

**The Power of Many Stories:
Afropolitanism in Teju Cole's *Open City* and
Chimamanda Adichie's *Americanah***

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Abstract

This thesis will examine Afropolitanism in Teju Cole's *Open City* (2011) and Chimamanda Adichie's *Americanah* (2013). Cole and Adichie are Nigerian writers who often write about an African experience from a diasporic perspective in the USA. Though they are different, both of these novels feature protagonists who travel relatively freely and engage with the world in the US, Europe and Africa. This engagement with the world is depicted for instance in the relationships and conversations that the protagonists have with other people. The other people are often from a different cultural background than the protagonists and have a different socio-economic status. Furthermore, the Afropolitan writers are often engaged with topics such as race, feminism, and politics. I consider Afropolitanism to be a new development of postcolonial literature and theory. Therefore, I will devote a chapter to a brief overview of the history of postcolonial theory. Subsequently, I will discuss Afropolitanism in relation to this theoretical framework. I will then consider Cole and Adichie against their Nigerian literary forefather Chinua Achebe, and his novel *No Longer at Ease*. Finally, I will explore the Internet presence of Cole and Adichie as I believe it is something which differentiates their work from earlier colonial and postcolonial writers.

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Introduction

They (read we) are Afropolitans
The newest generation of African emigrants
Coming soon or collected already at a law firm/chem lab/
jazz lounge near you
Taiye Selasi, bye bye Babar

In the last few years, there has been a surge of authors of fiction from Africa living in the West. They belong to the African diaspora. Many of these writers are at times labelled ‘Afropolitan’, a term which became popular around 2005 with an essay by Taiye Selasi. I have been intrigued by this concept for a long time, wondering what it has to offer us as readers and critics. The subject has attracted a lot of discourse and polemics, and I find it interesting to explore this vibrant field. I believe that Afropolitanism is a new development in postcolonial literature and theory, and this will be the topic for my thesis.

Having followed African literature and postcolonial theory since I studied in South Africa in 2006, to me Afropolitanism is a paradigm shift in postcolonial literature. When I was at the University of Stellenbosch in South Africa, we studied a lot of the classical and contemporary African writers like Chinua Achebe, Ngugi wa Thiong’o and Nadine Gordimer. We also studied contemporary writers at the time such as Bessie Head, J.M Coetzee, Tsitsi Dangaremba, Ama Ata Aidoo and Alex La Guma. Many of these writers are still active, but a lot has happened in African literature since 2006. Most of these writers wrote about an African experience, living on the African continent. It seems that African writers nowadays are increasingly writing about a diasporic experience outside of Africa. This will be my focus of my thesis, to look at the literary output of Afropolitan diasporic writers such as Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie and Teju Cole. I will investigate how this diasporic perspective has changed postcolonial theory and literature.

The thesis will thus be an exploration on the topic of Afropolitanism. My research question is: to what extent is Afropolitanism an extension of postcolonial literature and theory? Specifically, I will consider how it figures in the works of Chimamanda Adichie and Teju Cole. In my first chapter I will go into definitions of the term of Afropolitanism, and its relationship to postcolonial theory. Following this overview, I will explore some of the discussions pertaining to the topic. The term has attracted a lot of polemics and even

controversy. I will discuss why I think that is, and how I believe it to be an important development in postcolonial theory and literature.

After having discussed Afropolitanism as a theoretical framework and how it relates to postcolonial theory, I will explore Afropolitanism as it relates to literature. Considering my research question of whether Afropolitanism is a new development in postcolonial literature, I will discuss how that is the case with Adichie and Cole. I will compare the two novels *Americanah* (2013) and *Open City* (2011) by Adichie and Cole respectively.

Both Cole and Adichie are very active in the public discourse and have stated their ambivalence towards the term. Especially Adichie has been vocal about her rejection of this classification and has stated:

“I am not an Afropolitan. I am African, happily so (...) I am comfortable in the world, and it’s not that unusual. Many Africans are happily African and don’t think they need a new term”. (Dabiri, 106).

This statement from Adichie thus conveys a satisfaction with being African. Furthermore, I read it as an insistence that that should be enough. Perhaps Adichie here expresses a wariness of being essentialised or categorized. Perhaps she conveys a resistance of being regarded as a voice of all the young, well-educated African expatriates.

I have wondered whether it is right to use these writers as examples of Afropolitan literature despite their ambivalence and critique of the term. However, I have still chosen to consider Adichie and Cole as examples of Afropolitan literature. Perhaps it reflects my belief that as a principle one cannot say that the author has the final say on how we interpret their literature. Maybe it can be considered a thought experiment; if we were to say that these writers are Afropolitan, what would that mean? In what ways can they be Afropolitan and how does that enhance our readings of their literature?

In my third chapter I will consider Afropolitanism in relation to the African canon. Chinua Achebe will be exemplified as an African literary forefather. I find it interesting to discuss these three writers in conjunction with one another, as they are all Nigerian. My discussion will be on how Adichie and Cole can be related to Achebe. I will consider Achebe’s *African Trilogy*, and especially *No Longer at Ease*. Achebe’s novel from 1960 has a city setting which I think pairs well with Cole and Adichie’s cosmopolitan novels. I will

also consider Adichie's short story "The Headstrong Historian" as it relates to Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (1958).

Representing an earlier movement of colonial and postcolonial literature, Achebe can be contrasted against Cole and Adichie who both represent a contemporary movement of Afropolitan literature. Achebe wrote from the perspective of a Nigerian colonial past. His first novel *Things Fall Apart* came out in 1958 and Nigeria only gained independence in 1960. His novels can thus be seen as important documentation of a colonial past. The early emancipatory colonial and postcolonial literature was by necessity focused on the African continent. Cole and Adichie, however, write mainly from a diasporic perspective, reflecting an increasingly globalized world. Their characters are often relatively wealthy and are located in Europe and the US.

Cole and Adichie's Afropolitan literature conveys a variety of perspectives. Moreover, the authors are interested in the modern co-existence of different cultures, particularly in the cities. The multicultural perspectives of Cole and Adichie make them different from Achebe and is one way that African literature has changed since the time of Achebe.

I have read many articles on the topic of Afropolitanism and have been fascinated by the polemics. My contribution to this discussion will be how I consider these two writers to be examples of Afropolitanism. Additionally, I have not seen Afropolitanism being related to the trope of trauma. Thus, my chapter on *Americanah* and *Open City* will go into this topic. My discussion will be whether the trope of trauma is relevant in conjunction with Afropolitanism. Many critics have pointed to the inherent positivity in the term of Afropolitanism, however, I have observed that Afropolitan literature sometimes contains the topic of trauma. It is very relevant to Teju Cole's *Open City*, which contains the motif of trauma throughout the novel.

To me, Afropolitanism is an important topic as it relates to the contemporary world that we live in. I think that Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie and Teju Cole are interesting writers because they participate fully in this contemporary discourse. Adichie and Cole are also different from their African forefathers in the way that they participate in this discourse, via social media and Ted Talks which reach millions of people. In chapter 4, I will go into their presence on the Internet. I see their Internet discourse as an extension of their literary output, where they express similar ideas. However, often the discourse on the Internet reaches a different audience than those who read their books. I will discuss in what way I think this

enhances the contemporary postcolonial discourse. It is my view that Adichie and Cole are examples of a contemporary Afropolitan sensibility.

1.0 Postcolonial theory and Afropolitanism

My research question is whether Afropolitanism is a new era in postcolonial literature and theory and in what way this manifests. Thus, I think it fitting to examine what came before Afropolitanism in postcolonial literature and theory. In this chapter I will give a brief overview of the history of postcolonial theory as I understand it. Subsequently, I will introduce some of the main theorists of postcolonial theory and their works. Many of these critics such as Frantz Fanon, Edward Said and Homi Bhabha have informed my readings of the literature for this thesis, and I have referenced their work throughout. Their concepts have been important for postcolonial studies and the way we interpret postcolonial literature such as the literature in this thesis.

The second part of this chapter will examine Afropolitanism in relation to the history of postcolonial theory. How does Afropolitanism relate to the movements which preceded it? I argue that Afropolitanism is different from the movements which came before, because it has a more positive Afrofuturistic perspective. Afropolitan discourse is often about multicultural coexistence, which to me exposes a new kind of humanism in their works. Their literature conveys how people of different backgrounds can live together harmoniously. Furthermore, as I see it, Afropolitan literature and theory often brings forth a discussion of an African identity without oversimplification and essentialism. Additionally, it is my view that an Afropolitan perspective is often centred on questions such as race, feminism and politics and engages with these themes extensively. Furthermore, the Afropolitan novel often takes place in a city setting, where there is naturally a lot of possibility for encounters between people, and of peaceful multiculturalism.

1.1 Postcolonial theory: an overview

In this part of the chapter, I will present a brief overview of postcolonial theory as I understand it. Firstly, it is necessary to make a definition of the very term of postcolonial theory. Put simply, postcolonial theory is concerned with the study of colonialism and postcolonialism. Postcolonial theory is both concerned with the colonialism of the past, as well as postcolonial societies of today. Therefore, I understand it as a study of the past as well as the present, and how the two influence each other. Furthermore, in colonialism there is a power imbalance, between the more powerful and the less powerful party, where the more powerful party is the coloniser and the less powerful is the colonised. Thus, postcolonial theory is also the study of how cultural and political relations operate between “more powerful and less powerful nations and peoples” as Robert Dale Parker writes in *How to*

Interpret Literature: Critical Theory for Literary and Cultural Studies (286-7). Therefore, postcolonial theory is in many ways a political theory which engages with how the colonised and the colonisers have responded to and still respond to colonialism and different power structures. In this definition Parker also accentuates the cultural relations, and I believe this is because culture is influenced and responds to the colonisation. This thesis is in many ways about how culture has responded to colonisation. For example, Chinua Achebe's literature is a part of culture, which responds to colonialism.

Padmini Mongia has edited the book *Contemporary Postcolonial Theory, A Reader* from 1996. It is a collection of essays from important postcolonial critics such as Homi Bhabha, Gayatri Chakrabarti Spivak, Edward Said, Kwame Anthony Appiah, and more. In the introduction, Mongia discusses the different definitions of postcolonial theory, and the importance of the 'post' in 'postcolonial':

“Other critics, though, read the ‘post’ in ‘postcolonial’ as signifying both changes in power structures after the official end of colonialism as well as colonialism’s continuing effects, particularly as they are manifested discursively. For them, postcolonial theory is an umbrella term that covers different critical approaches which deconstruct European thought in areas as wide-ranging as philosophy, history, literary studies, anthropology, sociology and political science. In this perspective, the term postcolonial refers not to a simple periodization, but rather to a methodological revisionism which enables wholesale critique of Western structures of knowledge and power, particularly those of the post-Enlightenment period.

(1-2)

In the above quote, Mongia discusses the term ‘post’ in ‘postcolonial’, and the definition of postcolonial theory. To some critics, he writes, the ‘post’ does not only signify that the colonial period is behind us. To these critics, it is also important to consider how colonialism continues to affect the societies, even after colonialism. Mongia writes that this continued affect is manifested particularly in the discourse. Thus, to Mongia, the task of postcolonial theory is to ‘deconstruct’ the discourse in areas such as “philosophy, history, literary studies, anthropology, sociology and political science”. The reason for listing all these seemingly different areas of epistemology, I think is to be aware of how language is important in all parts of discourse. Furthermore, the reliance of deconstruction and the aim to deconstruct language, shows that postcolonial theory is a development of poststructuralist

thinking. In postcolonial theory, this deconstruction is a critique and revision of European thought and “Western structures of knowledge and power”, according to Mongia. Therefore, as a postcolonial critic, it becomes important to be critical towards the hegemonical discourse which has dominated Western knowledge-making for a long time.

As Mongia writes, even though colonialism in many places is a thing of the past, it is nevertheless interesting to consider its ramifications for the societies and peoples it touched upon and continues to affect. These aftereffects may still be present in people and societies today, even though the countries are no longer colonial, as Mongia writes. For example, Teju Cole writes in *Open City* about the Palimpsest, and how we carry the trauma of past generations within us. This trauma may not be visible, and Cole exemplifies it with the image of an old Native American burial ground in New York City. In Cole’s novel, it seems an important project to point to the erasure of past trauma and make the reader aware of it.

The field of postcolonial theory has a long history, according to Robert Dale Parker (185). However, Parker writes, Anglo-American postcolonial theory became increasingly important from the 1970’s, after several countries in Africa, the Caribbean, South Asia, and many peoples in the Pacific and Middle East gained independence (ibid). Mongia’s collection of essays is also concerned with Anglo-American postcolonial theory. The Anglo-American postcolonial theory distinguishes itself from for example French postcolonial theory, exemplified by the works of Frantz Fanon.

The wave of independence of the 70’s which Parker references thus happened across many continents around the world at the same time. The three writers I have focused on in this thesis are from Nigeria, a country which gained its independence in 1960. Whereas Achebe’s work was concerned with the colonial period, Cole and Adichie write mainly about postcolonial societies. Thus, with regards to what Mongia said about the colonial discourse, one can look at Cole and Adichie’s works and consider their discourse in terms of its relationship to the colonial era. One can discuss whether and how this relationship with the colonial times still manifests in their writing. As mentioned, my view is that their work represents a new paradigm in postcolonial literature, which distinguishes itself from the proceeding literary aesthetics.

Some of the most important theorists who became instrumental in the first wave of postcolonial theory were Edward Said with his *Orientalism* (1978) and a series of articles by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and Homi Bhabha (Parker, 285). In the following, I will discuss these postcolonial critics and their importance in postcolonial studies. I have chosen these scholars because they are the most central postcolonial critics from the first generation of

postcolonial theory. They have been central to the theorization of the field. Furthermore, these critics are still relevant, and are referred to constantly nowadays as well. After the wave of independence, there was a growing understanding that “colonialism turned out to be more entrenched than anticolonialists anticipated or hoped” (ibid). For example, this is manifest in the discourse, as Mongia writes. Thus, both in the discourse and the private lives and culture of people, colonialism can still be said to be present even today. For example, most of the countries in Africa that were under British rule, still have English as an official language today. The use of language influences one’s culture and relationship with the world. In Nigeria, English is the official language, whereas Hausa is the most widely spoken language. (Languages of Nigeria)

One of the ways in which the colonisers asserted their power was through the Western discourse. As Mongia wrote in the above quote, the awareness and critique of the hegemonic Western discourse has been an important aspect of postcolonial literature and theory since its beginning. One of the manners of expanding or deconstructing the Western discourse has been through the inclusion of postcolonial thinkers and writers into the contemporary discourse. As I understand it, this ‘opening up’ of perspectives within postcolonial discourse in that way challenges the limited Western perspective, and there is representation from other countries than the formerly dominant European.

For example, African writers writing about Africa has expanded the literary canon. Thus, this has expanded the artistic discourse of Africa. Chinua Achebe has been important as an African literary voice ‘writing from within’. Before Achebe wrote *Things Fall Apart* (1958), there had not been that much African literature written by African writers. With African writers such as Achebe writing about Africa, there was an increased sense of representation in African literature. African authors, writing about Africa, became seminal for the African literature that followed. For example, Chimamanda Adichie describes the joy of discovering Achebe, after having read a lot of British literature growing up (*The African Trilogy*, ix). The British literature she read did not describe her African reality. When reading Achebe, she felt for the first time that she could recognize herself in the literature. Before reading Achebe, she had not known that people like her “could exist in literature” (Ibid).

According to Homi Bhabha, a seminal postcolonial critic from India, one of the central tenants of postcolonial theory is its ability to challenge the Western historical writing of the ‘Third World’ countries. These ‘third World’ countries are the same as the former colonies. To Bhabha it is thus important to challenge the dominant ‘historical discourse’, perhaps because history is always a question of perspective. Bhabha has stated that “the term

postcolonial is increasingly used to describe that form of social criticism that bears witness to those unequal and uneven processes of representation by which the historical experience of the once-colonized Third World comes to be framed by the West” (Mongia,1). Bhabha thus argues that there has been a problem with the representation of Third World citizens historically. They have not been represented in the discourse of the world; they have been marginalized. Bhabha thus emphasizes the ability to correct in some way the historical writing of the ‘Third World’ countries which usually had been written by the colonisers in the past. In the last part of this chapter, I will discuss Afropolitanism. The topic of representation is important here too. For Taiye Selasi, one of the features of Afropolitanism is that it challenges how Africans are seen. The topic of representation is thus salient in Afropolitanism as well and relates back to earlier postcolonial studies.

The very use of the term ‘post’ in ‘postcolonial’ has been challenged by critics such as Ama Ata Aidoo and other writers. According to Padmini Mongia, (1) these critics fear that the ‘post’ signals an end of the unequal power balance of colonialism. However, this is often not the case. For example, many former colonial countries still operate with regimes which are similar to the erstwhile colonial power structures. Moreover, according to Mongia, the ‘post’ in ‘postcolonial’ also draws attention away from the “present inequities – political, economic and discursive”. Thus, there is still a lot of inequality that needs to be addressed, according to these critics. Perhaps there is a concern in some postcolonial critics that even though colonialism is formally over, it has been replaced in many instances by a form of ‘neo-colonialism’ which reproduces old power structures. According to Robert Dale Parker, we still live in colonial times in many ways (286). For example, the great colonial powers are still dominant in the capitalist structures of our modern world. Furthermore, there are still some countries that remain colonies today.

Moreover, Mongia comments how the term ‘postcolonial’ can signal a link with poststructuralism and deconstruction which not all critics are comfortable with (2). As I commented, deconstruction seems an important element of postcolonial theory, however, Mongia points out that it is not the only methodology. According to Robert Dale Parker, some critics “want more certainty than they see poststructuralism likely to encourage” (286). Perhaps some scholars regard poststructuralism as overly theoretical and philosophical in its approach and want a more practical or pragmatic epistemology of the world.

Another important aspect of postcolonial theory is its critique of Western epistemology and the way that knowledge has been created (Mongia, 5). Mongia accentuates the point that even though nationalism was seen as progress and a way of moving out of

colonialism, it was still based on a Western view of progress (ibid). The role for postcolonial theory has thus been to understand and critique the “link between the structures of knowledge and the forms of oppression of the last two hundred years” (ibid). Thus, for postcolonial theory it has been important to critique the structures of epistemology. This relates to what the discussion of discourse from earlier, the “structures of knowledge,” or the epistemology, is part of what has allowed for the oppression. Thus, as a postcolonial critic, it is important to be cognisant and critical to the epistemology of power. To critique the epistemology of power is to work against the oppression of the colonised peoples.

1.2 Edward Said

Born in Jerusalem in 1935, Edward Said was a Palestinian academic and literary critic. He was very engaged with the political rights of the Palestinian people and the creation of a Palestinian state (Edward Said). Drawing attention to the way in which the West has constructed an image of the Other, Edward Said used the term of the ‘Oriental’ and ‘the Orient’ vs. ‘the Occident’. Said’s *Orientalism* (1978) has been a seminal text in postcolonial theory (Mongia, 3). According to Britannica.com, it has been one of the most influential scholarly books from the 20th century. Said writes that:

Orientalism is a style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction made between ‘the Orient’ and (...) ‘the Occident.’ Thus a very large mass of writers, among whom are poets, novelists, political theorists, economists, and imperial administrators, have accepted the basic distinction between East and West as the starting point for elaborate theories, epics, novels, social descriptions, and political accounts concerning the Orient, its people, customs, ‘mind’, destiny, and so on.
(Mongia, 21)

In the above quote, Said defines Orientalism as a “style of thought”. It was a style of thought which was mostly found in the colonising party. The reason that Said lists all these different types of writers and different types of texts, is to demonstrate, I think, how discourse is part of so many aspects of society. All these different creators make meaning using discourse, and this discourse is never neutral. It is always coloured by our personal experiences, expectations, and ideologies. Said thus demonstrates through *Orientalism* how ideology shapes discourse.

According to Robert Dale Parker, Said's use of the term of the 'Orient' refers to the "Indian subcontinent and especially to the Islamic Middle East, though his ideas can be and have been applied to all colonial discourse" (293). This is the reason that *Orientalism* has been so seminal in postcolonial theory, I believe. As Said writes in the above quote, the dichotomy between the East and the West is similar to the dichotomy between the Orient and the Occident. Thus, in this thesis, I will apply Said's methodology to the colonial discourse on Africa, since I am mainly writing about Africa.

According to Said, the West has created a discourse about the 'Oriental' which meant that "European culture was able to manage - and even produce - the Orient politically, sociologically, military, ideologically, scientifically, and imaginatively during the post-Enlightenment period" (Mongia, 3). It was not only the political sphere where this discourse was apparent, also in sociology, the military, ideologically, scientifically, and imaginatively. When writing about the "imaginatively", I think Said is referring to the arts. It is thus not only in the sciences and politically that the discourse is present, but also creative art is influenced by the discourse. An example of creative arts is literature, which is the topic of this thesis. It is interesting that Said uses the term to "produce" the discourse. I think it reflects how the West created an image of the Orient and the Oriental in the creative arts. When discussing the discourse of a colonial piece of literature one can for example consider whether the discourse of Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* is racist. This was the critique that Chinua Achebe levelled against Joseph Conrad, which I will discuss in the chapter on Chinua Achebe.

Furthermore, Said argues that Western discourse created an image of the Oriental as an opposite to the Westerner (Parker, 294): the Oriental was constructed as "sensual, lazy, exotic, irrational, cruel, promiscuous" (among others) as opposed to the Westerner being "rational, hardworking, kind, democratic, moral, modern" (ibid). Thus, this discourse perpetuated an image of the Oriental as having all the negative traits that were opposite to the corresponding positive traits of the Westerner. I think this also partly what allowed for subjugation of the Oriental. Through the Western discourse, the colonisers created an image of the colonised which made him or her inferior.

Said's text thus highlights the way in which discourse is an important aspect of unequal power relations. Said shows how the earlier colonial discourse such as the political, scientific, military, and ideological discourse had been created by the colonial powers. I believe that postcolonial discourse offers this possibility of discourse to the formerly colonised. In that way, the formerly colonised participates in the contemporary discourse and

knowledge-making. Furthermore, the role of postcolonial theory is to be critical to the dominant hegemonic ideology and discourse. The dominant hegemonic ideology and discourse has been the Western, which also equals the colonising party.

Moreover, *Orientalism* demonstrates how the Western discourse facilitated the colonial enterprise through this discourse. By constructing the Oriental as ‘other’ it became possible to repress peoples through colonialism. Discourse may seem like a benevolent area, as it is ‘only’ words. However, Said demonstrates how the use of discourse may facilitate power abuse and violence. Thus, words can be violent, both in the way they affect someone on a psychological level, and how they can facilitate violence. Later, I will discuss how the Western discourse facilitated the colonial enterprise through their discourse on Africa. As mentioned, Chinua Achebe critiqued the Western discourse of Africa as a ‘dark’ continent with ‘savage’ peoples, which he saw evident in Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*.

1.3 Homi Bhabha

Born in 1949, Homi Bhabha is an influential postcolonial critic. According to Oxford Bibliographies, he is best known as a postcolonial theorist, however his work should perhaps be characterized as “vernacular or translational cosmopolitanism” (Homi K. Bhabha). Some of Bhabha’s key concepts are hybridity, ambivalence, stereotype, and mimicry. In his writing, he engages with other postcolonial thinkers such as Edward Said and Frantz Fanon, as well as earlier poststructuralists such as Jacques Derrida. Bhabha was interested in language and colonial discourse and writes about the stereotype:

An important feature of colonial discourse is its dependence on the concept of ‘fixity’ in the ideological construction of otherness. Fixity, as the sign of cultural/historical/racial difference in the discourse of colonialism, is a paradoxical mode of representation: it connotes rigidity and unchanging order as well as disorder, (...). Likewise the stereotype, which is its major discursive strategy, is a form of knowledge and identification that vacillates between what is always ‘in place’ (...) and something that must be anxiously repeated...

(Mongia, 37)

In this passage, Bhabha discusses the colonial discourse and how the concept of ‘fixity’ is related to the ‘construction of otherness’. This ‘construction of otherness’ relates to Said’s concept of Orientalism, which Bhabha references. I think the reason why he has

chosen to write about the stereotype, is that the stereotype is often part of a racist discourse. Therefore, to be critical to the discourse is to be critical to the stereotype as a part of language, and how the stereotype seeks to define the 'Other'. Bhabha writes in the above quote that fixity both connotes rigidity as well as disorder, and it is this which makes it paradoxical. He relates this to the stereotype, which he claims is similar, in that it is 'always 'in place'', as well as it having to be repeated. As mentioned, I think the reason that Bhabha is writing about the stereotype is that it is an important element of colonial discourse which in turns allows for the subjugation of people. An example of a stereotype in Western literature on Africa, could be of the African as 'savage' and less civilised than the European.

For example, in my chapter on Achebe, I discuss a scene from *No Longer At Ease* between two British civil servants. The civil servants are talking about the Africans and how they are unreliable and essentially corrupt. Achebe here conveys a stereotypical image of the African seen through the eyes of the Europeans. I think that Achebe in this way is making the reader aware of how the Europeans often regarded the Africans during colonial times. Achebe reveals a European discourse which conveys an ideology of superiority. By deconstructing the stereotype as a part of the colonial discourse, Bhabha is making us aware of the language and its underlying ideologies.

1.4 Frantz Fanon

Born in 1925 on the island of Martinique during French colonial rule, Frantz Fanon was one of the most important writers of black Atlantic theory (Frantz Fanon). Being a psychiatrist, Fanon was interested in how the condition of racism was internalised in the colonised individual. He argued that this internalisation of racism "perpetuate(d) the colonialist and racist myths of their inferiority" (Parker, 291). Fanon was a vocal critic of Négritude which I will discuss subsequently. According to Robert Dale Parker, he valued the pride which Négritude created, however he considered the movement to contain "romantic oversimplifications" (290). According to Fanon, Négritude, Pan-Africanism and similar movements all "depended on a romantic illusion of sameness that threatened to mask the variety of African and black peoples." Furthermore, he believed that "in the guise of rejecting colonialist prejudice, the poets and philosophers of Négritude reinvigorated the same stereotypes that the colonizers believed in." (Parker, 291) Thus, to Fanon, Négritude was also stereotypical in its discourse. We see here that Fanon like Bhabha discusses the stereotype of

the colonising discourse. It seems to me that stereotypical discourse is a topic which comes up a lot in postcolonial theory.

In *Black Skin, White Mask* from 1952, Fanon writes about the archetype of the black man and how it conflicts with the educated black man:

And of course, just as the Jew who is lavish with money is suspect, so the black man who quotes Montesquieu must be watched. Let me make myself clear: “watched” insofar as he might start something. I do not contend that the black student is suspect to his peers or his professors. But outside university circles there is an army of fools. It is a question not of educating them but of teaching the black man not to be a slave of their archetypes.

(18)

In this passage Fanon discusses how he believes the black man is regarded by the rest of society. Whereas inside of the university setting he is respected, on the ‘outside’ he is regarded differently. The book is many years old, so it reflects perhaps a more prejudiced world than we live in now. It is interesting however, to tie this quote to the depiction of Julius in *Open City* which I will discuss in the following chapter. Julius too, is a black intellectual, perhaps fighting against stereotypical expectations of being a black man.

1.5 Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak was born in Calcutta, India in 1942. She is a literary and postcolonial theorist, as well as a feminist critic. Like Homi Bhabha, she was also influenced by poststructuralism, and she is known for her “personal brand of deconstructive criticism, which she called “interventionist” (Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak). She published *On Grammatology*, an English translation of Jacques Derrida’s work in 1975. For her, it was important that women become involved in the development of deconstructive theory. Her most well-known essay is perhaps “Can the Subaltern Speak?” from 1988. In it, she discusses the practice of Sati, or widow burning in India (Parker,). The subaltern is a term she has borrowed from Antonio Gramsci, which refers to people who lack access to citizenship.

In the essay “Poststructuralism, Marginality, Postcoloniality and Value”, she writes:

This essay is not about the difference between Africa and Asia, between the United States and Britain. It is about the difference and the relationship between academic and ‘revolutionary’ practices in the interest of social change. The radical academic, *when she is in the academy*, might reckon that names ‘Asian’ or ‘African’ (...) have histories that are not anchored in truth but rather secure them. We cannot exchange as ‘truth’ (...) what might be immediate needs for identitarian collectives.

(Mongia, 198)

In this passage we see that Spivak was interested in the “academic and revolutionary practices” for making social change. Spivak writes about the “radical academic,” which is a term she seems to self-identify with. She also discusses the importance of “truth” and making social change. Thus, it seems that Spivak was interested in how the academic could participate in the global discourse and create social change.

In this section of the chapter, I have sought to explain my understanding of the field of postcolonial studies. Furthermore, I have explained some of the key issues within postcolonial studies. Lastly, I have gone through some of the most important postcolonial theorists to convey important concepts from their writing. In the following, I will go on to the more recent concept of Afropolitanism as it follows earlier postcolonial theory.

1.6 Afropolitanism and its definitions

The coinage of the term “Afropolitanism” has been credited to Taiye Selasi and Achille Mbembe and came into being around 2005. Selasi’s essay “Bye, bye Babar” is said to have “viralized” the topic of Afropolitanism and brought it into a commercial realm. Mbembe’s essay called “Afropolitanism” was published in 2007 in an essay collection entitled *Africa Remix – Contemporary Art of a Continent*. Thus, while Selasi’s essay popularized the term and brought it to the mainstream, Mbembe’s text discussed it in an academic setting. As I see it, Selasi with a ‘cool’ sensibility made Afropolitanism into an aspirational contemporary term, while it was simultaneously established academically. The term has been discussed extensively both inside and outside of academia.

In this section of the chapter, I will consider the topic of Afropolitanism specifically. I will look at how one can define the Afropolitan movement through the essay written by Taiye Selasi in *Lip Magazine* in 2005 and Achille Mbembe’s article on the topic. Consequently, I will posit these two definitions against each other. While Mbembe’s definition of

Afropolitanism seems to centre around the African continent, Selasi's understanding seems to involve mainly the African diaspora. Furthermore, Selasi seems to accentuate the city experience. I find these interesting differences which I will explore further.

As mentioned, Afropolitanism has been discussed extensively in academia and has attracted opposing voices and some controversy. My aim with this chapter is to define the concept of Afropolitanism as I understand it. To me, the term is multifaceted and open to differing interpretations. Moreover, I will go through some of the key points which have been levelled against Afropolitanism. I consider some of this criticism to be valid as it brings fourth important points such as a critique of elitism. In the following chapter, I will present Teju Cole and Chimamanda Adichie as representatives of the Afropolitan movement. I will look at their two novels through an Afropolitan lens.

1.7 Afropolitanism according to Achille Mbembe

Written in 2007, Achille Mbembe's essay on Afropolitanism was part of an essay collection entitled *Africa Remix – Contemporary Art of a Continent*. According to Miriam Pahl, Achille Mbembe's essay is concerned with the people from, within and moving to Africa. Furthermore, she sees Mbembe's Afropolitanism as a view of the world where its peoples are "constantly moving and mixing" (76). Mbembe writes that this has been the case on the African continent for a long time: "The precolonial history of African societies is one of peoples in perpetual movement over the continent" (104). Mbembe goes on to argue that the culture of mobility became threatened by the European invention of borders (ibid). It seems to Mbembe that this movement across the African continent is central to his definition of Afropolitanism. Furthermore, the European invention of borders became something which hindered this mobility. It seems that Mbembe's focus is on the whole of the African continent, whereas Selasi writes mainly about the city-experience outside of Africa. In Afropolitan literature there is often the motif of Africans moving, as Mbembe discusses, particularly across continents to for example the US and Europe.

Mbembe argues in his essay that the African way of being in the world has been marked by cultural mixing and interweaving (105). He writes that:

It is the cultural, historical and aesthetic sensitivity that underlies the term "Afropolitanism"- awareness of the interweaving of the here and there (...) the way of embracing, (...) strangeness, foreignness, and remoteness, the ability to recognize

one's face in that of a foreigner (...) to domesticate the unfamiliar to work with what seem to be opposites.

(Mbembe, 105).

Mbembe here defines Afropolitanism as an “awareness of the interweaving of the here and there”. Thus, to Mbembe, Afropolitanism is something which is related to movement and location. Furthermore, Mbembe also accentuates the importance of relationships and the coming together of different groups of people in his phrase “embracing, (...) strangeness, foreignness, and remoteness”. Thus, there seems to be an inherent positivity in his view of the term. The passage also resonates in the phrase “interweaving of the here and there”. By employing the verb “interweaving,” Mbembe denotes things that come together harmoniously through intentionality. To me, it seems a fitting verb which illustrates the Afropolitan vision.

Achille Mbembe's view of Afropolitanism is something which also resonates with the two Afropolitan novels I have chosen for this thesis. As I discuss in the chapter on the novels, both *Open City* and *Americanah* depict relationships between different groups of people from different backgrounds. Furthermore, there is an “interweaving of the here and there” in the way both novels depict spaces. Mbembe seems slightly idealistic in his phrase “the ability to recognize one's face in that of a foreigner”. This is partly why I will tie Afropolitanism to humanism, in the way that Afropolitanism often is concerned with the relationships between people and finding common ground, despite differences.

1.8 Négritude, Pan-Africanism and Afropolitanism

Mbembe goes on to distinguish Afropolitanism from earlier movements of emancipation such as Négritude and Pan-Africanism. Négritude was a movement led by the Martinican poet Aimé Césaire, French Guyanese poet Léon Damas and Senegalese poet Léopold Senghor. Paris became the centre of the global Négritude movement in 1937:

In the face of growing fascism, black students, scholars and artists from French colonies in Africa and the Caribbean got together with the aim of promoting an appreciation of the history and culture of black people. They also wanted to draw attention to the experience of those who had lived under colonial rule, including slavery.

(Négritude)

Thus, both Afropolitanism and Négritude seem to be similar in the focus on the celebration of black culture. However, in Mbembe's writing there seems to be an inclusion of all peoples on the African continent. Moreover, Mbembe seems to dislike the essentialism in Négritude, and connects it with identifying with victimhood. Like Teju Cole, he regards Afropolitanism as a certain aesthetics or poetics: "it is a way of being in the world, rejecting on principle any identity based on victimhood" (206). To Mbembe, perhaps the Négritude movement was too focused on victimhood, rather than seeing the possibilities for peaceful "interweaving" of cultures.

Pan-Africanism is "the idea that peoples of African descent have common interests and should be unified". According to Britannica.com, "in its narrowest political manifestation, Pan-Africanists envision a unified African nation where all people of the African diaspora can live." Thus, Pan-Africanism too seems different to Afropolitanism as it only seems to include Africans in its vision of cultures living together. As mentioned, Achille Mbembe emphasizes the importance of "strangers" living together, and of recognizing oneself in the face of a stranger. As mentioned, his view of Afropolitanism does not seem to include only Africans, but all people living on the African continent.

The focus on movement and mobility in Mbembe's text ties in with Taiye Selasi's view of Afropolitanism as a critical concept. The Afropolitan literature which I will explore in the following chapter also encapsulates this way of being in the world, with a lot of movement and mobility. Both *Americanah* and *Open City* feature characters who travel freely and interact extensively with other people from different backgrounds.

1.9 Taiye Selasi: Bye, bye Babar

Hugely influential both in academia and pop culture, Taiye Selasi's essay in *Lip Magazine* (2005) would define what I will call an Afropolitan movement in post-colonial literature and theory. The article was entitled "Bye, bye Babar". Here, Selasi describes the Afropolitan thus:

We are Afropolitans- the newest generation of African emigrants (...). You'll know us for our funny blend of London fashion, New York jargon, African ethics and academic successes. (...) Most of us are multilingual (...) There is at least one place

on the African continent to which we tie our sense of self (...). Then there is the G8 city or two (or three) that we know like the back of our hand. We are Afropolitans: not citizens but Africans of the world.

(Taiye Selasi, *Bye, bye Babar*)

In the statement “not citizens but Africans of the world,” Selasi links Afropolitanism to the precursor of cosmopolitanism. In his book *Cosmopolitanism*, (2006) Kwame Anthony Appiah dates the term back to the Cynics of the fourth Century BC, which literally translates to “citizen of the cosmos” (xii). “The cosmos referred to the world, not in the sense of the earth, but in the sense of the universe” (ibid). In the classification, there was thus a rejection of the idea that every citizen belonged to “a community among communities” (ibid). Inherent in the term of Cosmopolitanism is the importance of the universal and broader, as opposed to the singular, local city. Cosmopolitanism was also critical towards the past, according to Appiah: “The formulation was meant to be paradoxical and reflected the general Cynic scepticism toward custom and tradition” (Appiah 2006, Introduction).

Later, I will explore further how I think Afropolitanism also is critical towards the past. For example, Teju Cole has expressed a critique of earlier postcolonial perspectives, which seemed very focused on the village and the countryside, as opposed to the city. Furthermore, as discussed earlier, Afropolitanism is different from other emancipatory schools of thought because of how it embraces difference.

According to Pieter Vermeulen, cosmopolitanism signifies a “commitment to a community beyond rather than between nation states” (42). Thus, in cosmopolitanism there is an interest in community, and it does not include only one group of people. Rather, cosmopolitanism and Afropolitanism seem to embrace these differences. Furthermore, Vermeulen points to cosmopolitan theory’s connection with human rights: “Unlike discourses of empire and globalization, it is increasingly rooted in a commitment to human rights (43). These arguments which connect cosmopolitanism to human rights and community are some reasons why I think that cosmopolitanism and Afropolitanism can be related to humanism.

Vermeulen argues that literature was important in relation to spreading the cosmopolitan world view. He saw the novel as a “a crucial aide in helping cosmopolitan attitudes and human rights gain acceptance in the larger public”. Here, Vermeulen demonstrates the importance of the cultural discourse such as the novel, in affecting change. Vermeulen adds that this was partly done by the novel’s possibility of helping people learn

the perspectives of other people and their suffering. I think that this is a topic which is explored in both novels by Adichie and Cole, particularly in the novels' focus on trauma as well as its depictions of relationships.

In addition to the signifiers of being cool and hipster, to Chielozone Eze, Selasi's term was "a means to explain her own complex identity melange" (239). Eze thus accentuates the importance of Afropolitanism as an identity marker. Selasi had perhaps not found a relatable description of her identity in the contemporary discourse. Furthermore, the Afropolitan identity establishes an identification with a particular intellectual, elite group. Whereas earlier African emancipatory schools of thought had been focused on the African continent, Selasi's Afropolitanism brought the relationship with the West into the African popular discourse. As mentioned, this also contrasts with Achille Mbembe's view of Afropolitanism, which seems to be focused on the African continent.

Also focusing on hybridity and complex identity issues, Donald Morales sees Afropolitanism as:

being about young, well-educated African artists with global and multicultural sensibilities who have settled in a number of cosmopolitan capitals. These artists have produced works that reflect, in some ways, their hybrid status, movement, and resulting identity issues, but with increasing complexity and nuance in an effort to "redefin[e] what it means to be African" (223)

Morales here characterizes the Afropolitan as an African artist who lives in a cosmopolitan city. According to Morales, these artists' works are defined by their status as hybrid and their mobility. Furthermore, Morales seems to say that this hybridity and mobility results in identity issues, which is what the Afropolitan artists explore in their work.

According to the definition by Selasi, it seems that the Afropolitan is a privileged individual who has travelled abroad as a way of furthering their education and living what could be seen as a kind of 'jetsetter' lifestyle. Indeed, the critique of elitism and classism has been levelled against the position, and Donald Morales acknowledges that Selasi has been "accused of writing her own elitist, single story" (225). Both Selasi and Teju Cole agree that elitism could be a problematic issue regarding Afropolitanism, and Selasi has stated that it "is a concern, but we have so much to do, and I cannot let that concern stop me from addressing

the larger issue of how we are seen and how we improve our condition” (232). Thus, according to Selasi, her main agenda with Afropolitanism is to develop change through creating a different perspective of Africa and Africans. Additionally, bettering the circumstances of Africans is also accentuated by Selasi. Furthermore, Selasi acknowledges the importance of representation, which relates to postcolonial literature and the value of representation.

Addressing the issue of classism, Cole has remarked in a series of Tweets: “the discourse around Afropolitanism foregrounds questions of class in ways that the ‘I’m not Afropolitan’ crowd don’t want to deal with, (and in ways the ‘I’m Afropolitan’ crowd are often too blithe about).” (Hallemeier, *To Be From*, 233) Thus, to Cole, the Afropolitan discussion is interesting because it brings up questions of class which may have been underrepresented in the African literary discourse. Katherine Hallemeier argues that “authors such as Cole, Selasi and Adichie draw attention to questions of class that have perhaps been too easily overlooked in academic discussions of African literature and identity” (*To Be From*, 234). I agree, to me this is one of the things that appeals to me about their literary output, that both Cole and Selasi address vital concerns such as class, in addition to the subjects of feminism, masculinity and race.

The “single story” which Morales refers to in the quote above is Chimamanda Adichie’s lecture “The Danger of a Single Story” which argues that the narrative of the African continent has been oversimplified (*The Danger*). In the lecture, Adichie discusses how Africa in literature and media is often portrayed very one sided. In a later chapter I will discuss Adichie’s Ted Talks. To me, it seems that part of Adichie’s project is, as Selasi explicitly stated, to expand the narrative of Africans and the African continent. Chimamanda Adichie does this through employing many different platforms; she has had two Ted Talks which have had great influence and she has written several books (three novels, two essay collections, one memoir and one short story collection). Part of her talk “We should all be Feminists” was sampled by Beyoncé. In addition to this, she is also active on Twitter and Instagram. On Instagram, she is very engaged in fashion and style. Her discourse thus is varied and reaches a lot of people who do not typically read books.

In his review of the Afropolitan movement, Donald Morales accentuates Taiye Selasi’s refusal at oversimplification and her desire to bring to the fourth a “more subtle but futuristic perspective of Africa, albeit from a diaspora point of view.” (225). Thus, to Morales, the focus is on Afropolitanism as a futuristic perspective of Africa. Furthermore,

this image is “more subtle”. However, it is from a diasporic viewpoint, as Morales writes. Writing “albeit,” Morales is perhaps signalling a slight discontent with the diasporic perspective. Writing about Africa from the African continent would perhaps have been preferable for Morales and other critics. Perhaps he sees more value in writing about Africa, ‘from within’ like Achebe did.

Morales also warns against essentialism in Afropolitanism. He writes that Afropolitanism “should not represent an all- inclusive theory of African writers which essentializes the younger writers, particularly those living in the diaspora.” (226) This fear of essentialism is perhaps why some writers like Adichie and Aminatta Forna have shied away from the label; they do not want to be Pidgeon-holed.

In addition to the critique of elitism, the tie between Afropolitanism and consumerism has been questioned. Indeed, this seems to be one of the main reasons why many African intellectuals do not identify with the label. In her article “Why I am still not an Afropolitan”, Emma Dabiri is concerned with “Afropolitanism’s collusion with consumerism” (104). Dabiri critiques Selasi’s *Lip Magazine* essay and finds it too focused on elite lifestyle; “It seems again that African progress is measured by the extent to which it can reproduce a Western lifestyle, now without having physically to be in the West” (106). Here, Dabiri questions the equation of African progress with achieving a Western lifestyle. To me, this seems like a relevant critique.

Katherine Hallemeier argues something similar to Dabiri. To her, Afropolitanism can be a way of reproducing Western capitalist imperialism. She sees Afropolitanism as a new way of being in the world where the African individual is participating in the imperialist ideology: it (Afropolitanism) “highlights how Africans are at once complicit in and generative of, as well as opposed to, capitalist imperialism” (To Be From, 234). Hallemeier here links capitalism with imperialism and accentuates how they may be intertwined. Thus, it is a paradox that the former colonised countries of Africa should be “complicit” and “generative” of “capitalist imperialism”.

To me, the arguments of consumerism and elitism represent valid points against Afropolitanism. As I mentioned before, I do think that Selasi’s definition of Afropolitanism seems slightly superficial. I agree that Selasi mainly seems to focus on the commodification of culture, reproducing a Western way of living. A lot of the culture which has been created in relation to Afropolitanism seems very commercial. However, despite the critique of

commodification, it is still my argument that Afropolitanism and a lot of Afropolitan writers represent an important move in postcolonial literature and theory.

2.0 Afropolitanism in *Open City* and *Americanah*

One of the tenets of Afropolitanism in literature as I see it, is the way in which it offers a discussion of a contemporary cosmopolitan experience seen through the lens of an African protagonist. Furthermore, the narrator often brings in the perspectives of people from other classes and cultural backgrounds than themselves. The Afropolitan writers are often concerned with topics related to race and socio-cultural questions. The two Nigerian authors Teju Cole and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie have written two novels which each portray the experiences of a protagonist both in the US, Nigeria, and Europe.

As I see it, these authors express diverse socio-cultural interests through the portrayal and social engagement of these protagonists, Julius and Ifemulu. My research question is that Afropolitanism is a new era of postcolonial literature and theory. Therefore, this chapter will be an exploration of the topic of Afropolitanism seen through the lens of these two contemporary Nigerian writers and their two novels. My aim with this chapter is to show how Afropolitanism features in *Open City* (2011) by Teju Cole and *Americanah* (2013) by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie. Both Cole and Adichie are of Nigerian ancestry but are today for the most part based in the US. As mentioned previously, although Cole and Adichie have expressed ambivalence towards the term of Afropolitanism, I have chosen to label them as such in this thesis.

Both Adichie and Cole can be regarded as Afropolitans according to the definition put forth by Morales (see p.20); they are young, well-educated African artists whose works reflect hybridity, movement, and identity issues. As I see it, the Afropolitanism is also expressed in a willingness to go into topics such as race and socio-cultural questions. Cole and Adichie do not shy away from possibly controversial topics such as race, feminism, and politics. In *Open City*, we see this interest play out in the protagonist's engagement with other people, and in *Americanah* there is a social engagement in the blog of the protagonist Ifemulu. In this chapter I will explore Cole and Adichie's focus on these questions and how it relates to Afropolitanism.

In addition to this, according to Miriam Pahl, Cole and Adichie have a literary output and online presence which "challenges and revises the present world order" (Pahl, 73). I will discuss the ways they participate in the discourse through their online presence in addition to their literature. Their engagement on social media also expands the discourse to people who do not normally follow the postcolonial or literary discussion. I consider this to represent a democratization of the discourse and examples of a modern way of participating in the contemporary discourse. Additionally, in my view, this engagement on different platforms is

part of their Afropolitan sensibility. As I see it, the Afropolitan writers often engage with their audience on a variety of media, and Cole and Adichie are examples of this. I will go into this aspect of their Afropolitan engagement in the following chapter on their internet presence.

Thus, I consider both Chimamanda Adichie and Teju Cole to embrace a modern globalized worldview which changes the postcolonial discussion. They are active on different media and Cole is an accomplished photographer. Their online discourse includes Ted Talks, and a presence on Instagram and Twitter. Chimamanda Adichie's Ted Talks have been hugely influential, and she has spoken on topics such as African literature and feminism. To me this is part of my interest in these writers, that I believe they represent something new in the world as well as in relation to postcolonial theory. One of the manners in which I think they do this is by employing other modes than solely the literary. The older generations of African writers would mainly be active in the literary and academic fields and there was no social media. These contemporary writers however pursue new means of reaching a diverse audience. A lot has happened since the anti-colonial narratives of the 50s and 60s, and I find this an interesting juxtaposition which I will go into further in the chapter on Chinua Achebe and the 'golden age' of African fiction.

The Afropolitan writers thus are unafraid to engage with contemporaneity through different modes as well as commercially. This in turn garners great interest from a broad audience, and people who don't follow the academic or literary scene. For example, Chimamanda Adichie has become well known on Instagram and other platforms as a sort of modern African fashion icon. After her Ted Talk "We should All Be Feminists" went viral, Dior made a t-shirt with the statement (Which was sold for \$710). Teju Cole on the other hand, has been very active on Twitter, using the platform for example to write a poem, one Tweet at a time. According to *NPR*, Cole cannot "stop thinking how to connect with his readers" (Teju Cole Writes a Story). This way of being a modern writer exemplified in both Cole and Adichie I believe typifies the Afropolitan way of thinking and differentiates them from their African forefathers.

Seeing *Open City* and *Americanah* as examples of Afropolitanism I will discuss in what ways specifically I think they offer this perspective. Following the discussion on postcolonial theory and literature I will go into in what way this perspective is different from previous postcolonial literature. As examples of what I consider Afropolitan writing, I will explore the tropes of identity and hybridity in the works of these writers. In addition to this, I

am also interested in how the trope of trauma is portrayed in these two novels. Can the trope of trauma be considered in relation to the topic of postcoloniality and Afropolitanism? Is trauma a typical topic of Afropolitan writing? I will discuss whether the identity issues typical of Afropolitan writing can be related to trauma. In the following I will consider the novels in relation to each other.

Born in 1975 in the US, Teju Cole however spent most of his childhood in Nigeria. He came back to the US to attend college and finally achieved a PhD at Columbia University in African art history. In addition to being a writer he is thus very interested in the arts and is an accomplished photographer. He wrote about photography in *The New York Times* from 2015 to 2019. He has written two novels and one collection of essays. *Open City* was his second novel and was published to critical acclaim in 2012. He is currently the “Gore Vidal Professor of the Practice of Creative Writing at Harvard” (Tejucole.com). To me, Cole’s style of writing can be related to his interests in photography and the arts. In his novel, he observes a lot about art, culture and the city and writes about it in a very descriptive way.

Teju Cole has been one of the authors most frequently associated with Afropolitanism. Though he to some extent seems ambivalent towards the label, he does envision a new postcolonial perspective: “We need a poetics that extends from villages in the late 19th century to cities in the early 21st and beyond, all the way to the Afro-futurist horizon” (An Afropolitan 2017 Update, 230). Here, Cole interestingly foregrounds the cosmopolitan experience and connects the future of African literature with a move from villages to cities. To Cole, it appears the countryside and villages represent a more backward perspective. Certainly, Cole’s choice of locations in his novels are the cities. In this chapter I will look at how the Afropolitan perspective plays out in Cole’s *Open City* (2011). I will discuss why this perspective in my view enhances the contemporary postcolonial discourse.

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie was also born in Nigeria (Enugu), in 1977 (Chimamanda.com). Both Cole and Adichie were thus born and lived their childhood years in Nigeria. Their Nigerian backgrounds also connect them with their Nigerian forefather Chinua Achebe whom I will discuss alongside these contemporary writers in a later chapter. The fact that all these important African writers are from Nigeria is interesting and a point which I want to address. Nigeria is by some referred to as the ‘giant of Africa’. It has a population of over 206 million and is the richest or one of the richest countries on the African continent in terms of GDP. Thus, being a ‘giant’ in Africa economically as well as in population, it is not surprising that novelists from Nigeria are interested in participating in the global discourse. Perhaps, additionally, these contemporary Afropolitan writers’ interest in the commercial

realm could be linked to Nigeria's position as a booming economy. This link with consumerism has also been a point of critique of Afropolitanism as I discussed in the chapter on Afropolitanism.

According to her website, Chimamanda Adichie's parents worked at the University of Nigeria and Adichie grew up on that campus. Like Cole, Adichie also travelled to the US to attain an Ivy League education. She holds two master's degrees: one in African History and another in Creative Writing. She has had two *Ted Talks* which have had great influence and she has written several books (three novels, two essay collections, one memoir and one short story collection). *Americanah* was her third novel, and it was published in 2013.

According to Katherine Hallemeier, both Adichie and Cole's novels feature protagonists that are from the upper- middle class of the African diaspora. "These protagonists reflect the economic privilege of the African diaspora that has been rapidly expanding since the 1970s" (To Be From, 233). Thus, these protagonists are Afropolitans in their way, they have the resources to travel and study in the West; US specifically. While in the USA, they bring with them an African perspective and are both in a position of privilege yet at the same time looking at the US from "the outside". According to Miriam Pahl, "Adichie and Cole display an African cosmopolitan 'sensitivity', which means not so much that they are, or present themselves as, socially mobile and multiply affiliated as that they respond to and creatively rework metropolitan demands for cultural otherness in their work' (26). Thus, to Pahl, the importance is not on their social mobility, but rather that they engage with otherness in their work. It seems that Pahl connects this 'cultural otherness' with living in the city, and the cosmopolitan possibilities of engaging with other cultural communities. Connecting with other cultures can be more pertinent in the city.

2.1 The two protagonists: Julius and Ifemulu

Julius, the narrator, and protagonist of *Open City*, though a fictional character, does fit into the elitist category of the Afropolitans. The novel *Open City* follows Julius on his many walks along the NYC and Brussels' streets, and the encounters he has along the way. Julius is a Nigerian- American psychiatrist who, like Cole, was raised in Nigeria, but came to the US to attain an Ivy-league education. He explains how the walks for him are like a meditation, a way to process his busy workdays at the psychiatric hospital. In addition, the walks become a way of exploring the city and viewing it as a pedestrian:

“These walks, a counterpoint to my busy days at the hospital, steadily lengthened, taking me farther and farther afield each time (...). In this way, at the beginning of the final year of my psychiatry fellowship, New York City worked its way into my life at walking pace” (3).

There is not a great deal of narrative action taking place in the story, the novel resembles a diary, and it reflects what the narrator sees and the people he engages with on his way. Among the people he encounters are an older professor named Saito, various people he engages with on the street, an older woman he meets in Belgium and two Algerian men in Brussels; Farouq and Khalil. He also talks a little about a previous relationship with a woman named Nadège and a former friend from Africa whom he meets at a party. This meeting with the female ‘friend’ named Moji from the past provides an interesting turning point at the end of the novel which brings into question the authority of the narrator.

Throughout the novel, Cole brings in many voices which speak to the narrator from different vantage points. As I see it, this is an Afropolitan feature of the novel which also is present in *Americanah*. According to Katherine Hallemeier (Literary Cosmopolitanisms, 239), the elite protagonist relays the experiences of the marginalized, which are for instance immigrant workers. However, in Hallemeier’s view, the authority of the protagonist in *Open City* is questioned, as these marginalized peoples are described as having a greater understanding of the world than Julius. Additionally, his authority is also questioned by the events at the end of the novel which I will discuss subsequently. Thus, according to Hallemeier, Cole seems to undermine the elite narrator and points to an alternative way of viewing the world (244). As Julius seems to have an elite Western perspective, this Western, privileged position is thus questioned:

I argue, however, that Cole’s texts also endeavour to escape the binary that would laud an elite cosmopolitan storyteller for her worldliness and judge her for her betrayals. The texts question both the unnamed narrator’s authority through those characters who offer alternative visions of cosmopolitan literacy (...) These characters (...) lack the institutional and economic privilege of Cole’s narrators but are better able to negotiate perceived cultural differences (244).

Here, Hallemeier labels the narrator as cosmopolitan and “worldly”. However, she argues that the “cosmopolitan literacy” does not translate into great cultural understanding. In

my view, culture and relationships are themes of the novel. I would argue that these are typically Afropolitan themes which are present in both *Americanah* and *Open City*. A concern which seems to be present in both works is the peaceful co-existence of people of different cultural backgrounds and the misunderstandings and conflicts which may arise in our contemporary multicultural societies. Both works explore these issues in the realm of the private and social as well as in the public and political.

Americanah chronicles the life of Ifemulu as a girl in Nigeria and then as a young woman in the US. Depicting the relationship between Ifemulu and Obinze, the novel follows their journeys from Africa to Europe and the US and eventually back to Africa. They meet at school in Nigeria and Ifemulu later chooses to leave Obinze behind to go to the US for her education. In the US, Ifemulu is confronted with a new identity as a black person, and race thus becomes a bigger part of her consciousness. In her blog, Ifemulu explores issues related to race in the US and Africa.

According to Katherine Hallemeier, *Americanah* is a portrayal of a “distinctively Nigerian iteration of upper- middle class mobility” (To Be From A Country, 235). However, according to Hallemeier, this upper- middle class is not the same as its American counterpart. She argues that the novel does not speak “to the US” but rather “of the US” in articulating a better Nigerian future (ibid). Thus, according to Hallemeier, it seems that one aim of the novel is to envision a Afrofuturistic perspective which brings with it some capitalist and progressive elements from the West.

2.2 The city as a palimpsest- past and present trauma

As Teju Cole emphasized the cosmopolitan experience in the quote above, this is very much a cosmopolitan novel. The novel foregrounds the city-experience. Both *Americanah* and *Open City* offer explorations of culture in the cities and as mentioned, I see this as an Afropolitan perspective. In *Open City*, Julius’ walks are meditations on many topics, like African and American history, art, and architecture. He also encounters many different people on his way. In this manner, the city functions as a meeting point between different cultures. This is perhaps also visible in the title of the book which emphasizes the city as ‘open’. The expression of an ‘open city’ is a term associated with war and further relates to the trope of trauma which I will discuss later. New York city functions as an ‘open city’ which houses the cultures which are present at this moment in time, and in addition Cole also foregrounds the cultures of the past. Like this passage about the old Native American presence when Julius is walking around Ground Zero:

And before that? What Lenape paths lay buried beneath the rubble? The site was a palimpsest, as well as all the city, written, erased, rewritten. There had been communities here before Columbus ever set sail, before Verrazano anchored his ship in the narrows, or the black Portuguese slave trader Esteban Gómez sailed up the Hudson (...) I wanted to find the line that connected me to my own part in these stories.

(59)

In this passage we can see that Cole draws on the experiences of the people who came before him. Thus, the city is both a meeting point for the various cultures at that point in time, in addition to being a site of history forgotten and erased. Cole has said in an interview that the novel was a reflection on the trauma of 9/11 and the traumas which preceded it (Teju Cole On Open City). I will in the next chapter go into Cole's lecture "The City as Palimpsest" which he gave at the Graduate School of Design at Harvard in 2012. He there referenced the above quote and talked about his interest in spaces and the memory of what has happened in them. According to Merriam Webster, a palimpsest is a "writing material (such as a parchment or tablet), used one or more times after earlier writing has been erased". It functions as a metaphor for how there can be various layers beneath the surface (Palimpsest).

In the context of *Open City*, the palimpsest reveals the past generational trauma which is not visible and has been erased. Thus, it is as if Cole wants to point to this erasure. As I mentioned, Cole has stated that a project with this novel is to accentuate the trauma of 9/11 and how it follows past trauma. Additionally, in the phrase "I wanted to find the line that connected me to my own part in these stories," Cole seems to argue that we are as much a part of the past as the present, we carry the past within us. The past thus influences how we interact with the present.

Chimamanda Adichie's novel like *Open City* is partly a reflection on trauma, but it has in my view a lighter tone. Rather than being a reflection on historical trauma of different groups of peoples, Adichie's novel seems more focused on the personal trauma. After a period in the US, Ifemulu experiences severe depression following a series of financial difficulties and a general feeling of loneliness:

She woke up torpid each morning, slowed by sadness, frightened by the endless stretch of day that lay ahead. Everything had thickened. She was swallowed, lost in a

viscous haze, shrouded in a soup of nothingness. Between her and what she should feel, there was a gap. She cared about nothing.

(156)

This passage is an example of how Ifemulu experiences depression which probably is resonant to a lot of people who have had similar experiences. In addition to the financial difficulties, Ifemulu also experiences a traumatic sexual experience. As previously noted, Adichie is more focused on the personal trauma rather than societal in this novel. Her first months in America, rather than having a joyful experience in the 'land of the free', Ifemulu is weighed down by the financial responsibilities. This is not the experience of the carefree cosmopolitan traveling and living abroad for work and pleasure which I discussed in the chapter on the Afropolitans. However, Ifemulu's life in the US improves drastically over the course of the novel. After a while, she can support herself and live well as a blogger writing on the topic of race, Africa, and the US.

The transformational arch of Ifemulu is perhaps designed to make the story more interesting, or more suspenseful. As a reader, it can be gratifying to follow Ifemulu's journey from poverty to success in the US. According to Katherine Hallemeier, "*Americanah* presents an alternative, utopic version of global power in which the United States stands as a foil to the promising future of late Nigerian capitalism" (To Be From, 232). Mirroring partly Adichie's own work as a public voice on race and feminism, Ifemulu's blog functions as a means of getting out of the trauma. From being in a position of victimhood and poverty, Ifemulu achieves a turn-around into a position of privilege. From this privileged position she can be a person of influence rather than a victim. This transformation, however, can be criticised as being slightly unrealistic, the tremendous influence and success that Ifemulu experiences 'merely' from writing a blog. Katherine Hallemeier points to the economic realities of the US around 2007, it was the start of the great economic recession (To Be From, 235). This, however, does not appear to factor into Ifemulu's economic state. She eventually enjoys great personal and economic freedom.

Through flashbacks to his Nigerian childhood, it seems that Julius has a privileged background, having attended boarding school in Nigeria. He also describes having servants and a driver. When recounting his school years, it resembles how one could envision a colonial experience under the British Empire. Julius describes a hierarchical system of prefects and head boys, and public flogging is presented as a natural aspect of this world. While this hierarchical system was set in place by the Western colonisers, the continued

upholding of it after the decolonisation was performed by Africans in a system which comes close to a form of 'neo-colonialism', reproducing the hierarchical structures of colonialism (Robert Dale Parker, 288).

This neo-colonial experience, which lies as a backdrop in Julius' consciousness, is contrasted with his contemporary post-colonial experience of New York City and temporarily Brussels. This is also a way in which Cole brings the past into the present. By exploring Julius' past, the reader gets a greater understanding of the character in the present. Additionally, the novel shows how our shared past shape our present. In my view, the violence of the past can relate to the trauma and violence of the present. This is one way in which to understand the violent characteristics of Julius which become clear towards the end of the novel. I would argue that the trauma of the colonial past is linked with the rape which Julius is accused of in one of the last sections of the book. Here, an old acquaintance named Moji relates how they were at a party in her house in Nigeria and he had forced himself on her. Later, he had acted as if it had never happened, and would probably deny when confronted, she argued. She, however, explains how she had thought about it almost every day since and had wanted to die:

And then, with the same flat affect, she said that, in late 1989, when she was fifteen and I was a year younger, at a party her brother had hosted at their house in Ikoyi, I had forced myself on her. Afterward, she said, her eyes unwavering from the bright river below, in the weeks that followed, in the months and years that followed, I had acted like I knew nothing about it, had even forgotten her, to the point of not recognizing her when we met again.

(244)

This turn of events comes quite surprisingly towards the end of the novel. Up until that moment, the narrator has not mentioned anything violent relating to himself. However, as a young boy at boarding school in Nigeria he is flogged and harassed in public for something which appears to be a minor thing. Julius does not seem to be too affected by the flogging but relates the story without a lot of emotional force, as he relates the incident of Moji's accusations. Both stories are acts of violence, one performed against the narrator and another by the narrator onto the other person. The passage containing the conversation with Moji comes right after the narrator relates another traumatic event; a fatal car accident where Julius witnesses the victims. As I see it, the topic of trauma is recurrent in the novel, it becomes a

trope. The topic of erasure also seems significant and recurring, as how Julius' avoidance of the topic is like an erasure. The unwillingness in Julius to acknowledge it possibly augments the trauma for Moji.

The episode of Moji's confrontation is followed by a return to the narration of Julius and his life. This seems quite remarkable, how quickly the narrator turns back to the 'normal' internal monologue of Julius. The story of Moji's confrontation occupies only a couple of pages and then the chapter ends. Julius does, however, reflect a little on the nature of evil and whether it is possible to be a villain in your own story. He reflects that: "Each person must, on some level, take himself as the calibration point for normalcy, must assume that the room of his own mind is not, cannot be, entirely opaque to him" (Cole, 243). This reflection on sanity and the depths of darkness within the narrator are interesting considering that Julius is a psychiatrist and is supposed to heal people who are mentally ill. The contrasts between good and evil and villain and hero become interesting tensions in the novel, and the reliability of the narrator thus becomes ambiguous.

In the chapter following the episode with Moji, the narrator turns back to the main story of Julius, as mentioned. This turn however is marked by an ellipsis in the narrative, when we as readers return to the narration of Julius, he has finished his psychiatric residency and is working in a practice in the city. It is as if the narrator is unfazed by the allegations, as if they have no meaning to him. His infliction of trauma on another human being does not seem to affect him. This makes the allegations even more chilling to the reader though, as the apparent indifference in Julius towards the allegations may expose psychiatric illness in the narrator. In my view, one way to understand this, is as if all the violence and trauma of the past has been inflicted upon the protagonist, and in turn has made him violent. Peter Vermeulen calls the narrator's mind "fatefully disassociated" (42) and I concur.

As mentioned, throughout the novel, the narration returns continuously to the trope of trauma. In my view, *Open City* problematizes trauma and reveals how the human condition is to live with the traumas of the past. The traumas of the past can be great societal incidents like 9/11, slavery, or the erasure of the suffering of the Native Americans, but also smaller personal incidents which have great significance for the people involved. To me, the trope of trauma is also an Afropolitan topic, as it relates to personal and societal politics. Living together in cosmopolitan cities involves sharing and experiencing past and present trauma. Additionally, co-existing in cosmopolitan cities may involve conflict, war, or terrorist attacks such as that of 9/11. Experiencing this can, in turn, become traumas for those involved. Not acknowledging it becomes an erasure which may augment the trauma.

2.3 Afropolitan identities in the city

Both *Americanah* and *Open City* are important novels on the topic of race. Being perhaps more explicit in its discussion of race, *Americanah* to me represents a seminal text on the experience of race for a Nigerian in America in the 21st century. The same can perhaps not be said for *Open City*, as the narrator does not seem to identify as much with his African background.

When reading *Open City*, it can be hard to understand that the narrator of the novel is in fact a black man. Born in Nigeria to a black father and a white mother, Julius' heritage is both from Europe and Nigeria. However, his African background does not become immediately apparent to the reader. Most of the references that Julius mentions in the novel are of old European elite art and intellectuals such as Roland Barthes, Gustav Mahler, Francisco Goya, Johannes Vermeer, W.H. Auden, etcetera. It is not until a dinner party quite far into the book, that the reader understands that Julius is in fact black. Characterizing Julius as wearing a 'white mask' is a way in which one can describe Julius' relationship with the world and other people. Frantz Fanon has described this phenomenon in his book *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952). As discussed in the chapter on postcolonial theory, Fanon was, like the narrator Julius, a black psychiatrist and intellectual.

According to Frantz Fanon, the black man becomes whiter "as he renounces his blackness" (18). Linking the desire to become white with an inferiority complex, Fanon points to how "The more the colonized has assimilated the cultural values of the metropolis, the more he will have escaped the bush. The more he rejects his blackness and the bush, the whiter he will become" (2-3). Fanon was quite controversial and provocative in his writing. However, he is an important scholar in postcolonial theory because he discussed how colonisation had "gone so far to strip colonized people, including blacks of their sense of racial self-respect and a proud history" (Parker, 290). Thus, Fanon connects the colonisation with a decreased sense of pride in being black. Having mostly 'white', Western references, it may seem as if Julius is endeavouring to "renounce his blackness". This novel which has been characterized as Afropolitan, thus features a protagonist who to some extent seems to disregard his African heritage.

The manner of self-identification with 'white-ness' rather than African-ness seems to me to be a depiction by Cole of a particular Western-intellectual bias. The wearing of the 'white mask' can be seen as taken to a level where it is almost as if the white mask has replaced Julius' black skin. It is mostly other characters who refer to Julius as black, whereas he does not make much reference to his African background. He does not seem to like it

when others refer to a shared African background. It is almost as if Julius is erasing the colour of his skin. In that way, I think that the erasure of Julius' blackness ties in with the erasure of trauma which I discussed before. Both the trauma and Julius' skin colour is not visible.

The taking on of a 'white mask' is not applicable to *Americanah*. The protagonist Ifemulu is rather proud to be black. However, she does express that coming to the US made her more aware of being black. Living in Africa being black was perhaps not something she reflected on, as most of the people around her were black as well. In the US, however, it seems that she is constantly made aware of her colour. In addition to this, she is also made aware of cultural differences between African Americans and (American) Africans. This is one of the topics she explores in her blog.

Thus, as mentioned, whereas Julius seems to identify more as 'white,' Ifemulu expresses pride in her African background. Through her blog, "Raceteenth, or Various Observations About American Blacks (Those Formerly Known As Negroes) By a Non-American Black," she explores issues relating to race and society in the US. As evident in the title of the blog, Ifemulu writes about her experience as an African black. She contrasts this perspective with that of American blacks and throughout her novel there is a continuous discussion of these two viewpoints as it relates to living in America, Europe, and Africa. According to Miriam Pahl, the blog "first turns into a site where opinions are created and negotiated, a place of 'dialogic cosmopolitanism'. (78) Thus, the blog functions as a place with not only the voice of the author. The readers can also contribute with comments as well, and there is a dialogue. Interestingly, we can see how Pahl connects the dialogic aspect with cosmopolitanism, as cosmopolitanism often involves relating to otherness.

In one of her blogposts, entitled "Understanding America for the Non-American Black: What Do WASPs Aspire To?" Ifemulu writes about some of the perspectives of the different races and their view of suffering:

But there IS an oppression Olympics going on. American racial minorities—blacks, Hispanics, Asian, Jews all get shit from white folks, different kinds of shit, but shit still. Each secretly believes that it gets the worst shit. So there is no United League of the Oppressed.

(205)

This passage is also a good example of Adichie's irreverent style. The title of her blog and this passage display how Adichie is not afraid to provoke, she writes very explicitly about race and uses swear words. This can engage the reader and make it more interesting to read, however it is probably not for everyone. I do however think this is one of the reasons for the popularity of Adichie's novel. This humorous approach is also reflected in Adichie's Internet presence, which I will discuss in the following chapter.

Thus, whereas Adichie's protagonist (and Adichie) can be seen as being more explicit in her discussion of race, Cole's protagonist seems more reticent towards the topic. Cole's novel however is also a polemic on race, as the description of Julius implicitly discusses race by the erasure of his blackness. It can therefore be connected to the trope of trauma which also contains the dichotomy of visibility versus erasure.

2.4 Hairdressing salons and internet cafes as cosmopolitan venues

As discussed, both *Americanah* and *Open City* are novels concerned with the topics of race and politics. Furthermore, I see this as Afropolitan features of the novels. Whereas *Americanah* is very much a book about race, *Open City* discusses politics explicitly. In *Americanah*, both topics are important. Reflecting a very particular period in the USA in the runup and presidency of Barack Obama, *Americanah* chronicles how this time was significant for many Americans. Having a black presidential candidate was certainly very seminal for much of the black population in the US. For example, this is described in the relationship between Ifemulu and Blaine, which seems to be held together at the end because of their shared passion for the Obama campaign. Additionally, actively participating in society and being political through her blog and campaign work seems to function as a way of healing Ifemulu's personal trauma. Many critics have pointed to how Afropolitan literature often exposes how politics and the personal are intertwined. Ifemulu's political activism also ties in with her blog and her engagement with issues of race and politics throughout the novel.

In *Open City*, Teju Cole brings into the discussion people whose opinions seem to diverge from the politically correct Western liberal. In addition, these perspectives can be related to the trope of 9/11 which is a recurring topic of the novel. The two Algerian men whom Julius meets in Brussels represent Arab intellectuals:

The Qur'an is a text, Farouq said, but people forget that Islam also has a history. It is not static. There is the community as well, the Ummah. Not all interpretations are valid, but I'm proud of the fact that Islam is the most worldly religion there is.

(127)

When Julius travels to Brussels he gets into several exchanges with the two Arab men whom he meets in an internet café. He spends some time with them and together they have political and intellectual discussions. By bringing in perspectives such as these of the two Arab men, Cole problematises the challenges of peaceful co-existence in modern 'open cities', in addition to expanding the elitist Western perspective of the narrator. Figuring as examples of more extremist albeit intellectual views, these two Arab men are juxtaposed against the narrator. Arguably more radical in their worldviews, Farouq and Khalil's positions are voiced in the novel and become a pivotal representation of Muslim intellectual radicalism:

"And what about Al-Qaeda? I said. Khalil said, True, it was a terrible day, the twin towers. Terrible. What they did was very bad. But I understand why they did it"

(120).

Representing versions of an Arab-African worldview, the two African men butt heads with Julius' Westernized perspective. In my opinion, this perspective is more limited because he mostly does not seem to want to engage with people he sees as 'beneath him'. Throughout the novel, we see examples of how the narrator interacts with people of his own elitist socio-cultural background. Farouq the internet café operator and his friend Khalil which Julius encounters in Brussels become a counter point to Julius' limited world view. Introducing himself and evoking the familiar "brother", Julius meeting with Farouq interestingly represents one of the few instances where the narrator references a mutual African heritage; "How are you doing, my brother? Good, he said, with a quick, puzzled smile" (Cole, p.101).

Americanah also describes the meetings between people of different races and cultural backgrounds. Moreover, the novel depicts interactions between Africans in the US. One of the more notable passages being in the beginning of the novel where Ifemulu is sitting in a hairdressing salon. Interestingly, like in *Open City*, it is a place of business which provides a meeting place for the different people. Here, Ifemulu encounters other Africans who share some of her cultural background from Africa albeit heralding from different

countries. Being African includes her in the community, and makes the hairdressers relate to her more easily:

“You from Nigeria?” Mariama asked. “Yes,” Ifemulu said. “Where are you from?”
“Me and my sister Halima are from Mali. Aisha is from Senegal,” Mariama said.
Aisha did not look up, but Halima smiled at Ifemulu, a smile that, in its warm knowingness, said welcome to a fellow African; she would not smile at an American in the same way.

(10-11)

Interestingly, hair, and the styling of it functions as a trope throughout the novel. Having ‘African’ hair and the decision of how to style it becomes a signifier for socio-cultural background. Adichie demonstrates how the choice of whether to style it to be ‘relaxed,’ like Western hair, in an Afro, or in braids is a decision which impacts Africans’ personal and professional life. Wearing hair in an Afro or in braids could result in not being considered looking ‘professional’ and not getting a job. When going for a job interview her counsellor Ruth tells her: “My only advice? Lose the braids and straighten your hair. Nobody says this kind of stuff but it matters. We want you to get the job” (202). Adichie thus exposes how an African might have to be pragmatic and forego important identity markers to be considered for a professional job.

Furthermore, this view of what looks ‘professional’ also relates to how Westernized the person is choosing to be. Wearing the hair straight is a signifier of a more Westernized look. Hair is thus a marker of socio-economic status. Opening the novel in the hairdressing salon, this location recurs throughout the novel. Adichie relates how Ifemulu must travel far, to another city, to have her hair treated satisfactorily. Whereas hair salons for white women proliferate across the country, women with ‘African’ hair are not as easily serviced. In this, Adichie perhaps points to a racial difference. Additionally, the motif of hair figures as a trope on how the personal and political are in fact intertwined. The choice of how to style one’s hair is a deeply personal matter and one of the most important identity markers of a person. Adichie thus shows how this personal choice has grave ramifications because of structural racism.

Adichie seems to make a distinction between the working-class ladies of the salon and Ifemulu with her academic and intellectual background. Like in *Open City*, the public location of the salon is a venue where people of different sociocultural background engage.

The ladies working in the salon have different kinds of problems than Ifemulu, and she becomes like a mentor-figure to the women. They rely on her to help them with issues such as getting a green card, and Ifemulu promises to assist them with it. Whereas Julius in *Open City* seems more interested in meeting the Algerian men as a kind of tourism of other cultures, Ifemulu however relates to the women of the salon as fellow Africans. Caring for the women figures as a kind of social responsibility for Ifemulu relating to their shared African heritage.

We see thus that both *Americanah* and *Open City* feature public locations within the city which become meeting points for people of different cultural backgrounds. As the internet café in *Open City* functions as a kind of ‘miniature world’, the hairdressing salon is like a ‘mini- Africa,’ a substitute for the real deal within the US. I think this type of space is typical for Afropolitan fiction, it provides a meeting place for people of different cultural backgrounds within a cosmopolitan setting. This meeting place facilitates a discourse between the people of different cultural backgrounds and provides interesting contrasts between varying ways of looking at the world.

2.5 Afropolitanism and the elite traveller

Arguably, both narrators of *Open City* and *Americanah* can be regarded as Afropolitans. As previously noted, being Afropolitan, they travel freely for work and education. This contrasts with the migrant workers and working-class people who also figure in the novels, such as the women Ifemulu meets in the hair dressing salon and the two Algerian men in the Internet café.

The two men represent an African cosmopolitanism different from Julius’. Travelling around the world for pleasure, Julius’ mobility also contrasts with Farouq’s lack thereof. While Julius can be characterised as an Afropolitan according to Selasi’s definition in his high degree of mobility and intellectual achievements, Farouq is relatively immobile, staying within the location of his Internet café and the restaurant where they later meet for dinner. While both men have journeyed from Africa to Brussels, Farouq’s travel contrasts with Julius’ as his was less voluntary and more necessary, being an immigrant refugee and having less resources.

As previously mentioned, the women of the hair dressing salon in *Americanah* are also of a different socio-economic background than the protagonist Ifemulu. Despite initial financial difficulties, Ifemulu enjoys a higher degree of mobility than the women. This liberating travel that Ifemulu eventually enjoys also contrasts with the hairdressers’ more

baseline problems. While they are struggling with basic needs such as a green card, Ifemulu can and does travel freely and frequently.

In *Open City* however, it is my opinion that Farouq in some senses is more worldly than Julius because of his ‘engagement with the world’. Farouq’s Internet café can be seen as a micro-cosmos, where people of different cultures peacefully co-exist and communicate with the rest of the world. Farouq’s position, though less mobile, however affords him much knowledge of the world through the interaction with other cultures. New York City becomes a parallel to the Internet café, both representing spaces of peaceful co-existence bridging diverse communities. Farouq’s status as less mobile and lacking in resources thus does not equate with being less of a cosmopolitan.

Farouq’s studies in postcolonial theory and translation are also concerned with relating to the world through multiple perspectives and languages. The Internet café can, in turn, be seen as a metaphor for modern technology and communication between people. To me, this represents a central theme of the novel, communication, and the limits to understanding between people of different cultures and socio-economic backgrounds. Being educated and intellectual, Farouq and Khalil’s perspectives are interesting to the narrator. However, as Katherine Hallemeier points out, they are perhaps better able to navigate the world than Julius.

Throughout *Open City*, the trope of language seems to figure as a signifier for how well the characters negotiate the world. Hallemeier points to how Farouq’s facility with language is contrasted with Julius’s abilities (*Literary Cosmopolitanisms*, 244-245). Being a good communicator in other languages than English allows Farouq to have access to other kinds of discourse. Ideas and theories formulated in for instance French and Arab are accessible to Farouq and Khalil however unattainable to Julius. Cole thus problematizes how having a Western perspective and only speaking English can signify being closed off from many of the intricacies of the world.

Whereas Julius in *Open City* does not seem to fully understand the people which he engages with of a different socio-economic background, Ifemulu’s project seems different. Through her blog, it is evident that she wishes to engage with all kinds of people and learn from their experiences. Additionally, having worked herself out of financial difficulties, Ifemulu perhaps has more understanding of the people who are less fortunate. She also has a different cultural background than Julius. She seems more interested in popular culture, whereas Julius is only interested in intellectual ‘high’ culture. Julius seems to not have known

anything other than privilege and perhaps thus has difficulty sympathizing with people of the working class or migrant workers.

Problematizing Julius' relationship with his African heritage and other Africans seems to me an important aspect of Cole's Afropolitan project. Contrasting against Julius' limited, Westernized perspective and his weariness of being called an African, other Africans in the novel exemplify different ways of navigating contemporary African-ness. While the two Algerian men have less resources than the protagonist, they are perhaps more resourceful and have a greater understanding of intercultural communication.

Encountering the different people with a particular bias, the reader is engaged with Julius' thoughts concerning the meetings through his inner monologue. It seems that Julius has a privileged perspective and quite easily brushes off the people that he deems beneath him. Expressing a disregard for the unskilled workers, migrants, and generally less-educated people, it seems to Julius that they are not worthy of his time. Contrasting starkly with the lengthy conversations the protagonist has with his more educated, elite acquaintances, this disregard is palpable. One example of Julius' brusque degrading demeanour is his encounter with a post office clerk when he is going to send his Algerian friend a copy of Kwame Anthony Appiah's *Cosmopolitanism*. Gesturing towards a mutual understanding based on "African-ness", the clerk is endeavouring to connect:

Brother Julius, he said, with great feeling, you're a visionary, keep hope alive. (...)
Well, drop me a line sometime, he said. We can go to the Nuyorican Poets Café. I'd like to talk to you. Sure thing, I said. It was, in the circumstances, the simplest thing I could say. I made a mental note to avoid that particular post office in the future.
(187-188)

In this passage, we see that even though people are eager to communicate with Julius and relate to him as an African, this is not something he seems comfortable with. This is one of several examples where it seems Julius rather recoils at the idea of being identified as African and avoids the communities which label him as such rather than as an intellectual or a doctor. This ties in with the topic of erasure which I discussed previously. Further alienating him, in addition to being labelled as a "brother," he is also named a "visionary" by the post office clerk, a characterization which neither seems to appeal to Julius. The sum of being called a "brother" and a "visionary" by someone which Julius seems to identify as

‘beneath him’ all can be understood as correlating into the decision of avoiding the post office in the future.

This chapter has been an exploration of Afropolitanism in *Open City* by Teju Cole and *Americanah* by Chimamanda Adichie. It is my view that these novels are Afropolitan in several ways. Both novels are very interested in political and socio-cultural questions and how this affects people on an individual level. Both novels also feature strong protagonists who relate to and engage with people of different backgrounds, mostly from the African diaspora. I see these meetings between different people as typical of Afropolitan fiction, and it differs from how Chinua Achebe described the colonial society in Nigeria in the late 1950’s. In a later chapter I will explore the works of fellow Nigerian Achebe as it relates to the contemporary work of Adichie and Cole. The following chapter will be looking at how Teju Cole and Chimamanda Adichie are active on social media and how it forms part of their Afropolitan projects.

3.0 The Internet presence of Teju Cole and Chimamanda Adichie

One of the reasons for Teju Cole and Chimamanda Adichie's presence on the Internet may be to reach an audience which they don't access through their printed books. I have previously mentioned some of the ways in which Adichie and Cole participate in the public discourse through social media such as Twitter, YouTube, and Instagram. This chapter will be an exploration of their Internet presence on several fronts. My research question is whether Afropolitanism is a new era in postcolonial literature and theory, and in what way. I believe that Cole and Adichie's presence on the Internet is one of the ways in which postcolonial literature and theory has changed since the time of Chinua Achebe. The possibilities of reaching a large audience are much greater now, and the Afropolitan discourse of Cole and Adichie can reach a great number of people. Whereas Achebe had largely an intellectual audience, Adiche and Cole reach other groups of people as well, especially through social media. This seems to be a stated goal for both Cole and Adichie, to reach not only the people who read their books, but also other demographics.

As I see it, the Internet represents a democratization of the public discourse. It is now relatively easy for many to participate in a global discourse through social media. It is free and accessible to many. Miriam Pahl writes about how Adichie and Cole make use of the Internet in her article "Afropolitanism as a critical consciousness: Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie and Teju Cole's Internet presence" from 2016. Pahl points out that the Internet is not "accessible to everybody – globalization 'implies neither equity nor homogenization' (...) but it does affect and recreate daily life for those who do have access" (75). Thus, Pahl is voicing that the benefits of globalization are mostly for the privileged. Those who have less resources, may not be able to have access to the World Wide Web. However, Chimamanda Adichie's talks have reached an enormous number of people. This does contrast with Achebe's lectures to small, intellectual audiences at universities. Achebe's reach was much more limited than that of Adichie's influence with her Ted Talks. Furthermore, I think Adichie through social media makes use of a public persona which draws an audience.

I agree with Pahl that it is important to remember that the Internet is not available to everyone, however I do think that the Internet does represent a lot of potential in the 'opening up' of the global discourse. As Pahl writes, it does "affect" and "recreate daily life for those who do have access". A lot of people may be 'influenced' by what happens online. When Pahl writes about Internet 'recreating daily life,' I think she is referring to social media especially, and the way it is used in daily life. Achille Mbembe is critical to this, and "how these technologies become an extension of ourselves and erase the distance between the

human and the object” (Pahl, 79). Mbembe is part of an older generation, perhaps with an inherently more sceptical view towards social media than for example Cole and Adichie.

This chapter will deal with how the Internet has shaped and continues to shape these two writers, Adichie and Cole. I will discuss Adichie’s two Ted Talks “We Should All Be Feminists” and “The Danger of a Single Story”. I will explore Teju Cole’s participation on Twitter and his lecture on “The City as Palimpsest” from the Graduate School of Design at Harvard in 2012. As I see it, Cole and Adichie’s presence on the Internet furthers a discussion of a globalized, modern world from an Afropolitan perspective. This perspective contrasts with an earlier, emancipatory discourse such as that of Chinua Achebe. For example, I notice a tonal difference between the older and contemporary generations. I think Cole and Adichie often have a lighter and more humorous tone. As mentioned, they also reach a much greater ‘non-literary’ audience than Achebe did, through social media.

3.1 Internet presence as a form of activism

In her article on the Internet presence of Teju Cole and Chimamanda Adichie, Miriam Pahl writes about how Internet presence may function as a sort of activism. She quotes Achille Mbembe, who is more critical to the Internet than Cole and Adichie. Mbembe has said that “Internet is a means, it’s not the end.” (Pahl, 75) Therefore, Pahl writes, “online activism remains ineffective if it does not overcome the distinction between the virtual and the physical world.” (ibid) Thus, Pahl accentuates how the Internet is insufficient in and of itself, there must be some progress in the ‘real world’. A question becomes whether one can consider Chimamanda Adichie’s lectures on feminism and Africa in the world as a sort of activism. Furthermore, one can discuss whether her lectures have any effects in the ‘real world’. I believe so. These lectures have been hugely popular, and I see the importance in their possibilities of raising awareness on these issues. Also, it shows a development in public discourse; an African woman speaking of these issues would have been unthinkable just a few decades ago. I believe that this is something that Adichie is conscious of in her discourse. Furthermore, perhaps this is the reason her talks have become so popular. Both Adichie and her audience are perhaps aware of how she represents something new in the world. It is thus exciting to follow her as a representation of progress.

To me, Teju Cole seems to have a more pessimistic tone than Adichie, both in his novel and in his Internet presence. According to Miriam Pahl, Cole is expressing “his aesthetic articulation of doubt toward the transformative potential of language and literature” (75). She argues that this is expressed in his novels, and through his engagement on Twitter.

However, Pahl writes that he does have an aim to create “a more peaceful internationalism” (73) through his Twitter project entitled “The Time of the Game”. In this project, he asked his followers to send pictures of their screen from the 2014 football world cup. By doing this, they were ““testifying (...) to each other’s existence””, Pahl writes (74). To Pahl, this project is Afropolitanism “as a critical consciousness”. Furthermore, she believes that this is a way that Cole’s Afropolitan project is manifest. I understand the project as a way for Cole to use his Internet platform to raise awareness and possibly in the hopes of creating change. Perhaps Cole is doubtful to the “transformative potential of language and literature,” but sees potential on the Internet to reach a more varied demographic.

Chimamanda Adichie seems more hopeful with regards to the ‘transformative potential of literature.’ She would have good reason to, her Ted Talks have reached millions and have possibly had influence on how people perceive Africa and African feminism. Furthermore, her talk on “The Danger of a Single Story” is about the importance of language and literature in shaping our world. The “single story” she refers to is the one-sided depiction of Africa in the public discourse. Moreover, by her talk being so popular, it has the potential to expand the ‘single story’ of Africa. Through examining and talking about the problem of the representation of Africa in the discourse, Adichie also represents a solution. By informing the audience about this situation, she is also expanding the public’s consciousness on Africa, and thereby perhaps changing the epistemology of power.

Perhaps the topic of Afropolitanism had not become that popular had it not been for the Internet. According to Miriam Pahl, the Internet made possible the ‘virality’ of the term. Pahl claims that Afropolitanism would not be possible had it not been for the Internet, that “Afropolitanism ‘grew up’ online (77).” Pahl references Susanne Gehrman, who believes that the quick ‘propagation’ and ‘controversy’ of Afropolitanism would not have been possible without the Internet. Furthermore, this ‘vigour’ distinguishes it from for example Pan-Africanism (ibid), as an earlier movement in African emancipatory discourse. Thus, the quick rise of the popularity and polemic surrounding the term of Afropolitanism is connected to the possibilities of technology and the Internet. Furthermore, I believe that the Internet is what made the topic so commercially viable. Had Afropolitanism happened before, it may have been only a scholarly topic. The Internet and technology allow for an almost unlimited audience which was not possible in earlier times.

3.2 Chimamanda Adichie and her Ted Talks

Throughout the career of Chimamanda Adichie there seems to be a particular interest in two major topics: Africa and feminism. These topics have featured in all her novels and are the topics of her two Ted Talks from 2009 and 2012. These talks have had tremendous influence on the Internet, reaching far beyond her readership. (Her novel *Americanah* had sold about 1 million copies in 2017). Her talk on “The Danger of a Single Story” has had over 30 million views and her talk “We Should All Be Feminists” has had over 7 million views. Cole’s lecture on “The City as Palimpsest” has currently had about 10 000 views. I think Cole’s talk is a little more esoteric and intellectual, and thus does not have the same potential for reaching a wider audience.

To me, Adichie seems a very gifted communicator. She reaches an audience on a variety of platforms and seems to engage with her audience easefully and with joy. As I remarked in the chapter on *Americanah*, Adichie uses humour as a rhetorical device to reach her audience. She thus uses humour both in her literary works, and in her lectures. I think this may be one of the reasons for her popularity on the Internet. Even though the topics that she talks about are quite serious, she makes it light-hearted and fun. For example, in “The Danger of a Single Story” she makes fun of herself for mimicking in her early writing the British children’s books she read growing up. She wrote about things like snow, apples and people talking about the weather, however this did not reflect her African background. She was trying to be someone she was not, perhaps she thought that the literary world did not have a place for someone with her background. As mentioned in the chapter on Achebe, Adichie gives him a lot of credit for being a pioneer in describing African life in literature. He thereby allowed her to do the same.

I believe that Adichie further develops and modernizes some of the topics that Achebe discussed in his lectures for university audiences. I think she does this by popularizing his ideas, making them accessible to a wider demographic. As I discussed in the chapter on Achebe, Adichie can be seen as a transitional figure, bringing with her knowledge from her African forefathers. She makes use of this knowledge and popularizes it to fit a contemporary audience. In general, she often makes references to Achebe in her work and seems very influenced by him as an African literary forefather. For example, her talk of the “danger of a single story” is a reference to what Achebe calls “a balance of stories”. I will go into how these two lectures are related in the following.

Today’s digital world is very different than that of Achebe, whom I discussed in the previous chapter. Writers of today often do not only write books, but they are also often

gifted communicators on other channels. These channels might be talks which are published on YouTube such as the ones I am discussing in this chapter. Additionally, Chimamanda Adichie is very active on Instagram, and Teju Cole has been very active on Twitter. Social media such as Instagram and Twitter is perhaps different from other types of online communication in that it is more personal. Thus, the public figures bring more of their personality to this kind of communication. Perhaps this is also why this communication has the possibility of reaching a broader audience, because it is more personal.

According to Miriam Pahl, Adichie has become a “writer with a celebrity status similar to that of actors and musicians, which is a result of her success as a writer, but also of her own ‘marketing’” (79). Furthermore, Pahl considers Adichie to have a “carefully honed public persona”. (78) I agree with this assessment, and I think it represents a big development since the time of Achebe. Taking Achebe as an example of an earlier generation of African artists, this importance of ‘celebrity’ did not exist in his time. It may seem like Adichie has crafted this ‘public persona’ to reach more followers. It seems like she knows how to reach a wide audience and use her ‘celebrity’. Like Cole, she is conscious of her public persona and the potential for reaching many people. She makes use of the power of her influence in an intentional manner to discuss things that are of importance to her. However, one downside to this could be that she is known for a variety of creative output. Cole on the other hand, is perhaps more focused on his literary (and photographic) work.

3.3 We Should All Be Feminists

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s Ted Talk entitled “We Should All Be Feminists” was held in London in 2012. It has currently been viewed over 7 million times and has thus had a huge influence. In this talk she goes into her experiences as an African feminist. To me, it is interesting to learn about feminism as it relates to Adichie’s African background. Being a feminist in Europe is probably quite different than being a feminist in Africa, which comes through in her lecture. The talk is about 10 years old, and the emancipation of women and the relationships between sexes has probably developed on the African continent since then.

Adichie talks about how she was named a feminist by her male friend when she was a little girl, and he did not mean it as a compliment. She decided later that she would call herself a “happy African feminist”, since some people would think that feminists were “women who could not find a husband” (We Should All Be). She later relates of an incident where she wanted to be the “class monitor” but was not allowed to because of her gender. Additionally, Adichie mentions many other episodes where she was treated unfairly because

of her gender. For example, she talks about not being admitted to restaurants in Lagos without a male companion. Typically, she has observed that the servers will greet only the man, and not the woman in restaurants. To me, it seems that the server is thereby robbing the woman of her humanity by not acknowledging her presence. Furthermore, Adiche says that if she walks into a hotel unaccompanied, the people who work there will assume she is a sex worker. Many of these examples seem quite unthinkable here in Norway now. As mentioned, the lecture was given over 10 years ago, and things may have shifted somewhat. However, there may be less gender equality in Nigeria than in contemporary Norway.

Adiche says that she was accused by critics of being too angry, by bringing this message of feminism to the world. To me, this seems like a suppressing technique. Adiche replied to the accusation that “we should be angry,” that there is a lot of injustice to be angry about. She talks about how we can start to change the injustices of sexual politics by raising little boys and girls differently. She is thus not only descriptive of the current situation of African feminism, but also has ideas for how it can be improved. She has since written a book of essays entitled *Dear Ijeawele, or A Feminist Manifesto in Fifteen Suggestions* (2017). The book is written as letters to her friend’s daughter, Ijeawele. The book too, bears witness to her interest in changing African sexual politics. According to her website, the book has been translated into 19 languages.

3.4 The Danger of a Single Story

“The danger of a Single Story” was a lecture held by Chimamanda Adichie in 2009 for Ted Ex. According to the Ted Talk website, it has been one of the most viewed talks of all time. The “single story” which Adichie discusses is probably a reference to Chinua Achebe’s notion of a “The Balance of Stories”, and Adichie does reference Achebe in her lecture. Achebe’s lecture on “The Balance of Stories” can be found in Achebe book of essays, *Home and Exile* from 2000. The book is a collection of three of his lectures held at Harvard in 1998. According to Linda Hoyes, “Achebe’s purpose is to bring to the world’s cognizance the truth about the people of Africa”. I see Adichie and Achebe’s lectures as having similar aims; to discuss the view of Africa and Africans in the world. Therefore, I believe that their purposes are similar, they both want to challenge the narratives about Africa and Africans in the world.

As I write in the chapter on Achebe, Achebe’s oeuvre stretching from the 50’s to the 80’s can be considered a counterargument to the depiction of Africa and Africans found in European literature. Adichie’s lecture as well, can be seen as a counterargument to the depiction of Africa in the contemporary discourse. Adichie argues that this contemporary

discourse on Africa only allows one story of Africa; being a place of “beautiful landscapes (...) and people, fighting senseless wars, dying of poverty and aids, unable to speak for themselves and waiting to be saved by a kind, white foreigner (TEDx transcript).” Adichie is thus protesting this projection of African victimhood in the public discourse. To me, this seems a familiar trope in much literature and media coverage of Africa. As Adichie argues, we often hear about catastrophes happening in Africa such as famine and war, however we rarely hear good news and stories of growth. As Achebe critiqued Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*, so Adichie critiques the depiction of Africa and Africans in the global discourse.

To me, part of what makes Adichie compelling is the manner in which she does it. Whereas Achebe’s tone seemed more indignant and angrier, Adichie’s tone is lighter and more humorous. As mentioned, I think this is partly why she has had so much success, she expresses her critique with a smile on her face. She critiques not only others but laughs at her own oversights as well. This humanism which she displays I think is one of the things that attract people to her. She does not pretend to be perfect in any way.

Achebe, by contrast seems to have a more serious tone, and not so much space for humour in his works. In his time, the world looked different, and there was a lot of inequality and injustice to fight against, such as the colonial empire. According to Linda Hoyes, Achebe’s tone in his *Home and Exile* is not “of anger, but simply stating an undeniable fact: This view of Africa and Africans must be exposed and found to be unacceptable by all civilized human beings” (*Africa: Balancing the Stories*). Thus, in this book of essays his critique is not mainly the colonial enterprise, such as in *The African Trilogy*. As things have progressed since the *The African Trilogy*, he is in this more recent book critiquing the hegemonic Western narrative of Africa in the world. It is still a serious topic, and I think Adichie can afford to be humorous because there has been a lot of change and progress made on the African continent since Achebe’s time.

In the chapter “Today: The Balance of Stories”, Achebe writes that:

My hope for the 21st (century) is that it will see the first fruits of the balance of stories among the world’s people. The 20th century, for all its many faults, did witness a significant beginning, in Africa and elsewhere in the so-called Third World, of the process of ‘re-storying’ peoples who had been knocked silent by all kinds of dispossession.

(Linda de Hoyos, 2000).

This passage reveals Achebe's view on the power of a story. Particularly, it is powerful to the people of the "Third World", who have been without a voice in the public discourse. Achebe reflects that the 20th century saw the start of people from Africa telling their stories. This is probably a reference to postcolonial literature, of which Achebe was one of the forefathers. Achebe thus accentuates like Adichie the power of people who have been without a voice to tell their story.

In Adichie's lecture, she talks about her experience growing up in a middle-class family in Nigeria and reading children's books written by British and American writers. The characters were different from her, they were blue eyed and had a white complexion. They played in the snow and talked about the weather. Adichie says that she started writing books that resembled what she had read, but which had no basis in her reality. When she started reading writer such as Achebe and Camara Laye, there was a "mental shift in her perception of literature." She recognized that "girls with kinky hair and chocolate skin could also exist in literature." (Adichie 2009). She thus started to write about things that were familiar to her, in an African context. She stopped 'mimicking' what she had read in European literature, to borrow a term from Homi Bhabha.

To Chimamanda Adichie, the consequence of the single story, "is that it robs people of their dignity." This ties in with Achebe's critique of the depiction of Africans in European literature and how it often robbed Africans of their dignity. It also relates to Adichie's own description of being a woman in Nigeria and how she would be treated in restaurants and hotels. As discussed earlier, this experience seemed to rob her of her dignity. Achebe often criticized Joseph Conrad and his description of Africans in *Heart of Darkness*. He argued that the novel depicted the Africans as animals, without dignity. To me, it seems that a lot of racist and misogynist literature does precisely this, robbing people of their dignity. Thus, one way to fight this stereotypical narrative, would be to expand the 'single story' of cultural difference.

Adichie also highlights how the "single story" emphasizes how we are different, rather than similar. She talks about her experience being a student in the US, and how her roommate perceived her to be "African," and thus very different from herself. For example, her roommate could not envision Adichie liking the same music as herself. To me, this is a narrative that Afropolitan fiction seems to critique. A lot of the Afropolitan literature I have read brings people of different backgrounds together and demonstrate the possibilities of harmonious and loving friendships and partnerships despite differences.

Adichie broadens the scope to not only talking about Africa and Africans, but also discussing our general contemporary discourse on marginalized communities. For example, she talks about how her view of Mexico and Mexicans was shaped by living in the US. In the US, the discourse on Mexicans would often be about immigration. When visiting Guadalajara, she “realized that I had been so immersed in the media coverage of Mexicans that they had become one thing in my mind, the abject immigrant. I had bought into the single story of Mexicans and I could not be more ashamed of myself” (TEDx transcript). Thus, Adichie reveals that she too, was guilty of having a ‘single story’ about some other community, and this had brought her shame. I think that this also is an example of a rhetorical device which Adichie makes use of. I believe that it has the effect of humanizing her and thus creating a bond with her audience.

In my view, this example about Mexico shows Adichie’s contemporary Afropolitan perspective. Perhaps it is more globalized than Achebe’s African colonial perspective. The discussion of a contemporary discourse on marginalized groups relates to Edward Said’s work on the power of the discourse which I discussed in the chapter on postcolonial theory. Both Achebe and Adichie demonstrate how powerful the discourse is, and not only the colonial and postcolonial discourse of Achebe’s time. Adichie reveals that in our contemporary world as well the discourse on Africa is imbalanced.

3.5 Teju Cole: The City as Palimpsest

Since this lecture was held at a design school it offers a different perspective than the strictly literary to Cole’s work. Thus, it is interesting because Cole talks about his aesthetics, both as it relates to photography and his writing. Firstly, Cole goes into a short historical introduction of the first “beehive” city which was in Turkey in 8 BCD. He then discusses what are the connecting points between his artistic practices. Not surprisingly, both Cole’s photography and his literature reveals an interest in the city experience. He calls it his “obsession” with city life and discusses the experiences of various cities as it relates to design and architecture. For example, he talks about the capital of Nigeria which is called Abuja and was an artificially created capital much like Brasilia of Brazil.

Interestingly, Cole describes his aesthetics as similar in literature and photography, although expressed differently. For example, as the palimpsest in *Open City* relates to the erasure of past trauma, this is also evident in his photography. He explains how he uses slow shutter speed in his photographs to achieve some of the same effect. Creating a kind of “displacement” or “ghostly presence”, as he describes it, the photographs are a little bit eerie.

This “ghostly presence” in his photographs can be references to the trauma he writes about in his book. Both the palimpsest and the photograph thus reveal what is hidden underneath. It seems a project for Cole to make the invisible visible.

In the lecture Cole also talks about his Twitter project called “Small Fates”. He describes how he would go through the Nigerian newspapers looking for stories of tragedy and trauma. He recomposed them in the form of a poem and ‘tweeted’ them, a few lines at a time. He talks about the city as a space where terrible things happen to people, which are instantly forgotten. Thus, “what you don’t write down vanishes”. Again, as discussed in the chapter of *Open City*, it is as if Cole wants to point to the erasure and make it visible.

According to Miriam Pahl, this project has a meaning by expanding our image of Africa. This relates back to Chimamanda Adichie and her talk on the single story, that there aren’t that many narratives of Africa in the public consciousness. Pahl writes about Eileen Julien’s concept of ‘extroverted’ as opposed to ‘introverted’ African literature. ‘Extroverted’ African literature is oriented towards the world, whereas ‘introverted’ African literature is oriented towards the African continent and an African readership. Julien sees the ‘extroverted’ literature as literature of “contact zones”. Pahl says that Cole “confirms Julien’s concept of ‘extroverted’ African literature as an interpretation of ‘Africa’ for non-African readers. He builds an alternative archive of life in Nigeria (...) making visible a (...) marginalized component of the international community” (Pahl, 81). Thus, it seems that he is expanding a ‘single story’ of life in Nigeria and making an ‘alternative’ to this. He is ‘making visible’ that which has not been seen in Western public discourse. Additionally, this practice also relates back to Cole’s interest in the palimpsest, and the invisible parts of our history and collective trauma.

In this chapter I have discussed some of ways that Chimamanda Adichie and Teju Cole participate in the global discourse through their Internet presence. I have looked at their talks on matters that they are interested in, and how these talks participate in a postcolonial discourse. Both Cole and Adichie seem to be interested in furthering an agenda which I have noticed in Achebe’s work as well. This agenda is of expanding the discourse on Africa in the world. Furthermore, I believe that Cole and Adichie’s work is in making visible what is currently not so visible.

4.0 Afropolitanism and the African canon

My research question is whether Afropolitanism is a new era of postcolonial literature and in what ways. Seeing Cole and Adichie as representatives of a new kind of postcolonial literature, it is thus pertinent to compare with one of the most important African literary forefathers. This chapter will be an exploration of some of the early works by Nigerian writer Chinua Achebe, considering him as one of the founding fathers of the African canon. Furthermore, I will compare Achebe to the contemporary Nigerian writers Cole and Adichie. I am mostly looking at Achebe's *No Longer at Ease* from 1960. I have chosen this novel because it has a city setting, which ties in with the cosmopolitan perspectives of Chimamanda Adichie and Teju Cole. In addition to this, I will discuss Chimamanda Adichie's short story "The Headstrong Historian", as it is a direct response to Achebe's first novel *Things Fall Apart* (1958). I will consider Adichie's short story both as it relates to Achebe and to Afropolitanism.

I think it is fruitful to look at Achebe in relation to Cole and Adichie because they are all Nigerian writers but represent different times. These different generational perspectives also result in different views of what African literature should be. Whereas Achebe's writing can be seen as a protest of a European invention of Africa, Cole and Adichie have other concerns. And while Achebe's oeuvre stretches from around the 1950's to the 1980's, Cole and Adichie are contemporary writers. Achebe writes about the colonial and pre-colonial experience in Nigeria, whereas Cole and Adichie write about the (post)postcolonial experience of the African diaspora. There are thus a lot of things that separate the two generations of Nigerian writers. All in all, I am interested in these three writers' places in the African canon and as postcolonial literature. Tying it in with my research question, I will examine some of the ways that Nigerian literature like Cole and Adichie's has developed since the time of Achebe.

Achebe's writing came from a perspective of being frustrated with the depiction of Africa in European literature. Thus, Achebe's works were mainly focused on the African continent. Adichie and Cole, however, write about a variety of locations, both in Africa, the US and Europe. These contemporary writers are often concerned with the African diaspora, i.e., Africans living outside of Africa. Other contemporary African writers such as Taiye Selasi, Aminatta Forna, Helen Oyeyemi and NoViolet Bulawayo also feature African characters living in Europe or the US. These writers are perhaps concerned with depicting a contemporary African experience in the world, which increasingly entails migration and travel. At Achebe's time of writing, this was not an option for most Africans, and Achebe's

topic of interest was thus in the African continent. Though his characters sometimes travelled abroad, the focus was on the African experience. Achebe was regarded as writing about Africa ‘from within,’ which was revolutionary for his time.

Although interested in race and society, the resistance against colonial oppression is not a focus in most of the contemporary literature of Cole and Adichie as it is in Achebe. As mentioned previously, Cole and Adichie write mainly about the contemporary experiences of middle-class Africans of the diaspora. This is a truth with some modifications, however, as some of Adichie’s earlier novels deal with the Nigerian historical past. For instance, her novel *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2006) takes place during the Biafran war. Her short story “The Headstrong Historian” is set at the time of the first encounter between the British and the Nigerians in the 1890’s and is a direct response to Chinua Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart*. Thus, Adichie does write about the Nigerian historical past to some degree. However, she does so with a contemporary feminist perspective. In this chapter I will explore how Afropolitan literature of today differs from older emancipatory African literature like Achebe’s. Furthermore, I will look at how Achebe’s literature represented a turning point from earlier literature written about Africa and from Africa.

As I understand it, the colonial enterprise created a huge transformation in traditional African societies, which is a topic for a lot of early postcolonial literature. According to Britannica.com, Achebe’s work was concerned with “the social and psychological disorientation accompanying the imposition of Western customs and values upon traditional African society” (Chinua Achebe). Thus, to Achebe what was most important was the personal, psychological, and societal aspect in his writing about Africa. He depicted Igbo tribal life and the people’s encounters with the European colonial power. All three novels in his *African Trilogy* deal with this topic from a different point in time and has different generational perspectives.

The three seminal works which form part of his *African Trilogy* are: *Things Fall Apart* (1958), *No Longer at Ease* (1960) and *Arrow of God* (1968). Whereas *Things Fall Apart* follows Okonkwo, *No Longer at Ease* follows his grandson Obi Okonkwo. Chimamanda Adichie considers the three novels in the *African Trilogy* a “human chronicle of the cultural and political changes that brought about what is now seen as the modern African state” (*African Trilogy*, vii). Thus, she accentuates the importance of Achebe’s literature both as a historical document and as a humanistic narrative. To me, Achebe’s literature represents historical fiction that may teach us something about the African past. As Adichie highlights,

this literature of the African past in colonial times also documented a time of great change and unrest. Living under colonialism and then breaking free from it is what brought about the modern Nigerian state. Achebe was thus fictionalizing a pivotal time of Nigerian modern history. Reading Achebe can give us a greater understanding of the African past and can, in turn, make us better understand its present. I see Achebe as a representative of this colonial Nigerian past and Cole as a representative of the Nigerian postcolonial present and future.

4.1 Achebe and Adichie

In my thesis, I consider Chimamanda Adichie as a sort of transitional figure bringing together the time of Achebe and contemporary literature. Adichie has written the foreword to my edition of the *African Trilogy* from 2010. As mentioned, she has also written the short story “The Headstrong Historian” which is based upon Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart*. Thus, she seems very influenced by Achebe’s work as a literary forefather. I therefore consider her a writer who incorporates the past into the present. As mentioned, she has also written historical fiction such as *Half of a Yellow Sun*. To me, this contrasts with Teju Cole’s contemporary offerings. In my view, Adichie employs parts of the intellectual literary achievements of the past such as Achebe’s works to create something contemporary. She does this both in her Ted Talks and in her fiction writing.

Teju Cole, on the other hand, does not make use of his African literary forefathers in the same way. As mentioned in the chapter on *Open City*, the novel does include a lot of references to earlier art and philosophy; however, these references are mostly European and white. He does reference some Africans of the past, but that is mostly related to African trauma, such as the dictatorship of Idi Amin. The writing on Idi Amin ties in with Cole’s motif of trauma and historical hardships. Thus, as discussed in the chapter on *Open City*, his character Julius is someone who does not seem to relate that much to his African cultural heritage. Rather, Julius’ references are mostly from a European and Western cultural heritage. This is a legitimate choice of a contemporary writer; Cole does not have to explicitly mention his African literary forefathers in his works. However, one can say that Chinua Achebe’s work as an African literary pioneer paved the way for later generations of African writers, such as Teju Cole. Had it not been for Chinua Achebe, Teju Cole’s work may not have been possible.

In addition to being a literary pioneer, Achebe was also a sort of anthropologist, according to Chimamanda Adichie. As discussed previously, she sees Achebe’s work as

representing both literature and history (*The African Trilogy*, ix). According to Adichie, his writing would sometimes resemble anthropology rather than fiction. He would convey the customs and traditions of tribal Africa in a descriptive way and write about the Igbo as if observing them from the outside. Perhaps this was a perspective that Achebe could have because he knew Igbo culture from ‘the inside’ as an Igbo himself. He was better equipped at writing about and describing Africa by being African. Perhaps he saw it as his responsibility to rectify the image of Africa presented in earlier European literature. Achebe openly critiqued earlier literature about Africa such as Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* from 1899. African ‘literature’ before Achebe had been mainly oral. Narratives of the African continent were mostly written by Europeans. Achebe’s works thus represented a huge turning point from earlier literature about Africa and from Africa. He was the first African to write from and about Africa in literature (*The African Trilogy*, ix).

Adichie writes that it was a relief to read African novels written by an African. In the foreword of *The African Trilogy*, she writes about reading Achebe for the first time. Having grown up reading a lot of British children’s books, she felt a “strangeness of seeing oneself distorted in literature” (viii). She could not recognise herself in the representations of Africa and Africans in European literature, she felt it distorted her and her fellow Africans. Reading Achebe, she could relate and felt “a glorious sense of discovery” because she hadn’t known that “people like me could exist in literature (ix)”. Adichie thus highlights how Achebe’s literature was important in expanding the ‘single story’ of the African continent told by the colonisers. Adichie demonstrates how Achebe’s works have been immensely important both as literature and as a representation of being African in the world. As mentioned, Achebe also made it possible for later generations of Africans to write about Africa and the world, enabling Africans to represent themselves in fiction.

As mentioned, in this chapter I will look at Achebe’s *African trilogy* and focus particularly on *No Longer at Ease*. In addition to this, I will also consider Chimamanda Adichie’s writing back to Achebe in her short story entitled “The Headstrong Historian”. I will compare it to *Things Fall Apart*, upon which it was loosely based. Adichie’s ‘writing back’ forms part of a postcolonial tradition of revising and re-envisioning canonical works of literature from the perspective of marginalized characters. I find it very interesting how Adichie re-imagines *Things Fall Apart* from a feminist and Afropolitan perspective. This relates to my research question of how Afropolitanism is a new era of postcolonial literature. The Afropolitan perspective that Adichie brings to Achebe’s text enables her to gently push

the literature into a more political realm. Whereas Achebe's literature is not overtly political, Adichie's works are decidedly so.

4.2 Chinua Achebe and the African Canon

As I have mentioned before, Achebe's perspective was of being wary of the European depictions of Africa and Africans in literature. According to Achebe, these depictions were unfair and inaccurate. He has critiqued writers such as Joseph Conrad and Joyce Carey for their representations of Africa and Africans. Achebe held many lectures where he contended that Joseph Conrad and his *Heart of Darkness* is racist. Achebe also argued that the novel is based upon a dichotomy between Europe and Africa, where Africa is symbolized as a 'dark' continent and Europe a 'good' continent of progress. According to Caryl Phillips in *The Guardian*, Africa is presented as "the antithesis of Europe and therefore civilization, a place where man's vaunted intelligence and refinement are finally mocked by triumphant bestiality" (Out of Africa).

According to Phillips, Africa was thus presented as the opposite of Europe and therefore the opposite of civilization. The discourse on the Europeans related them to 'refinement and intelligence', whereas the discourse on the African related them to 'bestiality'. This type of discourse relates back to Edward Said's concept of "Orientalism", which I discussed in the chapter on postcolonial theory. There is a dichotomy in the discourse between the European and the African. I would argue that Achebe fought the stereotypical descriptions of Africans in European literature in many ways. Achebe's depictions of the Igbo people in his literature gave them status and humanity. He thus demonstrated through his writing that the Africans were not uncultivated 'beasts'. Rather than explicitly saying that the Igbo had a rich culture, he rather demonstrated it subtly through his work.

Brian Doherty argues something similar to Caryl Phillips. He writes that Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* is a response to European literature and the presupposition that "Africa had no history, culture, or civilization until the arrival of the Europeans" (190). Thus, it was as if the Europeans were doing the Africans a favour by colonising them, because colonisation was a kind of civilising 'mission'. Achebe's work in that way represents a corrective to this view by depicting the history, culture, and civilization of the Igbo people both before and after the arrival of the Europeans. By employing a descriptive narrative, Achebe shows that the Igbo people were indeed very civilized before the arrival of the Europeans. Achebe argues this in a gentle way, and thus critiques colonialism and the 'civilizational project' of

the Europeans implicitly. As I see it, Achebe's critique of colonialism in his literature was more implicit and gentler than the overtly political works of Adiche and Cole.

Achebe was at times very explicit in his critique of European literature, though. In his lecture on *Heart of Darkness*, he was very direct in his criticism of Joseph Conrad's novel. According to Caryl Phillips in *The Guardian*, Achebe's lecture on *Heart of Darkness* is "one of the most important and influential treatises in post-colonial literary discourse". This lecture was given at the University of Massachusetts in 1975 and was later included in his 1988 collection of essays, *Hopes and Impediments*. Achebe as mentioned, represents an important figure in African literature as one of the founding fathers. In addition, as seen here, he wrote some very influential academic texts on postcolonial literature. The academic discourse contrasts thus with his novels, by arguing more directly.

In *The Guardian* interview, Achebe explains the essence of his lecture on *Heart of Darkness* (Out of Africa). He argues that Conrad had "an admiration for the white skin" and regarded the Africans as barbaric and uncivilized. In *Heart of Darkness*, the Africans are described as monsters, Achebe argues. However, Achebe claims, what is most disturbing to Conrad, is the thought that they are in some way human too. In the article, Achebe quotes from the novel where Conrad is describing a meeting between the Africans and the Europeans. In his novel, Conrad describes the Africans thus: "they howled and leaped, and spun, and made horrid faces; but what thrilled you was just the thought of their humanity – like yours – the thought of your remote kinship with this wild and passionate uproar" (ibid). Conrad's description of the Africans here resembles a depiction of animals, they "howl" and "leap", "spin", are wild and make "horrid faces". When Conrad's narrator acknowledges the fact that they are indeed remotely connected, it is with a "thrill," as if it is almost unheard of to think that. As the Africans are depicted as animals, the comparison is almost as if saying that baboons are related to humans, the kinship is remote. To me, it seems as though Conrad in his novel removes the humanity from the Africans. Achebe's project was thus perhaps to rebel against this kind of representation, which he must have considered to be inaccurate and inappropriate.

4.3 Achebe's form

Achebe's literary style was ground-breaking, and he created a new literary form which was genuinely African. According to *The Guardian*, he did so by combining the oral traditions of Africa with literary modes, making a kind of hybrid (Chinua Achebe Obituary). As I see it, an example of this is that his novels include a lot of myths and folk stories which come from Igbo society. According to his obituary in *The Guardian*, he was not allowed to speak Igbo at school, and all the pupils were asked to renounce their pagan traditions. However, Achebe absorbed the folk tales told to him at home by his mother and sister. His fascination with folk stories comes clearly through in his works. As I see it, the folk tales in the novel function partly as wisdom which is inherited from generations past. In his novel, Achebe demonstrates how the Igbo people use this wisdom to navigate in contemporary society and give each other counsel. In my view, this shows how the Igbo people bring with them the wisdom of their forefathers.

This wisdom is also reflected in the proverbs, which are abundant in Achebe's writing. The proverbs employ a lot of imagery from nature and village life. A passage in *No Longer at Ease* is an example:

a man may go to England, become a lawyer or a doctor, but it does not change his blood. It is like a bird that flies off the earth and lands on an anthill. It is still on the ground (277)

This passage reflects the importance of one's heritage, one's blood and being part of the Igbo tribe. A man going to England is likened to a bird flying "off the earth". As the bird flies in the sky, the man travels in a plane. However, the bird is usually flying in the air, but in this case, it lands and is "still on the ground". Thus, it denotes that the traveling man is also "still on the ground".

This passage demonstrates the Igbo peoples' connection with the animal kingdom and nature. I understand the proverb to mean that even though a man like Obi travels to England, he is still of the Igbo people, and nothing can change that. His blood will always be the same, as well as his relationship with his tribe. I see the use of proverbs as one way in which Achebe created a novel literary form. His use of African proverbs reflected his Igbo heritage and provides a deeper understanding of Igbo tribal life. Furthermore, it reflects their knowledge and wisdom. By employing proverbs, Achebe acknowledges the humanity of the

Igbo people and the wisdom of their forefathers. As mentioned, this can be seen as a rebellion against a European narrative of Africans without any humanity or inherent wisdom.

Achebe's use of language was also novel, as he incorporated Igbo and English together. In this manner he remade the English language in literature, representing the way it was spoken in Nigeria among Nigerians. The question of language has been a contested point for some African writers, choosing whether to write in the oppressor's language, or use the traditional African languages. Ngugi wa Thiong'o has argued that language and thought are so closely connected, that to "decolonise the mind" former colonial subjects should stop writing in English. Achebe however argued that this Nigerian English was not the same as the language spoken by the British, that they have made it their own (Parker, 292). Thus, he chose to write in English, but mixed it with a lot of African language. Furthermore, he used a lot of African proverbs and folk stories which reflected his Igbo heritage.

4.4 The African Trilogy

The three seminal works which form part of Chinua Achebe's *African Trilogy* are: *Things Fall Apart* (1958), *No Longer at Ease* (1960) and *Arrow of God* (1968). Written in 1958, *Things Fall Apart* was his first novel. It is set in south-eastern Nigeria in the 1890's and depicts the colonial encounter between the Africans and Europeans among the Igbo tribe, with "the tragic hero Okonkwo at its center" (*The African Trilogy*, vii). Okonkwo is the leader of an Igbo tribe but is banished for accidentally killing a clansman. The novel follows his seven years in exile as punishment and his return to his society. According to Amy McKenna, (*Things Fall Apart*), it was the "intrusion in the 1890's of white missionaries and colonial government into tribal society" which affected the disintegration of the society. *Things Fall Apart* is thus a tragic tale of how the colonial and the 'civilizing' project often brought about a lot of turmoil and ruin for the native peoples involved.

Although the publishers were reluctant at first to publish an African novel, the *Times Literary Supplement* wrote after its publication that Achebe had "genuinely succeeded at presenting tribal life from the inside" (*The African Trilogy*, vii). Before that, there had been many books written about African tribal life, but these were from the outside, by authors of a Western background. Thus, as mentioned, Achebe's work was seminal as one of the first African authors to write about Africa.

4.5 No Longer at Ease

Opening with the trial case in which he is convicted of corruption, *No Longer at Ease* follows Obi Okonkwo. Obi is the grandson of Okonkwo from *Things Fall Apart*. The novel is also a tragedy, it is the story of the demise of Obi. As in *Things Fall Apart*, the novel portrays how the intrusion of European rule onto the African societies could produce a lot of trauma and disorientation. This time, the story has moved forward two generations and takes place in a city setting. Therefore, I have chosen this novel as it relates to the cosmopolitan novels of Cole and Adichie. Just as in *Things Fall Apart*, the narrative of *No Longer at Ease* has a tragic progression.

Obi is sent to England for studies in English after having succeeded at a high level at school in Nigeria. Upon his return, he is considered by his tribe as being a kind of ‘village celebrity’ after getting a BA in English. When returning to Nigeria, he is given a position as a civil servant, a job which comes with a lot of benefits and prestige. His family and tribe are proud of him, but the position also comes with some responsibilities to give back to his community and to take care of his family. In London he meets Clara, and they later become involved in a relationship. His family and community do not approve of Clara, however, as she is an *osu*, which is a kind of outcast. When Clara falls pregnant, Obi takes her to get an abortion. Obi is overwhelmed by the financial responsibilities of his position to take care of himself and his family. He is several times approached by people who want to bribe him to receive favours from him, and in the end, he succumbs to the temptation and receives the bribe. At the closing of the novel, he is arrested and faced with charges of corruption.

The demise of Obi is thus the theme of this novel. He tries very hard most of the novel to do things right, but as things start to go wrong, he is finally unable to deny the bribe. It is as if everything breaks apart, one thing after the other, like a tragedy. As I understand it, Achebe seems to be saying that the imposition of the European way of life was detrimental to African tribal life. Furthermore, Achebe may be arguing that it is the city which corrupts Obi, and this is how I understand the novel. When coming to the city, Obi is faced with a lot of temptations for a sinful life. He is faced with corruption, stealing, prostitution and drinking.

Achebe’s depiction differs very much from how Chimamanda Adichie portrays the city in *Americanah*. In Adichie’s novel, rather than being a location of sinful corruption, the city is more like a space of endless possibilities and opportunities. Similarly, Teju Cole’s *Open City* is a place of meetings and cultural encounters. However, it does also house a lot of trauma. Cole has argued in many interviews (for example in “The City as Palimpsest”) that

he enjoys the city more than the countryside. However, in *Open City*, one theme is the personal and collective trauma, and these take place in a city setting. Although there are a lot of opportunities for personal advancement in the city, it is also a location of many horrors, such as 9/11. Thus, both *Open City* and *No Longer at Ease* are tragic stories which take place in a city setting. Whereas Achebe's city is in Lagos in Nigeria, Cole's 'open city' is in New York City, in the United States.

In Achebe's depiction of Nigerian colonial society, one can see that there is a clear separation between the English and the Nigerians. The British and Africans sometimes work and do business together, but they are usually divided. To me, there seems to be a sense of 'us' and 'them' in Achebe's description of Nigerian colonial life. The two groups seem to harbour a lot of distrust against each other. Furthermore, one gets the sense that they are very different, that they cannot relate and understand one another. In *No Longer at Ease* the Nigerians and English seldom have interactions of a friendly nature. Moreover, they are quick to distrust each other, for example of corruption or other crimes. The depiction of the two groups does not resemble what Achille Mbembe describes as "recognizing one's face in that of a foreigner". The English and the Africans are not depicted as similar, they seem essentially different. They do not seem to even respect each other.

For example, a passage from the novel presents the following discussion between Mr. Green and the British Council man who are discussing the case of Obi's corruption:

'I cannot understand why he did it,' said the British Council man thoughtfully. He was drawing lines of water with his finger on the back of his mist-covered glass of ice-cold beer. 'I can,' said Mr. Green simply. 'What I can't understand is why people like you refuse to face facts.' Mr. Green was famous for speaking his mind. He wiped his red face with the white towel on his neck. 'The African is corrupt through and through.' The British Council man looked about him furtively, more from instinct than necessity, for although the club was now open to them technically, few Africans went to it. On this particular occasion there was none, except of course the stewards who served unobtrusively. It was quite possible to go in, drink, sign a cheque, talk to friends and leave again without noticing these stewards in their white uniforms. If everything went right you did not see them.

(154)

In this passage the reader is presented with a conversation between two European high-ranking officials in a club in Nigeria. At first, it may seem as if the reader is watching the scene through the eyes of a European narrator. It may seem that this narrator is describing the British as being one of them. Thus, it may seem that the English are presented with sympathy. However, the author of the novel was a black African who fought against the British colonial empire. I think there is a gentle critique here of the two Europeans, despite the semblance of benevolence. Achebe furthers his critique by exposing the racism in Mr. Green. Mr Green's view seems to be that not only Obi is corrupt, but that *all* Africans are corrupt. Almost as if it is in the African nature, or 'essence'. In this passage it also becomes the role of Mr. Green to expose 'the truth' to the British Council man. Achebe later writes that the British Council man has not been in the country for long, so it seems as if it is the task of Mr. Green to show him how Africans *really* are, to tell him 'the truth'.

This passage also demonstrates the separateness between the English and the Nigerians. The 'British Council man' is only called that, it is as if he becomes a representative of the British, a metonymy of the empire. Even though Mr. Green and the British Council man are in a bar in Africa, they are not around any Africans. There are servers there who are Africans, but it is as if they are invisible. Achebe seems thus to be exposing the erasure of the Africans in their own country. Achebe writes that even though the bar is now open to Africans as guests, few of them would visit the establishment. Furthermore, Achebe describes how the British Council man is looking around him to see if there are any Africans nearby who could hear what he is saying.

Finally, Achebe writes that "if everything went right you did not see them." This sounds as if it is written from the perspective of the British. However, it is more likely that it is written from the perspective of the African since it is written by Achebe. This phrase is perhaps a critique by Achebe of how the British were ruling the country but would perhaps rather not see any Africans around them. To me, Achebe exposes the resentment on the English side. Achebe seems to convey how the English and Nigerians were sometimes so far apart that they did not wish to interact with one another. The English do not wish to see the Africans whom they are subjugating through colonialism. This passage perhaps conveys that by keeping a distance, it was easier for the English to maintain the colonial power dynamic, and their position of superiority.

As discussed in the chapter on postcolonial theory, the colonizing powers sought to uphold a separateness through for example their discourse. The discourse served to keep the

colonizing powers in their position by accentuating the difference between the two peoples and furthering the belief in the colonisers' superiority. In his novels, Achebe was 'writing back' to the past colonial discourse dominated by a Western perspective. Achebe thereby discounted the European narrative and disrupted the power balance. To me, it seems that the power of representation and telling one's story is great.

The separation of different peoples as portrayed in Achebe's literature is typical of the colonial time and makes Achebe's works distinct from Adichie and Cole. As I discussed in the chapter on *Americanah* and *Open City*, these are novels about different groups of people relating to one another. Cole and Adichie's novels feature modern multicultural societies where this kind of segregation is not so visible. Achebe's literature represents a very different time than our contemporary world. In this manner, we see how as society changes, so does literature. Society shapes and reshapes literature.

4.6 Writing Back: The Headstrong Historian

The exercise of 'writing back' to canonical works has been an important aspect of postcolonial literature. According to Brian Doherty, contemporary writers make use of the classical texts to critique aspects of society (189). In postcolonial literature, this has been a way to critique and attempt to rectify hegemonic portrayals of the world. In canonical Western literature the perspectives of people of colour and women have often been marginalized. The postcolonial literature can then reimagine the perspectives of women and people of colour. One example of this literature of 'writing back' is Jean Rhys' *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966). The novel takes the character of Bertha Mason and creates the prequel of *Jane Eyre*, reimagining her as Antoinette on a Caribbean Island. The exercise of 'writing back' thus gives agency and a voice to characters whose voices have been unheard in classical literature. 'Writing back' can therefore to a certain degree correct and amend old power structures, as mentioned in Achebe's case.

"The Headstrong Historian" is thus not a classical example of 'writing back' since both Achebe and Adichie are of Nigerian heritage. They are both Africans, so Adichie is not giving a voice to unheard Africans. "The Headstrong Historian" is considered a 'writing back' to Chinua Achebe from a feminist point of view. By employing some of the characters from *Things Fall Apart*, Chimamanda Adichie creates a reimagining of the Igbo past, with a more feminist point of view. In that way, she is also gently rectifying what some have critiqued is a slight underrepresentation of women in Achebe's novel. "The Headstrong

Historian” was published in the *New Yorker* in 2008 and was part of Chimamanda Adichie’s short story collection entitled *That Thing Around Your Neck* from 2009.

“The Headstrong Historian” depicts the story of Nwamgba and her family in South-eastern Nigeria from around the time of the first European encounter (in the 1890s). It follows Nwamgba and her family for three generations. Nwamgba and her husband struggle with infertility and Nwamgba finally conceives a son through a lover. Her son Anikwenwa is sent to European school and becomes a Christian, eschewing his African heritage. He takes a Christian name; Michael and marries a gentle woman who he sees fit at becoming a Christian.

The final part presents us in modern time with ‘the headstrong historian’; the granddaughter of Nwamgba; Grace/Afamefuma. Afamefuma is described as a strong independent girl and woman who rebels against things which she finds unfair in society. For example, she divorces her husband and rebels against the nuns in her school. She decides to study history in part because she is frustrated with the public discourse on African history.

Many of the characters in the story have two names, one name being their African name, and another a Christian name that they have taken. The theme of the arrival of Christianity in the African tribal society is a motif in both Achebe’s novel and the short story. There is a clash between the old customs and religious practices of the Igbo society and the new Christian beliefs. Both texts depict this area of tension in the colonial encounter.

There are a few points that I noticed in Adichie’s short story as opposed to Achebe’s novel. Rather than having a male protagonist as Okonkwo in *Things Fall Apart*, the portrayal of Nwamgba both reimagines the historical past and revises Achebe’s story. Furthermore, critics have pointed to how Achebe’s novel perhaps under-represented the participation of women in pre-colonial and colonial Nigerian society. Ronda Cobham has suggested that this perhaps was due to Achebe’s wish to not upset the “European decorum” (Doherty, 91).

In Adichie’s short story, it is described how Nwamgba asks the Women’s Council for help after her husband’s cousins have stolen from her and treated her poorly. The Women’s Council then harass the cousins. However, according to Brian Doherty, the Women’s Council in Adichie’s story fails to stop the bothersome cousins (192). In Achebe’s novel too, there is a Women’s Council, however according to Brian Doherty, they have limited power compared to in Adichie’s story (191).

Nwamgba is described as fierce from the start of the short story, deciding who she wants to marry and informing her parents about it. She fights with her brother and her father

finds it exhausting; “this sharp-tongued, headstrong daughter who had once wrestled her brother to the ground” (The Headstrong). Both Grace/Afamefuma and Nwamgba are thus depicted in the short story as headstrong. It is as if this fighting spirit of Nwamgba recurs in Afamefuma. Nwamgba has been looking for aspects of her late husband coming back in his grandchildren. However, it is not until she sees Afamefuma that she recognizes his eyes and knows that his spirit has returned:

From the moment Nwamgba held her, the baby’s bright eyes delightfully focussed on her, she knew that the spirit of Obierika had finally returned; odd, to have come back in a girl, but who could predict the ways of the ancestors?

(The Headstrong)

According to Brian Doherty, Chimamanda Adichie has perhaps been too influenced by the Western tradition of ‘writing back’ and not utilized fully the African voices (188). Doherty additionally points to how the character of Grace does for African history what Achebe did for African literature; “to write Africa from the inside” (188). Whereas Achebe’s novel was a corrective of the literary Westernized view of Africa, Grace’s history writing is a corrective for African history seen from the point of view of the colonisers. As I have discussed earlier, Achebe’s novel was a response to some of the Western writers who had written about Africa such as Joseph Conrad and Joyce Carey (190).

Whereas the colonial forces in Achebe’s novel are in some ways described as inevitable, there seems to be a little more agency in Adichie’s characters. In the short story Nwamgba decides to use the power of her voice to get back what is rightfully hers. As mentioned, she talks to the Women’s Council to plead her case. Thus, whereas Okonkwo is described as a “tragic hero”, I see Nwamgba and Afamefuma as heroines. Adichie’s story shows how there is agency in the characters, even though they are ruled by another power. The female characters of Adichie’s story rebel against both male and colonial oppression.

It is interesting to see “The Headstrong Historian” in relation to Achebe’s work. One of the things that I believe makes Adichie’s short story Afropolitan is the way she accentuates the feminine perspective. As I have discussed previously, the Afropolitan writers are often concerned with socio-cultural questions such as feminism and politics. Their fiction employs protagonists who are strong and politically aware such as Ifemulu, Julius, Nwamgba and

Grace. This contrasts with Achebe's way of writing, which is more descriptive of the African way of life and more implicitly critiques the colonial oppression.

In addition, I find Adichie's tone more positive than in Achebe's tragic novel. Adichie's short story ends on a positive note, by using the character of Grace/Afamefuma. Perhaps, it is Afamefuma's agency and willingness to fight which gives the reader more of a sense of hope.

In closing I will briefly sum up a few of my thoughts on the works of Adichie and Cole in relation to Achebe. The plurality of perspectives which I believe is a hallmark of Afropolitan literature is not something which is present as much in the literature of Achebe. Whereas in Adichie and Cole we hear from a variety of characters from different backgrounds, Achebe's work is focussed mainly on telling the 'African story'. I believe that Cole and Adichie are more interested in embracing all the viewpoints of a multicultural society, be it in Europe, the U.S and Africa. In addition to this, I believe that the Afropolitan perspective not only focuses on what is lost in the interactions between Africans and the West, but also what is to be gained.

Conclusion

We returned to our places, these Kingdoms,
But no longer at ease here,
With an alien people clutching their gods
T.S Eliot, *The Journey of the Magi*

In my view, the cover of the first edition of Chinua Achebe's novel *No Longer at Ease* conveys a lot of what the novel is about. It is an illustration showing a man in a suit standing in the forefront of an image of a tribal village. There are village houses and villagers in the background. The man in the suit is thus juxtaposed against the background of African tribal life. Only his suited body is visible, his head is cut off from the image. In the image the man is at a distance from the others, and I think the physical distance symbolizes the psychological distance between the two groups. It is as if there is a clash between the two groups, and I think this is what the novel partly explores. Obi has been to England, and he has lived in the city of Lagos. When he returns to his village, he does not seem to fit in. Like his white suite clashes with the village attire, so he is an alien in his village. His suit makes him appear foreign, or different than the others. In Achebe's novel, there is a distance between the Africans and the English. However, there is also a distance between Obi and his people. He seems 'no longer at ease' in his village.

The cover of Chinua Achebe's novel reminds me of the cover of Teju Cole's *Open City*. My edition of *Open City* seems to be a photograph. The image also features a man and a busy background. However, in this case, the background is of a city, probably New York City. The cover is perhaps an attempt to illustrate the protagonist Julius and his many walks around New York City. The man in the photo is walking towards the city, which seems to convey his connection to the city. We cannot see the man clearly; he has his back to the viewer and is not so visible. Like Julius, the man on the photo is thus a little mysterious. This relates to the topic of erasure which I argued does recur in the book. The colours are warm, which connotes a welcoming atmosphere. The man appears large compared to the city background, the buildings are not that tall. All this makes the city appear welcoming and inviting. This contrasts with the Achebe cover, where the man seems alienated against the village background. He has his back against it as if to mark a distance.

Both these novels feature a male protagonist who seems a little alienated towards his community. Julius of *Open City* does not seem to connect so much with the people around him. In the novel he does not appear to have any close relationships, but rather casual acquaintances. I do think however that relationships are an important topic, in both novels. As I have argued, in Chimamanda Adichie's novel too, relationships are one of the major motifs. Both *Americanah* and *Open City* are about relationships in contemporary multicultural cities.

In this thesis I have explored the topic of Afropolitanism and its' relationship to postcolonial theory and the African literary canon. Learning about Afropolitanism has been very interesting to me. Having lived in Africa, it has been interesting for me to explore contemporary African literature as well as African literature of the past. To me, African literature is interesting as a document of Africa's past and its present. In this thesis, Chinua Achebe has represented earlier African colonial and postcolonial literature, while Teju Cole and Chimamanda Adichie are representatives of contemporary (post)postcolonial Afropolitan literature. Adichie and Cole write mostly from outside of Africa, and I see them also as representatives of 'world literature'.

In my first chapter, I discussed the topic of postcolonial theory. I sketched a short overview of this very vast field. My aim was to convey briefly what came before Afropolitanism and thereafter discuss Afropolitanism in relation to earlier postcolonial theory. I chose some of the most influential postcolonial thinkers who are all still relevant today. Furthermore, I gave an overview of some of their contributions to the field. The postcolonial thinkers provided a sort of methodology when I subsequently started to write about Afropolitanism and literature. To me, postcolonial theory is interesting because it is still relevant for our contemporary world. Moreover, I think that postcolonial theory can teach us as readers a lot about engaging with literature from different perspectives.

The different perspectives on life and literature became important in the second chapter. I discussed how Afropolitanism features in *Open City* by Teju Cole and *Americanah* by Chimamanda Adichie. The two novels are very different, though they do have some similarities, particularly as it relates to Afropolitanism. As I see it, both novels present a multitude of perspectives and depict how people may live together in contemporary multicultural societies.

Continuing with the two authors Cole and Adichie, in chapter three I went on to discuss their presence on the Internet. Their presence on social media and the Internet is

something which distinguishes them from their African literary forefathers. However, Adichie discusses a lot of the topics that Achebe discussed in his lectures at universities. Both Achebe and Adichie discuss the importance of creating a more balanced discourse on Africa. Contemporary artists have a much greater possibility of reaching large numbers of people through the Internet. I discussed the discourse of Cole and Adichie on the Internet and how it relates to their literary output. My view is that their Internet presence is an extension of their literary discourse. Teju Cole is more intellectual in his approach, both on social media and in his books. Chimamanda Adichie, however is more interested in popular culture, and I would argue that she is more commercial in her approach on the Internet. This is perhaps what results in the great popularity of her talks.

In the last chapter, I discussed Chimamanda Adichie and Teju Cole's works in relation to the African literary canon. As a representative of the African literary canon, I chose the fellow Nigerian, Chinua Achebe. I chose Achebe for his seminal role in African literature. Achebe was one of the first Africans to write about Africa 'from within', something which paved the way for many African authors who came after him. Thus, the three writers represent different times of African literature as postcolonial literature. Whereas Achebe represented the colonial era, Adiche and Cole are representatives of contemporary African literature.

As I discussed, I see Adichie as a kind of transitional figure in relation to the African canon. She brings with her a lot of the concepts of earlier African literature, and she references Achebe extensively. Furthermore, her short story "The Headstrong Historian" is a direct response to Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*.

In this thesis, I have looked at how Afropolitanism is present in modern African literature. I think Afropolitanism is a very interesting topic, as it engages with the world that we live in at this moment in time.

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