise to change the world's perception of Africa:

> […] it can offer new, albeit not overly optimistic nor simplistic views of Africa; a narrative that helps reposition the continent's place, perspective and voice in a global context, one not solely relegated to victimhood, poverty, disease, war/conflict, corruption, or aid-dependence, and one not necessarily at odds with Pan-Africanism nor entirely connected with African Renaissance (Fortier, 2015).

Embracing their connection to Africa and their subtle affiliation to Western locales moulds a new identity fluid enough to embrace the African heritage and the new cultural and ethnic additions. It is a metropolitan instrument for self-affirmation beyond the narrow geographic native dictates that renounces what lies beyond the ethnic and geographic borders. This new identity presents transnational Africans with a fitting language to identify themselves within global routes.

Africa has a history of the perpetual movement which gradually shaped African creativity and aesthetics. Critics of African modern art and literature should not overlook this reality of either Africans' dispersal in the world or the foreigners' presence in African communities. This inevitable circulation of people implies cultural interchangeability with all its forms:

> "It is a history of colliding cultures, caught in the maelstrom of war, invasion, migration, intermarriage, a history of various religions we make our own, of techniques we exchange and of goods we trade. The cultural history of the continent can hardly be understood outside the paradigm of itinerancy, mobility, and displacement" (Fortier, 2015).

There is no reliable and definite consensus if Afropolitanism is a theory, a sub-culture, an identity or a mere concept; "It has been described as a subculture, a movement, a fad and a call for action" (Abebe, 2015). As much as the concept summons supporters, it triggers shouts of critics who reject some fundamental deficiencies that, in their opinion, harm Africanness more than it brings profit. Much of the complexity of the term, and therefore the concept, lies in the complex nature of African diasporic history. Critics doubt the ability of Afropolitanism to

emulate the African diasporic experience, which is traced back to pre-colonialism, since it clearly fails to embrace the experiences of non-privileged Africans. The concept per se is abstract, ambiguous and overly ambitious. Abstract in the sense that the definitions do not grant a comprehensive overall understanding of the concept. Ambiguous for its undefined and open-ended quiddity; it raises more questions than supply answers. It is overly ambitious because the supporters and the label bearers turn a blind eye on the deficiencies of the concept that continue to plague its whole potential (Eze, 2014). As a result, it was reduced by some vocal critics to a mere capitalist stunt; they contend that it is a mere theory, not a label, an identity, not a movement (Dabiri, 2014).

The bearers of the label are dispersed transnational Africans living across world cities seeking a better life outside their discouraging native lands. The dispersal of transnational Africans and Afropolitans is an ongoing phenomenon powered by personal ambition, political strife, the dynamics of transnational capital and the quest for a better life away from an unpromising continent (Makokha, 2011). The results of searching Afropolitanism are a range of blogs, commentary magazines, photography, fashion shows and infographics. This loosely signifies that Afropolitanism is larger than a mere label; it is a movement of transnational African artists towards establishing a global platform on which to exhibit their contemporary art. This art is loyal to the African heritage, yet it also embraces the traces of intercultural exchange. It delivers a hybrid art that embodies the complexity and vigour of the African continent along with the diasporic experience (Hassan, 2012). Social media hosted many platforms that helped to bring together people from around the globe who subscribe to African values and culture. Also, the virtual base of Afropolitanism actually helped and encouraged mobilizing people physically to new locales in an attempt to expand their horizons and display their art on global podiums.

Opponents, however, strongly accuse Afropolitans of elitism, depoliticizing social relations and commodifying African culture. It has been declared as a vacant and modish attempt to desperately fit in Western societies to the detriment of native allegiances (Fortier, 2015). Particularly, critics have highlighted that not all Africans live in urban, cosmopolitan cities which doubted the ability of Afropolitan insights to apply real change and progress in Africa. Afropolitanism is beleaguered by flaws starting by the name per se; if the Afropolitan is willing to embrace both the 'metro' and the 'polis' why can't it simply be 'cosmopolitan' (Selami, 2014). Accordingly, the idea of hinging on the 'Afro-' prefix solely to affirm their Africaness is not sufficient if the perspective, the method, and the purpose are Western to an inordinate extent. The damning weaknesses of inequality and elitism hunt the potential of Afropolitanism. It does not represent and advocate those unprivileged Africans who are deprived of the opportunity to roam transitional locales and enjoy Western education. Although the potential remains undeniable, the gap of the theory should be filled by Afropolitans themselves to fulfill the desired promise.

2- Afropolitanism: A Brief History: As already mentioned, Taiye Selasi was the first to coin the term in 2005 in her text "Bye-Bye Babar"[2] calling Afropolitanism a positive modern-day definition for Africans who live transnational lives. Salah M. Hassan, in his 2012 article: "Rethinking Cosmopolitanism: is 'Afropolitanism' the Answer?", traced the very first events that celebrated Afropolitanism in the West, namely: "Friday Late: Afropolitans" by Victoria and Albert Museum in 2011, "Africans in America: The New Beat of Afropolitans" organized by the Houston Museum of African American Culture in 2011 that paved the way to a number of other events. Hassan agrees that these events helped to launch the careers of young African diasporic artists in the global market. These artists challenged the worldview toward African art and re-examined the generalized assumption about contemporary Afro-diasporic art. These events created a bond between artists of African descent and provided a podium for transnational Africans to express their artistry on a global scale. These events were important to support these artists and to flourish the whole concept of Afropolitanism. Most of these artists are young and were born after the liberation era. They reside temporarily or permanently in the Western metropolis while maintaining the African roots and links. Living transnational lives made these artists alert of Africa's marginalization and otherness. They are creatively and actively engaged with the real, imaginary and virtual effects of transnational movements of goods, cultures and people (Hassan, 2012).

African artists claim that there is a paucity of in-depth artistic criticism to analyse the paradox between the creativity of African artists and the African reality. They express their fear that African art will always remain trapped in Afro-pessimism if criticism failed to match modern art; "the lack of a corpus of art criticism on the continent and the dearth of critical texts that deal with the complex manifestations and reception of this paradox should not lead us to Afro-pessimism but rather to a renewed understanding and appreciation of the creativity and transnational circulation of these artists, who are subject to such difficult conditions" (Hassan, 2012). Their contemporary Afro-Western art is intended to provide a "renewed understanding" of the African global creativity. The West, however, offered an outlet that Africa failed to afford; a space to express their creativity and receive recognition and in-depth criticism. This outlet abounds with an out-of-crisis African art that proves that even though Africa is still plagued with war, genocide, aid-dependency, and stagnant economy, artists are able to interpret the crisis aesthetically. In the last two decades, contemporary African art has been capturing complexity that transcends the traditional ways and defies usual criticism. It diffuses disciplines and incorporates arts and media in an attempt to blur the boundaries between the Northern world and sub-Saharan Africa; an art that welcomes diversity and goes beyond the confinements, labels and tendencies that restricted the scope of African art since its inception (Hassan, 2012).

Previous eras witnessed a proliferation of artistic works that were devoted to resistance and liberation. The African continent past those eras beheld a decline in literary and artistic works in terms of both quality and quantity. A cadre of modernists who devoted their art to socio-political local problems was not replaced or succeeded. However, the emerging works of Afropolitans do not necessarily address local realities; it nonetheless aims to show the continent outside the stereotypical tropes. The Nigerian academic Tejumola Olaniyan believes that the contemporary creativity of African artists is not met with discerning criticism, which hinders the healthy development of cultural creativity:

> In contemporary Africa, cultural creativity far outstrips cultural criticism, happily and sadly. Happily, because the continent is not, at least, losing out on both creative and critical production. Artists in all media, though many could do with more and better training to sharpen their native talents, are working prodigiously to shape form and meaning out of their demanding specific contexts and the intricate ways those contexts interact with the world. Sadly, because the conditions for the training of intellectuals and cultural critics are far less than adequate, and because an overall healthy development of cultural creativity, the type that continually breaches accepted boundaries and invents new forms and suggests new meanings, depends on a robust interaction between talented artists and discerning critics, between the creative and the critical imagination. (Hassan, 2012)

Hassan claims that an innovative framework is needed for three reasons:

A) Firstly by trying to fathom the theories of discourse infrastructure of their artistic production and investigate the techniques, media, genres and the visual vocabulary they deploy, and to study their works within the global parameters.

B) Second, by investigating the Afropolitan works as transnational products rather than African; critics are asked to employ diasporic/global theories rather than local ideas.

C) Third, Africans of the diaspora have always provided the necessary help for African movements that developed ideologies and shaped the intellectual and artistic production. Therefore, the historical line of the dispersion of Africans should act as a frame to locate artistic practices without neglecting the individual experience that shapes each work because (Hassan, 2012).

Before Afropolitans, there was a generation of African diasporic intellectuals and artists who inhabited the Western metropolis. They succeeded to a prodigious extent to morph the perception of centre/periphery dichotomy and altered identity politics. They fought the exclusion of non-western arts and dexterously intercalated African art and literature into the Western canon. These works were deeply endorsed in socio-political and racial causes to subvert the Western theories of African inferiority compared to Western superiority (Kigotho, 2016). Afropolitanism, on the other hand, follows an apolitical endeavour and moves beyond rhetoric into social identity and practice. Afropolitans' duties are

to challenge a parochial representation of Africa through vibrant displays of African art, culture and innovation. Nonetheless, Selasi and Mbembe's assumptions on the history of African translocation differs relatively; Selasi believes that the concept is new and traced back to postcolonial translocation while Mbembe asserts that it is ancient across centuries of continental history (Makokha, 2011).

3- Afropolitanism and Cosmopolitanism: Afropolitanism is cosmopolitanism espoused with Africanity. In order to fully grasp the scope and the convenience of Afropolitanism, it is pivotal to visit cosmopolitanism. The word 'cosmopolitanism', which is derived from the Greek word '*kosmopolitês', was first coined and much owed to the Greek philosopher* Diogenes in the fourth century BCE, claiming that he is a citizen of both the 'polis' (the city) and the 'cosmos' (the world). Since the Greek onset of the concept, cosmopolitanism never ceased to be a challenging topic for a plethora of scholarships; it neatly finds its way into the core of modern researches (Hassan, 2012). Cosmopolitans accentuate the importance of the cosmopolitan affiliation to sustain worldly order and proliferate the common good. Regardless of any political, religious or ethnic affiliation, all citizens belong to a single cosmopolitan community; the cosmopolitan belongs to the community of human beings. The openness toward divergent cultural experiences and the convivial acceptance and tolerance of diversity is the cultural face of cosmopolitanism.

Cosmopolitanism according to Bruce Robbins could be understood as a "fundamental devotion to the interests of humanity as a whole". This cannot be remotely achieved without the "detachment from the bonds and affiliations that constrain ordinary lives". Being a cosmopolitan citizen does not imply the rejection of one's history, beliefs or citizenship. It implies cultivating a humanitarian character that positions humanity before the ethnic, racial and political affiliations. A cosmopolitan propels a character beyond the circumscribed identity and privileges humanity as a duty; "a true cosmopolitan is someone who acknowledges the humanity and dignity of others as a constituent to his own" (Selami, 2014). Elif Shafak, a renowned Turkish author, contends that cosmopolitanism means more the appreciation of hybridity than the recognition of its inevitability (Selami, 2014). Cosmopolitanism, therefore, requires consciousness instead of genes or actual palpable bonds. It is necessary to invoke the potential of cosmopolitanism in celebrating co-existence and diversity, for cosmopolitans relate to other entities in different locales as members of a sole community (Hassan, 2012). Afropolitanism, embracing the prism of cosmopolitanism, links the African with the cosmopolitan community and cultivates a modern identity that celebrates diversity in an age of intense transnational links.

Afropolitanism is an effort to create a cosmopolitan self-identification. It is a self-articulated identity to fit in both the metropolis and Africa, and matches the demands of the 21st Century. It embodies to a noticeable extent the prism of

cosmopolitanism to embrace a more inclusive vision and nuance an anti-hegemonic potential. Afropolitanism seeks to create a bridge between the African, humanity and Africa through art and intellect. African cosmopolitanism is not a new phenomenon:

> In fact, Africa, with its vast histories of migrations, dispersal and cross-regional interactions, however burdensome, has some of the world's most cosmopolitan cities. From Accra to Luanda to Zanzibar, it is not the presence of Europeans that 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 many other places. (Selami, 2014).

The works of contemporary African artists are a manifestation of cosmopolitanism with African roots to celebrate Africa as an entity of the cosmos. Afropolitanism, thus, raises a critical discussion about Africa at the core of cosmopolitanism to investigate the implications of globalization and modernity on Africa and the contemporary African identity. Afropolitanism, nonetheless, inherited the misinterpretation and deficiencies of cosmopolitanism. Afropolitans, same as cosmopolitans, are accused of rejecting their native roots and acting as snobs to fit in the modern society. The remarkable bond to urban life and social class tend to debilitate the relevance of cosmopolitanism and Afropolitanism alike in shaping experiences and identities (Dabiri, 2014).

4- Afropolitanism; a Relational Identity: New perceptions of cultural hybridity, contamination, conviviality and recently Afropolitanism suggest the complexity of African identity since the demise of apartheid in South Africa. There is no controversy that Africa is biologically and culturally hybrid, and this fact paved the way to a more inclusive identity urged mainly by the intense transnational ties and global reality. Transnational Africans are standing in many areas at once and cannot identify to an exclusive ascribed identity limited within the confines of local community or geography (Alpha, 2015). This has shaped unitary identities into multi-loyal identities. The new form of hybridity should be more welcoming based on transcendental local by choice rather than obligation. Simon Gikandi suggests that a new form of hybridity ought to be embraced; one that does not imply the Africans' displacement and scattered lives, the difficulties they face as they try to overcome their alterity in alien landscapes, and the deep cultural anxieties as a result of tormented lives between cultures and languages (Eze, 2014). Afropolitanism urges the adoption of a more welcoming and inclusive self-identification, which does not necessarily imply a rejection of African roots nor shattered identities. It rather calls for a more nuanced understanding of identity.

There has been always a subtle and persistent shift in African self-perception, and Afropolitanism marks the adoption of a cosmopolitan mindset in self-

identification. Cosmopolitanism, according to Ulf Harnez, is more about willingness and openness than about uniformity:

> "[It] includes a stance towards diversity itself, towards the coexistence of cultures in the individual experience. A more genuine cosmopolitanism is, first of all, an orientation, a willingness to engage with the 'Other'. It is an intellectual and aesthetic stance of openness toward divergent cultural experience, a search for contrasts rather than uniformity" (qt in Eze, 2014).

Cosmopolitan identity, therefore, is more about relation than opposition in binding people together. It requires a fundamental openness as the crux of a cosmopolitan human community. The new form of hybridity in Africa and the cosmopolitanism of its subjects, nonetheless, do not negate other local African social relationships, nor refuse local affinities and the modes of knowledge that they generate in favour of Western-biased identification. Gikandi agrees that Afropolitanism provides a new phenomenology of Africaness; "to be connected to knowable African communities, nations, and traditions; but it is also to live a life divided across cultures, languages, and states. It is to embrace and celebrate a state of cultural hybridity — to be of Africa and of other worlds at the same time" (Hassan, 2012).

New theories are more open toward diversity and highlight the absence of purity in cultures and identities to imply hybridity and contamination as the very substance of any culture and identity. Africans used to abjure any Western cultural identification. The common African identity was based on an oppositional rejection to all what is Western as a way to further reject oppression exercised against Africans. They embraced an identity based on a common cause and a common burden against the West. Formerly, it was a necessity to galvanize the populace for resistance against racism and colonization, and it was the first sparkle that launched the whole Pan-Africanist movement in 1919 by W.E.B. du Bois. Even previous literary works did not portray families of mixed African races or ethnicities; recent literary works portrays "quite the contrary, many African families are now increasingly multi-ethnic, multi-racial, transcultural; they are now polychromatic" (Eze, 2014).

Race, geography, and origin ceased to be sole markers of identity and the Africans are no longer Africans because of their opposition to Western culture. Although it remains crucial for self-identification, Africans begun to define themselves in more inclusive identities that are not at odds with the European ancestry. According to Eze, it is the result of post-Cold War global development in identity construction owing to cultural and economic consequences of globalization. The world, currently, is hyper linked due to advanced technology and Marcus Garvey's nativist slogan "Africa for Africans" is no longer valid because cultures are finally delocalized. Dispersal and migration are encouraged as opposed to being portrayed as tragedy;

> Instead of conceiving the massive migration of Africans to other continents and countries as a loss, the idiom of Afropolitanism embraces movement

across time and space as the condition of possibility of an African way of being. Dispersal implies a new ontology, not a tragic drama of sorrow. Here, in worlds that were furthest removed from Africa, from Iceland to China, expatriated African imaginaries and knowledge are turned from an intellectual deficit to a cultural bonus. (qt in Gikandi, 2011)

Afropolitanism aims to promote an utter acceptance of circulation, mobility, migration, and dispersal. It promotes for a modern notion of identity that can no longer be explained in purist existentialist and oppositional terms or by reference only to Africa. Afropolitanism is marked by intercultural hybridity rather than cultural purity and essentialism, for Africa has for centuries been both a historical donor and recipient of culture (Makokha, 2011).

II. Afropolitanism, Pan-Africanism and Afropessimism:

1- Afropolitanism and Pan-Africanism: Afropolitanism is repetitively and persistently compared to the 20th Century movement Pan-Africanism. Bloggers tend to describe Afropolitanism as "a modern, female hipper version" of Pan-Africanism. Others believe that it is the 21st Century updated version of Pan-Africanism, while Pan-African diehards refuse to accept any affinities between the two. Initially, Pan-Africanism is a movement that sought to unify all people of African descent to withstand white supremacy and to liberate Africa from the yoke of colonialism. The ideology of pan-Africanism embraced various spheres of activities: social, cultural, political and economic. Similar to Afropolitanism, it was born outside the boundaries of its homeland to voice the grievances of Africans and abolish race discrimination. Continental and racial unity is the leitmotif of pan-Africanism and revolution was the tone. P. Olisanwuche Esedebe simply defines it as "a political and cultural phenomenon which regards Africa, Africans and African descendants abroad as a unit. It seeks to regenerate and unify Africa and promote a feeling of oneness among the people of the African world. It glorifies the African past and incalculates pride in African values" (Adeniyi S. Basiru, Mashud L. A.Salawu,Adewale Adepoju, 2018).Pan-Africanism dissolved and the quest of unity gradually faded away after the wave of liberation as each African nation sought to uplift its own economy and reconstruct the country from colonial rabbles.

Afropolitanism and Pan-Africanism share the quest of promoting Africa to a higher rank in civil society and destroying the derogatory image of Africa following different agendas. Afropolitanism is rooted in cultural aesthetics more than political ambition; its leaders run blogs rather than political parties, and it calls for reinterpretation rather than the return to African culture and values (Abebe, 2015). Pan-Africanism had a political agenda that sought solidarity. Afropolitanism is, on the other hand, selective in political matters rather than being utterly apolitical. It has stepped away from the revolutionary stance of

galvanizing the masses and unifying efforts for the common struggle. The transnational African élite, labelled as Afropolitans, has been associated with the search for the revitalization of academia and socio-economic accomplishment in Africa along with selective emancipatory socio-political projects like race issues and gender equality. Pan-Africanism sought to galvanize resistance, adopt nativism and patriotism to maintain the land and Africanness. Contrastingly, Afropolitanism is geared towards social progress in order to position the continent in a global context and cure the Afro-pessimist malady. Also, Pan-Africanism embraces the holistic historical, political, cultural, spiritual and philosophical legacies from the ancient history of Africa. Afropolitanism celebrates the African legacy, mainly the parts that mean most to Africans; yet, it questions the boundaries of identity and culture.

The Achebean[1] Pan-Africanist perspective of postcolonial African culture is challenging the colonial narrative about Africans and reasserting the true African identity, for Africans were perceived as the ultimate other (Eze, 2014). The Pan-African embedded identity was oppositional and deeply rooted in resistance endeavours. However, present-day identity acknowledges historical wrongs, embraces the Western culture of the once oppressors and accentuates that identity is rather relational than geographic or oppositional. Nativism was a necessity when it was an impetus to sacrifice for liberation and democracy, and the rejection of every Western identification was deployed to defy Western erasure of African identity. Afropolitans felt the need to move beyond nativism to a more universal perception because the change brought about by globalization and transnationalism ought to be coped with a broader mindset:

> One of the greatest challenges facing African societies is how to go beyond the vestiges of relativism associated with the anti-colonial struggles and which have become embedded in parochial ethnic and tribal loyalties. The challenge is to weave a more universal solidarity that can accord individuals anywhere in Africa their rights and dignities regardless of their gender or ancestry (Eze, 2014).

Pan-Africanism is a response to Western theories and ideologies that are marked by dualism, dichotomy and ambivalence. Homi K. Bhabha agrees that new theories are necessary to transcend ambivalences, for the theories of the global North objectified Africans and rendered the wanton violence perpetrated on Africa and Africans justifiable and acceptable. Thus, Pan-Africanism sought to debunk the pristine theory of Western civilization and sensibilize Africans to reject these dichotomies and celebrate their Africanity. Further, Afropolitan tenets are traced back to Pan-African theories of hybridity and cultural mixing, which paved the way for a more inclusive less biased theories. Afropolitanism acknowledge the fact that the Pan-African aim was to demystify the Western

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[1] Achebean: After Chinua Achebe and his associates, who are considered the fathers of African literature Pan-Africanism.

claims whereas Afropolitans seek to embrace cultural medley and celebrate diversity (Kigotho, 2016). Factually, cultural mixing happens with and without biological mixing. Therefore hybridity and cultural creolization ought to be embraced rather than fought, especially by the postcolonial intelligentsia that stands at the crossroad of Western and African culture. Race and geography are no longer the markers of identity and culture; globalization delocalized identity and made it relational.

Although the Pan-African light deemed down, there still remain diehards of Pan-Africanism who maintain their belief in the movement. These same Pan-Africanists are vocal critiques of Afropolitanism. The deficiencies of Afropolitanism are highly accentuated by Pan-Africanists who harshly reduce it to a mere cultural stunt that sacrifices Africanity as a price to fit in global avenues. Some respect the necessity of intellectual and cultural openness to co-exist with the 'Other' in the wake of global reality. However, they believe that the elitist and aesthetic stance of the movement is no more than a 'touristic voyeurism' and that nothing is enterprising in producing African flavoured version of the Western social milieu (Kigotho, 2016). Another clique of these dissentients identify themselves now, more than ever, as Pan-Africanists and not Afropolitans, which signifies an oppositional identification of two African movements working towards the same aim. For them, the issue of commodification of culture, which will be tackled in details later, is heartening a fundamentalist behaviour to protect the African heritage and culture that is at stake. They also believe that Afropolitans are agents for the scramble of Africa in the 21st Century. Wainaina, namely, calls Afropolitanism "a marker of crude cultural commodification". Another group of African intellectuals is simply unable to identify with Afropolitanism and claim that this breed of transnational élite is providing an exclusive movement for the African minority living across nations and cultures eliminating all Africans who remain deprived of the transnational experience. In an interview with Yawande Omotoso, she states that immigration from Nigeria to South Africa made her witness a distinct diasporic experience that Afropolitanism failed to capture. She believes that to be an Afropolitan implies more about the West than cosmopolitanism or Africa, and she wonders why Africans have to have another distinction (Fasselt, 2014).

2- Afropolitanism and Afro-pessimism: Afro-pessimism is a framework that describes the ongoing effects of hardships implemented upon Africans from racism, colonialism, to historical processes of enslavement. It studies the impact of these hardships on structural conditions as well as personal, subjective, and lived experience and embodied African reality. Afro-pessimism is a shared understanding of blackness, race and slavery and a lens that offers a critical way of theorizing about Black existence/non-existence (Erik Ray, 2017).

The African and Pan-African conception of Afro-pessimism represents pessimism as the logical ramification to the historical traumas of colonialism and

slavery. However, Afro-pessimism has been conceived and used in Western media to portray post-colonial Africa as unlikely to achieve any sustainable economic development and democratic governance. This Western conception of Afro-pessimism believe that the provision of aid to African countries is and will remain futile. Western media prophesizes the bleakness of the African future because of the mass of embedded problems in the continent which further cripple tourism and foreign investment in Africa. However, this use of Afro-pessimism contradicts the original meaning of the term. It has been criticized as a Western paradigm to overwhelmingly portray Africa and African people within the tropes of tragedy, doom, victimization, health crisis, impoverishment, economic stagnation, famine and the lack of democratic governance. Frank B. Wilderson, along with Hortense Spillers, Saidiya Hartman, Achille Mbembe, Jared Sexton, D. S. Marriott, and others who enriched the Afro-pessimist theory, reject this Western conception of Afro-pessimism. Moreover, Pan-African ideology has highlighted the common racial identity and celebrated the power of African solidarity to overcome traumas of colonialism and slavery. Frantz Fanon's writings further proliferate pan-African and Afro-pessimistic approaches to decolonization and black liberation. Afro-pessimism for Africans is the refusal to forgive the outrages of the past, whereas Afro-pessimism in the West continues to stereotype Africa as the region that is too riddled to progress.

Enthusiasts of Afropolitanism believe it to be the cure of Afro-pessimism. Afropolitans are not condoning the historical injustices exercised on the continent and its populace. They seek to show Africa outside of the stereotypical tropes of victimization and tragedy. Mbembe states that Afropolitanism aims to display an "African mediated version of the world". He believes that it has the potential of redeeming the pessimism deeply inherent in Africa: "a promise of vacating the seduction of pernicious racialized thinking" (qt in Makokha, 2011). Gikandi also contends that Afropolitanism is more of an attitude towards the world to alter the world's conception of Africa and Africans as perpetually entrapped in poverty and aid-dependence. It calls for the innovation of visions and methods in order to transport a more expressive image of African culture and intellect through the rejuvenation of academia and arts. Rejuvenation means that African contemporary arts and achievements will set aside the Afro-pessimist perspective and aim to deliver a new Africa to the world.

Afropolitanism presents the worlds with a new language of cultural narratives; a language that alters the pessimist tone expected in African works. It shifts the conversation that was restricted within the limits of Africa and offers space for discussing and showing a rather artistic, innovative and productive Africa: "Afropolitanism shift the conversation on Africa and enlarges the scope to globalize the discussion to show the continent outside the stereotypical tropes" (Fortier, 2015). Afro-pessimism first emerged during the economic and political crisis in the 1980s to represent Africa as oppressed, persecuted and exploited. It

was the sole logical response to rigid stagnation; Afropolitanism in 21st Century strives to produce knowledge and creative imagination in order to overcome the lingering malady of Afropessimism (Gikandi, 2011). The opponents of Afropolitanism claim that it is not the only remedy to Afro-pessimism. This view, however, does not refute that Afropolitanism is the only potential solution until further endeavours.   The theory of Afropolitanism undoubtedly displays deficiencies of exclusivity and elitism, yet it strives to rethink Africa outside the trope of crisis and recover alternative narratives of African identity as it expands the notion beyond the traditional model (Gikandi, 2011).

   3- **Afropolitanism and Africanness:** Opponents of Afropolitanism refuse to see the potential in the theory and persist to accentuate its deficiencies. The elitist and exclusive criteria of Afropolitanism debilitate the theory's argument to be the solution for Africa to cope with globalization. Gikandi, who is one of the enthusiasts of Afropolitanism, expresses his fear that the debates about Africa are to be dominated by a small privileged élite and that African universities are to be increasingly marginalized or delegitimized. The privileged élite, with their lofty ideology, transnational links and Western education, are a threat to deprive non-privileged Africans of the possibility to voice African knowledge. Also, the commodification of African culture in the theory tends to escalate the voices of dissents. The centrality of capitalism and the extent of commodification is immediately proved when Afropolitanism is searched online; the results highlight the dominance of Western capitalist lifestyle through online shops, aspirational luxury and lifestyle magazines ((Dabiri, 2014). Afropolitanism is not only apolitical in its agenda, it also side-lines insights on race, identity and modernity in sacrifice to consumerism. Accordingly, many critiques refuse to accept Afropolitanism because there will be no outcome from reproducing Western culture with an African flavour while crucial issues remain unsolved. They stand by the idea that a progress cannot be measured by the extent to which it can reproduce a Western culture (Kigotho, 2016).

   Mbembe, notwithstanding his support of Afropolitanism, hints to Taiye's exorbitant openness for difference suggesting that it blindly adopts American and European cultures on the expense of Africanity. Binyavana Wainaina, among a number of other vocal critiques, assumes that Afropolitanism is "a marker of crude cultural commodification". Critiques believe that Afropolitans are disguised collaborators in the new scramble of Africa. They also claim that Afropolitanism is the last manifestation of the planetary trade in blackness since there is always a demand for more authentic black culture to be consumed. Afropolitanism is conceived as "too polite, corporate, glossy and it reeks of sponsorship and big business with all the attendant limitations" (Dabiri, 2014). Dabiri invites Fanon's ideas of the dual economy to further solidify her criticism of Afropolitanism. The rapacious consumerism of African élites does not support the economy because the wealth that exists in the pockets of the minor

transnational privileged Africans does not indicate the development of African economy. She also warns of any movement that embraces commodification to the same extent as Afropolitanism.

Conclusion:

Afropolitanism is a contemporary theory at whose core are questions of borders and identity of transnational Africans. It evolved as a rubric of self-identification in the global world for people who have multiple allegiances and affiliations. People of the Afropolitan community feel a larger sense of belonging to each other due to their shared loose connections to Africa and global sensibilities. This larger feeling of belonging purges Africans of the limited subscribed old identity that failed to contain their multiple allegiances. Afropolitanism as a movement, a theory or an identity remains controversial due to substantial deficiencies highlighted by voices of dissent. These voices continue to question if it can help in the creation of an identity that withstands its elitist inequality, if it can bring about African progress as it continues to profit the West more than Africa, or if it can properly present Africa in global arenas as it continues to deprive non-privileged Africans of their opportunity to be the delegates and custodians of African art and knowledge. Afropolitanism may appear as the solution; it may as well dangerously become the dominant narrative for African success. Yet, the conclusion cannot be limited to either the continuity of victimization or the pre-eminence of cultural commodification and elitism. While all people of African descent claim to be Africans, there is a huge gap between the privileged and the non-privileged. This gap, however, can very well be bridged. To achieve this, a dialectic interaction between culture and politics is crucial in order for the condition of Afropolitanism to jettison its elitist tendency and to enable theoretical and ideological gains. This interrogates Afropolitan willingness and qualification to address issues that concern all Africans because there would be no gain from ignoring the potential and will of transnational Africans or Afropolitans to assist the development of Africa. The ultimate solution for Africa is to make profit of all the possible resources.

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