# LEGACIES OF COLONIALITY AND RACIALIZATION: COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVES IN EUROPE

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**ABSTRACT**

This study looks at two fiction writers – Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie and Djaimilia Pereira de Almeida – from two apparently distinct geographies, in order to argue for epistemological connections across African diasporic communities from different geographies. I will be reading, in particular, the issue of race and phenotype features portrayed in two of their books, *That Hair* (2015; published in translations by Tin House in 2020) and *Americanah* (2013), in order to establish concerns raised by both writers which, one can argue, reflect the living communities from which they come and into which they circulate. Born in two different Western African countries, Nigeria and Angola respectively, both Almeida and Adichie are descendants of two distinct post-independence universes – one Anglophone, the other Lusophone – but, at the same time, similar. It is then my hypothesis that the Portuguese African diaspora shares more than diverges from other African diasporas elsewhere, being tied by epistemological and corporal aesthetic forms of resistance to ongoing forms of coloniality and racialization. In order to delve in the fictional world of both writers and understand their legacy of coloniality, I will use the concepts of Afropeans and Afropolitans developed by Johny Pitts, Achille Mbembe and Taiye Selasi, amongst others.

Keywords: Chimamanda Adichie; Djaimilia Pereira de Almeida; race; Afrolisbonites, Afropeans and Afropolitans.

**RESUMO**

Este estudo analisa duas escritoras – Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie e Djaimilia Pereira de Almeida – de duas geografias aparentemente distintas, a fim de argumentar sobre conexões epistemológicas entre comunidades da diáspora africana de diferentes geografias. Terei aqui em conta, em particular, a questão das características de raça e fenótipo retratadas em dois de seus livros, *That Hair* (2015; publicado em tradução pela Tin House em 2020) e *Americanah* (2013), a fim de estabelecer as preocupações levantadas por ambas as escritoras que, pode-se argumentar, são um reflexo das comunidades de onde vêm e nas quais circulam. Nascidas em dois países diferentes da África Ocidental, Nigéria e Angola, respectivamente, tanto Almeida como Adichie são

descendentes de dois universos pós-independência distintos – um anglófono, outro lusófono – mas, ao mesmo tempo, semelhantes. Argumento que a diáspora africana portuguesa compartilha mais do que diverge de outras diásporas africanas em outros lugares, estando ligada por formas epistemológicas e estéticas corporais de resistência a formas em curso de colonialidade e racialização. De forma a mergulhar no mundo ficcional das duas escritoras e compreender o seu legado de colonialidade, utilizarei os conceitos de *afropeans* e *afropolitans* desenvolvidos por Johny Pitts, Achille Mbembe e Taiye Selasi, entre outros.

## Introduction

I would like to start this article in an unconventional way, i.e., with an anecdote. Not very long ago, I was participating in a conference in Portugal and I mentioned in passing that I believed that the experiences portrayed in the fiction of several new generations of African authors living, studying, and writing as members of recent postcolonial waves of the African Diaspora in Europe and the United States shared many points of contact. Ranging from Nigerians writing in the U.S., to Somalians in Great Britain, to Kenyan writers with study experiences abroad, or Angolans living in Portugal, just to mention a few examples, these African or Afro-descendant writers often share common experiences in spaces structured by white supremacy and coloniality. My assertion was dismissed with a refusal: I could not compare the experiences of Africans or Afro-descendants in Europe with those in the U.S. or anywhere else in the world. This study is thus inspired by such rebuttal.

By looking at two writers – Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie and Djaimilia Pereira de Almeida – from two apparently distinct geographies, it is my aim to argue for epistemological connections across African diasporic communities from different geographies, as these face similar quotidian and institutional challenges in Eurocentric spaces. I will be reading, in particular, one issue portrayed in two of their books, *That Hair* (2015; published in translations by Tin House in 2020) and *Americanah* (2013), i.e., the question of race and phenotype features, in order to establish concerns raised by both writers which, one can say, are a reflection of the living communities from which they come and into which they circulate. Their fictional work portrays experiences of radical violence and exclusion which are inherent to the process of modernity (Sousa Ribeiro 2016: 45) and could be interpreted as a contribution to the critique of the pitfalls of that same modernity "assente numa ideologia de dominação essencialmente racista"[1] (Sousa Ribeiro 2016: 48). As Maria Paula Meneses affirms, "[u]ma das características da modernidade nortecêntrica consiste na criação e reforço permanente de uma hierarquia intelectual, na qual as tradições culturais e intelectuais do Norte global são impostas como o cânone, autodefinidas como superiores porque mais desenvolvidas"[2] (Meneses 2021: 1069). Adichie and Almeida can thus

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[1] "based on an essentially racist ideology of domination".

[2] "one of the characteristics of north-centric modernity is the creation and permanent

break the boundaries of intellectual hierarchy of the north-centric modernity by disputing and destabilizing the concept of race which lies at its core.

Both Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie and Djaimilia Pereira de Almeida are part of a generation of 21st century African or Afro-descendant writers living in the diaspora, way from Africa who, as pointed out by Margarida Calafate Ribeiro, "se reafirmam] [...] [n]uma linha literária de abrangência europeia – *afropean* [...] ou *afropolitan* [...] de identidades herdeiras dos processos coloniais"[1] (Ribeiro 2019: 2). I will further discuss these terms used by Calafate Ribeiro later on in this article. For now, it should suffice to mention that born in two different Western African countries, Nigeria and Angola respectively, both Almeida and Adichie emerge from two distinct post-independence universes – one Anglophone, the other Lusophone – but, at the same time, similar in their own postcolonial relationships to late global capital and the societal consequences thereof. It is then my hypothesis that the Portuguese African diaspora shares more than diverges from other African diasporas elsewhere since both books discussed here portray legacies of coloniality and racialization.

In a recent study on Afro-diasporic communities, Sheila Khan affirms that Portugal received "outros rostos, outras vidas com outras vivências, outras narrativas e outros modos de estar e ser"[2], and "estas outras presenças humanas permanecem, ainda, socialmente ignoradas e marginalizadas não obstante a existência de uma profilaxia politicamente correcta de Portugal como país 'lusotropicalista' e, como tal, multicultural" ["and these other human presences continue to be, nonetheless, socially ignored and marginalized despite the existence of a politically correct profilaxis of Portugal as a 'Lusotropicalist" and, as such, multicultural country" (Khan 2015: 42-43). In relation to the deficit of attention toward everything that came from the former colonies, Khan states that:

> [that] défice … resulta de uma certa tendência portuguesa de não saber encarar e aceitar o Outro como seu próximo e, de um certo modo, como sua parcela histórica, social e cultural, pois, em muitos aspectos como observara Eduardo

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reinforcement of an intellectual hierarchy, in which the cultural and intellectual traditions of the global North are imposed as the canon, self-defined as superior because they are more developed".

[1] "reaffirm themselves within a literary trajectory of European coverage – *afropean* [...] or *afropolitan* [...] of identities that have inherited colonial processes".

[2] "other faces, other lives with other experiences, other narratives and other modes of being".

Lourenço (2001), esquecemo-nos do passado, quisemos isso sim cortar com o nosso passado africano e, imediatamente, dentro dessa desmedida de imaginação de centro nos direcionarmos para um outro centro de auto-representação e de identificação, que se espraiou e se concentrou no horizonte europeu.

[(that) deficit... stems from a certain Portuguese tendency of not knowing how to face and accept the Other as kin and, in a certain way, as part of its social and cultural history. In many regards, as Eduardo Lourenço (2001) observes, we forget the past, wanting to break from our African past and immediately within that imaginary excess, we direct ourselves toward another center of self-representation and identification that extended itself upon the European horizon] (Khan 2015: 76-77)

That effort to cut ties with the African past after the independence of the African colonies, as stressed by Khan, is apparently seamless and it did not produce the expected results because of the obvious impossibility to stop the flow of people coming to and from Africa. Africans and their descendants living in Portuguese territory are still seen as "the others." Even though one can argue that Portugal has had a relatively stable African migration as part of the broader African Diaspora for the past fifty years, the new generations of Afro-Portuguese still have disadvantages in relation to their Portuguese counterparts: they are still, for the most part, relegated to precarious labor, engaging in meager occupations, and facing instability of work conditions; they have low representation at the university level; the levels of poverty in their community are high, living literally at the margins of society, as the "famous" Cape Verdean "bairro" Cova da Moura, in the outskirts of Lisbon, easily attests. Isabel Castro Henriques emphasizes this issue in the following manner:

the strength of secular prejudice reemerges through the resurrection of old, absurd, and obsolete formulas and representations. These formulas and representations reinforce, in the context of new laws and new problems inherent to the globalization that formatted the world beginning with the 1980s, innumerable acts of racial and social discrimination facing the many African immigrants who are seeking within Europe a place for survival and a new way of life. (2012: 99)

The realities faced by Africans in their host countries have changed, but not so considerably that the picture is much brighter, as will be further observed.

### 1. Afrolisbonites, Afropeans and Afropolitans

In the 1980s, black Kitttian-British Caryl Phillips begins a journey through Europe that results in his first book controversially titled *The European Tribe* (1987). This was not the common touristic travel narrative since it had a particular objective, as stated by the author: "if I was going to continue to live in Britain, how was I to reconcile the contradiction of feeling British, while being constantly told in many subtle and unsubtle ways that I did not belong" (Phillips 1987: 9). During his journey, he discovers a Europe that he compares to and through a lexicon of otherness projected by colonizers and white Europeans onto Africa and Africans, *i.e.*, a savage land full of primitive and tribalistic people. In Phillips's words, the troubles, conflicts, ethnic cleansings and so forth that he observed, "[...] leads me to the conclusion that the very same patterns of conflict and brutality which have troubled, and continues to trouble, the Third World are alive and very much part of life in 'darkest' Europe" (Phillips 1987: 132). His point is a straightforward one: "Europeans are human beings. They are subject to the same insecurities, the same inability to forget, the same prejudices, the same disturbing nationalism, the same cruelties, as any other people" (Phillips 1987: 132). When it comes to racial prejudice and visibility of black people in the "civilized" continent, thirteen years after his travelings, Phillips sees changes, nonetheless, that don't necessarily mean an improvement in the lives of Africans, African-descendants, or immigrants in Europe. As he states:

> [...] it remains a fact that the problem and difficulties persist across the breadth of the continent, some of which appear to be intractable. The continued and overwhelming evidence of both overt and covert racism has led many – including myself – to speculate as to just how deeply Europe is wedded to inequity. (1987: 131)

Another Afro-British writer who has speculated about the same issue is Johny Pitts, a sort of mentee of Phillips's who, belonging to a different generation and almost four decades after Phillips's book, also embarks on a journey of discovery of black Europe. It is certainly no coincidence that the assumptions made by Phillips of the intractability of racism in the continent have led Pitts to a voyage of observation across Europe in order to make sense of his own double identity. The Sheffield-born son of a white English mother and African American father spent five months on the road in search of Africa

in Europe, leading to his book, *Afropean: Notes from Black Europe* (2019). He was also searching for his "tribe" and a sense of belonging by claiming membership of a collective black community in Europe that offers a sense of belonging more nourishing than the reductive nationalism of individual European countries. Pitts makes a breakthrough by using the concept "Afropean" which rejects an identity that is never absolute or monolithic, and that includes a myriad of experiences, and which comes, at the same time, from the need to affirm an identity that is both European and African. "Afropean," according to Pitts, "had to build a bridge over that diving fence that says whether you're in or out and form some sort of informal cultural coalition" (Pitts 2019: 5). This also means that Pitts choses "Afropean" as "a potentially progressive self-identifier (rather than 'European') because there is something about the nature of Europe that destroys by assimilation [...]" (Pitts 2019: 24). As he travels across Europe, his convictions about how race and African diasporas are perceived in the continent become more of a clear reality:

> Various tempos reveal different realities, and very often Europe's black workforce inhabits the liminal terrain I'd just experience, as cleaners, taxi drivers, porters, security guards, ticket sellers and nightclub bouncers; they are there and not there. I knew of this world, of course; I'd been part of it in the past but had never before thought of it as an *invisible w*orld through which white Europe blithely passes without ever really seeing. (2019: 34)

Resembling Phillips's Europe, Pitts's nevertheless is not the same one any longer since historicity is now a defining element of its African diasporas and "Afropeans" reclaim a new "configuration of ideas, connected to Africa and Europe but transcending both" (Pitts 2019: 59). Whereas in *The European Tribe*, Phillips reversed the usual narrative of the white explorer in the "developing world" by dissecting the malaise at the heart of Europe and treating white Europeans as anthropologically interesting, Pitts's focus, moreover, is on previously white spaces now occupied by black people. As Pitts remarks,

> Those second-, third- and fourth-generation faces of new multicultural Europe; sons and daughters of post-colonialism, or perhaps decolonialism. They have been educated by Europe, paid taxes and took part in society yet were also often told to go home, that they didn't belong, didn't look right (2019: 59).

Whereas Phillips desire for Europe at the dawning of the twenty-first century would be for European centres to "assume responsibility of identifying themselves as places where difference is not only tolerated, but encouraged" (Phillips 1987: 133), Pitts claims that Europe's black diaspora needs "connection and collaboration to create a climate that can sustain plurality and produce a louder voice when facing racism" (Pitts 2019: 62). These aspirations are not mutually exclusive and together they claim an interplay between black and European cultures, something that Pitts called an "utopian vision of a black European experience" (Pitts 2019: 4). As he concludes, "If the West continues to vilify or close its eyes to global poverty, gross inequality and the necessary environmental and economic migrations currently taking place, Cova da Moura is what most of Europe may look like soon enough" (Pitts 2019: 373). As we will see later on in my reading, Afrolisbonites are also starting to reclaim an identity that is no longer hyphenated, reclaiming a place for themselves which is at the same time *in* and *of* Lisbon, *in* and *of* Portugal, *in* and *of* Europe, and *in* and *of* the world.

As we look into the global African world, we arrive at the term "Afropolitanism," and one could argue that "Afropean" is a derivation from it applied specifically to Europe given its obvious similarities in a smaller context, since there is no Europe without Africa "and there is no Africa that is not part of it", to adapt Mbembe's concept. Achille Mbembe advanced this concept to describe the position of Africa and Africans in the global world. It resembles the older Panafricanism ideology, but it distances itself from it by defining being an "African" in explicitly continent-wide and multiracial terms and rejecting pretensions to victimhood.[1] As Mbembe explains to Sarah Balakrishnan in an interview,

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[1] Historically, Pan-Africanism takes the shape of a political or cultural movement. Pan-Africanism can be broadly defined as the sentiment that people of African descent have a great deal in common, a fact that deserves notice and celebration, envisioning, at the same time, a unified African nation that encapsulates all people from Africa. Pan-Africanist ideas began to circulate in the mid-19th century in the United States. The early Pan-Africanist voices emphasized the commonalities between Africans and Black people in the United States. W.E.B. Du Bois is considered the father of modern Pan-Africanism and amongst other important names of Pan-African thinkers we can include, Marcus Garvey, C.L.R. James, Léopold Senghor and Aimé Césaire, to name a few. By the late 1940s the African American intellectual leadership of the movement receded, with Africans now taking the lead. The movement has taken different forms and perhaps the most-prominent current of ideas that can be called Pan-Africanist has been the Afrocentric movement in the United Sates. Calls for Pan-Africanism can still be heard in the United States at the turn of the 21st century, but by now the movement has come to stand for the unity of the countries on the African continent, especially sub-Saharan Africa.

> Afopolitanism refers to a way – the many ways – in which Africans, or people of African origin, understand themselves as being part of the world rather than being apart. [...] Afropolitanism is a name for undertaking a critical reflection on the many ways in which, in fact, there is no world without Africa and there is no Africa that is not part of it (Balakrishnan 2016: 29).

Mbembe have also attempted to define Afropolitanism from a more cultural or artistic perspective. In *Africa Remix: Contemporary Art of a Continent* (2007), he affirms that

> 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 (2007: 28-29).

The concept was widely disseminated by Nigerian-Ghanaian writer Taiye Selasi in her famous essay "Bye-Bye Babar, or "Who is an afropolitan?" in 2005. In this seminal essay she explores the term "Afropolitanism," a term that she concurs as expressing Africans or African descendants "not being citizens but Africans of the world" (n/p). Her need to disseminate the term came from her own experience and from the sense of helplessness she feels when asked where she is from: Selasi was born in London, raised in Boston and studied at Yale and Oxford Universities. The Africans who immigrated between 1960 and 1975 had children overseas and Selasi, like many others, is a product of that immigration. As she explains,

> What distinguishes this lot and its like (in the West and at home) is a willingness to complicate Africa – namely, to engage with, critique, and celebrate the parts of Africa that mean most to them. Perhaps what most typifies the 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 (2005: n/p).

To belong to a generation that is composed of different nationalities, countries, cultures – diasporic individuals who blend "London fashion, New

York jargon, African ethics and academic successes may sound "very cool," or as Selasi parodies in her essay: 'aren't-we-the-coolest-damn-people-on-earth?' (Selasi 2005: n/p). Nevertheless, she recognizes that "most Afropolitans could serve Africa better in Africa than at Medicine Bar on Thursdays" (Selasi 2005: n/p). Selasi thus sees Afropolitans as not having a rooted identity, but rather as possessing a fluid one. Afropolitans are characterized by careers, fashion, ethnicity, multilingualism, and self-expression as well as a connection with one country in Africa and an industrialized country in the West.

On the other hand, Gikandi asserts that, "[t]o be Afropolitan is to be connected to knowable African communities, nations, and traditions; (…) to live a life divided across cultures, languages and states. It is to embrace and celebrate a state of cultural hybridity – to be of Africa and of other worlds at the same time" (2010: 11).

Together, these three voices – Mbembe, Selasi and Gikandi – contribute to a better and more precisely defined perspective of Afropolitanism, which can be described as involving Africans who have lived or are living outside of the African continent, and who can call multiple places "home." Afropolitans embody multiple points of cultural reference and may be considered as unrooted Africans. In spite of this geographical movement, Afropolitan identity is formed at the axis of at least three points, "national, racial, cultural – with subtle tensions in between" (Selasi 2005: n/p). While these might seem like static identity markers, the relationality and interplay between the three implies that identity is an unstable process of becoming. The same could be said for Afropeans, an identifier that encompasses fluidity and avoids rigidity. In a century where mass migrations and the dispersion of people throughout the world is one of its main and defining issues, it does not come as a surprise that migration and the economic, social, and cultural factors attached to this geographical movement become a topic in contemporary African literature. With an eye in Europe or in the United States and another in Africa, a new generation of African or Afro-descendant writers are unified by their choice of literary themes which reflect contemporary concerns with the world they live in and which affect their communities either back home or in their new home society. One of these issues is race and the way one is perceived and treated when living outside of Africa.

## 2. Two sides of the same story: Adichie and Almeida

Even though Adichie has already acquired an international reputation as the author of an extensive literary oeuvre, Almeida has also, and since the publication of her first book *Esse Cabelo* in 2015, been conquering a space of national and international acclamation with the attribution of the Oceanos 2019 award and the translation to English of *Esse Cabelo* by the American publisher Tin House in 2020. Tori L. Tharps, in a *New York Times* critical review, affirms that "'That Hair' contains themes that will be recognizable to so many readers, regardless of their mother tongue, who are wrestling with their own mixed-race experience today – anyone who is attempting to make sense of hair texture, skin color and family ties that cannot fit into little blue census boxes. Despite the label of fiction, Mila's struggle in "That Hair" is all too real" (Tharps 2020: n/p). Adichie and Almeida share in their fictional writing notable similarities despite their mother tongue, as noted by Tharps. One of these is their experience as African women living outside of their own countries and their perceptions and experiences in terms of race and gender. One could argue that body, hair, race are among the most insistent presences in the books of both writers, issues with which they had to grapple with in their own experiences as Africans living outside of Africa. Quoting Margarida Calafate Ribeiro, their books

> são narrativas ficcionais de lastro autobiográfico de identificação dos seus próprios sujeitos enquanto minorias de uma comunidade mais vasta e cujas famílias têm as vidas atravessadas por percursos de emigração, fuga ou separação, ou por fenómenos políticos de grande escala, como guerras ou a descololização[1] (Ribeiro 2020: 293).

The intertextuality that can be observed in the works of both writers could also be traced to the readings of the younger Almeida who confesses in an interview to Marta Lança that she had begun to read African writers from other languages: "Mais recentemente, [...] a ler escritores africanos de outras línguas, da Nigéria, da África do Sul, da Zâmbia"[2] (Lança 2015: n/p). In the

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[1] "are fictional narratives of autobiographical ballast of identification of their own subjects as minorities of a wider community and whose families have their lives traversed by emigration, flight or separation paths, or by large-scale political phenomena, such as wars or decolonization".

[2] "More recently, [...] reading African writers of other languages, from Nigeria, South Africa, Zambia".

same interview she affirms that those readings give her a sense of familiarity with those other African universes: "Foi como se estivesse a chegar a casa. É como perceber que de repente o nosso corpo está a mudar ou o rapaz a mudar de voz. Ou que a criança já chega ao balcão da pastelaria"[1] (Lança 2015: n/p).

*Americanah* as well as *Esse Cabelo* dissect modern culture unveiling layers of racism and sexism. Both Ifemelu in *Americanah* and Mila in *That Hair* reveal social norms that inhibit the lives of young women, in particular Afro-Americans/Portuguese and Africans in Portugal and in the United States and their battle with issues of race, issues that affect their daily lives not only in the host countries, but also in Nigeria or Angola. Both books broach, among other related topics, the racial aesthetic politics of spaces structured by white supremacy. This presents quotidian and epistemological challenges that these women have to overcome, since the expectation is not to display their natural hair, but straighten it with chemicals in order to fit the "white ideal" of North American and European spaces, to be taken seriously in job interviews or as professional women. Concomitantly, both books make us reflect on the misrepresentation of black women and the need for a better understanding of their multifaceted, differing, and common experiences at the intersection of anti-black racism and white patriarchal power. Confronted by *Lança*'s question regarding internalized racism via hair, Almeida states:

> Sempre tive uma relação complicada com o cabelo. Não sabia como tratá-lo, nem como lidar com o que me era natural. A verdade é que ressentia o cabelo, sem que me tenha atirado para o lado oposto: nunca tive longos cabelos desfrisados, usei muito o cabelo rapado. Era como se não existisse, e quando me lembrei dele fiz tudo para o esquecer. Quando explico que acordei para certas coisas das quais passei ao lado, o cabelo é uma delas. Involuntariamente, estava sob uma amnésia a respeito não só de coisas que têm a ver com o lugar onde pertenço mas também se estendia às lembranças exteriores disso. Hoje este esquecimento parece-me uma circunstância nefasta que corresponde, ao mesmo tempo, a um privilégio: não fui recordada diariamente, com hostilidade, de que era diferente. Simultaneamente, no entanto, acredito que seria outra pessoa se não tivesse passado pela experiência de viver a minha natureza como qualquer coisa de hostil.[2] (Lança 2015: n/p).

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[1] "It was as if I were arriving home. It is like understanding that our bodies suddenly change or a boy's voice changing. Or like the child that can now reach the counter of the bakery".

[2] "I have always had a complicated relationship with my hair. I did not know how to

In an interview, Adichie's words echo those of Almeida when asked about her relationship with hair, revealing that the condition of African women, even being of a high educational and social level, shares a global commonality without geographic boarders:

> I don't think we have enough time to talk about this. It's interesting because I can say very excitedly now that I absolutely love my hair and I wouldn't change it. But, it's a relationship that has its ups and downs. There are times when I just don't have the time for my hair and I let it be a matted mess. And there are times when I think of my hair as this glorious gift from God in all of its kinkiness. There are times when it's frustrating and I go through a phase of having such a difficult time keeping the damn hair moisturized – it's utter frustration. And there are other times when I'm having a really good day with my hair. I'm still looking for the perfect hair moisturizer. (Weatherford 2016: n/p).

In the novels chosen here, both writers portray female characters who through their experiences with hair and, by extension, race, show this common place for women of African origin independently of the place where they are living – in Europe or the United States.

Ifemelu, a young Nigerian woman living in Princeton, New Jersey, while studying at Princeton, must travel to another town to get her hair braided properly. She likes Princeton, but its population is mostly white and so there are no hairdressers there who know how to braid her hair:

> But she did not like that she had to go to Trenton to braid her hair. It was unreasonable to expect a braiding salon in Princeton – the few black locals she had seen were so light-skinned and lank-haired she could not imagine them wearing braids – and yet as she waited at Princeton Junction station for the train, on an afternoon ablaze with heat, she wondered why there *was* no place where she could go braid her hair. (Adichie 2013: 3-4)

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treat it, nor how to deal with what was natural for me. The truth is that I resented my hair, without having gone as far as straightening it, I instead shaved it often. It was as if it did not exist, and whenever I was reminded of it, I did all I could to forget it again. When I talk about awakening to certain things I had ignored, my hair was one of them. Involuntarily, I was under a sort of amnesia regarding not only things that have to do with where I belong, but this amnesia also extended to memories beyond those. Today, this forgetting appears to me as a nefarious circumstance that corresponds, at the same time, to a privilege: I was not reminded everyday, with hostility, that I was different. At the same time, though, I believe I would be a different person if I had not had the experience of living my truth as something hostile".

She gets on the train and looks around at the passengers, wondering if they would make good subjects for the lifestyle blog she used to run, which was called "Raceteenth or Various Observations About American Blacks (Those Formerly Known as Negroes) by a Non-American Black." She used to interview random people she encountered on public transportation about racial issues and their opinions. Much of *Americanah*'s first part takes place as Ifemelu sits in a salon getting her hair braided. For Ifemelu personally, her hair represents her struggle for confidence and an identity as both a Nigerian immigrant and as a black American. In Nigeria, Ifemelu always braided her hair, but when she comes to America, she learns that she is supposed to relax (straighten) her hair with chemicals or else people will think she is unprofessional. She does so and feels that a part of herself has died with her hair's natural curl. Thus, the cultural pressure for black women like Ifemelu to straighten, dye, or somehow make their hair adhere to white standards of gendered respectability becomes a symbol of the racism inherent in American culture and indicative of its larger racial capitalist structures.

By the same token, in *That Hair*, Almeida tells the story of Mila and that of her hair which besides being a complex individual story is also a collective one of Portuguese nationality and integration of African immigrants and people of African descent in Portugal. As the protagonist mentions: "A verdade é que a história do meu cabelo crespo cruza a história de pelo menos dois países e, panoramicamente, a história indirecta da relação entre vários continentes: uma geopolítica"[1] (Almeida 2015: 13). The biography of Mila's hair takes the reader on a journey of understanding a country that over the centuries has been silencing and marginalizing stories of "black hair" and their epistemologies who live within its borders. Mila's story has the particularity of being a feminine body that has grown up and lived with the Portuguese side of her family and spent the summers in Angola visiting her African mother. Nonetheless, the materiality of her body keeps her away from belonging to a country that denies her blackness and prefers a false image of whiteness. Consequently, Mila's Africa is no more than an absence or a remnant:

> A casa assombrada que é todo o cabeleireiro para a rapariga que sou é muitas vezes o que me sobra de África e da história da dignidade dos meus antepassados. Sobra-me, porém, em lamento e escovadelas reparadoras, regressada

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[1] "The truth is that the story of my kinky hair traverses the story of at least two countries and, more broadly, the indirect history of the relationship between various continents: a geopolitical story".

a casa do «salão», como diz a minha mãe, e em não levar demasiado a mal o tra-
balho destas cabeleireiras cuja implacabilidade e incompetência nunca consegui
decidir-me a confrontar. Tudo aquilo com que posso contar é com catálogo de
salões, com a sua história de transformações étnicas no Portugal que me calhou
[...][1] (Almeida 2015: 14-15).

The story of Mila's hair is also the history of the status of African
women and non-white immigrants in Portugal. Through one apparently
simple characterizing aspect of physical appearance a whole history emerges,
a history of human beings that occupy the Portuguese national space, but
because they are physically and epistemically othered in the discursive matrix
of capital and white supremacy, are relegated to invisibility or caricature.

Both writers also portray experiences encapsulated in the term post-
memory with race at the core of a continuum of processes of colonization
based on social hierarchies that mark the western modernity. The semi-
autobiographical stories that they convey are not only engraved in the
memory of past generations of colonized Africans, but are still a reality
in the lives of their descendants. Memories and post-memories are here
intertwined, symbolizing a past that is no more than also a present. In this
sense, the role of art is fundamental to give the readers access to different
forms of interpreting reality and the space to reflect on past memories that
may differ from their own. As Sheila Khan asserts,

...a arte, na amplitude de seu alcance, permite-nos entrar em lugares que de
outra maneira o estatuto do real não permite, entre várias das suas dimensões
densas e complexas, como a retórica do multiculturalismo, que, por vezes,
assume uma máscara que tende a esconder, manipular e obscurecer realidades
humanas em constante desassossego, insegurança social, desterro e solidão[2]
(Khan 2021: 128).

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[1] "The haunted house that is all hair salons for the girl I am is often what is left to
me of Africa and the history of dignity of my ancestors. What is left, though, in lament and
shaving brushes, returning home from the "salon," as my mother says, and not taking too
much offense to the work of these hairdressers whose relentlessness and incompetence I
could never confront. All that I can count on is a catalog of salons, with its history of ethnic
transformations in the Portugal that befell me [...]".

[2] "... art, in the breadth of its reach, allows us to enter places that the statute of
the real does not otherwise allow, among several of its dense and complex dimensions,
such as the rhetoric of multiculturalism, which sometimes assumes a mask that tends to
hide, manipulate and obscure human realities in constant unrest, social insecurity, exile and
loneliness".

As I hope that I have been able to show, parallels and continuities exist between the two novels in regard to the proposed themes as well as between those striving to find a better way to make sense of their hyphenated identity in Europe or in the United States through the use of a continuum between past and present. Using either Afropolitanism or Afropeinism, their stories and experiences have more in common than might be evident from a simple reading. If we believe that difference is something inescapable, we need to inquire what is common in order to build solidarities in the ongoing struggle against global white supremacy and coloniality. As Jack Taylor reminds us, "If we follow the more culturally grounded notion of Afropolitanism advanced by Gikandi and focus on how identity is structured and shaped across cultures, nations, languages, and racial identification, then these similarities begin to surface" (2019: 72). And if we carefully read Johny Pitts' words that "racism and prejudice are cages – a prison sentence alienating those who hold these attitudes from the beautiful diversity of the world" (Pitts 2019: 50), then we might have a chance of having African diasporas fully integrated in their host countries, and a better chance of solidarity around the world.

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