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Afropolitanism and Citizenship: A Redefinition of National Identity

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Abstract

Afropolitanism is a philosophical movement propounded and popularised by Taiye Selasi and Achille Mbembe as a response to the identity challenges of Africans in the diaspora. It proposes a new approach to understanding multiple identities and cultures in the globalised world. Afropolitanism challenges the traditional view of citizenship and national identity as linked to borders and a single nation-state. It advocates for a redefinition of citizenship and national identity that accommodates cultural hybridity, transnational connections, and multiple national identities. It transcends the limitations imposed by geographical locations and fosters a sense of belonging that is not restricted to a single nation. Despite its advocacy for multiplicity of cultural affiliation, it retains and recognises the fact that diasporic Africans still maintain ties to their heritage while actively participating in the global economy. This study therefore critically examines how Afropolitanism redefines and reinterprets the traditional view of citizenship and national identity, and how it fosters a sense of belonging among Africans in the diaspora that is not linked to legal citizenship. Essentially, Afropolitanism presents a progressive and robust framework for redefining citizenship in an increasingly interconnected world.

Keywords: Afropolitanism, diaspora, national identity, citizenship, cosmopolitanism, borders/boundaries

Introduction

Africans are increasingly dispersed across different regions of the world today, a trend significantly accelerated by recent waves of migration commonly referred to as the "Japa syndrome"—literally translated as the "take off" syndrome. As a result, African communities have become an integral part of many societies globally. However, a substantial number of individuals of African descent were born and raised outside the continent and may have had limited or no direct engagement with African societies. This has given rise to the assumption that such individuals possess minimal familiarity with, or connection to, African cultural traditions and values. Culture, however, remains one of the most essential elements of identity for any people. The lived experiences of Africans in the diaspora differ markedly from those residing on the continent, creating the need to interrogate and possibly redefine what constitutes identity in the contemporary world.

Identity has often been understood in relation to nationhood and citizenship. Citizenship, in turn, has traditionally been viewed as a legal status that defines one's relationship with the state, often tied to birthplace, lineage, or residency (Battiste & Semaganis 2002). National identity is likewise conceived as an attachment to the geographic and cultural boundaries of a specific nation-state (Guibernau & Smith 2004). However, in an era of globalisation, digital citizenship, and transnational mobility, these conventional notions have become inadequate to capture the multiplicity of identities that emerge through cross-cultural exchanges and diasporic experiences. The rise of transnational movements such as cosmopolitanism, Afrocentrism, and, more recently, Afropolitanism has introduced new paradigms for understanding belonging beyond fixed territorial or cultural boundaries.

Afropolitanism, in particular, represents a contemporary philosophical and cultural framework that seeks to transcend rigid definitions of national belonging. It reimagines African identity through a global lens, situating Africans and people of African descent as dynamic participants in multiple cultural and social spaces. By embracing hybridity, fluidity, and interconnectedness, Afropolitanism challenges the conventional understanding of citizenship confined to legal documentation or singular national affiliation.

Afropolitanism therefore provides a progressive philosophical framework that redefines and reinterprets traditional conceptions of citizenship and national identity by decoupling belonging from geography or legal status, and situating African identity within a global, interconnected context. The following research questions guide this paper: How does Afropolitanism challenge and reinterpret the traditional notions of citizenship and national identity? In what ways does Afropolitanism reflect the lived realities and hybrid experiences of Africans in the diaspora? How can Afropolitanism serve as a framework for constructing a more inclusive and transnational understanding of African belonging in the 21st century?

This study contributes to the growing discourse on identity and citizenship in a globalised world by positioning Afropolitanism as both a philosophical and practical framework for rethinking African belonging beyond the nation-state. Unlike earlier studies that primarily view Afropolitanism as a cultural or literary movement, this research foregrounds its philosophical and ethical dimensions, demonstrating how it redefines citizenship through the lenses of mul-

tiplicity, mobility, and cultural complementarity. By doing so, it expands existing scholarship on African identity, offering new insights into how diasporic Africans negotiate belonging in transnational and digital spaces, and how such redefinition can inform broader discussions on postcolonial identity and global citizenship.

Methodology

A conceptual and analytical research approach is adopted in this paper. It does not rely on quantitative data or fieldwork; instead, it is anchored in conceptual analysis, textual interpretation, and comparative reasoning, grounded in a critical examination of existing literature on Afropolitanism, citizenship, and national identity. Primary sources include seminal works by Taiye Selasi and Achille Mbembe, alongside subsequent interpretations by scholars such as Simon Gikandi, Chielozona Eze, and Sarah Balakrishnan. Secondary sources are drawn from peer-reviewed journals, books, and conference papers that address themes of globalisation, diaspora, and cultural hybridity.

The analysis is qualitative and interpretative in nature. It employs a literature review to trace the genealogy of Afropolitan thought, highlight key debates surrounding its elitism and inclusivity, and situate Afropolitanism within broader philosophical and socio-political discourses on identity. The paper also applies comparative analysis, contrasting Afropolitanism with related frameworks such as Pan-Africanism, Négritude, and cosmopolitanism, in order to clarify its distinctive contribution to the discourse on African identity and citizenship.

The methodology is multi-layered: it employs conceptual analysis to unpack the meaning, assumptions, and implications of Afropolitanism as a category of thought; comparative analysis to situate Afropolitanism in relation to other ideological frameworks; and a critical literature review to synthesise debates on whether Afropolitanism is elitist, inclusive, or representative of the broader African experience. The absence of empirical data means that this study does not measure the real-life prevalence or social impact of Afropolitanism across African diasporic communities. Instead, it offers a theoretical and interpretive framework that can inform future empirical research.

Afropolitanism: A Conceptual Analysis

The quest for identity in Africa as a continent has led to the postulation of diverse philosophical ideologies. Colonialism and the adulteration of African cultural heritage by foreign cultures are core reasons for the need to redefine African identity. Oladipupo and Tomoloju (2024) opine that

> Africa as a continent has experienced and is still going through a lot of negative, derogatory and dehumanising experiences. This, in turn, formed the basis of the identity crises that rock the continent. Some Western philosophers, historians, and sociologists are of the opinion that Africans do not have an identity nor history of

> their own; this is emboldened in the idea that Africa is not part of world history. (p. 1)

Beyond redefining the identity of Africa, this study is focused on the identity of Africans regardless of their place of birth and residence. Afropolitanism is therefore not just a philosophy concerned about the impacts of colonialism; it is focused more on the identity of Africans and how they interact with the world. Afropolitanism is a combination of two words: Africa and cosmopolitanism. However, Afropolitanism is different from cosmopolitanism.

Cosmopolitanism implies being a citizen of the world, not having or claiming affinity with any nation. Brown (2009) explains the creed of cosmopolitanism thus: "it makes no difference whether a person lives here or there, provided that, where he lives, he lives as a citizen of the world" (p. 31). Basically, cosmopolitanism concerns humans living in the world with affinity for the world as a whole, not just a particular part of it. The Cynic, Diogenes of Sinope, one of the proponents of cosmopolitanism, when asked where he came from, responded that he was a cosmopolitan—that he felt at home everywhere (Lettevall 2014). Although cosmopolitanism and Afropolitanism share similarities, they are different.

The concept of Afropolitanism was propounded and advanced by Taiye Selasi and Achille Mbembe. Selasi introduced Afropolitanism to promote a consciousness of redefining cultural values and identities—a way for Africans to embrace their transnational diversities and personalities, cutting beyond borders and nationality without being restricted by geographical locations. Selasi's own diasporic experience, being of Nigerian and Ghanaian origin but raised in Toronto, shaped her description of the Afropolitan condition (Selasi 2005):

> We are Afropolitans—the newest generation of African emigrants, coming soon or collected already at law firm/chem lab/jazz lounge near you. You'll know us by our funny blend of London fashion, New York jargon, African ethics, and academic successes. Some of us are ethnic mixes, e.g. Ghanaian and Canadian, Nigerian and Swiss; others merely cultural mutts: American accent, European affect, African ethos.

An African born in England, schooled in America, and working there cannot be expected to give a single answer when asked where home is. As an Afropolitan, s/he is not bound by a nation; s/he feels at home anywhere in the world. This however does not diminish their Africanness. As Selasi (2005) puts it, "like so many African young people working and living in cities around the globe, they belong to no single geography, but feel at home in many."

The possibility remains that such Africans may lose their cultural heritage or genealogy. Selasi (2005) argues that tracing African lineage across generations is relatively straightforward, noting that beginning in the 1960s, many young and ambitious Africans migrated abroad in search of education and better opportunities, establishing diaspora communities across the world. The generation that left during this period raised children, many of whom were born and raised abroad, while some were occasionally sent back to Africa for cultural immersion and reconnection with their heritage.

Afropolitans are thus Africans outside the shores of Africa who embrace African culture. They do not idolise the geographical entity but believe that what makes one African is the spirit of nationality and culture, not geographical affiliation.

Selasi's postulation has been criticised as reflecting only the experience and identity of elite, influential, and wealthy Africans. Mbembe's view is, however, considered more encompassing. Mbembe (2007) noted that Africans, even before colonialism, were always moving from place to place, producing cultural hybridity through contact and intermarriage. He states:

> Afropolitanism is not the same as Pan-Africanism or négritude. Afropolitanism is an aesthetic and a particular poetic of the world. It is a way of being in the world, refusing on principle any form of victim identity—which does not mean that it is not aware of the injustice and violence inflicted on the continent and its people by the law of the world. It is also a political and cultural stance in relation to the nation, to race and to the issue of difference in general. In so far as African states are pure (and, what is more, recent) inventions, there is, strictly speaking, nothing in their essence that can force us to worship them—which does not mean that we are indifferent to their fate. (pp. 27–28)

Gikandi (2011) similarly holds that Afropolitanism is "the description of a new phenomenology of Africanness—a way of being African in the world" (p. 9). It is a way in which Africans everywhere maintain the consciousness that they are African. Gikandi (2011) further opines that Afropolitanism represents a reimagined worldview that frames African migration not as a narrative of loss but as an expression of a dynamic and interconnected African identity—one in which mobility and dispersal are integral to the African experience, signifying a renewed way of being rather than a story of displacement or despair.

The fact that an African relocates from the continent does not mean that he or she is no longer African, nor is migration from the continent a loss. According to Makokha (2011), Afropolitanism "embodies the ethos of mobility, migration, and cultural fluidity, emerging from the lived experiences and creative expressions of migrants and their descendants—both those of African descent in the diaspora and racial minorities within Africa, such as Asian communities in Eastern and Southern Africa" (p. 1).

Afropolitanism stresses that Africans are bound by their individual nationality, culture, belief, and history, while also being global citizens—Africans in the world. It is pertinent to note, however, that Afropolitanism does not propose that Africans are citizens of the world. As Selasi (2005) puts it, "We are not citizens of the world, but Africans of the world." Balakrishnan (2018) contends that

> Afropolitanism then, is not a nationalist struggle. It is not Pan-Africanism or Negritude. Rather, it marks an attempt to reconceive of African identity—and ergo, of Africa—outside of racial terms. This effort dovetails with a broader reimagining of a world without nations, or what has been called post-cultural pluralism... The belief... that collective identities arise from political fictions, not biology.

Ndibe (2017) portrayal of Afropolitanism, as reflected in his memoir *Never Look an American in the Eye*, presents a deeply personal and humanised exploration of the Afropolitan condition—one marked by alienation, displacement, identity crisis, and the longing for cultural belonging and redemption (pp. 13–14). Through his narrative style, Ndibe captures the lived realities of Africans navigating between multiple worlds. His Afropolitan subject is not the glamorous, globe-trotting elite often associated with Selasi's conceptualisation, but rather a site of conflict and self-discovery where migration exposes both the possibilities and fractures of identity.

Carrasquillo et al. (2022) observe that "while the concept of the Afropolitan is often most visible in fashion and consumer culture, it also embodies a distinctive visual aesthetic that reflects modern urban life, both within Africa and across the global diaspora, encompassing contemporary and historical contexts alike" (p. 3). Afropolitanism has, however, been widely critiqued as representing primarily the perspectives of the African elite in the diaspora rather than a comprehensive framework for all Africans.

Mgbeadichie and Okoye (2021) view Afropolitanism not as a rejection of other cultures but as an affirmation of cultural complementarity—an identity rooted in African heritage while engaging respectfully with global cultures. Chipato (2023) interprets it as a postmodern framework that values the fluidity and multiplicity of identity, challenging the traditional global order that positions the West as the centre and Africa as the periphery, and proposing instead a world of mobile and interconnected centres where the local and the global shape each other reciprocally.

In essence, Afropolitanism calls for a new way of being African that goes beyond fixed geographical identity. This raises the question of whether an Afropolitan has a national identity given the multiplicity of identities that Afropolitanism advocates. To answer this question, it is necessary to conceptually analyse citizenship and national identity.

Citizenship and National Identity

Citizenship and national identity are often linked together, even though they do not mean the same thing. Battiste and Semaganis (2002) define citizenship as "the state of being vested with the rights, privileges, and duties of a citizen" (p. 93). The concept has been further elaborated in political theory:

> [A] relationship between the individual and the state in which certain rights and duties are specified under law. Citizenship implies universality of rights and duties, that is, a notion of equality under law. To the Greeks a slave was not a citizen of the polis, for he did not share the rights of free men. To Aristotle citizenship meant the right to share in the administration of justice and in office, that is, legislation and adjudication, a definition appropriate for a democracy but not to other regimes in which political participation is restricted and where few people are permitted to hold office. The modern usage, however, is to use "citizen" to mean one who owes allegiance to a government and is entitled to its protection, without necessarily

> implying any rights of participation; thus, one can be a "citizen" of an authoritarian state (Weiner 1978, p. 325).

Citizenship can be acquired by birth, descent, marriage, or naturalisation, depending on a country's constitution.

National identity, on the other hand, "denotes a relationship to society rather than to the state, and implies a subjective rather than legal relationship. A national identity may be learned at home or in school, transmitted from one generation to another" (Weiner 1978, p. 325). Ji and Wang (2023) hold that "no matter what nationality a person belongs to, social status, cultural and historical similarities and differences, as long as he is a citizen of the country, citizenship is his first identity" (p. 3). National identity is that sense of belonging to a nation that influences how people see themselves within a larger community.

Guibernau and Smith (2004) hold that "national identity may refer to the subjective feeling an individual shares with a group of people about a nation, regardless of one's legal citizenship status" (p. 125). While citizenship is legally defined, national identity is more subjective and based on cultural and social factors. According to Tartakovsky (2010), national identity is "a set of cognitions and emotions that express an individual's relationship with a nation" and is "a subjective construct, differing from the concept of nationality" (p. 1851).

National identity is not culture-bound; the sense of belonging an individual has to a particular nation is not restricted by borders. Citizenship and national identity are interconnected but not the same. As Petric (2020) asserts, "individual must have national identity, but can be at the same time the citizen of the world too. We are all both national citizens and citizens of the world" (p. 1). Tartakovsky (2010) also identified the possibility of an individual having more than one national identity: "It is possible to develop a national identity that relates to a nation one does not belong to but wishes to belong to, while it is also possible to have a weak national identity relating to the nation one actually does belong to, as is often the case for immigrants" (p. 1851).

Digital Citizenship

Technology is now a part of daily life in most parts of the world, influencing the way people communicate, work, interact, and maintain the relationship between a state and its citizens. Mossberger (2008) defines digital citizens as "those who use the internet every day, because frequent use requires some regular means of access (usually at home), some technical skill, and the educational competencies to perform tasks such as finding and using information on the web, and communicating with others on the internet. . . digital citizenship is an enabling factor for political citizenship" (pp. 173–174).

Choi (2016) also defines digital citizenship as "abilities, thinking, and action regarding Internet use, which allows people to understand, navigate, engage in, and transform self, community, society, and the world" (p. 584). More broadly, digital citizenship refers to the ability to engage responsibly, respectfully, and effectively in the digital space through thoughtful communication, creativity, and ethical use of technology (Bocar & Ancheta 2023).

Digital citizenship therefore represents a new dimension of belonging and participation that transcends geographical and national boundaries. Just as Afropolitanism redefines citizenship beyond physical borders, digital citizenship extends this transformation into the virtual world, where individuals construct and negotiate their identities, share cultural narratives, and participate in global discourses. In this sense, digital spaces become new Afropolitan arenas of interaction, allowing Africans to maintain ties to their heritage while simultaneously engaging in a borderless, interconnected global community.

Given the evolving understanding of citizenship and national identity, now expanded through the idea of digital citizenship, critical questions arise: How adequate are traditional notions of belonging in capturing the fluid, hybrid experiences of Africans in a globalised world? Can citizenship still be confined to legal and territorial boundaries in an era defined by mobility, connectivity, and transnational identities? These questions naturally lead to a deeper exploration of Afropolitanism as a philosophical and cultural challenge to conventional conceptions of citizenship and national identity.

Afropolitanism as a Challenge to the Traditional Notion of Citizenship

Traditionally, citizenship is acquired primarily by descent and birth. Afropolitanism challenges this traditional view by blurring the boundaries of citizenship while promoting fluid national affiliations. An Afropolitan is an African who can identify with multiple cultures and nations. As Selasi (2005) holds,

> The whole scene speaks of the Cultural Hybrid: kente cloth worn over low-waisted jeans; 'African lady' over Ludacris bass lines; London meets Lagos meets Durban meets Dakar... were you to ask any of these beautiful, brown-skinned people that basic question—"where are you from?"—you'd get no single answer from a single smiling dancer. This one lives in London but was raised in Toronto and born in Accra; that one works in Lagos but grew up in Houston, Texas... They are Afropolitans—the newest generation of African emigrants... (they) are Afropolitan: not citizens, but Africans of the world.

Afropolitans are not citizens of the world, or of any single country, because they have identities with more than one country. Mgbeadichie and Okoye (2021) explain that "Afropolitan is not a citizen of any of these countries, but a mere African traversing the globe" (p. 9). Balakrishnan (2017) holds that for an Afropolitan, "the meaning of being African had to be dislodged from race, nativist traditions and be opened to the flows of global networks and worldly hybridity" (p. 7).

Eze (2014) advances a more far-reaching position, arguing that an Afropolitan is "that human being on the African continent or of African descent who has realised that her identity can no longer be explained in purist, essentialist, and oppositional terms or by reference only to Africa" (p. 240). Afropolitans "are no longer just X as opposed to Y; rather they are A

and B and X" (Eze 2014, p. 240). So Afropolitanism strives to eradicate the traditional view of citizenship that places emphasis on geographical location and instead promotes the cultural heritage of Africans. As Selasi (2005) holds, "Afropolitan consciousness is the refusal to oversimplify; the effort to understand what is ailing in Africa alongside the desire to honor what is wonderful, unique. Rather than essentialising the geographical entity, we seek to comprehend the cultural complexity; to honor the intellectual and spiritual legacy; and to sustain our parents' cultures."

An Afropolitan is not dissociating from African culture but rather promoting it within a movement where Africans are not defined by borders or citizenship. Howell (2018) holds that "Afropolitanism is one way in which Africans are empowering themselves within critical debates around what it means to be African" (p. 1). Phiri (2016) similarly opines that Afropolitanism departs from the fixed constructs of nationality and geographic belonging, embracing instead ideas of fluidity, ambiguity, and global identity.

Oladipupo and Tomoloju (2024) contend that "Afropolitans are mostly offspring of Africans who migrated from Africa to other parts of the world based on different reasons. However, they do not idolise the geographical entity, but the cultures embedded in it and are concerned about correcting the wrong portrait of media of Africa" (p. 5). The challenge however is one of legal and political citizenship, as Afropolitans must negotiate their rights and responsibilities within specific nations while maintaining connections to other places.

Afropolitanism: Redefinition of National Identity

Though not citizens in the traditional sense, Afropolitans belong somewhere. Mgbeadichie and Okoye (2021) hold that "Afropolitans are African diaspora who are consciously or unconsciously slanted to their root in a specific manner; they belong somewhere and the construction and reconstruction of their identity are tied to their root" (p. 4). According to Afolayan (2016),

> The "Afro" in Afropolitanism is a nod to the connection with Africa, but that is really not the main point of the connection since these are "Africans" who consider the entire cosmos as their home. Their beingness is not tied to the old continent and its sense of suffering and postcolonial victimhood. Africa has thrown the Afropolitans into the world; and thus their debt of honor resides in rethinking the context of Africa. (pp. 393–394)

Mgbeadichie and Okoye (2021) contend that "the Afropolitan cannot be categorised as rootless. They have a 'fixed or stable collective history, in which they are affiliated to the [African] race or ethnicity'...These people, no doubt, have a shared African root and collective history" (p. 12). Afropolitanism therefore describes Africans with multiple cultures and explains how they blend African roots with global experiences, bringing about a redefinition of national identity.

Afropolitans often have lived experiences in different countries, which creates a sense of belonging that goes beyond national borders. For instance, an individual born of Nigerian and

Portuguese parents, born in England, and raised in Dubai may develop a sense of belonging to all of these countries. With Afropolitanism, such an individual can hold multiple national identities. One interviewee, Yemi, captured this dynamic: "I look at magazines and at what people are wearing in the streets in Africa [Lagos] and try to mix that with what is happening here in London, in Dalston. Creating something that is unique... It just feels very Afropolitan because it is not typical African fashion. I'm creating my own prints inspired by both cultures" (Ankobrey 2019, p. 340).

Afropolitanism encourages a multi-layered identity in which an African exists in the world as an African. An Afropolitan may draw from traditional African values while embracing modern, global perspectives on issues such as gender roles, human rights, and political participation. In this way, Afropolitanism leads to hybrid identities that both honour African roots and respond to the demands of an interconnected world.

Afropolitanism: Africans in the World

Afropolitanism provides a broader framework by which Africans can interact and live in the world without necessarily losing their Africanness. Although different from cosmopolitanism, it shares some similarities. Rajendra (2009) defines cosmopolitanism as "the belief in open-mindedness towards any culture, value, belief and nationalities. In fact, it shows some aspect of universalism, which includes acceptability of human dignity all over the world" (p. 65). A cosmopolitan is therefore a citizen of the world who owes no allegiance to any country and has no national identity.

The Afropolitan, on the other hand, is not a citizen of the world, but an African whose national identity is not bound by geographical boundaries or borders. An Afropolitan has a sense of belonging to some nation(s) while a cosmopolitan has no national identity. Wieke (2018) notes that "cosmopolitan scholars fail to recognise that one universalised standard of education creates a monolithic culture, without a capacity for innovation or ability to cultivate strong cultural identities" (p. 1).

Afropolitanism is deeply rooted within African experiences and histories, allowing individuals to navigate global spaces while maintaining strong connections to their African heritage. Mgbeadichie and Okoye (2021) note that in explaining Ndibe's experience, "Ndibe retains his Nigerianness and acquires the 'American citizenship status'. He is, as he calls himself, a 'Nigerian-American', one who is aware of his permanent Nigerian identity, which is his root, and a new position as an 'American' as well" (p. 30).

Mgbeadichie and Okoye (2021) further assert that

> Afropolitanism exposes an Afropolitan to multiple cultures, [but] the Afropolitan is always rooted in a single culture which is his root culture. He is a rigidly determined product of his African culture and irrevocably cast into his Africanness. Even despite rejecting their Africanness in a foreign land and accepting the culture of their host country, as some Afropolitans do, they are always cast back into their African culture by the people of the host nation. (p. 3)

Balakrishnan (2017) holds that while cosmopolitanism is "a form of belonging which [is] not local, yet not western," Afropolitanism differs from this in that "it advocates sinewy affinity to the local culture, heritage, and root" (p. 5). Afropolitanism embraces diverse cultures and identities, but places greater emphasis on African culture and heritage.

The Relationship Between Afropolitanism, Cosmopolitanism, and Citizenship

The relationship between Afropolitanism, cosmopolitanism, and citizenship is deeply interconnected, as all three concepts engage with questions of belonging, identity, and global participation, though they do so from different vantage points.

Cosmopolitanism is a philosophical and ethical idea that emphasises global citizenship—the belief that individuals belong to a single human community beyond national or cultural boundaries (Afolayan 2016). It values openness, universality, and moral responsibility toward all humans, regardless of origin. Afropolitanism, while sharing cosmopolitanism's global outlook, reinterprets it through an African lens (Mgbeadichie & Okoye 2021). Unlike traditional cosmopolitanism, which is often abstract and Western-centred (Wieke 2018), Afropolitanism grounds global belonging in African histories, cultures, and diasporic realities, demonstrating that African identity can be both globally connected and locally meaningful.

Citizenship, traditionally, refers to a legal and political status that ties individuals to a nation-state (Ji & Wang 2023). However, both cosmopolitanism and Afropolitanism challenge this restricted notion. Cosmopolitanism proposes a universal form of citizenship beyond the nation-state, while Afropolitanism redefines African citizenship as transnational and fluid—one that acknowledges multiple affiliations, cultural intersections, and the capacity to belong to both Africa and the world simultaneously. Basically, Afropolitanism can be seen as an African reinvention of cosmopolitanism, offering a more contextually grounded vision of global citizenship that not only transcends borders but also reclaims the agency and narratives of Africans in shaping global modernity.

Critiques and Limitations of Afropolitanism

Afropolitanism, like every theory and philosophy, has its shortcomings. It has been criticised on various grounds, chiefly for expressing the identity of elite Africans while failing to address the problem of identity for all Africans. Dabiri (2014) states:

> [W]hile Afropolitanism may appear to offer an alternative to the single story, we run the danger of this becoming the dominant narrative for African success. The traditional Afro-pessimistic narratives, while obsessed with poverty, denied the poor any voice. While Afropolitanism may go some way in redressing the balance concerning Africans speaking for themselves, the problem lies in the fact that we still don't hear the narratives of Africans who are not privileged. [...] While

> Afropolitans talk and talk about what it means to be young, cool and African, are many of them concerned with addressing the world beyond their own social realities, to the issues that concern other Africans?

Toivanen (2017) contends that "Selasi's formulation is problematic because of its elitist and identity/author/person-centred emphasis, [whereas] Achille Mbembe's account of Afropolitanism may appear more appealing and applicable for analytical purposes. For Mbembe, Afropolitanism denotes the processes of hybridisation and transculturation that all along have informed the construction of Africa and its identities" (pp. 189–205). Since Afropolitanism is a framework for the identity of Africans in the diaspora specifically, the critique that it does not suffice for the lived experience of all Africans does not fully apply.

Musila (2016) questions the phrase "Africans in the world" as used by Selasi, contending that "The very necessity of qualifying Africans' being in the world only makes sense when we assume that, ordinarily, Africans are not of the world" (p. 112). She further argues that Afropolitanism presents Africa in a negative light, noting that "We don't hear Europeans proclaim themselves 'Europolitans,' or Americans as 'Ameropolitans' " (Musila 2016, p. 112). This observation, though valid, fails to note that solutions are proposed when a problem is identified—and the problem of diaspora identity is precisely what Afropolitanism addresses.

Howell (2018) argues that Afropolitanism risks being "polished to the point of commercialisation as if the pessimistic associations of a whole continent have been 'botoxed out' in favour of a slimline version of identity" (p. 2), citing events like the 2011 V&A fashion show as evidence that Afropolitanism can be reduced to cultural commerce. However, as scholars like Mbembe, Gikandi, and Mgbeadichie and Okoye have demonstrated, Afropolitanism as a philosophical and analytical framework is not restricted to culture and fashion; it is a narration of the lived experience of Africans in the diaspora.

Conclusion

Afropolitanism emerges as a critical tool through which the complexities of African identity, citizenship, and belonging in an increasingly interconnected world can be understood. While traditional conceptions of citizenship and national identity have long been anchored in territoriality, lineage, and state recognition, Afropolitanism invites a re-examination of these frameworks in light of transnational mobility, cultural hybridity, and global interdependence. As Howell (2018) notes, it is "a useful analytical concept and lends itself to broader discussions concerning the positionality of Africa within the global sphere" (p. 2). The African subject is no longer confined to the geographic boundaries of the continent; instead, identity becomes fluid, negotiated, and constructed through global encounters and lived experiences that transcend place.

Afropolitanism is not without limitations. It does not claim to represent the experiences of all Africans, particularly those whose realities remain tied to local struggles of poverty, exclusion, and political instability. Rather, Afropolitanism reflects a subset of African identities—those of individuals who have traversed geographical, cultural, and ideological borders, and

who embody the intersection between local and global consciousness. Yet this limitation does not diminish its intellectual and philosophical value. On the contrary, it highlights the necessity of viewing Afropolitanism not as a totalising category but as a situated discourse, one that reveals how African identity can be reimagined through global participation without erasing local specificity.

By situating African identity within global modernity, Afropolitanism challenges the dichotomy between the West and the non-West, the local and the global, the traditional and the modern. It decentres the Western notion of cosmopolitanism and proposes an African-centred cosmopolitan ethic, one that recognises the agency of Africans in shaping the global narrative. In doing so, Afropolitanism redefines citizenship as more than a legal status or political belonging; it becomes an ethical and cultural practice rooted in mobility, hybridity, and multiplicity.

Afropolitanism provides a philosophical and analytical framework that expands our understanding of what it means to be African in a globalised world. It compels scholars, policymakers, and cultural thinkers to rethink the relationship between Africa and the world—not as one of dependency or opposition but of mutual constitution. Ultimately, Afropolitanism challenges us to envision an Africa that is both rooted and global, particular yet universal—a continent whose identity is not confined by geography but continually enriched by its engagement with the world.

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