

Afropolitanism As a Narrative Discourse in African Diaspora Poetry: A Study of Warsan Shire's Poetry

Njan, Iliya Dayit

Department of English, University of Jos, Plateau State, Nigeria.

dayitiliya@gmail.com

Abstract

This paper argues that Warsan Shire's poetry exemplifies Afropolitanism by reshaping narratives of African belonging, identity, and global interconnectedness, making her an essential voice in contemporary African literature. Afropolitanism, as a concept in African literature using Warsan Shire's poetry. A Somali- British poet whose name means Leader. The objectives of this study is to examine how Afropolitan identity is constructed and represented in contemporary African diasporic poetry and To identify recurring motifs and discursive patterns that reflect Afropolitan values. The study employs qualitative research methods, specifically literary analysis.

This study embodies this Afropolitan sensibility in her poetry, which navigates the complexities of exile, belonging, and identity formation. Her poetry reflects key Afropolitan themes, particularly through her portrayal of displacement, multilingualism, and the intersection of personal and collective histories. She employs language as a medium of cultural hybridity, blending Somali oral traditions with contemporary English poetry to reflect the fragmented yet interconnected nature of diasporic identity.

Keywords: Afropolitanism, Contemporary, Identity, Diaspora.

INTRODUCTION

Afropolitanism has emerged in recent decades as a key term in cultural theory and postcolonial studies to describe the complex identities and experiences of contemporary Africans, particularly those shaped by global migration, hybridity, and cosmopolitanism. First introduced by Taiye Selasi in her 2005 essay "Bye-Bye Barbar," the term quickly gained traction in academic and popular discourse. However, its definition has evolved significantly, moving

beyond mere lifestyle branding to encompass deeper political, ethical, and philosophical dimensions. This essay explores the concept of Afropolitanism as a dynamic, multilayered framework for understanding modern African identity, while addressing its cultural, ethical, and political implications as well as its critiques. Taiye Selasi's seminal essay introduced Afropolitanism as a new identity category for Africans who are "not citizens, but Africans of the world" (Selasi). Her portrayal highlighted young, educated Africans raised in the diaspora who remain culturally and emotionally tied to the continent while participating in global cosmopolitan networks. These Afropolitans, according to Selasi, are fluent in multiple languages, comfortable in several cultures, and aware of their complex, often contradictory heritage. Selasi's work positioned Afropolitanism as a celebration of hybridity and modern African subjectivity, challenging monolithic representations of Africa.

While Selasi's definition offered a starting point, scholars such as Achille Mbembe have expanded Afropolitanism into a deeper philosophical framework. For Mbembe, Afropolitanism is not just a sociological or aesthetic category but an ethical stance. It is about "embracing, with full knowledge and without naïveté, the complexity, the impurity, the mixed nature of many African realities" (Mbembe 28). This perspective reorients Afropolitanism from a lifestyle label to a critical praxis rooted in openness, plurality, and self-reflexivity. It resists essentialist identity politics by promoting a grounded yet global African consciousness that is historically informed and critically engaged. Afropolitanism must be situated within the larger context of globalization, where the movement of people, ideas, and capital blurs traditional boundaries of nationality and identity. Afropolitans are often seen as agents of cultural production who challenge dominant narratives about Africa through literature, art, fashion, and digital media. Writers such as Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, Teju Cole, and Chris Abani exemplify this by crafting transnational narratives that explore displacement, memory, and belonging. Their works, while globally celebrated, remain rooted in African experiences and histories, offering complex representations that counter stereotypes.

OBJECTIVES OF THE SYUDY

The objectives of this study is to To examine how Afropolitan identity is constructed and represented in contemporary African diasporic poetry and To identify recurring motifs and discursive patterns that reflect Afropolitan values such as cosmopolitanism, cultural hybridity, and global African consciousness.

METHODOLOGY

The study employs qualitative research methods, specifically literary analysis. Through close reading of selected texts, the research explores thematic concerns, narrative structure, and stylistic choices of the poet.

POET'S BIOGRAPHY

Warsan Shire is a Somali-British poet, writer, and editor, born on August 1, 1988, in Nairobi, Kenya, to Somali parents. Her family later migrated to the United Kingdom, where she was raised in London. Growing up as a child of refugees, her experiences deeply influenced her poetry, which often explores themes of displacement, exile, trauma, womanhood, and cultural identity. Shire's poetry gained widespread recognition for its raw, emotional depth and ability to capture the struggles of refugees, immigrants, and marginalized communities. Her collections include; *Teaching My Mother How to Give Birth* (2011) is her debut chapbook, which established her as a powerful poetic voice. Her *Blue Body* (2015) is another chapbook continuing her exploration of exile, love, and survival. *Bless the Daughter Raised by a Voice in Her Head* (2022), is her first full-length poetry collection, examining themes of trauma, womanhood, and resilience. Her themes and style often addresses Migration and Refugee Experiences. The pain of leaving home and struggling to belong, womanhood and identity, the experiences of African women, particularly Somali and Muslim women, navigating oppression and self-discovery are the prominent issues in her works. *Family and Generational Trauma*.The way pain and resilience are passed down through generations. *Love and Relationships*, exploring intimacy, heartbreak, and emotional survival.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Afropolitanism is a cultural, political, and philosophical framework that rethinks African identity in a global context. It emerged in the early 21st century as a response to both narrow nationalist ideas of African identity and reductive Western stereotypes of Africa as primitive, static, or solely defined by poverty and conflict. The term *Afropolitanism* gained popularity through Taiye Selasi's 2005 essay "*Bye-Bye Babar (Or: What is an Afropolitan?)*", where she described a new generation of Africans who live transnational lives across continents, blending multiple cultural influences while remaining rooted in African heritage. The most notable thinkers of the theories includes; Achille Mbembe (philosopher) who developed a deeper philosophical grounding, linking Afropolitanism to aesthetic and ethical openness in postcolonial Africa, Simon Gikandi (literary critic) who tied Afropolitanism to global modernity and cultural production and Emma Dabiri who critiqued the concept for its elitism and class bias.

Despite its progressive aspirations, Afropolitanism has not escaped criticism. Scholars such as Emma Dabiri and Ainehi Edoro argue that Afropolitanism often represents an elitist, neoliberal identity accessible primarily to middle- and upper-class Africans in the diaspora. Dabiri criticizes the term for its tendency to commodify African identity into an aesthetic that is palatable for Western consumption (Dabiri). Others worry that Afropolitanism distances itself from the socio-economic and political realities of many Africans who do not possess the privilege of mobility or global access. Moreover, the overemphasis on cosmopolitanism risks diluting the political edge of African identity struggles. As Doreen St. Félix notes, the term can inadvertently obscure "the ugly truths of African statehood and inequality" under the veneer of coolness and cultural hybridity (St. Félix). Thus, while Afropolitanism offers a framework for reconceptualizing African identity, it must be deployed with caution and attentiveness to issues of class, power, and representation. A deeper concept of Afropolitanism moves beyond celebratory cosmopolitanism to embrace a critical, reflexive, and ethically grounded identity politics. It challenges reductive narratives of African identity and affirms the continent's multiplicity, modernity, and global interconnectedness. However, for Afropolitanism to remain relevant and inclusive, it must address its internal contradictions—particularly those of privilege,

representation, and accessibility. As such, Afropolitanism should not be a fixed identity but a dialogic, evolving practice that remains attentive to Africa's historical complexities and present challenges.

Other Concepts of Afropolitanism include: Diasporic Consciousness, Afropolitanism embodies the lived experiences of Africans in the diaspora who maintain ties with their countries of origin while engaging with global cultures. It involves negotiating multiple cultural identities, forming transnational networks, and fostering a sense of belonging that spans both African and Western spheres. Political Engagement and Activism; Beyond culture, Afropolitanism has political dimensions. It includes: advocacy for pan-Africanism and postcolonial justice; engagement with global inequalities affecting Africa; participation in grassroots and institutional change. It envisions Africans as agents in global decision-making, not just subjects of aid or discourse. Consumer Culture and Commodification; Afropolitanism is often commercialized in fashion, music, lifestyle, and branding. This "Afropolitan aesthetic" portrays Africa as trendy, stylish, and modern. While empowering, it risks turning African identity into a product—marketed mainly for elite, global consumption often detached from grassroots realities. Literary and Narrative Expression; Afropolitanism is a dominant theme in contemporary African literature. Writers like Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, Teju Cole, Taiye Selasi, and Yaa Gyasi use fiction to explore: hybridity, migration and exile, memory and return. Their narratives challenge static notions of African identity and create space for multiplicity and nuance. Ethical Cosmopolitanism (Philosophical Perspective); Achille Mbembe redefines Afropolitanism as a moral and philosophical stance: It affirms the mixed, complex, and entangled nature of African modernity. It values openness, cultural dialogue, and ethical engagement with difference. This concept sees African identity not as singular but as fluid and situated in multiple cultural worlds. Urban and Digital Afropolitanism; Afropolitanism thrives in urban centers and online spaces. Cities like Lagos, Nairobi, Johannesburg, and Accra are hotspots of Afropolitan creativity. On digital platforms, Africans express their voices, organize movements, and share art, creating new global identities beyond traditional borders. Afropolitanism vs. Pan-Africanism; While both promote African solidarity, they differ: Pan-Africanism is grounded in historical and political

unity across the continent. Afropolitanism emphasizes global citizenship, cultural hybridity, and the personal navigation of diverse worlds. A productive dialogue between the two can deepen both identity and solidarity and Critical Afropolitanism; This recent turn in scholarship calls for: recognition of class, gender, and regional disparities within Afropolitan discourse; inclusion of marginalized, rural, and queer African voices; de-centering elite narratives to embrace a broader, more inclusive vision of African modernity.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In the last decade diasporic African writers have made efforts in literature have made into the world literary space, reminding us once again of the complex and volatile dynamics underlying the making of world Literatures. Diverse authors diverse as Teju Cole, Taiye Selasi (born Taiye,. Tuakli Wosornu), Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, NoViolet Bulawayo and Dinaw Mengestu, are young creative cosmopolitan African immigrants” (Hassan 3) who have readily been subsumed by critics under the label ‘Afropolitan’. As is well known, the term ‘Afropolitanism’ is popularised by writer Taiye Selasi in her viral essay *Bye Bye Barbar*, published back in 2005. According to Selasi, the term captures the stylish “ethnic mixes”, the seemingly effortless multilingualism, “academic successes” and rather hip lifestyle of the “newest generation of African emigrants” (528).

Seeking to defy so-called Afro-pessimism and concomitant one-sided images of Africa perpetuated by western media. Firmly implicated in “African identity politics” (Wasihun 393) puts emphasis on the migratory patterns and open entanglements between locally grounded practices and global trajectories. As such, it seeks to designate a new way of being African in the world that moves beyond essentialist identity politics and fosters multi-local belongings as much as “multidimensional thinking” (Selasi 530). This distinctively African mode of being cosmopolitan reconfigures the historically strained relation between “the African Continent” and what Selasi somewhat nonchalantly calls “the G8 city or two (or three)” (528) as a transgressed play of in-between-ness, through which different and even conflicting values and identifications are brought into an open dialogue (Wasihun 2016:393).

Proposed by Achille Mbembe (2007) to recall the histories of mobility and exchange that have gone into the making of African cultures, the neologism Afropolitanism has gained currency ever since the publication of Selasi's essay. Several artists, museum curators, publishers and other cultural brokers have successfully mobilized the label to brand diasporic African art projects, and from a theoretical vantage-point, the concept was taken up and taken on by a number of critics, most prominently by Simon Gikandi. Just as Mbembe and Selasi, Gikandi too offers the term to re-conceive of African identities as both locally grounded and trans-culturally connected and to complicate stereotypical notions of the continent as a locus of crisis. According to Gikandi, the term "constitutes a significant attempt to rethink African knowledge outside the trope of crisis. [...] Instead of conceiving the massive migration of Africans to other continents and countries as a loss, the idiom of Afropolitanism embraces movement across time and space as the condition of possibility of an African way of being"(9–10).

Writer, photographer and art critic Teju Cole claims that the value the term has or at least the discussions it has sparked – is an acknowledgment of the political urgency of the category of class and a willingness to complicate one-dimensional concepts of racialised African identities. But of course, the concept of Afropolitanism was not only celebrated but also contested and criticized by a number of scholars and activists. Some such as Chielozona Eze (240) lamented the emphasis on a seemingly distinctively African mode of cosmopolitanism, asking why "an African" cannot "just be cosmopolitan" as the European or the Asian. Others, such as writer and journalist Binyavanga Wainaina, manages with global inequalities and decry the concept for its elitist and "product-driven" thrust, which, according to Wainaina, results in the commodification of both mobility and African identity (Wainaina, qtd. in Bosch Santana 2013).

Warsan Shire is considered one of the most important voices in contemporary poetry, particularly in discussions about diaspora, race, gender, and migration. Her work resonates deeply with refugees, immigrants, and people navigating multiple identities.

THE CONCEPT OF AFROPOLITANISM IN WARSAN SHIRE'S POETRY

Afropolitanism in Warsan's poetry is an intriguing yet relatively under-explored subject. Afropolitan literature often incorporates multiple languages as a reflection of hybrid identity. In

Warsan poetry, an Afropolitan approach might involve blending Polish with English, French, or African languages, mirroring the linguistic realities of diaspora communities in Europe. This interplay of languages can create new poetic expressions that reflect the cultural intersections between Africa and Eastern Europe. These are some of the themes explored by Warsan Shire.

The Theme Of Identity And Belonging

Warsan Shire's poetry embodies Afropolitan themes of identity and belonging by exploring the complexities of migration, exile, and transnational identity. As a Somali-born British poet, her work reflects the lived experiences of the African diaspora, navigating multiple cultural influences while grappling with displacement, memory, and home. Shire's poetry presents identity as fluid, shaped by multiple cultural, geographical, and historical forces. Thus she says:

no one leaves home unless
home is the mouth of a shark
you only run for the border
when you see the whole city running as well
your neighbors running faster than you
breath bloody in their throats
the boy you went to school with
who kissed you dizzy behind the old tin factory
is holding a gun bigger than his body
you only leave home
when home won't let you stay. (Home).

This metaphor captures the brutal truth: people do not abandon their homes willingly. Home, ideally a place of safety and comfort, has become dangerous and life-threatening like the mouth of a shark. It implies that leaving is not a choice, but a matter of survival. This emphasizes the collective trauma. It's not an isolated fear *everyone* is fleeing. The urgency is shared, pointing to war, persecution, or catastrophic violence affecting entire communities. The poem reflects on how war or conflict transforms everyday people into threats. The boy who once represented affection and innocence is now a child soldier, carrying a weapon. It shows how violence destroys both people and memories. The above poem captures the nostalgic feelings of the Afropolitan who leaves home for obvious reasons. The poet points to the fact that insecurity is one of the major reasons why people leave their 'Home'. The poem reveals the deep psychological and physical insecurity that forces people to flee their homes and seek safety elsewhere. The home becomes dangerous and insecure for people to live there, therefore it becomes necessary for them to run. Her characters are often caught between two worlds, Africa as a place of origin and Europe as a place of settlement. This mirrors the Afropolitan experience, where identity is not fixed but constantly negotiated across borders. In her poem, *Teaching My Mother How to Give Birth*, Shire explores how migrants struggle to reconcile their African heritage with the realities of living in the West thus:

New realities of being constricted to a barren area with no opportunities nor chances of social progression would push my mother to seek out her father at about eighteen. She travelled to her birthplace of Venda, not speaking or understanding the language. A few years later she met my father, and then I was born – along with my younger sister and brother. (3)

This line highlights the **social and economic hardships** faced by the speaker's mother. The phrase “**barren area**” suggests not just physical desolation but also **lack of opportunity**, stagnation, and deprivation. There is no future in this space—nothing to aspire to, no room for growth. So, the mother is forced to leave in search of something better. Her decision to seek out her father suggests **broken family ties**, a missing parent, or the hope of reconnecting with roots

that might offer support. **Venda is her birthplace**, she has been **disconnected from her cultural and linguistic roots**. Her return is symbolic—it's a journey toward identity, family, and possibly survival. But the fact that she doesn't speak the language underscores her **alienation**, even from her origin. It points to the **complex realities of displacement**—one can belong by birth, yet feel foreign due to cultural disconnection.

The mother's journey reflects how displacement is not always dramatic or violent, but can be subtle and systemic—pushed by poverty, limited opportunity, and historical inequality. Even though she returns to her “birthplace,” she is **a stranger in a familiar land**. This tension shapes identity for both her and the next generation. The inability to speak the language of her birthplace reflects **cultural erasure**, a recurring theme in postcolonial literature. Language here symbolizes **connection to ancestry and belonging**, and its absence reflects loss and fragmentation. Despite the hardship, life continues. The speaker is a product of migration and survival. This points to the **resilience of women**, especially mothers, in navigating hostile environments to create life and opportunity for their children. The mother's experience also highlights the gendered dimensions of migration **young women often carry the burden of displacement**, seeking survival while also bearing and raising the next generation.

She illustrates how identity is often fragmented, caught between nostalgia for a lost home and the challenges of adapting to a new culture. Also Belonging is a central theme in Shire's work, often depicted as something elusive for migrants and refugees.

In “Home”, she portrays the painful reality of displacement, where individuals are forced to leave their homelands but remain unwelcome in their new countries. The poem highlights how the idea of “home” becomes complicated when one's native land is unsafe, and the adopted land is unaccepted. Thus:

you have to understand,

that no one puts their children in a boat

unless the sea is safer than the land

[...] and no one would leave home
unless home chased you to the shore
unless home told you
to quicken your legs
leave your clothes behind
crawl through the desert
wade through the ocean. (Home)

Shire also explores the tension between first-generation immigrants and their children, who often struggle to balance their African heritage with Western influences. This reflects the Afropolitan challenge of navigating cultural expectations while forging new identities in the diaspora. This is captured better in “Teaching My Mother How to Give Birth”, she addresses the gap between parents who hold onto traditional customs and younger generations who are shaped by a different cultural environment thus:

Our relationship would go on to be strained by the gene of conflict and estrangement, particularly during my teenage years but my father’s presence neutralised the tension through his calm persona. A month after I dated one of my ‘first’ loves, my parents found out and it caused a huge upheaval. it disrupted their African first born ‘good daughter’ image of me. My father punished me through silence, my mother added scorn and aggression to her daily meals. I did not understand how she could not get into my shoes and sympathise with my mistakes or relate to my sudden discovery of sexuality and feelings. Had she never been a teenage girl filled with hormones and a senseless fairy tale before? (3)

This tension is central to the Afropolitan experience, where identity is shaped by both past and present influences. Afropolitan narratives often embrace multilingualism and cultural hybridity. While Shire writes primarily in English, her poetry is deeply influenced by Somali oral traditions, proverbs, and storytelling. This linguistic duality reflects the Afropolitan ability to exist in multiple cultural spaces, using poetry as a way to reclaim identity and assert belonging. Shire frequently uses the female body as a metaphor for migration and displacement. In her poetry, the body carries the scars of history, war, and trauma, reflecting the physical and emotional toll of migration. This aligns with Afropolitan narratives that explore identity through personal and collective memory.

Mother says there are locked rooms inside all women; kitchen of lust,
bedroom of grief, bathroom of apathy.

Sometimes the men - they come with keys,
and sometimes, the men - they come with hammers.

Nin soo joog laga waayo, soo jiiifso aa laga helaa,

I said *Stop*, I said *No* and he did not listen.

Perhaps she has a plan, perhaps she takes him back to hers
only for him to wake up hours later in a bathtub full of ice,
with a dry mouth, looking down at his new, neat procedure.

I point to my body and say *Oh this old thing? No, I just slipped it on.*

The poem above represents the woman's body, which becomes a site of trauma, memory, and emotional burden. This metaphor suggests that the woman carries her home within her, and when she migrates or is forced to leave, the trauma travels with her and lodged deep inside her body. It speaks of the resilience of diasporic women, whose identities are shaped by survival, adaptation, and resistance.

THE THEME OF LANGUAGE AND MULTILINGUALISM

Warsan Shire's poetry embodies Afropolitanism's engagement with language and multilingualism as essential aspects of identity, cultural hybridity, and diasporic experience. As a Somali-born British poet, her work reflects the intersection of African oral traditions and Western literary influences, using language to navigate themes of exile, memory, and belonging.

Shire's poetry often portrays language as a tool for expressing the emotional weight of migration. Her work captures the experience of being caught between languages—Somali as a mother tongue, English as the language of survival, and the silence that sometimes exists between them. This reflects the Afropolitan experience of existing in multiple linguistic and cultural spheres. Warsan Shire's poetry embodies Afropolitanism's engagement with language and multilingualism as essential aspects of identity, cultural hybridity, and diasporic experience. As a Somali-born British poet, her work reflects the intersection of African oral traditions and Western literary influences, using language to navigate themes of exile, memory, and belonging. Shire's poetry often portrays language as a tool for expressing the emotional weight of migration. Her work captures the experience of being caught between languages; Somali as a mother tongue, English as the language of survival, and the silence that sometimes exists between them. This reflects the Afropolitan experience of existing in multiple linguistic and cultural spheres. In 'Home', she expresses the struggle of displaced individuals whose identities are shaped by forced movement and linguistic adaptation:

no one leaves home until home is a sweaty voice in your ear
saying
leave,
run away from me now
i dont know what i've become
but i know that anywhere
is safer than here

The poem is written in English but often bends the language to reflect non-Western experiences, illustrating how English can be repurposed to express migrant realities. Here, the alienation of migrants is tied to their relationship with language, being unable to fully belong in either their homeland or their new country. This opening line personifies home, turning it into a living being whispering urgently and anxiously. The use of "sweaty"

evokes tension, fear, and discomfort—home is no longer a place of peace, but of panic. The voice is close, personal, and pressing. The idea is: no one abandons home until home itself tells them to go. The place that once offered belonging and comfort has turned hostile or dangerous. The repetition of imperatives “leave,” “run away” adds to the sense of immediate danger and desperation. The final lines echo a universal refugee sentiment—people flee not toward something, but away from something unbearable. The comparison to “anywhere” emphasizes the extremity of the situation: when any unknown, uncertain place becomes preferable, you know the situation is dire.

While not explicitly religious, the poem uses imagery that could resonate with Islamic and broader spiritual themes for instance. Words like dignity in suffering, the sanctity of home), subtly invoking values important in Somali and wider African and Arab-Islamic cultures. Afropolitan literature often embraces code-switching and the fluid blending of different languages, dialects, and cultural references. While Shire primarily writes in English, her poetry is infused with Somali phrases, cultural proverbs, and rhythmic cadences influenced by oral storytelling traditions. This linguistic hybridity reflects the lived experience of diaspora communities, where multiple languages coexist in daily life. She says:

It's 4:00 a.m., and she winks at me, bending over the sink,
her small breasts bruised from sucking.

She smiles, pops her gum before saying—

boys are haram; don't ever forget that.

Some nights I hear her in her room screaming.

We play *surah al baqarah* to drown her out.

Anything that leaves her mouth sounds like sex.

Our mother has banned her from saying God's name. (Haram)

This startling image introduces us to a young woman or girl, possibly the speaker's sister or a close relative. The time 4:00 a.m. suggests secrecy and the loneliness of night. Her breasts are "bruised from sucking," a raw and painful image suggesting either sexual exploitation, sex work, or an abusive sexual experience. The wink implies a kind of rebellious confidence or coping mechanism, masking vulnerability with a flirtatious gesture. The older girl offers a warning disguised as streetwise advice: "boys are haram" being the Arabic term for "forbidden" in Islamic law. It's ironic, even cynical, because despite her own sexual experiences (implied to be unwanted or damaging), she warns the younger girl against boys. The popping of gum underscores a mix of defiance, girlishness, and weariness.

The poet use language and multilingualism aligns with Afropolitanism's narrative of fluid, transnational identity. Her poetry captures the complexities of linguistic hybridity, the emotional weight of migration, and the power of storytelling in shaping diasporic belonging. By blending languages, exploring silence, and incorporating oral traditions, she embodies the Afropolitan spirit of navigating multiple cultural worlds through words.

THE THEME OF CRITICISM AND CONTROVERSIES

Warsan Shire's poetry has been widely celebrated for its raw emotional depth, vivid imagery, and powerful exploration of migration, exile, and identity. However, like many Afropolitan writers, her work has also faced criticism and controversy, particularly regarding representation, commodification of trauma, and the politics of identity. Sometimes to keep them away and sometimes to subject them to the policy of discrimination, exclusion, and humiliation. Simply, refugees have been directly or indirectly discouraged not to come to their countries or put into a position and perception of inferiority when they come. Warsan Shire writes about local people who are labeled as refugees as "blacks", "dirty immigrants," "sucking our country dry," "niggers with their hands out," "they smell strange," "savage," "messed up their country and now they want," "to mess ours up." These views attached to refugees are obviously negative and sometimes racial, and the mass media and social spreads these harmful views and then creates a

perception which makes the local people and politicians of the host countries afraid of the refugees, and sometimes these damaging views are used as excuse not to take refugees or to exclude them from the mainstream of social and cultural life. These attributes and phrases often circulate in the media, as well as in the talks of the politicians so that they, after a while, are made imprinted on the minds of the local people and then create negative perceptions.

However, in order to indicate the gravity of the situation back at home, Warsan Shire writes that these:

or the words are more tender
than fourteen men between
your legs
or the insults are easier
to swallow
than rubble than bone
than your child body
in pieces.
i want to go home,
but home is the mouth of a shark
home is the barrel of the gun
and no one would leave home
unless home chased you to the shore
unless home told you. (Home)

Shire's poetry powerfully captures the experiences of exile and migration, some critics argue that it risks reducing Africa to a place people flee from, rather than celebrating its complexities and vibrancy. In "Conversations About Home (at the Deportation Centre)", she writes thus:

I know a few things to be true. I do not know where I am going,
where I have come from is disappearing, I am unwelcome and
my beauty is not beauty here. My body is burning with the
shame of not belonging; my body is longing. I am the sin of
memory and the absence of memory. I watch the news, and my
mouth becomes a sink full of blood. The lines, the forms, the
people at the desks, the calling cards, the immigration officer,
the looks on the street, the cold settling deep into my bones,
the English classes at night, the distance I am from home. But

physical appearance is not appreciated a painful commentary on racism, xenophobia, or cultural dislocation. The body becomes a site of trauma and yearning. Shame arises from not fitting in, while 'longing' points to a deep desire for connection, belonging, or return. The speaker feels rejected or alienated in the new place. Their cultural identity or r is haunted both by what they remember and what they can no longer recall. Memory becomes both a burden and a void possibly referring to trauma, exile, or the erasure of history. A visceral reaction to the suffering seen in the media — likely related to violence, war, or injustice in the speaker's home country. The 'mouth full of blood' metaphor suggests voiceless pain, anger, or horror. A list of bureaucratic obstacles that define the immigrant/refugee experience. These mundane elements carry emotional weight, signifying dehumanization and constant surveillance. Alienation is both

social and physical. The 'looks' imply racism or suspicion; the cold suggests a deep, chilling loneliness or even a harsh unfamiliar climate. The necessity of leaving home because of war and violence is captured in her work as:

The war sits in the corners of your living room
laughs with you at your tv shows
fills the gaps in all your conversations
sighs in the pauses of telephone calls
gives you excuses to leave situations,
meetings, people, countries, love;
the war lies between you and your partner in the bed
stands behind you at the bathroom sink
even the dentist jumped back from the wormhole
of your mouth. You suspect
it was probably the war he saw,
so much blood. (Souvenir)

This kind of narrative aligns with broader Western discourses that often focus on Africa as a place of trauma rather than agency. Defenders of Shire's work argue that she is telling specific, personal stories rather than making generalizations about Africa as a whole.

It should be noted that Shire's poetry often focuses on the experiences of women, particularly in relation to migration, patriarchy, and trauma. While many readers praise her for giving voice to silenced women, some critics argue that her portrayal of African women leans heavily on themes of victimization. She portrays this as:

Is that what we're here for?

To sit at kitchen tables, counting
on our fingers the ones who died,
those who left, and the others who were taken by the police,
or by drugs
or by illness
or by other women?
It makes no sense.
Look at your skin, her mouth, these lips, those eyes,
my God, listen to that laugh.(What we Own).

The above line is in line with what Some critics worry that these narratives reinforce the idea of African women as powerless victims rather than agents of their own destiny. However, others argue that Shire's work is revolutionary in the way it foregrounds women's experiences and refuses to sanitize the harsh realities they face.

As an Afropolitan poet, Shire primarily writes in English, which has sparked debates about the accessibility of her work to African audiences. Some argue that the dominance of English in Afropolitan literature reinforces the legacy of colonial languages and excludes those who do not speak them.

THE THEME OF URBAN SPACES AND GLOBAL CONNECTION

Warsan Shire's poetry often navigates the intersections of identity, migration, and displacement, using urban spaces and global connections as central narrative devices. Through her depiction of cities, movement, and transnational identities, she captures the experiences of the African diaspora, illustrating both the estrangement and belonging that come with living in

global spaces. Shire often portrays cities as spaces where migrants and refugees struggle with isolation, racism, and the lingering traumas of exile. She evokes the harsh realities of migration as:

no one chooses refugee camps
or strip searches where your
body is left aching
or prison, (Home) .

Cities like London, where she grew up, become spaces of both refuge and alienation for displaced individuals. In her poem, She suggests that urban centers, while promising safety, can also be places where migrants continue to experience suffering, discrimination, and invisibility.

Shire's poetry reflects how urban spaces serve as melting pots where cultures, languages, and histories intersect. Her characters often exist in liminal spaces often between African heritage and Western influences, between past traumas and future hopes. London, for example, is not just a backdrop but an active participant in shaping diasporic identities, mirroring the broader Afropolitan experience of navigating multiple cultures. Cities in Shire's poetry are often depicted as cold, unwelcoming, and fragmented, mirroring the inner turmoil of displaced individuals. She contrasts the urban environment's physical and emotional harshness with the warmth and nostalgia of home, which exists more in memory than reality. This tension between belonging and estrangement is a recurring theme in her work.

I hear them say, *go home*; I hear them say, *fucking immigrants*,
fucking refugees. Are they really this arrogant? Do they not know
that stability is like a lover with a sweet mouth on your body
one second and the next you are a tremor lying on the floor
covered in rubble and old currency waiting for its return.

All I can say is, I was once like you, the apathy, the pity, the ungrateful placement; and now my home is the mouth of a shark, now my home is the barrel of a gun. I'll see you on the other side. (*Conversations about Home*)

This excerpt from Warsan Shire's poem 'Conversations about Home (at the Deportation Centre)' is a poignant, confrontational, and emotionally charged reflection on the refugee experience, xenophobia, and the loss of safety. The following analysis provides a line-by-line explanation of the poem, as well as a discussion of its central themes. The speaker begins with raw, direct quotes of anti-immigrant rhetoric. These lines capture the hostility faced by displaced people in foreign lands — showing the daily reality of xenophobia, dehumanization, and rejection. This rhetorical question challenges the ignorance and cruelty of those who utter such words, highlighting how detached they are from the truth of displacement. The speaker confesses that she once held similar detached or privileged attitudes ('apathy,' 'pity'). 'Ungrateful placement' might refer to being given a home or position she didn't appreciate until she lost it. These metaphors are stark and haunting. 'Mouth of a shark' implies danger, unpredictability, and violence. 'Barrel of a gun' suggests direct threat to life. Home is no longer safe — it is a place of death, war, or oppression.

Shire's poetry evokes the loneliness of city life, where migrants, particularly women, navigate new geographies while carrying the weight of cultural expectations and past traumas. she gives voice to the experiences of migrants detained in urban centers, emphasizing the dehumanizing aspects of border policies and state surveillance. The issue of digital urban spaces and the globalized diaspora is beyond physical cities, Shire's poetry also exists in digital spaces, contributing to the global Afropolitan narrative. Her poems circulate widely on social media, connecting a global audience of African and diasporic readers.

The rise of Afropolitanism as a literary narrative has significant implications for African literature, shaping its themes, representation, and global reception. Thus Afropolitanism

challenges rigid definitions of African literature by broadening the scope of African identity beyond geographic boundaries. Traditionally, African literature was associated with narratives set within the continent, but Afropolitan writers redefine what it means to be African by highlighting diasporic experiences, cultural hybridity, and global mobility.

Afropolitan narratives integrate African oral traditions with Western literary forms, resulting in a fusion of storytelling techniques. Writers often blend multiple languages, employ nonlinear narratives, and incorporate contemporary themes such as digital culture, migration, and globalization. This hybrid storytelling reflects the lived realities of Africans navigating multiple cultural influences. Migration has always been a theme in African literature, but Afropolitanism emphasizes voluntary and cosmopolitan migration, in contrast to narratives of forced displacement common in postcolonial literature. This shift highlights the agency of modern African characters that move between countries for education, career opportunities, and self-exploration. Afropolitanism brings African literature into mainstream global literary spaces, but it also raises questions about representation. Critics argue that Afropolitan narratives may cater to who see their experiences reflected in her work. In this sense, she creates a virtual “Afropolitan city” where collective memories, struggles, and identities are shared across borders.

Therefore Warsan Shire uses urban spaces as both literal and metaphorical settings to explore themes of migration, displacement, and identity. Her portrayal of cities reflects the complexities of diasporic life offering refuge and alienation, connection and estrangement. Through this lens, her poetry contributes to the broader Afropolitan discourse, illustrating how global connections shape modern African identities.

Conclusion

Warsan Shire’s poetry embodies Afropolitanism as a contemporary African discourse that navigates the complexities of identity, migration, and cultural hybridity. Her work gives voice to the transnational African experience, where personal trauma intersects with collective histories of displacement, exile, and belonging. Through evocative language and diasporic memory, Shire reclaims African subjectivity beyond geographical borders, challenging static notions of “home” and “Africanness.” Her poems resist marginalization, offering an intimate yet global narrative

that reflects the Afropolitan spirit rooted in Africa yet responsive to the world. In this way, Shire's poetry affirms Afropolitanism as a powerful mode of cultural expression, political critique, and emotional survival.

Works Cited

- Adesanmi , Pius. “ Colonialism, Ecriture, Engage, and Africa’s New Intellectuals. ” The Dark Webs of Remembrance . Toyin Falola ed.. (North Carolina : Carolina Academic Press , 2005): 269–285 .
- Adesanmi , Pius. “ Third Generation African Literatures and Contemporary Theorising. ” The Study of Africa vol. 1
- Adesokan , Akin. “ I Am Not an African Writer, Damn You! ” SLIP blog . Stellenbosch Literary Project, 2014. Accessed August 20, 2018 . <http://slipnet.co.za/view/blog/im-not-an-african-writer-damn-you>
- Adesokan , Akin. “ New African writing and the question of audience. ” Research in African Literatures 43.3 (2012): 1–20 .
- Ashcroft , Bill , Gareth Griffiths , and Helen Tiffin . The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures . London : Routledge , 1989 . Print.
- Bandele-Thomas , Biyi. The Man who Came in from the Back of Beyond . Heinemann , 1992
- Bandele-Thomas , Biyi. The sympathetic undertaker and other dreams . Heinemann International, 1993 .
- Bayart , Jean-Francois. The state in Africa. The politics of the belly . Paris , Fayard , 1989
- Benjamin , Walter. “ Paris: Capital of the Nineteenth Century. ” New Left Review. Vol. 1.48. March-April 1968 .
- Bernal , Martin. Black Athena: Afroasiatic Roots of Classical Civilization, Volume I: The Fabrication of Ancient Greece, 1785 – 1985 . Rutgers University Press , 1987 .

- Bernal , Martin. *Black Athena: The archaeological and documentary evidence* . Vol. 2 .
Rutgers University Press , 1987 .
- Bernal , Martin. *Black Athena: The linguistic evidence* . Vol. 3 . Rutgers University
Press , 1987 .
- Bratman , Michael E. *Structures of Agency: Essays* . Oxford : Oxford University Press
, 2007 .
- Brouillette , Sarah. *Postcolonial Writers in the Global Literary Marketplace* . Basingstoke;
New York : Palgrave Macmillan , 2007 .
- Cole , Teju. *Open City* . New York : Random House , 2011 .
- Cugoano , Ottobah. “ A Native of Africa. ” *Thoughts and Sentiments on the Evil and
Wicked Traffick of the Slavery and Commerce of the Human Species, Humbly Submitted
to the Inhabitants of Great-Britain* (1787).
- Currey , James. “ Chinua Achebe, the African Writers Series and the Establishment of African
Literature. ” *African affairs* 102.409 (2003): 575–585 .
- Dabiri , Emma. “ Why I Am (still) Not an Afropolitan. ” *Journal of African Cultural Studies*
28.1 (2015): 104–108 .
- DuBois , William Edward Burghardt. *The talented tenth* . New York , NY : James Pott
and Company , 1903 . Eagleton , Terry. *Literary Theory: An Introduction* .
UK : Blackwell , 1983 .
- Eburne , Jonathan P. (Jonathan Paul) and Braddock , Jeremy. “ Introduction: Paris,
Capital of the Black Atlantic. ” *Project Muse. Modern Fiction Studies*, 51.4, Winter (
2005): 731–740 .
- Ede , Amatoritsero. “ Narrative Moment and Self-Anthropologizing Discourse. ” *Research in
African Literatures* 46.3 (2015): 112–129

Paul Tiyambe Zeleza (Senegal : Codesria , 2006): 101–115 . Adesanmi , Pius. “
Reshaping Power and the Public Sphere: The Political Voices of African Writers ” in
Reframing Contemporary Africa: Politics, Economics and Culture in the Global Era .

Peyi Soyinka Airewele and Rita Kiki Edozie Eds. (2010): 258–274 .