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To "Own Yourself a Little More": Afropolitan Feminism in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's Americanah

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TO "OWN YOURSELF A LITTLE MORE": AFROPOLITAN FEMINISM IN CHIMAMANDA NGOZI ADICHIE'S *AMERICANAH*

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ABSTRACT

Afropolitanism, in part, accounts for itinerant and so autonomous Africans who shape the contours of a late-modern global history. If Afropolitanism describes the work and activism of 21st century Africans in Euro-America determined to challenge western discourses that malign Africa, it is important to witness the distinctive character and voice Afropolitan women bring to that history defining exercise. Otherwise, as critics and scholars interested in what Afropolitan*ism* brings to the work of reframing master narratives hitherto encircled for western primacy, we risk reinforcing the injustice we address.

To fill this gap in the literature, I employ Selasi's initial conception of the Afropolitan, what suffices for her consequent theory of an Afropolitan *way of being in the world*, to distinguish narrative moments and/or character portraits in Adichie's *Americanah* (2013) that point to, curate, and witness an Afropolitan feminism tethered to the habits and politics of being American. More specifically, I examine ways Afropolitan feminism, as delineated in Adichie's novel 1) promotes feminist advocacy for and in behalf of African female migrants, 2) mandates critical consciousness able to interrogate and counter America's racialized topography, 3) encourages African sisterhood, transnational female kinships precipitated by mutual struggles and aspirations, 4) repudiates white/American paternalism, 5) sanctions *transactional Pan-Africanism* or Pan-African alliances that allow African-female autonomy, and 6) mandates *Sankofa ideation* or the émigrés' return to an African home in the way it signifies an elevated Africa capable of housing the dreams of its wandering citizens.

In other words, I argue that *Americanah* submits an Afropolitan feminism that valuates voice, *the act of speaking and speaking back*, as critical counter-hegemonic agency for the African female migrant whose non-American identity supposes voicelessness and/or invisibility in discourses of national exclusion. I conclude that Afropolitan feminism, as delineated in this project, offers initial theoretical framework for distinguishing an Afropolitan feminist literature and narrative tradition undeniably crucial to an emergent discipline interested in accounting for, as other disciplines have, Black women who upstage systemic arrangements historically-tailored to exclude them. I further conclude that Afropolitan feminism provides opportunities for reframing intersectional feminism in the way the former accounts for African female standpoints and experiences otherwise subsumed under white and/or American mediated discussions of race, class, and gender.

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PREFACE

"Telling Truth, Creating Spaces."

> To hear one's experience described in words can, very simply, change the way one sees oneself: where one felt entirely alone, she now feels utterly human. As Scott Fitzgerald has it: 'That is the part of the beauty of all literature. You discover that your longings are universal; longings, that you're not lonely and isolated from anyone. You belong.' (Taiye Selasi qtd. in Eva Rask knudsen and Ulla Rahbek 289).

"So, you want to be teacher? You go to Ghana after this? I respect Ghana people dey speak good, very good English. Because English is easy here. Do you get teacher scholarship from Ghana? You wanna go back home?" My Somali *Lyft* driver, Mr. A. asked one more time after what appeared to me an unnecessary, and contrived fondness for Ghana. To be sure, Mr. A's questions followed initial pleasantries on our shared Africanness, what wonderful time of the year it will be in the summer, and concerns about inhabiting blackness in America. Except, I did not think it prudent to indulge conversations on repatriation considering new family ties and/or financial implications. However, above the insistence of his prodding "broken English" I told him, in resignation, that America "is home now." I added that "although Ghana did not sponsor my teaching here," returning "home someday will be honorable." The silence that followed his matter-of-fact nod carried mutual camaraderie, an Afro-centered pleasantness tinged with discernment. In that congregating silence, we were, it appeared, both contemplating "Non-American Blackness" in the American polis we call home: **Him**, the working-class African immigrant and longtime Minnesota resident navigating socio-economic odds he concedes require

"education" for better outcomes. **Me**, the self-styled "Afropolitan" woman, or "highly-educated" African female émigré in America admittedly hopeful about relative socio-economic mobility yet determined to punctuate his worries with my own "American-specific woes."

Really, I concede the agency my "social standing" promises relative to the less-fortunate African Lyft driver sharing a global stage that precludes his mobility. However, I also own consciousness that admits xenophobic racism, as experience and as a system, mitigates voice and place for all non-American Blacks. In the end, I am aware socio-economic mobility does not suppose inherent competence for African migrants like me positioned on, or en-route western-mediated platforms of privilege. This is to say that this project, which in broad terms uses Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah* (2013) to theorize an Afropolitan feminism that delineates and/or advocates agency for African female migrants in America, reflects my socio-intellectual posture---- it reflects the presence and voice I locate in, but also bring to the emergent politico-intellectual exercise we call Afropolitanism.

To put this another way, I start this work from the premise that Afropolitanism does not and should not presume homogenous Africanness within and without the continent. I acknowledge an Afropolitanism that, in part, discriminates interest in middle to upper-class Africans variously domiciled in Euro-America. Selasi, Afropolitan essayist, author, and putative progenitor of the Afropolitan label insists "it should neither surprise nor alarm us" there are those living on and off the continent who do not share" in the Afropolitan "experience" (qtd. in Knudsen and Rahbek 289-90). In other words, and by implication, the work to distinguish Afropolitan space or identity need not suppose indifference to non-Afropolitan subjectivities considering such suppositions imply the need for an Afropolitan posture that sees homogeneity in the experiences of all Africans. Certainly, in yielding space for those who share in or identify

as Afropolitan, Afropolitanism as mode of inquiry, as literary/critical endeavor, to invoke Selasi, inscribes "truth" in the many truths that constitute Africa's multidimensional and complex character (qtd. in Knudsen and Rahbek 290). Afropolitanism, as theory, as a rooted politico-intellectual exercise therefore contributes to the work of interrogating, chronicling, and witnessing the different voices and lives we hope characterizes a more constitutive and fair human history---- the kind of history that does more than valuate Eurocentric representations.

Therefore, the work I do in this project matters: in line with what theorist and philosopher Achille Mbembe argues should be "the starting point of any epistemological project" trained on Africa, I delineate the beginning contours of an Afropolitan feminist thought that presents Africa as a "major platform and . . . agent in the making of [a late] modern world order" (qtd. in Sarah Balakrishnan 31). I identify an Afropolitan femaleness not only "entangled" in the history and culture of inhabiting Black femaleness in America, but positioned to define and redefine the various iterations of a post-Black America: a post-Black America poised to disrupt long-standing "racial catechisms and dogmas" (Michael Eric Dyson qtd. in Touré xviii).

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Prevailing Definitions of Afropolitan[ism]

In a 2005 *LIP Magazine* essay, "Bye-Bye Barbar," Selasi describes Afropolitans as "the newest generation of African emigrants" who "belong to no single geography" because of their "funny blend of London fashion, New York jargon, African ethics, and academic successes." She characterizes the mostly "multilingual" Afropolitan group, some of whom were "bred on African shores then shipped to the West for higher education," or "born in much colder climate and sent home for cultural re-indoctrination," as "ethnic mixes" e.g. Ghanaian and Canadian," or as "cultural mutts: American accent, European affect, [and] African ethos." For Selasi, Afropolitans also redefine "what it means to be African" in the way they, for instance, "branch[...] into fields like media, politics, music, venture capital, design" where their highly-skilled immigrants parents who left Africa for the West in the mid to late twentieth century "sought safety in traditional professions like doctoring, lawyering, banking, engineering." Selasi mentions Claude Gruzintsky, founder of and editor for Trace, who designates artist Keziah Jones, architect David Adjaye, and novelist Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie "21st century Africans" in the way their transnational work reflects "African influences." She adds that the Afropolitan for whom "Home is many things" contemplates "investing in Africa's future" as evidenced by "the fair number of African professionals returning" home. For Selasi, Afropolitans, aware their "last names" conjure images of a "blighted Africa" linked to "corruption and lack," aware "media portrayals" of an Africa steeped in "war and hunger" educes "New World tropes" of the

"bumbling blue Black doctor," commit to the project of "complicating Africa," and/or rejecting an "oversimplified Africa. "

On his part, Mbembe argues Afropolitanism is "a name for undertaking . . . critical reflection on the many ways in which . . . there is no world without Africa, and there is no Africa that is not part of it" (qtd in Balakrishnan 29). Like Selasi, Mbembe apprehends an Afropolitan space populated by global Africans mapping intersecting cultural connections to the many worlds they call home. Except Mbembe, who also claims Afropolitans can be found in the various 'cosmopolitan' centers of South Africa navigating the ebb and flows of late-modern worldliness **(**qtd. in Balakrishnan 30**),** considers an Afropolitan mode of inquiry that suffices for explicating Africa's definitive agency in the world. Mbembe also distinguishes Pan-Africanism from Afropolitanism by highlighting a Pan-African ideology preoccupied with "race solidarity," and so misses the chance to account for "a contemporary Africa awakening to forms of multiplicity (including racial multiplicity) … constituent of its identity" (29). To explicate his point, Mbembe points to South Africa as the primary loci for, and originator of the concept of Afropolitanism in the way it "affords a rich laboratory for anyone who would like to think beyond the racial" **(**qtd. in Balakrishnan 30**).** In what makes for a nuanced characterization of Afropolitanism and the question of race or identity, Mbembe maintains despite its universalist stance, Afropolitanism is "aware" of targeted "injustice" and "violence" against Africa and its people (Mbembe 27-29). Mbembe asserts,

> Afropolitanism is not the same as Pan-Africanism or negritude. Afropolitanism is an aesthetic and a particular poetic of the world. It is a way of being in the world, refusing on principle any form of victim identity—which does not mean that it is not aware of the injustice and violence inflicted on the continent and its people by the law of the world. It

> is also a political and cultural stance in relation to the nation, to race, and to the issue of difference in general. In so far as African states are pure (and, what is more, recent) inventions, there is, strictly speaking, nothing in their essence that can force us to worship them---which does not mean that we are indifferent to their fate. (28-29)

It is apparent Mbembe, unwilling to disregard illusory insistences on monolithic nation-states or racial communes rallied by singular impulses, unwilling to minimize state-sanctioned "violence" against disaffected citizens offers Afropolitanism as a universalist posture, an aesthetic, a cultural and/or political stance that precludes national or racial fidelities, yet aware historically-sanctioned injustices and laws necessitate collective kinships and consequent resistance. I should add that other contemporaneous definitions of the term reinforce Selasi and Mbembe's interest in an Afropolitan identity or mode of inquiry that witnesses Africa's multidimensional yet distinctive character.

Simon Gikandi, postcolonial scholar and critic, for example, argues that Afropolitanism "has been prompted by the desire to think of African identities as … rooted in specific local geographies but also transcendental of them." He explains that "to be Afropolitan" is "to be of African and other worlds at the same time" (qtd. in Chielozona Eze 239-40). Also, while postcolonial critic, Eze, acknowledges Afropolitanism suggests Africans "can no longer be explained in purist, essentialist, and oppositional terms or by reference only to Africa" (239-41), authors Knudsen and Rahbek offer field defining distinctions between cosmopolitanism and Afropolitanism. In the distinction they offer, Knudsen and Rahbek argue that Afropolitanism brings an African "difference" to Kwame Anthony Appiah's cosmopolitan equation, which is "universality plus difference" (15). According to Appiah, Cosmopolitans are "citizens of the world" who are shaped by "nations, ethnic, or racial communities" but do not allow that "local

loyalty" to foreclose responsibility to a world community (qtd. in Knudsen and Rahbek 15). Appiah notes that Cosmopolitanism, as a consequence, adduce both "universal concern and respect for legitimate difference" (qtd. in Knudsen and Rahbek 15-16). Knudsen and Rahbek invoke Selasi's insistence Afropolitans are "Africans not citizens of the world" to make the case Afropolitanism ultimately represents "the limit of Appiah's Cosmopolitanism at its limit" (15-16). In other words, for Knudsen and Rahbek, while cosmopolitanism mandates global citizenship, Afropolitans "are not concerned with notions of citizenship, whether universal and local" (15-16). Afropolitans are "rather interested in exploring a sense of African identity and community in mobility [or] in worldlines" (15-16). To put this simply, Afropolitanism derives from Cosmopolitanism in the way the former echoes the latter's interest in communities rooted in both "local" and global "alliances." Except Afropolitanism allows unfettered agency in the way it rejects the constrictions of sworn allegiance----which is what citizenship implies. Afropolitanism to put this another way, and to invoke Dyson's conception of post-Blackness, describes Africans who are "rooted" in, but "not restricted" by the alliances they forge or oblige either "local" or global (qtd. in Touré xviii).

Afropolitan[ism] as a Contested Term or Field

In fact, Mbembe, but also Selasi's suggestion Afropolitanism offers opportunities for transnational or global facility draws contemporaneous contestations. While some critics specifically argue Afropolitanism merely identifies African or Black elites who enjoy certain superiority in their ability to afford international trekking, others insist the term packages western-mediated glimpses of Africa for white consumption. In a 2012 African Studies Association conference address, "I Am a Pan-Africanist, Not an Afropolitan," Binyavanga

Wainaina, for example, makes the case that Afropolitanism is "product driven" and "potentially funded by the West" (qtd. in Stephanie Bosch Santana 120-121). Author Yewande Omotoso also reveals she made sure to challenge a friend who called her an 'Afropolitan' because the friend assumed Selasi's Afropolitan characters in *Ghana Must Go* (2013) paralleled Yewande's own cosmopolitan lens and experiences. Yewande mentions her "immediate reaction" included categorical rejection of the Afropolitan label, and insists that barring claims to a cosmopolitan lens, she does not "identify with the west" (qtd. in Rebecca Fasselt 235). Omotoso explains:

> Being an Afropolitan to me sounds as if you are supposed to be a mediator between the West and Africa because you have travelled and lived overseas. I have no torn allegiances and I have no current interest of ever living in America or the UK. I want to live here. I'm of the continent. My mother was from the Caribbean, so I'm multicultural anyway, not only Nigerian. But I feel this doesn't mean I'm Afropolitan. I've travelled to places and I've learned things, but I'm still African. It doesn't mean I'm less African, and that's why the term is problematic. Why do we have to have another distinction? You have class, language and so on and now another special group of Afropolitans. Many of those Africans who travel and get educated overseas have the money and the means to do that. So they are of a privileged class, that's all. . . . The term Afropolitan only seems useful for the West as it gives the West an opportunity to understand and even "consume" Africa. . . . Afropolitan[ism] panders to something that I don't want to pander to. It is interesting that all these books are coming up now — Adichie's *Americanah*, NoViolet Bulawayo's *We Need New Name*s (2013), Teju Cole's *Open City* (2011), Selasi's *Ghana Must Go* (2013) and so on — because they are all about identity, the traveler, the African living in the West… (qtd. in Fasselt 235)

Wainaina and Omotoso undoubtedly consider Afropolitanism contrived approbation for African elitism and privilege; an exercise in pandering to western expectations for an obliging Africa, or Global South. Wainaina's insistence he is a "Pan-Africanist not an Afropolitan," suggests Pan-Africanism in relation yields tangible socio-political outcomes mobilized by networks of Black racial solidarity. If Omotoso, for good measure, similarly sees and indicts an Afropolitan posture and resultant migrant fiction that indulges in identity politics palatable to Euro-America, it is unsurprising Mbembe's oft-cited scholarly definition of the term anticipates and/or addresses Wainaina and Omotoso's stance. Mbembe includes a kind of "rejoinder" that makes the case for how Afropolitanism, notwithstanding its "universalist stance," mobilizes awareness of targeted "injustice and violence" against Africa and its people (28-29).

Allowing for Mbembe's conception of Afropolitanism then, I submit Wainaina's preference for Pan-Africanism seems at best, an ideological discomfort with emerging discourse types that threaten longstanding ideologies: as if Pan-Africanism should remain tethered to what defines shared racial aspirations for Africans/African descended people. Omotoso, on her part, acknowledges the phenomenon that defines Afropolitanism. In fact, she confirms she is also well-travelled, multicultural, and has "learned new things" (235). Except she intimates that unflinching allegiance to Africa proves a better stance. Omotoso, in other words, merely subordinates the identity politics she sees Afropolitanism indulging in to the kind of identity politics she prefers by suggesting exclusive moral fortitude in the act of being "of the continent." What is more, in minimizing the otherwise complex socio-cultural and political commitments texts like Adichie's promise through their Afropolitan characters, in minimizing the emerging body of African migrant fiction on assumption their Afropolitan posture solely and exclusively panders to the "west," Omotoso further indulges the blanket generalization she herself rejects in

the instance of being labelled an "Afropolitan" because she is well travelled (235). Really, if Mbembe's definition matters, it is because like Selasi's, it argues social, cultural and/or political gravitas for Afropolitanism.

Contribution to Scholarship

It is curious interested scholars and critics who invoke Selasi and/or Mbembe's representative conceptions do not distinguish an Afropolitan feminism---- one that discriminates, accounts for, but also witnesses ways Afropolitan women negotiate, claim, and reclaim agency in contexts historically sanctioned to elevate white/western/male subjectivity. In other words, if Afropolitanism accounts for itinerant and so autonomous Africans who shape the contours of a late-modern global history, if Afropolitanism describes the work and activism of 21st century Africans determined to challenge western discourses that malign Africa, it is important to witness the distinctive character and voice Afropolitan women bring to that history defining exercise. Otherwise as critics and scholars interested in what Afropolitan*ism* brings to the work of reframing master narratives hitherto encircled for western primacy, we risk reinforcing the injustice we address.

Ergo, to fill this crucial gap in the literature, I specifically employ Selasi's initial conception of the Afropolitan, what suffices for her consequent theory of an Afropolitan *way of being in the world*, to distinguish narrative moments and/or character portraits in Adichie's *Americanah* that point to, curate, and witness an Afropolitan feminism tethered to the habits and politics of being American. I distinguish an Afropolitan feminist stance that agitates in behalf of, and in the interest of a convoluted and intertwined femaleness and Blackness, the kind that is as yet non-American or non-western. To put this another way, I contribute an important lens and

voice to the scholarship on Afropolitanism in the way my analysis yields conclusions other critics who address Adichie's *Americanah* and/or its Afropolitan moments do not. I argue *Americanah* submits an Afropolitan feminism that valuates voice, *the act of speaking and speaking back*, as critical counter-hegemonic agency for the Black African woman whose non-American identity supposes irreconcilable difference in discourses of national exclusion, and so anticipates or suffers voicelessness, erasure, invisibility in the context of racialized and gendered degradation.

What is more, considering Selasi's definition, which frames the lens I bring to *Americanah*, does not suggest or argue an Afropolitan feminism, what I do in this dissertation is expand Selasi's definition of the term to account for gendered implications and resonances. It is important to note critics interested in making the case for Afropolitanism as a subject of serious academic enquiry disproportionately invoke and credit Achille Mbembe whose framing of the term populate scholarship.[1] In fact, I employ and deploy Selasi's definition, which critics concede offers the term's popular culture gravitas, because the "non-academic" tenor of her conceptualization matches Adichie's rejection of academic feminism. In doing so, I recommend which definition of the term better frames Afropolitan representations in Adichie's feminist text. I also (re)claim and (re)inscribe the teleological merits of Selasi's early coinage against charges her conception dabbles in, or gives fervor to the term's devolution, its invocation to market and sell a modern and so agreeable Africa.

In the end, I proffer initial theoretical framework for defining an Afropolitan feminist literature or narrative tradition undeniably crucial to an emergent discipline not only cultivating

[1] See: Bady, Aaron. "Afropolitanism." *State of the Discipline Report: THE 2014 - 2015 REPORT ON THE STATE OF THE DISCIPLINE OF COMPARATIVE LITERATURE,* 8 Apr. 2014.

self-identifying Afropolitan critics and scholars variously stationed in the humanities and social sciences, but interested in accounting for, as other disciplines have, cultural and literary artifacts that witness the long-standing efforts of Black women in America------Black women who upstage systemic arrangements historically-tailored to exclude them, and who occasion and drive cultural change towards gender equity. I do not suggest I proffer what suffices for conclusive work on Afropolitan feminism. I make the case *Americanah* addresses gendered moments in a way that theorizes an emergent Afropolitan feminist lens and voice specifically situated in, and so tailored to address a post-civil-rights, post women's suffrage, yet racialized, xenophobic, and gendered American context. Also, this project launches benchmarks for my work as an independent scholar probing and defining Afropolitan feminist theory beyond and absent figurations in literary texts. For further research and work, I aim to define and redefine Afropolitan feminism in texts that also account for a broader Euro-American context, and/or the experiences of LGBTQ+ Afropolitans.

Scope of Inquiry and Analysis

This project accounts for fiction produced and published within the last decade by African writers identified in the scholarship on 21st century African migrant literature as "Afropolitan" in the way their texts account for, as Selasi puts it, the "newest generation of Africans emigrants" who live and work in the United States of America. What this means is that I focus exclusively on migration from Africa to the United States of America. To be sure, and as authors Knudsen and Rahbek reveal, African scholars and critics working within and across Africa's nation states contend that "Afropolitan mobility need not ... include passages into the West" because movements between African nations and regions suffice (5). Also, in highlighting

ways Afropolitanism describes a "worlds-in-movement" phenomenon characterized by "dispersion" and "immersion," Mbembe encourages attention to "Africa's history of colliding cultures" via "migration… intermarriage, invasion, the various religion we make our own, the techniques we exchange," and "the goods we trade" (27). Mbembe suggests that "political and cultural critics" in highlighting "this culture of mobility" in terms of an African diaspora tend to gloss over "this historical phenomenon of worlds in movement" within and across Africa (27). Surely, and to echo Knudsen and Rahbek, literary/critical work able to capture the multidimensional phenomenon we call "Afropolitan mobility" promise expansive and balanced conclusions (5). Except that expanded scope requires work beyond present disciplinary interest.

What is more, *Americanah's* gendered narratives— especially those that address the experiences of its Afropolitan female protagonist— mandate scope of inquiry or analysis that takes for it limited subject and context Black Africans migrating from Africa to various cities in the United States of America**.** Really, any claims I make about an emergent Afropolitan feminism, and by deduction, an Afropolitan feminist literature that accounts for, for example, cultural, political, and national phenomena beyond this scope of inquiry, beyond *Americanah's* specific contextual framing of the Afropolitan woman, assume the kind of essentialism my particular intersectional feminist posture forecloses, and for good reason. To put this another way, assumptions about an Afropolitan feminist standpoint applicable to the myriad and distinct experiences of differently situated Afropolitan women assume a female monolithic; what Black feminist critics interested in distinguishable gender and gendered experiences deplore accounting for attendant erasure of disadvantaged groups.

Also, and as my thesis indicate, this project in terms of its analysis and conclusions primarily accounts for and responds to *Americanah*'s character protagonists and/or narrative

moments. Although I reference and analyze contemporary Afropolitan fiction like NoViolet Bulawayo's *We Need New Names* (2013), Yaa Gyasi's *Homegoing* (2016), Taiye Selasi's *Ghana Must Go* (2013), and Teju Cole's *Open City* (2011) for parallels, nuance, and to underlie themes that begin to theorize an Afropolitan feminism, the decision to proffer conclusions that to a large extent draw from *Americanah's* narrative moments, follows, in part, from Adichie's creative ingenuity and, what I argue, suffices for an Afropolitan commitment in *Americanah*. Adichie's prodigious character portraits, to be specific, reflect the range of Afropolitan archetypes populating contemporary Afropolitan fiction, and so allow for adequate and/or complex characterizations of an Afropolitan feminist ethos. Also, upon close reading, *Americanah's* literary minefield yields a panoply of interconnected Afropolitan tropes and themes that inform and support my consequent conclusions.

I further argue that Adichie's prolific literary career, her feminist activism, and the visibility she occupies as transnational cultural critic probing, indicting, and adjudicating gender and/or racial degradation in a 21st century American context beset by the festering wounds of past-ills, necessitate literary/critical outputs able, and willing to witness her voice and lens. To say the least, Adichie's defining cultural moments include a 2005 TEDX talk Beyoncé samples for a music album, interviews with numerous news outlets on feminism and LGBTQ issues, and widespread approbation in the aftermath of a contentious interview session with editor in chief of the *American Spectator*,[2] R Emmett Tyrrell, that addresses racism and the American presidency. Also, for some critics, Adichie's prolific literary outputs, expanding scholarship, and transnational feminist stance recall and memorialize literary predecessors like Chinua Achebe,

[2] See Sian Cane, "Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie slams BBC 'ambush' with Trump supporter." *The Guardian* (https://www.theguardian.com/books/2016/nov/28/chimamanda-ngozi-adichie-slams-bbc-ambush-with-trump-supporter-newsnight

Buchi Emecheta, Flora Nwapa, and for some, Toni Morrison[3]. Critic Suzan Andre, for instance, has this to say:

> Adichie's relation to her male predecessor, Chinua Achebe, is notable in several respects: she continues his practice of writing as an Igbo and a Nigerian, while maintaining thematic lines of conversation with the United States. ***She may be the first Nigerian author since Achebe to have comparable international fame at a very young age*** [my emphasis]. Purple Hibiscus, Adichie's first novel, pays homage to Achebe in its very first sentence: "Things started to fall apart at home when my brother, Jaja, did not go to communion and Papa flung his heavy missal across the room and broke the figurines on the étagère" (3). That the novel's title takes up only the first of the two clauses in that sentence, that the story Adichie tells is not limited by the reference to her predecessor-author, should alert us to the fact that she will take things in new and interesting directions. (92)

To be sure, when Andrade promises Adichie "will take things in new and interesting directions," she means Adichie's distinctive shift away from female literary forebears who represented "national imaginary" through familial structures (92). I will add that Adichie, with specific reference to *Americanah*, but also her public activism, has come to embody an Afropolitan space and intellectual tradition interested in defining and re-defining autonomous voice and place in America. It is therefore tenable to imagine Adichie's work populating the roots of an Afropolitan feminist literary canon. My point is that in choosing to cede primary and so significant textual space for Adichie's Afropolitan text, I advance scholarship that witness and memorialize

[3] See Westerhof, M.H.N. "AFROPOLITANISM: AN UNDERSTANDING OF COSMOPOLITANISM? Comparing Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie and Toni Morrison" (2016). Undergraduate Thesis Submitted to Utrecht University, Faculty of Humanities. https://dspace.library.uu.nl/handle/1874/345122

Adichie's present and anticipated Afropolitan tour-de-force as an author, scholar, and feminist mobilizing the terms and norms of an emergent Afropolitan discipline. By force of faith, I hope that scholarly responses to Adichie's seminal Afropolitan fiction begin the work of proposing an Afropolitan literary canon that recognizes Adichie's present, but also anticipated literary contribution and voice.

I should reiterate that like other creative writers "whose work" we "discuss [and] almost indiscriminately...market as Afropolitan" (Knudsen and Rahbek 4), Adichie has not, and does not claim to be Afropolitan. In fact, in response to a question on whether she identifies as Afropolitan, Adichie has this to say:

> 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 Bosch Santana 121-22)

As Knudsen and Rahbek acknowledge, most writers named in the literature on Afropolitanism as Afropolitan writers "are far less confident that [an Afropolitan] label captures their identities as storytellers and chroniclers of African lives" (4). However, if Knudsen and Rahbek also reveal that these writers admit to creating Afropolitan characters in the way their transnational characters occupy "privilege in terms of mobility and opportunity," there is no gainsaying the work to probe, delineate, and witness Afropolitan spaces anchored to America's racialized and

gendered topography does not, and should not terminate (4). In other words, authors' legitimate discomfort with "labels" should not invalidate associated critical or scholarly efforts. To be sure, authors chronicle distinct and complex lives. They witness "multidimensional" human experiences (Selasi). In fact, the decision they make to accept or reject labels that discriminate and define their craft is legitimately dependent on implications for the lives and stories they witness, their sense of artistic autonomy. Except author discomfort with labels should not mean critical apathy or unwillingness to distinguish and name literary contexts, voices, forms, and tropes that identify and witness the histories and aspirations of besieged peoples, for example. As Knudsen and Rahbek argue, "We . . . are literary scholars and teachers, whose job it is to look for recurring ideas, motifs, tropes, or styles across … creative works" (4); we are tasked with naming literary traditions authors participate in. Ergo, my commitment to delineating an Afropolitan feminism faithful to the context and time Adichie provides as backdrop for her protagonist's feminist stance— which is, an Afropolitan feminism tethered to the politics and habits of being a "Non-American" Black woman in a post-slavery, post-twentieth century suffragist yet racialized and gendered American context.

Critical Lens or Approach

Considering this project accounts for and makes the case for an Afropolitan feminist stance or ideology, I benefit from the various conceptual or theoretical framing of Afropolitanism, or the Afropolitan. However, I employ Selasi's theory of the Afropolitan as framework for my discussion and analysis, and so make the case Selasi's conception of the term better frames and/or characterizes *Americanah*'s Afropolitan narratives and character protagonists. In other words, beyond her vivid portraiture of the "Too-Cool-For-School"

Afropolitan who exudes bourgeois savoir-faire, intellectual gravitas, and attendant privilege, Selasi's conception of Afropolitan consciousness, which argues Afropolitans' strategic ability to discriminate and engage avenues for agency in the Eurocentric contexts they call home, frames the perspective I bring to Adichie's Afropolitan story-world. I should reiterate that my conclusions or consequent claims expand Selasi's theory of the Afropolitan in the way they argue opportunities for probing it gendered implications and resonances.

Also, considering academic modes of inquiry or theories generate from, respond to, deconstruct, and reconstruct precursors, I recognize Afropolitanism as theory, as a mode of inquiry advances and/or deconstructs other theoretical lenses trained on Africa and its diaspora. In other words, and to this end, I invoke Postcolonial feminist theory and literature as proffered by critics Deniz Kandiyoti, and Chandra Mohanty, and by authors Buchi Emecheta and Tsitsi Dangarembga to **1)** highlight the Afropolitan author, but also literary figure's distinctive and/or putative claim to Africa, **2) to** define the angst and aspirations of a postcolonial African context disillusioned by dictatorships dressed as functioning democracies and so forced to account for its global Africans, its westernized populace, and **3) to** distinguish relative influence for the Afropolitan feminist writer whose transnational work, unmoored from 20th century postcolonial feminist literature and its gendered limits, for example, signals unfettered literary and political agency.

I am also grateful to leading intersectional and Black feminist scholar, Patricia Collins, for launching keen insights on an intersectional feminism or feminist stance that privileges attention to the multiple oppressions women of color battle as they navigate an intersecting femaleness, Blackness, and class difference, and to Critical Race Theorists Trina Grillo, Stephanie M. Wildman, and Angela Harris for probing and theorizing the implications of

"analogizing racism to sexism." To be specific, the foregoing feminist scholars inform claims I make about an Afropolitan feminist stance aware it battles racialized and gendered denigration aggravated by xenophobic hostilities, and so takes for its ethos, an intersectional feminist posture that refuses promises of a "global sisterhood" despite and beyond the constraints of race and national origin.

Chapter Overview

In the following chapters, I argue *Americanah* proffers an Afropolitan feminism that takes for its primary obligation unyielding interest in promoting an autonomous and empowered African femaleness. In chapter 2, I make the case *Americanah's* gendered narratives proffer moments and tropes that delineate counter-hegemonic, sometimes counter-normative strategies able to constitute or define the culture, discourse, and praxis of Afropolitan feminism. I argue, for instance, that *Americanah* delineates or proposes critical consciousness crucial to the politics and habits of claiming voice and place in America. I also elucidate important ways *Americanah* proffers African sisterhoods, strategic alliances with both black and white Americans, and the trope of the African returnee to distinguish Afropolitan feminist agency.

Chapter 3, the concluding chapter, reiterates the significance of this project. I include important pointers to an Afropolitan feminist theory tethered to the discourse and praxis of intersectional feminism. I also re-litigate claims Afropolitanism as cultural space and/or group identity serves to distinguish and pacify Africa's 21st century global bourgeois who glamorize African modernity. Although I acknowledge the merits of these criticisms, I insist that Afropolitan feminism, at least as delineated in Adichie's *Americanah,* admits class inequities or refuses to argue distinguishing superiority for the Afropolitan woman, or feminist. I also provide

suggestions for further inquiry or critical analysis. The adjoining afterword is a creative non-fiction text that borrows Touré's conception of "Post-Blackness" to witness and argue an Afropolitan culture and space that inhabits a concomitant "post-Blackness," a celebratory post-Blackness unfortunately belied by the tragedy of occupying Non-American difference.

CHAPTER 2:

TOWARDS AN AFROPOLITAN FEMINISM : RE-READING AMERICANAH

Introduction: The Afropolitan Feminist Tenor of Adichie's Transgender Comments

> When people talk about, you know, 'Are trans women, women?' my feeling is that trans women are trans women. And I think if you've lived in the world as a man, with the privileges the world accords to men, and then change, sort of switch gender, I don't think it's a good thing to conflate everything into one, I don't think it is a good thing to talk about women's issues being exactly the same as the issues of transwomen…. (Adichie, 2017)

In response to a question on whether it matters how a transwoman arrives at being a woman, Adichie, renowned Nigerian-American author and avowed feminist in a March 10 interview with Britain's *Channel 4 News* cautions against equating or conflating the experiences of a transwoman who "switches gender" with that of a woman "who has lived from the beginning in the world as a woman," adding for good measure that "gender is not biology, gender is sociology." In her much-celebrated status as an award-winning author and an unapologetic cultural critic with a feminist lens that marshals public interest in gender equity—as when her acclaimed TEDX talk on "Why We Should All Be Feminists" is "sampled" for a Beyoncé music album that addresses Black womanhood[4]—Adichie's voice on feminism as

[4] Beyoncé's 2013 music album "Flawless" features Adichie's TEDX presentation on feminism and feminist activism. In a 2016 published interview with Adichie, *TheFader* reports Adichie "was shocked at the response from the press regarding her involvement, particularly by the number of interview requests she received about the video." Adichie commends Beyoncé for promoting female self-empowerment but adds that Beyoncé's "type of feminism is not" hers because "it is the kind that, at the same time, gives quite a lot of space to the necessity of men." Adichie says: "I think men are lovely, but I don't think that women

experienced by and advocated for minority women assumes the kind of discursive currency able to inform public consciousness. Really, in a contemporary political climate decrying legislative action/inaction on equitable bathroom access for transgender people, Adichie's insistence we are getting "to a world where we no longer have to be labelled feminists because the world will be gender equal," characterizes and argues persistent counter-action against gender repression. Except, for some critics, Adichie's insistence "transgender women are not women because they have lived with the privileges the world accords to men" contests transwomen's claim to womanhood and attendant opportunities for access. Critics also argue Adichie dismisses the public ridicule, discrimination, and attendant psycho-social distress transgender women endure both prior to and after a gender affirming transition. In this introductory section, I assert that Adichie's response to the controversy her comments generate reveals an Afropolitan feminist posture decidedly trained on rejecting western or American mediated paternalism. In fact, and as I argue later in this chapter, Adichie's critically acclaimed African migrant fiction, *Americanah*, theorizes Afropolitan feminism. I therefore conclude that the work to delineate or name Adichie's feminist posture, her public activism, should begin with *Americanah;* in my view, *Americanah's* Afropolitan feminism actually anticipates or provides blueprints for naming Adichie's (public) feminist activism.

To begin with, in a *Vox Magazine* article that makes the case for how "Adichie's comments, and the backlash they inspired, fit into a very old fight in feminism," Emily Crockett, in part, compares Adichie's remarks on feminism and transgender women to those of a "relatively small" and intractable "trans-exclusionary radical feminists, or TERFS" who not

should relate everything they do to men: did he hurt me, do I forgive him, did he put a ring on my finger? We women are so conditioned to relate everything to men." See: http://www.thefader.com/2016/10/07/chimamanda-ngozi-adichie-beyoncs-feminism-comment

only “push harmful myths about trans women preying on ‘real’ women in bathrooms and other gender- segregated spaces,” but “have been known to maliciously ‘out’ trans women to families and employers.” Crockett intimates that Adichie’s suggestion transgender women accrue advantages in consonance with their biological maleness pre-transition, wittingly consigns transwomen the kind of hegemonic power able to excuse or legitimize their exclusions from spaces otherwise allotted for gender equality. Adichie, Crockett suggests, courts the intransigent posture TERFs assume in their efforts at maligning transwomen. Adichie, in other words, characterizes transwomen’s claims to gender-specific resources as predatory. To verify continuing public denunciation after Adichie publicizes rejoinders to clarify her controversial suggestion that “transwomen are not women,” Crockett mentions Victoria Rodriguez-Roldan, Project Director for Trans/Gender Nonconforming Justice at the National LGBTQ Task Force who argues that Adichie’s “mistake,” her attempt “to silo out trans women…sends the message” that “it’s okay not to think about trans women, they are not the same as us.” Rodriguez-Roldan adds that while Adichie is “very much correct” to call “gender a social construct in her apology,” while it is inarguable gender informs “how people are treated in society,” Adichie’s comments dismiss “the way society treats trans people specifically” (qtd. in Crockett). On her part, Susan Stryker, professor of gender and women’s issues at the University of Arizona, argues that while it is “quite accurate and understandable” for people who have been “wounded by gendering” to insist as Adichie does that unaffected groups cannot make claims to or identify with those “wounds,” the “problem with that argument is when it gets used to challenge trans people's access to gendered public space” (qtd. in Crockett). For Rodriguez-Roldan and Stryker, Adichie’s suggestion that transgender women are not primarily women, in other words, indulges the hegemonic exclusions she works to address as an avowed feminist.

On the other hand, when Rodriguez-Roldan concedes Adichie was “very much correct” to call “gender a social construct in her apology” (qtd. in Crockett), she recalls Adichie’s feminist renown and posture, her socio-political stance against longstanding transnational but also culture-specific gendered norms that normalize the social victimization/exclusion of women. In fact, the apology Rodriguez-Roldan mentions is Adichie’s well-intentioned non-apology, what Adichie will rather consider ‘clarification’ aimed at quelling attendant controversy and charges of transphobia. In that lengthy March 2017 Facebook clarification, Adichie says,

> Because I have been the subject of much hostility for standing up for LGBTQ rights in Nigeria, I found myself being very defensive at being labeled 'trans phobic.'. . . It felt like a white person saying 'I'm not racist, I supported civil rights.' Because the truth is that I do think one can be trans phobic while generally supporting LGBTQ rights. . . . . I said, in an interview, that trans women are trans women, that they are people who, having been born male, benefited from the privileges that the world affords men, and that we should not say that the experience of women born female is the same as the experience of trans women. This upset many people, and I consider their concerns valid. I realize that I occupy this strange position of being a ‘voice’ for gender rights and so there is an automatic import to my words. I think the impulse to say that trans women are women just like women born female are women comes from a need to make trans issues mainstream. . . . But. . . . Diversity does not have to mean division. . . . Because we run the risk of reducing gender to a single, essentialist thing. Perhaps I should have said trans women are trans women and cis women are cis women and all are women. Except that 'cis' is not an organic part of my vocabulary. And would probably not be understood by a majority of people. Because saying ‘trans’ and ‘cis’ acknowledges that there is a

> distinction between women born female and women who transition, without elevating one or the other, which was my point. (Adichie)

As the opening statements of her Facebook clarification indicates, Adichie recognizes ardent activism on behalf of transgender groups does not erase relative advantage for privileged allies. As she puts it, "one can be transphobic, and still support transgender rights." Adichie consequently proceeds with an unequivocal acknowledgement of the criticisms and concerns that indict, at the least, the transphobic tenor of her controversial comments. If Adichie occupies an informed feminist consciousness that readily anticipates the inadvertent ramifications of circumscribing gender and gendered access, the argument can be made that that awareness she brings ameliorates any suggestions of transphobia. It also validates confidence in the "strange position" she occupies as a "voice for gender rights." Suffice it to say then that when Adichie insists her argument that "trans women are not women" should not suggest transphobia because she intends to escape "the risk of reducing gender to a single, essentialist thing," she swears interest in the tangible, entwining, but also distinct socio-cultural conditions characterizing the lived realities of women. She assumes a gendered posture that recalls those of an Afropolitan feminist willing agency and voice for all women without imagining a monolithic.

In fact, Adichie reiterates what some foremost and/or contemporary feminist scholars concur should inform literature on, and the politics of adjudicating gender and gendered oppression. In "Obscuring the Importance of Race: The Implications of Making Comparisons Between Racism and Sexism (Or Other -Isms)," Trina Grillo, and Stephanie M. Wildman, for example, and specifically, detail the implications of "analogizing sexism to racism" by reifying the consequent "dangers" of comparing Black women's experiences to those of white women (409-10). Although Grillo and Wildman acknowledge that "comparing oppressions" suggest

opportunities for "empathy" and "understanding," they make it evident the act of "comparing oppressions," in this instance, "analogizing racial discrimination to sex discrimination" exacerbates racial oppression by obfuscating and minimizing how people of color and whites experience race (409-10). Grillo and Wildman, in other words, verify what Adichie maintains should be consequential interest in problematizing essentialist convictions on and about an immutable and collective female struggle against sex-based discrimination. They validate Adichie's claim conflating women's experiences disadvantages historically--marginalized groups in the way it assumes monolithic female struggle against sex-based denigration. To be sure, gendered platforms that mobilize *all* women against sex-based discrimination guarantee targeted outcomes insofar as relatively privileged, and so visible female partners bring agency and voice. Except, for Adichie, but also Grillo and Wildman, the work privileged women do to advance gender equality should not suppose voicelessness or diminished presence for minority women. I do not intend to offer an apologia for controversial statements Adichie herself concedes suggest support for transphobic exclusions that deny transwomen access to gender-specific privileges. After all, and as Adichie's critics concede, the argument that transwomen enjoy past privilege as men, and so cannot identify as or with women, suggests transwomen's participation in gendered spaces portends unfair relative advantage over cis women. However, if Angela P. Harris, Black feminist scholar and critic, also warns against representations that assume all women struggle against an indistinguishable sexism (348), it is tenable to argue Adichie's widely panned position that "trans women are not women," accounting for her subsequent clarification, better characterizes prevailing scholarly/critical interest in indicting essentialist conceptions of femininity. In other words, Adichie, accounting for the clarification she offers, is no less interested in advocating transgender justice than her critics.

In a revealing March 21st interview with *The Guardian*'s David Smith, Adichie actually explains she does not use the jargon "cis-gender" to properly distinguish difference from transgender women because it's "not part of [her] vocabulary," adding that the pressure to "participate" in particular language orthodoxies obliges "the less pleasant aspects of the American left." Maintaining she has "nothing to apologize for," Adichie says,

> I didn't apologise [sic] because I don't think I have anything to apologise [sic] for…. What's interesting to me is this is in many ways about language and I think it also illustrates the less pleasant aspects of the American left, that there sometimes is a kind of language orthodoxy that you're supposed to participate in, and when you don't there's a kind of backlash that gets very personal and very hostile and very closed to debate. Had I said, 'a cis woman is a cis woman, and a trans woman is a trans woman,' I don't think I would get all the crap that I'm getting, but that's actually really what I was saying. But because 'cis' is not a part of my vocabulary – it just isn't – it really becomes about language and the reason I find that troubling is [the insistence] that you have to speak in a certain way and use certain expressions. . . . if we can't have conversations, we can't have progress." (qtd. in David Smith)

To be sure, it is curious Adichie passes the chance to affirm in no uncertain certain terms that "a cis woman is a cis woman, and a trans woman is a trans woman"— gendered language able to anticipate and so dispel charges she sought to deny transwomen the right to identify as "women." What is more, as an accomplished feminist scholar and renowned cultural critic who contributes to, and gains from feminist discourses and the terms that adjudicate gender equality in America, Adichie is no less complicit in the "language oligarchy" she indicts. However, to the extent that Adichie is an identifying Nigerian/Black African immigrant in America (also, accounting for her

reference to a "vocabulary" not shared by the American Left), it follows that she recognizes difference and disadvantage relative to the historical and systemic privilege her white and/or American feminist peers benefit from, or bring to the politics and language of female mobility.

Ultimately, and to my specific point, by invoking what constitutes her "vocabulary," which by summation refers to and accounts for an African female community thrice removed from the axioms of patriarchal power in America, Adichie, in my view, gestures towards an Afropolitan feminism unwilling to cede voice and terms of engagement to "unpleasant aspects of the American Left." To put this another way, I conclude that Adichie's insistence on a self-identifying and so Non-American/African feminist voice, her refusal to oblige an "American language oligarchy," in my view, models the tenor and character of an Afropolitan feminist stance. As I indicate in chapter 1, the literature on contemporary African intellectual thought in defining Afropolitanism or the concept of the Afropolitan does not distinguish Afropolitan feminism. What it does is, in part, identify 21st century African professionals or intellectuals living and working in the "West" as Afropolitans, as global Africans with multicultural ethos, values, and identities, and who, to invoke Mbembe, "do not accept any form of victim identity" (27-29). In fact, Selasi notably offers that "21st century Africans" or Afropolitans "must form an identity along at least three dimensions: national, racial, cultural – with subtle tensions in between" ---- 'tensions' that imbricate to define and so underlie the state of being Afropolitan. Except, Afropolitans, in her view, can also navigate and make decided claims to a "sense of self." Selasi in identifying as an Afropolitan, explains,

> Often unconsciously, and over time, we [Afropolitans] choose which bits of a national identity (from passport to pronunciation) we internalize as central to our personalities. So, too, the way we see our race – whether Black or biracial or none of the above – is a

> question of politics, rather than pigment; not all of us claim to be Black . . . . [h]ow we conceive of race will accord with where we locate ourselves in the history that produced 'Blackness' and the political processes that continue to shape it. If nothing else, the Afropolitan knows that nothing is neatly Black or white; that to 'be' anything is a matter of being sure of who you are uniquely. . . . The acceptance of complexity common to most African cultures is not lost on her prodigals. Without that intrinsically multi-dimensional thinking, we could not make sense of ourselves. And if it all sounds a little self-congratulatory, a little 'aren't-we-the coolest-damn-people-on-earth? I say: yes, it is, necessarily. It is high time the African stood up. There is nothing perfect in this formulation; professionals are returning [to Africa]; and there is consciousness among the ones who remain….

For Selasi then, the quintessential Afropolitan, in part, admits to performing racial, cultural, and national politics dictated by, and in response to interplay of situated affinities either obligated by the chance of birth/descent, or often necessitated by otherwise disabling socio-political conditions. When Selasi argues that the decision to identify as Black, biracial, or even to reject racialized affinity is a "question of politics rather than pigment," she defines an Afropolitan sensibility trained on advantage. Selasi defines an Afropolitan sensibility trained on the politics or intricacies of navigating essential connections to distinct realities, what she refers to as "the Afropolitan privilege." In fact, the Afropolitan sensibility works against the tides of a Euro-American context that flourishes on an essential/mono-cultural white/western privilege. As Selasi intimates, for the Afropolitan to claim and reclaim a counter/hegemonic "sense of self" without the fortune of an essential/singularly privileged identity, it needs competitive advantage, or the advantage of "multi-dimensional thinking." The kind of "multi-dimensional thinking" that

thrives on the idea that "nothing is neatly Black or white," or "to 'be' anything is a matter of being sure of who you are uniquely." Afropolitanism, or the state of being Afropolitan is therefore intrinsic critical awareness that follows from, but also thrives on the African's unique ability to accept and negotiate the "complex" vagaries of race, nation and culture. To put this another way, Afropolitanism is the consequent self-knowledge African migrants bring to the unidimensional experience of being merely American, for example. The idea that in an American context historically sanctioned to privilege whiteness or elevate an American-specific cultural exceptionalism, the "21st century African" who navigates a "complex" confluence of national, racial, and/or cultural affinities has the advantage of "multi-dimensional thinking," or understands that negotiating voice and place in America should not suppose self-negation.

It's no surprise that Adichie, a feminist, an American public intellectual also navigating the "cultural abyss" of being Nigerian, a Black woman, and a woman in America, resists the pressure to oblige "unpleasant" elements of the American Left interested in sanctioning language and voice. Adichie's refusal to yield voice and agency, her insistence on a distinct feminist "vocabulary" even as she negotiates and owns place in America's public consciousness embodies the kind of "multi-dimensional thinking" Selasi argues defines Afropolitans. In other words, Adichie knows that "nothing is uniquely black or white," and "to be anything is to be uniquely sure of who you are" (Selasi). To put this succinctly, and to reiterate my crucial point, Adichie— accounting for Selasi's conception of the Afropolitan— is, therefore, an Afropolitan feminist. Really, to the extent Adichie suggests she occupies a different voice or "vocabulary" as a Nigerian or African intellectual, what she sees and works to resist is a crisis of diminishing socio-political returns for marginalized women in America who must also negotiate or work against a historically marginalized Africanness and Blackness. In fact, I argue that the

Afropolitan feminist stance Adichie proffers, which is, her insistence on circumscribing autonomous lens and voice in behalf of an intersecting and subjugated femaleness, Africanness, and Blackness in America, recalls the Afropolitan feminism she, in my view, delineates in her oft-celebrated African migrant novel, *Americanah*. In the next section of this chapter, I make the case *Americanah*, broadly speaking, uses its African female protagonist and/or narrative moments to theorize an Afropolitan feminism. Accounting for what I assert *Americanah* offers as Afropolitan feminism, I conclude in the last section of this chapter that the work to identify or delineate Adichie's feminist scholarship and activism actually begins with *Americanah.*

Americanah's Afropolitan Story-World and Female Protagonist

Adichie's *Americanah*, some critics concur, contributes to an emerging body of African migrant fiction, an Afropolitan literature that, in part, introduces and territorializes African cultural, intellectual, and even political renaissance in consonance with the work and activism of Africans domiciled in North America or Europe. The "Afropolitans" populating the narrative worlds of these migrant texts also, and in part, signify visibility and counter-power for an Africanness and/or African Blackness immobilized by slavery, colonialism, and consequent western-mediated narratives of moral abjection and barbarity. Critics Knudsen and Rahbek designate Adichie's *Americanah*, Afropolitan literature, and offer that Afropolitanism can be understood, in part, "as a reaction to the miniaturization of people from the African continent as they appear in Eurocentric discourses" (37). Critic Miriam Pahl also designates Adichie's text, Afropolitan. She, however, and more specifically contends that Adichie is "a globally positioned author" who occupies "enhanced position" in America "in terms of mobility and resources (74). In their respective essays on *Americanah*, Christopher T. Fan and Katherine Hallemeier do not

characterize the novel and its story-world as Afropolitan. However, Fan's insistence *Americanah* weaves "resemblances between Asian Americans and Africans that is ultimately a resemblance with capital" (86), and Hallemeier's claim the novel "envisions a global capitalist system in which race does not exhaustively and exhaustingly delimit the affective bonds that enable financial success" (243) recall prevailing critical interest in Adichie's Afropolitan female protagonist and her socio-economic agency.

The foregoing critical commentary argue the novel's interest in an African Blackness, an Afropolitaness positioned to engage global power, and so better able to accost western-discourses disproportionately trained on Africa's woes. Except, in characterizing Adichie's *Americanah* and/or its characters as Afropolitan, critics do not address or consider ways *Americanah* theorizes or begins to theorize an Afropolitan feminism. To fill this crucial gap in the scholarship, I argue that the novel's gendered story-world, which accounts for the experiences and attendant aspirations of an African female migrant in America, delineates counter-hegemonic, sometimes counter-normative[5] strategies able to characterize the practice and discourse of an Afropolitan feminism. More specifically, I assert that *Americanah* proffers an Afropolitan feminist stance **1)** decidedly committed to protesting gender inequities tethered to the experience of being a Non-American Black woman, **2)** invested in an Afropolitan *way of knowing*, a kind of critical consciousness trained on the politics of negotiating America's racialized topography, **3)** moored to an African sisterhood, or transnational female kinships

[5]Hegemony describes "the cohesion of … social systems" in the way it "secures the reproduction of the mode of production and other basic structural processes." See: Joseph, J. *Hegemony: A Realist Analysis.* London: Routledge, 2002. Hegemony also references "preponderance influence or authority over others." See "Hegemony." Merriam-Webster.com, *Merriam-Webster*. www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/hegemony.

I employ the term counter-hegemonic to argue constitutive or disparate ways historically oppressed or so-called minority groups excluded from, or unaccounted for in social systems that cohere to form power structures proffer alternative but proportional action and reaction. By counter-normative, I mean actions and reactions that work to destabilize longstanding but exclusionary rules of engagement; those that allow marginalized groups opportunities for resistance and agency outside constraining norms.

precipitated by the experience and trauma of negotiating Non-American and/or Black femininity in America, **4)** committed to forswearing, in no uncertain terms, white American paternalism and resultant presumptions of Black and/or African ineptitude, **5)** interested in what I call *transactional Pan-Africanism, or* race activism that assures augmented action against racialized degradation yet allows dissent in the instance of Black male subjugation, or intraracial repression, and **(6)** ultimately tethered to *Sankofa* ideation----or the idea that the émigrés' return to an African home, in terms of its symbolism, forswears the need for an intervening white and/or American agency in the way that *act of return* elevates an agreeable and habitable Africa otherwise pilloried in western (mis)representations of a benighted Africa. To put this simply, I make the case *Americanah's* Afropolitan feminism is transnational [6] African female agency trained on the habits of *speaking and speaking back*, of negotiating and/or resisting gendered constraints tethered to the state and condition of being Non-American and Black, of inhabiting African femaleness in America.

To begin with, Adichie's *Americanah* is recognizably Afropolitan in the way it cedes narrative space to the socio-cultural capital and economic mobility its college-educated, middle to upper-class African female protagonist, Ifemelu, accrues from, but also brings to the experience and politics of owning place and voice in America. Accounting for what, in part, distinguishes "Afropolitan privilege" (Selasi), Ifemelu, for all intent and purposes, is Adichie's quintessential Afropolitan. She leaves Nigeria for America on a partial college scholarship that promises opportunities for higher-education otherwise inaccessible in beleaguered Nigerian

[6] In its general scholarly/critical deployment, transnationalism describes systems, interactions, relationships formed beyond and across borders or nation-states; in the context of this project, transnationalism references the experiences, aspirations, and even ideologies or habits of Black Africans variously connected to distinct nation-states in Africa, and who form and sustain new communities across and beyond Africa's borders. I use '"transnational African" to describe the African domiciled outside or beyond the borders of an identified African nation. As other critics do, I sometimes use the terms Afropolitan or transnational interchangeably, and when necessary to distinguish the former as a subset of the latter, so to speak. In other words, Afropolitans are transnationals for whom "Home is many places" (Selasi, 2005).

universities battling continuing faculty strikes. As the novel adroitly offers, Ifemelu's migration to the United States promises launch pads to socio-economic mobility and a coveted American savoir-faire as she "will have any kind of dress [she] wants in America," and so become a "serious Americanah" (100). In fact, Ifemelu's mother in a theater of anticipation, attributes Ifemelu's prospective American privilege and consequent prosperity to divine intervention (100). Her father, in a gesture that suggests migration to America portends outcomes comparable to yielding returns on invested capital, presses a "slender envelope in [Ifemelu's] hand," one that she suspects contains "borrowed" money (100). Perhaps, cognizant of the culture of expectancy or tangible hope prospective Afropolitans buoy up and so are (arguably) compelled to fulfill for and in behalf of family members back home (in Africa), Ifemelu admits she "HUNGERED to understand everything about America" (135). She reflects on how she "HUNGERED. . . to wear a new, knowing skin right away; to support a team at the Super Bowl, understand what a Twinkie was and what sport 'lockouts' meant, measure in ounces and square feet, order a 'muffin' without thinking that it was really a cake, and say "I 'scored' a deal" without feeling silly" (135). In fact, in her attempts at "wearing a new knowing Skin," Ifemelu confirms she invests in classroom discussions informed by the constitutive voices of whites, African Americans, Africans and/or designated international students debating what ways and otherwise America's vacillating representation of racist tropes in media texts "hurt... African-Americans" (137-38). Ultimately, Ifemelu's coming-of-age in America as an Afropolitan woman with a voice, that is, her American-mediated transcultural adroitness "takes on meaning" because it promises and/or sanctions claims to a legitimate belonging in America.

Ifemelu's transatlantic trek to America as a prospective, and later, expectant American college student, to put this another way, comes with an aspirational platform able to guarantee

the ascent to archetypal Afropolitan. In fact, Ifemelu becomes aware of the "mythologies" and "tribalisms" (136) distinguishing America. She acquires socio-cultural consciousness and relational advantage in terms of the politics and dynamics of becoming American, and so she becomes a race blogger. As a famous "race blogger," Ifemelu's informed "observations" on, to quote critic Caroline Levine, America's "strange and artificial" ways of "responding to race" (594), garners avid interest and support from American-based readers. Ifemelu's readers and followers become market capital for the blog's commercial value, and her much coveted voice on race issues. Companies, for example, invite her to give a talk on diversity (304-06). Ifemelu's avid followers and readers, I contend, embody the cultural license she brings to her reflections on race— polemical "observations" I argue, also suggest her latent interest in correcting the racialized miseducation of African émigrés relative to her Afropolitan ways of knowing. In a blog post on race and intra-racial color prejudice, for example, Ifemelu, with palpable bemusement, indicts the misguided lens "Non-American Blacks" bring to distinguishing race difference from "American Blacks" or African Americans. She writes,

> Dear Non-American Black, when you make the choice to come to America, you become Black. Stop saying I'm Jamaican or I'm Ghanaian. America doesn't care…. We all have our moments of initiation into the former society of Negroes…You must show that you are offended when such words as 'water melon" and '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. . . . (221)

To be sure, and as Levine argues, Ifemelu's reflections on America's racialized "habits" generally point to her "unwillingness to accept habitual falsehoods---the routines of hypocrisy and posturing that organize social relations" in America (593). In other words, for Levine,

Ifemelu's blog posts characterize her intransigent posture on America's "tribalisms," her refusal to oblige racialized archetypes fueled by prevailing misperceptions about racial difference. I will add that Ifemelu's mock contempt for Africans unwilling to acknowledge their inescapable "moments of initiation into the "former society of Negroes" (221) signals interest in adjudicating racial trauma for, and on behalf of Black African migrants. When Ifemelu acknowledges but refuses to offer a caveat able to excuse "Non-American Blacks" indulging delusions of non-Blackness, it is clear she intends to expose and indict racist systems that compel the African or Black émigré's particular convoluted relationship with Blackness in America---the structural illegitimacy of being Black and Non-American in a racialized America. When she later offers a sarcastic rejoinder that suggests she does not fault Black immigrants unwilling to assume offense in the instance a racist trope is deployed, she suggests immigrants do not share and cannot usurp historical recompense America owes African Americans. Ifemelu indicts boundless racism in America, the kind that in re-traumatizing "Black Americans" makes casualties of "Non-American Blacks." She, in other words, commits to a consciousness-raising that does not apologize for indicting America's "race problem[7]," a consciousness-raising that begins to highlight Adichie's interest in presenting her as the text putative Afropolitan feminist.

To put this another way, if Ifemelu is Adichie's characteristic Afropolitan, it is because she occupies the novel's illustrative attention to the distinctive socio-cultural perceptiveness educated "Non-American Blacks" bring to the politics of mooring historically maligned racial identities or disparate ethnicities to America's national fabric. It is also because Ifemelu occupies narrative space Adichie delineates for valorizing Afropolitan elitism, the kind of Afropolitan

[7] The race problem was associated with the Black middle-class struggle against the derogatory representation of Black bodies in minstrel shows and the problem of racial discrimination in general. See: Gaines, Kevin Kelly. *Uplifting the Race: Black Leadership, Politics, and Culture in the Twentieth Century*. Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 1996. Print.

elitism able to proffer means and resources (cue: race blogger) for interrogating racialized dilemma in America. It is consequently unsurprising Ifemelu's Afropolitan posture, in part, supposes advantage, or privilege relative to disadvantaged-Others; by comparison, working-class African/Black émigrés who do not own, and so cannot vaunt the palpable wit or consciousness Ifemelu wields as resident "race blogger." In narrative moments that illustrate what critics concur underlines Afropolitanism as elitist posturing intended to circumscribe subjective presence for upper to middle-class Africans in Euro-America, and/or intended to mark distance from working-class African or Black émigrés, Adichie's Ifemelu who becomes resident fellow at the elite Princeton college admits she resents making the journey to Trenton, Princeton's less affluent and ethnically diverse sister-city, to braid her hair (3). She expresses despair there are no braiding salons in Princeton even though she concedes Princeton's predominantly white and/or mostly "light-skinned Black locals" make it "unreasonable to expect a braiding salon" (3). In fact, to distinguish what Princeton's superior polis brings to Ifemelu's choice for conveniently located braiding salon, *Americanah* offers what tinctures Princeton's appeal:

> Princeton in the summer, smelled of nothing, and although Ifemelu liked the tranquil greenness of the many trees, the clean trees, and stately homes, the delicately overpriced shops, and the quiet abiding air of earned grace, it was this, the lack of a smell, that most appealed to her, perhaps because the other American cities she knew well had all smelled distinctly. Philadelphia had the musty scent of history…. Baltimore smelled of brine, and Brooklyn of sun-warmed garbage. But Princeton had no smell. She liked taking deep breaths here. She liked watching the locals who drove with pointed courtesy and parked their latest model cars outside the organic grocery store on Nassau Street or outside the Sushi restaurants…. She liked the campus, grave with knowledge…. She liked most of

all, that in this place of affluent ease, she could pretend to be someone else, someone specially admitted into a hallowed American club, someone adorned with certainty. (3)

If Ifemelu likes Princeton's "affluent ease," its "clean trees, stately homes, and … delicately overpriced stores," if she likes "taking deep breaths" in Princeton because its "lack of smell," compared to Baltimore's "brine" or Brooklyn's "sun-warmed garbage" better appeals to her (3), it is possible to make the case Ifemelu privileges place and ownership in America's storied and elite cityscape. Ifemelu's insistence on finding African hair braiding salons in Princeton indicates preoccupation with owning legitimate stake in Princeton's "hallowed American club" (3). In her "Non-American" Blackness, Ifemelu's hair, an important signification for Black or African femininity in the novel, verifies the distinctive presence she brings to the throng of whiteness she encounters in Princeton. In fact, in her conversation with authors Knudsen and Rahbek, Emma Dabiri, an Irish-Nigerian scholar, sociologist, and feminist, explains that "Hair, in Africa, had a great significance extending beyond beauty. In terms of Spirituality in Yoruba culture, for instance, hairstyles would be as high as possible because the higher they were, the stronger the connection to the ancestral spirits" (172). Dabiri adds that "hair is political" because "more African women are deprogramming themselves from thinking that Black hair is not beautiful on account of the increasing politicization, but also the celebration of Black hair" (qtd. in Knudsen and Rahbek 172). Suffice it to say then that, for Ifemelu, the chance to access braiding salons in Princeton, and not Trenton's, implies corresponding legitimate stake in the former's privileged topography, its savory elitism.

What is more, as resident scholar affiliated to Princeton's campus, its bastion of "grave knowledge" (3) and so able to distinguish the city's "lack of smell" from Baltimore's "brine," Ifemelu upends the politics of racialized exclusion. She deserves and earns space within the

limits whiteness ascribes for itself. It is this self-assuredness, this belief in the "certainty" her tenure as Princeton scholar confers— even as she deftly admits what pretensions undergird this "certainty" (3)— that, in part, illustrates but also characterizes Ifemelu's ***Afropolitan sophistication***, the kind that sets her apart from Trenton, "the part of the city that has graffiti, dank buildings," and " no white people" (9). When Ifemelu also invites attention to how the "West African women braiders" who populate Trenton's hair braiding salons have "loud and swift" conversations in "French, or Wolof or Malinke" but speak "English to customers ...as though they had not quite eased into the language itself before taking on a slangy Americanism" (9), when she mockingly recalls an encounter with a Guinean braider whose attempt at American slang renders her words of exasperation, "Oh God, I was so mad," into what Ifemelu finds an incomprehensible "Oh Gad, Az someh" (9), there is no gainsaying the narrative's interest in elevating Ifemelu's comparative Afropolitan sophistication and advantage as Princeton intellectual better positioned to engage, navigate and come into desired consciousness and voice. To be sure, if the African hair braiders Ifemelu appears to mock take on slangy Americanisms sans easing into the English language, it is not because they do not occupy voices or presences that matter. After all, their conversations in Wolof and French are "swift and loud." It is because in the racialized world Adichie weaves, the Anglo-Saxon voices that harness socio-cultural and/or class mobility exclude those that in seeking inclusion produce irreconcilable "slangy Americanisms" tainted by an otherness that signify inability to "ease" into the English Language (3). It is because in the consequent Afropolitan world Adichie weaves, Ifemelu's intellectual gravitas and attendant ability to inhabit the limits American English proficiency defines, constitutes necessary counter-strategy able to prod open mainstream socio-economic participation and access, for example. My point here is that the polished "certainty" Ifemelu

inhabits in Princeton, admittedly self-adulating (3), imbues socio-cultural capital Adichie's *Americanah* offers as unapologetic Afropolitanism, a sort of critical counter-strategy that accrues from resources and means otherwise inaccessible.

***Americanah*: Afropolitan Feminism as Advocacy for African Female Migrants in America**

The consequent subjective position Ifemelu's Afropolitan capital allows relative to working class African immigrants characterizes her raison d'être , or the novel's interest in using her character to delineate an Afropolitan feminism that signifies, but also ultimately promises opportunities for resolving the convoluted immobilizing reality of being female, Black, and Non-American, of being an African female immigrant in America. Ifemelu, Adichie's Afropolitan character in this narrative begins to assume an emerging feminist consciousness or stance that postures in the interest of comparatively disadvantaged "Non-American Blacks," specifically African female immigrants struggling against the shortfalls of gendered subjugation and/or the politics of sanctioned national exclusion in America. For example, aware Ifemelu has been living in America for fifteen years as permanent resident with the promise of citizenship, aware Ifemelu works for a reputable visa-granting firm, Aisha, "the smallest of the braiders" assigned to braid Ifemelu's hair at the African Hair Braiding Salon in Trenton, entreats Ifemelu to intervene so one of her boyfriends marries her (15-16). Aisha is dating two Nigerian immigrant men in the hopes consequent marriage to one of the men will yield opportunities for permanent residency (14-15). A distressed Aisha says, "I want you see my men. I call them. They come and you see them. First I call Chijioke. He work cab driver. Then Emeka. He work security. You see them…. No, I call them. You tell them Igbo can marry Igbo. They listen to you" (18). In fact, Aisha also insists through suggestion that Ifemelu's intervention could portend crucial possibilities for legal

residency in America (18). Really, it is undeniable Aisha asks Ifemelu's help because she assumes the latter's Igbo ethnicity, class status, and respectable Princeton air presage opportunities for outwitting her working-class African suitors, her Igbo love interests.

To be sure, considering Ifemelu lies about planned marriage to Obinze, her estranged boyfriend in Nigeria in an attempt to defend her intention to leave America for the drudgery Aisha suggests Nigeria supposes (15), considering Aisha later finds Ifemelu's return home reasonable because the latter intends to marry her boyfriend at home, the argument can be made marriage, for both Ifemelu and Aisha, signifies desirable outcomes accounting for ideal expectations. Consequently, more than it does her particular dubious disregard for legitimate marriage and associated desirable outcomes, Aisha's intention to marry one of her Igbo partners for permanent residency in America reveals a desperate helplessness absent government-sanctioned and so legal means of procuring residency. Aisha sacrifices or misses the chance to savor mutual love. She settles for what recalls long-standing but also culturally-specific male-sanctioned conjugal rituals that present women as plaint partners attracted by and often succumbing to what value their male partners confer. It is important to mention that Aisha's desperation surmises indignities both male and female prospective immigrants seeking access to socio-economic power in Euro-America oblige. It is worth noting Ifemelu's boyfriend Obinze, and his childhood friend Emenike, seek to or enter marriages with women who promise legal residency in Britain (246-79). Except for Aisha and other working-class "Non-American" female émigrés unable to afford what guarantees permanent residency, and so compelled to seek contractual marriages, there is a gendered double indignity— a gendered double negation of the self that follows from consequent subjection to both the suppressive dictates of American

immigration enforcement, and to traditional male-privileging conjugal rituals that present women's subordination to male subjectivity as desirable ideal.

However, seeing as Aisha appears the one insisting to the point of compulsion that her less than enthusiastic Igbo partners marry her, it is possible to apprehend opportunities for agency in what otherwise presages helplessness. By asking Ifemelu to help outwit her unyielding boyfriends, Aisha ultimately endeavors to situate autonomy, or at the least, initiate the terms that define her particular contractual marriage otherwise compelled by and beholden to America's immigration precepts. Aisha, to my key point, also elevates Ifemelu to model "Non-American" or African female immigrant whose sanctioned stake in America as citizen, whose associated legitimate lens on the gendered politics of visa-marriages bring needed voice and agency to the exercise of advocating and procuring permanent residency. In the narrative's affecting moment, it is apparent Ifemelu eventually consents to that improbable request because she apprehends the immobilizing agony and near-hopelessness attending Aisha's concerns about her terminally-ill mother in Senegal. Ifemelu considers the exacting reality Aisha might not be able to visit her ailing mother without an American permanent residency to allow for travel (363-64). Really, it is also possible Ifemelu sees Aisha's forceful insistence on marriage proposals from her Igbo boyfriends a necessary autonomous move that accrues Aisha some agency as she struggles against inaccessible rituals of inclusion in America. To be sure, Ifemelu does not ultimately deign to play matchmaker for Aisha. She even admits the inanity of that proposal: "Ifemelu looked at Aisha, a small ordinary-faced woman with patchwork skin who had two Igbo boyfriends, implausible as it seemed, and who was now insistent that Ifemelu should meet them and urge them to marry her. It would have made for a good blog post: 'A Peculiar Case of a Non-American Black, or How Pressures of Immigrant Life Can Make You Act Crazy'" (18).

Even so, Adichie's decision to present an affected and sympathetic Ifemelu who promises to help Aisha, in my view, highlights the feminist ethos she ascribes Ifemelu. Ifemelu, in other words, assumes an Afropolitan posture feminist in its particular sympathies for, but also interest in the African female immigrant grasping at voice and place in the gendered terms of engagement that guarantee American citizenship. Aisha's confidence in Ifemelu mirrors the confidence *Americanah* reposes in Afropolitan feminism— the kind of Afropolitan feminism Ifemelu begins to inhabit as Princeton elite and/or American citizen able to access and advocate agency for and in behalf of non-American women, specifically, Black African women in America.

Postcolonial Feminist Precursors

Actually, the idea that as an Afropolitan, Ifemelu negotiates and so inhabits control in an American context that works to handicap relatively disadvantaged "Non-American" women, the idea that she is able to arrange visa-marriages that yield access and means in America, recalls to some extent, the postcolonial feminist narrative Buchi Emecheta weaves in *The Joys of Motherhood* (1979). In fact, Emecheta's postcolonial feminist narrative anticipates Adichie's Afropolitan feminist posture (in *Americanah)* in the way their African female protagonists, to use postcolonial critic Deniz Kandiyoti's characterization, "bargain with patriarchy" for voice and place in male-privileging gender arrangements (274-78). Really, Nnu Ego's complicitous participation in male-sanctioned traditional norms, and Ifemelu's plausible role as visa-marriage contractor, which is a male-privileging marriage arrangement, illustrate counter-hegemonic ways both authors characterize socio-economic mobility for African women against the backdrop of gender degradation and exclusion. To begin with, Emecheta's novel specifically recounts the experiences of traditional Ibuza daughters, wives, and mothers who assume or enjoy traditional

masculinity as “senior wives” or mothers of sons, and so are implicated in otherwise unequal patriarchal arrangements. In the novel, Nnu Ego’s ability to birth sons in her second marriage situates her as a respected “senior wife” and putative male-head with authority over her husband’s other wives. In fact, as putative male-head and mother of sons, Nnu-Ego is not only able to lay claim to, allocate, or gain greater access to family resources, but has opportunities to, in the event of familial conflict either invoke or earn privileges the masculinity she garners through her position as ‘senior wife’ or ‘mother of sons’ confers. In the period after Nnu Ego’s husband is forced to join the army and shipped off to India, for instance, the narrative makes it evident tradition obligates Nnu Ego, as senior wife, to enact masculinity: Nnu Ego resolves not to “give in to her fears” because as “senior wife,” her culture requires her to be “strong” and to “behave more like a man than a woman’ (140). What is more, as ‘senior wife,” mother of sons, and consequent presumed male-head, Nnu Ego not only assumes control of and allocation of her husband Nnaife’s salary from the war, she earns the support and collegial platitudes of senior Ibuza men. As aforementioned, critic Kandiyoti in “Bargaining with Patriarchy” makes the case for how women in some “third world cultures” by virtue of their status in the hierarchy of familial privileges, for instance, “bargain with patriarchy” or support existing gender inequities for material and social gain. (274-78). Accounting for Kandiyoti’s claim, it is possible to see how Nnu Ego, to be specific, yields coveted gains from complicitous acquiescence in male-mediated arrangements. She approximates, and so gains from male-sanctioned gender inequities.

To be sure, and as I enumerate in preceding paragraphs, Adichie’s Ifemelu does not actively acquiesce in or “arrogate” male-sanctioned traditional gender arrangements that imply intent to “bargain with patriarchy” for material gain. However, considering Emecheta and Adichie both write agency for female characters whose distinctive non-western/non-American

identities otherwise suppose, for some western feminists, helpless acquiescence relative to the "increasingly autonomous, educated, and modern" western woman's ability to reclaim autonomy (Chandra Talpade Mohanty 243-46), the argument can be made that both authors, to quote Kandiyoti, endeavor to offer "a more culturally and temporally grounded understanding" of the politics of being female and non-western (274-78). To put this another way, by distinguishing Nnu-Ego's resolve to "behave more like a man than a woman" (140), and by distinguishing Ifemelu's self-adulating awareness she occupies privilege (American citizenship) that allows her to court male-interest in behalf of Aisha, Emecheta and Adichie respectively witness necessary counter-hegemonic moves their female protagonists make against disabling historical and/or socio-cultural realities. Both writers account for how the complex and distinctive experiences so-called "third-world" women negotiate can and should be considered active resistance to patriarchal and/or systemic orthodoxies.

I do not mean to suggest that fiction that accounts for the African or non-western woman's particular agency sanitizes or minimizes the debilitating nature of male-mediated arrangements or orthodoxies. In fact, *The Joys of Motherhood* ultimately reifies the pitfalls of "bargaining with patriarchy" (Kandiyoti 274-78). Emecheta highlights how the traditional role of the woman as putatively responsible for birthing generations of sons to guarantee the perpetuation of patriarchal arbiters, how imaginings of the infertile female womb as an anomaly in need of reconstruction conspire to suppress and emotionally immobilize women. When Nnu Ego is unable to conceive in her first marriage, for example, she is mistreated and subjected to emotional abuse when her husband upon marrying a second wife who becomes "pregnant the very first month" not only orders her around as "he would any farm-help" but labels her "a nervy female who is all bones" and so undeserving of his "precious male seed" (32). Considering

Emecheta consequently includes a suicide narrative that details Nnu-Ego's emotional breakdown and decision to jump off a bridge after she loses her first child/son, there is no gainsaying the text's interrogation and denouncement of repressive male-sanctioned obligations. Also, granted Ifemelu does not, in the end, recruit or court men with American visas for Aisha, it is evident Adichie does not intend to ultimately validate male-privileging arrangements that aggravate female repression.

In fact, Tsitsi Dangarembga's portrayal of Tambu in *Nervous Conditions* (1988) helps illustrate distinctive narrative strategies non-western or African women writers deploy that allow for female characters' contemporaneous compliance and noncompliance in male-mediated contexts of engagement. When an otherwise pliant Tambu, hitherto willing to oblige her overbearing uncle, refuses to attend an "English wedding" the latter arranges to legitimize her parents' marriage, what she considers humiliating to her parents, it is evident Dangarembga does not intend to validate male-sanctioned edicts. To be sure, educational opportunities Tambu comes into as her uncle's protégé, his obedient niece, become avenues for self-advantage within the constraints of colonial and patriarchal domination. In other words, and to repeat an earlier point, as a "third-world" woman navigating culturally-sanctioned male-arrangements rendered all the more intractable at the precipice of colonial subjugation, counter-hegemonic moves that guarantee advantage could mean advertent acquiescence, a "bargain with patriarchy." Except Tambu's decision to defy her uncle, her decision to interrogate and resist colonial indoctrination (203-04) suggest Dangarembga sees unfettered self-liberation as a necessary end astride the demands of patriarchy— Otherwise her 20th century postcolonial feminist text reinforces male oppression, reinforces what postcolonial critic Talpade Mohanty warns underlies western-mediated representations of a mindless, and self-abasing "third-world" femininity (243-46).

Notwithstanding African or non-western women's writerly interest in forswearing cultural or traditional norms that elevate male-desire, despite their interest in narrativizing redemption for female characters hitherto abetting male-hegemony, the choice to create narrative spaces that witness "women acting as men," or obliging men for self-advantage, matters. It matters in the way it serves to invert narratives that distinguish a liberated/non-liberated western/non-western woman binary. It matters in the way it argues "third-world" women's relative ingenuity or ability to accrue autonomy in the limit of space men cede. In other words, Emecheta and Adichie, for instance, mean to account for, and so do not apologize for the ways their female characters respectively situate or embody autonomy in response to distinctive "culturally and temporally grounded" inhibitions relative to those of white/western women (Kandiyoti 274-78). Even if that gendered autonomy supposes complicitous "bargaining with patriarchy" in Nnu Ego's case, and interest in courting male-paternalism in behalf of less-advantaged African women in Ifemelu's case. For Emecheta and Adichie, the agency and/or autonomy their respective female protagonists situate signal unapologetic moves some women make in the limit of space provided for resistance or contestation. In the end, it is tenable to see how some African/Afropolitan women's decision to acquiesce in patriarchy both within and without the continent supposes opportunities for reframing the terms of and for gender engagements.

Distinguishing Afropolitan Feminism

To reiterate my earlier point, it is possible to see how Emecheta and her literary progeny, Adichie, work to contest or problematize blanket assumptions "in some western feminist discourses" on and about "helpless third-world" women utterly immobilized by "sexual difference" from men, or by constitutive "third-world" traditions that preclude autonomy for

women (Mohanty 243-46). Except Adichie is not Emecheta writing 20th century postcolonial feminist fiction specifically interrogating colonial encroachment on traditional gender arrangements and the particular dilemma of the traditional wife or mother. Adichie writes 21st century African migrant fiction, Afropolitan literature, that places the transnational African woman's autonomous negotiation of and claims to international metro-borders beyond the precipice of colonial degradation, and/or postcolonial disillusionment. Adichie delineates the kind of feminism that offers autonomous trans/national border trekking and its associated privilege to verify emergent visions of mobility, reclamation, and self-liberation for the African female migrant in America. Really, for Adichie, African women's transnational presence refuses utter subjection to historical and/or male-sanctioned socio-cultural degradation tethered to traditions of home and nation. Adichie's *Americanah,* more than Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood*, promises, in symbolic terms, colonial/post-colonial healing and reclamation for the interested African woman. Critic Susan Z. Andrade is right when she makes the case compared to Emecheta's *Destination Biafra* (1982), Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2006) proves the "best [African] female novelists no longer hesitate to represent the nation in explicitly political terms," adding that their "doing so [does not] require abandoning a full sense of commitment to female characterization" (97). In fact, for Andrade, "Emecheta is path breaking, but Adichie is a writer of greater poise and ability" in the way her 2006 novel "demonstrates greater ambition in its reach and characterization" (97). Andrade confirms Adichie's literary presence memorializes Emecheta's trailblazing work. Except she also argues Adichie to a greater extent, upends gendered proscriptions of literary production by developing female characters with political agency beyond the constructs of home and family. I will add that beyond complex characterization and/or occasions for representing the "nation in explicitly political terms"

(Andrade 97), Adichie's work in *Americanah*, for instance, points to a more compelling feminist posture in the way her narrative launches new discourses of redemption and power for transnational African women. To invoke Mbembe, if Afropolitanism suggests "nothing" can "force us to worship" African states (28-29), Adichie's 21st century Afropolitan feminist text, *Americanah*, assures its interested readers that autonomous African women trekking transnational borders symbolize or signal unfettered agency.

My point here is that Afropolitan feminism as proffered by *Americanah* memorializes postcolonial feminism in the way it, in symbolic terms, proffers the "act of bargaining with patriarchy" as a necessary counter-hegemonic move that allows opportunities for female mobility in male-privileging gender arrangements: a necessary counter-hegemonic move postcolonial feminist forebears like Emecheta and Dangarembga, deploy in their work. Except, Adichie's Afropolitan feminist posture in *Americanah,* relative to Emecheta's postcolonial feminist politics, proffers or embodies a compelling turn in African feminism in the way it suffices for an Afropolitan feminism better trained on the politics of accruing agency and voice by virtue of its transnational and so more palpable refusal to "worship nation-states" and/or confining norms (Mbembe 28-29). Except, Adichie's 21st century Afropolitan feminist text, compared to its relatively muted 20th century literary representation of African women, evidences relative gains for African women writers able to produce feminist literature that places the African woman astride and atop the confines of familial and even national fidelities.

Really, it is no surprise Adichie's Afropolitan feminist, Ifemelu, chides unequal gender arrangements motivated by intractable often male-placating stereotypes of female inadequacy, and/or tethered to norms of place and identity. To take a case in point, Ifemelu, who comes into Afropolitan consciousness, a kind of geo-political consciousness that follows from the

sanctioned privilege of accessing informed lens and voice in America as a college student (137), commits to interrogating and indicting unfair gender arrangements, those stacked against African female émigrés also battling putative non-American Otherness. Ifemelu, for instance finds it irksome Aunty Uju's fiancé, Bartholomew, a Nigerian immigrant in America like Aunty Uju, "refuses to show interest in the son of the woman he is courting" (115). Ifemelu finds Bartholomew "jarringly unsuited for, and unworthy of Aunty Uju" in the way he "wears khaki trousers pulled up high on his belly, and [speaks] with an American accent filled with holes, mangling words until they are impossible to understand" (115). Ifemelu mentions she gleans "from [Bartholomew's] demeanor, a deprived rural upbringing that he tries to compensate for with his American affectation, his gonnas and wannas," and believes Bartholomew "behav[es] grandiosely, like a special prize that Aunty Uju was fortunate to have" because Aunty Uju humors him. When Bartholomew says, "Let see if this is any good" before eating food Aunty Uju offers him, Ifemelu sees a "certain assent" in Aunty Uju's "laughter" because Bartholomew's remark "were about [Aunty Uju] being a good cook, and therefore a good wife" (116). Ifemelu is convinced Aunty Uju has consequently "slipped into the rituals" of being a good cook and so, a potential good wife, "smiling a smile that promised to be demure to him but not to the world and lunging to pick up his fork … or serve him beer" (116). From the foregoing, it is apparent Ifemelu's expectations for fulfilling sexual relationships and/or conjugal arrangements follow from partners' mutual satisfaction, guarantees of love and respect, and/or desirable outcomes. In Ifemelu's feminist conception, relationships that necessitate mutual dependence should presuppose equitable responsibility, or at least, intent to assure equal exchanges of love and investment absent and in spite of the rituals of courtship, especially. For Ifemelu, Bartholomew's disinterest in Aunty Uju's son, the idea that Aunty Uju is,

notwithstanding, willing to oblige Bartholomew's expectations for an ideal partner suggests an emergent inequity that works against Aunty Uju's interest. Really, If Aunty Uju is willing to oblige the "rituals" of gendered courtship, "promising to be demure to [Bartholomew] but not to the world" (116), it is not, for Ifemelu, inconceivable to expect proportional investment from Bartholomew, especially in the matter of his fiancé's child. Ifemelu, in other words, sees and anticipates Aunty Uju's possible and palpable gendered repression, her subjection to a man admittedly preoccupied with circumscribing male dominance or control in the way he expects submission or an obliging decorum from women and as it were, not "intelligent" enough to mitigate that palpable injustice with analogous commitment (116).

Perhaps, in consonance with longstanding cross-cultural significations of patriarchal dominance and implications for female agency, Bartholomew, to put this succinctly, considers female acquiescence to male-placating edicts and desires, necessary means to an end, a necessary gendered conjoining that serves to expiate female inadequacy, and so no need for him to do more than offer his male presence "like a special prize that Aunty Uju was fortunate to have" (116). After all, it is Aunty Uju who solicits Ifemelu's prayer intervention so Bartholomew marries her. Except, Ifemelu apprehends an injustice, an amoral injustice even, in the way marriage to Bartholomew disappointingly portends self-negating ramifications for Aunty Uju— the kind of marriage Aunty Uju hopes provides mitigating mobility in a country "that is not [her] own," in a country that requires self-effacing racialized and gendered submission to job platforms owned by putative Americans (116). Ergo, when Ifemelu mocks Bartholomew's "deprived rural upbringing that he tries to compensate for with his American affectation, his gonnas and wannas" (116) she seeks to expose, ridicule, and invalidate Bartholomew's self-aggrandizing paternalism; his preoccupation with policing and sanctioning female propriety. Ifemelu assures readers she

occupies an informed lens, an Afropolitan lens that performs and adjudicates “America’s tribalisms” (136). Therefore, in presenting Bartholomew as a less than adequate American, an “exaggerated caricature” barely comprehensible in American affectations, she invalidates any legitimacy Bartholomew brings to his “overheated moralities” and/or convictions about norms of female propriety in Nigeria relative to America (115-16). In fact, for Ifemelu, Bartholomew’s transnational ignorance, or laughable Americanisms exposes perceptible fraud, an inherent moral decay that does not deserve Aunty Uju’s confidence. If Aunty Uju desires a male partner who brings an Afro-centered support, the kind of mitigating support able to ameliorate racialized and/or gendered constraints because it offers familiarity in an unfamiliar transnational context, Bartholomew's defective Americanisms and inadequate “rural upbringing” do not qualify. Ultimately, when Ifemelu contends that Bartholomew’s “American affectation” recalls those whose “people ...back home” consider “lost” because “He went to America and refused to come back” (116), she mourns the betrayal that underlies, in her view, Bartholomew’s American pretensions and witting dereliction of the duty— the duty he owes Aunty Uju, at least in the matter of her son, or in the conjugal arrangement he enters with a fellow Nigerian immigrant. In other words, if home is a putative Africa that supposes varied but familiar norms of conjugal responsibility, Bartholomew betrays consequent reliable affinities those from home seek in a country that is not their “own.” He betrays what affinity Aunty Uju hopes to foster with her pliant accent and consenting laughter, her willingness to slip into the “rituals of being a good cook,” and so a “good wife” (116). To put this simply, in Ifemelu’s Afropolitan feminist topography, Bartholomew’s defective Americanism, his ill-informed cross-cultural “moralities,” and/or self-aggrandizing expectations for an obliging femaleness without proportionate obligation ultimately point to, verify, and warrant a resultant contested male gaze.

In Ifemelu, and by extension, *Americanah*'s Afropolitan feminist conscious, unequal gender arrangements and associated ramifications for female suppression should suppose an amoral injustice, an indicted male paternalism. In a transnational context that otherwise suggests opportunities for mapping connections to, and/or gaining support from identifiable national or ethnic enclaves, that amoral injustice further supposes dereliction of duty, an inadequacy that witnesses what defection underlies the male-gaze as it wills or demands female obeisance. It is, therefore, not surprising Ifemelu challenges and so invalidates Bartholomew's male gaze— his targeted insistence on female decorum in terms of dress habits, or his suggestion that what placates male desire should sanction and so constitute cross-cultural female behavior. When Ifemelu, to Aunty Uju's chagrin and disapproval, corrects Bartholomew's self-assuring claim that America "has no moral compass" because " Girls in Nigeria would never wear" the " kind of dress" he sees on a girl featured in an American drama, when, she, that is, not only retorts "Girls in Nigeria wear dresses much shorter than that," but offers that she and her friends changed in each other's houses so their "parents wouldn't know " (116), Ifemelu exposes, but also discredits Bartholomew's ill-informed or misguided paternalism. She disproves Bartholomew's postulations about American morality and female decorum with her lived experience in Nigeria, and so orchestrates a contest of wills that forces Bartholomew to contend with female presence that both refuses subjection to his male gaze and works to undermine its self-indulgent authority. Ifemelu compels Bartholomew to confront an impotent maleness, to confront maleness subdued in the entrails of its apparent cluelessness and the realization it does not and should not sanction female habits. What's more, if Ifemelu makes sure to contest Bartholomew's paternalistic edicts on what constitutes appropriate femininity in America and Nigeria despite Aunty Uju's protestations, it is because she means to embody for Aunty Uju, the female adequacy and/or self-

assertion Bartholomew works to own or control. Ifemelu verifies for Aunty Uju opportunities for reclaiming the voice she cedes to Bartholomew. Ifemelu signals possibilities for a transnational African femininity, an Afropolitan feminist posture that thrives above the constraints of place and identity, and so not beholden to narratives and norms engineered to placate male-sanctioned suspicions of defective femaleness— the idea that an African female émigré, accounting for autonomous cross-border trekking and implications for self-assertion, brings practiced facility, perhaps, to the rituals of gender mobility.

Americanah, to put this another way, begins to envision an Afropolitan feminist consciousness that translates into female-specific counter-action against a convoluted gendered, racialized, and non-American otherness. I mean female-specific counter-action unwilling to cede space even for the perfunctory exercise of placating masculinity in exchange for male-sanctioned access to American-visa privilege. Aunty Uju divorces Bartholomew as she reclaims voice and place in the truncated space sanctioned for Black female mobility in America, as she apprehends and so concedes what counter-power accrues from resisting male-encroachment. To reiterate an earlier point, it also matters Ifemelu does not ultimately validate the autonomy Aisha risks ceding to her Nigerian boyfriends by helping Aisha woo her prospective male suitors. *Americanah*, ultimately delineates an Afropolitan feminist ethos unyielding in its insistence on territorializing the terms of its gendered engagement, its interest in claiming and safeguarding uncontested place and stake in a geopolitical space weathered against its interests.

I do not mean to suggest Adichie's *Americanah* envisages an Afropolitan feminism retroactively insulated from the socio-cultural and/or political crises of its national context. Really, it will be presumptuous to claim that relative to working class African female émigrés, African female professionals in America, that is, Afropolitans who accrue middle to upper class

socio-economic advantages and so participate in subcultures that evidence status, prestige, or political consciousness possess intrinsic capacities against contextual constraints. In fact, narrative moments in *Americanah* that detail racial anxieties and associated socio-economic exclusions also foreground a resigned Ifemelu incapacitated by racism, her non-American Otherness, and/or the ramifications of a gendered and/or sexist polis. Ifemelu, for instance, recalls how during her tenure as college freshman in America, she settles for "a four-bedroom apartment with moldy carpeting… where drug addicts sometimes [drop] crack pipes…," and how she shares "a fridge and toilet... a shallow intimacy with people she [does] not know at all" (120). Ifemelu also mentions how her former roommate, Elena, not only questions her refusal to pet her dog, and wonders if it's "a cultural thing" because she believes in "China they eat cat and dog meat," Ifemelu's retort she does not "like dogs" but her "boyfriend in Nigeria" does, elicits befuddlement from Elena that reminds Ifemelu of the addled looks she gets from her other roommates when she admits "she had never gone bowling," (128). Really, when Ifemelu insists her roommates' dismissive laughter at her recommendation they wear party-appropriate dresses rather than the "slouchy jeans" they all wear to a party suggest her white-American roommates see in her cultural difference, "a foreign pathology" (128), it is clear Ifemelu, or perhaps Adichie, intends to highlight the distinctive and immobilizing disadvantage "Non-American Blacks" bring to the variant exercise of negotiating and becoming American, the ways non-Americanness and/or Africanness, for instance, suggests an immutable decrepit cultural difference, an inherent inadequacy that questions and forecloses the African émigré's legitimate stake in what confers American privilege.

To be sure, the difficulty Ifemelu navigates sharing living space with four college peers, or accommodating undesirable living conditions appears in tandem with popular consensus on

college life and corresponding livelihood for middle to working class students— that is, it is possible to argue the squalid living conditions Ifemelu bemoans do not follow from cultural or color prejudice and associated sanctioned exclusions. After all, Ifemelu's perceptibly white and so recognizable American college roommates share living space with her. Except, in America's historically sanctioned, and so white-mediated cultural consciousness, Ifemelu's peculiar disinterest in Elena's dog and/or what the latter supposes might be associated with oriental oddity surmise an Otherness, an anomalous lens and attitude that should do no less than constitute preemptive strike against, as it were, Ifemelu's laughable American presence. In other words, if Elena, for instance, suspects Ifemelu's peculiarities reflect or explain what could, in terms of culture, be attributable to whole group behavior— as in her claims the "Chinese eat dog and cat meat"— it follows that to her white peers, Ifemelu's peculiarities typify an inherent and so irremediable foreign cultural canker best dismissed with derision. To put this another way, if Ifemelu's perceived oddities characterize whole group behavior, it follows that Ifemelu, according to her white peers, occupies or brings a "foreign pathology" that is innate or intractable because it emerges from her cultural identity, and so fittingly dismissed without engagement or humored with derisive laughter: the kind of derision that underlies resultant panoply of systematic exclusions arched against Ifemelu's Non-Americanness. To be sure, Ifemelu herself indulges stereotypes on and about a nondescript American culture and/or femininity when she says her white female roommates "looked almost interchangeable...small-boned, and slim hipped with lacrosse sticks piled on the narrow hallway" (128). Except, it is also possible to see how Ifemelu's admission she considers her white roommates "interchangeable" and so "unchangeably alien" suggests she apprehends, and perhaps, anticipates her own cultural

apartness and subsequent sanctioned exclusion. Ifemelu sees her "foreignness" slated for excision in a culture characterized by shared familiarity, or a conventional Americanness.

It matters that Adichie consequently illustrates what xenophobic exclusions follow from occupying non-American Otherness in an American culture interested in associative and/or sanctioned behaviors. The narrative, for example, notes how "Cristina Tomas...with her rinsed-out look, her washy blue eyes, faded hair and pallid skin...seated at the front desk with a smile," makes sure to "speak slowly, lips scrunching and puckering, as she gives directions to the international students: 'I. Need. You. To. Fill. These. Out. Do. You. Understand. How. To. Fill. These. Out?'" (133). When Ifemelu asks if she is in the right place for international student registration, Cristina Tomas offers her response in mono-syllables, "Yes. Now. Are. You. An. International. Student?" (133). Ifemelu's consequent insistence she "speak[s] English" compels Cristina Tomas to admit she speaks slowly because she doesn't "know how well" Ifemelu, and by implication, the other international students speak English (133). The narrative makes it evident Ifemelu "for a moment [begins to feel] like a small child, lazy-limbed and drooling when she realizes "Cristina Tomas was speaking like that because of her, her foreign accent…" (133). Reiterating Ifemelu's consequent distress, the narrative notes:

> Ifemelu shrank. In that strained, still second when her eyes met Cristina Tomas's before she took the forms, she shrank. She shrank like a dead 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. (134).

Americanah, undoubtedly, presents Cristina Tomas as quintessential racist, a practiced xenophobe convinced Ifemelu's international student status, her "non-American" difference harbors a handicap she must denigrate and exclude from what dignity the rituals of college registration confer. Cristina Tomas, in sum, is an American racist, and archetypal xenophobe who wields and exercises the power to distinguish and diminish international students' voices as different and inadequate, and so proceeds to exclude them from proper or decorous treatment.

To be sure, if Cristina Tomas preoccupies with, and/or trains her racist lens on Ifemelu's Blackness despite its non-American difference, it is because history positions Blackness as and for white racial adversity, it is because history makes Blackness ground-zero for white racial affirmation. This is to say that on the one hand, racist acts intended to discriminate white-American superiority, in part, suppose acknowledgement of a legitimate and contending Black-American presence, a Black American subjectivity or counter-presence legitimized by history. In *Making Whiteness: The Culture of Segregation in the South, 1890-1940*, Grace Elizabeth Hale confirms that in the context of Jim Crow, white America derived power, or at least, the perception of it, from and through its preoccupation with distinguishing superiority relative to Blackness. She argues, for example, that "the demands and desires of southern African Americans as well as the needs of America, as both a state and an identity, shaped the contours of modern southern whiteness, adding that…. [t]his doubled dynamic deepened the shadings of southern racial identities making them more starkly apparent than, even as they were vitally important to, American whiteness in general" (9). In other words, for Hale, racism and racialized denigration in America derives from, and so finds legitimacy in a historically-mediated Jim-Crow era racial dialectic that defined and continues to define white racial superiority in terms of, and on the condition of a pathologized blackness. In fact, Hale echoes Toni Morrison whose

seminal conception of "American Africanism" proposes literary criticism interested in gleaning the complex ways negative depictions of Blackness serve to bolster white subjectivity. Morrison, in *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination*, explains that a critical interrogation of notions of racial hierarchy, racial dispossession or exclusion must also account for the impact of those notions on those (nonBlacks) that "perpetuate" it (11). To my point then, and accounting for Hale and Morrison, history contextualizes and so proves that Black racial difference and/or presumptions of its inadequacy construct or bolster white racial subjectivity. In other words, if we consider Cristina Tomas' insinuations and/or denigrating comments about Ifemelu's language skills xenophobic and/or racist, the argument can be made the former seeks to define white/American efficiency, or relative superiority.

I should say that xenophobic acts, relative to racist animus, signify interest in distinguishing and excluding a "foreign" and so illegitimate and dispensable intrusion. If in the context of sanctioned racism, xenophobia specifically aims to denigrate and/or exclude foreigners, it follows that perpetrators perceive an invading aberration, and so foreclose possibilities for engaging or acknowledging foreigners' presence or subjectivity. Xenophobia, to put this simply, signifies foreigners' contested presence in host countries— contested presence that forecloses possibilities for resistance or counter-action. Therefore, as a Non-American Black, Ifemelu battles an intractable double subjugation. She suffers racist vilification tethered to America's racialized history, but denied the dignity of, and chance for proportional counter-action or self-assertion because in America's xenophobic conscious, she *does not belong*. Certainly, if Cristina Tomas' xenophobic insults make Ifemelu shrink "like a dead leaf" or feel like a "small child, lazy limbed, and drooling" (133-34), it is because *Americanah* intends to argue xenophobia ultimately infantilizes and so diminishes opportunities for resistance or

agency. In fact, Ifemelu's later decision to "practice an American accent" (134) points to helpless resignation, her tacit admission "non-American" or foreign accents portend voicelessness that truncates opportunities for agency, and/or desirable outcomes.

Actually, Ifemelu's initial fruitless attempts at finding a job, the consequent racialized and gendered difficulties she comes into better illustrate how in the context of systematic racial exclusion, Ifemelu's "non-American" presence supposes illegitimate foreign intrusion with implications for socio-economic access and mobility. *Americanah*, to put this differently, sees a "triple jeopardy[8]" for the "Non-American" Black woman who absent the privilege of claiming Americanness and associated possibilities for agency becomes victim to indignities compelled by the constraints of race, sex. The narrative, for instance, makes it evident Ifemelu bargains for, and uses Ngozi Okonkwo's social security card and name to solicit and apply for jobs that are otherwise inaccessible to "non-Americans" who have not earned and so do not deserve the benefits American permanent residency accrues (131-43). When Ifemelu's job applications and interviews do not yield job offers, *Americanah* presents a despairing Ifemelu debilitated by a potential loss of livelihood and pondering possible actions and inactions. Ifemelu, for instance, wonders why she is unable to get a job even after "read[ing] about interviewing for American jobs." She considers how her "lack of experience," and "foreign accent" undermine opportunities for job offers, but also admits her "African friends all [have] jobs," and "college students [get] jobs all the time with no experience" (145). Ifemelu also recalls how "a large Mexican man" who tells her the "attendant position" she applies for at "a gas station near Chestnut Street" has been taken "leers" at her "chest" and insinuates she can have sex with him for pay (145). Ifemelu, in

[8] Prevailing literature on intersectional feminism reference, or invoke "triple jeopardy" to address "various and "intersecting power-relations of race, class, and gender." See Patricia Collins (1990). I use the term to address ways Non-American or African female immigrants in America suffer intersecting, and intertwining oppressions that follow from distinct and sometimes converging structural and/or systemic exclusions on the basis of target groups' Non-American, racial, and gender status.

fact, eventually indulges sexual relations with a sports coach she previously characterizes as an 'unkind man" for money: she obliges "a sports coach in Ardmore seeking a female personal assistant [to] help him "relax," a "sports coach" Ifemelu finds particularly revolting in the way he requires her to "massage" and lull him to "sleep," in the way he nonchalantly admits he helped a woman who "massaged him " pay "a lot of her college debt" (143-44.). Ultimately, and to my point when Ginika tells Ifemelu ---- who forgets to respond to the name Ngozi after she uses Ngozi's American social security card to apply for a job ---- to tell white employers "Ngozi is [her] tribal name and Ifemelu [her] jungle name" because as Ginika puts it, white people "believe all kinds of shit about Africa (131), it is apparent *Americanah* acknowledges America's racialized context also makes victims of its "Non-American Blacks." Really, if Ifemelu does not own the social security card she finds employment with, if she is not in actuality, Ngozi, who, at the least, can claim legitimate American residency, the argument can be made Ifemelu occupies a voicelessness, an illegitimate presence that speaks to underlying fraud, and so invalidates any claims she makes as or in behalf of Ngozi against racialized denigration.

My point is that, Ifemelu's desperation, the paralyzing fear that characterizes what she experiences as diminishing livelihood and/or survival options, presents "Non-American" Blackness as intractable helplessness compelled by a "convoluted" mesh of systemic exclusions. Ifemelu, Adichie's prototypical Afropolitan feminist, her Non-American and Black female protagonist suffers racialized and gendered hostilities aggravated by the limitations and inadequacy of inhabiting an un-American foreignness. Ifemelu's "foreign accent," her non-Americanness, and so inability to advocate on her own behalf produces the kind of helplessness that undermines, or at the least, precludes her chance to confront racialized denigration the way

Ginika hopes she does, or that compels her decision to oblige sexual victimization. She obliges the fantasies of a misogynist who views women as purchasable conveniences.

To be clear, I do not suggest *Americanah* argues white and/or American women suffer less in the context of gendered denigration. After all, the college students Ifemelu says get jobs without experience also oblige "unkind" predatory men like the Ardmore coach to pay "most of their college debts" (143-44). Also, the argument can be made both Ifemelu, and the unidentified college woman who previously "massages" the Ardmore coach are subjected to or victimized by the gendered politics of a system historically arched to validate male desire, even those of an unkind man who assumes contractual arrangements with women sanction violation of their bodies. However, when Ifemelu in recalling the helplessness that characterizes her particular subjection to sexual predation admits "THE WORLD WAS WRAPPED in gauze" (132), it is evident Adichie does not intend to gloss over Ifemelu, and for that matter, the Non-American and Black woman's distinctive handicap, how "non-Americanness" suggests an illegitimate presence in America, a choicelessness, and so induces "a world wrapped in gauze" (132). In sum, Ifemelu's experience presages an intractable gendered victimhood in the way her decision to impersonate American residents for job opportunities, for example, indicates self-censure, a forfeiture of the self that forecloses agency in the instance of gendered subjugation.

Ultimately, *Americanah* refuses to disassociate the agency Ifemelu occupies as archetypal Afropolitan feminist from the politics of race and place. Ifemelu, *Americanah's* Afropolitan feminist, its middle-class intellectual and avowed activist, in other words, is susceptible to racialized and/or gendered hostilities that follow from the systemic exclusion of "Non-American Blacks." Rather than suggest Ifemelu wields an inherent competence or wit relative to working-class African female émigrés, and so unaffected by systemic inequities that immobilize non-

American Blacks, *Americanah* makes the case Ifemelu's agency, the consciousness and voice she comes into generates from, and is imbricated in socio-economic difficulties she encounters. *Americanah*, to put this another way, uses Ifemelu's character to proffer an emergent Afropolitan feminism tethered to its geopolitics--- an Afropolitan feminism aware of the stifling fixtures of its socio-cultural context and so uniquely interested in mapping resultant targeted agency or resistance.

***Americanah*: Afropolitan Feminism as Critical Consciousness**

To reiterate my preceding point, *Americanah* offers an Afropolitan feminism that recognizes it battles intractable subjugation, and so mobilizes counter-action distinctively tethered to, and trained on the habits and intricacies of circumscribing empowerment in behalf of a Black femaleness that is as yet non-American. In fact, as a counter-hegemonic move against contextual and/or systemic exclusions that immobilize Non-American or Black African women in America, *Americanah*, to begin with, proffers an Afropolitan feminist stance that follows from and so privileges critical consciousness able to deconstruct or parse opportunities for agency and mobility, for owning place and voice in America. Ifemelu's feminist posture, the counter-strategy she deploys performing and advocating an empowered "Non-American" or African femaleness follows from critical consciousness she garners accessing Afropolitan platforms sanctioned for interrogating and adjudicating America's race politics. To put this simply, Ifemelu's feminist consciousness derives from platforms that insist on an *Afropolitan way of knowing,* critical consciousness able to distinguish and privilege **1)** communities of support rallied by the "trauma of getting an American visa," **2)** Pan-African communities that bring historical legitimacy to countering racialized subjection, **3)** American norms that foreclose utter

subjection to systemic exclusions and resultant trauma, and **4)** memories of Africa as home or what Africa signifies for transnational Africans trekking borders. Ifemelu, for example, participates in African student communities rallied by the limitations of their essential "Non-Americanness," and so interested in mapping blueprints for agency. Ifemelu attends "ASA" or African Student Association meetings where "Nigerians, Ugandans, Kenyans, Ghanaians," "[sit] around eating, talking, and fueling spirits as their different accents [form] meshes of solacing sounds" (139). In fact, at ASA meetings, members ridicule American prejudice---- "You speak such good English. How bad is AIDS in your country? It's so sad that people live on a dollar a day in Africa" ---- and feel safe to mock Africa " trading stories of absurdity, of stupidity… because it was mockery "born of longing, and of the heartbroken desire to see a place made whole again (139). Also, African student leaders make sure to share experiences that illuminate America's cultural climate and the particular plight of the African student immigrant. They encourage new students to consider crucial counter-strategic moves that anticipate systemic denigration and exclusions. In her presentation to assembled freshman students from Africa, Wambui, a student leader from Kenya, for example, says;

> Very soon, you will start to adopt an American accent, because you don't want customer service people on the phone to keep asking you 'What? What' You will start to admire Africans who have perfected American accents, like our brother here, Kofi. Kofi's parents came from Ghana when he was two years old, but do not be fooled by the way he sounds. If you go to their house, they eat kenkey every day, His father slapped him when he got a C in a class. There's no American nonsense in that house. He goes back to Ghana every year. We call people like Kofi American African, not African American, which is what we call our brothers and sisters whose ancestors were slaves. (140)

I argue that Wambui's prediction newly-arrived African students will "admire" fellow Africans and long-time American residents for their "perfected American accents" suggests she sees the new student émigrés savoring what indicates place and privilege in American culture. In fact, she also, I will offer, argues necessary cultural assimilation to the extent adopting an "American accent," for instance, forecloses moments of sanctioned denigration and/or guarantees access to mainstream resources. When Wambui tells her peers not to be "fooled" by Kofi's "perfected American accents" because his parents insist on eating Ghanaian food "every day," or make sure Kofi goes back to Ghana every year" (140), she, on the other hand, warns against possible deception, perhaps a loss of self in the event the desire to assume American cultural habits and/or voice becomes an exercise in self-denigration— what, I argue, imputes relative superiority to white/American cultural habits. In other words, telling her audience not to be "fooled" by Kofi's American accent because his parents do not tolerate "American nonsense in their house" suggests Wambui acknowledges and cautions against possible misperceptions "American Africans" like Kofi relinquish what is identifiably African, and so impugn Africa (140-41). For Wambui, mindless emulation of white/American cultural habits and associated pretensions suppose self-loathing, an underlying dearth.

To my point then, Wambui deftly and ultimately encourages her peers to discriminate and trod socio-cultural pathways that present opportunities for mobility and even agency— pathways that reflect Black or African students' ability to isolate and oblige American norms that assure socio-economic returns, and not their interested attention to the rituals of reinforcing white and/or American superiority. Really, in their experience as veteran student émigrés, as expert "Non-American Blacks," Wambui and the leaders of the African Student Association know calculated choices and/or strategic affiliations suffice for navigating and countering systemic

exclusions that otherwise portend intractable odds. It makes sense the students leaders in recommending affiliations with African Americans "in [the] spirit of true pan-Africanism," also advise continuing or new friendships with "fellow Africans" and "other internationals like Koreans, Indians, Brazilians" for communities of support in the "traumatic" event of getting "an American visa" (140-41). Really, the ASA leaders' argument friendship with "African American brothers" yields pan-African ties suggest they anticipate augmented collective action against contemporaneous racism, against racist acts that follow from shared historical trauma. Except, the argument that new African students "might make friends more easily with other internationals than with Americans both Black and white," highlights what ASA leaders admit distinguishes necessary Non-American alliances that occupy primary importance relative to those offered in Pan-African contexts. The ASA leaders, in other words, see an unyielding American system designed to police and "traumatize" non-American difference, a system that compels crucial "Non-American" solidarity in the instance of racialized trauma. Really, if an African American is inclined to call an African "Mandingo," or indulge misperceptions about a pristine Africa populated by "Nubian Queen[s]" (140), it is not untenable to argue ASA leaders notice a prejudiced cultural context able to denigrate voices African Blacks bring to shared counter-action with "African American brothers" (140-41). To invoke Selasi's conception of the Afropolitan's stance, suffice it to say that Wambui and the ASA leaders ultimately encourage their peers to "choose which bits" of America's identity, "from passport to pronunciation," to "internalize "or make "central to their personalities," the ASA leaders encourage their peers to "see race" as "a question of politics, rather than pigment." Except Adichie's *Americanah,* beyond Selasi's conception, also presents the Afropolitan's interest in distinguishing "which bits" of America's "identity to internalize" as an exercise in strategic acquiescence, an exercise in

obliging sanctioned norms that guarantee socio-cultural mobility, and not a matter of nurturing, and/or by consequence, validating the tenets of a new "personality" (Selasi). Except Adichie's text also argues the Afropolitan in choosing "to see race as a question of politics rather than pigment" (Selasi), anticipates opportunities for claiming and reclaiming agency in the context of systemic and systematic racism.

To put this succinctly, *Americanah* offers the African student Association meetings to illustrate an Afropolitanism, an African-centered intellectualism or intellectual culture able to access and interrogate what foments America's "tribalisms," its attitude to "race, ideology, and region" (136). *Americanah* proffers an Afropolitan intellectual culture that mandates critical consciousness trained on the politics of navigating and accruing agency in an unyielding socio-cultural and political context. Really, Adichie does not hesitate to ascribe "consciousness-raising" crucial for performing an empowered non-American Blackness to her middle-class intellectuals, to her Afropolitan characters. To be sure, and to reiterate an earlier point, Adichie does not assume inherent facility for African student émigrés able to situate legitimate possibilities for socio-economic mobility. She does not also assume innate incompetence and so doomed fate for relatively disadvantaged African émigrés in America. If the ASA college group assumes voice and/or dictate socio-cultural pathways for agency in America, it is because they notice, but also struggle against systemic disadvantages. Really, Adichie does not apologize for offering an Afropolitan group, an African intellectual culture able to access spaces and resources sanctioned for interrogating America's "tribalisms" (136), and so better situated to proffer consequent blueprints for counter-action. I will also offer that in presenting the African Students leaders' simultaneous commitment to mocking and so indicting moments of "absurdity" or "stupidity in Africa," in privileging the students' "heartbroken desire to see an Africa made

whole again" (139), Adichie works to dispel charges the ASA group merely, and solely determines an America singularly and solely responsible for what crises the African immigrant battles. The ASA college group admits socio-political conditions in Africa equally constitute and so inform lens and voice African migrants map for agency. *Americanah*, in other words, presents its African student migrants, its Afropolitan intellectuals as honest brokers uninterested in peddling blanket assumptions about an American culture or populace irredeemably mired in xenophobia. The novel presents an Afropolitan group interested in yielding awareness and/or associated agency defined by what interplay of complex and complicated socio-political conditions plague African émigrés in America.

The ASA leaders, in sum, and by deduction, become Adichie's Afropolitan connoisseurs. They become witnesses to, and adept at habits and ways that promise legitimate voice and agency for African migrants in America. They insist on a conscious Afropolitanism that valuates pan-African connections for race-based agitation while maintaining affective bonds with other Non-Americans to mitigate the "trauma of getting an American visa." They advocate a *woke*[9] *Afropolitanism* that also refuses to forswear an African sense-of-self as it becomes American, or to invoke Selasi, as it "ascribes to the cultural breadth" that is America. Really, it matters that Ifemelu admits she experiences "a gentle… sense of renewal" at ASA meetings (139). Considering this "sense of renewal" foils Ifemelu's visa-related trauma, that is, when she obliges a sexual predator for money absent legitimate job opportunities for international students with "foreign accents," I reiterate that Ifemelu's Afropolitan feminism, the lens and voice she brings to navigating non-American Blackness follow, in part, from the consciousness she garners as an

[9] Woke, a "slang" term which generates from the African American English rendition of "awake," describes the state of being aware or conscious of current/political issues. *Merriam Webster* added 'woke' in September 2017. https://www.merriam-webster.com/words-at-play/woke-meaning-origin

African intellectual in America. To put this another way, I reiterate that Ifemelu's Afropolitan feminism, the counter-hegemonic moves she deploys against gendered, racialized, and/or xenophobic denigration, follow from targeted consciousness she accrues as an engaged Afropolitan intellectual, as a member of an African college group trained on the politics of place and identity in America.

Americanah:* *Afropolitan Feminism as Transnational African Sisterhood

It therefore matters that in delineating Afropolitan feminism, *Americanah* also distinguishes African female friendships, or *transnational African sisterhoods* that assure mobility in spaces otherwise inaccessible to Black African women who occupy perceived "Non-American" pathology— friendships that guarantee mobility in the truncated spaces allotted Black women in America. Ginika, Ifemelu's friend and high-school peer who leaves Nigeria for America in the period before their Nigerian high-school graduation, for instance, not only makes sure to "keep in touch through the years" with Ifemelu, "calling and writing letters or sending books" (125), she becomes quintessential sister-friend and mentor to Ifemelu when the latter arrives in the United States. Ginika gives Ifemelu a tour of her new American college, offers assurances or advice on job options, and later, recommendation for a legitimate job opportunity. Ginika's job recommendation, in fact, proves timely in the way it intervenes in what appears a destitute situation for Ifemelu who unable to find a job, pay utility and tuition bills, skips college classes, and contemplates murdering the "tennis coach" she has sex with for money (155). Ginika's timely job recommendation and the consequent job offer brings critical relief because it assures survival for Ifemelu hitherto unable to pay tuition and housing bills. Ginika's help also matters in the way it culminates in a green card opportunity for Ifemelu. What is more, when

Ginika assures Ifemelu her new employer will pay her "under the table," and "in cash," when she adds that her employer's gesture means she no longer has to use "a fake name" (146), it is apparent Adichie means to present an informed Ginika whose white American mother and/or American citizenship does not detract from the "perspective" she garners as a Nigerian-American with a Nigerian father, or as an identifying African hitherto resident in Nigeria. Adichie presents an informed Ginika who knows institutional restrictions encumber job opportunities for Non-Americans and international students, who knows consequent desperation that compels Non-Americans to use fake names for socio-economic gains suppose diminished agency, or foreboding indignity, and so secures on Ifemelu's behalf, a job option that circumvents institutional restrictions. She bargains and secures employment conditions that do not detract from or inhibit Ifemelu's sense-of-self.

To be sure, if the ASA group believes "friendships" with other internationals" like "Koreans, Indians, Brazilians" is a "good place" for Africans "to start" building relationships because "[m]any of the internationals understand the trauma of trying to get an American visa," if the ASA group suggests "Americans, both Black and white," do not "understand" non-Americans' visa-related distress (140-41), the argument can be made Ginika's American citizenship and associated privilege point to a lack of "understanding," even possible indifference to Ifemelu's non-American woes. It is not untenable to argue that because Ginika, an American citizen, does not share Ifemelu's visa-related struggles or associated indignities, her commitment to helping Ifemelu find college housing or a job appears perfunctory, a necessary and usual welcome ritual for new Americans or international students who are due such protocols regardless. Except, and as I argue, Adichie does not gloss over what ways Ginika's Nigerian identity and/or sojourn in Nigeria suffices for the kind of intra-African "friendships"

ASA leaders suggest avail launch pads for survival in the instance of xenophobic and/or racialized exclusion. To put this bluntly, and to my point, Ginika becomes archetypal African female friend whose familiarity with the nuts and bolts of surmounting systemic exclusions arched against Non-Americans, ultimately, and consequently, guarantees Ifemelu's socio-economic ascent as resident intellectual and/or famous race blogger. I do not suggest Ginika deserves sole honor for launching Ifemelu's legitimate residency in America, and/or the consequent opportunities she garners for interrogating "America's tribalisms" (136). Ifemelu's white boyfriend, Curtis, proposes employment that actually launches Ifemelu's socio-economic mobility and cultural influence. However, rather than present an affianced Ifemelu whose white and well-connected male suitor deserves singular praise for intervening in Ifemelu's otherwise non-American destitution, Adichie points to prior support and crucial intervention from Ginika, and so, at the least, diminishes semblances of a male savior atoning for white American patriarchy. Adichie forecloses consequent suggestions of an indolent non-American Black femaleness.

Actually, in subordinating Curtis' help to Ginika's primary and crucial intervention, Adichie not only weaves a story-line that valuates African female friendships contracted against the backdrop of pressing cultural, racialized and/or gendered inhibitions, she argues resultant gendered mentoring by more experienced female émigrés that promise pathways for agency astride the triple binds of race, sex, and Non-American difference. Really, and in my view, if Ginika's ultimately successful attempt at finding Ifemelu what suffices for legitimate employment follows Ifemelu's sexual victimization— which the narrative attributes to her inability to find a job and consequent financial distress— it is not untenable to argue Ginika's timely gesture anticipates systemic exclusions that compel Ifemelu's subjection to sexual abuse.

To put this another way, accounting for how the job opportunity Ginika contracts for Ifemelu actually promises relief from immigration precepts and consequent difficulties that include sexual violation, it is not implausible to make the case Adichie uses Ginika's gesture to illustrate female-centric support-systems able to anticipate and so intervene in xenophobic and/or racialized prohibitions— prohibitions that aggravate non-American and/or Black women's susceptibility to gendered abuse. In the case of the non-American and Black female migrant, Adichie argues gendered trauma often tinctured with racialized abuse follows from socio-political or economic exclusion weathered against Non-American and/or African subjects. She, therefore, witnesses African female friendships and/or communities of support that promise recourse for survival. Adichie has authorial control over which narratives anticipate or resolve Ifemelu's sexual subjugation. In a manner that recalls Alice Walker's commitment to weaving, but also reconstituting female bonds that triumph over the tragedy of race and sex in *The Color Purple* (1982), Adichie offers Ginika's sisterly support and timely intervention.

Certainly, in choosing to proffer Ginika's persistent loyalty and support, Adichie elevates Ginika to empathetic mentor whose American citizenship, long time residency, and law-school prospects suppose socio-economic and cultural advantage, and so able to advise potential paths to legitimate place and mobility in America. Adichie ultimately points to an ensuing *Transnational African sisterhood*[10] that supposes and thrives on *filial trust and empathy*, that thrives on an *Afropolitan female kinship* impelled by what interplay of gendered and racialized crises plague African women trekking and inhabiting transnationality. The narrative, for instance, presents Ginika switching to a "dated and overcooked version of Nigerian English" during a tour

[10] I italicize certain terms, phrases or words that are my own. As with this example, I italicize for emphasis and to highlight the terms' significance for my particular voice on the subject of Afropolitan feminism. They also encapsulate my important claims or arguments. The example here, Transnational African Sisterhood, describes African female friendships forged outside boundaries that demarcate Africa as home, and mobilized by shared aspirations astride the trauma and uncertainty of living in-between nations.

of Ifemelu's new campus (123). Ginika during the tour also offers insights on racial apprehensions that belie cultural attitudes to race, which notions of feminine beauty portend denigrating implications for dark-skinned women, and so on. Ginika says to Ifemelu,

> We're entering University City, and that's where Wellson campus is, shay you know? .... And can you imagine 'half caste' is a bad word here? In Freshman year, I was telling a bunch of my friends about how I was voted prettiest girl in school back home. Remember? I should never have won…. It was just because I was half-caste, There's even more of that here. There's some shit you'll get from white people in this country that I won' get. But anyway, I was telling them about back home and how all the boys were chasing me because I was half-caste, and they said I was dissing myself. So now I say bi-racial, and I'm supposed to be offended when somebody says half-caste. I've met a lot of people here with white mothers and they are so full of issues, eh. I didn't know I was even supposed to have issues until I came to America. Honestly, if anybody wants to raise biracial kids, do it in Nigeria…. Ginika made a face. Obinze had better hurry up and come to the US, before somebody will carry you away. You know you have the kind of body they like...You are thin with big breasts. "Americans say thin. Here thin is a good word…. Do you know I started losing weight as soon as I came? I was even close to Anorexia. The kids at my high school called me pork. You know at home when somebody tells you that you lost weight, it means something bad. But here somebody tells you that you lost weight and you say thank you. (123-25).

Ginika admits she was voted prettiest girl in their Nigerian school because all the boys were interested in a 'half-caste' or enamored by her light-skin. She reveals America's homologous valuation of light-skinned Blacks indicates Ifemelu, who is dark-skinned, will be subjected to the

kind of racism she (Ginika) is often spared (125). When Ginika adds that Ifemelu's "big breasts" and "thin" frame otherwise appeal to American men because she "has the kind of body they like," it is apparent Adichie intends to portray an astute Ginika able to interrogate, and at the least, understand what ways America's racialized and/or gendered standards of beauty portend intractable victimization, that is, a "triple jeopardy" for Black female migrants or dark-skinned African women who **1)** must contend with racist tropes that assume Black pathology, **2)** work against the kind of gendered denigration that reduces women to the sum of their desirable body parts, and **3)** suffer gendered re-victimization in the way America's prejudices recall or re-litigate those that stain memories of an African home. In fact, when Ginika also shares her own experience with colorism and denigrating gendered typecasts, she reveals intraracial color-prejudice saddles mixed-race Blacks with identity crisis that presages and so assumes homogeneous injurious consequences for all biracial Americans, even for a first-generation Nigerian-American like her who cannot situate analogous identity "issues" in Nigerian culture. Ginika also laments the compulsion to lose weight, to the degree an anorexic would, because some kids in her school called her pork (123). Thus, it is not unreasonable to conclude Ginika's attempts at making sure Ifemelu comes into options that allow or promise agency, her unflinching regard for Ifemelu's welfare follow from, or is motivated by shared experience : shared experience that obligates empathy or guarantees bonds akin to those cultivated in kinship arrangements, a kind of *transnational African sisterhood* that recognizes kinsfolk occupy mutual transnationality, a foreignness that often supposes interminable illegitimacy in America, and so obligates interminable bonds and associative support.

What I mean is that in the cauldron of her own subjection to racist and/or sexist denigration, Ginika undoubtedly recognizes Ifemelu battles analogous xenophobia that

forecloses opportunities for agency in the context of racism or sexist abuse. This is why Ginika proffers help or job opportunity the narrative confirms forecloses for Ifemelu, further subjection to racialized and/or gendered trauma. Ginika becomes *proverbial sister-friend,* whose citizenship notwithstanding, identifies xenophobic and/or related gendered overtures that constitute *mutual trauma* and so necessitates an *impermeable female kinship* with Ifemelu, or as it were, entitles Ifemelu to her loyalty, and benevolence. What is more, considering, as aforementioned, much of the novel witnesses Ifemelu's socio-economic ascent and cultural gravitas following Ginika's job recommendation, there is no gainsaying Adichie sees African female friendships yielding options for mobility and consequent agency in a gendered and/or racialized transnational context stacked against "Non-American Blacks." She makes the case for distinguishing an African sisterhood, communities of support obligated by shared recognition of the trauma and crisis of occupying Non-American femininity, and so able to guarantee group welfare. Adichie, in other words, sees a transnational and transitory African sisterhood able to replace kinships obligated by blood and memories of an African home. Really, if Ifemelu admits "unlike Aunty Uju," Ginika came to "America with the flexibility and fluidness of youth" and so she occupies consciousness that demystifies American "codes" (125), it is because Adichie intends to privilege African female alliances buoyed by the kind of socio-political cachet African "sisters" like Ginika who have "mastered ways of being" in America (125) bring to group consciousness. Ginika's long-time residency and/or legitimate claims to American citizenship presumes awareness, and so she is able to model or offer signposts to what yields empowerment for "non-American" Black women.

To put this simply, Adichie's text invites newly-arrived African female migrants to distinguish and partner with African female mentors or sister-friends obligated by shared aspirations, but also occupying the kind of socio-cultural facility and associated agency needed

for mapping and advising intra-group welfare. It is important to mention the narrative does not show Aunty Uju actively accommodating Ifemelu or seeking job options for the desperate Ifemelu. In fact, like Ifemelu whose "foreign" status and so inability to find legitimate income make it so that she indulges a sexual predator for money and means, Aunty Uju obliges sexist abuse from her Nigerian male-suitor in the hopes she gains American residency through marriage. However, absent Ginika's frustration with "colorism" and/or sexist typecasts, identity crises at odds with her cultural experience in Nigeria, the novel does not present Ginika actively battling racialized or gendered victimization precipitated by immigration prohibitions and resultant socio-economic constraints. Ginika's African identity via her Nigerian father matters in the way she treks Nigeria's border into America. Her migrant experience and associated gendered or even racialized alienation in America, in other words, underlies shared lens and aspirations with Ifemelu. Ginika is also biracial with a white American mother who guarantees her citizenship status and succor from visa-related "trauma." It is therefore conceivable Adichie uses Ifemelu's relationship with Ginika, and not Aunt Uju's, to argue transnational African female friendships advised by African "sisters" with representative access to otherwise inaccessible white/American mediated spaces, African "sisters" able to proffer alternative recourse for socio-economic mobility and resultant agency. Thus, Ginika's ability to secure Ifemelu a job that does not require she verifies employment eligibility, a job that does not require that she uses "fake names," or wrestle with associated anxieties about fraudulence, or compromised morality.

I will venture that Adichie's novel consequently suggests African female friendships rallied by the "trauma of getting an American visa" and its gendered implications suppose or necessitate what I call *symbolic matricide*— which is the distancing of the putative African

mother for the transnational African sister better stationed and so able to guide group welfare. Or in Ifemelu's transnational experience, a distancing of the hitherto revered paternal aunt, Aunt Uju. This is why Ginika's initial concerns about a depressed Ifemelu translates, years later, into voice and lens for Ifemelu who authors a blog post initiating conversation "On the Subject of Non-American Blacks Suffering from Illnesses Whose Names They Refuse to Know" (159); this is why Ruth, a veteran international student, and Ifemelu's African friend not only advises Ifemelu to "Lose the braids and straighten [her] hair" when Ifemelu mentions an upcoming "interview in Baltimore," but makes sure to add she is telling Ifemelu that "kind of stuff" because "it matters," because Ifemelu's community of African sister-friends— accounting for Ruth's reference to a "we"---- want her "to get that job" (202-03); and this is why Wambui, Ifemelu's Kenyan friend and apparent leader of her college's ASA group, not only succeeds at convincing Ifemelu to cut her hair by invoking the autonomy natural hair signifies, but offers to cut Ifemelu's hair, and later, points Ifemelu to "HAPPILYKINKYNAPPY.COM," a "virtual world ... sculpted" for Black women "where their coily, kinky, nappy, woolly hair was normal " (209-12). In fact, Ifemelu's decision to launch a race blog follows email conversation with Wambui on "things unsaid and unfinished," on "things" she is unable to share with her white boyfriend (295). Wambui encourages Ifemelu to start a blog; she also assures Ifemelu her impassioned views and questions on race and standards of feminine beauty in America will attract a large audience because it's "so raw and true" (295).

My point here is that Adichie's text distinguishes ways immigration prohibitions and associated socio-economic exclusions in America presuppose diminished agency for "Non-American" women also navigating gendered and/or racialized constraints. The novel, however, also uses its putative Afropolitan woman, Ifemelu, an African student émigré, Princeton Fellow,

race blogger and public intellectual to proffer resultant feminism: an Afropolitan feminism that germinates from, but also thrives on the collective consciousness and resultant goodwill of sister-émigrés. To put this another way, for *Americanah*, an Afropolitan feminist posture anticipates and thrives on African female friendships rallied by the "trauma" of occupying "Non-American" difference, rallied by shared interest in an egalitarian and/or inclusive American milieu able to account for an empowered African and Black female presence.

***Americanah*: Afropolitan Feminism as Resistance to White Female Paternalism**

To the extent Adichie's *Americanah,* to reiterate my earlier point, sees an Afropolitan feminism that values a resistance-by the-numbers strategy against systems that flame white/male predation, it makes sense the novel continues to curate an emerging socio-cultural and economic advantage for Ifemelu propped, in part, by a backdrop of interested female patrons, including white American female patrons twice removed from the constraints of inhabiting Blackness. I argue that *Americanah* in arbitrating the gendered experiences of its Afropolitan protagonist allows, in part, for interracial female engagements arched against a symbolic and palpable male-privileging society. Really, if Kimberly, a white female socialite and wealthy heiress, not only consents to employing Ifemelu, a "non-American" otherwise barred from seeking employment without sanctioned work authorization, but as the narrative suggests, agrees to a compensation contract that allows Ifemelu to evade possible apprehension, if Kimberly, in other words, risks ensuing legal charges that proves complicity in the instance of visa-related fraud, it is not untenable to argue Adichie sees opportunities for female engagement beyond race fidelity. It is also no surprise Adichie provides space in Kimberly's household for Ifemelu's short-lived but ostensibly enrapturing love affair with Kimberly's brother, Curt, who, more importantly,

recommends Ifemelu for a subsequent job option that translates into work authorization and citizenship (202). To put this another way, Kimberly becomes symbolic representation for ways cross-racial female bonding signals "coalition-building." Kimberly's character allows Adichie to indulge and, perhaps, test the premise of an essential femaleness drained of conflicting racial or cultural idiosyncrasies.

Except female communities convinced sex mitigates or ameliorates "race considerations" are either oblivious of or unwilling to accept the influence and tragedy of race. As Grillo and Wildman put it, conflating sex and race only serves to "offer protection for the "traditional center," and/or "neglect[s] the varying and complex contexts of … different groups" (Grillo and Wildman 410-11). Race does matter, and *Americanah* to that end, witnesses moments Ifemelu's "Non-American" Blackness and the "difference" it supposes exposes her white female employers' inordinate hostility or patronizing paternalism. Ifemelu does not gain unqualified camaraderie in her white female employer's household on the merit of being female. For example, when Ginika reveals Kimberly does not hire Ifemelu on the first try because Laura, Kimberly's older and patently abrasive sister, preferred another hire (147-50), it is evident Adichie's *Americanah* does not see mutuality of intentions or unequivocal empathy in cross-racial female relationships notwithstanding mutual struggle against white/male oppression. Laura disdains Ifemelu for countering her mostly ill-informed views about Africa, what she refers to as Ifemelu's "sassy" attitude, and so she makes sure to deny Ifemelu the chance for an employment option that guarantees legitimate livelihood. *Americanah* portrays Laura as the racist white matriarch able to discriminate, and so complicit in a white and/or male- mediated socio-political oligarchy that victimizes Black women thrice removed from the axioms of power in America because of their gender, race, and non-Americanness. In more telling examples of her

underhanded xenophobia and racism, Laura in conversation with Ifemelu and Kimberly argues "Nigerians are the most educated immigrant group" in America, adding that that fact "says nothing about the millions who live on less than a dollar a day back" in Nigeria. Laura recalls hospital visits with a Nigerian physician she hopes becomes her daughter's doctor because "he was wonderful, so well-groomed and well-spoken," and mentions she "knew a woman . . . from Uganda," a "wonderful" woman who didn't get along with the African American woman in [their] class" because "[s]he didn't have all those issues" African American women have (168-69). Laura, to be specific, invokes long-standing western-mediated (mis)representations of an Africa swaddled in irredeemable poverty or "third-world" primitivism relative to America and its "dollar." She by implication, suggests a generous and comparatively civilized America able to train or "reform" its otherwise "uncivilized" African immigrants. Laura also indulges racist typecasts that conflate African American reticence or "issues" with inherent ineptitude. When Laura suggests she appreciates the Ugandan woman in her graduate class because she did not have "issues" like their African American colleague, she diminishes tangible crises African Americans bemoan in the context of systemic racism. Laura courts racist apprehensions about an African American group unwilling to oblige whiteness; She also, by implication, argues an infantile African immigrant group willing and ready to imbibe pathways to "civility." In fact, Laura's assumptions recall white-mediated racialized and racist interest in a model-minority group better adjusted, or willing to oblige whiteness— in this case, a preferable Black minority whose achievements, at least in Laura's view, affirm or witness America's superior standing **vis**-à-**vis** Africa's wanton deprivation.

Really, if Laura suggests Nigerian immigrants in America, accounting for their preferable speech patterns, and "wonderful" behaviors, embody opportunities America allows its

immigrants for advancement and civility relative to the teeming degeneration Africa's poverty portends, if she, on the other hand, suggests and so admits America shuns Non-American "foreign accents" and strange habits, it is no surprise Laura in her interaction with Ifemelu insists on reinforcing America's charitable exceptionalism by gloating over Africa, and Ifemelu's relative disadvantage. The novel ultimately portrays Laura as a self-indulgent xenophobe whose racism follows from insinuations that serve to mark her place and voice as a patently non-conflicted and superior American. Non-conflicted and patriotic in the way her whiteness forecloses "issues" African Americans have, and superior in the way her Americanness marks legitimate ownership and power, the kind allowed to adjudicate immigrant behavior and worthiness. It is unsurprising Laura makes sure to "look up information about Nigeria, "asking" Ifemelu "about 419 scams, telling her how much money Nigerians in America sent back home every year," and showing Ifemelu a magazine that features a thin [and stunning] white woman, smiling at the camera, holding a dark-skinned African baby in her arms, and all around her, little dark-skinned African children...spread out like a rug" (160-63). Laura, to put this another way, not only preoccupies with distinguishing Africa's presumed degeneracy or a complicit Nigerian immigrant group perpetuating scams by sending money home, but suggests the corollary, which is, a (white) American moral superiority that elevates the lens and voice she brings to adjudicating Africa's plight, and so mandates Ifemelu's acquiescing silence. Laura performs what I call *self-indulgent Americanism*— to borrow Ifemelu's words, an "aggressive" and "unaffectionate interest" in a so-called "third world" culture, race, or nation with an aim to distinguishing or highlighting (white) American eminence (163). Laura personifies the quintessential racist xenophobe unwilling to engage an African American woman because her "issues" suggest irreconcilable ineptness, and unable to extend unqualified camaraderie in her

interaction with a "Non-American" Black woman, an African female immigrant (Ifemelu) because the latter's presence in America evokes xenophobic apprehensions about protecting or reinforcing (white) Americans' place and ownership.

I do not mean to suggest Adichie's novel argues a monolithic white and/or American female community willfully ignorant of the particular plight of Black women also battling sanctioned denigration or exclusions on account of their "Non-American" and so presumed apartness. I do not also mean to argue that Adichie sees a montage of xenophobic white women preoccupied with circumscribing American exceptionalism or parameters for voice and place in America against the backdrop of teeming Black and brown foreigners. In fact, Kimberly eventually hires Ifemelu for the babysitter position, a gesture that defies Laura's initial protestations or ostensible xenophobic disdain for Ifemelu. Kimberly's gesture provides Ifemelu succor from immigration proscriptions that ban employment for "international students," or from the kind of financial despondency underlying her decision to oblige sexual violation.

Absent what appears an improbable supposition, that is, the narrative of a white femme fatale obsequiously willing legal trouble in behalf of a destitute "Non-American Black," it is undeniable Adichie admits possibilities for female "coalition-building" across racial differences, and/or beyond the politics of home and belonging. Adichie crafts narrative space for emergent friendship and mutual empathy between Kimberly and Ifemelu. Kimberly, for instance, apologizes to Ifemelu on Laura's behalf after Laura dismissively labels Ifemelu's insistence on correcting misinformed views on Africa "sassy." She (Kimberly) also assures Ifemelu she does not like the word "sassy" in the way the word is "used for certain people and not others" (162). Ifemelu, on her part, admits she "liked" Kimberly on "that first day." She notices Kimberly's "purplish eyes are full of the expression Obinze, her Nigerian lover and putative soul-mate, often

used to describe the people he liked: “obi ocha. A clean heart” (147). Also, “in some small way that she does not understand,” Ifemelu realizes her “presence seems to steady Kimberly.” Ifemelu admits to feeling “protective of Kimberly,” and in palpable defiance of Laura’s relentless hostility, resolves “to be there for Kimberly” if Kimberly “wanted her to be there” (160-69). I will argue that Kimberly’s insistence she does not like the word “sassy,” accounting for how its racialized and gendered use typecasts white-female decorum vs. Black female impropriety, suggests Adichie appreciates occasions for gendered relationships or female engagements mediated by race consciousness. An indication Kimberly recognizes Laura’s racialized hostility towards Ifemelu germinates from a systematized and prevailing hierarchy of racial difference that serves to denigrate Black humanity. In retrospect, it is possible Kimberly’s later decision to hire Ifemelu for the babysitter position— allowing for what the narrative suggests the job portends for a struggling Ifemelu doomed by her “Non-American” or “international student” status— supposes Kimberly’s awareness of an American climate tethered to its racialized past, and so able to foreclose socio-economic advantage for its racial Blacks, more so, for its Black immigrants like Ifemelu. In this narrative, Kimberly does not sacrifice race awareness for filial piety. She typifies the intentions and lens of the white female ally acknowledging the representative experiences of female peers in a gendered relationship. It matters that Ifemelu befittingly sees in Kimberly’s intentions, an “Obi -Ocha,” a Nigerian Yoruba expression invoked to describe someone with “a clean heart,” and so vows to protect her white female employer. Really, if Ifemelu invokes a Yoruba descriptor not only associated with fond memories of her Nigerian high school sweetheart and incandescent lover, Obinze, but evocative of an African home mired in ties of blood and obligatory goodwill, it is evident Ifemelu anticipates, or perhaps concedes friendship with Kimberly promises, but also obligates

guarantees of mutual welfare and requited love— the kind fashioned by and for sister-friends motivated by unconditional loyalty. In other words, if Ifemelu in describing what analogizes Kimberly's intentions opts for language tethered to her Yoruba culture and identity, the argument can be made Ifemelu sees a well-intentioned white female ally, perhaps, aware of a historically-sanctioned, and associated socio-cultural bias for white/American subjectivity, and so able to cede space for Other voices, for Ifemelu's Non-American and Black subjectivity. Ifemelu sees a white female ally whose friendship recalls ties forged on filial terms, that is, on the premise mutual dependence, "obi ocha," assumes trust.

On the other hand, if Ifemelu considers Kimberly's preoccupation with apologizing for Laura's xenophobia tedious and self-absorbed (163), it is because Adichie's *Americanah* does not assume white female liberalism precludes assumptions of white subjectivity. As renowned feminist critic, scholar, and author Bell Hooks argues, "white liberals" do not "recognize the ways their actions support and affirm the very structure of the racist domination and oppression that they profess to wish to see eradicated" (113). History serves white agency and/or constitutive power, and so despite what indicates Kimberly's "clean heart," Ifemelu gleans a "self-indulgent" Kimberly whose insistence on "shielding" her from Laura's xenophobic racism suggests paternalistic intent. Kimberly's gesture, in other words, assumes an infantile Ifemelu needing succor from racialized hostility, a helpless Ifemelu reliant on the maturity and voice she (Kimberly) brings to adjudicating cross-racial/cross-cultural rancor. Also, if in response to a "misty-eyed," "soft-faced" Kimberly decrying her long delayed trip to Africa "to do something with her charity," Ifemelu admits, in jest, that "she felt sorry to have come from Africa, to be the reason [a] beautiful woman, with...bleached teeth and bounteous hair would have to dig deep to

feel such pity, such hopelessness" (150), the argument can be made Ifemelu knows white paternalism serves to reinforce white agency and its presumed relative superiority.

In fact, Ifemelu's cynicism, what appears a tongue-in-cheek comment decrying her connection to an impoverished Africa culpable in the soulless way it reduces otherwise beautiful Americans like Kimberly to needless sympathy, recalls NoViolet Bulawayo's attention to a first world/third world dialectic that supposes and reinforces the latter's perennial subordination in *We Need New Names (*2013). In the novel, Darling, a young African girl migrates to America following political upheaval and her family's escape to a shanty town in Zimbabwe. An Afropolitan fiction critics concur offers coming-of-age tropes on account of its child narrator and protagonist, Bulawayo's novel characterizes the experience of migration, alienation, and the struggle to assert voice and place in dehumanizing terms— an affecting characterization in the way it proceeds from the imagination and voice of a child narrator whose innocence and obliviousness preclude self-assertion, or whose precocity does not mitigate consequent hopelessness. In a chapter named "How They Lived," for instance, Darling's disembodied voice carries gut-wrenching portraits of hapless African migrants oscillating between sardonic laughter and grief as they concede Africa's tragedies and oblige America's paternalistic pity:

> And when they asked us where we were from, we exchanged glances and smiled with the shyness of child brides. They said, Africa? We nodded yes. What part of Africa? We smiled. Is it that part where vultures wait for famished children to die? We smiled. Where the life expectancy is thirty-five years? We smiled. Is it there where dissidents shove AK-47's between women's legs? We smiled. Where people run about naked? We smiled. That part where they massacred each other? We smiled. Is it where the old president rigged the election and people were tortured and killed and a whole bunch of them put in

> prison and all, there where they are dying of cholera----oh my God, yes, we've seen your country; it's been on the news. And when these words tumbled from their lips like crushed bricks, we exchanged glances again and the water in our eyes broke. Our smiles melted like dying shadows and we wept; wept for our blessed, wretched country. We wept and wept and they pitied us and said, it's okay...you are in America now, and still we wept and wept...and they gave us soft little thingies and said, Here is some Kleenex, here, and we took the soft thingies and put them in our pockets to look at later and we wept still, wept like widows, wept like orphans. (239-40).

Adichie's text finds resonance in Bulawayo's fiction and vice versa because their distinctive migrant narratives do not forget long-standing western-mediated (mis)representations of a benighted, barbaric, and disease-ridden Africa whose citizens bear consequent festering wounds that validate America's pity, and/or intervening paternalism. Really, if Ifemelu addresses Kimberly's self-flagellating regrets about abandoning her charity projects in Africa with a snide remark that questions Kimberly's intentions, and if Bulawayo's narrator "smiles" in response to tragedies distinguishing civil strife in the referenced African country, it is possible to argue both authors use their protagonists to forswear the inquiring or willing white paternalist— that is, if we assume cynicism and laughter presuppose Ifemelu and Darling's nonchalance or detachment, or the novels' attempt to dismiss white American patronage trained on the idea that Africa's disparate tragedies suppose an infantile African populace. On the other hand, if Bulawayo's narrator eventually mourns, and so considers the chance for American-mediated charity unfortunate, it is because like Adichie, Bulawayo's story-world admits Africa's discomfiting fate validates stereotypes and/or xenophobic exclusions with consequences for access and means, for asserting Africa's interior humanity. Both authors also acknowledge the American benefactor

who invokes the tale of the appeasing "Kleenex" to evidence an infantile and so ineffectual Africanness---- hence, our narrator "weeps." Ultimately, the trope of the empowered Afropolitan woman (Ifemelu) claiming avenues for voice in Adichie's text foreshadows agency for the Afropolitan girl (Darling) in Bulawayo's text too young to challenge America's racialized topography.

In other words, Adichie text, more than Bulawayo's Afropolitan Bildungsroman, characterizes an Afropolitanism that witnesses "global" Africans' inclination to reject on "principle any form of victim identity" (Mbembe 28-29). Really, if Ifemelu sees an underlying self-aggrandizement in the culture and politics of white/American humanitarianism— especially those curated to reinforce apartness from an infantile and expectant Africa dependent on western gratuity— it is because the consciousness she accrues navigating and engaging America's "tribalisms" typifies those of an Afropolitan who has come of age. Ifemelu, to put this differently, has no expectations for unqualified exchange and camaraderie in a gendered context of engagement defined by white/American paternalism, in a context tethered to the kind of socio-political gerrymandering that makes heroes of its American whites. In the Afropolitan story-world Adichie weaves, opportunities for female-coalitions across race and culture do not suppose unequivocal homogeneity or an essential female agenda— notwithstanding a 21st century context marked by measured gains in race justice post-Selma, a 21st century context that foreshadows the conscious calibration of the fiercely independent "pink pussy-hat[11]" wearing

[11] "The Pussyhat Project was launched Thanksgiving weekend to knit thousands of pink hats for those who would march in Washington, D.C. for the Women's March [2017]. The mission behind the project was to provide a 'unique collective visual statement which will help activists be better heard' and also to provide 'people who cannot physically be on the National Mall a way to represent themselves and support women's rights.'" See https://www.bustle.com/p/what-do-the-pink-hats-mean-the-womens-march-the-pussyhat-project-have-a-purposeful-message-32088

suffragists marching on Washington wielding inclusive voices against legislative assault on gains in women's rights.

Adichie's *Americanah*, in my view, eventually arrives at, and advances the prevailing case for multivalent femininity in female communes, that is, the case for an intersectional and intersecting feminism not sold on the morality of an essential or global sisterhood. What I mean is that for Adichie's *Americanah*, intersectional feminism, conceived in the literature as an overlapping gendered, racialized and class-mediated counter-hegemonic stance against systemic oppressions, illustrates pathways or rhetorical postures for Afropolitan female mobility and agency. Intersectional feminism typifies the nature and urgency of countering the systematic denigration and/or exclusion of Black women who are Non-American. To put this another way, an intersectional feminist posture that anticipates and accounts for the multiplicity of oppressions handicapping women of color, for example, suffices as crucial base ideology and illustrative counter-action for an African female émigré constrained by a convoluted and complex array of sanctioned exclusions on account of her non-Americanness. Therefore, in anticipation of the representative "Non-American" and Black female immigrant whose "foreign accent," for instance, excites suspicions and associated exclusions that foreclose the chance for resistance in the instance of racialized and/or gendered abuse, Adichie weaves a responsive feminist posture for Ifemelu. Adichie weaves an Afropolitan feminist posture that also takes for its ethos, an intersectional feminist stance viscerally attentive to distinctive realities of women astride racial, cultural, national, and/or class backgrounds. Adichie weaves an Afropolitan feminism that in more consequential terms specifically advocates the plight of the migrating and migrated 'Non-American" Black or African woman. *Americanah*, to be specific, proposes an Afropolitan feminist stance that accounts for what I call *critical intersectionality*, which is, the urgent

insistence on voice and presence for the Black or African female immigrant in the politics and praxis of an American-mediated intersectional feminism. This urgency is on account of an American female paternalism or its well-intentioned liberalism that precludes agency and representative voice for the African female immigrant in America— seeing as Ifemelu's presence not only supposes illegitimate arrogation of place and station in the discourse on American immigration, but recalls a "degraded" Africa apart from the character or spirit of American exceptionalism.

To be specific, in the narrative space Adichie offers for gendered engagement, its quintessential Afropolitan, Ifemelu, does not find acknowledgement or unqualified empathy in the context of her relationship with white American women— accounting for prevailing racialized anxieties that impugn Ifemelu's non-American difference, that underlie assumptions of her "discomfiting" African Blackness. *Americanah,* therefore proffers an Afropolitan feminism that as a matter of urgency, and in tandem with the character of intersectional feminism, refuses to cede voice and autonomy in spaces allotted for cross-racial, or cross-cultural engagement with white women. As an example, in response to Laura's claim an African American woman she knows has issues relative to a "wonderful" and kindly Ugandan woman, Ifemelu retorts, "Maybe when the African American's father was not allowed to vote because he was Black, the Ugandan's father was running for parliament or studying at Oxford" (168). Ifemelu also makes sure Laura knows "it's a simplistic comparison to make," and for good measure, advises Laura "to understand a bit of history more" (168). Really, if as the narrative suggests, Laura feigns confusion and distress in response to Ifemelu's retort— her "lip sag[ging].... stagger[ing] to [collect] herself, sniff[ing]" (168-69)— it is not untenable to argue Laura knows comparisons that distinguish "successes" African immigrants accrue relative to African Americans and their

"issues" dismiss history or indulge underhanded racist tropes about the latter's ineptitude and presumed "victim mentality." If Laura, in other words, actually understands "a bit of history," it is possible her brazen racialized and racist characterization of African American trauma serves to denigrate, but also circumscribe a racialized power differential: wherein Laura basks in the power and advantage she occupies as a white American woman able to indulge racist assumptions that denigrate Blackness, and Ifemelu, a submissive African migrant grateful for white/American gratuity, offers obliging silence.

To put this another way, although Laura's racialized denigration of African Americans juxtaposes what appears her favorable consideration of African immigrants, her decision to feign confusion and distress following Ifemelu's angry retort suggests she anticipates Ifemelu's resistance. Except, Laura, by deduction, also assumes and expects Ifemelu's acquiescing silence because Ifemelu is not American. Really, in Laura's racialized imagination, Ifemelu must accede to her white female employers for their gracious paternalism and kindly view of the African immigrant who embodies white-mediated expectations for model Blackness. Laura, in essence, simultaneously goads and forecloses Ifemelu's resistance: Laura sees a Black female who cannot and should not resist racialized assault on Blackness, who cannot address racialized typecasts that impugn African American women on account of her Non-American status. It is therefore undeniable that *in speaking back*, Ifemelu protests and resists Laura's underhanded attempt at foreclosing, but also contesting her (Ifemelu) voice and agency against racialized abuse. Ifemelu is aware Laura's willful ignorance and consequent brazen racism indicate the latter's deliberate intent to exclude or subjugate Black agency. Ifemelu is also aware her silence normalizes Laura's racialized abuse and/or suggest her (Ifemelu's) resignation. Ifemelu therefore refuses to cede voice or control. Adichie's Afropolitan female, Ifemelu, assumes *a zero-tolerance* posture

that, to an extent, indulges underhanded hostility of its own, a matter of fact insult about an oblivious or uniformed Laura in an attempt to register the urgency underlying her decision to speak back— that is, the idea that she (Ifemelu), otherwise risks subordination to white/American female paternalists in spaces that occasion female engagement.

In fact, Ifemelu's relationship with Kimberly better illustrates Adichie's interest in characterizing voice, *the act of speaking, and speaking back* as indicators of, but also crucial pathways to autonomy for Non-American Black women navigating relationships with white American women in a socio-economic or cultural context historically sanctioned to augment whiteness. The narrator, in a telling moment that illustrates Ifemelu's determined reticence or refusal to oblige white paternalism offers this exchange between Ifemelu and Kimberly:

> One day, late that winter, when she was with Kimberly at the huge kitchen table, drinking tea and waiting for the children to be brought back from an outing with their grandmother, Kimberly said, "Oh, look at this beautiful woman," and pointed at a plain model in a magazine whose only distinguishing feature was her very dark skin. "Isn't she just stunning?.' . . . "No, she isn't." Ifemelu paused. "You know, you can say just 'Black.' Not every Black person is beautiful". Kimberly was taken aback, something wordless spread on her face and then she smiled, and Ifemelu would think of it as the moment they became, truly, friends. (147).

It is important to note Ifemelu's hostile or even dismissive response to Kimberly's insistence the "Black model" is "stunning," follows from her exasperation with what appears Kimberly's purposeful preoccupation with referring to "ordinary looking" Black women as "beautiful" or "stunning" (147). Considering Ifemelu, to reiterate an earlier point, also finds Kimberly's determination to apologize for Laura's xenophobic claims "unnecessary" and "self-indulgent," I

offer that Ifemelu's counter-claim, her insistence the Black female model "isn't" stunning, works to unmask and address Kimberly's pretensions. If Kimberly, as a matter of habit, finds Black women "beautiful" and "stunning," if her kindly comments about Black women are solely and merely occasioned by the women's "very dark skin," I argue Ifemelu, and by extension, Adichie, see a white female ally with various charitable projects in Africa and in the "inner city" aware of the relative odds incapacitating Black and African women in America, and so perhaps, overcompensating for systemic exclusions with gratuitous affirmations of Black desirability, or with "unnecessary" apologies meant to mitigate other white women's racism. Kimberly, by implication, becomes white female savior lugging Black female indignation and anger. She diminishes Black female agency, and more importantly, usurps or appropriates those of the Black female foreigner, the African female émigré, like Ifemelu, who does not belong, and so does not occupy legitimacy that assures autonomous space for countering, resisting, or rejecting denigrations.

By making sure to counter Kimberly's patronizing affirmations of dark-skinned women, Ifemelu rejects the suggestion Kimberly occupies voice able to humanize Non-American Black women. She effectively challenges the premise validating Kimberly's insistence on affirming Black female agency. What is more, when Ifemelu encourages Kimberly to just say 'Black,' because "Not every Black person is beautiful" (147), she moves to revise and/or correct Kimberly's lens and voice on Blackness— a role reversal that presents Ifemelu as itinerant Black paternalist claiming relative or superior knowledge on Blackness, and so able to usurp Kimberly's voice by dictating what the latter should and cannot say. Ifemelu, in a more important sense, communicates agency or autonomous voice apart and in contravention to her white female employer's— what suggests Ifemelu's intent to also torpedo caricaturization of the

ingratiating African émigré whose presence verifies indebtedness to an American benefactor chaperoning an otherwise ineffectual Africa with charity projects. It is therefore not surprising Kimberly, initially "taken aback," and left "wordless" by Ifemelu's corrective retort, responds with a "smile" (147). Kimberly's "wordless expression" or evident shock suggests consequent awareness, an acknowledgement she occupies a deficient white gaze that mischaracterizes an otherwise capable and self-assertive African femaleness.

Also, to the extent Kimberly's "smile" makes Ifemelu think of that moment "as the moment they become friends, truly friends" (147), the argument can be made Kimberly's self-reckoning yields new perspectives on racial alliance: the kind of perspective that admits racial and/or cultural identities do not mitigate competence, and as Ifemelu anticipates, allows for unqualified exchange and mutual support in the context of gendered engagement. Ifemelu and Kimberly become "truly friends," an interracial female friendship or "coalition-building" that does not assume race, culture, and/or national identity mitigate competence, or sanction unmitigated, disproportionate advantage for white femininity— what, in retrospect, impugns Kimberly's initial decision to reject Ifemelu's job application on account of her white sister's racialized lens on Ifemelu's intentions, and what ultimately highlights Adichie's Afropolitan promise. In the end, the Kimberly-Laura-Ifemelu narrative in this novel illustrates an Afropolitan feminism with an interested intersectional posture. Ifemelu's reticence and/or counter-agency in this narrative proffers Afropolitan feminism that performs critical intersectionality in the way it exemplifies and advocates untethered representation for African female voices conceivably subsumed under general trifectas of 'race, class, and gender in America' on account of their appropriation by white/American female benefactors or paternalists.

<u>Americanah:</u> Afropolitan Feminism as Resistance to White /American Male Paternalism

If, as it happens, Ifemelu's Afropolitan feminist posture allows for counter-power, that is, refusal to cede voice and autonomy in the context of white female paternalism and racialized benevolence, it begs asking why Adichie would attribute what appears Ifemelu's first consensual sexual relationship in the period after her traumatic sexual subjection by the Ardmore Coach to spaces or turf white-female benefactors own. In other words, Ifemelu's romantic tryst with Curt follows from employment as Kimberly's babysitter. Also, Curt, who happens to be Kimberly's favorite brother, and a favored uncle to Kimberly's rather reticent daughter Morgan, makes a public spectacle of future marriage to Ifemelu in an attempt to woo Kimberly's affirmation. As the narrative reveals, Ifemelu, much like the compulsion to sacrifice self-dignity in her interaction with the Ardmore Coach, surrenders autonomy to Curt. Not only are "their lives... full of plans Curt makes," Ifemelu admits Curt's constant need for affirmation— asking which sexual cadences gratify her, and Ifemelu herself swearing interest that contravenes what she has "grown up... doing"— indicates "something in him, lighter than ego but darker than insecurity, that need[s] constant buffing, polishing, waxing" (207).

What's more, Curt's attraction to "exotic" physical attributes, that is, how he prefers Ifemelu's unpermed and kinky natural hair, for instance, to his "adventures" in bringing home "exotic species...a Japanese girl, a Venezuelan girl" (108), points to a kind of xeno-fetishism indicative, in part, of the axiom of white/American male power and the sexual exploitation of Black women toting historical degradation. It is therefore curious Ifemelu, who indicts the inherent shame in self-negating acts solicited and offered to placate white/American maleness— with reference to her interaction with the Ardmore Coach— capitulates. In fact, by Ifemelu's own admission, Curt's "[is] entitled in the way a child [is]: blindly" (210): an observation that

illuminates Curt's interest in a pliant femininity, one that surrenders self-control on account of "desirable" white masculinity. In fact, Curt complains a "brassy blonde" he "flirts" with not only "hit[s] on" him the moment she met him, he offers that the "brassy blonde" has "been after" him "since," and "won't leave him alone" (210). Really, it is surprising an otherwise empowered Afropolitan feminist, Ifemelu, who refuses to cede voice or power in the context of white female dominance, obliges Curt in a manner curiously reminiscent of her sexual victimization by the Ardmore Coach.

It is possible, on the one hand, that Adichie means to weave a sexual liberation narrative for an African female migrant that does not preclude reciprocal relations with white/American men. In fact, Ifemelu vows whirlwind romance with Curt. She readily consents to, and savors his impassioned love-making, often "flying to Cozumel for one night. London for a long weekend," and gaining approval from her favorite cousin, Dike, or Aunt Uju who see what appears a well-meaning and love smitten Curt invested in Ifemelu's happiness. Also, although Ifemelu concedes she does "not understand how Curt [can] grasp. . . . one thing about race, but [is] completely tone-deaf about another similar thing" (291), she reminisces moments Curt shows "being Black and white [are not] the same in America." Curt, for example, confronts an Asian hairdresser who refuses to trim Ifemelu's eyebrows because "they do not do curly hair," "angrily" declaring the Asian hairdresser will "fucking do [his] girlfriend's eyebrows or [he] will shut [the] fucking place" down (292). In fact, when Curt also counters his "Republican" mother's insistence that "Some people are still looking for reasons to complain even though America [is] now colour-blind" by pointing out their "fellow diners" will "be less than pleased if ten people who looked like Ifemelu joined them for dinner" (293), it is evident Adichie sees possibilities for fulfilling sexual or romantic bonds with white/American men actually elevated by occasions that verify

the latter's race consciousness, or their interest in acknowledging racialized exclusion— what, in retrospect, contrasts to the extent possible, the white Ardmore Coach's determined depravity, and/or witting abuse of women trapped by the constraints of sex, race, or class.

Beyond the palpable attempt to demonstrate requited interracial love incongruous with what history witnesses, it is not untenable to argue, on the other hand, that Adichie uses the Curt-Ifemelu romantic tryst to underscore, or perhaps, validate the Afropolitan's distinctive counter-normative power, which is, her/his strategic acquiescence and submission to sanctioned arrangements for otherwise inaccessible socio-economic gains. In fact, by recommending and influencing an employment position for Ifemelu that offers permanent residency benefits, Ifemelu's rather wealthy and influential white boyfriend, at the least, facilitates the agency and/or socio-economic mobility Ifemelu comes to inhabit in America as Princeton Fellow and race-blogger (202). Also, when Ifemelu begins to contemplate how some African female migrants like Wambui solicit and pay for visa marriages relative to the ease with which she earns a green card, the narrative, by deduction, begins to highlight correlation between Ifemelu's American-specific aspirations and those like Wambui, absent the different pathways to anticipated visa outcomes. After all, as Ifemelu's Nigerian friend, Ranyi confirms, Ifemelu's decision to oblige "self-entitled" Curt who offers opportunities for legal status mirrors Aunty Uju's in the way the latter obliges an American citizen, Bartholomew, anticipating permanent residency through marriage (422-23). My point is that in the narrative world Adichie creates, the Afropolitan woman battling systemic exclusions, or an immigration system that makes villains of its teeming Non-American petitioners, trains on an arsenal of counter-systemic, counter-normative strategies, least of which includes contracted visa marriages able to **1)** circumvent, accost, and yield legality and associated socio-economic advantage, and **2)** yield the kind of

legitimate American identity that leverages voice or agency in the instance of gendered and racialized violence. Certainly, and as I argue earlier in this chapter, systemic proscriptions that bar lawful employment for Non-American or international students like Ifemelu precipitate financial distress, and what the novel suggests denies Ifemelu the agency and/or choice to escape debasing gendered violation, her paid sordid affair with the Ardmore Coach.

Except *Americanah*, in the end, refuses to showcase Afropolitans, or Afropolitan women mindlessly preoccupied with American citizenship and residual cultural privilege, and so unwilling to appraise instances of abuse and consequences for voice and agency. Aunty Uju, for instance, divorces Bartholomew, her misogynistic Nigerian-American husband who not only abdicates parental responsibilities to his stepson, but demands the former surrenders her income on account of his position as head of the household. Also, it is important to remember Ifemelu does not, in the end, play matchmaker or convince Aisha's Ibo-American boyfriends to marry Aisha— what in my view, illustrates Ifemelu's foresight, or decision not to be complicit in what appears Aisha's submission to gendered indignity considering the latter's vociferous pursuit of unwilling and duplicitous male-partners for marriage. More importantly, and on her part, Ifemelu eventually cheats on, and breaks up with Curt after she has sex with a stranger she frequently encounters (287-88). Although the narrative reveals a distraught Ifemelu briefly agonizing over her break up, it also curiously presents Ifemelu nonchalant about cheating on Curt and admitting to self-sabotage. The narrative, for instance, highlights a self-reflective Ifemelu:

> It was true, she had cheated on Curt with a younger man who lived in her apartment building in Charles Village and played in a band. But it was also true that she had longed, with Curt, to hold emotions in her hand that she never could. She had not entirely believed herself while with him--happy, handsome Curt, and the spirited easy life he gave

> her, and yet she so often fought the urge to create rough edges, to squash his sunniness, even if just a little. . .. She had done it, in truth, because she was curious, but she would not tell Ginika this, because it would seem flippant . . .. Her relationship with Curt was what she wanted, a crested wave in her life, and yet she had taken an axe and hacked at it. Why had she destroyed it? She imagined her mother saying it was the devil. She wished she believed in the devil, in a being outside of yourself that invaded your mind and caused you to destroy that which you cared about. (287-89)

Really, if Ifemelu mourns her breakup, and/or makes attempts at reconciliation, it is because, on the one hand, Adichie anticipates and so works to quell charges the novel peddles or glorifies an amoral Non-American and Black female demographic, that is, African female migrants unabashedly invested in duping unsuspecting white and/or American male partners for visa opportunities, or given to the sacrilegious act of corrupting requited love. Ifemelu as the novel shows has regard for and returns Curt's affections without qualification. On the other hand, if a remorseless Ifemelu refuses to proffer explanation for her infidelity, or refuses to, as cheaters are wont to do, placate Curt by attributing her actions to lapse in judgement, it is because Adichie's *Americanah*, to reiterate my important claim, does not intend to make the case African female émigrés sacrifice well-being, self-worth, and/or autonomy for the chance to accrue legal status in America, even those enabled by legitimate relations with, or marriage to white/American citizens. In fact, Ifemelu's silence, her refusal to mitigate the shocking tenor of her infidelity with excuses that prove remorse indicates she does not intend to cede control to Curt by begging forgiveness and/or making Curt adjudicator of and for what autonomy she negotiates. Ifemelu refuses to oblige courtship rituals tethered to male dominance and associated interest in circumscribing female desire. To put this another way, Curt does not own, and so cannot

arbitrate what terms enable or occlude Ifemelu's sexuality— perhaps Adichie's authorial decision to foreclose presumptions of a white/American male savior not only willing to succor Black female immigrants from systematic exclusions weathered against their Blackness with visa-related employment provisions, but able to forgive and so rehabilitate female bodies degraded in sexual depravity.

In other words, the quintessential Afropolitan woman unable to claim white privilege in the context of gendered engagement, and unable to invoke legitimate Americanness in the instance of white mediated xeno-racism, as a matter of survival and by force of presence, brings unyielding resistance against and analogous to the perennial power of whiteness. In fact, beyond symbolic resonances of sexual control and agency, Ifemelu's non-explanation indubitably raises or highlights previous moments in the narrative that justify and excuse her infidelity---- perhaps another narrative strategy that allows Adichie the chance to make space for readers as objective witnesses able to verify and concede what necessitates Ifemelu's self-assertion. Suffice it to say, in retrospect, that Ifemelu's infidelity reveals racial mistrust, that is, her suspicions Curt's perfunctory interest in race camouflages glib indifference, the kind that reflects systemic disregard for racial grievances, or makes him accuse her of "overacting" when she points out racialized encounters. Ifemelu apprehends consequent compulsion to surrender autonomous voice, and/or her expectations for race justice to placate Curt's indifference. Hence, her decision to cheat; what symbolically and functionally defies the ties that bind her to Curt. When Ifemelu also admits consequent "jokes" about race "left her with a small and numb discomfort that she never admitted to" Curt (292), it is evident she seeks autonomous voice on race unmediated by white dispassion or male subjectivity. Really, if Ifemelu believes Curt's possible infidelity with a long-haired "brassy blonde" woman, or his rather predictable penchant for women with long hair

suggests Curt has no regard for Black ethnic hair or beauty, there is no gainsaying Ifemelu indulges racialized self-deprecation, the kind that follows from her concerns Curt considers her (Ifemelu) an "exotic" requiem for fleeting pleasure, and what, ultimately, necessitates the urgency underlying her grasp for independence.

It is important to mention the narrative does not impugn or query Curt's attraction to, or preoccupation with Ifemelu's physical or racial attributes. In fact, Curt makes sure to complement and offer assurances when Ifemelu, convinced natural short hair presents the appearance of a boy, indulges self-pity (292). Ifemelu also admits her preoccupation with hair lengths or types that elicit Curt's desire is "irrational" (292). Except, Ifemelu also sees an irreverent Curt whose ability to ease in and out of race consciousness, whose ability to minimize racialized affronts at whim indicates the kind of apathy she cannot afford. I mean the kind of apathy that forecloses Curt's unyielding interest in race awareness and active resistance, and so for Ifemelu, the need for physical and/or sexual apartness— sexual apartness that insures against the self-immolating doubts she indulges contemplating her desirability as a Black woman vis-à-vis Curt's hair fetish, or that restores the voice she forfeits choosing silence, dismissing "the small and numb discomfort" she feels broaching race "jokes" with Curt. To put this another way, if Ifemelu, rather than initiating separation or actively communicating concerns for redress, chooses infidelity aware it portends disruption and loss for Curt, it is because she apprehends concomitant disruption or resistance to what threatens her sense of self and ability to proffer voice in an American context disproportionately inoculated for white/male agency, or in the event xenophobic exclusions deny socio-economic means and associated resignation to gendered violation----as they are wont to do in Ifemelu's experience.

If Infidelity is traumatic in its disruption, Adichie's end game, in my view, is a conscious Black female émigré, an Afropolitan feminist willing to proffer absolute resistance, *a disruptive zero-sum counter-strategy* against a white-mediated male-privileging context apathetic to Black female denigration. In fact, Ifemelu's decision to sever ties with her white-male boyfriend and benefactor rather than bargain or surrender autonomous voice recalls her determined resistance to Laura's xenophobic racism and Kimberly's infantilizing paternalism; what I insist indicate Adichie's intention to propose an Afropolitan feminist stance able to appropriate and deploy habits undergirding white heteronormative agency for proportional counter advantage. This is to say, Afropolitan feminism, aware it occupies standpoint thrice removed from white heteronormativity, proffers relentless agency analogous to those whiteness inhabits— otherwise it risks reinforcing narratives that herald white/American/male superlative power over African female subjectivity.

***Americanah*: Afropolitan Feminism as Pan-African Agency**

Fortunately, in America's racial cosmopolis, some Americans are Non-Whites, and some Blacks, Non-American.[12] Adichie, to put this another way, does not pretend interest in new portraitures of "angry" Black women either incensed by aggregating injustices on account of their perceived Non-American aberration and so perennially suspicious of mutually affirming relationships with American peers, or convinced American-mediated partnerships jeopardize anticipated opportunities for autonomous voice and presence. To be sure, for Adichie's novel,

[12] See: Akasha (Gloria T.) Hull, Patricia Bell-Scott, and Barbara Smith's *But Some Of Us Are Brave: All the Women Are White, All the Blacks Are Men: Black Women's Studies* (1982). The text addresses concerns, struggles, intersecting oppressions that belie and distinguish the realities of black women, and/or women of color. The title of the text litigates Black women's particular erasure relative to white women, and Black men with reference to the experience of racism and sexism. My introductory sentence invokes that sentiment but with a specific twist: I reference a racialized American context that at the least provides its oppressed Non-American Blacks, sympathetic American "sisters and brothers" on the heels of a shared history ---slavery, and colonialism.

the African female émigré negotiating socio-economic and cultural ascent in spaces otherwise sanctioned for legitimate Americanness or protracted male-advantage, cannot afford the compulsion to surrender voice and place. Lest she, as a matter of consequence, forecloses opportunities for access to those spaces, or at worst, flame suspicions her resignation to subjugation reinforces inherent ineptitude.

However, Adichie's portrait of Ifemelu, an Afropolitan, a high-achieving African female émigré building community and deploying voice in partnership with, and on behalf of African-Americans, argues or witnesses ways Pan-African alliances actually cede and so promise "Non-American Blacks" the kind of legitimate standpoints or uncontested Americanness history mandates. What I mean is that if in the context of this novel, Ifemelu's "Non-American" identity, her African nationality, forecloses or diminishes socio-economic mobility and associated prestige with consequences for racialized and/or gendered denigration, the chance to commune with "American-Blacks," that is Americans of African ancestry, yields, to the extent possible, opportunities for legitimate voice and place in America. It is therefore not surprising Adichie situates Ifemelu's more palpable agency or self-assertion in the context of her work as "race blogger," and in the course of her idyllic romantic relationship with Blaine, an African American professor and liberal ideologue committed to Black racial uplift. It matters that Adichie presents an invested Ifemelu reveling in the role of prolific race blogger **1)** addressing issues of race and gender that span systemic injustices immobilizing Black civil rights, **2)** accepting invitations to lead diversity workshops and training exercises for companies and organizations seeking to promote "race consciousness, **3)** attracting commercial interests and so economic returns in exchange for what market-value her reader-base promises, and **4)** gaining from what appears a

supportive Blaine and a circle of interested liberal friends who define Ifemelu's legitimate standing as race expert in their acknowledgement and affirmations.

My point is that Adichie does not mince intentions when she proffers an Afropolitan, or Black female émigré better served allying with and supporting aspirations that galvanize Blackness and Black progress in America. It is evident Ifemelu's African American partner and his friends offer Ifemelu an engaging "liberal" community invested in her views and lens on America's racial politics or "tribalisms"— what I argue, highlights opportunities for autonomous voice and presence in an American-mediated space markedly different from her interaction with her white female employers, Laura and Kimberly. It is also undeniable the chance for public speaking engagements or workshops intended to "train" mostly white audiences on race and diversity, the advertising rush and capital gains her blog accrues distinguish socio-economic mobility and consequent cultural agency for Ifemelu in ways that presage her uncontested rights to America as a contributing citizen. Ifemelu, in terms of her Pan-African engagements, becomes a contributing citizen whose autonomous lens and voice, coveted as it is, promises to shape America's collective consciousness on race. To put this another way, when Ifemelu, as race blogger, proffers voice on racialized beauty norms and consequences for Black female denigration, when she with a dint of sarcasm enumerates race etiquettes for communicating with white Americans both Republican and Liberal, and when she ridicules African or Black émigrés who forswear affinity with African Americans in an attempt to distinguish model behaviors incongruous with racist presumptions of Black ineptitude, it becomes apparent Adichie's *Americanah* sees an America that makes victims of its racial Blacks regardless, and so urges a Pan-African" alliance with African Americans whose counter-voices, for better or worse, are legitimated through America's codified expiation.

To be sure, I do not suggest Adichie makes the case Afropolitans or African émigrés lack capacity for agency absent alliance with African Americans, or that Blaine brings legitimacy to Ifemelu's voice on race politics on account of him being African American. My point is that if racism in 21st century America memorializes or witnesses what history sanctions, if consequent constitutional amendments, at the least, codify or validate Black racial agency and voice, Adichie makes the case Afropolitans, indubitably subjected to racialized abuse on account of shared race and heritage with African Americans, gain from race activism and its denominating significance---- which is, the augmented resistance race activism supposes in the context of racialized exclusions. I should add that Adichie sees an *ownership-by-association privilege* wherein Afropolitans who advocate race justice in partnership with "American Blacks" assume legitimate place and voice in America as socio-cultural arbiters with codified rights. To put this another way, if race and race activism verify Black presence and subjectivity in America, the Afropolitan or African female migrant, otherwise hampered by a convoluted mix of gendered, racialized, and xenophobic discrimination, accrues an avenue for sanctioned resistance and counter-action. This is why in distinguishing agency for African female migrants ascending America's racialized and gendered metropoles, Adichie offers Ifemelu's consequent status as race blogger, as a legitimate American able to educate and shape public consciousness.

For Adichie then, Afropolitan feminism has a self-interested stance on Pan-Africanism, or race advocacy to the extent it accrues agency fettered to Black racial aspirations. In fact, the near-perfect tenor of Ifemelu's romantic relationship with Blaine becomes, in symbolic terms, raison d'être for an Afropolitan feminist ideology invested in training adjudicators for race justice. For example, in the context of her relationship with Blaine, Ifemelu finds audience with a perceptive and interested African-American partner, and so does not emote silence in the way

race conversations with Curt, her white boyfriend, leaves her "with a small and numb discomfort that she never admit[s] to (292)." What's more, the argument can be made Adichie actually wagers Afropolitan female agency, in part, on the promise of race solidarity and consciousness when she presents Ifemelu positively enthralled by Blaine's measured and respectable demeanor (6)— what forecloses the kind of sexual violation she suffers in her interaction with the white Ardmore Coach. In another example, upon Blaine's urging, Ifemelu switches support from Hillary Clinton to Barack Obama after considering the latter's prototypical and so identifiable experiences navigating Blackness in America. Ifemelu comes into race consciousness; she concedes her "Non-American" and Black presence do not guarantee the kind of gendered privilege Hillary's whiteness enables, hence her decision to support Obama (361). Also, when Ifemelu admits sex with Blaine on the night of Obama's victory resolves previous impasse (356-61), she emotes renewed physical and/or sexual awakening that crests with consequent hope— a Black president who represents dignity and redemption for Blackness, who symbolizes Black racial affirmation, and/or the virtues of Pan-African communion.

Necessary Pan-Africanism in Teju Cole's Open City

In fact, Adichie's attention to an Afropolitan consciousness that privileges Pan-Africanism finds resonance in, or adds to an emergent Afropolitan literary tradition that does not sacrifice race activism for stylistic innovation on account of a Euro-American literary culture that suggests "art for its own sake" points to elevated craftsmanship. I do not suggest Afropolitan fiction precludes considerations for innovative prose, or style. Helen Oyeyemi in *Boy, Snow Bird* (2013), for example, and in my view, weaves intricate yet vivid narratives interspersed with African folktales and myths that lend the novel its celebratory avant-garde, postmodernist form.

In her review for the "The Guardian," Diana Evans argues *Ghana Must Go* (2013) "stands up to the hype" because Selasi "writes with glittering poetic command, a sense of daring, and a deep emotional investment in the lives and transformation of her characters." However, to the extent exacting realities of race and racism in America threaten, or even upend an Afropolitan identity or space interested in "complicating" Africa, in elevating the "multidimensionality" of its global subjects (Selasi), there is no gainsaying Pan-Africanism, which guarantees platforms for agitating and reclaiming autonomy apart from white-racial subjectivity, matters for Afropolitan aspirations.

In *Open City*, Cole, for example, presents an African male intellectual, Julius, whose Afropolitan posture recalls Adichie's decision to portray Ifemelu's Pan-African activism as an exercise in "consciousness raising," an exercise in circumscribing racial dignity for, as Julius puts it, "we Blacks" – those "who have known rougher ports of entry" into America, both forced and autonomous (18). In fact, as Julius navigates America's racialized metropoles, he observes that those walking the pavement of Wall Street seem to have forgotten past racial ills post 9/11. Julius also notices "one table" in a city stall displaying enlarged photographs of early-twentieth-century lynchings of African Americans, " and remonstrates a "Harlem night" that has no "whites," especially "around the corner of St. Nicholas Avenue" where drivers of "Black livery cabs" gather to smoke cigarettes and talk," where "young men in hooded sweatshirts" represent "the denizens of an informal economy" (18). In fact, in a screed that argues past racial assault on Black bodies follows from New York's fomented wealth, Julius recalls how "Trading in slaves had become a capital offense in the United States in the 1820, but New York long remained the most important port for the building, outfitting, insuring, and launching of slavers' ships" (163). He also recalls how " much of the human cargo" on "those vessels" were Africans enroute Cuba

to “work on the sugar plantations there,” and how in “profiting from slavery, the City Bank of New York was not unlike the other companies founded by merchants and bankers in the same period,” seeing as “Moses Taylor, one of the world’s wealthiest men … joined the board of the City Bank in 1837 after a long and successful career as a sugar merchant” (163). Even when Cole tips his authorial hand for a rare glimpse of what possible lapse in judgement blights Julius’ otherwise astute appraisal of New York’s racial landscape, and so we see the latter confusing “a dark canvas sheeting on a construction scaffold” for “the body of a lynched man dangling from a tree” (75), the fact that that misidentified lynching apparition foils concrete signifiers of racial lynching in Harlem’s store-fronts, I will say, reveals how the city’s topology is embroiled in persistent racial anxieties, more than it does Julius’ tenuous judgement or intellect. Richard Falk, author and Professor Emeritus of International Relations, confirms Cole “renovates” the modern city with a cosmopolitan character attentive to the “contemporary, to those in danger of becoming modern victims of prosperous urban forgetfulness or carelessness.” I will add that Cole’s male intellectual is better suited to agitate “urban” amnesia, in the way he embodies an Afropolitan consciousness intent on adjudicating consequent erasure for racial Blacks tethered to racialized cityscapes.

In fact, in a poignant narrative moment, that recalls Ifemelu’s race activism on her “race blog,” Julius sets about revising and intervening in misrepresentations and consequent caricatures of African Blackness tethered to America’s cultural landscape. In what appears to be one of many post-film analyses he indulges, Julius notes how the “crowd at the ticket counter,” several of them “Black,” but also some “Asians,” “Latinos,” and “immigrant New Yorkers” were “atypical” but “expected” considering “the absence of marquee Hollywood names,” and the fact that the film was set in Africa (28-29). Julius further observes the film’s credit sequence featured

"music from the right time period, but not from the right part of Africa," and acknowledges that a movie he "watched the previous year about the crimes of large pharmaceutical companies in East Africa… left [him] feeling frustrated, not because of its plot, which was plausible, but because of the film's fidelity to the convention of the good white man in Africa" (28-29). In delineating connections between Hollywood's apathetic mis/characterization of African-centered narratives, and a white audience largely uninterested in cinematic representations obliging those narratives, Julius, in fact, parses contemporary apprehensions about racial difference, consequent racial exclusions and associated prejudice. He proffers an astute conclusion on the racist underbelly of America's cultural landscape and protests contemporary racial apprehensions that fuel media (mis)representations of an indistinguishable Africa. Cole's Afropolitan protagonist asserts and symbolizes targeted resistance to the "white man's will" ---like Ifemelu, he becomes race connoisseur who emblematizes and agitates Black visibility, or in the context of Cole's fiction, the subjectivity Hollywood's white-mediated tropes truncate.

I will add that Cole's text, more than Selasi or Bulawayo's contemporary Afropolitan fiction, better reflects Adichie's characterization of an Afropolitan character in political terms—of an Afropolitan committed to the means and ends of race activism. I will even venture that Cole and Adichie's texts ultimately enact complementary narrative strategies in the way Julius' commitment to *seeing and re-seeing* America's racist and racialized 'open city,' what appears personal reflections and quiet protestations, find resonance and so augmentation in Ifemelu's *act of speaking and speaking back*, in the voice she lends race activism **1)** indicting race ills on her personal race blog, and **2)** intervening in America's public conscious with public presentations on race diversity. In other words, it is possible to make the case Cole and Adichie's texts perform "call and response" textual strategies, what critic Angelyn Mitchell refers to as an "intertextual

pattern of antiphony" usually characteristic of narrative traditions (14), or what describes narrative traditions able to proffer continuity. In Cole and Adichie's case, an emergent Afropolitan narrative tradition that argues and defines necessary attention to pan-African spaces.

Negotiating Intraracial Repression through Transactional Pan-Africanism

Except, in the Afropolitan world Cole weaves, his Afropolitan male protagonist rapes Moji, a childhood friend; except Ifemelu's posture against gendered subjugation distinguishes Adichie's Afropolitan feminism and its Pan-African aspirations from Cole's male-privileging racialized landscape. Adichie's Afropolitan female cannot surrender autonomy on assumption alliance with men, even those obligated by bonds of race, or a shared Non-Americanness, guarantees reprieve from gendered degradation. From *Americanah's* Afropolitan feminist standpoint then, intraracial "coalition-building" does not mitigate Black male dominance, or even intraracial repression. When Blaine, Ifemelu's African American boyfriend and resident intellectual, for example, upon reading Ifemelu's blogs on America's racialized metropoles demands revisions that, in his view, properly accounts for complex factors, when he argues Ifemelu's "observations on race" miseducates her American readership because the posts do not bring nuance to the subjects she addresses (314), the novel makes the case occasions for Black racial solidarity do not ultimately preclude, or attenuate repression. Blaine's attempt to redefine or correct Ifemelu's race politics intimates his intent to appropriate, or at the least, adjudicate Ifemelu's voice on assumption he occupies superiority as prescient male academic and so informed intellectual. To put this simply, Blaine's insistence Ifemelu revises the content of her blog posts signals intent to appropriate Ifemelu's voice, and/or an attempt to invoke privilege he occupies as an American male able to repress what agency Ifemelu accrues navigating Non-

American and Black femaleness. Really, absent the chance for an augmented anti-racist agenda in the context of pan-African solidarity, Ifemelu's refusal to amend or reconstitute the voice she brings to her blog, as demanded by Blaine, evidences Adichie's ultimate interest in an Afropolitan feminist strategy that forecloses intraracial prejudice and/or gendered denigration. In fact, Ifemelu's earlier decision to miss a widely publicized race protest Blaine organizes in behalf of a Black university employee profiled and charged with a crime he does not commit (352), concretizes Ifemelu's determined agency, her commitment to circumscribing autonomous voice and presence in America.

As Minna Salami, a Finnish-Nigerian journalist and putative Afropolitan with an award-winning blog, *MsAfropolitan.com*, rightly asserts, "Afropolitanism and Pan-Africanism exists within the same realm," however, "You can be Pan-African and perhaps not subscribe to the idea of Afropolitanism" and vice-versa (qtd.in Knudsen and Rahbek 156). *Americanah*, in my view, consequently delineates an Afropolitan feminism markedly and distinctively interested in what I call *transactional Pan-Africanism*. What I mean is that to the extent "Non-Americans" occupy contested voice and place in America's cultural and national conscious on the grounds they do not belong, it is tenable to envisage intraracial xenophobia, that is, African-Americans wittingly denigrating African or Black migrants. For example, Blaine's suggestion Ifemelu does not bring informed judgement to her race blog considering her maladjusted "outsider" lens. Hence, a concomitant transactional strategy, a kind of transactional Pan-Africanism that allows African migrants to withdraw support or voice in the instance of intraracial xenophobia and repression. Really, transactional Pan-Africanism matters especially for Afropolitan women battling a convoluted array of racialized and gendered constraints rendered intractable by systematic exclusions wielded against their Africanness. My point is that in the gendered context of

Adichie's novel, the Afropolitan woman who cannot surrender autonomy, but recognizes Pan-African ties matter for countering racialized denigration, for instance, courts transactional relationships with race advocacy, with African Americans, and with Black men. The African female migrant (in performing transactional Pan-Africanism), therefore, considers symbolic bargaining in which she offers and accrues proportional support against systematic racism and its gendered overtures, but reserves space and/or autonomy for resistance and voice, even an ideological distance, in the event spaces sanctioned for race advocacy become injurious to gender equity or perpetuate xenophobia.

It is important to mention Adichie does not impugn Blaine or portray him as witting misogynist preoccupied with denigrating Ifemelu's "Afropolitan" lens on America's racialized metropoles, or insistent on putative male rights to Ifemelu's voice. In fact, after Ifemelu rejects his previous attempts, we do not encounter Blaine actively invested in "retraining" Ifemelu's gaze on America, or demanding concessions from her. It is therefore tenable to argue Ifemelu's decision to break up with Blaine— what she considers insensible accounting for Blaine's moral resolve on race justice and fidelity— shows peremptory commitment to disavowing American paternalism and its entrenched orthodoxies more than it does her dissatisfaction with Blaine. In other words, if Blaine's past attempts at correcting Ifemelu's lens on America's racial politics suggests backhanded sexism and/or xenophobic prejudice, it is because Blaine's machismo reflects an American culture wagering against its ¨foreign" sojourners, and so the need for Ifemelu's preemptive counter-action— definite separation from a romantic partner whose past actions suggest Black racial alliances in America do not attenuate sexism or xenophobia.

<u>Americanah</u>: Afropolitan Feminism as Sankofa

Ergo, Ifemelu's decision *to return home*, to resettle in Nigeria, in my view, suffices for a strategic counter-hegemonic move that points to, but also indicts and renounces America's prejudiced and prejudicial public consciousness— especially those weathered against African migrants on assumption their Non-American 'difference' harbors irreconcilable ineptness. This is to say in giving up her widely acclaimed and successful tenure as race blogger to resettle in Nigeria, Ifemelu, and by implication, *Americanah*, proffers intransigent feminism, an unapologetic self-interested Afropolitan feminism invested in asserting and (re)claiming autonomy, and so unwilling to indulge American-mediated paternalism. Although, Ifemelu's return to Africa diminishes or takes for granted the plight and exigencies of "working-class" African female migrants willing comparable socio-economic advantage and the choice to, perhaps, resist gendered violation, the narrative does not present Ifemelu apologizing for returning to an African home, or for presumably giving up the prestigious significations of living in America for Nigeria's so-called "third-world" drudgery.

I do not suggest relative to working-class African female émigrés, Ifemelu's socio-economic advantage and sanctioned access to American privilege, her Afropolitan pedigree supposes inherent morality antithetical to denigrating conditions in America, and so uniquely tethered to the desire and will to go back to Africa. After all, accounting for Aisha's aspirations, working class African émigrés able to garner and access American visas resolve to, and are able to visit or return to an African home. However, Ifemelu's return home, predicated on relinquishing relative socio-cultural influence and power in America for presumed unknowns in Nigeria, distinguishes unapologetic brazenness, perhaps, quintessential to an Afropolitan group unwilling to subordinate its agency or subjectivity to suppositions of an inherently superior

American context, an Afropolitan group willing to prove autonomous agency or socio-economic facility unfettered to American benevolence. Truth be told, it is possible to see how Ifemelu's decision to resettle in Nigeria, in retrospect, (re)litigates Kimberly's preoccupation with highlighting America's magnanimous attentions to Africa's degenerate poverty, or Laura's xenophobic suggestion 'well-behaved' and successful Nigerian migrants evidence America's ability to rehabilitate émigrés compromised by Nigeria's insipid immorality (147-51). In other words, accounting for Laura's xeno-racism, or what appears in the context of the novel, American-mediated presumptions of an African migrant group compromised by claims to a 'third-world' nationality and so better served obliging and/or assuming what agency America allows, Ifemelu's decision to resettle in Nigeria signifies *critical defiance*---- a symbolic but also crucial rejection of a prejudiced public conscious constitutive of America's racialized context.

I do not mean the a*ct of returning home* indubitably challenges American-mediated assumptions of African ineptness. My point is that allowing for, at least, Laura's xenophobic suggestion Afropolitans evidence America's civilizing superiority, the narrative of the Afropolitan returnee becomes a narrative of redemption---- ritualistic redemption even, one that in symbolic and literal ways **1)** proffers alternative visions of a habitable Africa able to carry its teeming citizens, **2)** refuses to placate and reinforce America's hegemonic posture considering returning Afropolitans renounce American-sanctioned socio-economic privileges, and **3)** importantly assumes gendered significance in the way it supposes an unfettered Afropolitan femininity able to challenge gendered violation. In other words, the trope of the African female returnee, as delineated in the gendered narratives Adichie weaves, characterizes an Afropolitan feminist stance ultimately interested in circumscribing, but also reclaiming essential selves and spaces that witness, argue, and confer uncontested agency or the facility to act and counteract.

Short of saying Afropolitans claim essential African identities, or that reclaiming Africanness confers inherent facility, if the Afropolitan woman subjected to racialized and gendered denigration must also inhabit voicelessness on account of her African identity or irreconcilable Blackness in America, it follows that ultimate counter action able to reclaim or argue agency for Afropolitan women resides in the act and counter-power of elevating Africa.

Therefore, Afropolitan feminism as conceived in Adichie's *Americanah*, and in terms of its *ultimate* counter-hegemonic move, mandates return to an African root, or to the ethos and praxis of *Sankofa*[13]'----- an Adinkra symbol or term attributed to the Akan people of Ghana that encourages attention to the past in anticipation of a desired future, or in its literal translation, makes the case for how "it is not a taboo to fetch what is at risk of being left behind." Certainly, in extolling Africa through its characterization of the Afropolitan female returnee, *Americanah* recuperates 'what is at risk of being left behind' or what the white/American paternalist maligns, which is, an African subjectivity constitutive of an unfettered Afropolitan femaleness. It is consequently unsurprising Ifemelu, having resettled in Nigeria, contests the hiring practices and contents of a feminist magazine she contributes to for its gratuitous interest in hiring American-trained staff on assumption they bring prestige to the magazine (402). Ifemelu also ridicules a consortium of Nigerian returnees, the "Nigerpolitans," previously domiciled in America and/or Britain, and who in performing the classical plight of Africa's newly-enlightened western-savvy citizens reminisce western conveniences or decry disadvantaging norms in Nigeria (407-09). Really, there is no gainsaying how Ifemelu's indictment of the women's magazine and the Nigerpolitan group reveals her disdain for, or better yet, her rejection of self-effacing behaviorisms intended to magnify or validate pretensions to western-mediated identity or culture.

[13] **See**; https://www.berea.edu/cgwc/the-power-of-sankofa/

It is important to remember how Ifemelu, who mimics American accented speech patterns in the period after a white admissions officer mocks her "foreign" accent reverts to her non-standard Nigerian English accent in a moment of self-reprieve and the consequent awareness she risks self-censure after an American customer service agent remarks she does not sound African. Actually, more than it does her indictment of a "Nigerpolitan" group eager to replicate or transport Euro-American status symbols, or of a gendered magazine's pretensions to western-savoir-faire, Ifemelu's indictment of the magazine and "Nigerpolitan" group advances *Americanah*'s ideological standpoint on the politics and ethos of reclaiming power against American hegemony.

Adichie, in other words, sees in Ifemelu's righteous indignation crucial disavowal of African spaces circumscribed for Euro-American worship, spaces that validate or affirm Africa's capitulation, and so relative ineptness and inferiority. I should add that Ifemelu's insistence the women's magazine she works for abandon fluff publications on wealthy Nigerian women, her defiant attempt to expose wealthy mistresses who abuse their stewards highlights an Afropolitan feminist stance that does not preclude class distinctions and implications for advocating unfettered female agency (412-19). To be sure, and accounting for scholarly consensus on how Afropolitanism in its nascent but definitive conception distinguishes Africa's transnational nouveau-rich or its western educated and domiciled bourgeois, I do not suggest Adichie proffers an emergent Afropolitan feminism that privileges the activism of working-class African female migrants. In other words, my thesis addresses an Afropolitan feminism characteristic of, and characterized by the activism of African female migrants in America able to come into and defined by an Afropolitan status— as middle to upper class African intellectuals, activists, media professionals, politicians, authors whose work suppose visibility, presence, and ability to inform

or change America's socio-political direction. However, and to my earlier point, if Ifemelu decries preoccupation with wealthy Nigerian heiresses in *Zoe* magazine's profile columns (412-19), the case can be made for an Afropolitan feminist lens willing to argue poverty forecloses equal representation or agency within and across cultures. Surely, it will be injurious to the kind of Afropolitan feminism *Americanah* proposes if its narratives preclude interest in class equality—considering Afropolitanism feminism, as characterized by Ifemelu's experiences, valuates agency, and associated opportunities for access and means.

Actually, in keeping with its symbolic and literal representation of the Afropolitan female returnee whose shift to an African home contests American-mediated presumptions of an African migrant group fettered to Africa's dawdling incompetence and so in need of white/American fostering, *Americanah* offers Ifemelu's epiphanic and consequential decision to launch a blog in Nigeria (415). The Nigerian blog, in fact, replicates the character and voice she brings to her American based race-blog. Ifemelu's blog posts in Nigeria, however, and in its distinctive way features reflective pieces on the "Nigerpolitan" group to didactic texts on young women in Lagos who solicit affairs with married oligarchs (422-23). In fact, Ifemelu's blogs in America and Nigeria both concretize a *coming-of-age consciousness* and consequent agency for Ifemelu considering the chance to mediate or inform readers' lens. However, and accounting for Blaine's protestations, Ifemelu's American blog compared to its Nigerian equivalent engenders contestations to Ifemelu's lens and voice in a racialized and gendered context pitted against her Non-American difference. Hence, in founding an equivalent blog in Nigeria, Ifemelu gestures towards symbolic reclamation of a contested voice better housed in an African context unencumbered by discomfiting racism. Ifemelu gestures towards an agile Africa able to nurture and generate autonomous subjectivities— what, I argue, ultimately and retroactively disputes

presumptions of an ineffectual African Blackness, and so forswears the need for a mediating and confining white/American paternalism.

It is important to mention Ifemelu's decision to adjudicate the plight of Lagos-based young women indulging wealthy married men for financial support, to some extent, disputes assertions that avow Ifemelu's unyielding stance on countering gender-based oppression, or even *Americanah's* interest in an Afropolitan feminism that disavows voicelessness. What I mean is that in posting an illustrative text, a confessional of sorts that exposes what appears the lurid details of her Aunt, Uju, or friend Ranyinudo's affair with married men (422-23), Ifemelu usurps the voices and experiences of the former. Ifemelu appropriates and so exploits the voices of relatively disadvantaged young women in Nigeria who do not own and so cannot access the platform she carves for indulging her self-placating or "informed" lens on which social issues stir Nigeria's public conscious. It is no surprise Ranyinudo, in fits of rage, not only indicts Ifemelu's self-aggrandizing attempt to distinguish relative disinterest in soliciting married men for money, but invokes Ifemelu's visa-related dependence on her white American boyfriend, Curt, to argue the latter's complicity (422-23). To my crucial point, Ifemelu's eventual contrition, her recognition the blog post appropriates and so works to diminish the agency of her represented subjects who have no chance for voice, and counter-voice (422-23), dispels charges Afropolitan feminism mimics the kind of paternalism it indicts. To be sure, considering Ranyinudo's claim Ifemelu's dependence on Curt for American permanent residence parallels those of the Lagos girls who placate married Nigerian oligarchs for financial support, it is curious Adichie, by the end of the novel, plots Ifemelu's reunification and subsequent relationship with a married former boyfriend, Obinze (477). In other words, seeing as Ifemelu denounces women who yield autonomy to placate married men, her decision to indulge a married man who fabricates plans to

outwit his wife turns Ifemelu's feminist ethos on its head. Really, narrative moments that show Obinze bemoaning his wife's submissive demeanor relative to Ifemelu's self-assertion (477), in my view, indicates Adichie's contrived attempt to elevate Ifemelu, or conflate her desirability with her determined posture on female agency. As if male desire in its rawness precludes interest in women entrapped in and so wading through male-sanctioned cultural proscriptions.

However, and to reiterate my earlier point, Adichie does not presume an Afropolitan feminism inured from moral failings because of its indignation at gender-based constraints, for instance. What Adichie does is rally attention to the distinctive struggles, but also defined aspirations of African women navigating unmoored borders and so hemmed in by questions of legitimacy and ownership. Adichie addresses the experiences of transnational African women whose summative experience encompasses subjection to immigration proscriptions designed to preclude their Non-American Blackness, and so inhabit consequent voicelessness in the context of racialized and/or gendered abuse. Ultimately, barring legitimate questions about Obinze's wife and how her resultant abandonment and consequent emotional abuse dispute expectations for a necessary African sisterhood and mutual aspirations, it is important to consider how Ifemelu's eventual romantic relationship with a recently separated Obinze, points to an Afropolitan feminism that *comes full circle* (477). In other words, if Adichie ends the narrative with an Ifemelu/Obinze romantic reunion and possible marriage that resolve the narrative's plot, it is because Ifemelu's disaffecting relationships and trysts with American men, both Black and white, anticipate the self-fulfillment or reprieve her relationship with Obinze assures. To put this another way, if Ifemelu and Obinze as the narrative shows, share convictions on race justice, gendered repression, but also necessary outlets for female agency, if Obinze's traumatic apprehension and deportation from Britain suggests he brings familiarity and empathy to what

Ifemelu experiences as the "trauma of getting an American visa," there is no gainsaying how Adichie sees Ifemelu's physical and emotional mooring to Obinze as a necessary end.

This is to say Obinze ideates Ifemelu's expectations for autonomous voice and agency. He ideates Ifemelu's return home to Nigeria, and what it supposes for an Afropolitan feminism intent on (re)claiming visibility and voice against entrenched xeno-racism and resultant gendered and/or racialized abuse. The Obinze-Ifemelu romantic tryst or reunion in Nigeria symbolizes Ifemelu's refusal to cede subjectivity to white and/or American mediation, or the kind of Americanism that indulges xenophobic ideas about African Blackness, and so willing to foreclose, appropriate, or arbitrate its claims to place and voice. Surely, at its crescendo, and more than it does Curt's or Blaine's, Obinze's fervid love, in symbolic terms, embodies Ifemelu's autonomous decision to yield guardedness in Nigeria, her experience of an African home that guarantees a non-threatening, non-constricting gendered arrangement.

If the African or Afropolitan woman battles racialized and gendered subjugation on account of her maligned Non-American or African Blackness, the Afropolitan feminist insists on, and inscribes agency tethered to an African self— a counter hegemonic move that challenges what negative presumptions of Africa deluge public consciousness in America. In fact, when Obinze's mother, earlier in the novel and during the heydays of Obinze and Ifemelu's college romance, advises Ifemelu to wait until she "owns herself a little more" before consenting to sex with Obinze (72), *Americanah* not only signals and indicts ensnaring and disproportionate gendered arrangements that privilege maleness, it subsequently memorializes that admonishment with Ifemelu's insouciance, her unfettered and impassioned tryst with Obinze in Nigeria after disquieting sexual partnerships in America.

Really, Ifemelu's self-assertion, her decision to abrogate the enveloping and subjugating terms of her relations with American men for what Nigeria promises, that is, to court and be courted without risk to self and voice presupposes an Ifemelu who "own[s] herself a little more" (72), who consequently and by implication, removes the white/American paternalist as adjudicator or subjective witness in the matter of the African female émigré. After all, and in the cadences of *Americanah's* Afropolitan feminism, if there is an essentialness to African female presences in America, it is that kind of essentialness that "owns itself a little more" (72), it is that kind of essentialness Yaa Gyasi, in *Homegoing* (2016), weaves for Marjorie, a 20th century descendant of an African matriarch (Esi) reduced to slave chattel and carted across transatlantic borders for bondage. Really, if Marjorie's return to an African home guarantees reconciliation with her "grandmother...the only person who really sees" her (Homegoing 278), or in Obinze's mother's words, guarantees the certainty of "owning" herself a little more (72), there is something to be said about Gyasi's authorial intentions: those of an Afropolitan author intent on symbolic restoration for the hitherto shackled African matriarch whose visions hold promise for future redemption, for autonomous transatlantic journeys unmoored to oceans enveloping slave fortresses in Cape Coast, and Elmina, for the grand daughter's home-going. In the end, and to put this another way, Adichie's Afropolitan feminist in the act of her "Homegoing," sees and enacts redemption that is not hers alone...

***Americanah*, Or Adichie's Public Activism/Feminism Come Full Circle**

To conclude, I reiterate my initial claim that *Americanah's* Afropolitan feminism, its interest in contesting and rejecting white/American paternalism anticipate and recall Adichie's own public activism— that is, in the way Adichie proffers and territorializes a feminist posture

that forecloses a mediating Euro-American lens and voice. It is important to remember Adichie, amidst a torrent of targeted criticisms and charges that suggest she is transphobic— after she claims that "transwomen are not women because they have not lived in the world as women"— swears she means to indict essentialist conceptions that conflate the experiences of 'transgender women' and 'cis-gender women.' She also argues she does not employ the term cisgender because it "is not part of [her] vocabulary." Really, Adichie's insistence she has nothing to apologize for on the grounds 'cis' is not "part of [her] vocabulary," her consequent denunciation of "a language orthodoxy," which she identifies as "the less pleasant aspects of the American left" preoccupied with defining and sanctioning voice, recalls Ifemelu's tussle with Cristina Tomas, a white American in charge of international students' admissions who mocks Ifemelu's Non-American accent, and with Blaine, her African American boyfriend and resident academic who insinuates Ifemelu's blog posts on race politics in America do not reflect America's complex racial character. It is important to remember Blaine demands revisions that do more than present glib observations.

In other words, I argue that Ifemelu's decision to revert to her 'non-standard accented variety of the English language after she assumes an American accent in an attempt to counter racist denigration and exclusion, her refusal to oblige Blaine's directives on appropriate lens for her race blog anticipate Adichie's intransigent posture on sticking to what is "part of [her] vocabulary," presumably, her Nigerian/African language repertoire as she navigates, but also lends voice to feminist discourses that adjudicate America's gendered politics. In fact, Ifemelu's suggestion reverting to a Non-American accent reinscribes her sense of self, her admission she does not oblige Blaine's demands for a nuanced analysis of the race subjects she broaches because she intends to assume autonomous lens and voice better suited for an African émigré

who has not experienced America's distinctive racialized past and so cannot pretend insight relative to African Americans, anticipate and reflect Adichie's public activism— which is, her interest in caving a self-defining, and so self-interested feminist posture that does not bargain or cede agency to an American language oligarchy interested in imposing the terms for probing America's cultural conscious.

My point is that it is not untenable to assert, as other critics have with reference to other autobiographical similitudes in *Americanah,* that the novel's Afropolitan female protagonist channels and gestures towards Adichie's personal or distinctive feminist ethos— that of the African female intellectual in America, the Afropolitan woman aware she occupies truncated spaces thrice removed from the axioms of patriarchal power in America in the way she battles constraints tethered to her femininity, her Black femininity, and her African difference, an Afropolitan woman who knows in the truncated space allowed Black female mobility, she occupies an African Otherness, or an alien status that supposes irreconcilable pathology and informs systematic exclusions tinted with American paternalism, and so, proffers a feminist stance that does not take for granted the merit and virtue of inscribing incontestable agency. Perhaps, for Adichie, and in what recalls Ifemelu's Afropolitan feminist consciousness, if the African female émigré adjudicating and rallying voices in behalf of transgender women must yield voice to an 'American' language hegemony on assumption her "vocabulary," her African voice, proffers insufficient and so ineffectual characterizations, a counter-logic will hold that refusing to bargain or cede voice distinguishes uncompromising agency— one that (re)inscribes effectual African subjectivity, one that as a matter of consequence defies and so forecloses co-optation by "unpleasant aspects of the American left."

I do not suggest Adichie admits to an Afropolitan feminist stance, or that in *Americanah*, Ifemelu engages and litigates transphobic sentiments against transwomen. As I mention in chapter 1, Adichie in an interview actually rejects an Afropolitan descriptor purposed to distinguish emergent African elitism. Also, barring Chinedu, the religious but gay character Adichie presents in her 2009 short story collection, *The Thing Around Your Neck*, what suffices for Adichie's remarkable and prolific literary career shows little investment in LGBTQ+ characters. Although I should add that the public voice she brings to countering entrenched homophobic/transphobic legislation in Nigeria matters. My point is that to the extent Adichie refuses subjection to what she identifies as a "language hegemony" preoccupied with adjudicating the terms of feminist discourse and activism in America, considering Adichie does not apologize for her voice, it is possible to argue congruity with the feminist posture her Afropolitan female protagonist assumes in *Americanah*: an intractable resistance to yielding autonomous lens and voice on the grounds willing submission **1)** validates a paternalistic white America preemptively and consequently interested in foreclosing voice and place for Non-American Blacks, **2)** conversely underlies or reinforces prevailing presumptions that argue an inherently inferior African Blackness, and so becomes paradigmatic evidence for systematic exclusions able to preclude agency for African female émigrés in the context of racialized and gendered abuse.

In fact, I conclude that the work to define and/or delineate Adichie's much celebrated feminist posture across and within America's racialized and gendered metropoles must begin with her archetypal Afropolitan narrative, Americanah---- Otherwise the charge will be that as students, critics, and teachers of literature interested in creative works that reflect and shape America's checkered and future defining history, that witness America's collective struggles and

definitive aspirations, we forget to account for those themes and motifs curated by Black women whose cultural presence and living testimonies become the seed from which their visions, their voices, creativity, and knowledge spring. We will be charged with divorcing knowledge, epistemologies from the lives of those Non-American Black women whose lives and stories, to borrow Alice Walker's words, " have been intruded upon in so many ways" because in America's ethnocentric and racialized conscious, they do not belong (405-06) and we risk reinforcing the hegemonic structures and systems we work to deconstruct and reconstruct.

Perhaps, as a student of African and African American Literature, a transatlantic subject or "Non-American black," I am more willing and ready than most to insist on an Afropolitan field or discipline connected to an American "past," or racialized memory that portends the advantage of legitimizing the voice and lens I bring to future scholarship that addresses disciplinary conversations between an American-mediated Black Feminist thought, and Afropolitan feminism. Like Ifemelu, my connection to the racial aspirations of American-blacks began when my ancestors suffered the journey across the Atlantic, when "holy water slapped the cringing brows of those" left behind (David Diop, line 3). For those of us interested in the cultural studies of Afropolitanism, we also know that Home, as Selasi imagines it, is *here* and *everywhere* the Afropolitan finds voice and place. As Elizabeth Alexander's poem, "The African Picnic," reminds Africans and those of African descent trekking borders, afloat and drifting in transnational spaces, home memorializes an Africanness, a familiarity, family, a "picnic," where "people come and go and say good-bye" (16).

"The African Picnic"
Elizabeth Alexander, 1962

World Cup finals, France v. Brasil.
We gather in Gideon's yard and grill.

The TV sits in the bright sunshine.
We want Brasil but Brasil won't win.
Aden waves a desultory green and yellow flag.
From the East to the West to the West to the East
we scatter and settle and scatter some more.
Through the window, Mamma watches from the cool indoors.

Jonah scarfs meat off of everybody's plate,
kicks a basketball long and hollers, "goal,"
then roars like the mighty lion he is.
Baby is a pasha surrounded by pillows
and a bevy of Horn of Africa girls
who coo like lovers, pronounce his wonders,
oil and massage him, brush his hair.
My African family is having a picnic, here in the USA.

Who is here and who is not?
When will the phone ring from far away?
Who in a few days will say good-bye?
Who will arrive with a package from home?
Who will send presents in other people's luggage
and envelopes of money in other people's pockets?
Other people's children have become our children
here at the African picnic.

In a parking lot, in a taxi-cab,
in a winter coat, in an airport queue,
at the INS, on the telephone,
on the cross-town bus, on a South Side street,
in a brand-new car, in a djellaba,
with a cardboard box, with a Samsonite,
with an airmail post, with a bag of spice,
at the African picnic people come and go.

The mailman sees us say good-bye and waves
with us, good-bye, good-bye, as we throw popcorn,
ululate, ten or twelve suitcases stuffed in the car.
Good-bye, Mamma, good-bye—
The front door shut. The driveway bare.
Good-bye, Mamma, good-bye.
The jet alights into the night,
a huge, metal machine in flight,
Good-bye, Mamma, good-bye.
At the African picnic, people come and go
and say good-bye.

CHAPTER 3

CONCLUSION

Afropolitanism: Renegotiating Intersectional Feminism

If Adichie's *Americanah* proffers an Afropolitan Feminism that advocates in behalf of Non-American and Black women, particularly African female migrants otherwise subjected to gendered and/or racialized degradation aggravated by xenophobic exclusions, if *Americanah* illuminates what critical consciousness underlies the African woman's particular interest in mobilizing communities of support, and if it argues an Afropolitan feminist stance that takes for its subject the African migrant's return to an African home in terms of its symbolic denunciation of white/American paternalism, the argument can be made for an emergent Afropolitan narrative tradition, or field of inquiry that does not leave its women on the margins of history.

In other words, *Americanah* signals an emergent Afropolitan literary field able to inscribe, memorialize, and witness those Non-American female voices and visions intersectional feminism, conceived to address American-mediated angst, precludes. This is not to say that intersectional feminism forecloses or does not account for the multiplicity of oppressions women of color battle. In "Race, Class, Gender, and Nation," Patricia Collins, leading intersectional feminist, proposes initial "directions" for addressing questions of "Nation" and difference as an intersectional issue. Collins suggests that because the family in America, whether biological or racial, becomes primary site for performing national identity in an American Nation-State that

racializes national aspirations, it is important to account for Black families putatively excluded from considerations of racial desirability and national belonging (31-33).

In other words, for Collins, the politics of national belonging and access excludes Blacks, more so Black women negotiating race, gender, and social class. To be sure, Collins' expectation for an intersectional feminist space that accounts for national identity promises inclusion for the Non-American Black woman litigating various oppressions compounded by the fact and angst of belonging "elsewhere." On the other hand, if in designating national belonging as an intersectional issue, Collins only looks to America's socio-geographical borders, the question arises as to how we account for a Non-American and Black femaleness. Do we assume Blackness mitigates considerations of national belonging and access for the Non-American Black woman? It is important to remember Ifemelu loses opportunities for desirable employment and attendant livelihood because of her foreign, and so irreconcilable African English accent. Blaine, Ifemelu's African American partner, also suggests her African perspective diminishes the race subjects she addresses on her blog. I do not mean to suggest Black American women suffer less racism on account of their national identity, or their Americanness. My point is that for a feminist discipline trained on the politics of inclusion in America, intersectional feminism certainly gains from Afropolitan feminist modes of inquiry, discourses, and representations that account for the distinctive experiences of Black women denied pathways to socio-economic mobility on suspicion their Non-American descent or prior citizenship suppose irreconcilable Americanness. In the end, I see an Afropolitan feminism that promises important cross-disciplinary, cross-cultural dialogue with feminist pedagogy, that is, in the instance the latter assumes an intersectional feminist posture or approaches to content.

Afropolitanism: A Class Issue, an LGBTQ+ Mandate

This is not to say Afropolitanism as a concept, a theory, or cultural space escapes its own exclusionary impulses. As I indicate in preceding chapters, Afropolitanism has its nay-sayers. Academics or critics uncomfortable with an African intellectual tradition or culture that submits its western-born, western-educated and/or domiciled bourgeois to argue a global African renaissance, or an empowered Africa that refuses "any form of victim identity" argue that Afropolitanism diminishes or erases the African poor. In other words, "Afropolitan mobility" as African agency precludes working class, and/or poor Africans domiciled in the west. It is true, on the one hand, and in terms of Selasi's conception, that the "Too-cool for-school Afropolitan" earning Princeton accolades, introducing African elements in her work to rewrite visibility for a hitherto maligned Africa is privileged. For instance, and as I offer in chapter 2, Adichie's protagonist, Ifemelu, is quintessentially Afropolitan because she is a middle to upper-class African migrant in the United States; she is college-educated, a Public Relations professional, a Princeton Fellow, and race blogger who commits to educating the public, including fellow Non-American blacks on the politics of navigating race in America.

In *Open City*, Cole's quintessential cosmopolitan, Julius, is decidedly Afropolitan. A naturalized American with a Nigerian Father and German mother, Julius not only migrates to and indulges the cosmopolitan tenor of major cities in America and Belgium, he is presented as an accomplished and precocious intellectual with practiced preferences for polished cultural artifacts prized in transnational couture. Julius, for example, recognizes the "opening movement of Mahler's late symphony *Das Lied von der Erde*, to reissues of Shostakovich symphonies played by long-forgotten Soviet regional orchestras" (16-17). As a psychiatrist in residence "conducting a clinical study of affective disorders in the elderly" that demands an "intricacy"

exceeding "anything else he has had to do" (3-7), Julius is also mostly committed to philosophical musings on J.M. Coetzee, the bedbug epidemic, Goya, the Tower Records' bankruptcy, and Climate Change. In fact, he makes sure to question uniformed ideologues who "have the tendency…of jumping to conclusions based on [mere] anecdotal evidence" (28). Feeling angered by the 'idiocy' underlying the "tendency by some" to blame usual changes in weather on climate change, for instance, Julius, offers targeted denunciation of associated logical fallacies:

> I was no longer the global warming skeptic I had been some years before, even if I still couldn't tolerate the tendency some had of jumping to conclusions based on anecdotal evidence; global warming was a fact, but that did not mean it was the explanation for why a given day was warm. It was careless thinking to draw the link too easily, an invasion of fashionable politics into what should be the ironclad precincts of science" (28).

Julius' apparent disdain for the kind of "careless thinking" that bastardizes science, his consequent admission he made the journey from global warming skeptic to an informed ideologue reveals what self-assuredness characterizes the sense and sensibility of an identifying Afropolitan who also naturally contemplates connections between "Homer's blindness," and those of a Nigerian "blind wandering bard" (37-38). Julius' cultivated taste for transnational music, his impatience for misguided convictions on subjects that range from climate change to issues of human folly, truth be told, are as assertive as his interesting and self-assured "globalist" insight into the mythological parallels between Greek and Yoruba-African notions of blindness. Julius, in other words, is a decided Afropolitan, a black intellectual and avowed transnational elite whose unfettered interrogation of, but also confident appraisal of the city-scape he navigates

signifies certain resolve to refuse subjection, or to invoke Mbembe, "any form of victim identity" (28).

In Selasi's *Ghana Must Go*, she presents an African family in America, an Afropolitan group inconceivably erudite or precocious. Kwaku Sai, the family patriarch, is a brilliant surgeon; his first wife Folasadé is a practicing lawyer who makes the decision to quit and take care of family, Kehinde, the oldest son, becomes a successful international artist, and his twin sister, Taiwo who is "always at the top" is "prodigiously gifted at playing piano." The youngest of the group, Sadie is also a Yale student as talented as the rest. What is more, in an interview with authors Knudsen and Rahbek, Asta Busingye-Lydersen, a Scottish-born Norwegian-Ugandan Journalist, artist, and author of "Afropolitt" who considers Afropolitanism "an international mindset," insists African émigrés in Norway unable or unwilling to participate in Norwegian culture and language are not, in her view, Afropolitan, because Afropolitanism signifies "open-mindedn[ess]," and "curiosity." More importantly, Busingye-Lydersen gestures towards questions of class and "Afropolitan mobility" when she offers that the Somali female immigrant in her illustrative story who has lived in Norway for years, yet requires a translator, recalls the plight of "underprivileged" immigrants unable to afford and/or access mainstream resources (175-77).

I do not mean to rehearse character portraits or testimonies from interested Afropolitans that characterize Afropolitan elitism. My point is that critics who indict an emergent Afropolitan culture or intellectual tradition tethered to the gleam and luster of inhabiting western-mediated African privilege, critics who impugn an Afropolitan discourse that proffer its western-domiciled and educated Africans to argue Africa's global presence, do so for good reason. Hence, [14]Nell

[14] March 8, 2013 review of Selasi's *Ghana Must Go*. See:https://www.nytimes.com/2013/03/10/books/review/ghana-must-go-by-taiye-selasi.html

Freudenberger's snide at a too good to be true Afropolitan world in *Ghana Must Go,* his suggestion it was "almost a relief" for him to "learn the youngest of the brilliant Sai family, Sadie, is bulimic. In fact, when Busingye-Lydersen, self-styled "Afropolitt," offers a rejoinder that suggests she does not mean poor and/or working class African migrants are close-minded or lack curiosity (qtd. in Knudsen and Rahbek 175-77), she illustrates Afropolitanism's class conundrum-----if the act of migrating to Euro-America in the 21st century, if the act of becoming a global African constitutes "Afropolitan mobility" and advantage, do we not designate all African migrants in the west Afropolitan on that account? Should social class mitigate what agency autonomous international mobility signifies?

Certainly, an emerging discipline or mode of inquiry probing contemporary cultural spaces confronts exigencies and attendant questions whose answers belong in the future. Like Salami offers, "what happens in the Afropolitan space is completely unpredictable because just like every person, every 'Afropolitan' who is involving herself with the space and interrogating it, will inevitably contribute to it in a different way because we are all different" (qtd. in Knudsen and Rahbek 5). Surely, an Afropolitan discipline interested in countering targeted inequities need not preclude questions of class and social standing. However, short of begrudging critics their specific lens on what it means to be Afropolitan, what appears intransigent criticisms of Afropolitanism because of its attention to class mobility, to say the least, suggest critics' unwillingness to account for pointers and resonances beyond Selasi's celebratory definition of the term/concept. What I mean is that although Selasi argues migration to, or residence in the west, but also class status, academic successes, and ethnic hybridity describes Afropolitanism, Selasi also insists "there is consciousness among those who remain." In other words, the work

"to complicate Africa," to contest Africa's (mis)characterization on the global stage is not the preserve of Afropolitans. Mbembe's definition also expands Afropolitan mobility to include migration and exchanges within the continent. Mbembe does not limit his "worlds-in-movements" paradigm to class status or migration to the west. In other words, Selasi and Mbembe do not suggest working class African migrants possess inherent inadequacy that precludes their interest in, or motivation for an "international mindset" : this is why in distinguishing Ifemelu as an Afropolitan feminist who occupies voice and place in America, and who brings agency to navigating America's gendered and racialized topography, I also make the case Afropolitan women do not inhabit superiority or possess inherent cultural competence on account of their class status. To put this simply, although I only designate or label middle to upper-class, but also college-educated female characters Afropolitan, I make the case Adichie's text in proposing Afropolitan feminism, in extending Selasi's definition, envisions an Afropolitan feminism that does not preclude class struggle or the immobilizing force of poverty, in terms of its concerns. Really, Ifemelu's "international mindset" as an Afropolitan intellectual navigating sanctioned privilege in America does not mitigate her socio-economic exclusion.

In fact, I will argue that in the end, Afropolitan feminism better addresses, or at least, begins to address contestations Afropolitanism merely suggests distinguishing privilege for Africa's westernized elite considering Adichie's text envisions an Afropolitan feminist stance that generates from the crisis of occupying a racialized and gendered context, an Afropolitan feminism that generates from its protagonist's traumatic experience navigating unemployment and diminished livelihood. I also submit that *Americanah*, in weaving an Afropolitan feminism rallied by the shared "trauma of getting an American visa," proffers what I will call *a transitory moment in the Afropolitan space* where African female migrants, on account of shared racialized

and/or xenophobic encounters, oscillate between a Non-Afropolitan or Afropolitan condition accounting for enabling factors---- the idea that Afropolitanism is owned through acquisition, a means to an end, by, for and in behalf of the African female migrant navigating a panoply of systemic and systematic oppressions, and not an indication or testament to inherent facility or superiority. If Afropolitanism has a "class problem," its emergent feminist stance, perhaps, promises community, shared humanity that makes class inequality, a shared **trauma.** Aaron Bady echoes *Americanah's* commitment to complicating questions of class and mobility in the context of Afropolitan engagement when he invokes Africa's history with class and class hierarchy. In a 2014 "State of the Discipline" article, Bady says,

> Class is a problem, a term that has always been unsettled when applied to Africa, and which has historically been displaced unto race. For the literary left, Africa has longed served a particular symbolic function in the West, standing in as the racial proletariat par excellence, the wretched of the earth. For this Fanonian tradition, African literature was necessarily political, from the beginning: to speak was to curse the West, and those who did not were dismissed as the co-opted bourgeoisie, a neo-colonial elite class.

I do not intend to use Bady's observation to argue the converse of an Afropolitan space that elevates its bourgeois; in other words, I do not argue Afropolitanism supposes a middle to upper class African elite bereft of political conviction, and so acquiescent in "neo-colonial" agenda. I am interested in Bady's argument that class as "a term has always been unsettled when applied to Africa." In other words, considering long-standing western-mediated significations of an Africa swaddled in irredeemable poverty, illiteracy, and even for some western feminist, compromised femininity on account of its presumed "primitive cultures," it is not untenable to make the case for an Afropolitan stance, perhaps, an Afropolitan feminist stance that refuses to detach race

from class, that does not assume class dictates dispassionate indifference and/or inherent ineptitude.

To be sure, I do not mean to argue the Afropolitan space is egalitarian, or that class does not mitigate social ascent for African émigrés in the west. My argument is that if class is a problem for an emergent Afropolitan theory, discipline, modes of inquiry, cultural space, and/or identity, it is only because class is its ongoing question, and not its particular distinguishing injustice. Certainly, a more comprehensive study of class as represented and deployed in Afropolitan spaces within and without the continent matters ---- otherwise, we assume Afropolitanism, Afropolitan feminism, mimics the injustice it sets out to indict. Also, for an Afropolitan intellectual tradition adjudicating and reconstituting its "class problem," what also matters is a convincing scholarly, and/or literary attention to the experiences of LGBTQ+ Afropolitans. Really, for an emergent Afropolitan discipline, theory, and/or cultural space touting a global, multidimensional, and complex Africanness, Nigeria's persistent criminalization of "same-sex affection[15]," Ghana's intransigent "widespread discrimination and abuse[16]" of LGBTQ individuals "both in public and in family settings," to mention a few, sanction and define the crucial work ahead. I do not intend to paint a monolithic homophobic Africa intent on criminalizing its LGBTQ+ citizens, and so evidence for the Afropolitan's willful disinterest in LGBTQ issues. As I indicate in preceding chapters, Adichie is an ardent advocate for LGBTQ+ rights in Nigeria. In an August 2017 published interview dubbed "Queering the

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15 "Mass Nigerian arrests for 'homosexual acts' in Lagos State" (July 2017). See http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-40774930

16 "Ghana: Discrimination, Violence against LGBT People Some Reforms, but Colonial-Era Law Should be Repealed" (January 2018). See https://www.hrw.org/news/2018/01/08/ghana-discrimination-violence-against-lgbt-people

Heteronormative with Teju Cole," Cole in response to a question that invites him to parse "masculinity," has this to say:

> Yes. There is the masculine but then there is also the heterosexual. In other words, what does it mean to write about heterosexuality? When it is always thought about as already explained, when it is considered as always already oppressive (and therefore, strangely, beyond critique), what possibilities are we foreclosing? And it is specifically heterosexuals that need that. ***Without confronting that, they will never understand why it is they feel the need to be homophobic or transphobic***, for example [my emphasis]. Heterosexual men need to understand that they're also functioning in a construct. (qtd. in Magnus Rosengarten)

In other words, Cole and Adichie, invoked in the literature on Afropolitanism to illustrate 21st century African renaissance, or a complex Africa not constituted by historically sanctioned, western-mediated stereotypes of illiteracy and barbarism, do not renege on addressing the spirit and tenor of Afropolitanism, they do not gloss over the multilayered and multivalent realities of a complex Africa, of a consequent Afropolitan space or intellectual tradition that owes its LGBTQ+ subjects. Also, Kenya and South Africa, for instance, provide resources for LGBTQ protection and security; they represent and evidence an African continent increasingly committed to relitigating human rights and social equality. The [17]"Gay And Lesbian Coalition Of Kenya," GALCK, for instance, is a "National Umbrella Body" representing LGBTQ "voices across Kenya." The foregoing indications of progress and justice matter. Except, what also matters for Afropolitanism, is a figurative theoretical, ideological, cultural, and political bag that does not

[17] See : https://www.galck.org/about/. The Mission oF GALCK is to "strengthen the coalition's capacity to provide comprehensive, rights-based services to GALCK member groups through capacity building, positive visibility and stigma reduction."

forget its LGBTQ+ Afropolitans, that does more than proffer a round-table seminar on "Queer Afropolitans" with "Mark Gevisser and Kwame Anthony Appiah in Conversation."[18] In the discourse and praxis of an Afropolitan theory, in the discourse of an emergent Afropolitan feminism, queer Afropolitan women, to repeat the words of Obinze's mother in *Americanah,* need not ask to "Own [themselves] a little."

[18] "Queer Afropolitans: Mark Gevisser and Kwame Anthony Appiah in Conversation" .

"A CLAGS event at The Graduate Center, CUNY, New York City, May 6, 2014. For more information about CLAGS, see our website: http://www.clags.org.".

See https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ggSfFsDvUHA

AFTERWORD

Afropolitanism as Post-Blackness, Or Why the Afropolitan Cannot Afford Complacency

If Ta-Nehisi Coates' *Between the World and Me* (2015) recalls James Baldwin's 1963 classic *The Fire Next Time*, it is because like Baldwin, Coates, in part, trains his eye on distinguishing racial blackness in the necessary immutable terms our claims to humanity assume--our insistence on liberty, dignity that also demand accommodations for failings recognizably human. Except in a 21st century milieu characterized by national adulation[19] for an America untethered to historical injustices because of measured provisions for civil rights and racial justice, Coates' particular attention to black humanity, his primary interest in denouncing racialized assault on the black body rather wrestles against shifting periods of historical amnesia and contrived racial advantage for blacks—those periods of "present absences" that require American blacks to, for instance, "get over slavery" or miss opportunities to covet the new humanity allowed them. A new humanity presumably "untainted by past ills," yet sullied by present suspicions of an immutable pathology to blackness. Coates, therefore, fittingly critiques systemic racism and consequent discrimination in ways that are at times polemical and/or unnerving as when he invokes morbid metaphors that show the black body "breakable," and

[19] Scholarship on Critical Race Theory indicts 21st century post-racial illusions and consequent socio-political injustices that replicate past racial horrors. Kimberle Williams Crenshaw interrogates present allusions to post-racialism that invoke President Barack Obama's "widely applauded" racial feat to make the claim that what "remains of race are the baseless efforts of identity politicians" preoccupied with perpetuating the "toxic discourse of racial grievance" (1314). See Crenshaw, Williams Kimberle. "Twenty Years of Critical Race Theory: Looking Back to Move Forward." *Connecticut Law Review* 33:5 (2011): 1253-1352. Print.

"naked before the elements of the world, before all the guns, fists, knives, crack, rape, and disease," or when he chides "a society that protects some people through a safety net of schools, government-backed home loans, and ancestral wealth but . . . only protect[s] [blacks] with the club of criminal justice . . . " (18). In delineating systemic racism, as sustained assault on the "black body," Coates' text, to reiterate my earlier point, paints blackness as the festering wound soiling America's post/slavery contrition, but it more importantly yields discursive space for rejecting suspicions of an inherent racial malaise to blackness.

And so, rather than indulge the resignation Coates brings to his otherwise timely lamentation of battered black bodies sprawled beyond the margins of history, Touré, cultural critic, author, and journalist chooses post-Blackness: a kind of contemporary Afro-Optimism that emblematizes a complicated, multidimensional, stereotype-bending, capable blackness that anticipates and memorializes Obama's race-defying and hope-fulfilled rise to President of the United States. In Touré's W*ho's Afraid of Post-Blackness*? *What it Means to be Black Now,* he solicits, gathers, and shares the voices of Black luminaries from professors, to artists, journalists, to civil rights icons, and a US attorney general who embody Blackness that embraces its defined socio-cultural distinctiveness, but proves it is not tethered to a monolithic tribe, or does not owe an American imaginary insistent on invoking historical trauma to argue a perpetually aggrieved people bleeding from enduring malignancy.

Touré acknowledges Michael Eric Dyson, a university professor of sociology at Georgetown university who confirms Post-Blackness means "We can't argue from a priori Blackness, a Blackness that is given and remains steady despite the ebb and flow of history and struggle, adding that "That's why post-Black is so suggestive a term" because it clearly doesn't signify the end of Blackness; it points, instead, to the end of the reign of a narrow, single notion

of Blackness" (xvii). Dyson further argues Post-Blackness "has little patience for racial patriotism, racial fundamentalism, and racial policing" (xvi**ii)**

Touré also quotes Cornel West, philosopher, author, actor, activist, and speaker, who offers that Being Black is one of the great blessings in [his] life …. Because to be Black means that you are tied to a tradition of a people who have produced levels of excellence and elegance and dignity from Ellington King, from Sarah Vaughan to Toni Morrison to [his] mother" (149).

Touré does not forget Kamala Harris, US senator, former attorney general of California, and the first Black woman to ever hold that office. Harris does not apologize for being a "great patriot" because as she puts it, she is "the kind of patriot who believes in the promise of our country based on the foundation of our country. Who believes in the ideal of our country as outlined in that great manifesto from 1776. And [who] believe[s] to fight for the ideals of our country is truly what patriotism is about" (198-99).

Touré, on his part, does not forget self-affirmation. He admits to a post-Blackness unmediated and unmitigated by "the white gaze," the kind of post-Blackness that in "reaching [a] higher level of maturity...also rejects the Black gaze," the judgmental kind. He declares: "I'm going to judge me, for me. I'm going to define Blackness for myself [….] and I want the forty million black people in America each to feel the freedom to define Blackness for themselves" (260). Really, Touré sees post-Blackness that celebrates a resilient population scarred but not incapacitated by slavery, segregation, civil-right chaos, and contemporary racialized hostilities, a post-Blackness that more importantly celebrates inexhaustible agency, and mobility; a post-Blackness that consequently refuses subjection to domineering and dominating forces regardless of creed or hue. In Touré's 21st century America, there are occasions for "building more Baracks" (175-201).

Suffice it to say that post-Black America mirrors Afropolitan America in the way the Afropolitan, an "African of the world," does not succumb to the demoralizing consequences of historical ills, or claim an a priori Africanness "in so far as African states are mere inventions" (Mbembe 28-29). The Afropolitan in America, in the interest of "building more Baracks," is also the conscious Black sister, or brother not only basking in "academic successes," socio-economic mobility, and cultural influence, but "aware of the injustices done to Africa and its people by the laws of the world" (Mbembe 28-29). In *Post Black*: *How a New Generation is Redefining African American Identity*, Ytasha L. Womack not only confirms Black "encompasses a lot of cultures," African-American, Caribbean-American, or Ghanaian-American, but credits a "wave of new African immigrants" in America for contributing to the perceptible dynamic in black America that is post-Black (55-58). Womack explains that "By 2000, foreign-born blacks constituted 30 percent of the black population in New York city, and 28 percent of the black population in Boston according to an analysis of census data conducted at Queens college" (55-58). Womack also mentions the census data indicates "African immigrants are more educated than any other ethnic group, including white Americans, holding as many degrees as white Americans, and four times as many as native-born African Americans" (55-58).

What's more, if Alice Walker, novelist, poet, activist, and putative phenomenal woman confirms Black women, more so than Black men, have been "handed the burdens that ...everyone else … refused to carry," if the [20]National Center for Education Statistics confirms that "black women are now the most educated group in the United States," we offer an intransigent prayer: that post-Blackness in all its blazing glory *does not forget* the Black woman, the Afropolitan

[20] "According to the National Center for Education Statistics, between 2009 and 2010, black women earned 68 percent of all associate degrees awarded to black students, as well as 66 percent of bachelor's degrees, 71 percent of master's degrees and 65 percent of all doctorates awarded to black students." See: www.theroot.com/black-women-now-the-most-educated-group-in-us-1790855540

woman whose "labour of love" has otherwise been "knocked down her throat" (Walker qtd. in Angelyn Mitchell 405-406). And so, in the voice and visions of Womack and Walker, perhaps the Black woman, the Afropolitan woman in America is not just post-African, but post-Black?

To invoke Selasi, I will say "Yes, necessarily…"

She is [21]**Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie,** Nigerian-American author, winner of the Commonwealth Writers' Prize, the National Book Critics Award, the Hurston/Wright Legacy Award, the Orange Prize, and a New York Times Notable Book award. Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, whose 2009 TED Talk on "The Danger of a Single Story," the "most-viewed TED Talk of all time," is an invitation to apprehend and engage the complex and multi-layered stories constituting cultures and identities, an invitation to question definitive pointers to the African's positioning in the world, those informed by western-mediated representative Truths about the continent. Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, author, activist, and leading feminist who rivals Chinua Achebe, Africa's literary giant and foremost postcolonial critic in transnational poise and influence (Andrade 92). Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, MacArthur Foundation Fellow, daughter of Oyá, Goddess of Winds and Strength, who will not yield to "unpleasant elements of the American Left," or those interested in imposing the language and terms of feminist activism. Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie who memorializes Sojourner Truth--- Truth, whose famous "Ar'n't I a Woman?" speech at the Women's Rights Convention in Ohio re-appropriates the voice and lens her white-female benefactor, Olive Gilbert, appropriates as primary transcriber for the *Narrative of Sojourner Truth* (1878). Truth, whose famous "Ar'n't I a Woman?" speech not only reinforces commitment to women's rights and empowerment in tandem with the responsibilities women assume but underlies her self-assured and self-liberating feminist posture: ¨I can't read,

[21] See www.cerep.ulg.ac.be/adichie/cnabio.html for Adichie's biography, scholarship, creative texts, interviews, and so on.

but I can hear. I have heard the bible and have learned that Eve caused man to sin. Well, if woman upset the world, do give her a chance to set it right side up again" (qtd in Henry Louis Gates and Nellie Y. Mckay 198).

She is [22]**Amy Sherald,** Baltimore-based artist who "only paints African American subjects," and whose awe-inspiring, tradition defying, race-edifying portrait of Michelle Obama garnered global attention and praise. Amy Sherald, "the art world's latest sensation," whose color-filled, African-themed, and so Yoruba-gracious portrait of Michelle Obama defeats racist apprehensions and insults: Amy Sherald, whose portrait calls racists to the warrior dance of the Maasai, to the victory that is Mrs. Obama's elegance, and grace. Amy Sherald, whose portrait calls on [23]Pamela Ramsey Taylor, director of Clay County Development Corp., Clay, West Virginia, who referred to Mrs. Obama as an "ape in heels," on Georgia school teacher Jane Wood Allen, who considers Mrs. Obama a "poor gorilla" who "needs to focus on getting a total makeover (especially the hair), instead of planning vacations," and on Patrick Rushing, mayor of Airway Heights, Washington, who believes Mrs. Obama has a "gorilla face." Amy Sherald, whose portrait of Michelle Obama mesmerizes 2-year-old Parker Curry, a little black girl[24] poised for post-blackness---- and so we remember an artistic forbear, Phillis Wheatley, who lays foundations for black female artistry beyond slave ports. Phillis Wheatley, whose poem "On

[22] See Edward Helmore " Michelle Obama Portrait puts black Baltimore Artist in the Spotlight" (2018). www.theguardian.com/us-news/2018/feb/18/michelle-obama-portrait-amy-sherald-baltimore-conversation

[23] See Mikki Kendall's "22 times Michelle Obama endured rude, racist, sexist or plain ridiculous attacks" (2016). www.washingtonpost.com/posteverything/wp/2016/11/16/22-times-michelle-obama-endured-rude-racist-sexist-or-plain-dumb-attacks/?utm_term=.2fead79c22b6

[24] See Michael S. Rosenwald's "'A moment of awe': Photo of little girl captivated by Michelle Obama portrait goes viral" (2018).www.washingtonpost.com/local/a-moment-of-awe-photo-of-little-girl-staring-at-michelle-obama-portrait-goes-viral/2018/03/04/4e5a4548-1ff2-11e8-94da-ebf9d112159c_story.html?utm_term=.42bec87309a8

Being Brought from Africa to America" counters her white-guarantor's imposing voice by insisting in line 7 that Blacks can join the "angelic train" too.

She is [25]**Lupita Amondi Nyong´o,** graduate of Yale drama school, acclaimed Hollywood actor, and academy award winner for her debut role in ¨12 Years a Slave¨ (2013). Lupita Nyong´o, Hollywood's breakout sensation and distinctive dark-skinned celebrity whose "lucrative contract as the face of Lancôme" upstages racialized beauty norms that valuate white racial features. Lupita Nyongó, whose "appearance on the world map" becomes inspiration for a young girl hitherto "desperate to use skin-lightening cream." Lupita Nyongó who consequently admits ¨being ubiquitous – on screen or on magazine covers – matters to her" because it ¨help[s] other [dark-skinned] girls feel validated." And Lupita Nyongó, who knows she is "directly affected by the political situation" in America, and so lends voice to *TimesU*p, Hollywood's ubiquitous campaign against sexual assault and harassment. Lupita Nyong'o, who refuses to join in "the conspiracy of silence" that allows male-predators to "prowl for so many years," and so shares her encounters and near-encounters with the alleged Hollywood predator to raise awareness, and advance opportunities for recourse and action. Lupita Nyong'o, whose decision to share her story elicits outright rebuke and denial from the accused white-male abuser; although the latter, rather curiously, refuses to address or respond to similar accusations from white-female peers— what prompts some critics to argue the alleged white male-abuser, in singling out and responding to Miss Nyong'o charges, denies interest in black women, or suggests black women do not deserve voice and place in the fight against sexual assault on

[25] See Nosheen Iqbal's "Lupita Nyong'o: 'Art is political in whatever way you slice it'" (2016). www.theguardian.com/film/2016/oct/20/lupita-nyongo-art-is-political-in-whatever-way-you-slice-it

Also See: Lupita Nyong'o' " Speaking Out About Harvey Weinstein" (2017). .www.nytimes.com/2017/10/19/opinion/lupita-nyongo-harvey-weinstein.html

account of their (presumed) disagreeable physical characteristics. Lupita Nyong'o, whose decision to *speak and speak back*, regardless, characterizes black female resilience, and so, reminds us [26]**Tarana Burke,** a Black female activist, started the "Me Too" movement 10 years ago to rally women of color subjected to sexual violence, and not actress Alyssa Milano initially credited with coining the campaign-slogan and "igniting the conversation." Lupita Nyong'o, who reminds us Tarana Burke does not also relent, or submit to privileged-voices positioned to appropriate disadvantaged-others. And so, we remember Harriet Jacobs, author of *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* who claims and reclaims voice astride oppressive conditions that allow white authenticators to define, appropriate, or sanction slave narratives. Jacobs who reclaims voice by affixing a preface she authors herself to the introductory text written by her white editor, Maria Child. Harriet Jacobs, who does not hesitate to detail traumatic sexual ordeal and abuse at the hands of her second slave master, and so refuses to placate a white editor anxious about the "indecorum [of] presenting [those] pages to the public" (6-9).

She is **Faria Johnson**,[27] a Baltimore woman fired from her job for wearing blonde streaks in her hair "because it [doesn't] look natural on African American women." Faria Johnson, barred from wearing blonde streaks in her hair "while other (white) women were allowed to highlight their hair." Faria Johnson, who in a remarkable show of resistance and power files a lawsuit to challenge the injustice of her discrimination---- who consequently disputes the "natural" aesthetic merit or value "blonde hair" reserves for white women. Faria Johnson, who in filing the lawsuit and winning $ 250, 000 in settlement, not only rejects

[26]See SANDRA E. GARCIA's "The Woman Who Created #MeToo Long Before Hashtags." (2017). www.nytimes.com/2017/10/20/us/me-too-movement-tarana-burke.html

[27] See: Elizabeth Chuck's "Former Hooters Waitress Awarded $250,000 in Racial Discrimination Case." (2015). www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/former-hooters-waitress-awarded-250-000-racial-discrimination-case-n337396.

historically sanctioned socio-cultural figurations of white exclusivity in relation to beauty practices, but symbolically rejects white invincibility. Faria Johnson who renders frivolous tacit assumptions about an inaccessible whiteness better preserved from the corrupting influence of blackness. Faria Johnson whose resistance matters, and so we remember [28]Nana Yaa Asantewaa, Queen mother of Edweso, who led the Ashanti confederacy to war against the British in the 1900's. Nana Yaa Asantewaa, black female warrior, African feminist, who exalted Ashanti chiefs to resist an invading and disruptive British presence.

She is also [29]**Ms. L., w**ho fled the Democratic Republic of Congo with her seven-year-old daughter "in fear of her life." Ms. L, who did not know after presenting herself to border agents at a United States port of entry near San Diego that she will be detained and separated from her 7-year-old daughter four days later. Ms. L., who remained "at a detention center in the San Diego area while her daughter [was] detained in Chicago, halfway across the country, without her mother or anyone else she knows." Ms. L, who must remain nameless in anticipation, and hope that the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) wins its suit: the suit "argues that the separation of Ms. L. and her daughter is in blatant violation of the due process protections of the Fifth Amendment since the two were separated without justification or even a hearing." Miss L., who following [30]reunification with her daughter, must remain nameless while she awaits asylum and immigration proceedings able to confer Americanness. Miss. L., who *does not belong* yet. Miss.

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[28] See: Boahen, Adu, A. *Yaa Asantewaa and the Asante-British War of 1900-01*. James Currey, 2003. Print.

[29]See: Jenny Samuels' "A Mother and Child Fled the Congo, Only to Be Cruelly Separated by the US Government." (2018). www.aclu.org/blog/immigrants-rights/deportation-and-due-process/mother-and-child-fled-congo-only-be-cruelly

[30] Also See: Rex Huupke's " Congolese mother and child finally reunited in Chicago." (2018). www.chicagotribune.com/news/opinion/huppke/ct-met-family-separation-aclu-trump-asylum-huppke-20180316-story.html

L., who is Non-American, and Non-Afropolitan, and so cannot claim post-Blackness. Miss L., whose tragic story ultimately laments the fate of the African female migrant who, to invoke Ifemelu in *Americanah,* may never witness her initiation into the society of newly-minted Afropolitans, or putative post-Blacks. Miss L., whose tragic experience, notwithstanding its idiosyncrasy, recalls what was or could be the Afropolitan woman's distinctive Non-American lament— a reminder that post-Africanness, in terms of its distance from the borders of Africa, does not automate or guarantee post-Blackness, a reminder that the Afropolitan woman, in the end, cannot afford an uncritical and so self-assured posture in the context of Post-Black advantage.

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