

ASSESSING AFROPOLITANISM IN THE LIGHT OF CONVENTIONAL DISCOURSES ON AFRICAN EMANCIPATION AND IDENTITY

Sansan SIB

Université Alassane Ouattara, Bouaké

sibsansan01@gmail.com

Abstract: At the close of the present paper, there is only the scope to demonstrate the complementarity between Afropolitanism and the conventional narratives committed to African emancipation and identity, namely Afrocentricity and Pan-Africanism. It essentially aims at sorting out the extent to which these ideologies collide and nurture each other. It envisages to posit therefore that beyond the apparent contradiction, these narratives concur all to form an outstanding ideological standpoint for the emancipation of Africans and the reclamation of African identity for both homeland and diasporic Africans.

Keywords: African, Afrocentricity, Afropolitanism, Identity, Pan-Africanism.

ÉVALUATION DE L'AFROPOLITANISME À LA LUMIÈRE DES DISCOURS CONVENTIONNELS SUR L'ÉMANCIPATION ET L'IDENTITÉ AFRICAINES

Résumé : Cette étude vise à terme à démontrer la complémentarité entre l'Afropolitanisme et les narratifs traditionnels poursuivant l'émancipation et la restauration identitaire de l'africain, notamment l'afrocentricité et le panafricanisme. Elle vise essentiellement à mettre en exergue le fait que ces idéologies s'opposent et se complètent. Notre analyse a ainsi pour but de démontrer qu'en dépit de leur opposition apparente, ces concepts participent à la formation d'une base idéologique pour l'émancipation et la réclamation de l'identité africaine aussi bien dans le continent que dans la diaspora.

Mots Clés : Africain, Afrocentricité, Afropolitanisme, Identité, Panafricanisme.

Introduction

Afropolitanism was born within the flows of the traditional discourses pursuing African emancipation and the restoration of the people's identity. It stands as one the youngest conceptual apparatus in the wide range of conventional narratives committed to African emancipation and identity. The concept burgeoned indeed within the context of globalization with the constant demand for the removal of regional and national hindrances between countries, regional entities and even continents. It is a conceptual background that aims at reclaiming the current global order as a space for cultural and identity emancipation.

Part and parcel of discourses committed to African emancipation and identity, the concept was first coined almost simultaneously in the 2000s by Achille Mbembe (2005) and Taiye Selasi (2005). Ranged therefore in the mainstream of the ideologies committed to the quest

of African identity in a multicultural world, it offers according to its proponents a theoretical standpoint aiming “to dismantle the Western myths aimed at ensuring both the subjugation and exploitation of Africa” (Kasanda, 2018, p.380).

Defined as an alternative to traditional conventional discourses on African identity, Afropolitanism brings into the fore a new form of hybridity that is viewed by its proponents as the only tolerable answer responding to the new context of globalization prevailing in today’s world. Due to its relevant contribution in the debate related to the endless fragmentation of the African people, it appears necessary to devote further scholarly attention to the concept. As a new ideological matrix centered on African identity, Afropolitanism provides relevant arguments to apprehend what it means to be an African in a globalized world. Indeed as an ideological basis, the concept provides a positive answer to Africa’s contemporary challenge in a context of globalization. It represents a new paradigm from which to better apprehend the issue of African identity due to the new context in which the African people are evolving.

Thus, far from representing an odd one in the debate, Afropolitanism offers a dense conceptual apparatus that participates syntonically within the wide range of the discourses interrogating Western hegemony and the endless fragmentation of the African people. At the core of this paper, there is therefore a desire to provide clues and arguments that prove that, as an ideological basis, Afropolitanism is located in the wide range of discourses interrogating the endemic subjugation of Africans and their descents. Thus, far from standing as an antagonism to conventional narratives of African emancipation and identity, it is rather an ideological basis that is quite complementary to them as it will be illustrated through its appropriation of Afrocentric and Pan-African principles.

1. Afropolitanism and Pan-Africanism

1.1. Two concepts in conflict

The emergence of Afropolitanism offers an alternative to redefine what it means to be an African in a globalized world. Comparing its core principles to the ones underlying pan-Africanism appears relevant. As a new paradigmatic standpoint to apprehend African identity, Afropolitanism stands in many regards as an antagonism to the ideology of Pan-Africanism. The first perspective from which to apprehend this antagonism has to do with the historical context from which the two concepts have emerged. In his survey of the pan-

African ideal, Hakim Adi provides, for instance, not only the historical context from which pan-Africanism was born but also the major strands that define the ideology in its evolution. He has this to say on this account:

The earlier form emerging during the period of trans-Atlantic enslavement originated from the African diaspora, stressed the unity of all Africans and looked toward their liberation and that of the African continent. The more recent form emerged in the continent in the period after 1945. This form of pan-Africanism stressed the unity, liberation and advancement of the States of the African continent, although often recognizing the importance of the diaspora and its inclusion (Adi, 2018, pp.3-4).

However, contrary to pan-Africanism, Afropolitanism is relatively recent and has emerged from a quite different background. Attributed separately to Achille Mbembe and Taiye Selasi, the concept dates back from the 2000s. It represents for its proponents a change of paradigm on the way African identity has been so far apprehended through conventional narratives on African emancipation and identity. In her "Bye Bye Babar" (2005) for example, Selasi defines the Afropolitans in the following terms:

you'll know us by our funny blend of London fashion, New York jargon, African ethics, and academic successes Some of us are ethnic mixes, e.g. Ghanaian and Canadian, Nigerian and Swiss; others merely cultural mutts: American accent, European affect, African ethos. Most of us are multilingual: in addition to English and a Romantic or two, we understand some indigenous tongue and speak a few urban vernaculars. (...) Then there's the G8 city or two (or three) that we know like the backs of our hands, and the various institutions that know us for famed focus. We are Afropolitans: not citizens, but Africans of the world. (Selasi, 2005, p. 528)

Like Selasi Mbembe stands undeniably as an outstanding figure in the rise of the ideology of Afropolitanism. This forerunner seems even to assume more vividly the fatherhood of the concept as his commitment in the field tends to demonstrate. He defines the concept as a change of paradigm as the definition of African identity is concerned. For this scholar indeed, African identity has to be adapted to the cosmopolitan environment characterizing many African mega polis today. Mbembe's perception of Afropolitanism aims therefore to define an African identity according to the current position of the continent and the people in the planetary village that the world is representing today. He defines thus Afropolitanism as the "way – the many ways – in which Africans, or people from African origin, understand themselves as being part of the world rather than being apart" (A. Mbembe & Balakrisnan S., 2016, p.29). In other words, being an Afropolitan according to this proponent, is nothing but "an assertion of the African way of being in and negotiating with the world" (Kasanda, 2018, p. 381).

The portrayal of the conceptual background from which Pan-Africanism and Afropolitanism emerged provides a clear overview on the kind of antagonism opposing the two ideologies. Pan-Africanism was born in the context of struggle aiming to liberate both homeland and diasporic Africans from Western hegemonic tutelage. Thus, in its nucleus basis lies the desire to provide freedom to the African people both in the homeland and in the diaspora at every regard. However, contrary to Pan-Africanism, Afropolitanism tends to privilege just few Africans enjoying a Western lifestyle. In fact, as Selasi and Mbembe's definitions of the concept clearly show, it is targeting a category of African population in the continent or in the diaspora that is not representative at all of the great deal of African people.

The population that is the target of Afropolitanism according to its proponents cannot represent the African identity in the broader sense. As some critiques of Afropolitanism rightly remark, the scope of the concept is very limited. It involves indeed just a group of privileged Africans who have received a very good education and are enjoying middle class lifestyle either in the G8 countries¹ or even in Africa. This group represents nothing compared to the millions of Africans suffering severe racial prejudices and precarious living conditions in Western countries as well as the great majority of African citizens who are living under the yoke of poverty. Emma Dabiri remarks this on that account:

While Afropolitanism may appear to offer an alternative to the single story, we run the danger of this becoming the dominant narrative for African success. The traditional Afro-pessimistic narratives, while obsessed with poverty, denied the poor a voice. While Afropolitanism may go some way in redressing the balance concerning Africans speaking for themselves, the problem lies in the fact that we still don't hear the narratives of Africans who are not privileged. (...) While Afropolitans talk about what it means to be young, cool and African, are many of them concerned with addressing the world beyond their social realities, to the issues that concern other Africans. (Kansanda, 2018, p.391)

For this critique indeed, while Afropolitanism is provided a wider space to thrive within the conventional narratives related to African identity, it misses to involve the great deal of Africans. In this regard, the ideology cannot be considered to represent a space to objectively apprehend African identity. Like Dabiri, Brian Bwesigye expresses his fear about the mission embodied by Afropolitanism. Thus, as he maintains, far from being committed to

¹ The term refers to the group of eight countries that are the most industrialized and the richest of the globe.

the welfare of African people, Afropolitanism has rather been developed into “a new single story, focusing on well-off African emigrants and thereby erasing African realities from the literary landscape – realities of poverty that stand in contrast to those described by Taiye Selasi” (Pahl, 2016, p.77).

This statement implies that in addition to the divergences related the context from which the two concepts have emerged, various aspects oppose Afropolitanism to pan-Africanism. As a major advocate of the concept, Mbembe himself distinguishes Afropolitanism from the preceding narratives on African emancipation and identity. He admits for instance that the difference between Afropolitanism and other conventional narratives committed to the quest of African emancipation and identity such as pan-Africanism and Négritude is quite obvious. He contends therefore that:

Afropolitanism is not the same thing as Pan-Africanism or Négritude. (...) it is a way of being in the world that rejects, on principle, any form of victim identity (...) It is also a political and cultural position on issues such as the nation, race and the question of difference in general. (...) As for African nationalism», it represents, at the beginning, a powerful utopia whose insurrectional power was unlimited (...). But as soon as nationalism was transformed into the official ideology of the predatory state, it lost all ethics (...) This issue of the human face, of the human figure, constitutes the obstacle against which nationalism and nativism stumble endlessly (Kasanda, 2018, pp.386-387).

Mbembe's disagreement against proponents of Pan-Africanism as it is offered to notice through this comment rests essentially upon the fact that for him conventional narratives have failed to embody the authentic African identity. He argues mainly that proponents of Pan-Africanism failed to apprehend properly the essence of African identity due to their endorsement of obsolete and essentialist politics of identity. Mbembe maintains for example that “proponents of Négritude and Pan-Africanism endorsed without rigorous questioning central categories of the colonial discourse, including notions such as civilization, race, tradition, and the acceptance of national borders inherited from the Berlin conference” (Kasanda, 2018, p.388). For him indeed, Pan-Africanism merely defined Africans from the point of view of the former colonizer's point of view. In fact, the present borders of African nations is nothing but the invention of colonial ideology. Therefore, to keep defining the people from this lens is nothing but a way to perpetuate a victimized position. Mbembe argues thus that:

The reaffirmation of a human identity denied by the other is part (...) of the discourse of rehabilitation. But if the discourse of rehabilitation seeks to confirm African co-

belonging to humankind in general, it does not deny, on the other hand, the fiction of race. This is true of both the Négritude and the different varieties of Pan-Africanism. Indeed, in these theories (...) it is on the basis of race that not only difference in general but also the very idea of the nation can be grounded since racial determinants have to serve as the moral basis of political solidarity (2000, p.29).

Mbembe's criticism against Pan-Africanism appears quite irrelevant for the simple reason that the manifestation of Western hegemony upon Africans and their descents is motivated and nurtured essentially by racial preoccupations. Indeed, like slavery, colonization finds its justification in Europe's racist supremacy pretention. In fact, beyond the colonizer's pretention to bring civilization lies a desire to quench a capitalist thirst. Aimé Césaire defines colonization in the following words:

To agree on what it is not: neither evangelization, nor a philanthropic enterprise, nor a desire to push back the frontiers of ignorance, disease, and tyranny, nor a project undertaken for the greater glory of God, nor an attempt to extend the rule of law. To admit once and for all, without flinching at the consequences, that the decisive actors here are the adventurer and the pirate, the wholesale grocer and the ship owner, the gold digger and the merchant, appetite and force, and behind them, the baleful projected shadow of a form of civilization which, at a certain point in its history, finds itself obliged, for internal reasons, to extend to a world scale the competition of its antagonistic economies (2000, pp.32-33).

As it is offered to notice slavery, colonization and even the present neo-colonial atmosphere are nothing but the manifestation of Western hegemonic pathology towards the black race. Therefore, given that Western hegemonic assertion towards Africans and their descents is embedded in racist pretensions, it is necessary to rehabilitate the people from that racial perspective. In this regard, the Pan-African discourse sounds quite valid contrary to what Mbembe and other proponents of Afropolitanism seem to admit. Defining African identity from the racial perspective is not to adopt a victimized position as proponents of Afropolitanism seem to pretend. However, far from representing strong antagonism, these apparent contradictions do not prevent a certain complementarity between ideologies.

1.2. Complementary ideological standpoints

Afropolitanism and Pan-Africanism kiss and nurture one another in many regards. They both offer a complementary ideological standpoint from which a better definition of what it means to be an African today can envisaged. Mbembe's politics regarding African identity in the context of globalization can be meaningful if it is handled from a Pan-African perspective. In fact, the easy circulation of people from different world places favoured by globalization has made it possible to experience hybridity more than ever. This implies therefore a redefinition of what it means to be an African in such a globalized world. Thus,

to be appropriately apprehended in this globalization context, African identity must be defined by taking into account the hybrid environment in which the “here and there” are intermingled.

Thus, far from proclaiming the demise of Pan-Africanism as Mbembe and other proponents of Afropolitanism tend to justify, the two ideological standpoints can rather significantly concur to define a strong ideological basis which will provide new perspectives that are likely to foster the achievement of African emancipation and an authentic African identity. Though these concepts emerged from different contextual background, they present many similarities proving that they can be complementary in many regards. Birgit Neumann and Gabriel Rippl are well aware of this complementarity between Afropolitanism and Pan-Africanism. They argue in their essay “Celebrating Afropolitan Identity” (2017) that Afropolitanism provides tools to advocates of Pan-Africanism and black Atlantic² theory to achieve their goals. These authors maintain for example that with “its emphasis on both rootedness and mobility, the concept of Afropolitanism must be understood as an attempt to bring together two distinct frameworks for understanding African identity, namely the frameworks offered by Pan-Africanism and the black Atlantic respectively” (B. Neumann and Rippl G. 2017, p.163).

Indeed, at the core of Mbembe’s definition of Afropolitanism lies the notion of circulation of different worlds that meet and share many things together. According to him, far from representing a new phenomenon, he believes that the circulation of peoples as it happens within the context of globalization is as old as the world itself. In fact, according to him, this very reality is what essentially characterized pre-colonial Africa. Thus, he remarks for example that “African pre-colonial history was, most of the time, a process of people constantly moving across the continent” (Kasanda, 2018, p.382). This is quite true in the sense that in pre-colonial Africa states were almost borderless with the peoples going and coming. It is a fluid environment allowing people to circulate freely without constraint and regional borders.

² Black Atlantic is a concept developed by Paul Gilroy. In his book *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double-Consciousness* (1999), he explains the notion as the possibility to define the African American identity in the context of “the historical experience of transatlantic slavery and the subsequent

This is especially true with the ancient empires³ that predated Western colonization in West Africa. Though representing strong states ingrained in very strong political systems, people were authorized to go and come at their will. Therefore, the present mobility of Africans all over the world is nothing but the perpetuation of this migratory tradition. This contributes in the eyes of Mbembe to shape the hybrid nature of African identity. Therefore, for him, it is on the basis of this hybrid background that Africans can claim their place everywhere in the world.

Such a definition of identity clearly tends to locate Afropolitanism and Pan-Africanism at the crossroads. Indeed by admitting the circulation of Africans all over the world, Mbembe and other advocates of Afropolitanism assert by the same token the possibility to establish a pan-African identity. One major tenet advanced proponents of Pan-Africanism is the definition a globalized black identity which takes into account not only homeland Africans but also the African diaspora from the world's five continents. This is the mission essentially pursued by the Pan-African movement that emerged after the 1945 Manchester Conference⁴. As a major voice of this new Pan-Africanism⁵, Nkrumah's Pan-African ideal aims essentially at removing the artificial frontiers separating homeland Africans resulted from the balkanization of Africa during the Berlin Conference⁶.

It is quite obvious in this regard that Afropolitanism and Pan-Africanism are quite complementary in the sense that like Mbembe, proponents of this new trend of Pan-Africanism that emerged in the African continent view the precolonial fluidity as the standpoint from which to reclaim African identity and propel Africa's freedom and development as well. Teju Cole admits this complementarity between the two narratives. The fact that he presents himself as being at the crossroads of various narratives of African emancipation and identity is quite meaningful. He admits for instance being at the same time "an Afropolitan, a Pan-African, an Afro-pessimist" (M. Pahl, 2016, p.79). According to

³ West Africa witnessed four major empires before the beginning of Western colonization. These include Ghana, Sosso, Mali and Songhai empires.

⁴ Pan-Africanism emerged as an emancipatory movement in the Americas spear headed by the descent of former slaves. It is after 1945 after the Manchester conference that homeland Africans begin to play leading roles.

⁵ The term New Pan-Africanism refers to the pan-African movement that emerged after the 1945 Manchester conference with Africans playing leading roles in the pan-African arena.

⁶ In 1844 took place in Berlin that changed the face of the African continent forever. Gathered to share the cake that the continent represented for them, Berlin hosted the conference that scrambled Africa into small parts to quench Western countries' thirst for capitalist extension.

this scholar, Pan-Africanism and Afropolitanism provide both a wider space that can concur to define the African identity.

Indeed, though Pan-Africanism and Afropolitanism emerged from different historical backgrounds, both ideologies share in many regards the same concerns as African identity and emancipation are concerned. As two ideological standpoints aiming to define an African identity out of the infringement of Western hegemonic biases, the two concepts converge in various aspects. Afropolitanism in this regard is therefore quite complementary to Pan-Africanism in that both narratives are preoccupied by African emancipation and identity. Both represent ideological bases allowing the struggle for an alternative and a good perception of Africa and Africans.

Like Cole, Kasanda contends for example that independence fighters and Pan-Africanist heirs such as Césaire, Senghor, Nkrumah and Nyerere “did not engage on the basis of their own political and cultural imagination. They were moved by the imperative that they must stand up for their people and produce a relevant answer to the fundamental question of ‘being or not being’” (2018, p.389). This desire to fight on behalf of the African people is also what nurtures the fight of advocates of the Afropolitan ideal.

Thus, like advocates of Pan-Africanism, Afropolitanism offers according to its most outstanding voices a space to seek to answer the problem of African identity by defining it from the perspective of the new world order imposed by the process of globalization. By interrogating the meaning of African identity in a globalized world, Afropolitanism is seeking to provide to the post-colonial African subject an authentic identity which corresponds to the real place of the people in the world’s multicultural table. In fact, in the context of power relations dominated by Western ideologies, Afropolitanism and Pan-Africanism stand as “a foundation for the discursive unpacking of contemporary local and collective power structures with the loss and consequent rediscovery of agency within the notion of self” (H. Cawood, 2015, p.358). In fact, they both represent conceptual standpoint for the stimulation of the people’s agency at every regard.

It sounds therefore crystal clear that both ideologies are granted a wider space to play an important role in the black man’s struggle to overcome alien forces. As it is offered to notice, in the African people’s quest for emancipation and identity, both ideologies can be helpful.

Indeed, the Pan-African struggle can only be a success if it takes into account the new configuration of the world imposed by the flows occasioned by the process of globalization. As an emancipatory ideology pursuing the total liberation of Africans both in the homeland and in the diaspora, Pan-Africanism can only be more effective if it integrates some of the Afropolitan principles. It is therefore necessary for Pan-African fighters in their quest for a globalized black identity to back up their struggle with the Afropolitan model of the circulation of the world.

2. Afropolitanism and Afrocentricity

2.1. *Two antagonistic theoretical perspectives*

Afrocentricity and Afropolitanism emerged within two different settings. The former emerged in America as the willful desire of African American scholars in the 1980s to define a theoretical standpoint for the reclamation of a genuine freedom in every regard for Africans and their descents. Asante who stands as the most outstanding voice of the ideology justifies the emergence of the concept by the fact that “once we are no longer accepting as legitimate a particular direction, scheme, or plan, we can consider the possibility of an alternative or many alternatives” (Monteiro-Ferreira, 2014, p.ix). Thus, as the African American scholars noted the ineffectiveness of Western essentialist and hegemonic theories to locate properly the black subject, the Afrocentric paradigm stood for them as a relevant alternative.

However, contrary to Afrocentricity, Afropolitanism emerged more recently in 2000s as an alternative to conventional narratives centered on African emancipation and identity. This new intellectual standpoint for the reclamation of the people’s identity is essentially spear headed by African intellectuals. Thus, the fight against Western hegemony, from its various manifestation, has been conducted through emancipation and identity theories including Afropolitanism and Afrocentricity. Like Afrocentricity and other emancipatory discourses pursuing the restoration of the African personality, Afropolitanism is an ideological standpoint aiming according to its proponents “to dismantle the western myths aimed at ensuring both the subjugation and exploitation of Africa” (Kasanda, 2018, p.380).

Echoing vividly within the wide range of discourses challenging Western hegemony, Afropolitanism and Afrocentricity participate importantly to the black man’s quest for freedom both in the homeland and the diaspora. Though representing narrative discourses centred on African emancipation and identity, they seem to apprehend the definition of an

authentic African identity from different perspectives. As it is noticeable with Pan-Africanism, Mbembe and proponents of Afropolitanism proclaim the obsolescence of Afrocentricity viewing this ideological basis as not being relevant in the context of globalization. In fact, for proponents of Afropolitanism, Afrocentricity has proven its limits in that in a world in which everyone borrows from others, it is not possible to define an authentic African identity out of this globalized environment.

In his theory of Black Atlantic for instance, Paul Gilroy criticizes the claim of advocates of Afrocentrism⁷ for pure African ancestry. For him, as a fundamental standpoint to define African identity, it represents an essentialist view in the same way that Eurocentrism is. He maintains indeed that “Afrocentrism is even determinant to claims of African self-representation, because it asserts the same binary patterns that underwrite Eurocentric racism and embraces a nostalgic image of Africa, presumably untouched by the rupture of modernity” (B. Neumann and Rippl G., 2017, p. 163). Thus, for Afropolitans, it is not possible to define an African identity that rests essentially upon Africa’s ancestral background and pre-colonial past. This is justified by the fact that we live today in a globalized world within which different worlds are intermingled. It is not therefore possible for this critic to define African identity without taking into account the fact that it is an identity that has borrowed so much from other people namely Westerners.

One of the major tenets that tends to distance proponents of Afropolitanism and Afrocentricity is that the Afropolitan ideology authorizes “to leave behind an oppositional victimized position that Africa is conventionally assigned to allowing instead for nuanced and differentiated subject positions that Afropolitans inhabit” (M. Pahl, 2016, p.389). Proponents of Afropolitanism argue indeed that Globalization has so much redefined the world and human relations that this new world order needs to be taken into account when it comes to define one’s identity. This is justifiable by the fact that according to Chielozoma Eze “identity is no longer shaped exclusively by geography or blood, or culture understood in oppositional terms. On the contrary, identity is now relational” (2014, p.235). Thus, one’s identity can be defines in relation to other identities.

⁷ Though proponents of Afrocentricity disagree with the use of Afrocentrism to refer to their ideological movement, its use here refers to the same concept.

All these valuable arguments contribute to some extent to prove that Afrocentricity, as coined by its proponents, tends to be old-fashioned according to advocates of Afropolitanism. This obsolescence seems justifiable in that contrary to the conception of identity supported by advocates of Afrocentricity that finds power and sustenance in a racial solidarity underpinned by determinedly non-European epistemology⁸, Afropolitanism in its fundamental principles is rather ingrained within “the ability to recognize one’s face in that of a foreigner (...) to domesticate the unfamiliar” (Balakrishnan, 2017, p.11). However, beyond this apparent antagonism portrayed by the two theoretical standpoints, many points tend to converge the two concepts in the same perspective.

2.2. *Afrocentricity and Afropolitanism at the crossroads*

Afrocentricity and Afropolitanism are quite complementary in many regards. The very first perspective from which to apprehend this complementarity has to do with the fact that both concepts belong to the wide range of conventional narratives committed to African emancipation and identity. Indeed, the chronicle of the West’s hegemonic assertion upon the black race is manifested through political domination, economic exploitation and cultural alienation. It goes with the people left under the weight of an endemic trauma crossing generations and continents. This reality has made it a difficult task to define an authentic African identity. Aware of this difficulty Chinua Achebe defines for this reason African identity as not established yet. In fact, to talk of an African identity according to him is to admit that it is an identity that is not frozen but is in a construction process. He maintains thus that:

It is, of course true that the African identity is still in the making. There isn’t a final identity coming into existence. And it has a certain context and a certain meaning. If somebody meets me, say, in a shop in Cambridge, [England], he says ‘Are you African?’ Which means that Africa means something to some people. Each of these tags has a meaning, and a penalty and a responsibility. All these tags, unfortunately for the black man, are tags of disability (A. K. Appiah, 1992, pp.73-74).

Achebe is right in the sense that Africa, as it is offered to notice today, represents just an invention of Westerners. The black man is essentially defined indeed from Western essentialist and Universalist point of view. The apprehension of what it means to be an African from this Western perspective is quite fallacious and Eurocentric at the same time. It tends indeed to deny humanity to Africans in every regard. For example, Hegel’s

⁸ A way of seeing, being and thinking through the world that is contrary to European worldviews.

definition of history from this Western perspective is quite meaningful. Mbembe denounces thus the misrepresentation that Hegel does of the history of the African people. He contends on that account that “historically, Africa has been defined in the Hegelian paradigm as out of history, as not belonging to the world – as being some region of the planet which as no significant importance whatsoever in terms of the real history of the human in the world” (Mbembe and Balakrishnan, 2016, p.29).

This wrong definition Africa’s history and achievements places the people in the margin of Western centre. Due to this wrong definition of their history and cultural achievement, Africans are more and more claiming for their rightful place as subject rather than object. In the same way that Marxism emerged from the precarious living conditions imposed to the Russian peasants, various narratives emerged both from the homeland and the diaspora aiming to claim the rightful place of Africans in the world multicultural table. Ngara maintains for example that, it is the very nature of colonialism and imperialism that “leads to revolt by the colonized whose exploitation, dehumanization and enslavement sooner or later result in national consciousness that openly challenges foreign domination” (Ngara, 1985, p.26).

Afrocentricity and Afropolitanism represent therefore an effort to define an authentic African identity. In this quest for identity, the two narratives offer complementary devices to come to the definition of an authentic African identity. This is justified by the evidence that the desire for a world without hindrances and difference advocating proponents of Afropolitanism seems to sound quite contradictory with its major tenets. In fact, While pleading for a world without borders, Mbembe at the same time acknowledges that “from a political, military, and cultural point of view (...) Africa has to become its own center” (Mbembe and Balakrishnan 2016, p.31). These words from one of the most outstanding voice within the Afropolitan discourse proves undeniably the immersion of Afropolitanism in the Afrocentric discourse. Indeed, this point of view reasserts one of the major tenets underlying Asante’s Afrocentric discourse. Indeed, the vision of a world without border is quite opposed to the quest for Africa’s political, economic, military and cultural self-definition advocating proponents of Afropolitanism. This vision implies the quest of Africa’s own centre to define itself as advocated by proponents of Afrocentricity.

Pursuing one's own centre is also one way to be distinguished from others. Afropolitanism therefore embodies a narrative that has for long raised the interest of proponents of Afrocentricity. In fact, proponents of Afrocentricity have always claimed for the rightful location of the African people in every aspect of their experiences. This implies the reclamation of the African centeredness as a core standpoint in the definition of every phenomenon involving the African subject. Placing therefore the concept of location at the core of the Afrocentric ideology, Asante defines Afrocentricity essentially as the "quality of viewing phenomena from the perspective of the African person (2008, p.16). In doing so, Afrocentricity does not deny the definition of other groups from their own perspectives as advocates of Afropolitanism tend to wrongly argue.

Thus, far from being ethnocentric and essentialist like Eurocentrism, Afrocentricity advocates that African phenomena are misrepresented when viewed from other groups' perspectives. Thus, though the contribution of Afropolitanism in the debate about African emancipation and identity is undeniable, it is wrong to admit, as its advocates pretend, that it has left Afrocentricity "to the annals of history" (Mbembe and Balakrishnan, 2016, p.29). On the contrary, Afrocentricity provides some clues upon which the Afropolitan definition of the African identity should be embedded. Both narratives can be therefore quite complementary in the definition of what it means to be an authentic African.

Defining the African identity from these two ideological perspectives is likely to foster an authentic definition of what it really means to be an African. Indeed, such a definition takes into account the people's past and present experiences and achievements. Thus, by demanding to draw resources only in Africa's precolonial past, Afrocentricity proposes a definition of African identity that is limited for it does not take into account the people's present experiences with the "runaway world"⁹ (A. Giddens, 2003, p.7). Missing to take into account the effects of globalization upon the African subject will undeniably infringe a genuine apprehension of an authentic African identity. Likewise defining an authentic African identity without taking into account the people's precolonial achievements of the people will certainly be insufficient. Though viewed by its proponents to represent "a contra 20th century Pan-African and Afrocentric endeavours to create a civilization based on the African Personality" (Balakrishnan, 2017, p.10), Afropolitanism is rather complementary to

⁹ Anthony Giddens uses the term to refer to the present globalized world.

the conventional narratives of African emancipation and identity as is well established with Afrocentricity.

Indeed, though it is undeniable that the other worlds are crucial in the definition of African identity, to do it only in the context of “a world in which there is no center for Africa, no cultural integrity” (Balakrishnan, 2017, p.10) as advocated by proponents of Afropolitanism appears mistakable and irrelevant. Asante contends in fact that, without this centeredness, Africa will bring “nothing to the multicultural table but a darker version of whiteness” (Monteiro-Ferreira, 2014, p.3). The definition of a genuine African identity that reflects the cultural and social achievements of the African people lies therefore in one’s ability to apprehend it from both the Afrocentric and the Afropolitan perspectives.

What Afrocentricity and Afropolitanism seem to provide as tools in the definition of an authentic African identity is the possibility to combine past and present and “here” and “there”. Indeed, though presenting some contradictions in many regards both ideologies nurture one another in the sense that they both provide complementary solutions to get rid of Western hegemony and define a genuine African identity. Thus, if the ultimate goal pursued by advocates of Afropolitanism is “to weave a more universal solidarity that can accord individuals anywhere in Africa their rights and dignities regardless of their gender or ancestry” (C. Eze, 2014, p. 237), they will be more effective by handling this quest from an Afrocentric perspective. Indeed, Afrocentricity is “a theory of wholeness that seeks ways of unity based on mutual respect for the cultural agency of all people” (Monteiro-Ferreira, 2014, p.3). Representing therefore two streams opening into the same river, these concepts sound both relevant within the wide range of discourses committed to the total liberation of the African people. Afrocentricity and Pan-Africanism provides therefore complementary theoretical background to define a genuine African identity liberated from Western hegemonic biases.

Conclusion

This paper has been an attempt to highlight the extent to which Afropolitanism, as an ideological basis, is complementary to the conventional narratives pursuing the total liberation of Africans both in the homeland and the diaspora. The paper has therefor proven that contrary to the portrayal made by its major proponents tending to distance it from the traditional conventional narratives, Afropolitanism is solidly ingrained within the wide

range of discourses pursuing a genuine freedom for both homeland and diasporic Africans. It has been therefore proven throughout the paper that though these narratives are handled from different perspectives, they do not represent antagonistic theoretical standpoints. Indeed, as it is offered to notice, Afropolitanism is quite complementary to Pan-Africanism and Afrocentricity. Thus, despite the ideological gap that seems to distance conventional narratives committed to African identity and emancipation, they concur to form a sophisticated ideological standpoint for the reclamation of African identity and the emancipation of the people in many regards.

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