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**The Afropolitan Experience in  
Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie and Igiaba  
Scego: a Comparative Study**

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# The Afropolitan Experience in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie and Igiaba Scego: a Comparative Study

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## Introduction

The aim of my work is to present an articulated comparison between two contemporary authors who both belong to the new generation of African writers called Afropolitan.

In the first chapter, I start from defining the term *Afropolitanism*, exploring its origins and its main features (Selasi, 2005); Afropolitan culture is linked with the idea of ethnic fusion and cultural hybridity and then the concept of ethnic group is clarified; furthermore, Afropolitan culture requires a redefinition of the term home because of the fact that its subjects do not belong to a single geography: in-betweenness and multilingualism appear as typical elements of Afropolitan subjects whose identity generates in a space that is ambivalent and contradictory; then, African context is taken into account as a dynamic entity characterized by multiplicity, diversity and interconnections since pre-colonial time, according to Mbembe's theorization of the concept of Afropolitanism (2007); although Selasi stresses that Afropolitan culture is temporally located in recent years, both views agree in saying that the idea of Africa portrayed by Afropolitan culture is that of a complex organism whose subjects are active and they are responsible for the formation of cultural bridges between nations. Then, the following section focuses on relations that exist between Afropolitanism and other two concepts: transnationalism (Bauböck, Faist, 2010) and diaspora (Cohen, 2008), finally highlighting the importance of agency to avoid stereotypical representations of Africa.

Moreover, the second chapter concentrates on the authors' backgrounds by analyzing the contexts they come from: Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie is a Nigerian writer who moved to the USA (University of Oklahoma, 2006), while Igiaba Scego is an Italian writer of Somali origins (Scego, 2013). They are both involved in the experience of being in-between two worlds, a condition which emerges in their novels; in this chapter, the presence of historical and contextual references is researched within novels, particularly, I will refer to Adichie's *Americanah* (2013) and Scego's *Adua* (2015).

In effect, the third chapter begins with an excursus that concentrates on the common themes between these two novels, analyzed in comparison: sensory feelings appear as important elements for the Afropolitan experience; the idea of home is redefined and gender is considered as a significant factor in determining Afropolitan migrant's

experience; in this occasion, body assumes a central role and, during the process of Afropolitan identity formation, diasporic subjects' awareness of their need of a hybrid identity frees them from social and cultural constraints; the Afropolitan experience lived by diasporic subjects is also shaped by the presence of technologies that represent one of the fundamental pillars of contemporary global society; I finally provide a conclusive overview of this third chapter, paying attention to some structural elements that emerge both in *Americanah* and in *Adua*, represented by frame narratives inserted within the narration (Fludernik, 2009).

Then, the fourth chapter takes into account other works written by these authors, Adichie's collection of short stories *The Thing Around Your Neck* (2009) is observed in comparison with *Adua* and particularly its first section provides an analysis of two characters who share many common points: Nnamabia is the male protagonist of Adichie's short story *Cell One*, that belongs to the collection *The Thing Around Your Neck* (2009) while Zoppe is the *Adua*'s father in Scego's memoir *Adua* (2015); both of them experience situation of violence and humiliation that prevent them from developing a hybrid identity, on the contrary, the result of this shock is the subjects' alienation. Finally, the second section of the fourth chapter focuses on the similarities between Scego's *La mia casa è dove sono* (2012) and Adichie's *Americanah* (2013). The major theme shared by these novels is the condition of in-betweenness lived by Afropolitan subjects, whose hybrid identity is required in contemporary society; this condition is linked with the idea of collective memory that is a fundamental element for the preservation of diasporic communities' past, that has to be both collected and remembered, rebuilt. Then, the idea of belonging to a place is connected with principles that regulate citizenship; furthermore, a parallel is drawn between the relationship that correlates Africa, America and Europe. The need of remembering the past of a diasporic community stands out from Adichie's character of Dike, whose reaction to American society is extreme and it brings him to an attempted suicide, determined by his feeling without a conscious knowledge of his roots; then, the solution appears to be able to build hybrid identities as Scego's idea of completing her own personal map of Mogadiscio demonstrates; it represents both her awareness of being an hybrid subject and the consciousness of an identity that is not rigid. Moreover, heterogeneity within members of the diasporic group emerges by the portrait of Scego's family.

Then, this section proceeds with the analysis of Adichie's *Americanah* (2013) and Scego's *La mia casa è dove sono* (2012); it reflects on the authors' choice of languages, on the figure of mothers and, finally, it observes the representation of metropolitan spaces in connections with characters' life experiences.

Therefore, a comparative study of these two authors is useful to show how Afropolitanism is a concrete reality: although Adichie and Scego belong to different backgrounds and countries, they both touch current global issues like immigration, discrimination, job-related problems, feminist matters, keeping a connection with their African origins. The choice of Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie and Igiaba Scego has been determined by my desire to deal with the concept of Afropolitanism not only on a global level but also in the European context, in order to show that not only America, but also Italy, is involved in this globally-spread phenomenon.

## 1. Afropolitanism

### 1.1. Origins of the term

“We are Afropolitan: not citizens but Africans of the world” states Taiye Selasi<sup>1</sup> (2005, 2) in her essay *Bye-Bye, Barbar (Or: What is an Afropolitan?)* published on the *LiP* magazine. These words effectively condense the meaning of the term *Afropolitanism*. This concept which emerges from Selasi’s essay was theorized in 2007 by Mbembe; according to him, it is used to both describe a new literary trend of African fiction and rethink the idea of Africanness strictly related to the *cosmopolitan*<sup>2</sup> 21<sup>st</sup> century society. This term is essential in dealing with contemporary African fiction, because it covers a central position in the discussion of significant matters “at the centre of new African literatures in Europhone and Afrophone languages being produced by a new generation of writers for a new time and a new century.” (Makokha, 2010, 21).

Starting from Selasi’s essay, it is possible to point out the main features of this concept. In fact, Selasi (2005) talks about *ethnic fusion*, which characterizes the opening scene of her article: a group of brown-skinned people dancing in London on Thursday night. Selasi identifies as Afropolitan those young African migrants of second generation, whose parents left the African continent between 1960 and 1975 and moved to the West: therefore, the Afropolitan subject is a *cultural hybrid*, because of his/her life divided across cultures and countries (Selasi, 2005). Moreover, Selasi’s choice of the adjective *ethnic* is significant because it deals with the issue of human diversity, which is an integral part of today’s plural society: the collective identity of a group is taken into account without employing the term *race*, which otherwise would imply the existence of fixed categories (Bassi, 2014). In effect, the term *ethnicity* describes “the human variation in terms of culture, tradition, language, social patterns and ancestry” (Ashcroft, Griffiths, Tiffin, 2007, 75), and it represents a combination of traits shared by a group of people, the so called *ethnic group* (Ibid.). The Afropolitan subjects therefore “belong to no single

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<sup>1</sup> Taiye Selasi, previously known as Taiye Tuakli-Wosornu, coined the term *Afropolitan* (Straub, 2016, pp.391-394).

<sup>2</sup> *Cosmopolitanism* is a concept whose ancient origins date back to the Ancient Greece society; it derives from the Greek *kosmopolitês* which literally means “citizen of the world” (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy). This term is contained in the word Afropolitanism, which thus connects the African identity with the entire world society, underlying the fluidity which characterises the concept of Africanness today (Ledent and Tunca, 2014, 7).

geography but feel at home in many.” (Selasi, 2005): generally, they live and work in cities around the world, outside the African continent, but they still have a connection with it because of their families; the cultural hybridity implied in the term Afropolitan requires a redefinition of the idea of *home* which does not relate only to their African roots but also to the culture of the country where they spend their life (Gikandi, 2010, 10). As Selasi (2005) writes, “‘Home’ for them is many things: where their parents are from, where they spend their vacations, where they went to school, where they meet old friends, where they live (or live this year)”.

Furthermore, the Afropolitan subject is multilingual, which means that he/she is able not only to speak English and other European languages but also to understand African dialects and *urban vernaculars*<sup>3</sup> (Selasi, 2005).

The condition of being in-between languages, cultures and countries, typical of the globally spread phenomenon of Afropolitanism, is perceived positively: the state of hybridity is regarded as an opportunity to reformulate a richer identity and culture (Gikandi, 2010, 10). Because of its relevance, an explanation of the term *hybridity* itself is needed; according to Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin (2007, 108-109) this concept, which is severally used in discussing post-colonial matters, represents an empowering feature of cultural identity which generates itself in a space which is, according to Bhabha (1994, 160) *ambivalent* and contradictory. Bhabha identifies this space with the colonial and postcolonial environment affected by the colonial power: the process of hybridization is the result of this kind of oppressive power. However, Mbembe (2007, 27) argues that this productive space of ambivalence is independent from the colonialism: it has instead a pre-colonial nature because Africa has always been involved in population movements both as a destination and as a departure point. Individuals coming from different societies brought with them their own “languages, customs, eating habits, clothing fashions, ways of preying” and consequently these cultural flows determined the development of a dynamic space where relationships between various ethnic groups intermingled in a complex network (Ibid.). This idea of African dynamism contrasts with the stereotypical

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<sup>3</sup> According to the Oxford Dictionary, a *vernacular* is a “language or dialect spoken by the ordinary people of a country or region”, therefore the combination *urban vernacular* refers to the slang typical of a precise city, and Selasi’s choice of using these words underlines the connection between the Afropolitan subject and the cities around the globe (Selasi, 2005).

conception of Africa as fixed, ahistorical and monolithic; according to this West-centred perception, the African continent appears as “[...] an exotic prism through which outsiders, mainly Europeans, refracted images of the other and of themselves” (Parker, Rathbone, 2007, 5). On the other hand, the complex dynamism of Africa is sustained by Mbembe (2007) who theorized the historical phenomenon called *worlds in movement*<sup>4</sup>; it underlines that itineracy, mobility and dispersal cannot be detached from the cultural history of African continent (Makokha, 2010, 19): they have always been part of it. In fact, as Parker and Rathbone state,

Every region of Africa provides historians with examples of linguistic, cultural, and political diversity. These kaleidoscopic variations [...] are the consequences of millennia of human movement, of conquest and subordination, of cultural exchange, of long-distance trade, of the dissemination of religious faiths, of colonialism and its demise – and of sexual attraction, which can transcend and then erode the barriers of perceived difference (Parker, Rathbone, 2007, 28)

Accordingly, diversity and multiplicity are key terms which contribute to the definition of African cultural history; assuming that culture can be generally seen as those values, beliefs and ideas shared between the members which belong to the same community, it is possible to state that Africa consists of a multiplicity of cultures (Parker, Rathbone, 2007, 26). The complex portrait which emerges from the analysis of African history presents the continent as a network of interconnections which have developed since pre-colonial times because Africa has always been characterized by the continued movement of populations and, to sum up, Afropolitanism can be observed as an ancient phenomenon rooted in pre-colonial African Past which consists in a form of cosmopolitanism which manifests itself in Africa (Makokha, 2010, 18-19).

From a historical point of view, it appears that Mbembe’s elaboration of the concept of an anciently rooted Afropolitanism contrasts with Selasi’s previously exposed idea of Afropolitan subjects which are precisely located in time: she states that these individuals are African-rooted men and women whose parents moved to the West during the 1960s

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<sup>4</sup> According to Achille Mbembe (2007), the *worlds-in-movement* phenomenon refers to the idea of Africa as a central space for population movements; he states that this is a two-sided phenomenon which comprehend both the *dispersion*, which is the movement from Africa to other countries, and the *immersion*, which is represented by population movement towards Africa in order to settle there. Both cases imply cultural meetings between subjects who comes from different societies.



and 1970s (Selasi, 2005). However, both Mbembe and Selasi agrees in stressing that a key feature of Afropolitanism in the “willingness to complicate Africa”: the Afropolitan subjects comprehend Africa cultural complexity so they refuse to simplify it (Ibid.). In effect, Mbembe (2007, 29) provides a definition of *Afropolitan* culture which is a transnational kind of culture developed by broad-minded Africans who currently “experience several worlds”: in fact, they spend their life either on the African continent or outside it, and some of them decide to continue moving across countries (Ibid.).

Furthermore, Afropolitanism represents a possibility to elaborate a new idea of Africa which is located “[...] outside the trope of crisis” (Gikandi, 2010, 10). As Selasi (2005) argues, it does not mean to ignore that African reality has its own problems – she mentions corruption for instance – but it is important to consider it as a more intricate panorama: its complexity must be celebrated. Thus, Afropolitan culture perceives Africa as an active entity, and it refuses to identify it as a victim: as opposed to *nativism*<sup>5</sup>, Afropolitanism does not believes in stereotyped forms (Mbembe, 2007, 28-29). An attempt to overcome stereotyped representations of Africa is represented by Wainaina’s ironic article *How to Write about Africa* published in 2005, which lists the more common stereotypes usually associated with Africa - such as primitiveness, nakedness, adventure, starving children – suggesting ironically that an effective text about Africa must contain some of them. Therefore, the Afropolitan subject, aware of the articulated African reality, plays an active social role, which consists in creating *cultural bridges* between cities, languages and traditions and, particularly, between the African continent and other countries usually located in the West (Gikandi, 2010, 11).

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<sup>5</sup> According to Mbembe (2005, 28), nativism celebrates diversity by drawing a clear separation line between autochthons and non-natives, reinforcing in this way those fixed categories created by colonialism. It refers to the will to return to pre-colonial indigenous forms of culture and society (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, 2007, 143).

## 1.2. Afropolitanism, transnationalism and diaspora: a connected network

Starting from Selasi's and Mbembe's considerations about the idea of Afropolitanism two strictly related concepts emerge and they require a deeper analysis. Firstly, *transnationalism* arises as an integral feature of Afropolitan culture because, as Makokha (2010, 16) affirms, Afropolitan subjects embody the "inter-cultural or inter-racial union between Africa and the rest of the world, especially the Occident.". Secondly, a closer examination of the term *diaspora* is needed in connection with the idea of mobility stressed by Mbembe (2007, 27): currently millions of individuals of African origins live dispersed in different countries around the globe because of centuries of migrations. Both transnationalism and diaspora can be defined as *cross-border social formations* which imply a situation of transformation on a socio-political level, such as migration (Bauböck, Faist, 2010, 9). It is possible to analyze these terms on different levels which affect their meaning: firstly, transnationalism and diaspora can be considered as notions, categories, useful to describe and analyze social issues related respectively to population mobility and cultural practices which are distinctive of a community (Ibid., 16); secondly, both transnationalism and diaspora refer to phenomena of population movement which are typical of contemporary society and they both share a common ground which consists in the idea of exchange of goods and beliefs: although the collective identity remains a distinctive element of a cultural group, transnational ties are created between communities, therefore transnationalism and diaspora can be seen as socio-cultural conditions for cross-border mobility of both people and ideas, goods, customs (Ibid, 18).

Furthermore, the idea of nation covers a central role in both of the concepts and, as Ashcroft, Griffith and Tiffin (2007, 135) stress, it represents an unstable social entity, whose community is characterized by heterogeneity and diversity; however, it is important to focus on the concepts of state and nation starting from their roots and they are going to be analyzed as distinct entities; then it is possible to understand more clearly the idea of nation-state and the reason why, according to Ohmae (1996, 10), it has become an unnatural concept in global society. Firstly, the state as a political entity rose between 14<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> century, although during that period the idea of state coincided with that of personal government and therefore it identified with the figure of the ruler; on the other hand, it lately represented an "abstract organization with its own persona separate from

that of the ruler”. Then, the connection between population and state organization is strong because it is based on needs of individuals; in fact, people ask the state to assure them safety in order to be free to develop their own projects and energies (Burckhardt, 1992, 101). The link between ethic and political field is stressed in Plato’s *Republic*: in this work, he deals not only with political concepts but also with justice; he believes that political activity is a basic element involved in individual’s formation so that the idea of state itself and the lives of individuals are strictly related. While this connection is still valid in contemporary times as it was in the past, another kind of relationship should be revised: the link which exist between territory and state has been influenced and modified by the phenomenon of globalization which determines the need to rethink the concept of geography, moving from an area geography called *trait* geography to a *process* geography based on motion, action and interaction in the field of human organization; processes involved in this shift are travel, war, exile, pilgrimage and colonization, which tend to generate variable geographies starting from specific contexts called *region*: the formation of these *imagined areas* is due to migrants’ activity, tourism, media and capital movement; this phenomenon of process geography formation is considered as global and it is seen as part of contemporary society (Appadurai, 2001, 8). Here, the role played by imagination is significant and it emerges in the relationship which exists between nation and state, and it appears while observing those forces of disjuncture called *scapes* (Appadurai, 1996, 39). Furthermore, as UNESCO website reports, a focus on the concept of nation shows that it consists of a group of individuals that legitimate the power of the state over the territory; this political community determines a change in the idea of state as an entity which belongs to all of its citizens without identifying with the figure of rulers; thus, nationality becomes the link between citizens and state (UNESCO, 2003). Then, according to Appadurai (1996, 39) the term nation implies the idea of nationhood as a common element shared by a group of people; at this point, it is important to observe that although nation is usually associated with the idea of state, and combined with it in the term *nation-state*, it represents a different concept: state, in effect, contains the idea of power and government, but it usually tries to enlarge and comprehend typical elements which usually characterize the concept of nationhood: states seek to appropriate the “moral resources of a community” firstly by affirming that nation and

state are coincident concepts which exist coevally and, secondly, by identifying various social groups in a uniform way; on the other hand, nations and communities appear to be in search of their own state (Ibid.). Although nation and state seem to be concepts which reciprocally involve one another, they are actually linked by a disjunctive relationship which implies negative consequences; in fact, contemporary nation-states employ nationhood to create a situation of pacific uniformity “[...] by exercising taxonomic control over difference, by creating various kinds of international spectacle to domesticate difference, and by seducing small groups with the fantasy of self-display on some sort of global or cosmopolitan stage.” (Appadurai, 1996, 39). Therefore, the idea of nation as a tool which levels out cultural differences emerges from the relationship between the nation itself and state and it refers to the concept of *ideoscape*: this category coined by Appadurai (1996, 36) relates to those chains of images and ideologies which frequently deal with political subjects and state ideologies linked with the Enlightenment philosophy; in effect, terms like freedom, rights, representation and democracy belong to this group.

However, this nation-state attitude which tends to eliminate difference and create uniform realities contrasts with the concept of Afropolitanism, firstly because Afropolitan culture constantly interacts with the metropolitan environment in which it generates and this interaction implies the ability to live in a heterogeneous environment where different cultures coexist: according to Bauman (2000, 106) this ability requires practice and exercise because the difference appears as a more dangerous threat if the society deals with it by trying to eliminate it:

“The inability to face up the vexing plurality of human beings and the ambivalence of all classifying/filing decisions are, on the contrary, self-perpetuating and self-reinforcing: the more effective the drive to homogeneity and the efforts to eliminate the difference, the more difficult is to feel at home in the face of strangers, the more threatening the difference appears and the deeper and more intense is anxiety it breeds” (Bauman, 2000, 106)

Therefore, metropolitan spaces which are strictly linked with the Afropolitan culture (Selasi, 2005), appear as complex realities where difference and heterogeneity are largely spread and cannot be ignored, so they can be defined as *ethnoscapes*; this term, which means “landscape of persons”, comprehend all those groups of individuals which are constituent elements of the contemporary world: tourist, refugees, migrants and workers are members of these groups and their presence in a society influences the relationship

between nations and within the nation itself (Appadurai, 1996, 33). Therefore, interactions between these groups are basic elements of contemporary societies which cannot be defined as stable but as fluid realities, and fluidity is a “leading metaphor for the present stage of modern era”: it is based on the idea of change, mobility and travel and it is important to understand the present (Bauman, 2000, 2). In particular, cultural mobility of contemporary society has caused the need to redefine concepts and assumptions connected with culture itself and think about those factors which are involved in the process of history and identity formation; processes like colonization, emigration, exile, wandering and contamination are forces whose disruptive action plays a significant role in the fluid modern society (Greenblatt, 2010, 2).

### (a) Transnationalism

Transnationalism consists of “the processes by which migrants forge and sustain multi-stranded social relations that link together their societies of origin and settlement.” (Basch, Glick Schiller, Szanton-Blanc, 1994, 8). According to Ashcroft, Griffith and Tiffin (2007, IX), the term transnationalism is used in postcolonial studies to describe migrant communities as unfixed realities which expand themselves; in effect, the adjective *transnational* is employed in the examination of postcolonial cultural productions linked with the idea of mobility and population flows across national borders; therefore, the postcolonial space, which is a fluid space, is described as a place of confrontation, exchange of cultures. This concept fits with the definition of *contact zone* given by Pratt (2008, 7): it is a space of meeting of different cultures but relationships between them are often all but symmetrical, so that an example she provides is that of the colonial space. Here, in fact, the relationship between colonizer and colonized is asymmetrical because it is grounded in a situation of power and subjugation where power is disproportionately concentrated on the colonizer’s side: the colonial power is unilateral and it does not generate a symmetrical relation whose dialectical parts can be inverted and then located in subverted positions, because relations of power are multiple and decentered (Bhabha, 1994, 101).

Nowadays, the concept of *contact zone* can be applied to metropolitan cities which are integral parts of the Afropolitan culture; in effect, Selasi (2005) underlines that Afropolitans are linked to both the African continent and the G8 cities which they are familiar with. These metropolitan cities can be defined as *contact zones* because they possess those features employed by Pratt (2008, 8) to define this articulated space; the first idea she points out is that of *transculturation*<sup>6</sup>: it explores how cultural material, which is produced by a dominant culture, is selected and elaborated by a marginal cultural group. As Ashcroft, Griffith and Tiffin (2007, 215) state, this process of appropriation is a reaction to a situation of subjugation and it consists in the dominated group’s ability to employ selected cultural tools, associated with the dominant culture, in order to resist the

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<sup>6</sup>The term *transculturation* was coined by Fernando Ortiz in 1940s, when his work *Cuban Counterpoint: Tobacco and Sugar* was firstly published. This term refers to the fact that both in colonial spaces and in metropolitan cities different cultural practices influence each other reciprocally. (Ashcroft, Griffith, Tiffin, 2007, 213).

dominant culture itself: this process of appropriation of cultural materials is typical of marginal communities which tend to select aspects of the metropolitan culture that surrounds them; the cultural tools which undergo this process of appropriation are usually language, writing, customs, thoughts, beliefs, and popular culture aspects such as theatre and films. Consequently, the marginal subjects' personalities result not only transformed but also enriched: parts of another culture are contained in them, which is a typical feature of the Afropolitan subject; as Selasi (2005) underlines, the Afropolitan subject builds his/her own personality by choosing some traits of a national identity and culture which are internalized, then they assume central roles in the Afropolitan identity; this process can be both conscious and unconscious but it demonstrates how this cultural process of appropriation happens.

Furthermore, these metropolitan cities, where Afropolitan subjects live, represent the spaces where different culture meet but this cultural encounter is possible only if the two cultures are co-present in that place at the same time; in effect, as Pratt (2008, 8) affirms, *co-presence* is one of the key elements of the contact zone, a place of relations and contact between populations which were previously geographically separated. In the Afropolitan case, the individuals called *African of the world* (Selasi, 2005) put into contact the African continent with the Western world and particularly with metropolitan cities in the West where this meeting comes into being: Afropolitan subjects acts like bridges between two different worlds and particularly they have the significant social role of creating these links between cultures, languages and geographical space which are co-present in them (Gikandi, 2010, 11).

Then, another common aspect between the concept of contact zone and the space of the metropolitan cities is the situation of *interaction* stressed by Pratt (2008, 8); in fact, she underlines how personal relationships between subjects determine their self-formation, which happens in this space of crossroads of paths, trajectories and cultures. This idea of interaction, which implies reciprocity, is considered to be a fundamental element of these spaces of contact: starting from the fact that the colonial space is a contact zone, Bhabha (1994, 2) sustains this idea of interactive space of meeting between cultures as a space of identity formation; cultural subjects cannot be considered as detached from the historical background, therefore in a colonial context,

the building of cultural identities is strictly and necessarily linked with the colonizer-colonized relationship: they cannot be seen as totally separated entities but, on the contrary, their interaction is significant in the self-formation process. Similarly, in a metropolitan space, the Afropolitan identity derives from a series of interconnections between the African continent and the new metropolitan culture of Western cities: as Makokha (2010, 19) states, it is the product of *intercultural hybridities*.

Moreover, the term transnationalism implies the fact that a group of people, therefore a community, shares a *contact zone* with a different cultural group: this community, which is located in-between its own place of origin and its host country, is called *transnational community* (Bauböck, Faist, 2010, 43). This concept emerges in 1990s in academic works and it represents a group of individuals who migrates searching for employment: they generally leave from basic rural contexts to Western cities; however, the transnational communities' connections with their homelands remain strong: family ties are maintained although they deliberately choose to root themselves in the host country too, trying to gain a *double affiliation*<sup>7</sup> which means that they usually try to have citizenship of both their home country and their host country (Ibid.). However, it is important to underline that transnationalism has become increasingly significant in the contemporary world on both the national and the global layer, and transnational communities influence people's life across the world; transnational processes affect not only migrants but also previously settled individuals, which implies an inevitable reciprocal influence (Kennedy, Roudometof, 2002, 1).

Moreover, in order to fully understand the concept of transnational communities, it is important to step back and reflect upon the concept of community itself; starting from the fact that “communities are units of belonging whose members perceive that they share moral, aesthetic/expressive or cognitive meanings, thereby gaining a sense of personal as well as group identity”, their symbolic nature emerges because of the fact that the group identity is linked to members' involvement in rituals, meanings and practices which represent occasions for social relationships (Kennedy, Roudometof, 2002, 6); however,

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<sup>7</sup> In post-colonial studies, the word *affiliation* defines cultural identification processes which are cohesive elements in the contemporary complex society; previously, on the other hand, traditional societies could be seen as entities made of filiative relationships, considering *filiation* as the group of natural heritage bounds (Ashcroft, Griffith, Tiffin, 2007, 96).



relations between members of traditional early modern communities were mainly *natural* relations defined according to kinship, neighborhood, and nation of belonging: both the shared territory and the physical closeness between members allowed direct personal relationships, and mobility was perceived as a threatening experience which exceeded locality. On the other hand, contemporary society is characterized by a different kind of communities based on mobility and dynamism, whose members are not naturally bounded but they consciously decide to become part of a certain community because they share its cultural, symbolic and informational aims (Ibid., 7). Furthermore, while traditional communities were mainly defined by a face-to-face communication, contemporary communities are affected by technological development which determines the formation of communication networks through which ties can be created and strengthened, especially thanks to internet (Bauböck, Faist, 2010, 29). Focusing on technology as a key element of contemporary modern society, Appadurai (1996, 34) defines as *technoscape* that quick technological movement which enables individuals to communicate and to overpass almost every kind of spatial boundaries; then, the fluid process of contemporary communication through technology cannot be detached from the idea of rapid diffusion of information condensed in the concept called *mediascape*:

Mediascapes refer both to the distribution of electronic capabilities to produce and disseminate information (newspapers, magazines, television stations, and film-production studios), which are now available to a growing number of private and public interests through the world, and to the images of the world created by these media. (Appadurai, 1996, 35)

These mediascapes create links between individuals around the world by providing images and narratives to viewers who perceive that they are sharing both a realistic and a fictional experience with people in different parts of the world (Ibid, 35). These ideas of media-related interconnection and quick technological communication are basic concepts linked to transnational communities and therefore to the Afropolitan community itself because, as Gikandi (2011, 11) affirms, Afropolitan subjects react to their displacement around the world by creating “cultural bridges between countries, languages and localities”, stressing that places and tradition within Africa itself are ruled by complex relations, which reflect the complicated links which connect the Afropolitan subject with

localities around the world: this is the Afropolitan way of facing those “transnational challenges” caused by the African displacement abroad. Therefore, these connections can be maintained thanks to technological communication and media development, thus both technoscapes and mediascapes assume an important role in contemporary society; however, they do not represent linear elements of the current society and of the social processes which constitute it: although they are part of this reality they are *disjunctures* which relate to different dimensions of global societies and, according to the socio-cultural anthropologist Arjun Appadurai (1996, 32), five main disjunctures exist in contemporary society; in his work *Modernity at Large* (1996) he taxonomizes them in relation to the cultural dimension they deal with: he talks about ethnoscapas, mediascapes, technoscapes, financescapes and ideoscapes. The presence of the suffix -scape stresses the fact that these dimensions are not objectively given constructs but they depend on many factors such as history, language, politics, economics, religion, family kinship and diasporic phenomena. Therefore, the current society has to be seen as an intricate network of relationships and, particularly, it is characterized by interactions between social groups; although interactions have always been part of the world, contemporary relationships between cultural groups belong to a different kind of order: while in the past cultural interactive relationships were possible thanks to warfare and religious conversion and they used to deal with physical spaces, today’s world is characterized by communities which often do not perceive a sense of place but that share an imaginary common landscape, which appears as “a constructed landscape of collective aspirations” (Appadurai, 1996, 29-31). The Afropolitan group constitutes a modern kind of community which refuses to fossilize on an established fixed idea of geography and, on the other hand, it stresses cultural complexity of the African continent starting from “its intellectual and spiritual legacies” both within itself and with the rest of the world (Selasi, 2005).

Then, Appadurai (1996, 33) underlines the importance of imagination in contemporary society and, particularly, in connection with these transnational communities which mainly identify themselves by mean of landscapes and dimensions called *imaginary worlds*; they consist of historically situated realities which form thanks to the imagination of individuals and communities around the world. For what concerns the Afropolitan group, the imaginary world consists in their conscious will to consider the African

continent as a complicated entity which does not have to be reduced to simple fixed stereotypes of poverty and starvation (Selasi, 2005).

## (b) Diaspora

After having explored the concept of transnationalism, the focus moves to the idea of diaspora; this term comes from the Greek *dia*, 'through', and *speirein*, 'to scatter', therefore it implies a phenomenon of dispersion which occurs from a 'home', a centre (Brah, 1996, 178). This concept is significant for the definition of Afropolitanism because it contains the idea of journey and therefore of movement, which is a constituent feature of African culture starting from pre-colonial times; this fact, stressed by Mbembe (2007, 27), is the base of his worlds-in-movement theory which focuses on the idea of African mobility and on its interaction with the rest of the world. Therefore, the concept of diaspora needs to be analysed because of its complexity; in fact, it is not a fixed clear concept and, although it possesses some common basic features, it can be characterized by other elements depending on many factors related to the diasporic group, such as its history and its experiences (Cohen, 2008, 16). As Faist (2010, 10) states, transnationalism and diaspora are two strictly related terms described as *dance partners* linked by a relationship from which many questions can arise: they both refer to situations of change and transformation on a social and political level which involve groups of individuals that have migrated either because of their own will or because forced by circumstantial events. However, while transnationalism mainly concerns with transnational ties established by communities and organizations, the term diaspora deals with the idea of groups of individuals living outside their homelands (Faist., 2010, 10). Then, transnationalism can be considered a constituent element of diaspora itself: in effect, diaspora implies other concepts such as transnationality, movement and commitment for the definition of the diasporic group as a distinctive community which has experienced displacement from its own environment (Clifford, 1994, 308).

Moreover, the complexity of diaspora is confirmed by its evolution during time underlined by Cohen (2008, 2) who describes this concept outlining the *prototypical* form of diaspora and its main features: he identifies the *victim diaspora* as the classical form of diaspora whose origin was determined by a significant shocking event in the home country; a traumatic experience is responsible for the dispersal of population; those groups which are considered victim diasporas because of the historical traumas they have experienced are Jews, Africans, Armenians, Irish and Palestinians. These diasporic

groups share two main elements which consist of “the traumatic dispersal from an original homeland and the salience of the homeland in the collective memory of a forcibly dispersed group.” (Cohen, 2008, 4). In fact, diasporic communities struggle to maintain their identity living inside a *national time/space* but they are aware of their being different, which does not imply a desire of separation but it represents a symbol of community consciousness (Clifford, 1994, 308).

Then, this prototypical form of victim diaspora has expanded and the use of this concept has increased although it is difficult to define it clearly; thus, it is important to remember the main features of diasporas by focusing on those elements shared by members of a community: firstly, they have been displaced from an original *centre* of origin to foreign countries, secondly, their homeland is remembered thanks to their collective memory, in the third place, they perceive themselves as partly separated from the society of the host country, in addition, members of diasporic communities share the idealization of their homeland and they think about their descendants’ or their own return in case of favourable conditions, furthermore, they believe in the importance of members’ commitment to the prosperity of their homeland and, finally, the centrality of homeland itself is underlined by the fact that diasporic members’ relationship with their home country defines them as a group (Cohen, 2008, 6); however, contemporary diasporas do not have to possess necessarily all these elements, which conveys the concept of diaspora a flexible quality. In effect, Cohen (2008, 35) recognizes the necessity to have a more elastic definition of diaspora which would be suitable for contemporary society where this concept is increasingly employed to identify several types of communities and migrant people, therefore its meaning cannot be reduced to the idea of displacement of individuals who find themselves unhappy in the host country considered their *country of exile*. The evolution of the concept of diaspora, due to its increased use, is underlined by Clifford (1994, 310) who stresses that, nowadays, it has been appropriated by many displaced groups individuals who perceive a strong link with a homeland they had to leave; the strength of this *sense of connection* determines its resistance although processes of assimilation operate in the host country; thus, groups which could be considered minorities claim to be diasporic communities because they feel they are actually a community of people which differs from the society where they are inserted in.

Furthermore, the idea of dispersal of people implied in the concept of diaspora is a significant element of Afropolitanism because the Afropolitan group is formed by the *Africans of the world* (Selasi, 2005). Therefore, dealing with Afropolitanism implies concentrating on African diaspora; it is important to underline its way of conforming with the classical elements of all diasporas and study why it can be considered a victim diaspora (Cohen, 2008, 39). The origins of African diaspora date back to the slave trade which is usually associated with the Atlantic trade:

Between the 1440s, when Portuguese mariners first began to kidnap and to purchase Africans, and 1867, the year of the last recorded slaving voyage to the Americas, some 12 million men, women, and children were turned into commodities and exported from the continent. (Parker, Rathbone, 2007, 78)

Particularly, the usually recalled historical moment is that of European exploitation of African slaves for the New World plantations, which determined the trade of individuals in the Atlantic area; however, the Atlantic commerce was not the only kind of African slave trade (Parker, Rathbone, 2007, 78). In fact, African experience of slave trade and migration began in ancient times under the Islamic rule during 8<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> centuries, when movement of slaves interested the Sahara Desert, the Nile area, the Red Sea, the Indian Ocean and India itself (Cohen, 2008, 42). This phenomenon identified as the Muslim trade was different from the previously named Atlantic trade because of the captives' destiny: while victims of Atlantic trade had to work in American plantations and mines, Muslim trade captives were moved to the Muslim society and employed as domestic slaves (Parker, Rathbone, 2007, 78). This fact stressed that Africa was not simply a passive victim of that exploitative trade but it was also an active part of it: in order to gain economic power, both African countries and members of African societies oppressed weaker populations that were located near their territories; this idea named by Bayart (2000, 219) *extraversion* not only underlines the fact that the African continent had ties with external territories but it demonstrates African agency in the process of exploitation and movement of slaves and population; by mean of this concept he underlines African active participation: Africans voluntary took part at the process of colonization and African leaders sold slaves to European without any form of compelling. Moreover, until the last third of the nineteenth century African traders used to be autonomous in deciding their own commercial terms to their British customers particularly for what concerned the

palm oil trade (Bayart, 2000, 221). However, it is important to remember that, although this voluntary participation was relevant, most of those Africans involved in the slave trade process were victims and this exploitative phenomenon was extremely violent and barbaric: to stress the fact that Africans were both victims and agents in the slave trade means to give the phenomenon a more complex structure, by recognizing that not only Europeans but also Africans were involved in power relations linked with slave trade activity in the Atlantic area (Parker, Rathbone, 2007, 81).

In effect, the use of the word diaspora referred to Africans is used in a *metaphorical* way in the sense that it has not to be considered a rigid idea because it possesses a voluntary element: in fact, the movement of people across the Sahara and the Indian Ocean started eight centuries before the Atlantic slave trade; because of these routes, Africans dispersed not only in Americas but also in Asia and in the Mediterranean area; many of them were slaves while others were traders (Cohen, 2008, 42). Therefore, it is important not to forget both Eastern direction of African diasporic phenomenon and its voluntary active side, a fact which again enables Africans of action and that creates connections between African diaspora and Afropolitanism, two phenomena based on both action and complexity (Selasi, 2005).

Thus, the slave trade phenomenon represents that traumatic event which contributes to label the African diaspora as a victim diaspora, but a diaspora is a complex phenomenon which must not be reduced to its negative elements; in fact, as Brah (1996, 190) states:

The word diaspora often invokes the imagery of traumas of separation and dislocation, and this is certainly a very important aspect of the migratory experience. But diasporas are also potentially the sites of hope and new beginnings. They are contested cultural and political terrains where individual and collective memories collide, reassemble and reconfigure (Brah, 1996, 190).

In effect, the idea of African diaspora as a victim diaspora implies the need of focusing on the concept of homeland and it is important to distinguish between *homing desire* and desire for homeland: in this sense, the idea of homing desire determines that the home country becomes a kind of placeless space, therefore an essence (Cohen, 2008, 9). This concept is studied by Brah (1996, 187), who stresses that the idea of home is embodied

in the diasporic phenomenon and it can be ambiguous because of its connection with that category of people considered native or indigenous; this group of people can be associated with both negative and positive views, in fact, during the British imperial conquest in colonies indigenous people were identified as *natives*, a term which was associated with an idea of subordination and it represented another label for those who were not British: who belonged to the group of natives was considered the Other. However, ambiguities emerge because “Whereas in the colonies the ‘colonial Native’ was inferiorised, in Britain the ‘metropolitan Native’ is constructed as superior.” (Brah, 1996, 188). Therefore, the idea of home implied in the diaspora discourse is connected with the concept of origin, of being native of a certain place, which possesses both positive and negative connotations; on the other hand, the term ‘home’ itself assumes many meanings in the diasporic discourse: it represents an idealized place of desired return but also the local everyday experience of life in a specific place which involves feelings, smells, sounds, new circumstances and everyday situations; this second connotation of the idea of home underlines its link with the social relations that characterize cultural contexts; in societies, social groups perceive themselves as natives of that particular place if there is a certain level of inclusion, thus the feeling of belonging to a society is determined by processes of social inclusion or exclusion which are responsible of personal inner conflicts (Brah, 1996., 189). Then, the concept of home as experienced life situations and feelings is central in the study of Afropolitanism because, although African origins are not rejected, a strong connection exists between Afropolitan subjects and metropolitan cities around the world where they live and work (Selasi, 2005). This means that diaspora discourse creates a strict link between home and dispersal: the concept of homing desire emerges from the tension between them and it implies in effect two connotations: homing desire can be considered as the desire of returning home, identified as the place of origin, but is can be also defined as the need of cultural belonging to a society (Brah,1996, 189).

The relevance of social relations in observing the diasporic phenomenon increases when a distinction is done between the experience of first and second generation of migrants; in effect, the relationship which connects the first generation with its place of origin is influenced by memories and experienced situations of displacement: the fact of leaving the place of origin implies the need of becoming part of a new society that consists in a network of new relations which have to go through a process of cultural negotiation;



on the other hand, the diasporic experience of second generation groups tends to enlarge the concept of home which moves into a *multi-placed* entity; it does not signify that these individuals perceive no kind of connection with their place of settlement but it means that they feel home in many places (Brah, 1996, 191). This trait links the experience of African diaspora with the Afropolitan culture because many young Africans who live in cities around the world feel to belong to several places, so their idea of home is complex and shaped by their life experience which leads them to be part of a multiple geography: their home is their parents' country of origin but also where they were raised as children and where they currently live; Afropolitans do not belong to a single geography (Selasi, 2005).

### (c) Agency against stereotypes

Both transnationalism and diaspora share an agency-oriented perspective about phenomena of population movement, which represents an important starting point to avoid generalizations usually related to cross border processes (Bauböck, Faist, 2010, 33). The concept of agency is central in dealing with African context in order to promote a non-stereotypical image of it: in effect, the idea of stereotype implies fixity: stereotypes constitute mental images that mediate individuals' knowledge of external reality; however, these fixed images are usually rigid simplifications and generalizations of the multi-shaded external reality which is complex and human beings find it difficult to understand (Mazzara, 1997, 15). Therefore, talking about diaspora and transnationalism through an agency-focused perspective and focusing on the Afropolitan dynamism is an effective way to contrast the rise of the idea of Africa as a flat entity. In fact, although individuals serve of stereotypical images to interpret reality, these represent also the base, the *cognitive nucleus* which prejudices grow from (Mazzara, 1997, 17); though, stereotypes and prejudices are not identified as correspondent entities but their relationship is really strict. Then, stereotypes as mental processes can refer to both a general group of fixed ideas without the necessity of social connotations and usually negative images related to social groups and contexts; considering the second case, before exploring stereotypes related to the African context it is important to underline the way in which these stereotypical processes work, starting from the idea that stereotypes can be identified on the base of some elements which consist in social sharing of the stereotype, its generalization and its rigidity; the first element refers to how much a stereotype is spread within a social group or culture, the second relates to the idea of whether stereotypical features attributed to a social group are considered to be homogeneous, and then the third feature refers to stereotypes that can be seen as more or less rigid on the base of their stronger or weaker connection with culture and personality of members of a certain social group (Mazzara, 1997, 18).

Thus, stereotypes are cultural products that help individuals in interpreting reality but they can determine homogeneity of values and beliefs in a certain social group; these preconceptions influence the way individuals perceive reality, people and events , therefore processes of categorization can emerge in relation with social groups which are

linked to specific systems of values (Arcuri, Cadinu, 1998, 33); furthermore, dealing with Africa and stereotypes implies the need to focus on the concept of dehumanization, which derives from people's gaze; in particular, black people's displacement comes from the way they are described in opposition with whites:

My body was given back to me sprawled out, distorted, recolored, clad in mourning, in that white winter day. The Negro is an animal, the Negro is bad, the Negro is mean, the Negro is ugly; look, a nigger, it's cold, the nigger is shivering because he is cold, the little boy is trembling because he is afraid of the nigger, the nigger is shivering with cold, that cold that goes through our bones [...] (Fanon, 1986, 113)

The process of dehumanization that turns black subjects into fixed images derives from the meeting with the white man; at this point, black people are identified not only with their body but also with their race and their ancestors, from which derives their becoming aware of their blackness and ethnic features: cannibalism, intellectual inferiority, racial defects and slavery were the major characteristics that white people attributed to black people (Fanon, 1986, 112). These elements that have been connected with Africa during the colonial experience can be observed and studied useful in fictional contexts: in fiction, images and words are employed to represent a reality that is much more articulated; generally, references to Africa are present from the very beginning of the work of fiction which contains in the title words that recall Africa as an exotic dark entity, a place where people travel and explore rivers in a sort of primordial timeless atmosphere (Wainaina, 2005, 1).

The choice of Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie and Igiaba Scego as authors that explore the concept of Afropolitanism and deconstruct stereotypical views of Africa demonstrates to be justified starting from the titles of their narrative works; *Americanah*, *The Thing Around Your Neck*, *Adua*, *La mia casa è dove sono*: none of them contains the word 'Africa' or allusions to adventures and explorations in savage dark places; in fact, the Africa they refer to is not a vague entity but they deal with real concrete places and individuals' life experiences, that are narrated without excluding human emotions and feelings while, on the other hand, stereotypical views of Africa tend to represent Africans as types, fixed characters, that starve and need help, usually portrayed naked or dead, and

sexualized with uncovered genitals; in stereotypical representations of Africa, Africans appear usually as flat characters that have no central role which instead is generally covered by a white Western hero (Wainaina, 2005, 2). On the contrary, narrative works of both Adichie and Scego show individuals of African origin that cover the role of protagonists and all the Africans portrayed are fully round characters, carriers of human emotions and experiences that enable the reader to observe a complex panorama which characterizes the Afropolitan culture; Afropolitan subjects are aware of the stereotypes usually attributed to Africa but, at the same time, they are ready to deconstruct them; processes of victimization and simplification are substituted by observations that explore in deep individuals' mind and the metropolitan culture that surrounds them (Selasi, 2005).

Moreover, dealing with Afropolitanism requires a focus on the word 'Black' because this term carries meanings and contradictions:

"Black" as a descriptive adjective for people of African origin and descent came into popular usage during the period of Black power movements in the US, the UK, the English-speaking Caribbean and in South Africa during the 1960s and the 1970s (Davies, 1994, 5)

History and culture of African identity reinforced in those years and took the name of 'blackness', a highly-political term related to racist contexts: in fact it is connected with the idea of a Black World that is located both in Africa and in diasporic contexts; although blackness seems to present itself as a homogeneous concept, it is indeed heterogeneous because it includes not only African identity but also liminal categories such as Asian, Caribbean, Latin American peoples and the so called 'people of colour', i.e. Africans in the US (Davies, 1994, 6). Contradictions are constituent parts of this concept that seems compact and rigid but, on the contrary, contains a multiplicity of shades; then, it is significant to show that 'blackness' emerges as a representation of African identity in a white background where whiteness is conceptualized and possesses a certain supremacy: this is not only the case of the US context explored by Adichie but this situation appears also in the Italian setting observed by Scego, with a particular focus on Italian colonial past which determines its being a background where whiteness is connected with the idea of power: in fact the configuration of an idea of blackness is determined by contexts where racism is strongly present (Davies, 1994, 7).

However, the concept of blackness in the American context assumes a significant meaning because of the existent link between the black body and the Transatlantic slave trade, which generates a kind of *cosmic consciousness* of the past and determines the ambiguous relationship between black people and America:

Never forget that we were enslaved in this country longer than we have been free. Never forget that for 250 years black people were born into chains – whole generations followed by more generations who knew nothing but chains. You must struggle to truly remember this past in all its nuance, error and humanity. [...] You have to make your peace with the chaos, but you cannot lie. You cannot forget how much they took from us and how they transfigured our very bodies into sugar, tobacco, cotton and gold. (Coates, 2015, 70).

The fear of preserving the body and its safety was constantly present during the 80s, when violence constantly pervaded streets and schools, where youngsters had to face fear every day; gradually, fear transformed into rage and young generations were surrounded by a world of physical violence which represented a kind of social language; in effect it was the way police employed to communicate with black people, which caused in them a sense of never being safe and protected: on the other hand, the common feeling of black people especially during 80s was that of being in constant danger: the phenomenon of crews was in fact widely spread; feeling in danger at home is a feeling that has not been eliminated yet because the police keeps on having the power of destroy the black body; the awareness of this past and fear represents the starting point for Afropolitans to build their own cosmopolitan identity without forgetting their ancestors' memories (Coates, 2015).

This relationship between America and Africans can be observed by analysing the term *African American* and studying its two components separately: firstly, the term *African* is a monolithic definition that is employed in contrast to the West, therefore Europe and America; however, many different peoples, cultures, nations and individual experiences can be found under the general definition of *African*; originally, the term *Africa* comes from Afri, Afriqui or Afrigi, which was the name of a small Tunisian population but then it started to be employed to identify a wider area, from Morocco to Libya; moreover, Romans used the term *Africa* to refer to a territorial category called *Africa proconsularis*, a fact which demonstrates the strict link between names and politics

of control and dominance; this determines the formation of Afrocentric personalities whose identity and heritage develops according to this monolithic fixed construction of Africa as a solid and unique entity (Davies, 1994, 10). The inclusive term African risks to uniform and not to take into account the diversity that is part of Africa on the linguistic, cultural and political level; these variations provide a heterogeneous scenario and they are directly involved in historical processes as results of centuries of population movement, dominance, conquest and cultural interchange (Parker and Rathbone, 2007, 28). However, homogeneity and unity have also been turned into positive features of Africa in representation of the continent strength and struggle against Western definition; in fact, Pan-Africanism and Negritude have employed Western negative categories transforming them into positive features (Parker and Rathbone, 2007, 34).

Proceeding with the analysis of the adjective African American, the term *American* contains ambiguities as well: first of all, it is important to focus on the concept of race, because race and nationality have remained separated entities in the United States, which determined radicalization and exaltation of racial differences (Davies, 1994, 9). Particularly, race is a construction that derives from racism which consists in ascribing specific features to people and then determining their destruction by mean of humiliations, and it is implicitly accepted in the United States as something natural although it is not openly claimed (Coates, 2015, 6). This fact confirms ideas of Du Bois (1903), who portrays race as perfectly divided between two opposed parts: the *white nation* and the *non-white others* have been a defining feature of American population starting from the birth of the USA and the abolition of slavery has not been enough to modify this mechanism and the privileges born upon it: therefore, Du Bois concept of *double consciousness* refers to this division which black people are aware of and, furthermore, his idea that race would represent a key matter in 20<sup>th</sup>-century modern society has been confirmed (Waugh, 2006, 374).

Moreover, the term *American* is politically-oriented because it is usually associated with the United States identity although this represents a categorization that excludes other territories which extend from North to South and belong to the American continent too (Davies, 1994, 9). Thus, the idea of American people has to deal both with this political aspect and with the matter of race, that is explored in Adichie's *Americanah*.

On the other hand, Scego's *Adua* focuses on the Italian context in relation to Somalia, stressing the Italian colonial past that is usually forgotten, therefore Africa does not cover a general role in the novel as an undefined mysterious entity of adventures and wildness as it happens in stereotypical fictional images, but a precise identity is taken into account, the Somali identity, which has to face the space of Italy that consists in the representation of the colonial power; therefore, the implicit power relationship implied in the previously analysed term *African American* can be found in a certain way in the term Somali-Italian: the echoes of history cannot be ignored but they have to be taken into account, so agency is needed also in dealing with national identity and its definition: in this way the Afropolitan subject is able not to lose contact with his/her own body in a country which performed physical violence and it still employs it (Coates, 2015, 12).

The choice of Adichie and Scego as authors whose works exemplify the Afropolitan phenomenon has been driven not only by their being able to represent African round characters in their fiction avoiding victimizations and stereotypical images, but also by the fact that they are two female authors which provide a feminine perspective to Afropolitanism, exploring not only matters of race, transnationalism and diaspora but also aspects of sexuality and gender issues: in fact, gender studies in transnational contexts and postcolonial studies are often interconnected areas of research whose meeting has determined the birth of new research questions and contradictions; this situation of conflict and tension between these two fields of research is important and inevitable as it is the result of those contrasts which constitute contemporary societies, therefore, the language used in dealing with social phenomena has necessarily to be characterized by conflicts and tension (Bassi, Sirotti, 2010, 126).

In the 80s and 90s, in fact, a new kind of feminist discourse emerged: usually marginalized groups of women such as African American, Caribbean, Indian, affirmed that Western women could not talk and struggle on behalf of all the women focusing on a common oppressor, a fact that demonstrates that the category of women does not represent a homogeneous group; on the contrary, it contains tensions and problematic features determined by the diversity of its members (Bassi, Sirotti, 2010, 127). In effect, during the Second Wave of feminism after 1960s these groups of women did not feel represented by this kind of universal feminist voice which tended to consider women as

a united group where differences between its members risked to be ignored; moreover, black women sustained that the sexual oppression was not the only one they had to face and their identity battle involved not only gender but also race: black women perceived these two entities as undetachable and argued that they had to struggle for their identity on more than one level (Waugh, 2006, 331). African women's multi-layered identity can be identified in Judith Butler<sup>8</sup>'s idea of gender as a performance and, starting from this concept, the category of Black women consists in a multiplicity of performative acts of gender, race and sexuality that depend on the communities where subjects are inserted in (Davies, 1994, 8).

In 1980s white feminism was accused of racism and criticized by African American, Caribbean and British black feminists who believed that white feminists struggled against white women's experiences of oppression but they were not able to express black women's problematics, with the consequence of reducing marginalized groups' experiences and identities to a rigid and fixed theme, a category with no deep but made of *topoi* and stereotypes: this group identified by white women studies as *Third World women* was homogeneous and rigid and represented an object of analysis, therefore its members were seen as fixed unities with similar features; these perspective produced generalizations and identified Third World women as static victimized subjects that suffer from gender oppression; specific features of each individual were not taken into account but reduced to undifferentiated elements of a victim position which involves a static and passive nature (Bassi, Sirotti, 2010, 130). This process of generalization implies the reproduction of racial power relationships typical of colonial power that represented the *subaltern* as the passive subject, unable to speak and express his/her own identity (Spivak, 1988, 104).

Third World women's voices are replaced by white feminists' discourse which implies that the female subaltern subject is silenced; in fact, the subaltern colonized group within the colonial discourse should be observed in its own heterogeneity and the category of

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<sup>8</sup> In her work *Gender Trouble* (1990), Judith Butler sustained that gender was a fluid entity subverting binary traditional norms that saw masculine and feminine as fixed biological positions; on the other hand, she claimed that these categories were artificially built and, actually, multiple gender positions exist; consequently, the category of women lost its own meaning and started to be deconstructed (Waugh, 2006, 338).



the oppressed is made of several different subjects; this idea can be applied to both colonial and gender oppression and it emerges in Spivak's postcolonial research. Spivak considers the category of the subaltern women that comprehend that group of Third World women, usually essentialized by white feminists as a fixed rigid and stereotypical category of victims; therefore, this dynamic way of interpreting reality is useful to go beyond preconfigured categories and it provides postcolonial feminists the possibility to think about subjectivities and identities of African American and other usually marginalized women as active autonomous subjects, although tensions and conflictual aspects of the matter cannot be avoided (Bassi, Sirotti, 2010, 130).

## 2. Authors in comparison

### 2.1. Backgrounds

Exploring the Afropolitan phenomenon by means of narrative works by two writers of African origins implies the need to concentrate on their backgrounds specifically because both of them deal with a Western country and an African country: while Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie was born in Nigeria and lately moved to the USA, Igiaba Scego was born in Italy from Somali parents, therefore Nigeria and Somalia are going to be analysed from a historical point of view in relation to the periods which novels refer to.

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie was born in Enugu in South-Eastern Nigeria, in 1977, and she grew up in Nsukka where both her mother and her father worked (Tunca, 2004). Adichie's country of origin appears in her writings, therefore some historical moments are to be recalled to better identify *Americanah's* setting (Emenyonu, 2017, 186). Nigeria gained independence from British colonial rule in 1960 becoming a republic in 1963: the queen was replaced with an indigenous president as Head of State; however, three years later a military coup brought General John Aguiyi-Ironsi at the head of the country but it was followed by a counter-coup by General Yakubu Gowon; then, in 1967, the Eastern region of Nigeria was proclaimed independent and became the Republic of Biafra, followed by the formation of several states, provoking the division of Nigeria in thirty-six states and a Federal Capital Territory at Abuja; civil war between Federal Military Government and Biafran separatist forces lasted from 1967 to 1970 and it ended with Biafra reincorporated into Nigeria (Falola, Heaton, 2008, xvii). This constitutes the background that saw, in the following years, the Nigerian economic boom because of the rise of oil price; in fact, oil exportation was fundamental for Nigerian economy and government, a fact which determined the spread of corruption and an ineffective management of state funds and resources; after other military coups, Nigeria reverted being a republic with the civil administration of President Alhaji Shehu Shagari, who was not able to manage the climate of economic decline that followed the previous oil boom: state money and funds were spent by politicians without paying attention to the economic situation, a fact which transformed Nigeria into a debtor country; then, in 1980s, other military coups were not able to solve the situation of economic decline; in 1993, presidential elections were held but results were annulled, and this fact provoked a state

of chaos in the country, followed by a military coup which brought General Sani Abacha at the power: his regime lasted until 1998 and it was a real tyranny characterized by violence and executions used to suppress any form of dissent; after his death, Nigeria returned to be a republic again in 1999 and its President Obasanjo tried to improve economic and political conditions of the country both on national and on international level, which led to few improvements; then, in 2007, for the first time, a transition from a civil government to another civil rule happened although it was quite controversial because of the general opinion that results had been controlled by the ruling Democratic Party (Falola, Heaton, 2008, xviii).

This historical climate of corruption and military power emerges in Adichie's *Americanah*, and the importance of having money in Nigerian society appears clearly in the first section of the novel where a significant character is introduced: Chief is a rich Nigerian man who chased Obinze's cousin Nneoma for a long time and she exploited this situation to start her own business with his help; in fact, he provided her capital to start her own activity which consisted in frozen chicken distribution (Adichie, 2013, 28). Therefore, Nneoma took Obinze to Chief hoping to help Obinze starting a business on his own by mean of her close relationship with Chief, who still chased her; she is aware that knowing right people in Nigerian society was the only way to succeed and become rich and Chief knew many important Nigerian people related to the political world:

"I was Babangida's friend. I was Abacha's friend. Now that the military has gone, Obasanjo is my friend," he said. "Do you know why? Is it because I am stupid?" [...]  
"They said the National Farm Support Corporation is bankrupt and they are going to privatize it. Do you know this? No. How do I know this? Because I have friends. By the time you know it, I would have taken a position and I would have benefited from the arbitrage. This is our free market!" Chief laughed. (Adichie, 2013, 32)

From Chief conversation names of politicians emerge, a fact which locates the novel in a specific period; in fact, Babangida and Abacha were two Generals who had taken control of Nigeria by mean of military coups respectively in 1985 and 1993, while Obasanjo was the head of civilian administration from 1999 to 2007, although controversial opinions exist in relation with presidential elections that brought him to the power; his main aims were the reduction of Nigeria's debt by mean of foreign

investments, and the privatization of Nigerian industry and business (Falola, Heaton, 2008, 236). Obasanjo priorities emerge in *Americanah* too, when Chief refers Obinze that National Farm Support Corporation is going to be privatized, a fact that represent an opportunity for Obinze to start his own business that consisted in undervalue properties, acquiring them and then selling them (Adichie, 2013, 32). Therefore, *Americanah* refers to Nigeria under Obasanjo's government, a period when corruption was highly spread and rich people covered a crucial role in society: money determines a change in people's perception of individual in Nigerian society: life becomes simpler for rich people in dealing both with everyday matters, with banks and with visa permissions; this attitude of veneration of money is linked to another feature of Nigerian society: it is a hungry society that does not care about honesty in business and it continues to hustle to get money because of the Nigeria's permanent climate of uncertainty about the future (Adichie, 2013, 30). In effect, although Nigerian foreign debt was reduced under Obasanjo's government, rural communities continued to be affected by poverty and their situation did not improve while some urban areas developed and, in these areas, few districts became the symbol of both wealth and corruption of those businessmen and state officials which constituted the elite of society: they kept on enriching while most of Nigerian population remained poor (Falola, Heaton, 2008, 237).

Furthermore, by mean of this character, Adichie provides not only setting references related to the Nigerian context but she also offers the reader a round character: Obinze's thoughts report a quite grotesque image of this powerful man: "It surprised him that Chief was something of a fop, with his air of fussy grooming: nails manicured and shiny, black velvet slippers at his feet, a diamond cross around his neck. He had expected a larger man and a rougher exterior" (Adichie, 2013, 29). This man who sat on a throne-like golden chair was drinking cognac while his guests surrounded him, was a kind of caricature and he is perceived by Obinze as a rather small person that does not convey feelings of fear or threat at first sight; however, as the novel proceeds, Obinze's thoughts about Chief change and he starts to reflect about the reason why Chief has decided to help him and imagines possible dangerous requests Chief would ask him in change of that generous favour (Adichie, 2013, 34).

Furthermore, *Americanah* presents another character that embodies the political situation of Nigeria providing setting information: in fact, in Part 2, the figure of The General enters the novel; he is one of the generals of Nigerian Head of State who decided to take care of Aunt Uju because he liked her and wanted to enjoy her company especially on a sexual point of view: in exchange he provided her everything she needed and wanted, a house, a job, he paid for her hairdresser and shopping and made her totally dependent from him; Aunt Uju finds him attractive mainly because of his power, exemplified by his possibility to create job opportunities: “The hospital has no doctor vacancy but The General made them create one for me”, otherwise Aunt Uju would have been jobless (Adichie, 2013, 55). This is a clear reference to the climate of corruption of Nigerian society, described by Aunt Uju as an “ass-licking economy” (Adichie, 2013, 93): this passage recalls the previously analysed section in Part 1 when Nneoma introduces her cousin Obinze to Chief in order to help him starting his own business. Although their openly dirty business, these figures are adored by people who stress their generosity and venerate them as gods: this attitude is exemplified by Ifemelu’s mother who prays for The General and calls him a mentor (Adichie, 2013, 54). The same behaviour is shown towards Chief Omenka who gave the church two vans as a gift and then he received garlands and he was elevated to the state of benefactor by the community although everybody was aware of his business:

“Why should I make decorations for a thief?”

Sister Ibinabo stared in astonishment. A silence fell. The other girls looked on expectantly.

“What did you say?” Sister Ibinabo asked quietly, offering a chance for Ifemelu to apologize, to put the words back in her mouth. But Ifemelu felt herself unable to stop, her heart thumping, hurtling on a fast-moving path.

“Chief Omenika is a 419 and everybody knows it,” she said. “This church is full of 419 men. Why should we pretend that this hall was not built with dirty money?” (Adichie, 2013, 62)

This passage refers clearly to a Nigerian criminal practice: 419 men were criminals involved in the so called 419 scams; it was a kind of fraud that began in Nigeria in 1980s after oil bust; it started dealing with investment opportunities, at the beginning by mean

of letters and later through emails and fax; its name comes from Section 419 of Nigeria's Criminal Code which is violated by this scam (Dyrud, 2005, 1). These figures involved in illegal business, corruption and criminal practices seem to be accepted and praised by people, because their money appear to be a good way to assure safety and goods to the community; nevertheless the climate of uncertainty emerges as a permanent feature of Nigerian political context: The General, in fact, died because of a military crash which had been probably planned by the Head of State himself who felt threatened by his own officers; he feared they were organizing a coup (Adichie, 2013, 104).

Furthermore, Nsukka university campus is presented in *Americanah*: here students talked about the importance of being active and staying united because if they were a union, institutions would have listened to their problems; moreover, demonstrations were made by students against long-lasting university strikes:

They chanted "No Light! No Water!" and "VC is a Goat!" and found themselves carried along with the roaring crowd that settled, finally, in front of the vice chancellor's house. Bottles were broken, a car was set on fire, and then the vice chancellor came out, diminutive, encased between security men, and spoke in pastel tones.

Later, Obinze's mother said, "I understand the students' grievances, but we are not the enemy. The military is the enemy. They have not paid our salary in months. How can we teach if we cannot eat?". And, still later, the news spread around campus of a strike by lecturers, and students gathered in the hostel foyer, bristling with the known and the unknown. (Adichie, 2013, 110)

The portrait of the University of Nigeria that emerges in the novel convey the climate of uncertainty that pervaded the country during the 1990s military government, and particularly Nsukka University appears as the symbol of youngsters' resistance and dissent, which is a further confirmation of the difficult situation of Nigerian civil society during that years (Emenyonu, 2017, 20).

While Adichie's *Americanah* presents the Nigerian context of post-independence period, Igiaba Scego in her novel *Adua* deals not only with 1970s-Somalia but in some parts of the text she inserts references of Italian colonialism, although Scego decides not

to analyse historical moments specifically during her narration in order to underline emotions and life experiences, and therefore characters' subjectivity (Scego, 2015, 1).

Nevertheless, references to Italian colonialism emerge from the title, *Adua*, which corresponds to the female protagonist's name and refers to the first African success against colonialism (Scego, 2015, 49). Italian colonialism in the Eastern African region called Horn of Africa started during the second half of 19<sup>th</sup> century, particularly after 1869 when the Suez Channel was opened, which represented a significant opportunity for Italian colonial enterprise: Italian entered the Horn of Africa starting from an economic point of view, while political control over this territory began in 1882; the Somali territory was characterized by a multiplicity of ethnic groups and from the second half of 19<sup>th</sup> century onwards it was under control of three different countries: France, Great Britain and Italy; the latter controlled the Benadir area, Mogadiscio, and the Indian Ocean shore; Italian protectorate of Italian Somalia began in 1889, and in 1905 it became an Italian colony: Italian interest towards Somali territory in effect had increased after Adua battle in 1896, when Ethiopian armed forces defeated Italian army in a bloody conflict; therefore, after Addis Abeba peace, which determined the end of Italo-Ethiopian conflict, Italian interest towards Ethiopia decreased while Somali territories were seen as a more interesting opportunity; furthermore, in 1920s, Italian fascist government occupied Somalia with terrible consequences for Somali ethnic groups that lived on that territory: they were expropriated from their own territories which were given to Italian colonists (Scego, 2010, 168).

Moreover, 1934 was a significant year because of the armed conflict determined by the desire to control the Ual-Ual oasis region in Ogaden: both Italians and Ethiopians wanted to extend their control over this territory, whose border position between Ethiopian and Somali territories favoured the climate of tension that determined the 1934 conflict; this episode constitutes the *casus belli* for Italian Fascist government to attack Ethiopian territories (Treccani, 1980). Ual-Ual conflict emerges in Igiaba Scego's *Adua* in the form of a dream of the male protagonist of her novel, Zoppe, Adua's father, who possesses a kind of premonitory ability: in his dream, Benito Mussolini's war that started in a place located on the Ethiopian border, whose liminal position increased possibilities of tensions; a conflict to gain the control of this territory would have been Mussolini's

reason for declaring war to Ethiopians; then, Zoppe asks himself whether his dream is, maybe, a future prevision and not just a dream (Scego, 2015, 50). In this way, Scego inserts historical information generating an oniric atmosphere in between fiction and reality; however, punctual references to the historical setting of the novel are provided too: in fact, chapter 3 opens with references to the year, 1934, and the place, Rome, contextualising the character, Zoppe, as a figure situated inside the period of Italian colonialism (Scego, 2015, 3, 1).

While the Italian colonial period is presented in the text mainly through Zoppe's experience, both on the Somali and on the Italian context, the female character, Adua, provides details related to the 60s: during those years, her sister and she were taken from the forest where they lived and brought by their biological father, Zoppe, to the city of Magalo (Scego, 2015, 43). Magalo is described as a city full of infrastructures although it was not as big as Mogadiscio: there were schools, offices, a library, churches, mosques, restaurants and many other structures and facilities, which rendered Magalo an active and dynamic city (Scego, 2015, 61). Furthermore, 1960 is identified in the novel as the year when Italians left Somalia; in fact, this was the year which marked the end of AFIS (Amministrazione Fiduciaria Italiana), which was a ten-year period of Italian trusteeship of Somalia in order to guide the country towards the independence: it started in 1950 and it represented a period of great tension between Italian government and a political nationalist organization composed by young Somali who wanted autonomy; nevertheless, a parliament was instituted in 1956 and in 1960 Somalia was proclaimed an independent country; however, situations of tension continued because this new country, the Republic of Somalia or Great Somalia, was formed by five different territories whose boundaries had not been properly defined: Italian Somalia, Somaliland, French Somalia, Ogaden and north-eastern Kenya; therefore, during the second half of 1960s, a period of political instability started and it was followed by Said Barre's regime of dictatorship in 1969 (Scego, 2012, 170).

Moreover, references to Said Barre's regime emerge in the novel: in fact, in 1976, Adua is informed that her father had been arrested because accused of insubordination; in effect, Zoppe did not agree with Somali political choice of alliance with URSS and he openly expressed his disagreement and his anti-communist point of view (Scego, 2015,



105). In fact, Said Barre's regime started in 1969 with an innovative nationalist programme which promoted school education, medical health care services and Somali language teaching; however, during 1970s, Somalia and URSS became allied and the Somali Revolutionary Socialist Party was established in 1976; although Barre's political programme seemed to possess many positive and innovative points, problems emerged when power started to be concentrated in his hands; furthermore, food supply became difficult because of the two-year drought that hit the country in 1974-75, and the situation was worsened by Barre's nationalist decision to start an armed conflict against Ethiopia in order to gain control over the Ogaden region: however, Somali army was defeated and it determined the rise of inner tensions in the country against Said Barre's dictatorship, which ended in 1991 after some years of violent repression of dissent (Scego, 2012, 72). In fact, widespread opposition against the regime determined the end of Barre's government in 1991 but civilians' situation did not improve because of the outbreak of Civil War and famine all over the country, which led many people to emigrate; in fact, this situation was the main responsible for contemporary dispersal of Somali diasporic communities around the world (Lewis, 2008, 129). An example of emigration from Somalia is presented in the novel by mean of the character of Adua: in fact, in 1970s she met Italian people in Magalo thanks to a man, Omar Gemale, involved in illegal traffics: Italians were looking for girls who were going to be employed as actresses in movies, which seemed to Adua a great opportunity to move away from the Somali difficult situation and start a new life in Italy (Scego, 2012, 104). Furthermore, her choice to escape from Magalo to become an actress was driven by her dream-like image of Italy and of the world of Italian movies she had developed by mean of books and actors she saw in movies: however, it would reveal to be an idealised image of 1970s-Italian society, which is actually cruel and disappointing (Scego, 2012, 9).

Therefore, history is present both in *Americanah* and in *Adua* and it emerges by mean of either characters' experiences or specific details in the text, therefore Africa is presented in both of the novels in a specific way: Nigeria and Somalia emerge as real contexts in both texts; they have their own history and their own peculiarities: this way of writing about Africa does not confine the African continent to the margin; its history is not dismissed in favour of a European perspective but, on the contrary, it is evaluated

(Emenyonu, 2017, 15). Therefore, reading these novels the reader receives historical inputs that are a useful starting point for reconstructing the setting of these narrative works.

### 3. Recurrent themes in Adichie's *Americanah* and Scego's *Adua*: novels in comparison

Adichie's *Americanah* and Scego's *Adua* appear as quite different novels and, at first sight, they seem to be quite difficult to compare; first of all, their style differs, but also their length and the authors' language: in fact, *Americanah* appears as a lighter reading in comparison with *Adua*, which possesses a crude style; furthermore, *Americanah* is written in English while *Adua* is in Italian; the choice of comparing these two novels is determined by the aim to show common themes which emerge in both of them: they both belong to the postcolonial panorama; in effect they problematize aspects such as language, identity, history, memory, cultural appropriation and issues related to individual move to ex-colonizer countries; although Italian colonial past is usually forgiven or hidden, it is important to underline that its social and economic ground has been modified by the relatively recent phenomenon of migratory flux towards Italy; people coming from ex colonies such as Ethiopia, Libya, Somalia, Eritrea has been usually forced to move looking for better life conditions; this process has determined the development of a literary and cultural phenomenon identified as *migrant literature* in Italy which is constantly growing (Bassi, Sirotti, 2010, 234). Particularly, Scego explores the Somali migrant's experience in Italy.

On the other hand, the American context deals with postcolonial matters in a particular way: its ambiguities are expressed in Adichie's work by mean of characters' experiences which recall concepts such as the idea of double consciousness elaborated by Du Bois in relation to the formation of African American identity which is highly influenced by the racially-oriented American environment and by their memory of a past of enslavement in those territories: these issues are studied by Gilroy who later focuses on this idea contextualizing it in the process of hybridization and formation of a transnational identity; these elements are significant because of their power of linking the past to the present situation of African diaspora that is typical of contemporary society: African individuals move across national and cultural boundaries in Western countries and the have to face situations of dislocation and experiences of otherness; particularly, Adichie's *Americanah* deals with the Nigerian migrant's experience in USA and Great Britain, underlining their

contradictory and ambiguous position, whose complexity characterizes African diasporic subjects (Emenyonu, 2017, 216).

Therefore, despite the differences that emerge between Adichie's and Scego's contexts and novels, some common themes can be listed, a fact which confirms their belonging to the postcolonial category; firstly, the relationship between a place and its own smell is explored, followed by a focus on the idea of home and travel; moreover, the body is taken into account and attention is given to some physical elements that assume a relevant social role in the individual perception of the self; then, the female experience of migration is analysed and linked with depression; furthermore, the male migrant situation is observed in both novels and, finally the analysis concentrates on the idea of freedom of self-expression, with a particular reflection upon the role of technology and media in the migrant's construction of identity. These features represent key qualities and aspects typical of the Afropolitan individual whose personality is shaped by his/her own relationship with both his home country and the Western metropolitan space where he/she lives (Selasi, 2005).

### 3.1. Sensory feelings

From the very beginning of both *Americanah* and *Adua*, the theme of the senses emerges and, particularly, the importance of the sense of smell is stressed: each place is characterized by a particular smell which provides both the reader and the character the first impression about that place which will be linked with the character's life. In Adichie's novel, a first sensory reference appears immediately:

Princeton, in the summer, smelled of nothing, and although Ifemelu liked the tranquil greenness of the many trees, the clean streets and stately homes, the delicately overpriced shops, and the quiet, abiding air of earned grace, it was this, the lack of smell, that most appealed to her, perhaps because the other American cities she knew well had all smelled distinctly. Philadelphia had the musty scent of history. New Heaven smelled of neglect. Baltimore smelled of brine, and Brooklyn of sun-warmed garbage. But Princeton had no smell (Adichie, 2013, 1).

The connection between places and smells underlines the fact that Ifemelu, the female protagonist of Adichie's novel, has lived experiences which relate her to these places; the lack of smell typical of Princeton is significantly positioned at the beginning of the novel because it determines the identification of Princeton as a neutral space where Ifemelu can take *deep breaths*, and this neutrality assumes a significant role in her identity building: in effect, she feels often overwhelmed by sensations of *bleakness* and *borderlessness* that leads her reconsidering her life with her boyfriend Blaine and her own successful blog; this neutrality has turned her amorphous but has given her strength and space to investigate her need to be rooted, which consequently brings her to come back to Nigeria (Adichie, 2013, 7).

In Scego's *Adua*, the first reference is the smell of onion that characterizes Mogadiscio, but this sensory feeling is experienced indirectly by the protagonist; in fact, it is reported by Adua's friend Lul who has just returned to Somalia after many years in Italy, therefore Adua asks her many questions about their country, in order to know how it had changed in those thirty years they have been away from their home country:

Lul è stata la prima delle mie amiche a tornare. Mi ha chiamato dopo una settimana che stava a Mogadiscio, e mi ha detto "l'aria odora di cipolla". Non mi ha detto molto altro. Io le ho fatto domande su domande. Volevo sapere se era davvero cambiato

tanto il nostro paese e se noi che da più di trent'anni viviamo fuori avremmo potuto legarci di nuovo alla nuova, nuovissima Somalia della pace (Scego, 2015, 10).

This reference to smell offers again an occasion for the protagonist to reflect about her own roots and the possibility of coming back to her home country; Adua asks both Lul and herself if it is possible to face those changes that inevitably have occurred during years of civil war and famine that afflicted Somalia for many years; therefore, thoughts linked with the return home emerge early in both of the novels underlining the importance of this theme in the whole novel and, particularly, a stress is given to the ambivalent relationship between the protagonists and their home country and roots. Moreover, in *Americanah* the smell of Nigeria is described in the final section of the novel, when her arrival in Lagos after many years abroad is described as a kind of sensory assault for Ifemelu, who describes Lagos chaotic atmosphere as exaggerated, full of voices and confusion; this strong sensory feeling is followed again by a smell-related sensation perceived when her friend Ranyinudo arrives at the airport to pick her up: in that occasion they hug and Ifemelu perceives the smell of her home country: in effect, "Ranyinudo smelled of a floral perfume and exhaust fumes and sweat; she smelled of Nigeria" (Adichie, 2013, 476).

Sensorial feelings related to the African city of Mogadiscio are presented in Scego's novel also by mean of the male character Zoppe, Adua's father: in a flashback he describes his impression determined by the encounter with Mogadiscio he first experienced with his father when he was a child: the sense of smell, sight and hearing are involved in this moment of first contact with this place: it is described as a shocking experience for the young Zoppe who was not used to this mix of sounds and smells; particularly, he firstly perceives a strong and strange smell of cinnamon; furthermore, he sees many colours he associates to things, actions and feelings; finally, his contact with Mogadiscio involves his sense of hearing because of people's screaming and chatting: the whole experience of chaos of sounds and smells conveys a feeling of confusion which recalls the previously analysed passage of *Americanah* when Ifemelu's arrival in Lagos is described:

Fu dopo queste parole che l'odore secco della boscaglia venne soppiantato da uno strano profumo di cannella.

“Lo senti figliolo?” chiese Hagi Safar tutto eccitato. “Questo è l’odore di Mogadiscio.”

Zoppe fu stordito da quel chaos di suoni e odori tutti diversi.

Poi vide i colori. Vide il giallo dei sorrisi, il viola della violenza, il verde della rassegnazione, il rosa del pianto. La gente ululava a Mogadiscio. Ululava come un leone prossimo alla morte. Si urlava per i conti che non tornavano, per gli amori finiti male, per una libbra di carne che non sarebbe bastata a sfamare una famiglia (Scego, 2015, 148).

This way of considering spaces from a sensory point of view prevents generalizations and it avoids the creation of a rigid division between Western and non-Western spaces as it usually happens in stereotypical representations: in the case of Adichie’s and Scego’s novels, every place possesses its own smell and features without idealizations while usually fixed categories of space are created by representations of non-Western African spaces that are usually described as savage, wild, obscure, indefinite, primordial in contrast with organized and civilized Western social spaces: instead of *romantic, evocative and unparticular* descriptions of African spaces, Adichie and Scego offer visions of spaces that are full of specific details (Wainaina, 2005, 2). Furthermore, not only African spaces are presented as real contexts with their own specific features, but also Western spaces are not idealized: in fact, although in *Adua* Zoppe imagines Rome as an open-air realm, therefore an elegant and clean place, he finds himself surrounded by a bad-smelling environment where the smell of urine was strong and persistent (Scego, 2015, 23).

This anti-stereotypical approach to places is typical of Afropolitan culture: both African and Western spaces are not described as fixed entities but they are filtered by characters’ life experiences and protagonists’ personal growth appears to be strictly linked with these cities, both in the West and in the African continent, which is a basic feature of the Afropolitan identity: thus, both Adichie and Scego employ an Afropolitan approach to their novels because Afropolitan subjects refuse to essentialize geography, they prefer to complicate it in order to underline its complexity in opposition with the simplicity that characterizes stereotypes (Selasi, 2005).

### 3.2. Home

Both *Americanah* and *Adua* invite the reader to reflect about the concept of home which is embodied in diasporic situations where it assumes a double meaning: in effect, home can be considered by the diasporic individual as an imagined and desired place, a kind of imagined dimension where it is impossible to return, which appears to be different from the geographical place that corresponds to the country of origin; then, a second interpretation of the idea of home corresponds to the lived *experience of a locality*: this definition refers to those sounds, smells and sensory sensations that an individual links with a specific environment where he/ she has experienced everyday life characterized by cultural and social events and situations (Brah, 1996, 188).

These two definitions of the idea of home can be recognized in Adichie's and Scego's characters; in particular, in *Americanah* Ifemelu reflects about the place of her roots: "Nigeria became where she was supposed to be, the only place she could sink her roots in, without the constant urge to tug them out and shake off the soil" (Adichie, 2013, 7). In fact she is in Princeton and she is pervaded by a feeling of homesickness after thirteen years away from Nigeria; her feeling empty and bleak contrasts with the emotional vortex that surrounds her when she arrives in Lagos: voices, smells, traffic generate a *jumble of feelings* that provoke and initial confusion in Ifemelu's mind; her perception is filtered by her American experience, which makes her feel as if many things have changed and, particularly, the city environment convey her a feeling of decay (Adichie, 2013, 475).

Therefore, her return seems to underline that she has been changed by her years in America and then she has appropriated of a typical Western behaviour of stressing strange features a traveller is not familiar with (Emenyonu, 2017, 209). Nevertheless, this reaction is followed by an emotional moment, accompanied again by a familiar sound, the sound of generators:

[...] in the greyy of the evening darkness, the air burdened with smells, she ached with an almost unbearable emotion that she could not name. It was nostalgic and melancholy, a beautiful sadness for the things she had missed and the things she would never know. Later, sitting on the couch in Ranyinudo's small stylish living room, her feet sunk into the too-soft carpet, the flat-screen TV perched on the opposite wall,



Ifemelu looked unbelievably at herself. She had done it. She had come back (Adichie, 2013, 479).

However, after this highly-emotional moment, a situation of discomfort due to the humid and hot air, she starts complaining and she finds herself relieved for having an American passport which gives her the choice to stay or to leave; this reaction proves that she has been changed by America, and unconsciously she knows it: "She was no longer sure what was new in Lagos and what was new in herself (Adichie, 2013, 478).

Although her initial idealization of Nigeria as the place of her roots, she finds out that this supposed ideal home is *unhomely* to her; in this situation she recognizes herself in a position of both insider and outsider (Emenyonu, 2017, 209): she becomes aware of her condition when she goes to the Nigeropolitan Club where Nigerian returnees meet and talk about American things they miss; in this context Ifemelu understands that she loves both Nigerian everyday life and food but also American aspects she has become accustomed (Adichie, 2013, 503). Therefore, Ifemelu's home is now impossible to connect to a single geographical space but it is a concept formed by both Nigerian and American elements; it is a kind of in-between space shaped by everyday experiences of life: it confirms that homing desire does not necessarily corresponds to the migrant's will to return to his/her country of origin (Brah, 1996, 189).

Therefore, Ifemelu is an example of transnational actor because she has absorbed cultural and social aspects of her host country, America, without totally assimilating to American society: she has been able to preserve some aspects typical of Nigerian culture and language; in fact, once returned in Nigeria, she realizes that Nigeria and America are the places she would live, her homes, and she recognizes of having assimilated some American behaviours but she still shares Nigerian values for what concerns education and children raising (Adichie, 2013, 564). Adichie's female protagonist has been able to develop parallel identities as if she has doubled herself; furthermore, she considers her American passport an instrument that gives her the choice of mobility, therefore it gives her alternatives and opportunities and she recognizes it: this fact demonstrate that, as a transnational actor, she decides to remain in a transnational space of in-betweenness where she is free to maintain connections with both Nigerian and American society that now constitutes a fundamental part of her Afropolitan personality (Emenyonu, 2017, 208).

The idea of home as a concept composed of everyday personal experiences emerges in Scego's *Adua* both in Zoppe's and in Adua's thoughts; Adua's idea of home, however, is quite ambivalent and reflects Ifemelu's doubts which lead to the definition of a double identity which feels home in a space of in-betweenness; in fact, when she was a child her encounter with Magalo, a harbour city on the Indian Ocean, is not positive:

All'inizio Magalo non mi piacque. Per me era un'usurpatrice. Una che voleva prendere il posto delle mie caprette adorato. Una che mi aveva strappato ai miei genitori, le creature che più amavo al mondo.

È stato odio a prima vista tra me e Magalo.

Magalo era la fine di una vita, la sfumatura nefasta di un destino (Scego, 2015, 61).

Although it is presented as a dynamic city full of services, schools, a library, a church, and many other activities, Adua links Magalo with her being taken away from her life in the forest, therefore this traumatic event influences her perception of the place, which will change during the course of the character's life. In fact, the ambiguous relationship between Adua and this city emerges from her thoughts at the beginning of the novel, when she is a grown-up woman and reflects upon her life: she identifies Magalo as her home but she refers to an imagined city of Magalo she has built during her years in Rome; in fact she states that she feels comfortable and safe in a precise place in Rome that is Saint Mary above Minerva square where there is Bernini's elephant sculpture that supports an obelisk; she identifies with this place that gives her peace in the confusion that characterizes the city of Rome, which assumes positive connotations for the protagonist in this moment of her life:

Mi piace Roma d'estate, soprattutto la sua luce di sera, sul far del tramonto, è calda, e anche i gabbiani diventano più buoni e viene voglia di abbracciarli. Sono i padroni delle piazze, ma qui ci sei tu, elefantino mio, e loro non si azzardano. Via, state lontano da piazza Santa Maria sopra Minerva! Mi sento protetta vicino a te. Qui sono a Magalo, a casa (Scego, 2015, 11)

There is a double identification that emerges from this passage because, by mean of the adverb of space *here*, the protagonist recognizes that her home is both Rome, in particular that precise square of the city, and Magalo: Italian and Somali identity

intermingle determining a state of uncertainty in the moment when the protagonist has to face the decision to come back home in Somalia: her ambiguous relation which the city of Magalo is expressed in her way to describe the Indian Ocean from a sensory point of view: it is both a place of magic and perfumes but also a place which smells of fish (Scego, 2015, 11).

Both the case of Ifemelu and that of Adua confirm the link between the idea of diasporic identity and the concept of multi-locationality that goes beyond cultural boundaries and geographic territories: home represents for diasporic subjects, and therefore for Afropolitan individuals, a multi-placed construction that connect diasporic subjects with more than one place; however, it does not implies that they perceive no attachment with their host country where they have settled (Brah, 1996, 191). Brah's identification of home with the concept of *lived experience of locality* emerges from Zoppe's thoughts in Scego's Adua, but some differences appears between his idea of home and the two cases previously observed: this difference is determined by the fact that the character of Zoppe is an example of first generation migrant, who has lived the colonial experience directly, therefore the trauma linked with his diasporic situation is too strong to consent him a connection with Rome, that represent for him a space of humiliation an suffering; therefore, the traumatic historical event, typical of victim diasporas, is still too close to the character's experience (Cohen, 2008,4).

### 3.3. The migrant's experience is a gendered matter

Gender plays a significant role in the diasporic experience of migration; in fact, the tendency to observe the diasporic phenomenon without considering gender distinctions would mean to *normalize* the male experience, producing generalizations; for this reason it is important to compare male and female experiences of migration presented in Adichie's and Scego's works, reflecting on many issues such as the relevance of gender roles in diasporic situations, the ability to maintain connections with the homeland, and the role of diasporic community in the host country as a support or an oppressive element (Clifford, 1994, 313-314). Furthermore, the analysis of female experiences of migration focuses on the following issues: body, violence and depression are all common matters that have to be treated in dealing with Ifemelu's, Adua's and Aunt Uju's lives as migrants; the analysis of male migrant's experience, embodied in Adiche's and Scego's works by Obinze's and Zoppe's experience, focuses mainly on humiliation and on the feeling of danger as a constant element that characterizes migrant's life.

In both novels, the female protagonists' migratory process begins with a journey towards a country that has been widely idealized by the characters. In the case of Ifemelu, in effect, America has been idealized as a cold place because it was overseas:

It was summer in America, she knew this, but all her life she had thought of "overseas" as a cold place of wool coats and snow, and because America was "overseas", and her illusions so strong they could not be fended off by reason, she bought the thickest sweater she could find in Tejuosho market for her trip. She wore it for the journey, zipping it all the way up in the humming interior of the airplane and then unzipping it as she left the airport building with Aunty Uju. The sweltering heat alarmed her [...] (Adichie, 2013, 127).

Ifemelu's initial disappointment due to the hot weather she has not expected to encounter increases when she sees the landscape that was matte and not shining as she had imagined; however, she was excited about the idea of discovering America (Adichie, 2013, 130). Similarly, in Scego's novel, Adua begins her process of migration to Italy with a journey full of expectations and illusions: in effect, after having met Italians, Adua was selected for acting in an Italian movie, therefore she was excited because of this great possibility that would give her the possibility to change her life and going away from

Magalo and from her life in Somalia: she seriously imagined Italy as the country of opportunity where she could become a star; however, Adua was not aware that the movie *Femina Somala* she had been selected for was a porn movie; although at start she was not aware of the situation, she early understood Italians were interested in her body: in fact, she experienced violence and sex harassment (Scego, 2015, 122).

Therefore, after their journeys, both of the protagonists feel disappointed and then they both have traumatic encounters with the new society: the centrality of female body in their experience of migration is relevant; in fact, in Adua's case, losing control of her own body means renouncing to her own dignity (Scego, 2015, 122), and similarly, Ifemelu's encounter with American society determines a resembling situation in which the female body assumes a relevant role for her social inclusion: Ifemelu's experience of being African in America is characterized by the protagonist's initial struggle to find a job: the need of money and the frustration determined by her unsuccessful attempts drive her to have a sexual encounter for money, an event that shaped her life and determined her period of depression (Emenyonu, 2017, 234):

She sat naked on her bed and looked at her life, in this tiny room with the moldy carpet, the hundred-dollar bill on the table, her body rising with loathing. She should never have gone there. [...] she could not bear the thought of touching her own body, and so she put on her nightdress, gingerly, to touch as little of herself as possible (Adichie, 2013, 190).

Therefore, in both cases the female migrant's geographical displacement due to their journey to a new country is accompanied by a psychological displacement that the traumatic encounter with the new society produces; in both cases, a direct consequence of these traumatic events corresponds to a period of depression in which both Ifemelu and Adua feel alienated: Ifemelu in effect loses control of her life and she feels to have lost the ability to care, asking herself which was the point of her life (Adichie, 2013, 192). Similarly, Adua's traumatic encounter with Italian society is followed by a period of drugs and alcohol after the movie director and his wife had exploited her weaker position (Scego, 2015, 155).

From an analysis of both situations, the concept of *deterritorialization* emerges as relevant because it corresponds to a situation of alienation and exile in which identities,

people and meanings are displaced; this phenomenon is typical of postmodern society and it characterizes the migrant condition: it can be described as a sort of *defamiliarization*; alienation is a constituent part of it, and it determines a significant consequence because it shakes the subject, awakening his/her own imagination, which is activated, a fact that generates an evolution of identity of those individuals involved in this process (Kaplan, 1987, 188). Therefore, being a migrant in an unfamiliar society enables the diasporic subject to develop a consciousness achieved by mean of the everyday struggle for social inclusion, but understanding new cultural mechanisms is complicated and dissatisfaction can emerge as the result to the migrant's failed attempts; furthermore, the migrant's identity is shaped by his/her experiences in the new country, but it can also be deprived of some features (Emenyonu, 2017, 230). An example of this mechanism is shown in Adichie's *Americanah* by Auntie Uju's changes determined by her forced migration to America after The General's death: in her case, Auntie Uju has changed in order to be included in American society; as Ifemelu notices, Auntie Uju uses a different accent when she speaks to white America, which sounds more nasal, and her behaviour becomes apologetic (Adichie, 2013, 134). Furthermore, Uju refuses the Igbo language and asks Ifemelu not to speak Igbo with her son Dike in order not to confuse him with two languages; moreover, she adapts her way to pronounce her own name, Uju, with the American pronunciation:

Auntie Uju's cell phone rang. "Yes, this is Uju." She pronounced it you-joo instead of oo-joo.

"Is that how you pronounce your name now?" Ifemelu asked afterwards.

"It's what they call me."

Ifemelu swallowed the words "Well, that isn't your name". (Adichie, 2013, 128)

These changes in Auntie Uju's behaviour are determined by her desire not to be an outsider in American society, but her process of assimilation into American society is deleting some fundamental traits of her identity: Uju's struggle for social inclusion provokes a displacement of subjectivity because "America had subdued her" (Adichie, 2013, 133). Therefore, Uju's subjectivity is fighting for building a new identity because she finds herself in a new social and cultural context where the development of a double

consciousness is needed: struggling to be both Western and black represents a challenge and requires a *double consciousness*: in effect, the African subject that lives in Western contexts “[...] simply wishes to make it possible for a man to be both a Negro and an American, without being cursed and spit upon by his fellows, without having the doors of Opportunity closed roughly in his face” (Du Bois, 1903, 4). Uju is striving to find the balance between her African values and American social behaviours she has to face: this appears a really difficult goal to reach because she arrived in America as an adult; the issue of age is noticed by Ifemelu in comparison with her friend Ginika who came to America when she was really young:

“There were codes Ginika knew, ways of being that she had mastered. Unlike Aunty Uju, Ginika had come to America with the flexibility and fluidness of youth, the cultural cues had seeped into her skin, and now she went bowling, and knew what Tobey Maguire was about, and found double-dipping gross” (Adichie, 2013, 152).

However, being a migrant at early age does not mean not to have to face difficulties related to identity building and social inclusion within the new society: in fact, Ginika admits she had serious issues related to her body at start, because she was considered fat at school, therefore she started losing weight and she went really close to anorexia (Adichie, 2013, 150). It is possible to notice that the theme of body emerges again as a significant element involved in female migrant’s traumatic experiences.

On the other hand, the male experience of migration is presented in Adichie’s *Americanah* and Scego’s *Adua* by mean of the main male characters of these novels that are respectively Obinze and Zoppe; in both cases humiliation and constant danger appear as common elements of their experiences although the historical periods they refer to are quite distant. Obinze is a young Nigerian who migrates to Great Britain in order to find a job after university: after his graduation, he asked for an American visa several times but the American embassy kept on denying it, therefore he tried to find a job in Nigeria but his attempts revealed unsuccessful, thus his mother provided him the opportunity to go to Great Britain in order to find his own path elsewhere away from Nigeria (Adichie, 2013, 288). The setting of Obinze’s experience can be derived from a reference to Obasanjo’s government in Nigeria, which went from 1999 to 2006 (Falola, Heaton, 2008, xviii). On the other hand, Zoppe’s experience of migration took place in Italy during the period of

Italian government of Somalia in 1930s: he decided to move to Italy working as a translator for the Italian colonial government: he was moved by the desire of money therefore, although his father did not agree with his decision, he started his job as a translator for the colonial government (Scego, 2015, 18). Although these settings differ both on the temporal and on the spatial level, Obinze's and Zoppe's experience share some elements: both of the characters live a situation of humiliation in the new country, worsen by the feeling of constant danger and loneliness which accompany them every day and finally, as subjects, they are objectified and dehumanized by the host society.

In Scego's *Adua*, Zoppe is presented as a character starting from a situation of suffering and humiliation, in fact his presentation opens with a scene of pain because it is 1934, he is in Italy and three Italian men are beating him:

Erano in te a picchiarlo. Uno lo teneva fermo, gli altri lo riempivano di botte. Il più giovane strinse zoppe con tutta la forza. I picchiatori ridevano di quello zelo a buon mercato. "Bravo Beppe! Tienilo, stritolalo bene questo bastardo di un negro." E Beppe ubbidiva. Zoppe sentiva un fuoco divampare dalla sua pelle. E se l'era fatta addosso come quando era bambino. [...] Si sentiva umiliato, solo, un frutto avvizzito su una pianta ancora acerba. (Scego, 2015, 14).

In Zoppe's situation, humiliation is strictly linked with body pain therefore it is both a mental and physical condition which recalls African slaves condition: he was both punched and insulted by Italians who were colonial masters of his country of origin, Somalia. On the contrary, Obinze's humiliation is mostly on a psychological point of view: once arrived in London, the first job he got was that of toilets cleaner, and he decided to deal with it with irony; however, one day he found a *mound of shit* on a toilet lid, which represented for him a kind of personal affront, therefore he refused to clean it and because of this he decided not to return to that job (Adichie, 2013, 293). Furthermore, humiliation was worsened by the feeling of dislike he knew people felt towards him:

The next job was a temporary replacement with a company that delivered kitchens, week after week of sitting beside white drivers who called him "labourer", of endless construction sites full of noises and helmets, of carrying wood planks up long stairs, unaided and unsung. In the silence with which they drove, and the tone with which they said "labourer!" Obinze sensed the drivers' dislike. (Adichie, 2013, 312)



This feeling of dislike towards the black man is perceived also from Zoppe's experience in Rome; in fact, while he walked in the streets he had to avoid people's spits which were clear manifestation of Italian people's contempt towards him, a fact that was psychologically painful for him; this situation made him walk quickly, almost running, because he did not want to be seen; Zoppe would have preferred being invisible, like an illusion or a ghost (Scego, 2015, 23). Links between the Black man and ghosts are relevant because they result to be useful to understand better this figure, still connected with a memory of enslavement, within contemporary society: in this sense the *Black slave* is considered a plastic modifiable subject whose destruction has led to a moment of transformation; therefore this process of deconstruction, in Derrida's sense, is relevant for the future and has turned the Black man into *the ghost of modernity* who has been able to escape from a past of enslavement without forgetting it (Mbembe, 2017, 129). However, at a first stage, the positive potential of the deconstructive moment is not perceived by subjects involved in the negative experience. In fact, the main feeling that characterizes these situations is fear: this sensation of not being safe recalls the feeling of nakedness that African American perceived in America during 1970s and 1980s when crews of young men represented a real danger: they were scared and thus they turned their fear into rage and anger (Coates, 2015, 22).

In effect, the same *urge to run* felt by Zoppe while walking in the streets in Rome emerges from Obinze's life in London as an illegal worker: this situation determined his feeling of constant fear of authorities and police; moreover, he felt he was invisible in British society (Adichie, 2013, 318). This sensation connects him with the figure of the ghost previously observed and, in Obinze's case, this sense of being invisible was increased by the fact that Obinze is forced to change his name in order to gain a NIN, which is the British National Insurance Number that is needed to work in Great Britain; therefore "That evening, as dusk fell, the sky mutung to a pale violet, Obinze became Vincent." (Adichie, 2013, 310). This event, which is responsible for identity displacement of the individual, becomes more shocking for Obinze when he sees how simple was for British people to change his name, because his new name was quickly turned from Vincent to Vinny Boy by his new boss (Adichie, 2013, 312). The individual's sense of displacement determined by the loss of his/her own name introduces the mechanism of

objectification of the migrant subject who is not treated by the host society as a human being but as an object that has to be *removed* as it happens in Obinze's case when he is caught by London police in the act of performing a *sham marriage* to gain his papers: "“Removed.” That word made Obinze feel inanimate. A thing to be removed. A thing without a breath and mind. A thing.” (Adichie, 2013, 345). This alienation he felt appears from Zoppe's job experience as a translator for the Italian government, because his role requires his own ability to stay neutral and report and translate each word precisely; however, this implies the growth of Zoppe's sense of betrayal towards his own country determined by his first-person involvement in political matters: therefore, Zoppe realizes that he had to dehumanize himself, translating words and sights without thinking about their meaning; Zoppe has been transformed into a mere instrument, an object, exploited by the Italian colonial system against the freedom of his own country (Scego, 2013, 165). This process of objectification of human beings arises as a constituent element that defines the relationship between the concepts of race and Blackness: in effect, this process constitutes the basement of this relationship whose starting point corresponds to the Atlantic slave trade that covered a many centuries from 15<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> century: transformation of African individuals into objects and commodities with an economic value; their status of objects was confirmed by the fact that they had owners who disliked them, and furthermore their name were changed and their language forbidden: their status as human beings was denied, thus they could be better defined as *human-objects*, *human-commodities* and *human-money* (Mbembe, 2017, 3). Both Obinze and Zoppe in these novels live experiences that imply this process of alienating objectification, which can be considered as the common element shared by female and male migrants, although differences exist between female and male experiences of migration, as previous examples demonstrate: while in the first case body and sexual harassment emerges as strictly linked, in the second case humiliation related to physical and psychological violence represents an important feature.

### 3.4. Body politics

As previously observed, body-related issues are central in the construction of the diasporic subjectivity and they are often related with traumatic events that determine alienation of these subjects; furthermore, Adichie's and Scego's works underline more emphatically a physical aspect that possesses symbolical meaning in Afropolitan women's personal development.

This element, hair, arises as a theme in *Americanah* and it is treated as a symbolic entity that refers to external qualities but in the meantime, it reflects characters' inner life: the importance of body politics in contemporary female African fiction demonstrates that body-related issues, such as hair, carry ethnic and thus cultural meaning and their link with self-construction is confirmed (Emenyonu, 2017, 245). In particular, a stress is given to the process of transition and rediscovery of natural Afro hair; in fact, in *Americanah* emerges that usually African women refuse their natural hair in favour of long and straights extensions or relaxing treatments, as the reader notices when Ifemelu accompanies Aunty Uju to a hair salon in Lagos:

It startled Ifemelu, how much a relaxer retouching cost at Aunty Uju's hair salon; the haughty hairdresser sized up each customer, eyes swinging from head to shoes, to decide how much attention she was worth. [...] It was here, at a Lagos salon, that the different ranks of imperial femaleness were best understood. [...] Aunty Uju laughed and patted the silky hair extensions that fell to her shoulder: Chinese weave-on, the latest version, shiny and straight as straight could be: it never tangled. (Adichie, 2013, 93)

Adichie's choice of using the adjective *imperial* underlines those patriarchal mechanisms of both race and gender that impose Western ideals of beauty, objectifying women as a mere men's gadgets whose duty is to adapt to men's aesthetic standards; this perception of femininity as a cultural construction determines African women's refusal to wear their natural Afro hair (Emenyonu, 2017, 246). This behaviour becomes more evident in diasporic subject because they try to adapt not only to patriarchal gender structures but also to Western social patterns that consider Afro hair untidy and unprofessional; for this reason, both Aunty Uju and Ifemelu relax their hair before going to job interviews in America, although at the beginning Ifemelu does not agree with Aunty

Uju's *exaggerated gratitude* towards America which leads her not to braid her hair for job interviews because braids are considered unprofessional in American society and therefore she feels in duty to adapt to Western social norms (Adichie, 2013, 146). Furthermore, the theme of hair is treated in one of Ifemelu's blog entries, which refers to Michelle Obama as an example of African woman who has adapted to American standards of appearance: in effect, as Ifemelu notices in her blog entry, Michelle Obama appears on TV or in public with straight hair, a fact that confirm that hairs are the *metaphor of race* and they lead to reflect upon racial dynamics that are part of Western society, underlying which aesthetic canon is accepted as professional in American society (Adichie, 2013, 368). Then, the theme of hair implies a reflection upon the process of transitioning, which consists in the decision to return to wear natural Afro hair; in Adichie's *Americanah*, Ifemelu decides to undertake this process which involves not only physical changes but also a psychological development which brings her to be more conscious about her own identity: the connection between hair policy and identity emerges from Ifemelu's character when she decides to relax her hair before going to a job interview following a friend's advice, therefore, after an unsuccessful homemade attempt to straight her hair she goes to a professional hairdresser:

" Just a little burn," the hairdresser said. "But look how pretty it is. Wow, girl, you've got the white-girl swing!"

Her hair was hanging down rather than standing up, straight and sleek, parted at the side and curving to a slight bob at her chin. The verve was gone. She did not recognize herself. She left the salon mournfully; while the hairdresser had flat-ironed the ends, the smell of burning, of something organic dying which should not have died, had made her feel a sense of loss. (Adichie, 2013, 251)

This sense of loss described by the protagonist denote her awareness that she was denying herself an important part of her own personality but it was a price she had to pay to gain social inclusion, and particularly to be recognized as professional in her new job environment, because in America "professional means straight" (Adichie, 2013, 252). However, her scalp reacted badly to the chemical relaxer, a fact that convinced her to let her friend Wambui to cut her hair: the initial shock was considerable, Ifemelu felt ugly and unfeminine and, when she decided to come back work after some days home she had

to face her colleagues' reactions and comments: they asked whether her choice was political or it was a kind of sexual declaration of homosexuality (Adichie, 2013, 262). Then she began to follow an online community called *HappilyKinkyNappy.com* that dealt with natural hair and biological products, and finally her transition became complete when she finally accepted her own natural dense Afro hair looking at herself in the mirror: in that moment, she felt not only acceptance of her natural self but even self-love: "she fell in love with her hair" (Adichie, 2013, 264). Thus, transitioning represents the starting point of Ifemelu's experience of self-development, which implies the subject's ability to control his/her own identity in a conscious way, without being ruled by patriarchal structures of gender and race (Emenyonu, 2013, 258). From Ifemelu's experience emerges the relevant role covered by social networks and media in the process of identity development of Afropolitan subjects because they imply members' active participation and sharing experiences represent a positive way to resist the process of objectification: in these *safe spaces* Black women are able to develop their own identity as detached from stereotypical structures of womanhood and it empower them to become active social agents in transnational contexts by mean of the expression of their individualism (Collins, 2000, 102). Both the online community *HappilyKinkyNappy.com* and Ifemelu's blog about race and gender represent two examples of safe spaces whose relevance in the protagonist's identity growth clearly appears. Furthermore, this confirms the importance of *mediascapes* and *technoscapes* in contemporary society, because they are able to create high-speed interconnections between individuals around the world by providing images and news in a narrative way, eliminating previous geographical boundaries (Appadurai, 1996, 33). Moreover, blogs imply the existence of active audience and migrant diasporic subjects feel part of a community by mean of participation to these virtual communities (Guarracino, 2014, 13).

In addition, Scego's *Adua* presents the theme of hair by mean of Adua's thoughts related to her traumatic experience in Italy:

E poi Lul, ne sono certa, si sarebbe opposta come una fiera all'allisciamento dei miei capelli. "Sei ridicola con questi spaghetti, non sei credibile, Adua" e mi avrebbe fatto sentire quanto è più bella la libertà di portare la propria criniera riccia in testa. E

poi se ci fosse stata Lul mi avrebbe insegnato a essere orgogliosa di me stessa. (Scego, 2015, 157)

Adua's ex-post considerations about her experience stress two important elements in the construction of the diasporic Afropolitan subjectivity: firstly, the choice of wearing natural Afro hair denotes personal self-consciousness and self-love that Adua lacked when she faced the Italian context and relaxed her hair; secondly, the importance of relationships of friendship in hostile contexts of migration is underlined and this recalls Collins' idea of *safe spaces*: even individual relationships are presented as safe spaces that allow Black women's self-development by mean of dialogue and confrontation: in effect, informal personal relationships of friendship and family interaction represent contexts of individual development for African American women who are able to affirm their humanity and identity thanks to conversations and experience sharing (Collins, 2000, 103). Probably, if her friend Lul had been present at the time of Adua's encounter with Italian society, the protagonist's choices would have been different (Scego, 2015, 157).

### 3.5. Freedom

Both Adichie's and Scego's works convey in the end a positive sense of freedom that confirms the evolution of their protagonists during the course of the novel and the development of their identity, shaped by their life experiences; in particular, both *Americanah* and *Adua* end with an idea of identity as an open-ended process, which resembles the idea of unfixed identity proposed by Bauman (2000, 83): he sustains that individuals struggle during their life to stop or at least slow down the flow of reality that is in continuous movement: individuals try to construct their own identity on the base of principles of harmony and logic, aspects that they cannot find in their life experience, characterised by fluidity and formlessness; however, this human attempt to slow down the flow of reality by mean of building a solid identity does not work because it contrasts with the essence of reality itself; moreover, identity is perceived as solid when it is observed from the outside because, if observed from the inside, subjects perceive the continuous challenge of facing fluid and changeable experiences of life (Bauman, 2000, 84). Bauman's idea of identity as volatile and unfixed imply the recognition that reality cannot be reduced to fixed categories because it consists in a continuous flow; this way to reflect on contemporary global society focuses on complexity that characterizes all the aspects of reality and it does not try to find simplifications for it; a similar attitude is performed by Afropolitan subjects who refuse to generalize Africa and reflect about of Afropolitan identity as an articulated construct without reducing it to other pre-existent categories and structures; on the contrary, Afropolitans highlight complexity (Selasi, 2005).

In Adichie's *Americanah*, a final sense of freedom is provided by Ifemelu's awareness of having reached a state of serenity in her own country, Nigeria, taking in consideration past experiences in America that have been responsible for her identity formation: "Still, she was at peace: to be home, to be writing her blog, to have discovered Lagos again. She had, finally, spun herself fully into being." (Adichie, 2013, 586). This sense of personal fulfilment is connected with her decision to go on writing her blog but, rather than concentrating on race and gender matters she decides to write about life, a choice that determines a stronger connection between the protagonist and Lagos, which is now perceived by Ifemelu as home although the initial shock. Freedom given by personal

fulfilment is increased by her decision to face her ghosts and, particularly, to confront with Obinze, her high school boyfriend and first love: the urgent need to free herself from ghosts that filled her mind leads her to call him (Adichie, 2013, 526). They met several times, share their life experiences and have sex although he is married and they both realize they are still in love with each other; their love relationship covers a significant position because it closes the novel providing an open-ending final where the creative imagination of the reader is stimulated: "He paused, shifted. "Ifem, I'm chasing you. Im going to chase you until you give this a chance." For a long time she stared at him. She was saying what she wanted to hear and yet she stared at him. "Ceiling," she said, finally. "Come in."" (Adichie, 2013, 588).

Adichie closes her novel with a focus on Ifemelu's personal life and love relationship, which denotes the author's desire to stress the human features of her protagonist who is not just a mere object of study but she represents a diasporic subject whose personality and identity are not deleted: it implies a humanization of the African woman subject. This is a typical postcolonial writers' technique which focuses on representation of characters' inner state in fiction: in fact, access to characters' mind and consciousness contrasts with the typical colonial novel that saw colonized subjects as rigid masks whose views and thought were never represented; on the other hand, providing non-Western points of view implies an inversion of the traditional basic structure that sees the focalizer as a Western character (Fludernik, 1993, 919).

The final part of Scego's *Adua* conveys a sense of freedom as well, although this feeling of liberation is expressed in a more symbolical way, therefore a concrete object, Zoppe's blue turban, appears as the carrier of meanings and memories:

Di lui mi era rimasta solo quella stoffa blu, quello strano turbante, che fino a poche ore fa non mi sarei levata dalla testa per niente al mondo. E poi quel gabbiano con un gesto, in mezzo a piazza dei Cinquecento, me lo ha strappato via. Ti rendi conto, elefantino mio, di quel che ha fatto? Era il segno della mia schavitù e delle mie antiche vergogne, quel turbante. Era il giogo che avevo scelto per redimermi. Come fare ora senza la mia schiavitù in testa? Come fare a espiare ora tutte le mie colpe? (Scego, 2015, 172)



The fact, this blue turban that belonged to Adua's father represents for her the weight of her sense of guilt and shame for her past experiences which she was slave of; therefore, the seagull stealing her the turban is a symbolical act of freedom that permits her to start thinking about the possibility of a new life free from the burden with her past. This act symbolically parallels Ifemelu's *Big Chop*, when she's convinced by her friend Wambui to let her cut Ifemelu's hair after the unsuccessful relaxing treatment: in both cases, the protagonists do not decide autonomously to act, but they are both driven or obliged to do it: the result in both cases is a sense of freedom; while Adua is liberated from her sense of shame and guilt for her past, Ifemelu starts a process of transition that frees her from patriarchal structures of gender and race that previously ruled her life (Emenyonu, 2017, 255).

The difference between the ends of these two novels consists in the fact that, while Adua is beginning her process of changing and transition towards new possibilities, Ifemelu has already reached consciousness of her own identity; thus, these two endings represent moments of freedom that belong to different stages of the same process that leads the Afropolitan subject to reach consciousness of identity.

### 3.6. The role of technologies in diasporic experiences

After having observed the sensation of freedom that emerges from both *Americanah* and *Adua*, it is important to focus on the relevance of technologies and media for diasporic subjects in the process of elaboration of their in-between personality; in fact these are instruments which enable interaction between diasporic individual that belong to contemporary global society characterized by cultural transactions between social group and these connections manage to go beyond geographical borders thanks to contexts, defined as *disjunctures*, in which cultures and social groups overlap; relationships between different dimensions of contemporary society identified as landscapes related to culture, economy, technology, ideologies, whose main feature is fluidity and actors involved in these contexts comprehend diasporic individuals and communities; imagination is considered a *social practice* and it plays a significant role in the formation of these landscapes, opening a wide range of possibilities because of its strict relationship with the possibility of agency that is a fundamental aspect of the Afropolitan phenomenon (Appadurai, 1996, 31). Therefore, these dimensions of *ethnoscapes*, *mediascapes*, *technoscapes*, *financescapes* and *ideoscapes* are characterized by possessing irregularities given by the fact that these are built in a perspectival way, so that they are not objective constructs, but this aspect does not prevent to observe that relations between these landscapes exist and emerge in *Americanah* and *Adua* because, in these novels, a connection between ethnoscapes, technoscapes and mediascapes stands out clearly and, significantly, from these connections between social landscapes, the protagonists' final sense of freedom manifests itself as a confirm of their personal development; that moment of conscious personal growth is a starting point for further developments, it is not just a point of arrival, therefore dynamism and agency are central in these situations of identity development, thus imaginary social landscapes cover an important role in the evolution of diasporic subjects' personality because they imply agency, movement and non-static contexts (Appadurai, 1996, 33).

In particular, these novels show connections between ethnoscapes, technoscapes and mediascapes in diasporic contexts of formation of Afropolitan identity: in fact, ethnoscapes are those landscapes of individuals such as tourists, migrants, refugees, guest workers and migrant groups that are part of the deterritorialized contemporary world

where stability is substituted by dynamism; this feature is stressed also by the idea of technoscape: technology is configured by fluidity, in effect it is in constant and quick movement across boundaries and its distribution depends on relations between economy, money flows and politics; furthermore, a significant function is covered by those landscapes of images that comprehend ideoscapes and mediascapes: newspapers, magazines, television and electronic devices are able to produce and distribute information; these media provide a wide repertoire of images of the world to a large audience who understands that mediascapes are based on narrative and images; connections between images, ideas and concepts produce, on the other hand, the so called ideoscapes, whose elements comprehend terms such as freedom, right, representation, and therefore they are politically-bound (Appadurai, 1996, 36). Starting from these concepts, their connection emerges both in Adichie's *Americanah* and in Scego's *Adua* because protagonists' sense of freedom and achievement of personal conscious growth is related respectively to Ifemelu's blog and to Adua's video camera she receives as a gift by her husband.

In fact, in Adichie's *Americanah*, Ifemelu becomes a conscious agent thanks to her blog on race and by mean of observing the context around her, Ifemelu is able to develop her own personality and involve readers in her experience as a black woman in America, where race covers a central position; in effect, her blog entries are focused on stereotypes, clichés and everyday situations in which racial mechanisms are activated, a fact which provides the reader a clear image of Africans in America (Emenyonu, 2017, 236). Her blog on race is called *Raceteenth or Various Observations About American Blacks (Those Formerly Known as Negroes) by a Non-American Black* (Adichie, 2013, 4) and it implies that the protagonist is identified as an ethnographer and more precisely both Ifemelu and Adichie herself cover the role of native informants; the figure of the *native informant* collects and offers information related to his/her own country of origin, which poses him/her in an active position different from the usually inactive status attributed to indigenous population during colonial times (Spivak, 1999, x). Furthermore, Adichie and the character of Ifemelu go beyond this figure because they offer a personal interpretation of their place of origin for an audience that is part of the Western society, providing comments and reflections (Guarracino, 2014, 6). In particular, during the novel, Ifemelu's

blog is described as a real cultural commentary which brings social responsibilities particularly in relation with her audience:

“I don’t want to explain, I want to observe,” she said. “Remember people are not reading you as entertainment, they’re reading you as cultural commentary. That’s a real responsibility. There are kids writing college essays about your blog,” he said. “I’m not saying you have to be academic or boring. Keep your style but add more depth.” (Adichie, 2013, 386).

Therefore, as an informant, Ifemelu has responsibilities because her relationship with the mediascape represented by her blog enables the protagonist to reach a wide audience that is involved in her experience and readers directly express their opinion because they feel they have shared similar experiences: the active role of the audience in the context of a blogosphere determines the need to manage people’s comments and this situation overwhelms Ifemelu who feels “subsumed by her blog” (Adichie, 2013, 376). In effect, she began writing her blog to elaborate her experiences by mean of the blog because she needed active listeners who were able to give their own contribute to her experience; it started as a written elaboration of her life in America that required the audience participation:

Blogs were new, unfamiliar to her. But telling Wambui what happened was not satisfying enough; she longed for other listeners, and she longed to hear the stories of others. How many other people chose silence? How many other people had become black in America? How many had felt as though their world was wrapped in gauze? She broke up with Curt a few weeks after that, and she signed on to WordPress, and her blog was born (Adichie, 2013, 366).

This moment represents a significant step in the protagonist’s life: after a love relationship with a white man, Ifemelu realises and openly admits that race is an issue in America, and reflects on the fact that she starts perceiving herself as black once in America; therefore her relationship with Curt had to deal with society that surrounds them and thus race assumes importance; for this reason she decides to break up with him and start writing about her life experience in America, related with racial and social matters (Adichie, 2013, 359). This step is fundamental in Ifemelu’s achievement of racial consciousness and she reflects on the fact that her interaction with American society was ruled by racial behaviours; furthermore, gaining this awareness represented a starting

point for Ifemelu to stop being silent about African woman's experience in American society, a fact that helps her dealing with her sense of emotional pain she had to face when she first arrived to America (Guarracino, 2014, 13).

Thus, from these observations emerge that the ethnoscape constituted by American society comprehend diasporic groups such as that of Africans who employ mediascapes such as blogs that empower them as active individuals; mediascapes enable African women to share their experiences and elaborate past traumatic events.

Similarly, in Scego's *Adua*, the presence of technology appears symbolically as a new possibility of freedom after traumatic past events: in fact, in the end, Adua's husband Ahmed, usually called Titanic by Adua, is leaving Rome to move to Germany; in that occasion, he gives her a significant present, a video camera, and states "Ora potrai filmare quello che vuoi, ora potrai narrarti come ti pare e piace [...]. E potrai finalmente scoprire cosa c'è al di là del mare" (Scego, 2015, 174). This sentence pronounced by Ahmed possesses an important meaning for the protagonist because it shows that her husband is aware of her need to rewrite herself to go beyond the Western representation that Italian society has employed to label her; furthermore, the video camera enables Adua of real agency and provides her the possibility to explore not only new places but also herself as an active subject who is now free to develop her own identity; thus, technoscapes, represented by the video camera, determine possibilities of agency for those individuals that belong to diasporic groups and migrant communities inserted in societies different from their country of origin; these ethnoscapes present strong connections with technologies, whose role in contemporary society is fundamental; thus ethnoscapes and technoscapes, as well as mediascapes, represent a network of fluid and continuous connections in contemporary global world: in this historical period, in fact, these *disjunctures* cover a central position in defining cultural global interactions (Appadurai, 1996, 37). Furthermore, this final part of Scego's novel shows the circular structure of the novel: Adua's freedom from her past and her possibility to move, change her life and rewrite it; this possibility is symbolised by her video camera, which explains her initial status; in fact, at the beginning she is thinking about the possibility to come back to Somalia, and this situation brings her to reflect about where her home is (Scego, 2015, 10). Therefore, the video camera given her by her husband represents symbolically the

starting point for the development of Adua's personality and it parallels the moment, in *Americanah*, when Ifemelu decides to start writing her blog; thus both techniscapes and mediascapes are responsible for individuals' personal evolution in modern society; this evolution emerges from the fact that, in the course of Adichie's novel, Ifemelu's blog develops and modifies according to Ifemelu's changes: it was, at the beginning, a cultural commentary on American life and racial issues, but later it becomes a blog focused on Ifemelu's own life after her decision to move back home to Nigeria: at this point it changes name, passing from *Raceteenth or Various Observations About American Blacks (Those Formerly Known as Negroes) by a Non-American Black* to *The Small Redemptions of Lagos* (Adichie, 2013, 515).

### 3.7. Final considerations on *Americanah* and *Adua*

In conclusion, it is possible to delineate some similarities between Adichie's *Americanah* and Scego's *Adua* both in themes and in structure. For what concerns themes, the process of identity building emerges in both novels and it is affected by all the previously analysed elements, that are involved in this process both as causes and as consequences. However, these processes of identity formation do not correspond to the traditional concept of personal development implied in the idea of Bildungsroman: in these cases, there is no resolution (Emenyonu, 2017, 240). In fact, neither Adichie's nor Scego's characters reach a complete stable fixed identity but it is rather presented as a plural heterogeneous entity which keeps on evolving; this fact is explained by the diasporic nature of these characters' personalities, because the feeling of multi-placedness typical of diasporic situations implies subjects feel home in more than one place; on the other hand, dynamism and movement across boundaries, both on cultural and on geographical level, demonstrates why migrant's identity is considered an on-going process (Brah, 1996, 191). *Americanah* and *Adua* provide examples of this process of personal formation at different stages of its development: while the character of Ifemelu personifies the whole process from the beginning to the open-ended conclusion and fulfilment informing the reader about all the in-between steps; on the other hand, Scego's female character Adua is portrayed in the initial stage of her identity development that begins with the liberation from her past, symbolically represented by her father's turban (Scego, 2015, 160). From this moment, she acquires an active status and she moves from her previous passive status of victim to a new condition because she becomes an agent of her own life: the possibility of agency is represented by the video camera that her husband gives her as a present (Scego, 2015, 173). While these two examples represent situations linked with positive future possibility of development of Afropolitan identities, a failure of Afropolitan identity formation is also presented by mean of Obinze, the main male character in Adichie's *Americanah*, who is not able to create positive connections between his own personality and British society where he finds himself inserted: he does not manage to deal with the sensation of being socially excluded, a condition that determines his feeling lonely and invisible and he is finally forced to come back to Nigeria: he had never reflected upon his own migrant experience in Great Britain, a fact that has prevented

him from growing (Emenyonu, 2017, 241). Thus, the elaboration of past experiences is a fundamental step in the construction of Afropolitan personality but representing failed attempts, such as Obinze's one, demonstrates Adichie's will not to transform Afropolitanism in a utopian concept and reality. The same intention emerges from Scego's representation of the ambiguous relationship between Adua and her young husband: although his name is Ahmed, she has never called him with his real name (Scego, 2015, 173). On the other hand, she has always used *Titanic*, a name that labels him and particularly his condition of irregular migrant who arrived at Lampedusa by boat:

Era un Titanic, uno sbarcato a Lampedusa, un balordo. Gli serviva una casa, una tetta, una minestra, un cuscino, un po' di quattrini, una speranza, una parvenza qualsiasi di respiro. Gli serviva una mamma, una *hooyo*, una puttana, una *shermutta*, me. E anche se tutta rugosa, gli ho dato quello che cercava. Mi dispiaceva che un bel ragazzo come lui soffrisse la fame in via Giolitti (Scego, 2015, 28).

Thus, although his problematic background, Adua keeps on calling him Titanic, which is very offensive because it refers to his possible fate of dying in the sea; however, this has not happened, he has survived and has reached Lampedusa alive (Scego, 2017, 30). This situation demonstrates that mechanisms of labelling and objectifications activate not only between members of different groups but also between members of the same social group: both Adua and Ahmed belong to a group of outsiders in respect to Italian society, but Adua's behaviour exemplifies a categorization of Ahmed which is thus dehumanized: he is deprived of his own name; in the end Adua uses her husband's real name, Ahmed, which is significant because it shows she has gained consciousness of herself and thus it makes her able to relate to other human beings (Scego, 2015, 173). In these final scenes both Adua's and Ahmed's real personalities emerge and they are both able to escape from Western stereotypical labels they have interiorized; in fact, this process of interiorization is demonstrated by the fact that both Blackness and Whiteness are concepts invented by Western society and gaze, therefore the fact that Africans employed European categories to define themselves demonstrate it, in effect, starting from the colonial period the monolithic idea of power and binary categories have spread and have been psychologically internalized (Ashcroft, Griffith, Tiffin, 2000, 190). However, at a certain point during the 20<sup>th</sup> century people of African origin used the concept of Blackness to identify themselves in the literary movement called Negritude; this was a different kind



of interiorization because they modified the inner meaning of the term Blackness: they attributed it ideas of action and dynamism instead of emptiness and fixity, which confirms the possibility to change these psychological mechanisms of objectification (Mbembe, 2017, 43).

For what concerns structure, in both novels the main narrative body is interrupted by autonomous internal frame narratives that determine the formation of different narrative levels, that are *intradiegetic*: stories are told by characters who become narrators (Fludernik, 2009, 28). This is the case of *Adua's* chapters called *Paternale*, when Zoppe, Adua's father, refers directly to his daughter as if he is really talking to her: in these ten chapters, the father-daughter complex relationship comes to the surface and, in the final one, Zoppe finally expresses himself openly showing his fragilities he had hidden behind the mask of the severe father (Scego, 2015, 158). On the other hand, *Americanah* presents an internal narrative by mean of Ifemelu's blog entries; a character thus becomes a narrator, a writer in this case, and a new inner intradiegetic level is created within the narration: in Ifemelu's seventeen blog entries, the theme of race is treated in relation to American society; Ifemelu's blog also deals with those social conflicts that African migrants have to face once arrived there, mirroring Ifemelu's racial consciousness and awareness (Emenyonu, 2017, 236).

Therefore, although authors' different backgrounds, these novels present a complex portrait of Afropolitan identity as an ongoing process exploiting intradiegetic frame narratives that provide narrative complexity, determining a non-linear kind of narration.

## 4. Afropolitan culture and diasporic identities

### 4.1. Characters' connections between *The Thing Around Your Neck* and *Adua*: Nnamabia and Zoppe

After having compared Scego's *Adua* and Adichie's *Americanah*, it is important to notice other analogies between these two authors exploring Adichie's short story Cell One in comparison with Scego's novel *Adua*; although they belong to different narrative forms they share common points for what concerns two male characters who both live an experience in prison: Nnamabia and Zoppe.

Nnamabia is the protagonist of *Cell One*, one of Adichie's short stories that belong to her collection *The Thing Around Your Neck* (2009) which focuses on themes of dislocation and search of identity that are part of those matters that Adichie's Nigerian characters have to face in relation with American society and their African roots: characters of these short stories are mainly female; however the collection opens with *Cell One*, whose main character is a boy, Nnamabia; although he is the main actor within the novel, the story is narrated from his sister point of view, therefore the female presence is still significant: "The second time our house was robbed, it was my brother Nnamabia, who faked a break-in and stole my mother's jewellery." (Adichie, 2009, 2). The narrator observes her brother behaviour and explains his reasons for behaving that way:

He had done it, too, because other sons of professors were doing it. This was the season of thefts on our serene campus. Boys who had grown up watching "Sesame Street", reading Enid Blyton, eating cornflakes for breakfast, and attending the university staff primary school in polished brown sandals were now cutting through mosquito netting of their neighbours' windows, sliding out glass louvres, and climbing in to steal TVs and VCRs. We knew the thieves. [...] The thieving boys were the popular ones. (Adichie, 2009, 5)

Therefore, Nnamabia's behaviour is due to his desire to be included in the group of popular guys, which brings him to be involved in a social phenomenon defined as "cults": fraternities in fact had evolved into gangs of eighteen-year-old popular boys who used guns and violence to impose their dominion over other groups following the example of American rappers they saw on TV; police's commitment in trying to solve this social

problematic situation drove to arrests (Adichie, 2009, 7). This social matter underlines the influence of American culture on African society thanks to mediascapes, such as television and radio, that spread images typical of American society around the world, confirming that mediascapes are responsible for the creation of networks that link parts of the globe that are geographically and culturally distant (Appadurai, 1996). Moreover, this phenomenon of “cults” resembles that of gangs that emerged in America in 70s and 80s; they share the language of violence as medium of communication and their members employ guns and arms to spread fear and control a territory that, in the case of cults, corresponds to university campuses (Adichie, 2009, 5).

Thus, Nnamabia was considered involved in cults and he was arrested, but his experience in prison will lead to a deep change in the boy’s identity, because of the shocking situations he has to face there, which mainly deal with humiliation and violence towards an old man who is innocent but finds himself in prison because of his son’s fault; that man is perceived by Nnamabia as fragile and weak when he is brutally humiliated by prison guards who make him walk naked through the corridor while they keep on laughing at him (Adichie, 2009, 16).

This kind of physical humiliation recalls the violence Zoppe has to face when he is in prison in Italy: Scego’s character in fact has to face police’s violence when he is in Regina Coeli prison although he is innocent; in effect, he was arrested while he tried to stop people who were arguing (Scego, 2015, 42). Guards’ violence towards Zoppe destroyed him both physically and psychologically:

Il dolore non passava. Era il basso ventre a fargli male da morire, soprattutto i testicoli. Beppe aveva picchiato proprio duro. Zoppe si chiese se dopo tutte quelle botte il suo seme avrebbe ancora procreato. I testicoli gli pulsavano e la punta del pene gocciolava un liquido giallastro. Si sentiva indolenzito. E gli occhi tumefatti si aprivano a fatica. Aveva vent’anni ed era un vecchio. Un *odaay* precoce, con la bava alla bocca e le ossa sofferenti. (Scego, 2015, 35).

Zoppe is physically suffering and in the meantime he is worried because he has been beaten so hard in his genital area that he is afraid of having become sterile; his fear is due to his physical conditions and it is also symbolical because it represents a humiliation that involves not only him as an individual but generally his possibility to have children,

therefore his human nature, exemplified by the procreative function, is questioned and appears to be in danger: for this reason Zoppe decides to focus on his mind and detach from his own suffering body; this is his strategy to survive: in fact, this is a mechanism of protection that is useful in every situation of life and it consists in the subject's separation from his own body; after a moment of evasion from reality, the subject takes again control over his own body (Mbembe, 2017, 144). This process is exemplified in Scego's novel by mean of Zoppe's visions when he remembers smells and flavours typical of his own country, Somalia, and of his past: he knew that the best way to overcome all those sufferings was to be found inside his own mind (Scego, 2015, 33).

Humiliation emerges as a central feature of prison experience both for Zoppe and for Nnamabia, although the two characters live it in different ways: while Zoppe experiences humiliation directly on his own skin, Nnamabia live this sensation in a passive way by seeing the innocent old man humiliated by guards, a fact than determines his reaction towards guards and consequently his reclusion in Cell One, where he has experienced violence on his own body; the traumatic result of this episode is visible in the narrator's description of her brother's changed demeanour in telling what happened: he was really shocked and therefore he did not exploit this event to gain popularity (Adichie, 2009, 21). In both cases, a consequence of humiliation appears to be alienation; it represents, in effect, a consequence of the mechanism of *separation from oneself* that can be connected to various moments of the Black discourse characterized by three events: slavery, colonization and apartheid; in these moments, in fact, the African subject becomes a kind of *lifeless identity* and the process of separation from oneself determines the development of an alterity that causes the impossibility for the self to recognize itself; furthermore, violence and humiliation experienced by slaves in the past and, in previously observed situations, by Zoppe and Nnamabia, provoke a suffering that generates a process of *social death* characterized by the loss of dignity which determines the subject's degradation (Mbembe, 2017, 78). This is visible not only in Nnamabia's change of behaviour but particularly in Zoppe's thoughts, when he admits of having been annihilated by humiliation and violence and destroyed by them (Scego, 2015, 159).

In both cases the encounter with Western society has not determined the development of hybrid identities, as usually happens in the Afropolitan case, because both of the

characters have been blocked by the traumatic events they have experienced; instead of determining and promoting personal growth, these shocking situations have provoked fear, related with the sensation of feeling naked; this nakedness is perceived because the body is made *breakable* by the social system; from this sense of fear usually rage and alienation emerge as consequences (Coates, 2015, 17). In fact, when Nnamabia saw the old man humiliated in prison, his first reaction is one of rage and anger because of the injustice perpetrated by guards:

“I shouted at the policeman. I told him the old man was innocent and ill, and if they kept him here it wouldn’t help them find his son, because the man did not even know where his son was. They said that I should shut up immediately, that they would take me to Cell One. I didn’t care. I didn’t shut up. So they pulled me out and slapped me and took me to Cell One.” (Adichie, 2009, 21)

Nnamabia is immediately punished by mean of violence that appears as a common language that rules social relationship of power and force; this provokes subjects’ alienation because society, which is usually a structure that protects individuals, does not secure safety for its own member and, moreover, it is the responsible of their being in danger; a feeling of constant lack of safety determines the development of ambiguous relationships between individuals and their country (Coates, 2015, 17).

Then, it is interesting to notice that mediascapes are able to create transnational links and modify concrete social realities by mean of imaginary landscapes, thus imagination plays a significant role as social practice in global cultural processes, particularly it is linked with the possibility of agency and with the creation of imagined communities and groups (Appadurai, 1996, 32). In the case of Nnamabia, the social phenomenon of cults, in fact, spreads from images that come from America and perceived by Nigerian youngsters thanks to music and television, thus they try to emulate American social behaviours typical of rappers; their violence recalls that one performed by gangs, which represent a real social problem that affects American society and particularly African American individuals in 70s and 80s: “The guns seemed to address this country, which invented the streets that secured them with despotic police, in its primary language – violence.” (Coates, 2015, 30).

#### 4.2. The condition of in-betweenness in Scego's *La mia casa è dove sono* and Adichie's *Americanah*

Talking about Afropolitanism implies reflecting upon contemporary diasporic communities and those dynamics that characterise relationships between their members; in effect, diasporic subjects have to be differentiated from travellers: although both the dimensions imply an idea of movement, the traveller's condition is temporary in contrast with the long-term diasporic condition which consequently determines the formation of new communities away from the country of origin; in these new contexts, the collective memory assumes a significant role because of its link with the past home country: the act of remembering, performed by diasporic individuals, possesses in this case a double meaning, referring both to the idea to collect a people past experience linked with the country of origin and to the concept of reconstruction: re-membering is a necessary act to maintain the diasporic community alive because social and cultural transformations due to the new context has caused the formation of hybridized situations (Di Maio, 2010, 86). Hybridization results as a necessary process in diasporic situations for what concerns identity development, and particularly it is important to concentrate on the idea of in-betweenness:

The move away from the singularities of 'class' or 'gender' as primary conceptual and organizational categories, has resulted in an awareness of the subject positions – of race, gender, generation, institutional location, geopolitical locale, sexual orientation - that inhabit any claim to identity in the modern world. What is theoretically innovative, and politically crucial, is the need to think beyond narratives of originary and initial subjectivities and to focus of those moments or processes that are produced in the articulation of cultural differences. These in-between spaces provide the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood – singular or communal - that initiate new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration, and contestation, in the act of defining the idea of society itself. (Bhabha, 1994, 2).

In contemporary societies the subjects' positions are defined by mean of criteria that differ from previous categories; these new terms of personal collective identification focus on those moments of cultural difference that determine the need to think about identity in a new way that involves these differences; however, their representation does not mean that they existed as pre-existing rigid traditional traits; on the contrary, the

representation of cultural differences is a complex social process that links moments of historical changing with the inevitability to hybridize identities, which have to be flexible to adapt to new contexts and whose formation is affected by the overlapping of different social and cultural spaces (Bhabha, 1994, 3). Both the process of hybridization of individuals and the mechanisms of remembering, in his double meaning, are important for the diasporic community survival within the host country and for the maintenance of collective memory of diasporic community, which imply a strong will to resist to processes of assimilation in the host country (Di Maio, 2010, 88). The situation of in-betweenness has a strict connection with the matter of citizenship that can prevent migrants and their children from feeling part of the new community, generating obstacles for migrants' inclusion within the host society: for this purpose, it is important to distinguish between *jus sanguinis* and *jus soli*, which are the two principles that determine citizenships; in France and Italy, for example, the *jus sanguinis* principle implies that citizenship passes by mean of blood, thus migrants' sons born in Italy are not considered Italian citizens; on the other hand, many American and North European countries adopt the principle of *jus soli*: according to this, citizenship is linked to the soil of birth, independently from parents' nationality; thus, citizenship is a relevant theme to be discussed in postcolonial works because it affects the migrant's perception of belonging to a country, and thus it may be responsible for individuals' feeling of being between two worlds (Di Maio, 2010, 89). Therefore, in order to provide a deeper analysis of the Afropolitan condition, Adichie's novel *Americanah* is observed in comparison with another Scego's novel entitled *La mia casa è dove sono* (2012), that presents a significant portrait of the Afropolitan condition in Europe, and particularly it explores the Afroitalian condition. AfroEuropeans represent the coexistence between African traditions and Western life within the same body; however, the relationship between Africa and Europe is ambiguous because European continent has produced violence in the same way America did to African slaves but this fact is often concealed and hidden, and then forgotten by society; here, the black body lives in a continuous situation of danger of being destroyed, and then AfroEuropean subjects perceive themselves as outsiders particularly because they feel Europe considers them invisible subjects (Scego, 2017). Then, the condition of AfroEuropeans requires a further specification because the AfroEuropean experience differs on the base of the European country the subject belongs

to; in *La mia casa è dove sono* (2012) Scego focuses on the Afroitalian condition exploring the forgotten colonial relationship between Italy and Africa and underlining how Italian colonial crimes had been deleted from the national collective memory; it is significant to reflect on these historical links to better understand similarities between the African American experience and that of AfroEuropeans, which will emerge through the analysis of common points of the novels studied, stressing the condition of in-betweenness typical of Afropolitan individuals.

The need of remembering the past to create a collective memory is a necessary step for the diasporic individual's formation of a hybridized identity, a fact that is confirmed by the character of Dike, Ifemelu's cousin in *Americanah* and by the idea of drawing a map that emerges in *La mia casa è dove sono*. Dike is Aunt Uju's son and Ifemelu's cousin; his father was The General, an influent officer in Nigeria, involved in politics and corruption; he died in a plane crash probably organized by the Head of State who wanted to get rid of his own officers because he was afraid they were planning a military coup against him (Adichie, 2013, 104). After The General's death, Aunt Uju and Dike are forced to leave Nigeria and they moved to America; there Dike grew up and, when Ifemelu moved to America she saw him again, and he was "a first grader with a seamless American accent and a hyper-happiness about him; the kind of child who could never stay still and who never seemed sad" (Adichie, 2013, 129). However, as the novel proceeds, this happiness is corrupted by Aunt Uju's and Dike's ambiguous social behaviours, all of them oriented towards social inclusion in the American society: at a certain point, Aunt Uju asks Ifemelu not to speak Igbo to Dike, otherwise he would have been confused by the use of more than one language, a sentence that sounds absurd to Ifemelu who has been raised bilingual as every other Nigerian (Adichie, 2013, 134). Furthermore, Dike starts asking questions related to his name, which denotes a research of roots and identity: in effect, he asks questions about his father, and Aunt Uju gave him an answer that partially reflected reality, telling him that his father was in the military government, and Dike had her mother's name in order to be safe because "some people in the government, not his father, had done some bad things" and therefore he needed protection (Adichie, 2013, 211). Identity matters emerge increasingly in the novel and Ifemelu perceives Dike's changes: she saw him growing up and becoming progressively



more reserved, and then one day, after he came back from the summer camp he was attending, she noticed that his expression was sad and cautious; Dike's guardedness was due to a significant episode: in effect, he was not given sunscreen because he was dark and thus the group leader thought he did not need it; although this episode clearly upset him, he tried to react as his friends did, pretending it was a funny thing and stating "I just want to be regular." (Adichie, 2013, 227). This desire to be part of American society emerges both from Auntie Uju's and from Dike's behaviours and it is a typical migrant's reaction to be assimilated within the new society; however, this struggle for belonging risks to provoke alienation of the subjects, which is exemplified by Dike's attempted suicide: he tried to kill himself with pills (Adichie, 2013, 453). At start, Auntie Uju affirms that it happened because of teenage depression but Ifemelu forces her to face reality:

"Do you remember when Dike was telling you something and he said 'we black folk' and you told him 'you are not black'?" [...] "You should not have done that." [...] "You told him what he wasn't but you didn't tell him what he was." [...] "His depression is because of his experience, Auntie!" Ifemelu said, her voice rising, and then she was sobbing apologizing to Auntie Uju, her own guilt spreading and sullyng her. (Adiche, 20113, 471).

Dike's extreme reaction in fact was determined by his being uncertain about his own identity, which was not complete without its Nigerian part, that was continually denied both by his mother and by himself. Then, on the other side, American society has determined his alienation as a black subject because of its strong racial components: in fact, race emerges because of people's gaze and voice, and particularly a certain kind of gaze has the power to transform an individual into a stereotype and particularly, looking and seeing someone imply a judgement that inserts the individual within categories (Mbembe, 2017, 110). Adichie then describes Dike's life after the attempted suicide: he decides in fact to go visiting Ifemelu in Nigeria, which is a symbolical decision that shown the will to create links with his home country: Adichie's tones describe with humour his initial impact with Nigeria, in fact he states he has never seen so many black people in the same place (Adichie, 2013, 518). Then, the novel takes more serious and reflective tones when Dike admits he would like to be able to speak Igbo: although he is able to understand it, he feels it is not enough; he wants to be actively involved this language that is the symbol of his Nigerian origins; moreover, Dike's awareness of his roots is deepened

by finally discovering the whole truth about his father and finally Ifemelu brings him to see The General's house in Dolphin Estate where Aunty Uju used to live, which signs a kind of significant point for Dike's awareness of his need of an identity which is in the middle between America and Nigeria (Adichie, 2013, 524). A similar sense of fulfillment and peace emerges from a particular moment in Scego's *La mia casa è dove sono*: the novel is an autobiography that identifies the author Igiaba Scego as an Afropolitan subject who is liked both to her country of origin, Somalia, and to a Western city, Rome, where she lives and where she has grown up; the whole novel focuses on the idea of drawing a map of Mogadiscio, which is the Somali city the family comes from: the idea of mapping Mogadiscio comes from Igiaba's nephew Deq, and soon the project involves Igiaba, her brother Abdulcadir and their cousin O: this act of mapping represents symbolically the desire not to forget a country of origin which is far away, destroyed by civil war, thus this act is fundamental for the maintenance of diasporic collective memory (Scego, 2012, 23). At this point, Igiaba realised that she did not know Mogadiscio in the same way her brother and their cousin did, and then she admitted, mostly to herself, that she knew Rome better, places in Rome were familiar to her, nevertheless she tried to concentrate and remember Mogadiscio because she was aware that it was a constituent part of her identity, of her roots; suddenly, Deq's question shocked her: he asks her if the city on the map was her own city (Scego, 2012, 31). At this point, Igiaba's inability to answer denotes her inner conflict in dealing with her hybrid identity and she finds herself forced to face it: as her mother stresses, Igiaba needs to complete that map with places that reflected herself and her own experience (Scego, 2012, 33). The author's choice of using notepapers to complete the maps adding names of places in Rome is significant because it represents Scego's idea of identity as something changeable: as notepapers, elements that constitute identity can move and modify, and this concept is recalled by Igiaba's moment of epiphany she has when she sees her feet, thus that part of the body that is responsible for her movement (Scego, 2012, 34).

Both Adichie's character of Dike and Igiaba Scego herself provide examples of the need of hybridity in the building of a diasporic subject's identity; this concept relates to the fact that transcultural formations and ties between different cultures generate in ambivalent contexts of contact produced by colonialism (Ashcroft, Griffith, Tiffin, 2000,

106). Thus, hybridity covers an important role for Afropolitan subjects that live in those country who were linked with their mother country's traumatic past, and these environments require subjects' negotiation of identity: "There is a negotiation between gender and class, where each formation encounters the displaced, differentiated boundaries of its group representation and enunciative sites in which the limits and limitations of social power are encountered in an agonistic relation."; thus, negotiation is useful in spaces of cultural encounter for what concerns identity, gender and class for the development of diasporic individual personalities, and hybridity is defined as an empowering feature (Bhabha, 1994, 41).

The act of drawing a map of Mogadiscio in Scego's *La mia casa è dove sono* underlines the importance of the past in the formation of diasporic identity; in effect, the country of origin, that in this case corresponds to Somalia, is connected to the past and recollected by members of Scego's family; mapping the city of Mogadiscio represents a way to exercise diasporic collective memory of the mother land that has to survive because future generations have to be aware of their roots; in fact, although Deq is just a child, he is curious about this city named by adults and he requires answers in order to develop a conscious identity (Scego, 2012, 31). These were the same answers that the young Dike needed in *Americanah* that would have helped him dealing with American society; in fact, a knowledge of the country of origin and the family past represent a solid basis for a migrant to face a new society where people tend to identify African subjects as outsiders: the process of othering, in effect, typical of colonial environments, consisted in the identification of colonized subjects as Others and therefore, colonizers recognized themselves as superior and different from these Others (Ashcroft, Griffith, Tiffin, 2000, 8). Thus, Scego's act of mapping and locating herself within that map represents her will to escape this process of definition by mean of other people's gaze, which usually reduces individuals into objects, but she decides to locate herself in an active way (Viarengo, 2011). Similarly, after his attempted suicide, Dike decides to stop being defined by American society but he starts taking active choices not oriented towards social integration but aimed to construct his own self: he actively decided to visit Nigeria and he expresses his wish to develop his Nigerian side by hoping to learn speaking Igbo, and finally he states, "I kind of like it here", openly admitting the possibility to move to

Nigeria (Adichie, 2013, 524). In both of the situations, the collective past appears as a significant feature for members of a diasporic group, because the collective past related to the homeland works as a sort of glue which keeps all the members together; their diversity, in effect, is determined by their different life experiences, as Scego's family demonstrates in *La mia casa è dove sono*: Igiaba is Italian, her brother Abdulcadir is British and her cousin O is Finnish, they have followed different paths but remembering their home country keeps them together (Scego, 2013, 16). Heterogeneity is presented as a key feature within the diasporic group and, in this case, the pluralism within the same family represented by individuals with different Western European citizenships reflects the plural contemporary global European society that is characterized by transcultural connections which go beyond national borders; in effect, transnational society is characterised by actors that belong to different cultural tradition but this fact does not prevent them to interact in the transnational space:

It is a new space of political socialisation, one of identification beyond that of national societies. The EU has created a transnational civilian society in which national, provincial, religious and professional networks compete and interact among themselves, thereby promoting the logic of supranationality. (Bauböck, Faist, 2010, 45).

One of the members of Scego's heterogeneous family is cousin O, whose experience in Finland has forced him to face directly racial violence perpetrated by naziskins against black people: in fact, a friend of cousin O had been beaten by them, then naziskins had carved a swastika on his forehead; this episode determined cousin O's decision to leave Helsinki and move to the UK (Scego, 2012, 19). This example proves that the fear of losing the body characterizes not only African American people but also AfroEuropeans: thus, a continuous struggle is necessary for the black subject to be safe both physically and psychologically:

Struggle for the memory of your ancestors. Struggle for wisdom. Struggle for the warmth of The Mecca. Struggle for your grandmother and grandfather, for your name. But do not struggle for the Dreamers. Hope for them. [...] The Dreamers will have to learn to struggle themselves, to understand that the field for their Dream, the stage where they have painted themselves white, is the deathbed of us all (Coates, 2015, 150).

Coates' words confirm that not only blackness but also whiteness is a construction and that this process of othering lays at the core of racial violence; he refers specifically to the American context but the same situation can be extended to Europe and the Western world. Heterogeneity and pluralism previously seen between members of diasporic groups oppose to the rigid concept of blackness as non-whiteness and enlarge the discourse on Black Reason: in fact, "Black reason consists of a collection of voices, pronouncements, discourses, forms of knowledge, commentary and nonsense, whose object is things or people 'of African origin.' [...]" and its function consisted in analysing the racial manifestations towards a subject called the Black Man or the Native; narrative forms considered by Black Reason are multiple and they often show divergences and contradictions (Mbembe, 2017, 28).

### (a) Languages

The issue of language emerges in both *Americanah* and *La mia casa è dove sono* as an important matter both on the discourse level of narration and on the story level: its presence during the narration symbolise a precise choice of the authors and then characters in the novel highlight that using a language instead of another conveys specific meanings for diasporic individuals.

Starting from analysing the level of narration, both in *Americanah* and in *La mia casa è dove sono*, Adichie and Scego decide to employ respectively English and Italian as the main languages of narration; however, during the narration words and sentences in Igbo and Somali language are inserted; in fact, in postcolonial literary tradition, the choice of using the language of the colonizer/oppressor is a symbol of resistance: in particular, postcolonial writers are able to use techniques and strategies to create *contrapuntal*<sup>9</sup> narrative texts that are used as weapons to write back against the colonial system that oppressed them; in this way postcolonial writers turned upside down traditional Western narrative forms and asserted their own agency modifying traditional Western texts (Waugh, 2006, 352). Thus, the use of Western languages represents a similar strategy of resistance and challenge and authors' choice has not been accidental: in fact, this choice implies the existence of tensions between African and Western languages: colonialism has imposed European languages determining the detriment of indigenous languages that have been corrupted; however, the choice of Western languages represents the African authors' ability to appropriate of colonial tools and use them to express their own selves (Peterson, 2012, 681). Significantly, in both of the novels, authors have inserted words and sentences in their indigenous language: non-English and non-Italian items are encapsulated in the narration; sometimes their meaning is explained in the course of narration, sometimes they are left unexplained and the reader has to interpret them (Fludernik, 2012, 918). In *Americanah*, Igbo words are often present in dialogues between characters and they convey authenticity to characters' interaction; in this way, dialogues reflect better a real conversation: in the sentence "Mummy, *chelu*, let's hear" pronounced by Obinze to his mother, although the reader does not know the meaning of *chelu*, he/she

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<sup>9</sup> The term *contrapuntal* was introduced by Edward Said in his book *Culture and Imperialism* (1993).

understands that the Igbo term is used in informal familiar situations (Adichie, 2013, 86). On the other hand, Scego's *La mia casa è dove sono* opens with an entire sentence in Somali language, "*Sheeko sheeko sheeko xariir...*" which is immediately translated in Italian with the following sentence "Storia storia o storia di seta"; this kind of incipit stresses the importance of Somali tradition and memory that emerges during the narration and it intermingles with Scego's research of identity (Scego, 2012, 11); in Scego's *La mia casa è dove sono*, the meaning of Somali terms is generally explained in the course of the novel and sometimes footnotes are employed to translate non-Italian items: here the reader is guided during the reading experience that results quite linear. On the other hand, in *Adua*, Scego employs a different strategy to deal with non-Italian lexical items: she inserts them directly in the narration without providing any kind of translation but, at the end of the novel, she adds a vocabulary: meanings are provided but the reading experience results less linear because it is necessary to interrupt it and look for translations at the end of the volume; these are techniques used in recent postcolonial fiction; Western languages are elaborated by authors who made them personal by inserting lexical items in their own indigenous language which enriches their novels (Fludernik, 2012, 918).

At the story level, characters reflect on the use of their indigenous language and on the contexts in which it is used; in Adichie, Aunt Uju usually does not speak Igbo to his son Dike, and Ifemelu was afraid he would have identified it as the language of disagreement and conflict:

The last time Ifemelu visited, Aunt Uju told him, "I will send you back to Nigeria if you do that again!" speaking Igbo as she did to him only when she was angry, and Ifemelu worried that it would become for him the language of strife. (Adichie, 2013, 211)

Similarly, Igiaba Scego links her mother's use of Somali language to specific situations: for example, she does not use the Italian word *catastrofe* when she refers to the tragic episode of Igiaba's uncle's death that signed the beginning of the decline of Scego's family; in effect, her mother employs the Somali language whose hard and strong sounds are more suitable to describe that situation: "*Hoog, balaayo, musiibo, kasaro, qulalaas*. La cantilena dei miei terrori. Solo anni dopo capii quanto appuntite erano le lame di quelle parole." (Scego, 2012, 90). In Scego's novel, the sharp sound of

Somali words explains why Somali language is used to talk about certain matters, and probably in the case of Aunt Uju the choice of using Igbo to threaten Dike is due to the fact that it sounds more effective than English in showing her anger; however, the result is not a positive one because it causes the formation of negative associations within Dike's mind, right as Ifemelu worried (Adichie, 2013, 211).

Furthermore, language underlines the migrant's desire of inclusion within the new society: it emerges from *La mia casa è dove sono* and *Americanah*: in fact, the protagonists at a certain point decide to modify their use of language in order to adapt to the society they find themselves inserted in: this choice is determined by their wish of being considered part of that societies instead of outsiders. In Adichie's novel, Ifemelu is shocked by the way she is treated when she had to register at university; in effect, at the International students' office she is spoken to as if exaggeratedly slowly because of her foreign accent, a fact that makes Ifemelu feel as if she were a child:

Ifemelu shrank. In that strained, still second when her eyes met Cristina Tomas's before she took the forms, she shrank. She shrank like a dead leaf. She had spoken English all her life, led the debating society in secondary school, and always thought the American twang inchoate; she should not have cowered and shrunk, but she did. And in the following weeks, as autumn's coolness descended, she began to practice an American accent. (Adichie, 2013, 164)

This moment determines the rise of insecurities within Ifemelu's self and she starts questioning her own identity which was previously defined; the act of shrinking implies that she starts feeling inadequate for the American society which does not consider her life experience but it just focused on the differences between her and Americans: thus, Ifemelu starts reducing her Nigerian self and she works to build a personality that would suit with American standards of social inclusion: for this reason she began to practice an American accent, which represents the beginning of her attempt to assimilate within her host society. Similarly, Igiaba Scego in *La mia casa è dove sono* describes the moment when the 5-year-old Igiaba decides to stop speaking Somali language: her choice of refusing her mother tongue is caused by her need to feel integrated within the Italian world where other children used to laugh at her not only because of her skin colour but also because of the way she spoke: they said she was just able to make animal sounds but



not to speak; thus, her desire to uniform to the group of white children could be partially fulfilled by refusing Somali language and speaking only Italian (Scego, 2012, 151); despite her efforts, Igiaba kept on being discriminated at school, both by other children and by their parents because of her black skin.

Both cases represent the migrants' reaction to a society that excludes them; thus, their mechanism of total assimilation that imply a refusal of their own cultural identity will bring them to feel displaced and lost; this derives from the internalization of a process that dates back to the colonial period and it consisted in the elimination of cultural differences in favour of politics of assimilation that focused on cancelling pre-colonial cultures (Ashcroft, Griffith, Tiffin, 1995, 241). In Adichie's *Americanah*, this phenomenon is observed in Ifemelu's father relationship with the English language: in effect, his English is described as formal, elevated and mannered, and it makes Ifemelu think about his past as a colonial student who listened to his missionary teacher when he was at school during 50s; however, Ifemelu did not approved his *affected words* that she interprets as a kind of shield for her father against his own insecurities; this rigid attitude contrasts with those moments when Ifemelu's father speak Igbo, his own language, that does not convey his insecurities and regrets related to things he had not done in his life, such as gaining a higher degree in education or having a more wealthy life (Adichie, 2013, 57).

Ifemelu's father is not able to overcome his insecurities which even worsen when he has to face the difficult moment of losing his job (Adichie, 2013, 56). On the other hand, *Americanah* and *La mia casa è dove sono* show the evolution that Ifemelu's and Igiaba's identity experience: while the novels proceed, the protagonists realise that both their accent and their mother tongue are *markers of cultural difference* that are symbols of cultural authenticity: they represent migrant subjects' struggle to argue their cultural existence although their personality has to develop hybrid traits (Ashcroft, Griffith, Tiffin, 1995, 17). In this way, migrants are able to maintain their cultural differences, which constitute significant elements of culture: in fact, cultures are neither unitary nor dualistically defined by mean of Self-Other relationship (Ashcroft, Griffith, Tiffin, 1995, 207). In effect, cultures are characterised by hybridity determined by the fact that they generate in a space which is ambivalent and contradictory called by Bhabha *Third Space*:

here meanings generate and interpretation takes place; thus, the acceptance of this inevitable condition of hybridity determines liberation of subjects who become *bearers of a hybrid identity* (Ashcroft, Griffith, Tiffin, 1995, 208). This concept is central in Afropolitan culture, which stresses cultural differences as elements that convey complexity to its cultural subjects (Selasi, 2005).

## (b) Mothers

The relevance attributed to the figure of the mother spreads out of both *Americanah* and *La mia casa è dove sono*, although Ifemelu's mother and Igiaba's mother are portrayed as really different characters.

In Adichie's novel, Ifemelu's mother is described starting from a defining element of her body: hair; her hair has always been black, thick, full and glorious but suddenly something changed in her life and, one day, she decided to chop them off and then she burned her hairs with all her previous *objects of faith*, crucifixes, rosaries, missals; this happened because her faith has changed becoming more severe and she modified her behaviour according to this (Adichie, 2013, 50). Other similar episodes followed this one, Ifemelu's mother's faith modified quite often, but each change underlined the important role that faith played in her life; in effect, her reaction to shocking situations was always characterised by prayers for God; it emerged, for instance, when her husband was unfairly dismissed; in that occasion, she stated that God would provide another job for him (Adichie, 2013, 56). Ifemelu's mother reaction to challenging life events demonstrates a passive attitude because she transfers all her agency to her faith and to God.

On the other hand, the portrait of Igiaba's mother in *La mia casa è dove sono* presents a woman who is proud of her Somali traditions and who has been able to face difficulties in her life with an active attitude towards changes and life challenges, the first she had to face was that of infibulation:

Dopo questa pratica mamma dovette ridisegnare la sua mappa per la prima volta. La seconda fu quando fu costretta a lasciare la boscaglia per la città. E la terza quando dovette lasciare il suo paese per una terra straniera. La seconda volta non fu facile come si può immaginare. In fondo è lo stesso paese. Che vuoi che sia, ci si sposta di pochi chilometri. Per mia madre fu un cambiamento radicale. Un terremoto che la portò a modificare tutto della sua esistenza; anche le parole e i gesti assunsero u sapore nuovo. (Scego, 2012, 70).

Igiaba's mother way to face life challenging situations is characterised by the action of re-mapping and re-defining, which enables the subject to adapt to new contexts and conditions; firstly, when she was a child she sustained the pain due to the practice of

infibulation because she thought it was a religious practice linked with God's will; however, when she discovered it was not, she decided to oppose to her daughter's infibulation in order to give her active contribution to change history and traditions like that (Scego, 2012, 69). Then, moving from nomadism to sedentarism represented a shock for Igiaba's mother, who had to adapt to city life in Mogadiscio, characterised by different relationships with humans, animals and rhythms of life (Scego, 2012, 71). Then, her third moment of life change was signed by her becoming mother in her new host country, Italy, where different traditions brought her to reflect about the meaning of having children in Somalia; there, it was a collective experience while, in Italy, becoming a mother was a private event (Scego, 2012, 62). This time, being in a foreign country implied the need to deal with new traditions, but this fact did not prevent her from remaining faithful to her own origins, represented by her telling stories that talk about African animals (Scego, 2012, 63).

These mothers' portraits in Adichie's and Scego's novels represent two different approaches to life changes and challenges and, in both cases, the figure of mother is linked with daughters' identity formation; in Adichie's novel, in effect, Ifemelu's mother description is connected with the theme of hair that symbolically accompanies Ifemelu's process of identity transition; even in her mother's situation, change of hair symbolizes personal transformations: Ifemelu notices that her mother spoke and behaved differently (Adichie, 2013, 49). In Scego's novel, Igiaba's mother's attitude towards life difficulties influences her daughter approach to discover her in-between identity: a solution Igiaba's mother proposes to her daughter is to re-map herself taking into account both those places related to Mogadiscio, that represent her origins, and those places that have shaped her life in Rome, because in-betweenness cannot be ignored but accepted as a constituent part of migrants' and Afropolitans' identity (Scego, 2012, 33).

### (c) Metropolitan spaces

Metropolitan spaces play a significant role in the Afropolitan experience: in fact, Afropolitans' link with nations, cities and places in Africa combines with their connection to Western cities known by Afropolitans really well (Selasi, 2005). This strong relationship with the West is underlined by the fact that both *Americanah* and *La mia casa è dove sono* provide maps; in particular, while Scego structures her novel on the basis of places in Rome that represent her life experience, Adichie creates Ifemelu's personal map of America formed by those cities that have covered an important role in her identity building.

Scego's decision to begin each chapter with the description of a place in Rome is symbolical because she describes it with a focus on how it has been influent in her life; her map touches several spaces in the city: Sistina Theatre, Saint Mary above Minerva square, Axum stele, Termini train station, Trastevere, Olympic Stadium: all these spaces have contributed to the formation of Igiaba's personality thus, her map cannot be considered complete without them as her mother affirms at the beginning of the novel (Scego, 2012, 33). A similar way of dealing with spaces, although less explicit, emerges from Adichie's *Americanah*: Ifemelu's continuous movement from one place to another determines the formation of links between her and these American cities: in effect, Ifemelu arrives in America and she makes a journey from Brooklyn to Manhattan (Adichie, 2013, 145), then she moves to Philadelphia (Adichie, 2013, 150) and visits Aunty Uju in Warrington (Adichie, 2013, 221), moreover she moves to Baltimore (Adichie, 2013, 255) and then to Princeton: from there she has to get a train to reach her hair salon in Trenton (Adichie, 2013, 3).

In these novels, characters' cities of origin are represented in a way that differs from the one used for the representation of Western spaces; both Ifemelu and Igiaba claim their belonging to their cities, respectively Lagos and Mogadiscio, although they feel that these are not the only places they call home because, as Afropolitans, they feel home in many places because "they belong to no single geography" (Selasi, 2005). In Scego's novel, Igiaba talks about her ambiguous relationship with Mogadiscio:

Ero sotterranea. Nascosta. Mi atteggiavo talvolta a ospite talvolta a paesana. Giocavo più ruoli: ero terzino e centravanti; un'africana e un'europea. In quelle strade non sono nata. Non sono cresciuta. Non mi hanno dato il primo bacio. Non mi hanno deluso profondamente. Eppure le sentivo mie, quelle strade. Le avevo percorse anch'io e le rivendicavo. Rivendicavo i vicoli, le statue, i pochi lampioni. Anch'io avevo qualcosa in comune con il cugino O e con Abdul. (Scego, 2012, 36)

Igiaba's words underlines that Mogadiscio has not been the place where she has grown up because all her teenage experiences have taken place in Italy; nevertheless, she shows her desire to confirm her link with the city of Mogadiscio that she considers her city as well as Rome is. The feeling of being both a host and a peasant in their own city characterises both Igiaba's and Ifemelu's experience although their situation is slightly different; in effect, Ifemelu lived her adolescence in Nigeria, thus her connection with her home country is strengthened by this fact; however, when she came back to Lagos, at the beginning she perceived herself as an outsider and, thanks to her friend Ranyinudo, she became aware she was observing the city with an external eye, the host's eye, which was the American eye in her case:

Had it always been like this or had it changed so much in her absence? [...] She had grown up knowing all the bus stops and the side streets, understanding the cryptic codes of conductors and the body language of street hawkers. Now, she struggled to grasp the unspoken. When had shopkeepers become so rude? (Adichie, 2013, 475)

Ifemelu's considerations denote not only that her way to relate to Lagos has changed but the city itself has modified; this idea of transformation emerges in Scego's novel too, when cities are compared to living organisms thus, they are dynamic entities which modify and finally die: this is what happened to the Somali city of Mogadiscio, because of war (Scego, 2012, 27). This idea of geographic spaces as living entities characterised by dynamism and transformation recalls Mbembe's definition of Africa as a continent in movement in the sense that it has been both a destination and a point of departure for population flows and thus, according to the *worlds-in-movement* phenomenon, the African continent cannot be understood separately from the idea of mobility (Mbembe, 2007, 27). Then, metaphorically the idea of metropolitan spaces as living organisms is confirmed by the fact that Ifemelu's and Igiaba's description of their Western spaces presents the reader entities that are formed by different parts, like cells that compose

pluricellular organisms; the union of these parts constitute the Western environment that has influenced the development of characters' Afropolitan personality. Thus, representation of both Western and non-Western geographical spaces in Scego's *La mia casa è dove sono* and Adichie's *Americanah* respond to postcolonial need to provide the reader a full representation of real spaces, whose connection with characters make them more complex (Waugh, 2006, 352).

## Conclusion

This work focuses on the concept of Afropolitanism that emerges from novels written by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie and Igiaba Scego. It concentrates not only on Adichie's *Americanah* (2013) and Scego's *Adua* (2015) but it also reflects about some common themes shared by other narrative works of the same authors, such as Adichie's collection of short stories *The Thing Around Your Neck* (2009) and Scego's *La mia casa è dove sono* (2012).

This thesis opens with a chapter that analyses the concept of Afropolitanism starting from its origins and then concentrating on its theorization. Then, the following section of the first chapter shows connections between Afropolitanism, transnationalism and diaspora, these concepts are linked and they determine the creation of an interconnected network of ideas that are useful to interpret contemporary global society and its population movements across geographical boundaries. Furthermore, the importance of agency for Afropolitan diasporic subjects is highlighted and it is presented as a possible way to face stereotypical representations of the African continent.

The second chapter provides information related to the authors' backgrounds, focusing on their countries of origin; a historical overview presents events of Nigeria and Somalia underlining their connection to textual references found in Adichie's *Americanah* (2013) and Scego's *Adua* (2015). *Americanah* presents post-independence Nigeria as a place characterised by corruption between members of military government, which is represented in the novel by Chief, The General and Chief Omenka, who are involved in politics and illegal affairs. In *Adua* two moments of history emerge and demonstrate the connection between Italian and Somali history: Italian colonial past is central in Zoppe's experience, while 1970s Italian society is highlighted by *Adua's* story of migration; they intermingle with the representation of 1960s Somalia.

Then, the third chapter compares Adichie's *Americanah* to Scego's *Adua* on the basis of common themes that come out of these texts and demonstrate that these novels are linked with the idea of Afropolitanism; in effect elements of Afropolitan culture emerge. Firstly, sensory feelings assume a central role in the definition of migrants' identity; the sense of smell appears connected with places that are relevant in characters' life and it



prevents to fall into generalizations and idealizations: geography is not essentialized. Furthermore, the Afropolitan idea of home referred to a sense of belonging to many places is shown by Adichie's and Scego's characters who embody diasporic personalities. Moreover, the third section of the third chapter focuses on the centrality of gender in the experience of migration, in effect it is important to compare male and female experience of migration in order not to normalize the diasporic male experience. Then, migrants' subjectivity is strictly related to their body and, in particular, novels concentrate on hair as a symbolic element for characters. Furthermore, the next section underlines that a sense of freedom is conveyed by Afropolitan subjects' awareness of their own hybrid identity. The following section concentrates on the important role played by technologies and media in diasporic experiences and these novels underline the connection between ethnoscapas, technoscapas and mediascapas in the contemporary global society. Finally, the third chapter ends with some final considerations on *Americanah* and *Adua* showing how both novels are characterised by internal narratives that create different levels of narration determining a more complex narrative structure.

Then, the fourth chapter provides an analysis of other narrative works written by Adichie and Scego: themes connected with the Afropolitan culture and diasporic identities appear from this analysis; firstly, two male characters are observed in comparison: Adichie's short story *Cell One* belongs to her collection *The Thing Around Your Neck* (2009) while Zoppe is Adua's father whose story is told in Scego's *Adua* (2015); their stories deal with the concept of violence and fear of losing their own body, which is often linked with experiences of humiliation.

Finally, this thesis ends with a focus of the concept of in-betweenness that is a central feature typical of Afropolitan subjects; it is observed in relation with Adichie's *Americanah* (2009) and Scego's *La mia casa è dove sono* (2012); after having explored the concept of hybrid identity that is relevant both for Afropolitans and for AfroEuropeans, the idea of in-betweenness is seen in relation with matters of citizenship that determines individuals' belonging to a country; geography is connected to identity building thanks to the idea of remembering and remapping, in order to build diasporic collective memory of an ethnic group; then, my work reflects on the authors' choice of using Western languages for their novels but English and Italian, employed in these

novels, are enriched with lexical items of authors' indigenous languages; Adichie inserts Igbo words that are connected to colloquial situations while Somali words and sentences are used by Scego. Furthermore, both novels present figures of mothers that are central for characters' development and, in both cases, protagonists' mothers' behaviours show different ways to approach challenging life situations. Then, these novels present both Western and African metropolitan spaces underlining their connection with characters, a fact that gives complexity to geography which is not stereotyped but personalized.

Thus, this analysis of Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's and Igiaba Scego's works underline that Afropolitan culture represents a significant element of contemporary society; in particular, it is significant not only in the American context, as Adichie's works demonstrate, but also in the European context, as Scego's novels prove, and particularly current episodes in Italy demonstrate that it is important to reflect on the theme of in-between identity of migrants; Italian society has changed and it has become a multicultural society; because of this, it is important to remap Italy taking into account its colonial past and its relation with the African continent (Scego, 2013, 23:51). Furthermore, this work stresses the importance of observing African subjects and Africa itself in a non-stereotypical way, in effect it provides different examples of Afropolitan experiences which are useful to find out common traits of the phenomenon but they also stress the importance of characters' personal life; in these novels, African subjects are not objectified and, on the contrary, they provide the reader a multiplicity of stories of diaspora, migration and identity building that contrast with typical stereotypes; although these are not usually untrue, they are incomplete, offering a view that is based on a single story (Adichie, 2009, 14:05); on the other hand, presenting many stories related to Afropolitanism means to stress the complexity of this phenomenon and thus Afropolitan individuals are seen not as object of study but as humans.

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