

Afropolitan Connectivity in the Contemporary World: A Postcolonial Analysis of Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah* and *Purple Hibiscus*

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Abstract: The current study analyses Afropolitan connectivity in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah* (2013) and *Purple Hibiscus* (2003). Focused on postcolonial theory, the study investigates the different forms of Afropolitan connectivity in the contemporary world. It also aims to show the way they are used by Adiche to deconstruct the colonial discourse. Physical connection based on black identity and belonging, virtual connectivity and Nigerpolitan Club are different elements used by migrant and immigrants to remain connected or to reconnect themselves to African culture and identity in the world. This new concept which implies constant migration is used by postcolonial writers as a strategy to assert the new global African identity all over the world and enables them to move from the peripheral position to the central one.

Key words: Afropolitanism, belonging, connectivity, Nigerpolitan Club, virtual connection.

Résumé : La présente étude porte sur la connectivité afropolitaine dans les œuvres *Americanah* et *Purple Hibiscus* de l'écrivaine Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie. S'appuyant sur la théorie postcoloniale, ce travail vise à étudier les différentes formes de connectivité afropolitaine dans le monde contemporain et la manière dont elles sont utilisées par notre écrivaine Nigériane pour déconstruire le discours colonial. La connectivité physique basée sur l'identité noire et l'appartenance, la connectivité virtuelle et le « Nigerpolitan Club » sont les différents éléments dont font usage les personnages immigrants et migrants pour rester connectés ou pour se reconnecter à la culture et l'identité Africaine dans le monde. Ce nouveau concept engendré par la migration constante est utilisé par les écrivains postcoloniaux du monde contemporain comme une stratégie pour affirmer la nouvelle identité globale Africaine dans le monde et leur permet de passer de la périphérie au centre.

Mots Clés: Afropolitanisme, Appartenance, Connectivité Physique, Connectivité Virtuelle, Nigerpolitan Club.

Introduction

Living here today or living there tomorrow is a mark of instability that characterizes Africans in general in the Afropolitan time. African people are no longer stable because of the aftereffects of colonization. Being spread in the world due to the increasingly constant migration, African people become citizens of the world and they do not belong to a single community. No matter what a human being can be or wherever s/he is, dislocated or not from his own community, s/he remains connected, consciously or unconsciously, to his local roots. Connectivity in this context is the fact of being connected or attached to one's roots.

Afropolitanism is a term quoted by Taiye Selasi in her work entitled *Bye Bye Babar* published in 2005. In conjunction with her, Achille Mbembe deals with that concept in his production entitled *Africa Remix: Contemporary Art of a Continent* (2007). Taiye Selasi defines the concept of Afropolitanism as a new identity which concerns Africans of the world. For Achille Mbembe, Afropolitanism refers to the presence of the elsewhere in the here and the presence of the here in the elsewhere. From these definitions, Afropolitan connectivity focuses on the interconnection between African cultures and traditions. It casts light on the connection between African subjects living abroad in the present time. The African of the world is the one who becomes worldly without denying his home culture. It is the one who proudly asserts his culture, tradition and African identity all over the world vis-à-vis the colonizers' cultures and ideologies. In short, Afropolitan connectivity deals with the attraction and preference that exist within only African people or everything that reminds Africa to the world.

As an Afropolitan writer, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's different narratives throw light on an Afropolitan connectivity. In this condition, our topic deals with: *Afropolitan Connectivity in the Contemporary world: a Postcolonial Analysis of Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's Purple Hibiscus and Americanah*. The question that triggers our analysis is the following one: how does Afropolitan connectivity lead Africans to the centre and self-assertion in the current world? In this perceptive, our analysis will be focused on three main questions: how is the physical connectivity done through people and location? How is virtual connectivity used to redeem the image of Nigeria? How does the Nigeropolitan club in *Americanah* help Nigerian returnees reconnect with their home culture?

1/Physical Connectivity: Identity and Belonging

An identity is considered to be a label composed of education, cultures, moral values to name but some of the things that make someone or a group of people particular or different. Belonging is a connection to someone or something. Afropolitan identity is defined as a Black identity which encompasses cultural diversity coming from the four corners of the world. Afropolitan belonging is the connection or attraction between an African subject and his local, place or another African community. It is a global African identity that concerns only African people no matter where they are located in the whole world. The connection that exists between African people and their motherland is based on their blood, culture, tradition and mostly their history which is related to colonization. Some of the Africans of the world “are ethnic mixes, e.g. Ghanaian and Canadian, Nigerian and Swiss; others are merely cultural mutts: American accent, European affect, African ethos.”. Most of them “are multilingual” (T. Selasi, 2015, p. 528). That specific identity concerns African people, but at the same time, it deals with foreignness. In afropolitanism, we have the blending of both localness and foreignness.

In Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s fiction, afropolitan identity and belonging are perceptible through individual personal connection and connection to a location. Individual personal connection is considered to be a crucial fact in human’s life. It contributes to people happiness and removes loneliness from their lives. Living in a foreign country, Adichie’s characters always feel at ease with those people coming from the same region or community as them. This is a natural feeling. In *Americanah* for instance, the writer deals with the way African characters are happy to meet other Africans in the host country through the image of Halima the hairdresser and Ifemelu the protagonist. This is plausible in the following narration:

Halima smiled at Ifemelu, a smile that, in its warm knowingness, said welcome to a fellow African; she would not smile at an American in the same way. She was severely cross-eyed, pupils darting in opposite directions, so that Ifemelu felt thrown off balance, not sure which of Halima’s eyes was on her. (C. N. Adichie, 2013, p. 13).

As mentioned in the above statement, the connection between Halima the hairdresser and Ifemelu the client is quickly done once she enters the salon. This is marked by a “warm smile”. Here, Halima does not consider Ifemelu as an ordinary client. She considers the protagonist as a blood sister who shares the same cultural values and history (colonization) like her. Halima’s smile

is the expression of solidarity, unity or fraternity in the African continent as that continent is well known for life in community. It also pictures the way African immigrants carry an innate need to be surrounded and connected to some fellow Africans no matter what their nationality can be. The twenty-first century Indigenous is no longer the one who really cares about nationalism. The Afropolitan connectivity between both characters is the expression of their comfort when it comes to African culture than the one of the colonizers. This Afropolitan connectivity helps keep African traditional values alive. Those Africans who are interconnected by their history are now able to keep in touch with the local culture abroad because each of them is the representative of African culture elsewhere. In this context, the concept of Afropolitanism can be considered as a response to colonial imperialism as it is used by postcolonial writers to center the indigenous cultural identity.

Besides, the interconnection between a place and a subject creates what we call a location attachment and refers to a part of an individual's self-identity. Connection to a location following the concept of Afropolitanism deals with African Diaspora. Despite living far from the local country, African immigrants remain connected consciously or sometimes unconsciously to motherland Africa. In Adichie's creative work of art precisely in *Purple Hibiscus*, she depicts some African characters like Amaka who lives far from the home country but remains connected to her local community left behind in her thoughts. This aspect is illustrated in one of Amaka's letters in which she compares the local community and the host one. She mentions what she misses from Nigeria and impossible to get in America. The narrator upholds:

Amaka's letters are often quite as long, and she never fails to write, in every single one, how everybody is growing fat, how Chima "outfits" his clothes in a month. Sure, there has never been a power outage and hot water runs from the tap, but we don't laugh anymore, she writes, because we don't have the time to laugh, because we don't even see one another. (C. N. Adichie, 2003, p. 301).

The Afropolitan connectivity is manifested in Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* through Amaka whose life has been related to both communities. This passage shows Amaka's attachment to her local setting and local habits. She becomes an African of the world once she relocates from Nigeria to the United States of America and asserts her black identity or Africanness through her letters. As a global subject, Auntie Ifeoma's daughter cannot be satisfied with only American culture and habits. She really misses her local community's warm which is impossible to get in her new-home. This nostalgia of Nigerian's habits demonstrates the character's connection with her ancestral place.

Through Amaka's Afropolitan connectivity, the Nigerian writer reclaims her African identity and history all over the world. She deals with the importance of African culture for Africans of the world. Also, staying connected to Africa while living abroad is apprehended as an opposition or a resistance regarding colonial imperialism. The assertion of Afropolitan identity and belonging by Adichie's characters living abroad goes beyond the physical space and touches the digital space in *Americanah* to achieve its goal on every scales.

1. Virtual Connectivity: The Redemption of Nigeria's Image Through Nigerian Community Blogs.

Virtual or digital connectivity is different from the first one because it happens online with a virtual community. This kind of community is set to be important in the Afropolitan concept because it allows African migrants to remain connected to their cultural values in a virtual world. Here, "the community, which is global and often manifest online is made up of people who feel a sense of belonging with each other due to their shared connections to Africa" (A. Abebe, 2015, p. 2). In Adichie's *Americanah*, virtual connectivity is used by some African immigrants to redeem the image of Africa, show the importance of its culture and to bring it into the center. To be precise, the redemption of Nigerian image is done so by the means of the community blogs. Those community blogs are used to gather, connect, communicate and even keep in touch with Nigerian fellow returnees in order to share their common experiences. Again, they serve to give information about the country and at the same time celebrate its traditional and cultural values all over the world. It also serves to share Nigerian migrants' experiences. In the domain of postcolonial theory, blogs are used by some Afropolitan subjects as a powerful tool to struggle against colonial imperialism and question the colonial authority. It is also utilized to restore and reorder the image of Africa. In one of her blogs entitled *The Small Redemption of Lagos*, the female protagonist named Ifemelu draws the readers' attention on the fact that Nigeria and America are two different nations with different cultures and tradition that should be acknowledged on equal terms. She states:

If your cook cannot make the perfect panini, it is not because he is stupid. It is because Nigeria is not a nation of sandwich-eating people and his last oga did not eat bread in the afternoon (...). Nigeria is not a nation of people with food allergies, not a nation of picky eaters for whom food is about distinctions and separations. It is a nation of people who eat beef and chicken and cow skin and

intestines and dried fish in a single bowl of soup, and it is called assorted (C. N. Adichie, 2013, p. 303).

In this post, *Americanah*'s protagonist throws light on the returnees' behavior who want to get the same privileges they used to have in America or in the ex-communities as they have adapted to American food habit and culture. For them, any community which does not have the same privileges as America seems wrong or imperfect. In the same illustration, the narrator compares both communities, cultures and food habits. She celebrates her home country which is Nigeria. As far as Ifemelu is concerned, people should stop judging those who are not capable to reproduce the same kind of food like Americans in Nigeria because Nigeria is not America and vice-versa and each country owns its food habits and culture. Through Ifemelu's online blogs, the writer is raising awareness of the readers that realities can be different from one society to another. Each society is determined by its own culture, traditions and even food habits. Hence, those returnees or Nigerian immigrants coming from diverse communities and cultures should stop complaining about Nigeria's food habits. Likewise, for those who are planning to come and visit that African nation, they should not expect to get a European food well done in this local place because this is not part of Nigerian food habits and culture. Throwing light on Nigerian cuisine and the westerner's one, Adichie as a postcolonial writer asserts her local identity and tells "the world that she belongs to an African ethnic group." Again, "her love for Nigeria gives her self-esteem, power and dignity." (B. F. Zohira, 2018, p. 42).

Moreover, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie celebrates Nigerian culture all over the world since it is captured in the postcolonial time as a community impacted by migration but keeps its traditional and cultural values. Being connected to her home culture despite the cultural diversity of the current world, Adichie's migrant character creates a Nigerian community blog in order to keep her cultural and traditional values alive in the world. As a matter of fact, she makes people around the world "subscribe to Afropolitan values and culture" (A. Abebe, 2015, p. 2). This migrant people redefines Nigeria's home culture abroad online. Indeed, the online space is used by the protagonist to reconstitute African identity, celebrate traditional culture and pictures its beauty. The virtual connectivity is a means used by Adichie to redeem Nigeria's image in the world. This is a way of resistance and self-assertion. It is used to rebut the colonial domination and ideologies and fits in Afropolitan perspectives. Nigerian community blogs is seen as important in the celebration of African traditional and cultural values. It creates a connection between African of the world.

Then, it helps them keep their African values and redeem the defamatory image of Africa destroyed in the course of colonization. Afropolitan connectivity is set to be a connection between African migrants living abroad and their homeland. This new strategy helps the indigenous people fight down all the stereotypes imposed in course of colonization. It enables the colonized people move from the peripheral position to the central one as they claim for cultural sameness. Finally, Afropolitan connectivity through the virtual space is used to change the single story about Africa and portrays this indigenous continent as a place with a glorious past. Going further, the Nigerian writer pictures another means that allows those African migrants disconnected from Nigerian home culture because of migration to be reconnected to it. This is expressed in the following analysis through Nigerpolitan club.

2. Reconnection to Nigerian Community through the Nigerpolitan Club in *Americanah*

Afropolitan connectivity makes some Africans living abroad come back to their motherland, Africa, in order to appreciate the African cultural tradition and reconnect to their authentic African cultural values. In *Americanah*, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie portrays some characters coming back from America, London and so on, in order to be in touch with Nigerian cultural values. To achieve this goal, a group called Nigerpolitan club has been created to help those returnees who became hybrid subjects maintain African cultural values alive. This Nigerpolitan club is defined in the story as “just a bunch of people who have recently moved back, some from England, but mostly from the U.S.? Really low-key, just like sharing experiences and networking?” (C. N. Adichie, 2013, p. 291). The objective of the members of this group is to stay connected or reconnect themselves, keep and celebrate together Nigerian cultural identity. Nigerpolitan club is used to “empower themselves and give sense to their African identity within societies which under evaluate them.” (B. F. Zohra, 2018, p. 42). In the process of reconnection, the Nigerpolitan club privileges everything that comes from Nigeria to the detriment of the host habits. Thanks to the Nigerpolitan Club, those migrant subjects are now interested in everything their local community offers as it is noticed in the following narration:

In the car, he turned the engine on, and the music came on too. Bracket’s “Yori Yori.”

‘Oh, I love this song,’ she said. He increased the volume and they sang along; there was an exuberance to the song, its rhythmic joyfulness, so free of artifice, that filled the air with lightness.

‘Ahn-ahn! How long have you been back and you can already sing this so well?’ he asked.

‘First thing I did was brush up on all the contemporary music. It’s so exciting, all the new music.’

‘It is. Now clubs play Nigerian music.’ (C. N. Adichie, 2013, p. 318).

The above passage epitomizes a conversation between the famous lovers of the story named Ifemelu and Obinze. Both characters are expressing their feelings and emotions about Nigerian’s music. The female protagonist exposes her love for Nigerian music and describes it as an exuberance song which is “rhythmic joyfulness, so free of artifice that filled the air with lightness”. Through these words, Ifemelu asserts and accepts her local culture in the world. She introduces the importance of Nigerian’s music for Nigerian people and defines it as something pure and free of artifice. The reconnection with Nigerian contemporary music seems to be enjoyable for them in the sense that they find their own way in Nigerian culture and traditions. These migrant subjects find their own-self in this local music and are happy to come back and reconnect to their local roots. In effect, beyond being a mere tool to have fun, music plays a significant role in culture and history of a given community. Most of the time, it deals with social issues and denounces some realities in order to be eradicated. Thereupon, the Nigerian writer depicts in her novel the Afropolitan connectivity through local music which deals with Nigerian cultural values. The presence of “now” in the previous illustration indicates that in the past, some Nigerian migrants have been disconnected to their African culture because of the weight of the foreign culture. But now, those people try to reconnect themselves to mother Africa and her culture. In short, thanks to the Nigeropolitan club, the writer sheds light on the impact and the importance of the Afropolitan concept on African people’s lives as it enables them to reconnect and readapt to Nigerian culture and tradition.

In postcolonial time, Nigerian people assert African culture and tradition freely with the rise of the concept of Afropolitanism which extols Africanity in diversity. They feel themselves comfortable in local songs better than in the one of the settlers. The migrant characters successfully adapt and reconnect to their cultural values proudly in the current time which is considered to be the time of adaptation. In this time, every cultures are acknowledged on equal terms. Then, the concept of Afropolitanism is used by postcolonial writers to deconstruct the colonial discourse and

its binary opposition between the margin and the center “into which the world was divided” (B. Ashcroft et al., 2000, p. 32) in the course of colonization. Afropolitan reconnection seems to be clear enough in Nigeropolitans’ mind in the present time. It is utilized to destroy all negative images of Africa set up in the course of colonization. Afropolitan reconnection is used by returnees to redefine the home culture and assert proudly the indigenous identity in the world. Being Africans of the world, the subjugated people are proud of their African culture and celebrate it freely without any complex.

Conclusion

The analysis of Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s *Americanah* and *Purple Hibiscus* allowed us to study and understand the Afropolitan connectivity in the contemporary world. Afropolitan connectivity has been foreshadowed through physical connectivity, virtual connectivity and Nigeropolitan Club in *Americanah*. Based on the physical aspect in Adichie’s novels, Afropolitan connectivity deals with the connection between two or more African migrants living abroad, the local habits or location. It is focused on African people at large and not on a particular African nationality. Virtual connectivity is portrayed in Adichie’s fiction through Ifemelu’s online blogs and it is used to redeem the image of Africa. The protagonist’s online blogs are considered as a means used to connect African migrants and African culture in a virtual space for, it serves by African migrants as a tool to communicate, to value African culture and deconstruct the colonial discourse online about the colonized and colonizer’s food habits. Finally, Nigeropolitan club is pictured as an element of Afropolitian connectivity in the sense that it helps the migrants keep in touch and reconnect to Nigerian culture and tradition. This particular aspect concerns the returnees whose local culture is on the way of extension. In this perspective, we can come to the conclusion that Afropolitanism is a global identity with African routes that leads us to cosmopolitanism.

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