

Debating the Afropolitan

This volume evaluates the vitality of the term 'Afropolitan' within the fields of African and Afro-diasporic studies. A hotly debated and malleable term, its wide circulation has allowed for Afropolitanism to become a contested space for critical inquiry. The contributions to this book are representative of the lively discussions that Afropolitan aesthetics, identity politics and Afro(cosmo)politanisms have sparked in recent years. The book aims to continue the debates around these concepts foregrounded by earlier works in the fields of postcolonial literature, African cultural studies, and studies of diaspora and transnationalism. This book was originally published as a special issue of the *European Journal of English Studies*.

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Introduction

Debating the Afropolitan

Emilia María Durán-Almarza , Ananya Jahanara Kabir and
Carla Rodríguez González 

It's 8 pm local time in Accra, Ghana. A group of men and women, in their mid twenties to late thirties, are gathered in a spacious restaurant in East Legon, a middle-income, outlying, yet well-connected neighbourhood in the city. The restaurant is in turn located next to the swimming pool in a well-equipped sports complex, and it is furnished in a neutral, contemporary manner. The same can be said about the clothing styles of its clientele, who are dressed as though they might be in an upmarket club somewhere in Europe that catered to a predominantly RnB taste. They come together to learn and practise two social dance styles which are popular wherever in the world partner dances are enjoyed as a global, transnational leisure practice: salsa (an Afro-Latin dance with roots in Cuba and significantly shaped by the Puerto Rican diaspora in New York) and kizomba (an Angolan dance that crystallised in Luanda during the civil war and enjoyed a European boom through early proliferation amongst the Angolan diasporic community in Lisbon). To highlight the equal emphasis on both dances during these gatherings, they are branded 'kizalsa evenings'. The flyer associated with these evenings, however, goes a step further: centring on a Black woman with sophisticated makeup, high cheekbones and a frizz of natural hair, it declares in yellow font, 'Afropolitan Super-Sensual Sundays'. In smaller print, it clarifies: 'Mastermind Concepts presents an Afropolitan lifestyle experience with Kizalsa.'¹

'Kizalsa' as a term was coined by Ricci Boateng, the CEO of the Accra-based content-creation company Mastermind Concepts, who describes it as 'our first Afropolitan lifestyle experience'. What does 'Afropolitan' signal to Boateng? 'For a long while, it had to do with the Africanisation of the cosmopolitan', he says. 'And I kind of disagree with that a little bit. I thought it had a little bit more than that.' Son of diplomat parents who grew up all over the world before he completed his university education in the Ghanaian city of Kumasi and set up business in the capital, Accra, Boateng 'read many definitions of Afropolitan' and found it 'interesting' enough to engage his team in several discussions about the term, as well as 'what we wanted the Afropolitan lifestyle to represent'. The result of those brainstorming sessions was the desire to mobilise the term as 'a global culture base, if you like, where we're looking at not just the assimilation of other global cultures, but where we can also put something on the table and say, well this is Africa, but this is also something that can work anywhere else in the world'.

The examples Boateng offers to illustrate this potential of 'Afropolitan' range from music and dance to food and fashion. Pointing out that 'had kizomba not been exported to the West, we'd probably never have known anything about it; it would probably have only still

been in Angola, he launched another pre-emptive strike the previous year by focusing on the famous West African dish, Jollof rice.

We launched last year the world Jollof festival after Jamie Oliver started presenting his version of Jollof. This was us trying to look at aspects of African cuisine. If pizza, pasta, cornflakes, burgers, have been able to go international, there's no reason why we can't do that for Jollof. It's because we haven't branded it properly.

Indeed, for Boateng, 'it's high time Africa was able to brand what we have, and offer it on the global cultural table, and say, "this is us"'. Acknowledging that he has 'no problem with people using Afropolitanism as a new version of pan-Africanism, giving it a political tinge', he reserves the right to retain the link to visible aspects of lifestyle and self-fashioning that he understands as intrinsic to its connotations:

I also think that given the relationship between Afropolitanism and cosmopolitanism in the very origin of the word as focused on the very visible aspects of social life and lifestyle in general, it's understandable that most of us use it in association with those aspects.

At the same time, he does admit to the need to restore the political charge to lifestyle choices: 'but perhaps, yes, it would be great to take it a bit deeper'.

'To take it a bit deeper' is exactly what we, the editors of 'Debating the Afropolitan', aim to do. This project attests to the interest we happen to share with an articulate and ambitious Ghanaian entrepreneur and others like him – in interrogating a term that, over the past few years, has become inevitably linked to discussions about what it means to be young, mobile and African in the contemporary world. Its ubiquitous presence in virtual and scholarly forums has generated manifold responses in the form of journal articles, book chapters, and blog and social media posts, whose positionality ranges from being claimed by many self-identified 'Afropolitans' as a new identity category that captures the complexities of their transnational lives and its ambivalent relationship with African roots, to its rejection on the grounds of its alleged ethnic and class bias, or on its limited potential as a tool for foregrounding critical analyses of cultural phenomena, best covered by existing terms.

In this special issue of the *European Journal of English Studies*, we aim to evaluate the vitality of the term 'Afropolitan' within current conceptualisations while opening alternative paths for further developments in African and Afrodiasporic studies. A hotly debated and malleable term, the Afropolitan continues to appeal to critics as well as bloggers, and – as our opening discussion indicates – cultural producers of various kinds and economic entrepreneurs. Thus, if in her 'Bye-Bye Babar' (2005), Taiye Selasi coined it as an identity category to account for (an)other way of being African in and of the world, in an attempt at naming a type of cosmopolitanism grounded on African realities, its wide circulation has allowed for Afropolitanism to become a contested space for critical inquiry. The articles compiled in this volume are representative of the lively discussions Afropolitan aesthetics, identity politics and Afro(cosmo)politanisms have sparked in recent years, and they aim to continue the debates around these concepts foregrounded by works such as Eva Rask Knudsen and Ulla Rahbek's *In Search of the Afropolitan: Encounters, Conversations, and Contemporary Diasporic African Literature* (2016) or Jennifer Wawrzinek and Justus Kizito Siboe Makokha's *Negotiating Afropolitanism: Essays on Borders and Spaces in Contemporary African Literature and Folklore* (2011).

The essays in this volume examine a variety of issues that include: the emergence of an Afropolitan literary aesthetics (Rask Knudsen and Rahbek); writing and self-identification (Bastida-Rodríguez); literary representations of Afropolitan subjectivities (Phiri); connections

and points of departure between contemporary Afropolitans and other Afrodiasporic subjectivities (Carrera-Suárez, Eguíbar Holgado); and the concept's relation to the notion of cosmopolitanism (Toivanen). In the process, contributors explore the situatedness of Afro(cosmo)politan embodied experiences as they figure in the fictional works of a young generation of African (diasporic) authors. In their engagement with fictionalised Afropolitan characters and tropes, the different papers put the concept to test by trying to identify whether it should or could be considered either a literary trend or movement, who and what kind of writing might qualify as Afropolitan and to what extent this concept establishes fruitful dialogues with other terms that are also used to refer to African mobile subjects and ideologies such as 'Pan-African', 'Cosmopolitan', 'Afrodiaspora' or 'Afrospora'.

The volume as a whole offers insightful accounts of the genealogy of the term 'Afropolitan', pointing, on the one hand, to Taiye Selasi's essay as the 'founder of a (new) discursivity' (Knudsen and Rahbek, 2016: 292) that reflects on the experiences of certain groups of African expatriates; and, on the other, to Achille Mbembe's understanding of Afropolitanism as 'a particular poetic of the world ... that refuses the victim position' (2007: 28). It is mostly from these two texts that scholars and writers have positioned themselves, either celebrating them and working towards more nuanced conceptualisations of the terms (Eze, 2014; Gehrmann, 2016; Gikandi, 2010; Makokha, 2010; Knudsen and Rahbek, 2016; Salami, 2015); or by pointing to their shortcomings and hence advocating for its rejection, suggesting instead the use of alternatives to what some see as a highly commodified apolitical trend (Adichie in Barber, 2013; Bwesigye, 2013; Dabiri, 2014; 2016; Ogbachie, 2008; Omotoso in Fasselt, 2015; Tveit, 2013; Wainaina in Bosch Santana, 2013).

In their 'An Afropolitan Literary Aesthetics? Afropolitan Style and Tropes in Recent Diasporic African Fiction', Eva Rask Knudsen and Ulla Rahbek set out to explore so-called Afropolitan novels in order to evaluate the emergence of avant-garde literary stylistics. Their thoughtful analysis of particular characters in Taiye Selasi's *Ghana Must Go* (2013), Sefi Atta's *A Bit of Difference* (2012), Yvonne Owuor's *Dust* (2013) and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah* (2013) allows them to advance some of the characteristics of what they call a 'literary Afropolitan aesthetics', which is inevitably still fluctuant, flexible, and in the making. For them, the trope of a 'mobility-induced anxiety which entwines place and self' is a central, traceable recurring motif in these novels, where there are constant tensions between ways of seeing Africa and ways of experiencing Africanness. The characters' uneasiness in their relation with the continent and their diasporic homes is best represented in the quest for self-understanding they undergo, which usually comes together with an exploration of an alternative ontology of return to Africa. In coming to terms with dislocation and distress, the meaning of Africa itself, they contend, is complicated as it is never imagined as a destination for a safe return, thus challenging hegemonic renderings of home and diaspora. Indeed, such affective returns to these versions of the continent are complicated owing to the characters' (lack of) attachment to place, chiefly as a result of the efforts required on their part to reconnect with the unstable signifier that is Africa. The authors argue for an integrative analysis of the style of Afropolitanism, where ways of writing and of presenting the self – what they denominate the *prose* and the *pose* – work together in this aesthetics. By choosing to concentrate on the 'human dimension' of this contemporary phenomenon, their ontological approach seeks to incorporate the affective patterns represented through the literary characters of the novels they consider.

Patricia Bastida-Rodríguez's essay, 'Afropolitan in Their Own Way? Writing and Self-identification in Aminatta Forna and Chika Unigwe', takes a different approach, posing the question of whether the Afropolitan label can be loosely applied to writing by authors who either have not identified as such or actively refuse to do so. She chooses to focus her attention on the literary dimension of Afropolitanism rather than on other cultural phenomena associated with it, since she considers this to be a privileged means for the development of the concept. Literature, though, is understood in its written form, but also in relation to other surrounding environments such as interviews, literary awards, book-launching activities – useful for the promotion both of the novels produced by Afropolitan writers and of Afropolitanism itself as a commercial label – or any other marketing strategies that have contributed to the commodification of the term, as well as to its global dissemination. Through a detailed analysis of Aminatta Forna's and Chika Unigwe's biographies and authorial images, along with an extensive review of their literary productions, Bastida-Rodríguez discusses the ambivalence that characterises the term together with the role that self-identification plays in the way their works have been received by popular and academic audiences. She bases her analysis of Forna as an Afropolitan writer on Selasi's conceptualisation, which takes these writers' social class as a fundamental element to consider their privileged subject position, but also assesses Forna's access to the production of media material, thanks to her former job as a journalist. Yet, above all, Bastida-Rodríguez follows Gehrman's (2016) imbrication of cosmopolitanism and African heritage to approach Forna's writing. Unigwe, on the other hand, who is not so frequently identified as an Afropolitan, is incorporated by the author within the corpus of Afropolitan writing, in spite of her different experience of international mobility – namely, her alienation and culture shock when she first moved to Europe – on the grounds that cosmopolitanism is not necessarily an initial status for these writers, but rather something they may achieve through time. Thus, focusing on both the lived experiences of the authors and their characters, Bastida-Rodríguez tests their proximity to a set of Afropolitan ideas and evaluates their commitment to African realities; their freedom (or lack thereof) to travel around the world; and whether they adopt or not a celebratory tone in describing their (privileged) diasporic positions. Through her identification of these three motifs in Afropolitan accounts, she argues for the existence of 'Afropolitan concerns' or 'Afropolitan phases' as more accurate concepts than that of 'Afropolitan writing', which can capture and explicate better the voices of the authors concerned.

Further revisions of held critical positions are offered in Aretha Phiri's essay, 'Lost in Translation: Re-reading the Contemporary Afrodiasporic Condition in Taiye Selasi's *Ghana Must Go*'. Turning to this, one of the most acclaimed Afropolitan novels, Phiri departs from Knudsen and Rahbek's reading of its narrative as offered in the opening article in this volume, to focus instead on the figure of Sadie, the younger daughter of the Sai family. Phiri's contribution challenges the perception that some forms of Afropolitan writing are 'insufficiently African', given that, in her view, this idea contributes to the perpetuation of 'exclusionary hierarchies of blackness'. For her, one of the genre's strengths is precisely its ability to complicate 'blackness' and Africa as signifiers, and she offers Selasi's novel as a valuable example of the ways in which Afropolitan fiction and characters offer nuanced understandings of Afrodiasporic materialities. She contends that there is an intrinsic tension between Selasi's development of Afropolitanism in her groundbreaking article and in her novel, which, according to Phiri, captures much more successfully the subtleties derived from the embodied intersections of such important categories as race, gender, class or age in the African

diasporic experience. Taking Sadie's material body as the site of larger political struggles, Phiri's cosmofeminist approach delves into the intimate as the means through which to explore Afro(cosmo)politan subjectivities. Her reading of the novel suggests that the Afropolitan experience inevitably requires a corporeal engagement with the concepts of home, mobility and transience where the world becomes a sort of 'home-in-the-self'.

Isabel Carrera-Suárez's 'Negotiating Singularity and Alikeness: Esi Edugyan, Lawrence Hill and Canadian Afrodiasporic Writing' assesses the significance of Afropolitanism as a self-designating strategy in the context of Canada's multiculturalism. She discusses Esi Edugyan's and Lawrence Hill's Henry Kreisel lectures, *Dreaming of Elsewhere* (Edugyan, 2014) and *Dear Sir, I Intend to Burn Your Book* (Hill, 2013) in relation to their internationally acclaimed novels *Half-Blood Blues* (Edugyan, 2011) and *The Book of Negroes* (Hill, 2007), in order to review contemporary debates on cosmopolitan Canadian identities and the redefinition of blackness within the nation. Carrera-Suárez's article introduces Afropolitanism within this analytical context and compares it with other existing identity discourses, which she explores, first of all, by means of a historical and cultural contextualisation of Afro-Canadian writing. Her analysis of Edugyan's texts concentrates on what she denominates the 'reversed journey into citizenship', which in the context of post 9/11 has come centre stage, destabilising not only legal rights, but also affective forms of belonging. This argument is connected to her reading of Hill's writing, where she advances the theoretical stance that she will develop thoroughly in the final part of her article: an argument that recent conceptualisations of diaspora and cosmopolitanism offer more nuanced analysis of the tensions inherent in the Afropolitan debate, especially as regards the 'binary divides between home/host and national/transnational, as well as between singularity and communality'.

Miasol Eguíbar Holgado's 'Transforming the Body, Transculturating the City: Nalo Hopkinson's Fantastic Afropolitans' also situates Afropolitanism in the Canadian context. She puts forward an innovative reading of Nalo Hopkinson's speculative fiction as Afropolitan. In line with Mbembe's conceptualisation of Afropolitanism as a phenomenon with a long tradition in Africa, insofar as transnational migration has been central in the continent for centuries, Eguíbar Holgado argues for a reappraisal of the experiences of long-standing Afrodiasporic communities through the analytical lenses of these recent theoretical developments. She suggests the expansion of the discourse of Afropolitanism and analyses whether applying this paradigmatic conceptualisation to Afro-American or Afro-Caribbean ontologies could be possible. In order to contextualise her analysis of Hopkinson's fiction in the framework of Afro-Canadian representation, Eguíbar Holgado establishes a comparison between Selasi's rendering of Afropolitanism and the theorisation of what she denominates the 'modern' African diaspora, namely the experience of African diasporic subjects in pre-global times. By concentrating on the characteristic de-territorialised consciousness developed in Afropolitan writing and speculative fiction, she also identifies potential (political) alliances between the two, which she finds can be facilitated by the flexibility of this genre.

In the final piece, titled 'Cosmopolitanism New Clothes? The Limits of the Concept of Afropolitanism', Anna-Leena Toivanen provides an in-depth examination of what she considers the main weaknesses of the concept of the Afropolitan as a tool for text analysis. Pointing, on the one hand, to the fact that in her view, in spite of its wide usage, the term remains poorly defined theoretically, Toivanen argues instead for reclaiming the concept of cosmopolitanism and working towards specific understandings of the term in tune with African particularities, rather than investing time and effort in developing novel

(unnecessary) terminologies. She contends that even if Afropolitanism, as it has been theorised, may be useful in the analysis of diverse cultural phenomena, it loses its strength when applied to literary analysis, where the concept of cosmopolitanism is much more powerful. In order to demonstrate this, she focuses on Sefi Atta's *A Bit of Difference* (2012), Aminata Sow Fall's *Douceurs du bercail* (1998) and Brian Chikwava's *Harare North* (2009). In her analysis, cosmopolitanism is conceived of as a thematics rather than as an identity marker. It is precisely such an association of Afropolitanism with an identity discourse that puts off the author of this article, given its 'potentially racialised biases', which she believes can be avoided by adopting a cosmopolitan stance.

'What I like about a concept in its developmental stages is that it's malleable,' says Ricci Boateng about the term 'Afropolitan'. As a whole, the selection of papers here presented points to new directions in the study of (neo)cosmopolitanisms in literature produced on the African continent and its diasporas. As such, they represent the state of the play around the term 'Afropolitan', posing an invitation for the conversation to continue. As we indicate at the start of this introduction, the intersection of the literary and textual worlds with the realms of social dance and other embodied and performative acts of self-fashioning would be a fruitful way forward. We hope this volume will provoke new investigations into how constructions of the Afropolitan within literary texts dialogue with mobilisations of the term within other discursive domains, and into how the desire for cosmopolitanism interacts with colonial legacies and postcolonial nativist impulses to shape African and African diasporic subjectivities today. The next stage of collective critical interventions would be to chart how 'debating the Afropolitan' illuminates the ways in which African choices and attitudes contribute to and complicate a wider, possibly more equitable understanding of cosmopolitanism as a version of global aspiration. As Pliny the Elder said in a maxim that contemporary, self-styled 'Afropolitans' today, including Ricci Boateng, still like to cite: 'from Africa always arises something new' ('ex Africa semper aliquid novi').

Note

1. This account of the Kizalsa Afropolitan Super-Sensual Sunday is drawn from Ananya Kabir's research visit to Accra in January 2017. The flyer circulates through social media (WhatsApp and Facebook). Ricci Boateng was interviewed by Ananya Kabir and Elina Djebbari at The Room, East Legon, Accra, in January 2017; all quotes are taken from that interview.

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1 An Afropolitan literary aesthetics?

Afropolitan style and tropes in recent diasporic African fiction

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ABSTRACT

This article discusses what the authors call an emerging Afropolitan aesthetics. Through an exploration of recurring stylistic features, the article focuses particularly on the trope of a mobility-induced anxiety that entwines place and self. The ontological and affective troping of return and of self-understanding and the contemporary signification of Africa as a complex place of relocation and reconnection are explored in discussions of literary characters in Taiye Selasi's *Ghana Must Go* (2013), Yvonne Owuor's *Dust* (2014), Sefi Atta's *A Bit of Difference* (2013) and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah* (2013).

In this essay, we explore an emergent literary aesthetics, exemplified in a number of different texts, which are popularised under the banner of Afropolitanism.¹ Whether such narratives favour a mode of writing that is elliptical and fragmentary, as in Taiye Selasi's *Ghana Must Go* (2013) and Yvonne Owuor's *Dust* (2014), or realistic and unobtrusive, as in Sefi Atta's *A Bit of Difference* (2013) and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah* (2013), we argue that, despite their stylistic differences, their narratives play an important part in the ongoing process of developing certain recurring and recognisable tropes. While Selasi's and Owuor's novels begin with extraordinary, elongated prose-poetic descriptions of a moment of dying, Atta's and Adichie's works, in contrast, open with quite ordinary, prosaically described, moments of arrival (at Atlanta airport in the former) or departure (from Princeton Junction for a hairdressing salon in Trenton). By referencing these four novels, we trace the central trope of a mobility-induced anxiety which entwines place and self. This anxiety about ways of seeing Africa and ways of being African in the contemporary world is foregrounded, albeit in quite different modes, in each of the stories. Our focus is on literary figures that we suggest can be read as Afropolitan characters: Selasi's two sets of twins Taiwo and Kehinde and Olu and Sadie, Owuor's Ajany, Atta's Deola and Adichie's Ifemelu. We begin with a brief consideration of how to make sense of Afropolitanism, before proceeding to explore the style of the four novels with a special focus on the ontological and affective tropes of return and of self-understanding. In lieu of a conclusion, we offer a few reflections and questions on the contemporary signification of Africa as a complex place in the texts explored.

Like most interventions into Afropolitanism, we, too, begin with Taiye Selasi's 'Bye-Bye Babar' (2005) and her understanding of Afropolitanism as a way of talking about the 'new demographic' of 'Africans of the World' who are 'redefining what it means to be African' in the twenty-first century (2005). Hers is a 'new' diaspora perspective that ceaselessly complicates what Africa is and what it means to be African for a hybridised, globalised, diasporic citizen of the world who maintains a connection with their African origin. This perspective is useful for an exploration of the Afropolitan as *literary* figure. While Selasi sees Afropolitanism as 'a strictly novel phenomenon', Achille Mbembe, the other populariser of the term, sees it as a type of cosmopolitanism in Africa that predates colonial history (Makokha, 2010: 18). Mbembe (2007: 28) suggests that Afropolitanism is a 'worlds-in-movement phenomenon' that relies on the 'interweaving of the here and there, the presence of the elsewhere in the here and vice versa ... and the ability to recognise one's face in that of a foreigner': Afropolitanism, Mbembe holds, 'is an aesthetic and a particular poetic of the world' – indeed, it names a way of being in the world 'that refuses the victim position' (28). Afropolitanism, from his African location, describes a way of being located in an Africa that is, and has 'always' been, mobile and hybrid. Furthermore, for him it is both an aesthetic *and* an ontology. Thus, even from its inception, the term ambiguously describes something new and 'born in diaspora' at the same time as something old and typically African – and this insight is constitutive of the inherent complexity of the term itself, which helps to keep the 'field' open to intervention and negotiation.

Simon Gikandi's 2010 definition of Afropolitanism as 'a new phenomenology of Africanness' that constitutes 'an attempt to rethink African knowledge outside the trope of crisis' (2010: 9) must be included in this brief exploration of how to make sense of Afropolitanism. For Gikandi, too, Afropolitanism is what we might call an *ontology*, 'a way of being African in the world' that celebrates 'cultural hybridity – to be of Africa and of other worlds at the same time' (9). We want to supplement (and complicate) this initial celebration of Afropolitanism as a 'particular way of seeing and being in the world' (11) with Gikandi's more recent thoughts on the *anxiety* of the Afropolitan figure when it comes to places to take for granted in an instable and fluctuating world. In a conversation with us for our book *In Search of the Afropolitan*, Gikandi admits that his attitude to Afropolitanism has changed somewhat since his initial celebration:

I am beginning to see [Afropolitanism] as a response to what I call the incomplete project of transnationalism, or of globalisation. I think what makes Afropolitan literature interesting is that it rehearses [an] anxiety ... Instead of celebrating transnationalism, it creates a new space ... I was focusing too much on the celebration. Since then I have come to realise that it is the most privileged Africans living in the West who are the most anxious, and they need cosmopolitanism to deal with this anxiety.

(Knudsen and Rahbek, 2016: 51, 54)

Afropolitan literature, building on Gikandi's thoughts, can thus be explored as a new *space* of investigation into the effects of globalisation on the African character – and the African place. The central contemporary shaper of the term, Minna Salami, also sees Afropolitanism as a space. She envisions Afropolitanism in a radically open and always unpredictable way that may take its point of departure from Selasi, Mbembe and Gikandi, but which is infinitely more provocative and daring. According to Salami, Afropolitanism is a space of critical enquiry:

It is a space exploring what it means to be a person of African heritage in a global world ... It is raising questions about consciousness and decolonisation in varying degrees and I think that what happens in that space is completely unpredictable because ... every 'Afropolitan' who is involving herself with the space and interrogating it, will inevitably contribute to it in a different way because we are all different ... It is crucial, of course, for that space to be aware of who is taking part in the dialogues, what are the backgrounds of those people, and what privileges do they have.

(Knudsen and Rahbek, 2016: 156–158)

To her, then, Afropolitanism is a space that is flexible, inclusive and unpredictable – a space of *enquiry* into Africa and Africanness. On her blog she presents her many views on Afropolitanism, one of which states: 'Since Afropolitanism is in constant flux, the conversations, the issues and the aesthetics it grapples with are also in constant flux' (Salami, 2015a). Any attempt to make sense of Afropolitanism therefore has to be tentative, undogmatic and malleable.

Informed by these initial and admittedly brief considerations on the *meaning* of Afropolitanism, particularly as an ontology and as a space of critical enquiry into ways of seeing Africa and being African in today's globalised world, let us now consider what we mean when we suggest that an Afropolitan *literary aesthetics* seems to be in the making by exploring the style and (some of) the tropes characteristic of such an emerging aesthetics.

The proposition we make of an emerging Afropolitan aesthetics is to be understood specifically as a *literary* aesthetic. Style, Roger Fowler admits, is a 'tormented' term because its 'meaning is controversial' and its 'relevance disputed' (1993: 236). Indeed, style has a slightly old-fashioned ring to it, yet for our purposes it works well. Style is traditionally defined as a 'manner of expression', as Fowler states (236), going on to elaborate on this by suggesting that style is 'given significance by personal or cultural, rather than verbal, qualities' and, furthermore, that it relies on the foregrounding of 'some selected feature, or set of features' (237). It is precisely such a personal or cultural set of features, as foregrounded in an Afropolitan style of writing, that we label tropes, another admittedly problematic category. Still, we have opted for the term 'trope' here to signal how a word, or a cluster of words, takes on more meaning than initially meets the eye, not necessarily in a metaphorical sense, but rather in a sense where the term vacillates between the literal and the metaphorical. In the trope of return, for example, the seemingly innocent word 'return' takes on a complexity of meaning that needs to be teased out by the reader. The word – or related words – is thus used in a conspicuous sense that is of note because it forces us to rethink, or problematise, its meaning. The word is thus simultaneously familiar and unfamiliar, both for the reader and for the character who experiences the actual return and reflects on the what, why and how of his/her passage. The constant foregrounding of instances of variegated return speaks to how the term is currently being troped in Afropolitan writing.

We also use the term 'style' here to invoke two different, and overlapping, ideas which are manifested in two different, and intertwined, tropes. This usage is inspired by Simon Gikandi, who in conversation with us explained, 'I think of style as meaning two things at the same time: style as a pose, as a way of being and of presenting yourself in a certain way ... And style also in the linguistic sense, as a way of telling your story and of representing your side' (Knudsen and Rahbek, 2016: 55). For us, then, style means not only a way of writing, what we call the *prose*, and is what is implied in the 'manner of expression' definition of style, but it also a way of staging and presenting yourself, what Gikandi calls the *pose*. The prose and

the pose are united in the recurring trope in *all* of this writing – the trope of a mobility-induced anxiety about place and about self.² In contrast to what we might call a postcolonial anxiety, the result of feeling lost in-between homeland and host-land, an Afropolitan anxiety is mobility induced in a different way. It seems to emerge, not from a sense of loss, but from being in transit, and multi-local, while commuting across geographical locations, and feeling a sense of belonging to all or none of the places involved. The experience of being acutely transient and always-already mobile thus characterises the Afropolitan anxiety about place. This specific anxiety is precipitated by mobility, here understood as a feeling of being on the move, as the experience of travelling out of Africa and into the West, but also as an experience of coming back ‘home’ to an African space left behind, either by the literary character or that character’s parents. This anxiety is thus attached to a sense of being culturally hybrid *and* multi-local and, furthermore, to a recurring sense of unease about belonging, again felt in connection to place and, in a profoundly ontological or existential way, to a sense of self, as an individual in a globalised, twenty-first-century world. Ontological anxiety therefore relates directly to the experience of living transnational lives in which a close affiliation with a specific African origin or location is often unstable, a matter of continuous and conscious negotiation or of a personal engagement from a position of living elsewhere. It is thus also related to the diasporic feeling of not being seen as genuinely, i.e. authentically, of Africa if one is mobile across continents.

If to Chielozona Eze, Afropolitanism corresponds to ‘the cultural face of cosmopolitanism’ (2014: 239), for us, then, its ‘literary face’ surely deserves to take centre stage. Here, we fine-tune our analysis to the human dimension of Afropolitanism – the human face as represented in *literary characters*, and how these characters battle with affective and ontological ways of making sense of place and self – typically manifested in the multifaceted trope of return.

Anxiety about place, and concomitantly about home and belonging, is manifested in variations of this trope of return. In his introduction to *The New African Diaspora*, Isidore Okpewho (Okpewho and Nzegwu, 2009: 10–11) mentions schizophrenia, trauma, pain and despair as descriptors of the experience of diaspora, as well as the associated question of whether it is indeed possible to ‘go home again.’³ We have chosen to stay with the term ‘anxiety’, though it is true that *Ghana Must Go* can also be read as a trauma novel. The trope of return is very differently rehearsed in recent fiction as compared to that of earlier generations of writers from the African continent. While the ‘traditional’ or recognisable African ‘been-to’ characters – who visit the West for a shorter or longer period – can always return to a familiar place where they feel a sense of belonging and attachment, many Afropolitan writers, by contrast, typically elaborate on a reconnection or notion of going back which is emphatically different from the certainty implied by the notion of return. Afropolitanism, as Gikandi reminds us, is invariably connected to Africa in one way or another ‘but it is to be of Africa *and other worlds* at the same time’ (2010: 9; our italics). Similarly, in the words of Mbembe, Afropolitanism expresses ‘an awareness of the *interweaving* of the here *and there*’ (2007: 28; our italics). Such statements do not suppose a return to a known, safe place, but to an individual version of an African place that the characters typically do not have a secure attachment to. This going back is better grasped as a reconnection to and a complication of the figure of Africa. And it is firmly attached to how the literary characters consider their relation to place. Is reconnection also a reinvestment in Africa? Is it a reorientation away from the West, not only physically, but also mentally? Does return imply reaspora? Such complicated ways of going back are descriptive of the many types of Africa that are in circulation

in the early twenty-first century, and 'Africa' and 'African' thus become highly unstable and slippery signifiers and affect the troping of reconnection in numerous ways. The noticeable instability also helps to 'complicate Africa', to echo Taiye Selasi's rallying cry at the conclusion of her 2005 essay, 'Bye-Bye Babar'.

For the adult children of the Sai family in Selasi's novel, the trope of return is indeed articulated in complex ways. When they go to Ghana for their father's funeral they do not, as their parents did when their migrant lives in America became too troublesome, come 'home' to Africa. Far from it, they arrive as strangers to a continent that they do not aspire to be reclaimed by, nor does the continent reclaim them beyond the simple gesture of welcome. To them, Africa is an elsewhere place that their parents once fled from – for Sadie, who has never been there, Africa is merely a sad void associative of 'The Man from the Story' (Selasi, 2013: 149), the runaway father she never knew; for Olu, a painful memory of a previous visit cut short by the father's mistress and his betrayal of Olu's hopes to bring the family back together; and for Taiwo and Kehinde, inseparable from an intensely traumatic childhood stay with a perverse uncle in Lagos who forced the twins into an incestuous sexual relationship. There is nothing celebratory about their turn to Africa, which is by no stretch of the imagination a return in the conventional sense of a movement back to a well-known place of belonging. In fact, Africa becomes the site of the return of the repressed as their African sojourn involves a painful process of coming to terms with the past after steamed-up anger and silent hurt are brought into the open for the first time, notably on African shores. Return unleashes unaddressed emotions that require close attention and tough processing before the fallen-apart family can begin to seek rapprochement, the crucial point at which return becomes catalytic of a restored attachment. This suggests that return must be understood as a point of reconnection on African ground for a family that broke up in America and became scattered across continents.

The strange newness of the children's African experience eventually gives rise to unexpected possibilities for the family to get to know themselves, and each other better, and the fact that Africa eventually also figures as a refuge that drives them towards such *re*-cognition is significant. Fresh and wondrous impressions of Ghana impinge upon their senses. Kehinde, for example, is struck by the movement of people, 'none of the ancientness of Mali, nor the ambitiousness of Nigeria, just a steady-on movement toward what he can't tell' (209), suggestive of how Kehinde, the observant recluse, desires, after all, to reconnect with Ghana, his parents' point of departure. Olu's former rejection of Africa and the unreliable African father figure is converted into a deeper understanding of the contingency of pain residing in the parents' pasts. The children's individual responses resonate with Selasi's own realisation that 'there is no return to the old Africa. There is me and what I am now and what I make of Africa when I am there' (2014). 'There', of course, indicates a close affinity with Africa that must be mediated through the distance of an elsewhere 'here' that is also part of the Afropolitan's trajectory. The reader assumes that her characters are bound to move on again after their cathartic stay in Africa, as indeed suggested by the novel's temporal composition and division into three parts, 'Gone', 'Going' and 'Go', which suggest a pattern of movement through time which is incongruous with the conventional chronology of the migrant story as a one-way passage from a place of (parental) origin into diaspora (where one would expect the reversed order of 'Go', 'Going' and 'Gone'). As a story, however, of a scattered family that attempts to understand itself backwards in time, through lost or repressed memories, Selasi's organisation of narrative movement (her prose), ending with 'Go' as a stylistic pointer of

Afropolitan agency, is in tune with the Afropolitan's pose and ontological mediation of what it means 'to be of Africa and of other worlds at the same time' (Gikandi, 2010: 9).

Ajany in Owuor's novel is also an anxious soul. An artist in Brazil, she is forced to return when her beloved brother Odidi is murdered in the post-general election riots in Kenya in 2007. For her, 'music and painting bandaged soul-holes' and art provides a possible means to colour in 'landscapes of loss' (Owuor, 2014: 14, 18), especially in diaspora. For this sensitive artist, her return to Kenya becomes something like an encounter with ghosts:

Touchdown at Jomo Kenyatta International airport against a dawn cliché of a postcard Nairobi sunrise, acacia-in-the-morning scene, the sky red, mauve. An exact sensation of life wafted around the passengers. Kaleidoscope flavours, earth scents, for her a tumble of memories ... A childhood written in aromas.

(Owuor, 2014: 49)

This is the moment of return to – or perhaps better, reconnection with – Kenya. It is a profoundly sensual and affective moment that layers present on past, collective on individual responses. As she walks through customs, Ajany feels that she is 'of Kenya again' (49). The moment of return marks a powerful reconnection and reappraisal with memories and smells – and the discovery of a kind of safety in these affective recollections. Yet this arrival is also accompanied with 'at least ninety ghosts' (49) that she anxiously has to come to terms with.

In Kenya she meets Englishman Isaiah Bolton, who is also tracing ghosts – and his quest takes him to Ajany's home, Wouth Ogik, or Journey's End (113). When Ajany sees Isaiah for the first time, it is clear that this uncanny stranger is, in a ghostlike manner, very familiar and thus he becomes enfolded in the complexities of return. 'She wants to paint him' (61), and thus properly recognise him, or know him again. However, she later realises that her home is equally uncanny and begins to feel that it is really *his* home, not hers: 'It will return to its true heir ... Homelessness is where Far Away is' (353), Ajany ponders. Where does she belong, then, if her home is really his home? Does she belong in homelessness, in what the novel poetically calls *Far Away*? *Dust* goes some way towards answering this question: it ends with her sensation that 'Isaiah's arms tighten around her', and with him telling Ajany that he promised her mother to 'enfold' her (357). The embrace is not only a physical connection, but also a reconsideration of home, indeed, a kind of safe homecoming, enfolding the lost Ajany.

Safe homecoming is not a desire for transient Deola in Atta's novel as she commutes regularly between her London home and her childhood home and family in Lagos. As she has this home of roots to return to, at self-chosen intervals, she can afford both to be critical of its confining shortcomings, in particular in regard to patriarchal gender roles, and reflective of why she may eventually need to return more permanently to Nigeria, where she is free from the pressures of racialised London. Deola's *returns* (note the plural) are, then, not reflective of a nostalgic longing for Africa, or Nigeria, but a continuously ongoing (re)negotiation of the conditions that will make homecoming meaningful for her as an African woman, born and bred, who has acquired expertise in transnational living. Yet the passage is never completed for Deola, an existential migrant who left Nigeria in pursuit of an independent life of purpose, self-development and authenticity: 'home becomes the impossibility and necessity of the subject's future (one never gets there, but is always getting there)' (Ahmed, 2000: 78). But perhaps, in Deola's case, that is precisely the point. Return marks an interval (only) through which Deola may explore and complicate her sense of belonging to Africa and therefore return is imbued with intense ambivalence: 'she still thinks of herself as a Lagosian,

not a Londoner' (Atta, 2013: 224) at the same time as she notes that every time she leaves Lagos 'she gets the impression that she is emerging from a thick fog she hasn't been aware of' (176). Through a host of linguistic twists and turns of the very idea of return, Atta's novel suggests that return is forever doomed to be indecisive and without closure, thus the many references in the novel to 'reorientation' as the ability required not only to manage mobility across continents, but also to ponder the distances travelled between the vacillating locations of here and there. The novel ends with a chapter entitled 'For Good', as Deola has made up her mind to return permanently to Nigeria, but she is yet to leave Britain: 'Why did she think she would not miss London?' (297). This sense of an ending is not in fact a proper ending at all, but more of a temporary break or stopping-off point in a personal itinerary that keeps returning Deola to Nigeria without convincing the reader that she is actually destined to resettle there.

Adichie's novel begins with equally complex thoughts about return. Successful blogger, American-based but African-born protagonist Ifemelu suffers from homesickness, described as 'cement in her soul', which to her feels like a morning disease of 'fatigue, a bleakness and borderlessness' accompanied by 'amorphous longings, shapeless desires' (Adichie, 2013: 6). Through her morning sickness she is pregnant, as it were, with 'the dull ache of loss' (6), an anxious Afropolitan longing for a secure place of belonging, or for a sense of re-rootedness, or, perhaps, reaspora. When Ifemelu contemplates Nigerians who have returned 'home' she feels that they are living *her* life: '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' (6). Through the well-established metaphor of roots of belonging to a known geographical location, Ifemelu tries to make sense of her impatience with the Afropolitan mobility that has characterised her lifestyle and her pose thus far in her American sojourn. Her return 'home', however, is also a (possible) reunion with ex-boyfriend Obinze, who embodies those longed-for roots, as with him she 'never felt the need to explain herself' (6). And yet, there can, of course, be no return to the life left behind when she migrated to America, so when Ifemelu finally does come back to Nigeria, the magic moment of homecoming is also an utterly disorientating one – in Lagos, 'a ripe tomato could burst out of solid stone' (385). Obviously, Ifemelu's perceptions of home, roots, and indeed Obinze, need to be readjusted to the changed realities she returns to.

Indeed, return, or reconnection, has profound effects on her sense of self, leading to an oxymoronic sensation of 'falling into a new person ... falling into the strange familiar' (385). In fact, this relocation initially precipitates an acute experience of dislocation, both of self and place: 'She was no longer sure what was new in Lagos and what was new in herself' (387). Furthermore, even the most quotidian of phrases, such as the gateman of her friend's house bidding her 'welcome back', sets in motion 'an 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' (388). Although 'home is where you feel a welcome', as Caryl Phillips proposes in *The Final Passage* (1985: 115), for Ifemelu, however, it is not the idea of welcome that affects her, but the less conspicuous word 'back' that especially resonates. 'Back' implies a solid investment in return – as if the gateman knows that she is 'truly back' (Adichie, 2013: 389), that is, back for good. That is also why she feels guilty when she remembers her American passport, which protects her from the choicelessness that inspired her – and Obinze – to leave Nigeria in the first place. That American passport provides her

with the luxury of choice, and a possible escape route: 'She could always leave, she did not have to stay' (390).

The trope of return, then, draws attention to a host of complicated quests and questions. What kind of return, and return to what kind of Africa? Mbembe reminds us that 'there is no single way of "seeing Africa" (2001: 2), neither between insiders, the 'nativists' who have remained on the Continent, nor outsiders, 'those in exile from Africa in the West' – because 'plurality is the norm'. Madhu Krishnan's gloss on *Ghana Must Go* develops this insight. She suggests that Selasi's novel offers 'a view of the Continent both as a space of refuge ... and a space of degeneration ... Africa, here, is a site of regeneration and estrangement' (2014: 21). This complexity of refuge and estrangement is bound up with the multiply voiced trope of return. Return can be expressed in many guises in Afropolitan writing: as homecoming, as traditional return, as reconnection and relocation, and as reappraisal or reaspora, that is, the return of the diaspora to an original African location. Return figured as *retour*, as the traditional return to a place of origin, is what we see at the end of *Americanah*, when Ifemelu comes home after many years in the US, whereas it figures as reconnection and reorientation (physically and mentally), as going back in a different way from returning, in *A Bit of Difference*. It seems to us that return and reconnection name two somewhat different ways of relocating and reappraising, expressing different investments in the emotional and political complications of figuring and representing Africa in today's globalised world.

The unifying trope of anxiety is also manifested in complex and sometimes frustrated ways of presenting and reflecting on a sense of self. Looking at literary figures through the lens of self-definition is informed by Gikandi's and Mbembe's elaborations on Afropolitanism as descriptive of a pose, that is, of specific ontological ways of seeing Africa and being African in the twenty-first-century world that, among other things, go beyond the victim position. This approach is also inspired by Chielozona Eze's (2014) argument that not only does Afropolitanism name the cultural face of cosmopolitanism, it also precipitates new and nuanced understandings of identity. The Afropolitan self is unavoidably hybridised as a result of multi-locality, mobility and its multiplex cultural embeddedness. Furthermore, the trope of self-reflection is often embodied in characters whose desire is to be seen as, and who see themselves as, ordinary. Indeed, the trope of self foregrounds the everyday, and it can be read as a critique of the attitude to the African figure as exceptional and (ultimately) different when seen from a Western perspective. Against a historical backdrop of the figure of the African as less-than-human or as somebody who is emphatically *not* ordinary – longing for ordinariness, for the quotidian, is striking in recent Afropolitan writing. Afropolitanism has been charged with dissociating itself from any obligation to reflect on African lives that are (still) disadvantaged in the global age, and for promoting a new kind of African exceptionalism. However, the *Afropolitan literary characters* themselves in the narratives considered here do focus on the continuing disadvantage (and perhaps exceptionality) of themselves and their peers as diasporic Africans in the modern world, while yearning for precisely the ordinariness that Afropolitanism is often considered to ignore. Like Ajany, Deola and Ifemelu, the adult children of *Ghana Must Go*, insist on the right to be, and to be seen as, ordinary human beings whose lives pivot, not only on the challenge of being recognised as human before they are cast as African (migrant), but also on the quotidian moments in life of love, pain, anger and frustration that reflect their individual aspirations, their desires and their anxieties.

Although they suffer silently under difficult circumstances, Selasi's characters cannot be read as simply victims. Theirs is 'a story which is human, no more and no less' (Selasi, 2014). 'For all of the hoopla about race' they have no desire 'to be Caucasian' (Selasi, 2013: 146), yet they still have an anxiety about belonging that strains their sense of self. They are all extraordinary achievers, so focused on perfecting the 'successful' migrant script that they become estranged by their 'ongoing effort ... all striving for the common goal, as yet unreachd. They [are] unfinished, in rehearsal, a production in progress ... the stress of performance ever-present ... as a sort of sound in the background. A hum' (123). As the parents' African pasts are a closed book, their children feel transient and lightweight and without the 'vertical axis', the 'roots spreading out underneath' which 'heavy' families with 'pictures on the wall' (146) of family forebears have. Thus all the unarticulated tensions in their lives ultimately hinge on the migrating metaphor of the father's slippers, emblematic of the craving for stability and the comforts of home in America. However, when the slippers reappear at the end in Ghana, inside a Ghana-Must-Go bag, they have become metonymic of the unsettled sense of belonging that has haunted the entire family, who have never really experienced the comfortable sense of homeliness that those slippers indicate.

It is, however, when the children reunite with their mother in Africa that they begin to disclose and (ad)dress the wounds of the past (inherently related to and metonymically compacted into the worn-out slippers inside the made-to-go bag), that they can let go of the hold that their scripted lives have on them and finally allow themselves to be merely human, and thus vulnerable, and dependent on one another. In order to piece together, in Africa, the family puzzle of what essentially broke them apart in America, the children need to 'touch' their parents' pasts and understand their own pain. In this sense, Africa gives them a perspective from which to 'feel' it from a return-to-the-scene perspective that will, eventually, allow them all to love again. Although their incipient recovery from their anxieties about self and belonging is set in motion in Africa, it is, of course, important to note that Ghana does not figure as an ancestral place of origins that will heal through an offering of secure roots and spontaneous bonding. Africa is not made to fulfil such an improbable function, but it does provide a significant space for reconciliation and reattachment to this family, who are 'weightless', 'unbound' and 'drifting' (146) and in need of grounding.

One of the anxieties that Ajany in *Dust* has to battle with is homelessness – a homelessness that Odidi, who never left Kenya, had set in motion himself and which affects Ajany's sense of self profoundly. It also informs her mobility-induced anxiety (Owuor, 2014: 117), or what she calls her 'floundering' (120). Odidi embodies a rootedness she herself does not feel – thus he can talk about home in a way that she cannot: 'She would do anything to feel as he felt ... Was it possible that two separate feelings of place could exist between them?' (119). Upon return to Kenya, and like Selasi's Sadie, who during a tribal dance in Ghana feels that 'something [is] clicking, a logic inside her ... that knows what to do, knows the music, this footwork, this rhythm, the body relaxing' (Selasi, 2013: 270), Ajany also experiences temporary relief from ontological anxieties of belonging through dance: 'When she dances, the dread dies. When she moves, she is not lost. When she moves, there is no absence' (Owuor, 2014: 200). In Owuor's prose, dancing is not presented as a spiritual experience or as the kind of 'healing ritual dance of reunification' that Joseph McLaren discusses in his essay on African American return figurations (McLaren in Okpewho and Nzegwu, 2009: 434). Rather, it is described as an individual and profoundly physical sensation of letting go and giving in to the power of the musical moment. Dance becomes cathartic through sheer physical exhaustion and joy,

and helps Ajany forget herself, her ghosts and her anxieties – for the time being, at least. The physicality and the relief of the dance-moment is echoed at the end of the novel when the ‘floundering’ Ajany is able to relocate with her lost self and her unpredictable home(land) in the arms of that other ghost-hunter and equally floundering soulmate, the Englishman Isaiah. The trope of restless and anxious self-reflection is thus arrested or fused, as it were, when the ‘hybrid lovers’ leave Journey’s End together, and embark on a future in an African location that can, perhaps, engulf and enfold them both.

As an inter-continental commuter, Atta’s Deola does not seem to be bogged down by torn allegiances as migrants often are. Rather, Atta’s prose succinctly uncovers the ‘bit of difference’ that Deola’s Afropolitan experiences add to her perception of Nigerians at home, as in her encounter in Lagos airport with the ‘gap-toothed man’: ‘She loves her fellow Nigerians, especially this one with his white pointed shoes. His arse is half-way up his back and his jacket almost reaches his knees. His oblivion is a spectacle of beauty’ (Atta, 2013: 69–70). The way in which an ordinary Nigerian registers, through Deola’s perceptive gaze (or her Afropolitan pose), as a ‘spectacle of beauty’ inadvertently suggests that her relationship with Nigeria is simultaneously familiar and estranged. She is both an insider and an outsider to the cultural spaces she lives in and passes through and this affects her perceptions. But this is not a cause for deep worry. Deola is an astute introvert observer of culture and difference, but she is not suffering from an acute ontological anxiety about self as much as from a personal existential crisis that relates directly to the African gender politics that keep her independent but lonely in London, and socially embedded but confined in Lagos. While she can deconstruct the Western media coverage of Africa’s ‘quintessential’ problems and ponder on the ‘the lack of perspective and continued absence of her experiences’ (291), it is far more difficult to negotiate a space for herself in Nigeria where ‘boys [carry] on like little polygamists’ while ‘well-brought-up Nigerian girls were essentially house-wives-in-training’ (37). Pregnant at the end of the novel, however, by mature and responsible Wale, Deola’s anxiety may be alleviated as she sheds her ‘barbedwire’ (255) attitude, lets down her guard and through a haptic skin encounter that recognises and respects her sense of self, she learns how to ‘become home’ to herself, irrespective of geographical location: ‘Her skin smells of his sandalwood. There isn’t a part of her body his hands ... have not touched. She tasted herself on his lips’ (296). This encounter reflects what Ahmed (2000: 89) terms the affective sensation of skin as home and of ‘being-at-home in terms of inhabiting a second skin ... a skin which ... allows the subject to be touched, and to touch the world, that is neither simply in the home or away from the home’.

Ifemelu’s way of being African in the world is, as we have seen, also highly sensual. *Americanah* relies on emotions and tactility – feelings, affect, and their effect are central to how Ifemelu experiences the world and her place within in. The intimate and ambiguous signifier ‘skin’ is foregrounded in the novel’s prose, and it takes on multiple, and diverse, connotative values. Upon arriving, ‘her body [is] unsure of itself’ (Adichie, 2013: 106) in its encounter with the newness of the US. In order to make sense of the novelty she feels the need ‘to wear a new, knowing skin right away’ (135). As she becomes enmeshed in the US, especially while dating rich and handsome Curt, she realises that she ‘had slipped out of her old skin’ (200). But her new skin is not entirely indicative of a new self. She cannot feel American African, nor is she African American – she is, she gradually realises, ‘just’ an ordinary African. Thus, in the US she experiences ‘an incomplete knowledge of herself’ (289) that she cannot live with, even though she is increasingly successful in her career. She chooses to

return to Lagos and thus becomes an Americanah, or an Afropolitan who looks at Nigeria with the knowing and slightly blasé eyes of someone who has been away, albeit in a very different manner from the been-tos of earlier novels. As her colleague at her new job in Lagos reminds her, “‘Been-To’ is like so outdated? This is not 1960’ (405). Indeed, the Nigerpolitan Club has been established to cater for returnees from the US and the UK and their acquired tastes for low-fat soya milk and vegetarian food that seem to accompany their new sense of being in the world as twenty-first-century Afropolitans. Ifemelu’s relocating in Lagos inevitably implies reconnection with Obinze, another returnee, albeit from a degrading stay in the UK as an illegal immigrant. Obinze’s new life in Lagos prior to Ifemelu’s return has been with his wife, Kosi – but this is a ‘second skin that had never fitted him snugly’, the narrator insists (456). For Ifemelu, though, the return to Lagos – and to Obinze – doubles as a return to a more ‘authentic’ sense of self, again expressed through the recurring metaphor of skin: with Obinze ‘her skin felt as though it was her right size’ (61). Thus she is reunited with him, with herself – and with Africa.

The Africa that the children come back to in *Ghana Must Go* is associated with a double breaking-away in their parents’ stories (their break, as young migrants, from Africa and then, as parents, from each other). Africa aptly figures as the always-already ‘after the break’ location where atonement must be sought and then subsequently, beyond the novel’s last page, lead the children to figure out their own individual relationship with Africa, separate from that of their parents. They will, we assume, give word to what Minna Salami (2015b) calls ‘the mental/moral bridge between the “I”, “Humanity” and “Africa”’. In this sense, Africa is both an exit point in history and an entry point into the future and other ways of thinking about Africa – at one and the same time settling and unsettled. To Afropolitans, the notion of reconnection is crucial to their sense of being Africans of the world, yet the reconnection must be made through a personal effort to bridge what history separated.

‘Memories are ghosts ... Places are ghosts, too’, Owuor writes (2014: 121–123). One of the Kenyas the novel introduces us to, although it is a Kenya her characters cannot return to, is the 1960s Kenya of Tom Mboya:

Wanderers, cattlemen, camel herders, fishermen and hunters, dreamers, strangers, gatherers and farmers, trading nations, empire builders, and the forgetful. Such were the people for whom Nyipir [Ajany’s father] had carried the new Kenya flag ... Blended cultures, intoxicating fusion – the new, revised Kenya.

(Owuor, 2014: 25)

This Kenya of memory attests to Mbembe’s worlds-in-movement vision of a mobile and already-hybrid African location. But it is a Kenya which is not allowed to remain and flourish. In fact, Mboya’s death ‘created a fissure in the nation, as if it had split apart its own soul’ (272). And this soul-torn nation is a piece of the ghostlike haunting of the signification of contemporary Kenya – a reminder of a Kenya that could have been. ‘After Mboya’, the narrator proposes, ‘Kenya’s official languages [were]: English, Kiswahili, and Silence’, but ‘[t]here was also memory’ (273). The Kenya that Ajany is forced to reconnect with is a Kenya where ‘most citizens understated ethnic roots, overemphasising Kenyan-ness in brash Kiswahili and even louder English. Renegotiating belonging, desperate faith in One Kenya’ (192). This is not a happily hybrid Kenya, but a Kenya of division, fear and dread. It is a Kenya that for Ajany begins with the death of her brother, a haunting parallel to the death of Mboya. However, it is possible to read the ending of the novel as suggesting a movement forward, towards

the idealism of Mboya's Kenya embodied in the (re)union of Ajany and Isaiah, and of what they symbolise in terms of Kenya's mobile, hybrid and fused history.

Nigeria in Atta's novel is also an unstable nation that grapples with change, with an older privileged generation troubled by the fact that 'Nigeria does not belong to them anymore' (Atta, 2013: 162), which is further complicated, Deola observes, by the newly rich who 'may not do much for the common good, but they achieve so much for themselves' (119). Nigeria, in short, is 'beyond postcolonial' (Atta in Knudsen and Rahbek, 2016: 183). New and complicating questions need to be asked about the current state of affairs in Africa, which is precisely why it makes sense to be alert to Deola's critical intervention that resists any one-sided rhetoric of blame in its addressing of what ails Africa in the contemporary moment. As an Afropolitan migrant commuter between continents, Deola is in an advantageous position to engage in sober and honest conversations about Africa's future. This is a challenging conversation – '[c]oming from abroad, she can never be right about Lagos. Everyone complains, but the moment she says things are bad, someone will say they are not so bad' (Atta, 2013: 105) – yet one that is crucial to the future of Nigeria as a locally differentiated and globally implicated part of Africa. Nigeria is neither an abject nor a revered place in Deola's mind and in her decision about whether to, perhaps, return for good. Nigeria simply is, and that in itself seems an apt starting point for her continued engagement with her place of birth.

The African Students Association (ASA) that Adichie's Ifemelu encounters in the US manifests an Afropolitan anxiety about place and belonging – and about the meaning of Africa. They mock American perceptions of Africa, but they also mock their own perceptions of Africa; this, however, is a 'mockery born of longing, and of the heartbroken desire to see a place made whole again' (Adichie, 2013: 139). With ASA, Ifemelu feels a sense of renewal, and also that, in an echo of her intuitive and intimate link with Obinze, she does not 'have to explain herself' (139). With Obinze, Ifemelu has never felt the need to elaborate on what it means to be an African of the twenty-first-century world. Perhaps we might suggest that Obinze and ASA come to symbolise a rootedness in Africa, possibly even a signification of Africa, for Ifemelu in diaspora. Indeed, Africa, or more precisely Nigeria, is the embodiment of the idea of safety in a home of roots, the novel suggests in its closing. In the concluding pages, Ifemelu is home, writing her new blog and discovering Lagos again. She is back, and can spin 'herself fully into being' on African ground (475).

The many explorations of ways of *being* African through the trope of anxious self-reflection and the many different ways of *seeing* and understanding the Africa that Afropolitan characters return to, as foregrounded in the complex trope of return, trouble the *signifier* Africa for characters in the novels and readers of the novels. Indeed, the meaning of Africa is at the heart of Afropolitan critical enquiry. Afropolitan narratives notably engage with Africa, or rather the figure of Africa in different ways, but never as the uncomplicated destination for a safe return. Africa is not employed as a consoling or unifying descriptor of a shared past or present. Rather, Africa emerges as a series of diverse cultural spaces: Nigeria is emphatically not Ghana or Kenya (or vice versa) in the novels discussed here. Each nation is distinctly its own place, in terms of culture, history, politics and global embeddedness. Afropolitan narratives clearly work to resist 'diminutisation' and to cast Africa as a complex space of continental dimensions. This, of course, also means that Afropolitan writers debunk the outmoded expectation that their narratives should bear the burden of representing an entire continent.

In our conversation with Simon Gikandi, he reflects on some of the Africas in circulation in the twenty-first century:

There is the Africa that scholars engage with seriously, and there is an Africa of the imagination, which also carries remnants of the old Africa of the Western imagination. We no longer perform the racist representations of Africa, but they lie under the surface occasionally. Africa tends to be caught between these two representations. But there is also a third dimension: a romantic desire for Africa.

(Knudsen and Rahbek, 2016: 46)

Madhu Krishnan pinpoints a similar conundrum: 'Africa ... remains elusive; yet, it perpetually offers its spectral presence. In its simultaneous transparency and opacity, Africa stands as a paradox that speaks as much about us, its readers, as it does about the place and its people' (2014: 15). Perhaps the complex and slippery signifier of Africa, coloured by individual and collective ontological and affective responses, stands at the centre of the emerging Afropolitan literary aesthetics – uniting as it does the intertwined trope of a mobility-induced anxiety about place and self for the Afropolitan character – because a critical enquiry into the *meaning* of Africa is not over? Perhaps, too, this constant and ongoing negotiation of what the signifier 'Africa' stands for is one of the reasons why Afropolitanism has garnered so much interest, *and* gathered so much criticism?

Notes

1. While a more comprehensive discussion of Afropolitan aesthetics in general would have to include fashion, music and art, or what Minna Salami calls 'Afrocentric creativity' (2011), the present essay ponders more narrowly the emergence of what we call an Afropolitan *literary* aesthetics through a specific focus on recurring stylistic tropes.
2. In a conversation between Teju Cole and Taiye Selasi in *The Guardian* (Selasi, 2016), the authors discuss style in a way that links with our pairing of pose and prose. Selasi reads Cole's style as 'a continuous journey' where the author is always 'in transit'. His style, Selasi thus suggests, reflects what we call the author's (ontological) pose. Cole, on the other hand, claims that style is 'the chassis and meaning of the engine'. In other words, and elaborating on Cole's metaphor, style is to be understood as a flexible internal and supportive frame, a kind of skeleton upon which the literary prose is fashioned.
3. The anxiety about belonging that we read from Afropolitan narratives does not reflect schizophrenia or despair, but is rather specifically related to the Afropolitan's multi-local affiliations. In as far as this anxiety can lead to traumatic pain, Sara Ahmed's study *Strange Encounters – Embodied Others in Post-Coloniality* (2000) is a useful reference.

Disclosure statement

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2 Afropolitan in their own way?

Writing and self-identification in
Aminatta Forna and Chika Unigwe

Patricia Bastida-Rodríguez

ABSTRACT

After Taiye Selasi's enthusiastic vindication of the term 'Afropolitan', discussions of Afropolitanism have been taking place for years with a special focus on the features that qualify a person as such. However, they have hardly considered the question of self-identification. This paper examines this issue, as well as the role of writing in demonstrating its author's involvement in the new conceptualisation of identity suggested by Selasi. The analysis is carried out by focusing on two widely acclaimed recent writers: Aminatta Forna and Chika Unigwe, both members of a new generation of writers but with different backgrounds in terms of social belonging and diasporic experience.

In her introduction to *Negotiating Afropolitanism: Essays on Borders and Spaces in Contemporary African Literature and Folklore* (2011), J.K.S. Makokha discusses the concept of Afropolitanism and its influence today by examining the views offered by Achille Mbembe (2007) and Taiye Tuakli-Wosornu (2005), the latter now better known as Taiye Selasi, as those that have been most prevalent since the first deployment of the term in the 2000s. For Makokha, the term emerged as a result of the attempt to 'find a way out of the conflict between the cosmopolitan and nativist descriptions of identity and culture' (Makokha, 2011: 13), a conflict discussed at length by Mbembe. Makokha mentions the points in common as well as the differences between Mbembe's and Selasi's perceptions. This encompasses not only the philosophical versus the artistic spheres to which each belongs, but also the time frame the authors assign to the concept: the former suggesting that Afropolitanism has characterised African cultures since pre-colonial times (Mbembe, 2007: 27); the latter interpreting it as a strictly post-colonial phenomenon (Selasi, 2005: 2).

In contrast to the pessimism prevalent in twentieth-century perceptions of Africa, a celebratory tone seems to be central in both Mbembe and Selasi, as well as the perception of hybridity as an essential component of Afropolitanism, initially understood as including only Africans born or living outside the continent, but now interpreted in a much broader sense. As such, Nigerian poet and philosopher Chielozona Eze perceives the Afropolitan as 'that human being on the African continent or of African descent who has realized that her identity

can no longer be explained in purist, essentialist, and oppositional terms or by reference only to Africa' (2014b: 240). This shift in interpretation has been, in my view, one of the elements that has affected discussions of the term and debilitated its usefulness in the critical sphere, since it has contributed to the appearance of a wide range of opinions whose mere existence defies a homogeneous usage.

Proof of this is that, several years after its coinage, the term has been contested in a variety of ways. In her 2014 essay 'Why I'm Not an Afropolitan', Emma Dabiri mentions some of the best-known voices sharing her rejection of the concept, such as S. Okwunodu Ogbachie in 'Africa without Africans' (2008), Marta Tveit in 'The Afropolitan Must Go' (2013) and Brian Bwesigye in 'Is Afropolitanism Africa's New Single Story?' (2013), some of the titles ironically challenging supposedly 'Afropolitan' narrations.¹ Most of the arguments offered are related to the commodification to which the term has recently been subjected, its association with the West, or the exclusion of ordinary African people and realities it seems to imply. Writer and journalist Binyavanga Wainaina, for instance, denounces a growing use of the concept as 'the marker of crude cultural commodification – a phenomenon increasingly "product driven," design focused and "potentially funded by the West"', and claims instead to be a 'Pan-Africanist' (Bosch Santana, 2013: 1). These voices of dissent have become more and more prominent in recent years, a tendency Emma Dabiri finds striking in comparison with previous celebratory accounts of Afropolitanism (2016). The extensive rejection of the term reveals, to my mind, the shortcomings of a concept which was received enthusiastically in the media as a fashionable trend when it had not been sufficiently explored at the theoretical level, with the consequence that its meaning still remains to be clarified and many of its uses are either confusing or confused.

The issues I would like to address here are related to these debates and to the impact the concept has had in the literary field. It is significant that both Selasi and Mbembe include writers as being among the professions which are more prone to an Afropolitan perspective. Indeed, writers seem to occupy a prominent position in online listings of Afropolitans (e.g. BET Interactive, 2016), with novelists such as Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, Teju Cole and Taiye Selasi herself often at the top of the list, though media and fashion professionals such as Minna Salami also feature strongly. Even Makokha refers enthusiastically to an 'Afropolitan generation' of African writers:

[Afropolitan writers] are both cosmopolitan and internationally acclaimed. Most of them live outside the continent but remain committed to the cultural politics of their own native/natal nations and the continent at large. They are the cosmopolitan African writers – a new generation that can boldly lay claim to the name, 'the Afropolitan generation'.

(Makokha, 2011: 17)

However, these listings often respond to a frivolous deployment of the term in contexts like the media, where Afropolitan celebrities are typically associated with economic success and Western consumerism to such an extent that the lists themselves can be seen as little less than arbitrary, including as they do mainly successful, trendy, young African professionals usually, but not always, living in the diaspora. At this stage I find it necessary to make explicit my own understanding of the term, which I find useful at the theoretical level as relating to an African cosmopolitanism and the privileged position granted by mobility and freedom of choice.

While I value the Afropolitan as a welcome sign of renewal in the perception of Africa, as a concept which places contemporary Africa and African identities on the cosmopolitan

map, I am aware that its unexpected popularity has done great harm to its potentialities, leading to ambiguity in its usage and a staunch opposition to it that is also visible in the literary field. Indeed, in her previous quotation Makokha highlights the commitment of Afropolitan writers to their native countries and the African continent at large. Yet, some African authors have publicly stated their opposition to the term despite their commitment to Africa and the fact that they are generally considered Afropolitan. Such is the case of Nigerian Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, who in 2013 rejected the term, arguing that 'I'm not an Afropolitan. I'm African, happily so' (Barber, 2013). Another case in point which is even more notorious considering the hybrid background of the author is that of Yewande Omotoso, a Caribbean-Nigerian novelist living in South Africa, who explains that:

Being an Afropolitan to me sounds as if you are supposed to be a mediator between the West and Africa because you have travelled and lived overseas. I have no torn allegiances and I have no current interest of ever living in America or the UK. I want to live here. I'm of the continent. ... The term Afropolitan only seems useful for the West as it gives the West an opportunity to understand and even 'consume' Africa.

(Fasselt, 2015: 235)

Omotoso thus rejects Afropolitanism on the grounds of its association with Western consumerism, which she finds unrelated to her own experience. While the dominant view in academia has been to take for granted the acceptance of the label on the part of artists, intellectuals and professionals, it is interesting that dissenting voices like those of Omotoso and Ngozi Adichie should emerge, which leads me to one of the issues I intend to explore in this essay: to what extent do authors have a say in being perceived as Afropolitan? Is self-identification relevant for inclusion within Afropolitanism? For Mbembe, Afropolitanism is not only 'an aesthetic and a particular poetic of the world' but also 'a political and cultural stance in relation to the nation, to race and to the issue of difference in general' (2007: 28–29), which implies some positioning on the part of the individual, like being a feminist or a socialist. However, this does not seem to be taken into account in listings of Afropolitan celebrities, as we have seen.

In my discussion I would like to focus specifically on the literary field, since it is my view that literature, and particularly fiction, has contributed greatly to the popularity of the concept, not only because of the media influence of writers labelled in this way through literary awards, interviews or book launches, but also because of its role in the inscription of the Afropolitan model. If writing can be interpreted as the expression of an author's interests, a number of novels published recently have been perceived as the expression of an 'Afropolitan spirit' because of their portrayal of characters and experiences which can be considered 'Afropolitan'. Indeed, the labels 'Afropolitan literature' and 'Afropolitan authors' have started to be used in the literary sphere, although there is still doubt about their usefulness. Susanne Gehrman mentions 2013 as 'the year of an incredible boom of African diasporic literature' (2016: 66), most of which she views as 'Afropolitan' and, therefore, as 'worth reading because it goes much deeper than some of the cyberspace presences and discussions into the concept of Afropolitanism' (66). One clear example of this new fiction is Taiye Selasi's debut novel, *Ghana Must Go* (2013), which depicts an African diasporic family who has to live scattered around the world. But there are certainly others: Nigerian-American Teju Cole's widely acclaimed novel *Open City* (2011), which focuses on a solitary Nigerian immigrant in New York, is often mentioned in online lists of Afropolitan fiction, as well as Zimbabwean NoViolet Bulawayo's *We Need New Names* (2013) and Congolese Alain Mabanckou's novel in French,

translated as *Tomorrow I'll be Twenty* (2010), to name only a few (see for example BET Interactive, 2016).²

In the novels mentioned above, the topics approached have been read to a great extent as proof of their authors' involvement in the new trend, that is, of their 'Afropolitan attitude', which leads me to another interesting question: To what extent can we talk about Afropolitan writing? Taiye Selasi herself has said that the 'Afropolitan novel' does not exist as a genre, as Afropolitanism refers to individuals, not to fiction (Gehrmann, 2016: 69). It has even been said that the intended audience for 'Afropolitan literature' is 'fellow Afropolitans' (Bosch Santana, 2016: 121). In order to explore these issues, I will concentrate on the position and literary contribution of two recent authors who are very different in terms of social background and diasporic experiences, but who might be considered Afropolitan due to their status as members of the new generation of African writers living outside the continent. One is Aminatta Forna (Britain, 1964–), often taken as a representative of the new Afropolitan trend and mentioned in online references to Afropolitan writers (e.g. Afropolitan 360°, 2012; BET Interactive, 2016). The other is Chika Unigwe (Nigeria, 1974–), not usually cited among Afropolitans despite her current diasporic position. Both are today successful novelists whose literary careers started to gain attention in the first decade of the new millennium. In order to examine their writing and their position with respect to the concept of the Afropolitan, it is necessary to examine in some depth their backgrounds and literary trajectories, which shall be discussed below.

Aminatta Forna is a clear example of a diasporic individual. She was born in Glasgow, UK, to a Scottish mother and a Sierra Leonean father, a doctor who became an important politician in his country in the 1960s. As a consequence, her childhood was divided between Britain and Sierra Leone, and she spent periods in Iran and Thailand after her father's death because of her stepfather's job as a diplomat (Forna, 2015: 2). Her family background and middle-class origin (see Williams, 2007: 5) seem to qualify her as an Afropolitan in Taiye Selasi's terms, belonging as she does to what Selasi calls 'the newest generation of African emigrants', the children of those who left Africa between 1960 and 1975 (2005: 2–3). Selasi refers to 'cultural hybridity' and 'ethnic fusion' while highlighting the multilingualism of Afropolitans as well as their link to one or several 'G8 cities' (2005: 1–2), a description Forna seems to match perfectly. In fact, Selasi's profile of the Afropolitan borrows much from the concept of cosmopolitanism as discussed by theorists like Kwame Anthony Appiah in *Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in a World of Strangers* (2006). If the cosmopolitan can be seen as 'the privileged subject of cultural goods and vocabularies that are only accessible to elites' (Gikandi, 2010: 24), 'a connoisseur of modern cultural goods' (23), Selasi defends a similar view of Afropolitanism when, including herself, she affirms: 'You'll know us by our funny blend of London fashion, New York jargon, African ethics, and academic successes' (2005: 2), characteristics that Forna (to a greater or lesser degree) is likely to possess. Forna's former profession as a journalist and documentary-maker for the BBC also places her within the orbit of Afropolitanism as the media has been seen as a sphere which is more prone to an Afropolitan perspective. Her background thus grants her a privileged position as a 'cosmopolitan with African roots', the definition Susanne Gehrmann has offered of the Afropolitan (2016: 1), and which I share.

Unigwe, on the other hand, only left her native Nigeria to settle in Belgium in 1995 as an adult after finishing her university degree and marrying her Belgian boyfriend.³ Thus, although having several siblings living in the USA and the UK and a relatively privileged

position in Nigeria as a university graduate, Unigwe's experience as a diasporic individual differs greatly from those of Forna and Selasi. In fact, she has authored several texts exploring the culture shock she experienced on arrival in Belgium, one the short autobiographical essay 'Losing My Voice' (Unigwe, 2013), where the metaphor of the lost voice is used to reflect her inability to communicate with Belgians, which was only overcome after several months of intensive Dutch lessons: 'In that first month of my migration, I was busy losing my voice in small imperceptible ways. I was finding out that nothing I knew before seemed to be of consequence. Not language. Not social etiquette' (2). Culture shock can be defined as 'the feeling of disorientation, loneliness, insecurity or confusion that can occur when someone leaves his or her home country to live in a new culture' (Harzing, 2016). And in Unigwe's acknowledgement of experiencing this phenomenon, she differentiates herself from Selasi's Afropolitans, who 'belong to no single geography, but feel at home in many' (2005: 2).

This ability to move smoothly between cultures, which is referred to as mobility in contemporary critical discourses, has also been perceived by authors other than Selasi as a central concept of Afropolitanism, just as it is seen as being central to cosmopolitanism. Indeed for Susanne Gehrman, the essential characteristics of cosmopolitanism, as explored by Appiah (2006), are present in the Afropolitan to such an extent that 'cosmopolitanism can be said to be an indispensable component of Afropolitanism', with the only difference being that the Afropolitan has a 'privileged bonding with Africa' (Gehrman, 2016: 63). Mobility is in fact one of the features that makes both cosmo- and Afro-politanism different from the common experience of migration that Chika Unigwe might be said to represent, as Gehrman highlights that 'the cosmopolitan globetrotter's mobility has often just as well been perceived as an elitist type of travelling when compared to the average migrant's peregrination' (63). However, after overcoming her culture shock and achieving literary success Unigwe has now moved to the USA, where she has chosen to live since 2013, which implies some mobility of the type suggested above as well as some freedom of choice and, therefore, in some way a move towards Afropolitanism.

The second point that deserves discussion is the nature of the two writers' literary production. Although both started writing fiction in the 2000s, the topics and even genres of their first publications differ greatly. Forna initiated her literary career by writing a memoir of her father's imprisonment and execution in 1975, when she was 10 years of age, after he resigned as a Minister of Finance for Siaka Stevens's government in Sierra Leone. Entitled *The Devil that Danced on the Water. A Daughter's Memoir* (2003) and published originally in the UK, where she is resident, it is a first-person narration of her childhood in Sierra Leone, and references the British literary tradition on the one hand, such as a famous quote by eighteenth-century poet Alexander Pope – her father's favourite – and African cultures on the other. Her reflections reveal her understanding of the latter:

In the African oral tradition great events and insignificant moments, the ordinary and the extraordinary, are notches on the same wheel. They exist in relation to each other. The little occurrences are as important as the grand designs: the threads are the texture of truth that separate man-made myth from fact. They are the testimonies; the words of history's eyewitnesses.

(Forna, 2003: 18)

As a consequence, the hybrid nature of the book is clear from the beginning, as well as the author's love for her ancestors' home, as can also be observed in the numerous reviews referring to it as 'an African memoir' or the story of 'an African childhood'. Moreover, the genre of the memoir, like the travel narrative, can be said to be particularly suited to an Afropolitan

perspective in the terms suggested by Makokha (2011: 17), since it reveals a lot about the author's commitment to African realities. In Aminatta Forna the choice of non-fiction and a text about her early life in Sierra Leone reflect a commitment which places her work within the framework of Afropolitanism. After the success of the book, which was shortlisted for the Samuel Johnson Prize for non-fiction, her following publications have been mainly fiction and essays, some focusing explicitly on African topics and settings.

Unigwe's first publications appeared in the 1990s while she was a university student in Nigeria and they were mainly volumes of poetry – *Tear Drops* (1993) and *Born in Nigeria* (1995) – which dealt to some extent with Africanness. After a period with little or no writing coinciding with her relocation in Europe, these were followed by short fiction and children's books such as *A Rainbow for Dinner* (2003a) and *Ije at School* (2003c) in the 2000s, also offering diverse explorations of African identities and realities. Her first novel, *The Phoenix* (*De Feniks*), was published in Dutch in 2005 and in English in 2007. Although it portrays a Nigerian protagonist and first-person narrator, Oge, who lives in Belgium, it should be highlighted that the plot in fact focuses on the trauma produced after Oge's young son dies and she is then diagnosed with cancer:

Life is a Fata Morgana. Teasing. Taunting. And when you are most desperate, it dissolves into nothingness. The illusion that is my life is breaking up. It started with Jordi's death. And continued with a discovery I made when I reached under my red sweater for a good scratch. I felt a lump. Small. Hard. Like milk clots when one is breast-feeding.

(Unigwe, 2007: 168)

Thus, grief and loneliness are explored in *The Phoenix* as part of universal human experience, in consonance with the shift in topics Unigwe herself noticed in her writing after settling in Belgium:

When I began to write again, I discovered that I was not writing the kind of fiction I would have written back home. Certainly not at first. I wrote about displacement and sorrow. The voices of immigrants filled my head ... My characters were mostly melancholic women unable to return home but lacking the tools (or perhaps the temperament) to fit into their new home. They were victims browbeaten into silence by an alien culture and an alien climate.

(Unigwe, 2013: 6)

The autobiographical connections between Oge's diasporic situation and background and the author's make us think the experiences depicted in *The Phoenix* are not Afropolitan at all, as the protagonist is confronted by serious conflicts which prevent her from having any choice in life or being able to celebrate her position. Rather, she feels the pain of loneliness and social exclusion resulting from her migration exacerbated by the traumas she is going through. A hint of hope does though seem to be offered at the end of the novel: a marriage which might be saved, and the wish to fight against illness, in a symbolic 'resurrection' or new 'lease of life' (Unigwe, 2007: 183) which gives significance to the novel's title.

Lack of freedom and enjoyment is also present in Unigwe's second novel, *On Black Sisters' Street*, published initially in Dutch as *Fata Morgana* (2007) and later in English (2009), which attracted more international attention than her first, being awarded the Nigeria Prize for Literature (2012). Again, the protagonists are unhappy women, this time four prostitutes brought illegally from Africa to the Belgian city of Antwerp who want to rebel but are not allowed to do so. It is significant that the only one who attempts rebellion, Sisi, ends up dead, murdered by her pimp in a narrative that is full of suffering, fragmented narrations and the early dreams of these young women. As in *The Phoenix*, Afropolitanism cannot be said to be

present in this novel, although it is something desired by Sisi as she moves through the city and settles in a suburb with her boyfriend, before her tragic death:

She could be anyone from anywhere. She could be a married woman with a husband called Peter and a huge duplex in Ikeja: the sort of woman who could afford regular holidays abroad, living from hotel to hotel in cities across the globe, Mastercard and Visa Gold at her disposal.

She could be a professional single woman with money to burn and places to see. She was any story she chose. Far away from the people she knew and who knew her.

(Unigwe, 2010: 258–259)

An affluent position and the freedom to travel around the world are characteristics expected of the Afropolitans Sisi dreams about, though she is ignorant of the word and indeed the concept itself, but she is aware that a certain class of Africans enjoy this lifestyle.

But her reality is utterly different and she dies before realising it was all a dream. *On Black Sisters' Street* has been said to be about feminism and the objectification of women (Eze, 2014a: 90), and certainly its characters, though living in the diaspora, lack the qualities associated with the Afropolitan and even the freedom to be visible in society, as they are illegal immigrants with a profession which is rejected by everyone.

Unigwe's next novel, *Night Dancer* (2012), is significantly different because it does not focus on migrant experience, but on gender relations in contemporary Nigeria. It is divided into three sections corresponding to three different time periods: the 1960s, 2001 and 2002, and it portrays a contemporary Nigerian character, Mma, exploring her family past after the solitary death of her mother, Ezi, and discovering that Ezi's downfall was the consequence of her rebellion against patriarchal customs which subjected women to polygamous marriages. For Bernardine Evaristo it depicts a woman's 'rebellion against the cultural norms of her community, especially the impact on her daughter ... The price Ezi pays for leaving her husband is to become a pariah' (2012: 1). Thus, *Night Dancer* focuses more on local traditions and their influence today than on globalisation and diaspora. However, despite her unhappy, solitary childhood in adult life, Mma enjoys the freedom to travel through Nigeria in order to discover the truth about her past, which could be related in some way to the freedom of the Afropolitan to move between different realities, although it is my perception that as readers we do not know enough about her to be able to include her in this group, even when following Chielozona Eze's broad interpretation of the term (2014b). Moreover, Mma is still oppressed in a similar way to her mother since her boyfriend does not consider her origin as a repudiated daughter respectful enough for her to be introduced to his family, which places her, like her mother, in a disadvantaged social position until the very end, when he seems to change his attitude, although maybe too late (Unigwe, 2012: 261).

In *Black Messiah* (2014), Unigwe's most recent novel to date (only published in Dutch at the time of this paper), we find another exploration of a, this time more distant, past as it offers a fictionalised biography of Olaudah Equiano, the famous freed slave and abolitionist who lived in eighteenth-century Britain. His autobiography, *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa, the African* (1789 [2001]), widely read at the time, is thought to be the first influential slave narrative ever written and to have contributed greatly to the abolition of the slave trade in Britain in 1807. Equiano was allowed by his master in America to read and write and to earn his freedom, after which he moved to Britain, where he pioneered the abolitionist movement in the 1780s. Although there are doubts about parts of his biography, Equiano states in his memoir that he was born in Igboiland, so

he is apparently of the same ethnic origin as Unigwe herself, which may be one of the reasons for her interest in him. Despite its temporal distance from the present day, it is interesting to note to what extent Equiano might be considered an early Afropolitan in Mbembe's non-contemporary perception of the term, since his experiences allowed him to get some education, visit different countries and finally adopt a cosmopolitan attitude, always with a commitment to the abolitionist cause and therefore to Africa. Whether Unigwe was attracted to him for this reason is something we ignore, but in my view *Black Messiah* is the closest novel she has written to what could be called 'Afropolitan literature', albeit a very different text from Selasi's and those set in contemporary times.

As previously mentioned, apart from long fiction, Unigwe has also written an important number of short stories, some of them having been awarded literary prizes, which leads us to pay some attention to them in this essay. After examining many of them, it can be said that most deal with either a traumatic experience of migration from Africa to Europe ('Anonymous', 'Cotton Candy'), an unhappy life in Nigeria ('Dreams', 'The Smell of Home') or the complexities of motherhood ('Bethlehem', 'Possessing the Secret of Joy'), sometimes fusing several of these themes within the same text. Such is the case of 'Borrowed Smile' (2003b), which depicts the shattered illusions of a girl who abandons her sad life in a Nigerian ghetto for one of prostitution in Antwerp. With an innovative second-person narrative which encourages identification in the reader, the protagonist is seduced in adolescence and imagines a prosperous future in Europe with the world at her feet:

He says he will take you anywhere you want to go as he cradles your breasts, like they were newly born twins. He kisses your ears and tells you to choose. Antwerp. Brussels. Milan. Madrid. Barcelona. Amsterdam. Berlin. Frankfurt. The world is your oyster. All you have to do is say where. And he will make sure you get there.

(Unigwe, 2003b: 31)

However, the reality she finds in Belgium is much less glamorous than she expected, though she soon learns how to fake a smile whenever she returns home to visit her family. Another fusion work, 'Thinking of Angel' (2004), offers the reflections of a lonely Nigerian woman in Belgium suffering from cancer and remembering her friend, Angel, back in Nigeria, who died of Aids, who was a far more extroverted, cheerful girl than the protagonist herself, and challenged life but was punished with an early death: 'Nobody could lead Angel astray. She was the head of the gang, entering where the others feared to tread' (Unigwe, 2004: 2). All in all, Unigwe's focus on unhappy characters who feel trapped or socially isolated suggests, once again, little connection between her work and the recent conceptualisation of the Afropolitan, in spite of revealing her clear commitment to African realities. As a consequence, Unigwe's short fiction cannot in my opinion be considered Afropolitan as it is far from the typical expectations of Afropolitan writing: it neither introduces Afropolitan characters nor is a celebration of a privileged diasporic position.

If Unigwe's writing is not usually perceived as Afropolitan, the position Aminatta Forna's fiction occupies is completely the opposite. Her literary debut being an autobiographical narrative on her African childhood is significant enough, and immediately locates her as an 'Afropolitan' author with 'Afropolitan' concerns. Her first novel, *Ancestor Stones* (2006), continues this trend as it portrays an African diasporic female character, Abie, who travels from London in 2003 to the land of her ancestors to explore the lives of her aunts, the daughters of her grandfather's wives. Although we might imagine Sierra Leone as the setting for the narrative, no mention is actually made of it in the novel: only the name of an invented village

appears, Rofathane, together with numerous references to the African continent in general, its peoples and traditions. Indeed, reflections on Africa are frequent in *Ancestor Stones*, particularly in the opening chapter, where the narrator compares the European conquerors' perceptions of the continent with African perceptions:

Five hundred years ago, a caravel flying the colours of the King of Portugal rounded the curve of the continent. She had become becalmed somewhere around the Cape Verde Islands, and run low on stocks, food and water. ... The sailors thought they had found no less a place than the Garden of Eden.

And for a time that's what Europeans thought Africa was. Paradise. ...

I thought of the sailors' story. And for a long time, I thought it was just that. A story. About how Europeans discovered us and we stopped being a blank space on a map. But months later, ... I realised the story was really about something else. It was about different ways of seeing. The sailors were blind to the signs, incapable of seeing the pattern of logic, just because it was different to their own. And the African way of seeing: arcane, invisible yet visible, apparent to those who belong.

(Forna, 2007: 5–6)

The choice of the whole of Africa as Abie's land of identification rather than a specific African country contributes to a great extent to the vindication of an African community, which is in line with an Afropolitan perspective. Furthermore, the presence of a diasporic character who is the listener of the stories narrated and who responds to an Afropolitan profile – as she has the freedom and the economic resources to travel back and forth between London and Rofathane with her family – is also revealing. It is certainly because of the tone and topics in her first two works that Forna's writing is often perceived as Afropolitan. However, her subsequent novels challenge this perception in profound and surprising ways.

Thus, *The Memory of Love* (2010) focuses on recent historical events, the Sierra Leonean Civil War of the 1990s, in order to explore the trauma it produced through its portrayal of three characters who interact at a local hospital. One is a British psychologist, Adrian, a volunteer with conflicts of his own who treats patients suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder. The second is a local surgeon, Kai, who is busy reconstructing the limbs of the thousands mutilated during the war. The third is a retired Sierra Leonean university professor, Elias Cole, who, because of his obsession with a woman, committed the worst of betrayals and needs to find peace before dying. It is significant that none of these characters can be considered Afropolitan in any respect, as they are all crippled in some way by suffering and trauma, unable to solve their conflicts, and none of them inhabits that privileged space of freedom which grants a cosmopolitan vision. Neither do the topics explored seem to be close to a vindication or celebration of African cosmopolitanism; instead, the theme which has been perceived as central is that of healing (Habla, 2010: 1), which is only achieved through the sharing of experiences and the overcoming of silence, in a narrative where pain, despair and the will to survive prevail:

Adrian remembers his early patients, or would-be-patients, their reluctance to talk about anything that had happened to them. He put it down to trauma. Since then he has grown to understand it was also part of a way of being that existed here. He had realised it gradually, perhaps fully only at this moment. It was almost as though they were afraid of becoming implicated in the circumstance of their own lives. The same is true of most of the men at the mental hospital. Questions discomfit them. Remembering, talking. Mamakay is right, it's as though the entire nation are sworn to some terrible secret. So they elect muteness, the only way of complying and resisting at the same time.

(Forna, 2011: 321–322)

It is interesting that the only characters in the novel who might be perceived to be to any extent Afropolitan before the war breaks out are the couple formed by Julius and Saffia. Both have a university education, lived in Britain for a while and seem to possess a liberal view of a world beyond Africa. However, both have their illusions crushed: Julius dies in prison as a consequence of being betrayed by Elias, who Saffia then marries, ignorant of his role. But Saffia becomes a sad, unhappy woman until, approaching her death, as her husband recalls: '[i]t was as if she had realised her error in marrying me, but now it was too late. So, as many women do, she swallowed the bitterness of her regret and submitted. The stillness was what was left' (Forna, 2011: 294). *The Memory of Love* stands as Forna's most successful novel to date, being awarded the Commonwealth Writers' Prize in 2011. However, the specific context it explores discourages any perception of it as an Afropolitan text, despite initial hints to this effect in the secondary characters mentioned.

In her next and most recent novel, *The Hired Man* (2013), Forna continues to address the context of war, but this time with the peculiarity that it does not introduce African characters or settings. Instead it is set in Europe, and portrays life in a small Croatian town in the 2000s, some years after the conflict in former Yugoslavia. The arrival of a British family who have bought a house there for their summer holidays stirs memories in one of the locals, Duro Kolak, who was involved in the ethnic cleansing that characterised that brutal period, and who becomes the narrator of past and present events:

Laura arrived in Gost and opened a trapdoor. Beneath the trapdoor was an infinite tunnel and that tunnel led to the past. In the last days of the family's stay in Gost I seemed to have become trapped in the tunnel, somewhere between a time sixteen years ago and now.

(Forna, 2013: 233)

The parallels with *The Memory of Love* are numerous, from the themes of betrayal and violence to memory, trauma and the will to survive. However, Africa is absent from the narrative, thus signalling a shift in Forna's concerns towards a more universal exploration of war. Nevertheless, a significant degree of continuity can be established with her earlier fiction as *The Hired Man* explores 'Forna's overriding theme: the gradual accretion of small, seemingly insignificant acts of betrayal that eventually find expression in full-scale horror. In that respect, she remains committed to a single story' (Hickling, 2013: 2). But it is a story where Afropolitanism is no longer present.

Apart from the aforementioned works, Forna has also published children's fiction (*The Angel of Mexico City*, 2014) and, more interestingly for our purposes, essays and interviews where she discusses issues such as writing and the socio-political situation in Sierra Leone. Her views on these matters are of great interest for our discussion since they indirectly reveal her attitude to the concept of Afropolitanism, which leads to the third point to be explored in this essay: the two writers' personal identification or disidentification with the term. Whereas Forna's opinions on Sierra Leone make evident her concern about the realities of her father's country, and hence about the African continent – made material in the project she has funded to build a school and a farm in her family's village, Rogbonko (Farndale, 2013: 1; Steffens, 2008: 13) – her views on writing reveal her perceptions of literature and of her position as a writer, and they never refer explicitly to the concept of Afropolitanism. In this respect, a particularly interesting article has the thought-provoking title 'Don't Judge a Book by its Author' (2015), wherein she openly argues against the classification of writers under any label. As she explains, citing Ngugi wa Thiong'o's rejection of national canons,

All this classifying, it seems to me, is the very antithesis of literature. The way of literature is to seek universality. Writers try to reach beyond those things that divide us: culture, class, gender, race. Given the chance, we would resist classification. I have never met a writer who wishes to be described as a female writer, gay writer, black writer, Asian writer or African writer. We *hyphenated writers* complain about *the privilege accorded to the white male writer*, he who dominates the western canon and is the only one called simply 'writer'.

(Forna, 2015: 2–3, emphasis added)

This affirmation corroborates Forna's previous allusions to the pressure put on writers by publishers' expectations, as well as her determination not to be pigeonholed (see Steffens, 2008: 13; Wheelwright, 2006: 3), which add to her wish to be perceived as simply a writer: 'I'm a writer and everything else happens on the side' (Williams, 2007: 5). My inference from this is that, despite generally being listed among Afropolitans, Forna does not seem to identify with any particular tendency, which brings about an ethical problem: in view of this, to what extent are we entitled to consider her Afropolitan? Even though her social background and first publications have features in common with the new trend, it is my view that her own perceptions of herself and her writing should prevail over anything else. In consequence, Forna's classification as an Afropolitan writer is more than questionable, and leads to the questioning of the validity of the label for writers and other professionals who have not explicitly expressed their connection with the movement.

Like Forna, Unigwe has also published several essays, most of them on African cultures, African women and her own diasporic experience, thus revealing the African consciousness which is also present in her fiction.⁴ However, as we have discussed above, the topics approached in her first publications and her position as a first-generation diasporic individual have generally placed her outside the Afropolitan tendency despite occasional inclusions (see Derulo, 2015). It is significant that, like Forna, Unigwe has never publicly discussed the term or given herself the label, so my perception in this respect is that we are not entitled to identify her as such. Nevertheless, in her case there is a circumstance that deserves attention and that brings to the fore the temporal dimension of the concept: as she has lived in the USA since 2013, where she is now Professor of Creative Writing at Brown University, does this not, as suggested earlier, imply her experience is now another, closer to that of the Afropolitan in terms of class and social mobility? In that case, maybe we should reconsider the uses made of the concept to date.

Zimbabwean writer Petina Gappah, a close friend of Taiye Selasi, who lives in Geneva, has said that she does not consider herself Afropolitan because she was born in Zimbabwe as 'the daughter of a goatherd; ... the first person in [her] family to be in the middle class', but her son born in Europe might probably be one due to his privileged diasporic position and his belonging to the second generation (Phillips, 2016: 6). Can this be applied to Unigwe's children born in Belgium, or even to Unigwe herself, now that her social position has shifted from being a lonely, ordinary migrant to an affluent successful writer? As hinted at before, my perception is that Afropolitanism should be viewed, not as a way to classify people's lives and careers, but as a description of a position which is subject to change and, therefore, may undergo evolution. That said, having a privileged diasporic position is not in itself sufficient for a person to be considered Afropolitan, as Forna's rejection of classifications reveals. In my view, an explicit, active attitude of support for the tendency is also necessary, of the kind offered by Selasi in interviews, essays and novels.

Furthermore, even if we consider Unigwe Afropolitan, there is the question of her writing. Indeed, an open literary exploration of the Afropolitan attitude through characters and plots is another interesting feature to be taken into account, but Unigwe's fiction deals predominantly with sorrowful situations and painful states of mind, not at all in tune with Afropolitan celebration. In this respect, Unigwe's recent novel on Oludah Equiano reveals a shift in concerns which can be interpreted as a move towards an Afropolitan perspective, since it depicts a story of success in an African diasporic individual even though with a non-contemporary plot. At this point, and not considering the authors' self-identifications, we might even state that Chika Unigwe seems closer today to the assumptions of Afropolitanism than Aminatta Forna, whose recent fiction has moved away from the topics expected under the label.

The conclusion to be drawn from this is that if we take Afropolitanism as an attitude that may change with time, that is, as non-fixed and temporary, then it does not seem adequate to talk about 'Afropolitan writers' or 'Afropolitan people', but rather it would be preferable to mention 'Afropolitan concerns' or 'an Afropolitan phase' in the evolution of a writer, if the author explicitly identifies himself or herself in those terms. As for the literary inscription of the Afropolitan, it has certainly been carried out by prominent figures openly self-identifying as Afropolitan (i.e. Taiye Selasi), but there are other writers who seem problematic, for example, Forna herself, who has never expressed any connection with the new tendency, despite the themes of her early publications, or Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, whose novel *Americanah* (2013) has been read as representative of the trend, although the author has openly stated she is not Afropolitan (Barber, 2013). In light of what has been discussed here, it seems too daring to refer to 'Afropolitan literature' unless an author has explicitly stated his or her identification with the label at the personal and/or literary level. As a consequence of this scenario, it is difficult to foresee what the future holds for the new concept: i.e. whether it will be consolidated thanks to the work of theorists and practitioners in the literary field and other spheres, whether it will be transformed as a result of new contributions, or whether it will eventually disappear because of the inherent contradictions it contains. Meanwhile, we can do little but wait, hoping that maybe, as Emma Dabiri suggests, the transformative space literature provides will contribute to the production of more creative, insightful articulations of the concept (2016: 107).

Notes

1. Tveit, for example, plays with the title of Selasi's debut novel *Ghana Must Go* (2013), whereas Brian Bwesigye seems to allude to Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's well-known, widely acclaimed TED talk 'The Danger of a Single Story' (2009).
2. Articles such as Gehrman's (2016) also discuss some of these novels within the framework of Afropolitanism.
3. As a matter of fact, Unigwe continued her studies while in Belgium, completing her PhD at the University of Leiden in 2004.
4. These concerns can be found in 'The Burden of My Being' (2005), 'Sex, Women and (Hu)Woman Rights' (2001) and 'The Near-Impossibility of Assimilation in Belgium' (2015). In 'How to Be an African' (2009), she even reflects ironically on the stereotypes of Africa in the West.

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3 Lost in translation

Re-reading the contemporary Afrodiasporic condition
in Taiye Selasi's *Ghana Must Go*

Aretha Phiri

ABSTRACT

This essay maintains that where Afropolitanism has been contested in several critical quarters, Taiye Selasi's debut novel, *Ghana Must Go* (2013), offers a more nuanced and sophisticated appreciation of the African diaspora than is provided in her seminal essay 'Bye-Bye Babar'. Demonstrating how the novel articulates more complexly and illuminates more creatively the cultural and subjective anxiety associated with the negotiation of identitarian roots and routes, the essay puts forward an existential, materialist re-reading of Afropolitanism which considers the lived intersectional interactions of race, ethnicity, gender, class and age in the formation of contemporary Afrodiasporic subjectivities.

Introduction: debating Afropolitanism

In her seminal essay 'Bye-Bye Babar' (2005), Taiye Selasi describes the aesthetic appeal and political agency of 'the newest generation of African emigrants', whose embodied specificity *and* universality testify to the increasingly mobile and fluid, globalised character of twenty-first-century African subjectivities. Within the diasporic frame of an interconnected politics of identity and location, the Afropolitan character and mode of being of the contemporary African diaspora is distinct from its postcolonial precedent which, emanating particularly from the wave of African migration from the continent between the 1960s and the 1980s, tended to emphasise the link with, and bemoan the loss of, an authentic collective culture.¹ Afropolitanism's disruption of a postcolonial 'linear progress narrative' that does not account for the qualitatively multidimensional character of the African diaspora (Wright, 2015: 18) is endorsed in some contemporary critical quarters (see Gikandi, 2011; Mbembe, 2007). While cognisant of his/her lineage(s), the Afropolitan Afrodiasporic subject rejects the allure of nativism for a cosmopolitan 'allegiance to the worldwide community of human beings' (Nussbaum, 1996: 4).

Yet, not unlike cosmopolitanism itself, the political efficacy of Afropolitanism has come under criticism. Where critics have challenged neoliberal cosmopolitan thought as premised on a conventional, abstract understanding of the person as an element of cultural exchange (see Pollock et al., 2000),² still others have questioned the specific application and

applicability of its African referent (see Gikandi, 2010). Debating here its ideological inclusivity, some critics have dismissed what they view as Afropolitanism's elitism (see Tveit, 2013), commercialism (see Dabiri, 2016; Musila, 2016) and pretentiousness (see Aidoo, 2016), all of which appear to undermine its ethical and cultural responsibilities (see Ede, 2016) and actively to sustain global socio-political hierarchies and inequalities (see Toivanen, 2015) that impact negatively on African literary outputs, accessibility and representation (see Harris, 2014; Ojwang and Titlestad, 2014).

In these critiques is the necessary problematisation of Afropolitanism as a contested, rather than putative, subjective ideology. But while the apparent (mis)appropriation by markets in the north of 'African' literary outputs reflects the continued challenge of global inequities, these criticisms ironically reveal something of their own embeddedness in conservative and parochial (re)colonising structures, despite literary evidence of Africa's historical and dialectical internationalism.³ More significantly, insinuations that a contemporary brand of Afropolitan Afrodiasporic writing is 'insufficiently African' (Selasi, 2015) betray a fundamental anxiety around the contamination of that elusive but doggedly, extant, racialised African 'texture', exposing 'the very narrow and particular way in which Africa is used, signified' (Wright, 2013: 6) to reinforce ethnic and cultural particularity and thus to reinstate exclusionary hierarchies of blackness.

It is precisely this over-determined, prescriptive ethnographic imperative for the representation of an archetypal, definitive African 'everyday life' and identity which still frames postcolonial thinking, literary studies and practice that is increasingly being resisted and transgressed by contemporary black African writers of the diaspora, including Helon Habila (2014), Ben Okri (2014), NoViolet Bulawayo (2013), Maaza Mengiste (2013), Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie (2009) and Binyavanga Wainaina (2008). Through a worldly aesthetic and cosmopolitan poetic of less explicitly politicised, idiosyncratic versions and visions of African diasporic culture, contemporary Afrodiasporic writing reflects and facilitates the mechanisms of an increasingly contentious and inevitably protean blackness (Harvey, 2016).⁴

has many faces, forms and agendas ... We are moving into a future that will render blackness more opaque, questionable, complex and potentially contradictory than ever before – even though its dominant public face remains that of poverty, unemployment and the rest of the social miseries.

(Harvey, 2016)

Observing subjectivity and identity as transitional processes and terrains (Pollock et al., 2000) embedded in cultural and ideological mongrelism (Njami, 2007), Afropolitan fiction of the African diaspora advocates a phenomenology that seeks to complicate – 'engage with, critique, and celebrate' – in order to review 'what it means to be African' (Selasi, 2005) in a contemporary postcolonial, post-apartheid global milieu and imagination.

In its ability to extend repertoires of and discourses on blackness, a case can be made and space created for the expansive vision and transformative potential of an Afrodiasporic writing that is decidedly 'of the world' (Selasi, 2005) in its symptomatic translation of geo-political, spatial mobility into 'interior mobility', what Chielozona Eze (2016: 116) identifies as that existentially negotiable relation to the world. More specifically, the imaginative crossing-over of socio-political and sociocultural 'personal borders' enables subjective translation through the trespassing of the more porous 'boundaries of the self' (Selasi, 2013c: 14). That is, Afropolitan Afrodiasporic fiction embeds the contemporary Afrodiasporic condition in an ethical frame in which respect for the diversity and specificity of all people renders each

person simultaneously responsive to the intrinsic otherness of the self. In initiating a cosmopolitan understanding of 'humanity in all its guises' (Nussbaum, 1996: 9), the promise is not just of 'some moral re-examination of the world' (Eze, 2014: 244) but, more fundamentally, of some ethical reinterpretation of the self in the world. The dialogic, rather than dialectic, impulse established therein necessitates a 'different kind of imagination; a different kind of thinking; a different kind of language' (Dlamini et al., 2013: 37) in an effort to read existence(s) differently.⁵

In this regard and rather ironically, Selasi's debut novel, *Ghana Must Go* (2013a), offers a more nuanced and sophisticated appreciation of the complex condition of the Afropolitan subject than does her essay. Maintaining that there is a subtle but apparent tension between her representation of the Afropolitan subject in her essay and the embodied experiences of (contemporary) Afrodiasporic subjectivities portrayed in her novel, this essay will extend Chielozona Eze's reading of the inter-relational moral implications of Afropolitanism (2014: 239) by exploring in *Ghana Must Go* its intra-relational existential implications premised on the materiality of Afrodiasporic subjectivity. The essay expands Afropolitanism's vision as 'an aesthetic and a particular poetic of the world' (Mbembe, 2007: 28) by observing how the novel domesticates and reinterprets an abstract phenomenology through its pointed focus on the intimacies of family life and the intricacies of Afrodiasporic experiences. Considering thus how 'the intimate recesses of the domestic space become sites for history's most intricate invasions' (Bhabha, 1992: 141), this essay examines in *Ghana Must Go* the lived intersectional interactions of race, ethnicity, gender, class and age in the formation of contemporary Afrodiasporic subjectivities as the existential illumination and creative interrogation of 'the strange corners of what it means to be human' (Okri, 2014).

In this way, the essay will attempt what Sheldon Pollock et al. put forward as a *cosmofeminist* approach that seeks to establish a 'critically engaged space that is not just a screen for globalisation or an antidote to nationalism but is rather a focus on projects of the intimate sphere conceived as part of the cosmopolitan' (2000: 584). Recognising and problematising the conservative, heteronormative frameworks of cosmopolitan and African diaspora studies, this essay's particular focus on and exploration of the embodied expression of the cultural and subjective anxiety of the Sais' youngest daughter, Sadie, attempts to reimagine and reinterpret, in order to expand and render inclusive, the public, political sphere through the intricacies and intimacies of private, domestic space. Such a reading hopes to offer a fresh and critical, fundamentally existential, perspective on, and embodied re-reading of, the contemporary Afrodiasporic condition.

Reading differently: reading *Ghana Must Go*, re-reading Afropolitanism

In conversation with Aaron Bady, Selasi, who is herself of mixed cultural heritage and exhibits a transnational, cosmopolitan subjectivity, confesses that:

When I wrote that essay, I was not writing – consciously – from a position of overt optimism. I was describing an experience ... [of] 'de-territorialized brown people.' I wasn't writing from a position of power, I was writing from a position of pain ... [in which] my twin sister and I ... were acutely aware at all times of our non-belonging. If I say I'm American, people say 'no you're not.' If I say I'm British, as I was born in the UK, people say 'your accent isn't terribly British. No you're not.' If I say I'm Nigerian and try to speak Yoruba, my cousins mock my horrible accent, as well they should. You're not American, you're not British, you're not Ghanaian, you're not Nigerian.

Always 'you're not' ... this was incredibly alienating ... This was disorienting ... 'Afropolitan' came from that stranded place. Not from a utopian vision at all.

(Bady and Selasi, 2015: 158–160)

Selasi's earnest expression here of an overwhelming sense of existential negation, wherein aspiration to, or the attempt at, self-construction – the often mentioned 'if' – is consistently qualified by a negative, dialectic articulation of de-construction – 'no you're not' – suggests something more complicated and less celebratory than is expounded by established (African) diaspora theory or proponents of Afropolitanism alike. Where the centralised notion of 'play' in (African) diaspora studies positively and subversively indicates 'the instability, the permanent unsettlement' (Hall, 1990: 228) and the 'restlessness of spirit which makes the diaspora culture vital' (Gilroy, 1993: 16), Selasi's conversational version of the diasporic condition here negatively and inversely suggests the persistent deferral of subjective positionality and substance. Qualified by existential anguish, the Afropolitan subject more properly exhibits an anxiety of spirit that quantifies the African diasporic condition as 'a chaotic, living, disorganic formation ... that strives continually towards a state of self-realisation that continually retreats beyond its grasp' (122).

Selasi's personal, embodied experience of Afropolitanism here, as with her fiction, does not attempt philosophically to counter a discourse of Afro-pessimism that emerged as illustrative of Africa during the political and economic crises of the 1980s and 1990s. Hers is not 'a hermeneutics of redemption' (Gikandi, 2011: 9) that seeks to reinterpret, in order to recuperate alternative narratives of African identity in the global imagination; nor does she strictly conceive the utopian possibility of 'transcending race' (Mbembe, 2008). While beneficial, these academic analyses of Afropolitanism operate within the (limited) frame of established (Western) epistemologies and ontological modes of civilisation in which the material facticity and lived implications of race and ethnicity at both a political and a domestic level are elided and rendered abstract. Selasi's personal and fictional materialist purview of the contemporary Afrodiasporic subject reveals a dystopian situatedness in that 'stranded place' of psychosocial and psychocultural disorientation and alienation, a condition which aligns with trauma a permanently 'disruptive experience that disarticulates the self and creates holes in existence' (LaCapra, 2001: 41).

Taking inspiration from the historical event of the expulsion and consequent mass-migration of Ghanaians from Nigeria in 1983, *Ghana Must Go* opens with the extended omniscient narration of the impending death of Kweku Sai, the distinguished surgeon and accomplished African patriarch whose professional disgrace and subsequent flight from/return to Ghana precipitate the themes of home and exile and anticipate the twin motifs of death and life. Set predominantly in Boston, America, inscribed into the novel's portrait of the intergenerational Afrodiasporic Sai family is an interstitial existential condition expressed in their perpetual navigation of the 'shadowy gap between worlds' (Selasi, 2013a: 221), in which the question of identity is always posed as lying tentatively between subjective roots and routes, between existential 'shadow and substance' (Bhabha, 1994: 40). Caught in that 'deep abyss of Culture' (Selasi, 2005), the Sai family, in spite of its middle-class, urban(e) positionality, and despite the novel's titular and sectional invocation of mobility and agency, is not just "'lost in transnation'" (Selasi, 2005), but lost in subjective translation. That is, while etymologically evoking the 'act of moving or carrying across from one place or position to another, or of changing from one state of things to another' (Buden et al., 2009: 196), the notion of their commensurate national and cultural translation is here extended and

simultaneously problematised in the emphasis on a subjective translation which does not presuppose definitive transformation; it implies, rather, their situatedness in a continuously transitional process of subjective (re)interpretation.⁶

This is demonstrated in the novel's circuitous segues between structural (non-linear), temporal (present to past) and spatial (Africa to America), which disrupt the Afropolitan ideal of seamlessly fluid subjectivities with the suggestion instead of a family deeply mired in subjective, often context-responsive, instability in which they are rendered 'weightless ... without gravity, completely unbound' (Selasi, 2013a: 146). Underpinned by the text's oppressively melancholic mood and nostalgic tone, the 'aching, with longing' (251) for existential legitimation that characterises each family member and manifests in their collective and self-destructive behaviour, undermines the Afropolitan feeling of being 'at home' in the world, replacing it with an elusive and fragile reality of being fundamentally unhomed. In their efforts at self-(re)creation, each family member is essentially 'unfinished, in rehearsal, a production in progress' (123), within a larger traumatic existential drama/narrative of civil wars, (in)voluntary migrations, child abandonment, (child) sexual abuse, infidelities and self-harm that renders them not just strange(rs) to each other, but strange(rs) to themselves. Living thus '*in grayness*' (221, emphasis in original) – in the metaphoric interregnum between life and death, the novel's lyrical (blues) mode, which mirrors the cinematographic, voyeuristic effect of Kweku's roving 'camera', presents an affective aesthetic that illumines the family's hauntedness and unhomedness through 'the losses' accrued in the 'endless pursuit of becoming' (Hewett, 2014: 19). Indeed, 'frequently caught between rupture, loss and personal progress as well as the reinvention of the worlds to which they strive to belong; mobility for the Sais is not just a 'sign of the struggle of identity' (Gehrmann, 2016: 67); mobility here signals the struggle *for subjectivity*, for existential articulation and legitimation.

Nervous conditions: the contemporary Afrodiasporic and the nausea of history

In an appraisal of its 'individualistic political effects', Amatoritsero Ede (2016: 93) argues that Afropolitanism's celebration of cultural hybridity and transnationalism mutates 'into an ironic and symbolic collective black self-negation', so that Afropolitanism, 'as cultural politics, can be viewed as a coping mechanism against the nausea of history'. *Ghana Must Go's* reinterpretation of Afrodiasporic coping mechanisms against, into traumatic manifestations of, the nausea of history extends the cultural politics of Afropolitanism to include subjective politics in the analysis of how we exist in the world. Indeed, when Kweku and Folasadé Sai, father and mother respectively, abandon their children in America, the politics of their own previously orphaned states – Kweku through voluntary migration from Nigeria, and Fola through forced exile – at the cultural level, are re-presented at the familial level as material demonstrations or materialisations of the repetition of history. Here, the 'nervous condition' expounded in Frantz Fanon's *Wretched of the Earth* (1990) as symptomatic of the postcolonial condition/moment, is translated from the 'native' parents and psychologically transmitted to include their progeny, revealing culture's traumatic 'referential force' and 'endless impact on a life' (Caruth, 1996: 7). The oldest son Olu's fear of intimacy (with his own family and with his wife, Ling) and feelings of inadequacy despite, like his father, being a successful medical doctor, are the psychosocial and psychocultural manifestations of the nausea of familial history. This is evinced also in the self-destructive actions of the twins, Taiwo and Kehinde,

which are intimately connected to the tragic abuse they suffer at the hands of their uncle in Nigeria – she embarks on an illicit affair that compromises her career as a gifted Ivy League student and he habitually practises a form of self-harm at odds with his accomplishments as an artist. These manifestations of the nausea (at the repetition) of history at the intimate, domestic level find ultimate, embodied expression in the body dysmorphic disorder and consequent bulimia of the youngest child, Sadie.

As the only child never to have visited Africa and the only family member not to have directly suffered the impact of her parents' initial displacement through migration, Sadie's apparent lack of history, when first encountered, renders her the most ostensibly Afropolitan, and the least impressive, character. In comparison to her accomplished siblings, whose personal experiences of abandonment, sexual violation and self-harm align them more closely with the historical distresses and disillusionments of their parents, Sadie's is a privileged, protected positionality in which class (achieved through the accrued successes of her parents) and age (she is not yet a legally recognised adult) converge to suggest her relatively limited lived experience. This is demonstrated in her generic and categorical infantilisation – she is known as the 'baby' – by her family and in the text. Indeed, when first properly introduced, Sadie is depicted at her own 20th birthday party, which is being hosted by her wealthy best friend Philae, and is hiding in the bathroom, an intimate, domestic space that variedly signifies a 'limited' subjectivity: On the one hand, the closed bathroom door symbolises a closeted sexuality evidenced in her repressed sexual attraction to Philae. On the other, described as a feminine, 'woman's' space, the bathroom evokes a maternal, 'cocoon, a world away' (Selasi, 2013a: 143) in which Sadie, not unlike her divorced single mother, typically recedes from the world at large. In this womb-like imaging, the bathroom here significantly recalls Sadie's intimate yet retracted connection to Fola, and not just because hers is the shortened version of her mother's name. Fola's departure to Ghana following Kweku's own abandonment of and escape from his family signals the severing of the mother-daughter bond established at Sadie's birth. The trauma of familial, particularly maternal, loss and absence that Sadie experiences is again pronounced in another poignant image and expression of subjective regression:

Your mother is gone, she thinks, curled on the bed in her clothes on the blanket that smells of the past, of a time, very brief, when they lived in a house with the Man from the Story and they were still whole, and she cries very softly for all that is true, for the loss of that man and for missing her mother, how light things became and how lost she's become ... she doesn't belong. But isn't meant to.

(158, emphasis in original)

The mythical reference to her father as the 'Man from the Story' points not just to a limited linguistic and cultural repertoire – 'when they lived in a house ... and they were still whole', and her foetal positioning is not merely the physical enactment of a commensurate psychological regression. Underscoring this scene is the suggestion of something far more sinister – a kind of arrested existential development. Tellingly, Sadie still feels, at this celebration of her imminent coming-of-age and initiation into formal adulthood, that in reality she is an infantile 'four' year old (147). More significantly, her feeling that 'she *doesn't* belong [b]ut isn't meant to' recalls her own premature birth as a symbolic event which, mirroring her parents' equally premature departures, signals a subject 'trembling with the effort to *be*' (31, emphasis in original), struggling existentially to navigate and define her position in the world.

In an uncanny repetition at the familial level of the pain of historically 'de-territorialised' subjects, her existential habitation of that 'stranded place' and the subjective rupture experienced therein is registered in Sadie's sense of interior alienation and non-belonging. Naïve to her genealogy and denied maternal security, Sadie's orphaning at the domestic level extends to her sense of existential disorientation and estrangement at the level of normative, Western culture and its ontological and epistemological 'truths'. In an expression of self-loathing, Sadie perceives that:

Her eyes are too small and her nose is too round and she hasn't got cheekbones like Taiwo or Philae, nor long slender limbs nor a clean chiseled jaw nor a dipping-in waist nor a jutting-out clavicle. She's five foot four, solid, not fat per se, stocky, pale milky-tea skin, number-four-colored hair, neither tall nor petite, with no edges, no angles; she looks like a doll, one she wouldn't have wanted.

(265)

Qualified by both excess and lack, her self-description here recalls Selasi's own personal feeling of inhabiting a precariously liminal, essentially negated existential space. More disturbingly, Sadie's self-objectification, which reads uncannily like a description of an African American slave (at auction), renders her condition akin to the situation in which African American slaves were rendered 'non-person[s]' belonging to no 'legitimate social order' (Patterson, 1982: 5). Self-portrayed as 'like a doll, one she wouldn't have wanted', the nausea of a racialised and racist slave history is here translated in the contemporary moment into a similarly reductive slave mentality. In this, her aestheticised but fundamental feeling of inferiority articulates the institutionalised and structural racial prejudice that continues to characterise American metanarratives of existence, and which she appears actively to inhabit.⁷

At odds with her limited, infantile cultural repertoire here, Sadie's previously sanitised readings of, and satirical impatience with, race and racial(ised) discourses in which she reads contemporary blackness as merely the 'patina of whiteness' (Selasi, 2013a: 146) reflect post-structural/postmodern constructionist interpretations of identity. On the surface they suggest a sophisticated intellect in line with her highbrow, Ivy League status. Yet implicit in her dismissal of race and racial(ised) discourse, is the expression of racial self-loathing informed by and embedded within a white, heteronormative sociocultural metanarrative. Sadie's abiding desire for Philae's 'smile and gray eyes and blond hair and tan skin and long legs' (145) and her wish to be 'reborn a blond Waif' (265) significantly echo another fictional character's racial self-hatred. Recalling Pecola Breedlove's symbolic yearning for blue eyes in Toni Morrison's novel about the psychological violence of whiteness to the African American community, *The Bluest Eye* (1999), Sadie's narrow, racialised self-perception, despite the apparent age difference, here mimics Pecola's adolescent sociocultural repertoire. Her problematic self-perception is the manifestation of a sociocultural narrative that elicits a Du Boisian 'double-consciousness' – the sense of 'always looking at one's self through the eyes of others' (Du Bois, 1999: 11). But in her subsequent claim that she 'doesn't want to be Caucasian She wants to be Philae' (Selasi, 2013a: 146), Sadie's implicit (inter-)racial self-loathing is translated more poignantly into intra-subjective shame, that existential feeling 'that one ought not to be as one is' (Vice, 2010: 329). Thus, in that she desires being-through-others, her ability to attain 'true self-consciousness' (Du Bois, 1999: 11) is elided in the conscious 'invention of an other Otherness, a hyperstatic alterity' (DuCille, 1997: 22) that

affirms, as Fanon's (post)colonial observations elucidate, a definitive, dialectical structuring of the self and the world through the body (1986: 83).

'Bodies that matter': embodying Afrodiasporic experience

In this regard, Sadie's central preoccupation with her body is not just the negative articulation of culture; it is symbolic of her intricate and intimate navigation of culture. On the surface, her obsession with her body suggests that she suffers from body dysmorphic disorder, a phenomenon clinically described as 'the preoccupation with perceived defects or flaws in physical appearance with repetitive behaviours or mental acts as a response to the appearance concerns' (Dlagnikova and van Niekerk, 2015: 104). But her fervent pronouncements, '*I hate this body, it is ugly, I hate how it looks . . . This body is ugly*' (Selasi, 2013a: 268, emphasis in original), register her perception of the body as a cultural battleground outside of/separate from herself and upon which she wages war. Envisaging the body as 'the difference between her and the rest . . . the reason she cannot be seen' (268), Sadie's somatic emphasis on the body-as-corporeal positions the 'material body as the site of political struggle' (Bordo, 2003: 16). As such, her body dysmorphia, and consequent bulimic assault against it, extend Foucauldian readings of the body as the politicised 'object and target of power' to explore more intimately how the *self*-disciplined body becomes both a 'technique for the transformation of arrangements' and a symbol for 'a network of relations' (Foucault, 1979: 136, 146). That is, her behaviour is not just aligned with contemporary evidence of the widening racial and cultural demographics of eating disorders which comprise an increasing number of black female adolescents (Medical News Today, 2009); nor is it merely a feminist 'defense against the "femaleness" of the body and a punishment for its desires' (Bordo, 2003: 8) associated with her nascent sexuality. Sadie's subjection of her body to the routinised, self-disciplining trauma of bulimia is evidence of how female bodies indicate referentially 'a world beyond themselves' (Butler, 1993: ix), as both transgressive initiative/process of subjectivity and embedded cultural artefact/construct.⁸

Echoing Tsitsi Dangarembga's representation in her influential postcolonial novel, *Nervous Conditions* (2004), of the manifestations of eating disorders as indicative of the purging of (Rhodesian, patriarchal) colonialism, Sadie's bulimia expresses 'a covert but disruptive act of rebellion' (Hill, 1995: 87) against an entrenched (Western) heteronormative sociocultural imperialism. Thus it signals in part a metaphysics of the body whereby her traumatised corporeality reads as a metaphor for her silenced self by putting forward a "'semiotics" that linguistic communication does not account for' (Kristeva, 1997: 312). But Sadie's disciplinary "'treatment" of the body as a figure of speech' within a culturally symbolic order simultaneously 'violates the body by translating it into a term in a representative scheme' (Jolly, 1996: 8). Her fascinated description of the distressing process of purging – 'the vomit. How it emerges with a *logic*, in the *order received*. With a touch of the ceremonial, she thinks, in the action, the kneeling and performing the *same gruesome rite*, the repetition and the silence' (Selasi, 2013a: 142, emphasis added) – tellingly functions within and gestures toward a culturally normative and ritualised meta-discourse of reason and rationality for its actualisation. Demonstrating the limits of interpreting subjectivity solely through and in the culturally representative scheme of the body, Sadie literally enacts through her purging the schizophrenic condition of abjection enunciated in Julia Kristeva's seminal essay, *Powers of Horror* (1988). Thus, because she routinely performs an act in which, as Kristeva states, the I

expels the self at the same time that the I claims to establish a self, an 'Other has settled in place and instead of what will be' Sadie (Kristeva, 1988: 10), effectively exceeding and deferring realisation of the subjective enterprise.

In this way, that which is most personal/domestic, that to which she is so intimately attached – the body – becomes, in Sadie's act of purging, a complicated, political vehicle against, and ironically embodied expression of, an historical *and* contemporary limited cultural imagination. Not unlike Pecola Breedlove, Sadie's is fundamentally the expression of, and protest against, the 'experience of not being seen' as a legitimate subject in and of the world – 'she is invisible' (Selasi, 2013a: 265). Recalling her premature birth, 'her whole being trembling with the effort to *be*' (31, emphasis in original), hers is finally and fundamentally the desire for an a priori subjectivity, elucidated by Jean-Paul Sartre as the condition in which '*existence comes before essence*' (1973, 26, emphasis in original), wherein the fact of existence precedes a prescriptive sociocultural metanarrative.

Going (b(l)ack): the roots of/routes to subjectivity

It is telling, then, that it is in the apparent journey, at her father's death, to her genealogical 'source' – a village in Accra, Ghana – that Sadie is indeed 'seen' by her paternal aunt, Naa.

Sadie feels the gaze on her face, with the humidity, a pressure or a magnet: it tugs at her eyes, though her chin, out of habit, resists the ascension and sinks to her chest while her eyes travel up. She rarely looks people in the eye when she meets them, preferring their mouths or her hands as an audience – anything to throw off the would-be observer, to avoid being looked at too closely, too long ... [but] Undaunted, indifferent, or accustomed to uneasiness, Naa gazes on, drawing Sadie's eyes upward – and holding them put: Sadie can't look back down, for her shock at the striking resemblance.

(Selasi, 2013a: 264)

Invoking but reversing the imperialist white gaze, which Morrison in her fiction demonstrates has historically negated the black subjective process, Naa's observation of Sadie here fills precisely 'the vacuum where curiosity ought to lodge' and undermines '[t]he total absence of human recognition' (Morrison, 1999: 36) that slavery and colonisation induced. Naa's 'look', which forces Sadie to 'look' back in return, initiates a (physically) dialogic, rather than dialectic, intersubjective and inclusive, humanising process of recognition. Therefore the self-in-relation to the other translates also into the self-in-relation to the self, redressing Fanon's (1986) concerns with the structural, existential violence of the colonial enterprise. This is confirmed in the 'striking resemblance' of aunt and niece, in Sadie's acknowledgement of her lineage as the namesake of her father's dead sister, Ekua, and in Naa's definitive, transcendent statement, 'Welcome Back' (Selasi, 2013a: 266).

It is interesting the insinuation here that Sadie's physical journey to her native, familial 'roots' translates metaphysically into the 'route' to her subjective acknowledgement and consequent self-enlightenment, that is, to her existential legitimation. Selasi would appear in this section of the novel finally to have succumbed to the allure of ethnic nativism.⁹ In this regard, it is telling that the ritualised self-disciplined body is reinterpreted into the dancing, performing body, into an affirmative, even emancipatory, cultural vehicle – of West African orientation. Moved by the sound of the African drums and invited to dance, Sadie's

reaction is visceral, she feels her heart slow, or succumb to this new form of beating, more ordered. Only now does it occur to her that her heart has been pounding, quite literally throbbing, since

they left Fola's house, such that now she is sore, bodily sore, physically exhausted, as if she's been exercising, running for miles. This pounding becomes harder but also calmer with the drumming, her breath breaking off from the pace of her thoughts, following instead the mounting rhythm as it builds in its complexities. *A surrogate heartbeat*. Harder, calmer, and surer. ... Her siblings are watching with what looks like a mixture of worry and encouragement, their eyes and smiles wide, as if watching a baby trying to learn how to walk, ready to spring to their feet when she falls She doesn't fall When they speak of it later they'll say that ... she was dancing in the clearing as if she'd been born doing traditional Ga dance. No one will know what it is in this moment that overwhelms Sadie, not even Sadie herself ... A surrogate heartbeat ... a stranger inside her that knows what to do, knows the music, these movements, this footwork, this rhythm, the body relaxing ... she is outside her body or *in it*, inside it, unaware of the exterior, unaware of the skin, unaware of the eyes, unaware of the onlookers.

(267–270, emphasis in original)

The previous image of Sadie's disciplined body 'kneeling and performing the *same gruesome rite*' (142, emphasis in original) is thus here transformed into a liberated and energised picture of movement, where the pain and trauma typically associated with her body is translated into inexplicable euphoria. With rupture transformed into rapture in this way, the body and the self are envisioned positively as holistically compatible, mutually constitutive elements in the subjective process. Her responsive, embodied reaction to the existential Ghanaian melodies revises, in an ethnic, African mode, the initial articulation of the African American blues in the novel as 'paralyzing absence and ineradicable desire', in order to register its internal dialectic of 'change, movement, action, continuance, unlimited and unending possibility' (Baker, 1984: 7). Reminiscent of Morrison's exploration of the African American slave's psychological and durable connection to a sustaining ethnic heritage in her neo-slave narrative *Beloved* (2005), Sadie's apparently innate, embodied 'route' to her ancestral 'roots' – '*A surrogate heartbeat* ... she was dancing in the clearing as if she'd born doing traditional Ga dance' – culminates in her subsequent subjective grounding (Selasi, 2013a: 267–269, emphasis added).¹⁰ Oblivious here to imperialist sociocultural metanarratives of existence – 'she is outside her body or *in it*, inside it, unaware of the exterior, unaware of the skin, unaware of the eyes, unaware of the onlookers' – 'She doesn't fall' (270, 269, emphasis in original).

Conclusion: being (at home) in the world

The cultural and subjective border-crossing enacted and endorsed in this scene, in the phenomenon of a fluid and mutable (contemporary Afrodiasporic) subjectivity, suggestively attempts to simultaneously celebrate and (re)integrate a marginal political body (Africa) within the global imagination. But Nell Freudenberger's (2013) positive reading of the novel as 'Selasi's project of particularizing the African experience for a Western audience' is problematised in this section by overtones of the exotic, which have the effect of essentialising race and ethnicity. Naa's initial description as being heavysset, dressed in a 'traditional outfit of simple black cloth' and standing 'like a woman of seventy hard years: with her elbow on the wall and her head on her fist and her hip pushing out, other hand on that hip, as if seeking to rest the full weight of her past on this crumbling brick wall' (Selasi, 2013a: 263), renders her a stereotypical, representative picture of traditional black African matriarchy. This image is ostensibly at odds with Sadie's lived experience of a fragile maternity and suggests the notion of an authentic black African (female) cultural identity (diluted, in Fola's case, by

Western influence). Similarly, the localised accent on Sadie's performative body does not here offer, as Judith Butler has argued elsewhere, a postmodern 'playful' 'parody of the *idea* of the natural and the original' (1999, 41, emphasis added) that works actively to disrupt essentialised, static identitarian politics. It appears instead to reinstate the racialised, Manichean imperatives of colonialism in which the black body signifies black African identity; that is, an originary, arcane blackness is in this scene apparently 'produced and authenticated' (Johnson, 2003: 239) through and in the image of the performing body.

But the risk of parochial romanticisation – of potentially othering the black body – is moderated in what would also seem to be the problematisation of the postmodern 'assumption of performance as "product" rather than process' (235). In the novel's expression here of the procedure of subjective translation is the simultaneous and inverse suggestion that Sadie's performing body is an attempt to give body to the phenomenological through its articulation of the protean, personified processes of Afrodiasporic subjectivity. While registering geocultural influence, her dancing body also appears to transcend cultural placement in the experience rather than the process of transculturation, a porous, non-static 'translational perspective on culture and history' (Stephanides and Karayanni, 2015: xxi). Tellingly, the emphasis in the dancing scene above on '*these movements, this footwork, this rhythm*' (Selasi, 2013a: 270, emphasis added) implies the temporality of geographical space and culture as always vulnerable to the prospect of (re)translation and change. That is, her physical mobility is here interpreted as an interior, existential cosmopolitan condition in which 'centers are everywhere and circumferences nowhere' and that registers 'infinite ways of being' (Pollock et al., 2000: 588). This affords the imaginative, fluid reinterpretation of home as 'not just a place, but a way to be in – a way to know – the world' (Selasi, 2013b), as diffuse, occurring within and across cultural and personal borders. Sadie's frustrated plea at her mother's own burdensome insecurities – 'I want to live my *life!*' (Selasi, 2013a: 156, emphasis in original) – is here revised to emphasise, instead, *living* her life, with all its inconsistencies, as Sadie experiences herself as a 'creator, and not a creation' (Selasi, 2013b) in her dancing body's obliviousness to her spatial surroundings. Implied in this is an ethical *and* existential imperative of 'sensuality, [of] susceptibility to being affected' (Levinas, 1998: xxix) by, and being responsive to, another(s) world.

Overcome by 'belated self-consciousness' (Selasi, 2013a: 270), Sadie's performance here initiates her not just into an immediate (racial, cultural and familial) community from which she had been estranged, but translates into and extends to include a broader, more expansive comprehension of cosmopolitan community. The intuitive 'surrogate heartbeat', the mature and knowledgeable 'stranger inside' that her dancing body unveils, advocates an internal embrace of 'strangeness, foreignness and remoteness, the ability to recognise one's face in that of a foreigner and make the most of the traces of remoteness in closeness, to domesticate the unfamiliar, to work with what seems to be opposites' (Mbembe, 2007: 28) in the apparent realisation of a priori subjectivity.

In Sadie's physical journey to her genealogical beginning, in the embodied, material re-enactment here of her existential 'trembling with the effort to *be*' (Selasi, 2013a: 31, emphasis in original), is the suggestion of a recurrent re-birth in which the contemporary Afrodiasporic condition is conceived as a future-oriented process rather than identitarian achievement, affirmed in the ambiguous conclusion of the novel's final section, 'Go'. This version of subjectivity more aptly discovers 'poetics in disjunctures rather than continuities' and insists 'on the non-linear relationship between departure and arrival so that the arrival is not to a

particular end but, rather, a process of cultural translatability and memory' (Stephanides and Karayanni, 2015: xviii). It is an impermanent and unstable vision that is realised ultimately in the novelistic portrait 'not of a People, the art history of Peoplehood, constant and strong, but the shorter, very messy, lesser history of people, small *p*' (166–167). *Ghana Must Go's* pointed focus on the intimacies of domestic life and the intricacies of Afrodiasporic experiences is an attempt to reimagine the political, to reinterpret an abstract cultural phenomenon. In an existential revision of Afropolitanism, the novel's vision of home as residing in the embodied, moving self more sincerely unveils, and creatively translates, the (idiosyncratic) world as home-in-the-self.

Notes

1. I refer specifically to the intellectual and political Afrocentric and Pan-Africanist movements. Afrocentrism dates back to the nineteenth century and supports the idea that universal history commenced in Africa, while Pan-Africanism, originating in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, presupposes a common African consciousness and experience. Imported into Africa to galvanise the nationalist political solidarity of African states, Pan-Africanist philosophy has witnessed a resurgence on the African continent.
2. See also Homi Bhabha's 'Unsatisfied: Notes on Vernacular Cosmopolitanism' (1996), and Walter Dignolo's 'The Many Faces of Cosmo-polis: Border Thinking and Critical Cosmopolitanism' (2000).
3. I specifically have in mind here the writings of Chinua Achebe, which, while foregrounding African cultures, also acknowledge the influence of colonialism on those cultures.
4. Ebrahim Harvey's delineation of post-apartheid blackness in South Africa is globally applicable. Noting the reconfiguration of black socio-political and socio-economic identities, he argues that blackness today
5. My description of the dialogic here extends Mikhail Bakhtin's (1981: 263) definition of the dialogic imagination as establishing a variety of subjective 'links and interrelationships' to include an internal dialogism that articulates the inherently 'heteroglossic and polyphonic' character of subjectivity.
6. In her Ted Talk (Selasi, 2014b), Selasi extrapolates on the definitive significance in this regard of the experiential based on ritual, relationships and restrictions.
7. Sadie's perception that she 'looks like a doll' recalls the famous doll tests undertaken by doctors Kenneth and Mamie Clark in the 1940s. Their study concluded that racial prejudice and segregation created a feeling of inferiority among and damaged the self-esteem of African American children. The pervasive effects of this were revealed in a similar test conducted in 2010 which showed that children, black and white, were biased toward lighter skin. See the NAACP's (2016) 'Doctors Kenneth and Mamie Clark and the "Doll Test"', and the CNN's (2016) 'Study: White and Black Children Biased toward Lighter Skin'.
8. According to the National Eating Disorders Association, more than nine million females in the United States struggle with bulimia. In 2009, an important study by researchers at the University of Southern California of 2300 girls at schools in Ohio, California and Washington DC over a 10-year period, challenged the widespread perception that bulimia primarily affects privileged, white teenagers by revealing that African American girls were 50% more likely than girls who are white to be bulimic, and girls from families in the lowest income bracket studied were 153% more likely to be bulimic than girls from the highest income bracket (Medical News Today, 2009).
9. Selasi has in interviews repeatedly expressed irritation at this reading of Sadie's journey to Ghana. See 'I'm a Multi-local African' (2014a).
10. Indeed, in this scene the intertextual references to and thematic resonances of Morrison's prize-winning novel *Beloved* (2005) are striking. In particular, the reference to the dancing in the

clearing as an embodied, subjective enterprise that enables the black body to live intuitively, across and within (geo)cultural narratives.

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4 Negotiating singularity and likeness

Esi Edugyan, Lawrence Hill and Canadian Afrodiasporic writing

Isabel Carrera-Suárez

ABSTRACT

Approaching the concept of the Afropolitan as one among various contemporary endeavours to redefine Afrodiasporic identities, this article compares Selasi's gesture of self-naming to the debates on terminology and affiliation engaged in by Canadian Afrodiasporic writers, which shift between demanding recognition in the national imaginary and declaring allegiance to the African diaspora. Focusing on belonging, likeness and (creative) singularity in the Kreisel lectures delivered by Esi Edugyan and Lawrence Hill, it proposes that a reading within recent theories of diaspora and neo-cosmopolitanism may provide an interpretive framework for the apparently contradictory allegiances and the open citizenship practiced by Afrodiasporic writers.

At the heart of Taiye Selasi's formulation of the concept of the Afropolitan (Selasi, 2005) lies, among other issues, a personal rebellion against the repeated essentialising of African and Afrodiasporic subjects, fuelling a desire to practise an alternative self-definition which may allow the author, and others in her generation, to position themselves in a globalised, urban, multilocal world. Her neologism *Afropolitan* clearly appealed to a very extended desire in a variety of diasporic Africans around the world, given its subsequent proliferation in popular, consumerist and intellectual spheres. In the academic world, prone to coinage of terminology, sometimes in its own version of consumerism, the concept has been as much debated and critiqued as outside the academy. Whether the neologism is a useful or accurate analytical category in a variety of research fields is, of course, a suitably academic concern. My own intervention here will attempt not so much to judge the convenience of its existence or application to cultural and literary analysis, as to read its significance in parallel to other examples of Black/African self-designation, in this case in the context of a specific nation, Canada, whose iconicity as official multicultural state may offer an instructive vantage point for comparison.

Taiye Selasi's act of self-naming is only one of recent attempts to redefine various Afrodescendent subjectivities which do not concur with stereotypical ideas of 'Africa' (as portrayed by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie in 'The Danger of a Single Story', 2009) nor are coterminous with the subjectivities of those descended from transported slaves or from

early migrants. With contemporary 'Africanness' no longer conceived necessarily in opposition to 'Westernness', the complexities of Black diasporas across the world are being foregrounded and analysed from within and from multiple geolocalisations. Black writers in Canada have been dissecting such complexities for several decades, in both national and transnational frameworks¹. They have done so from the relatively peripheral position occupied by their country in global cultural affairs, but also from the nuanced and articulate discourse derived from years of multicultural practice and critique, in a culture which has, however imperfectly, allowed difference into its imagined self. Canada's 'hyphenated identities', 'visible minorities' and immigrant dwellers are, together with First Nations, recognised constituents of Canadian citizenship. And yet, African Canadian and Black Canadian subjectivities have been unearthed in their varying historical dimensions only in relatively recent times, with writers playing an active role in the research and dissemination of this new knowledge. The rapid manner in which the Canadian cultural scene has incorporated and been shaped by Black Canadians (as well as other visible minorities) since the 1990s, and the depth of the ensuing debates, are impressive developments which may, nevertheless, veil the as yet unnaturalised citizenship and 'belonging' of many of its actors.

By focusing on Esi Edugyan's and Lawrence Hill's respective Henry Kreisel lectures, *Dreaming of Elsewhere* (2014) and *Dear Sir, I Intend to Burn Your Book* (2013), which relate directly to the novels that established each of them as international writers, *Half-Blood Blues* (2011) and *The Book of Negroes* (2007), I will engage with the commonalities and yet singular character of the writerly stances and practices of these two second-generation Canadians, in an attempt to assess some of the long-standing complications of those 'old', apparently resolved, diasporic concepts of home and belonging, of local and transnational allegiances. For this purpose I will discuss Edugyan's and Hill's Kreisel lectures, first in the context of Canadian redefinitions of Blackness and then in light of recent approaches to neo-cosmopolitanism. Such an analysis may help to gauge the extent to which Canadian debates, and particularly these two authors' stances and practices, may relate to 'Afropolitanism', and whether their strategic positions may be read through the lens of what Sneja Gunew (2017) has recently described as the 'neo-cosmopolitan mediation' of post-multicultural writers.

Debating the Afro-Canadian

The history of Black Canadians is today fairly well documented, and extends back almost as far as transatlantic settlement.² A small number of Africans arrived in the territory later to be known as Canada in the seventeenth century, slaves taken into New France from New England or from the West Indies. Some were also transported later by British Loyalists, although a higher number in fact arrived as free persons, having earned their liberty through their own loyalty to the British Crown. In 1783, the names of 3000 Black Loyalists who were granted admission into Canada were recorded in the historical document known as 'The Book of Negroes', which inspires and gives title to Lawrence Hill's 2007 novel. In fact, before the twentieth century, the majority of Africans or their immediate ancestors had entered Canada fleeing slavery, many through the Underground Railroad, with another notorious group, composed of Jamaican Maroons, also arriving in Nova Scotia in 1796. These incomers settled in Eastern Canada, mostly the Maritimes. However, there had also been smaller migrations of free Americans to the Canadian West, from California to Vancouver Island in the 1850s and, at the beginning of the twentieth century, a migratory move from Oklahoma to

the Prairies, mainly Alberta. These successive waves of migration did not produce a substantial Black Canadian population in terms of numbers, and arrival directly from Africa continued to be very rare. In fact, in a parallel with Britain that David Chariandy (2007) has highlighted, the numerical growth of the Black and African population in Canada takes place only after the Second World War (particularly after the 1967 lifting of policies which restricted 'coloured' immigrants). Many West Indians, but also Africans, particularly from Ghana and Nigeria, immigrate at this point in larger numbers. This mid-twentieth-century migration has contributed to the popular and often resented belief that all Black individuals and communities are recent arrivals. Further historical data from every period is undoubtedly awaiting retrieval, as the Hogan's Alley Memorial Project in Vancouver, among others, testifies, but it is worth noting that this enhanced historical knowledge of Black/African Canadians' past has grown in parallel to the advent of an active and talented community of writers who have contributed effectively to rescuing this past and, as is the case with the Afropolitan debate, have maintained an intense writerly dialogue on the naming and ascription to Africanness, Canadianness and Blackness, a dialogue on national or transnational identifications.

'Black Canadian literature' is therefore, as Chariandy puts it, 'a creaky and polyvocal field' (2007: 820), where writers align to varying degrees and in different manners with an African past. The classic polarisation in this debate, loosely identifiable with Paul Gilroy's routes/roots distinction (1993), filtered through a Canadian lens, has been represented by the divergent argumentations of Nova Scotian writer and critic George Elliot Clarke and Caribbean-born critic Rinaldo Walcott, both based in Toronto. Clarke's term 'Africadian', a composite of African and the Acadian culture of Nova Scotia, was coined to describe the Black communities established in the Maritime area for generations. Clarke (2002) advocates the recognition of their Canadianness in an appeal to the right of national belonging. His poetry, critical theory and novelistic practice compose a historical-fictional project of *Canadian rootedness* for Africadians, whom he sees as forming a 'settled diaspora' (Eguibar Holgado, 2015), an oxymoron that may nevertheless accurately describe the contradictory position of those whose roots are firmly established in their country of birth but who have not quite been accepted into its imaginary. The other end of the theoretical spectrum is represented by Rinaldo Walcott's transnational position, expressed early on in his ground-breaking volume *Black Like Who?* (1997), which, inspired by Gilroy's *The Black Atlantic* (1993), follows 'the circuitous routes of Black diasporic cultures, their connectedness and differences' (17, my emphasis), focusing on transcultural migrations and rhizomatic subjectivities. As is now the case with the term 'Afropolitan', writers have tended to identify with one or the other position, even if these have come to be found, in effect, not so incompatible. Writers of West Indian origins like Marlene NourbeSe Philip or Dionne Brand tend towards an international, diasporic identification with the commonalities of Black experience, viewing Africa as a twice-removed home, 'a place strictly of the imagination' (Brand, 2001: 25), while also rejecting national allegiances. Marlene NourbeSe Philip uses the term 'Afrospora' to encompass those she describes as united by a loss of home and a shared psychic wound. Dionne Brand speaks eloquently on her transnational stance in her essays (particularly *A Map to the Door of No Return: Notes to Belonging*, 2001) while practising a located transnational representation in celebrated works such as her novel *What We All Long For* (2005), whose protagonists are four young characters of different diasporic origins sharing friendship and urban lives in multi-cultural Toronto. A further contribution to the debate, and one that, like Clarke's Africadia, is closely identified with a specific Canadian location, is Wayne Compton's *After Canaan*

(2010), born from the experience of being Black in Vancouver. Compton proposes an assertive 'Afroperipheralism', which might contest hegemonic visions of Blackness circulated in studies that presume either a 'Black Atlantic' pattern or a subjectivity tinged with the particular circumstances of the United States. Vancouver's Black community has developed outside the direct sites of slavery, with migrants arriving from the US or through other recent routes, and a high percentage of its members living in interracial families whose mother tongue is English, rather than a diasporic language. One of its historical locations, Hogan's Alley, which housed most of the Black population in the city, was demolished in the urban development frenzy of the 1960s, and its inhabitants scattered. Compton leads the Hogan's Alley Memorial project, which salvages the memory of that communal life. Combining the features of writer and historian, he works to record the genealogy of Black presence in Vancouver and British Columbia, which he has explored in his creative writing (*The Outer Harbour*, 2014).

This condensed account of the dialogue on Africanness in contemporary Canadian letters³ attempts to illustrate the ongoing search for what Rinaldo Walcott denominates 'a Canadian grammar for black' (1997: 145 ff), a search which might ring familiar to Afropolitans seeking 'a way of being African in the world' (Gikandi, 2011: 11; Selasi, 2005), a way which necessarily involves cultural hybridity. This projected grammar is further complicated by the many so-called mixed-race subjectivities, so well represented in recent generations by writers such as Lawrence Hill, Wayne Compton or Suzette Mayr, among others, who address mixed parentage both in autobiographical essays and in fiction.

The two texts that I will discuss here are based on lectures delivered by writers who share the condition of second-generation 'Black Canadians', but whose personal histories differ in a number of ways. They also share notable literary success that begins in each case with a highly imaginative, historically grounded novel. Lawrence Hill received international acclaim for *The Book of Negroes* (2007), telling the story of Aminata Diallo, who is captured as a child in Niger and transported to South Carolina as a slave. Aminata eventually becomes one of those inscribed (and helping to inscribe others) in 'The Book of Negroes', moves to Nova Scotia and later returns to Sierra Leone, where Nova Scotians founded Freetown. At the end of her life she contributes to the Abolitionist campaign in London and writes her life story. This encompassing book, which charts the globality of the slave trade and dispels the myth of Canada as a haven for slaves, has received international awards, sold beyond most Canadian expectations and inspired a TV mini-series. It successfully blends imaginative storytelling with an impressive amount of historical knowledge, a trademark of Hill's work. In turn, Esi Edugyan's first international success, *Half Blood Blues* (2011), is set in Berlin and Paris and features the members of a young jazz band escaping Nazi persecution. Hieronymous Falk (Hiero), the inspirational leader of the band, is one of the so-called 'Rhineland Bastards', the children of white German mothers and Black French colonial soldiers who participated in the occupation of the Rhineland after the First World War. These children were subsequently declared 'hereditarily unfit' and persecuted by Hitler. In 2012 and 2013 respectively, Hill and Edugyan were invited to take part in the Henry Kreisel Lecture Series at the University of Alberta. Both based their talk on issues related to these most famous of their books, while also referring, in different degrees, to their diasporic identities and allegiances. The published versions of these lectures therefore provide access to two recent reflections, by established second-generation Canadian writers, on the complexities of self-naming and identification, reflections which directly inform their creative practices.

Writing home: Esi Edugyan on estrangement and belonging

Perhaps the first striking feature of Edugyan's text, prominently underlined in the title, *Dreaming of Elsewhere. Observations on Home* (2014), is its involvement with the issues of home and belonging, relatively 'old', over-discussed concepts in postcolonial and diasporic theories. The significance of this revisiting, however, should not be underestimated, as it alerts us to its contemporary relevance and the incompleteness of the multicultural project. Edugyan weaves her lecture from a number of stories, some personal, others involving Afrodiasporic characters. She begins by recalling the life of Amo, a historical figure who in 1707, as a young boy, was transported from Ghana to Germany, probably as a slave or 'gift'. On his master's decision, however, he was educated at the University of Halle, excelled in various scientific disciplines and languages and taught at a number of universities, but eventually returned 'home' to Ghana, 40 years later, in 1747, following his public lampooning during an anti-liberal period of hostility towards Africans. The second story told is the author's encounter with a Ghanaian taxi driver in Toronto, a former professor of physics in Accra. In both cases she tries to imagine the feelings of estrangement and un/belonging involved, despite the different historical and personal circumstances:

Three hundred years separate their lives, and so much has changed. And yet the nature of belonging has not. As the daughter of Ghanaian immigrants, raised in a household where Twi, Fante and Asante were as likely to be heard as English or French, my life has been an uneasy one in relation to the ground under my feet. Home, for me, was not a birth right, but an invention. (Edugyan, 2014: 6)

This uneasy belonging, it must be noted, does not extend to the act of writing, given that 'minority' writing in Canada, Britain and the US, she argues, has become 'the new dominant kind of narrative', much sought after by publishers who encourage young writers to 'flaunt their ethnic distinctiveness' (7). With this understated suggestion of 'ethnographic' interest in the designated 'multicultural writers', Edugyan declares postcolonial literary challenges a thing of the past, and her own writing path paved by pioneers. And yet, she hastens to add: 'do I believe that we live in a colour-blind society, a society where race goes unnoticed? I confess I find the notion ridiculous' (7). Her text, and our argument here, build on these contradictory realities.

The concept of *home* is, of course, pivotal in all diasporic theorising. Some of the most lucid analyses remain those put forward by Avtar Brah (1996), who describes home as 'a mythic place of desire in the diasporic imagination' but also 'the lived experience of a locality' (192), mediated by specific social relations. The notion of home, Brah reminds us, 'is intrinsically linked with the way in which processes of inclusion or exclusion operate and are subjectively experienced under given circumstances. It relates to the complex political and personal struggles over the social regulation of "belonging"' (194). Edugyan's text begins the personal side of her account precisely by speculating about what moved her to travel extensively in Europe in her twenties, 'leaving myself behind for a month or two at a time' (2014: 8), never quite escaping the ubiquitous 'home' question, the racialising 'Where are you from?' and its telling sequel, 'Yes – but where are you from *really*?' (11, emphasis in the original). 'Home is the first exile' (10) she concludes, and moves into the discussion of 'the kind of belonging with which I have been most concerned recently, that of citizenship' (13).

Most cultural and postcolonial theorisation on belonging has centred on the imaginary, the affective or the biopolitical, appropriately viewing formal citizenship as the mere starting

point of belonging. The focus on citizenship has returned to the forefront of international political agendas after 9/11, but – albeit on different terms – citizenship has always figured prominently in Canadian practice and imagination, given the country's character as settler colony and immigrant nation. From its founding moment, Canada negotiated citizenship laws with issues of race on the agenda. What Edugyan investigates here, however, is a reversed journey into citizenship: with the extreme but paradigmatic example of the Third Reich in mind, she asks through what mechanisms one is, rather than granted, *deprived* of citizenship in one's own country, how one becomes stateless and vulnerable, and what strange affiliations are forced on subjects so dispossessed. Edugyan's research into Afro-German history yields the surprising discovery that some of the mixed-heritage children who were forcibly sterilised by the Reich were then accepted into the Hitler Youth, thus acquiring, in the author's words, 'a new kind of skin, neither black nor white: simply German' (17). Such precarious belongings, dictated by shifting rules of citizenship, inform key events in the plot of *Half Blood Blues*, where the mysterious disappearance of Hiero is retraced 50 years later, narrated by his bandmate Sid. The powers conferred on citizenship also underpin secondary characters like Hiero's father, a former African chief who embraces Germanness uncritically: in his son's words, 'he make hisself into a German' (Edugyan, 2011: 71).

In imagining the life of Hiero, a Black German citizen marked by the 'broken citizenship' characteristic of exiles (25), Edugyan delves into historical records but also pulls on her personal experience of the elusiveness of belonging. Part of the process that led to the writing of the novel, together with her time in Stuttgart, was her 2006 journey to the home of her parents in Ghana, her first visit to Africa, which she describes in the lecture. The odd sense of alikeness and difference, which begins on the flight to Accra, is described with a mix of wonder and empathy that does not circumvent the sometimes eerie quality of the experience. 'Home' is a taken-for-granted place for their Accra host, Kojo, a relation/friend of the family, who drives them through the city while disparaging Nigerian women, 'French Africans' and university-educated Ghanaians who do not return home, plus the children of such traitors, who visit as tourists. This notwithstanding, he assumes, like her direct family will do in the village, that the travellers (Edugyan and siblings) are 'home' in Ghana. This assumption is perplexing for the author, swept into 'a kind of tribal inclusion, a bond of blood and history which *did not require mutual consent*' (23–24, my emphasis), no matter that she and her siblings struggle with the affiliation: 'We were simply, profoundly not at our ease. We did not belong' (24). The ambiguity of alikeness and difference encountered on the plane to Accra, where she had recognised her features in other passengers while feeling alien to their conviviality, has come full circle. Not belonging, she concludes, can also be rooted in similarity, and she later draws on this experience for her portrayal of Hiero.

It is worth noting that Edugyan frames her lecture between two significant questions, the iniquitous 'Where are you from?' which prompted her early travels in Europe, and a second, related, question directed to her by a woman in her parents' Ghanaian village: 'Eh, Obruni, why don't you come home?' This affective moment of inclusion ('*Come home, she'd said. Not go home*', 2014: 31, emphasis in the original) is subsequently tempered by a new knowledge, 'It wasn't until later that I learned obruni meant White Person' (31). For Edugyan, the child of parents whose lives still 'straddled two worlds' (30), but herself 'a Calgary girl, born and raised' (Endicott, 2014: xviii) and 'feel[ing] as much a Canadian as anyone' (Edugyan, 2014: 30), home becomes ultimately 'a way of thinking, an *idea* of belonging' (emphasis in the original), rather than belonging itself. Wherever their setting, she claims, 'All our stories

are about home' (32). Edugyan's lecture focuses on moments where belonging ceases to be a choice: removal of citizenship or fixed 'tribal' affiliation, to affirm instead an identity that is self-defined and shaped, a journey towards being 'at home, in ourselves' (32).

Shaping likeness: Lawrence Hill on diasporic identifications

Lawrence Hill's background differs from Edugyan's in the trajectories of his activist parents, a mixed-race couple who migrated from Washington DC in the 1950s escaping the laws against interracial marriage in the US. Lawrence himself was born in Newmarket, Ontario, and fairly early in his career he dissected the experience of 'being black and white in Canada': in *Black Berry, Sweet Juice* (2001), he writes a sharp enquiry into a number of everyday matters, including reactions to 'The Question' (the dreaded 'Where are you from?'). An accomplished writer and researcher, familiar with the African continent through various visits, and a confident speaker on race, he nevertheless states in his Henry Kreisel talk his shock on receiving an email beginning with the words that constitute the lecture's title: 'Dear Sir, I intend to burn your book'. Sent shortly after the publication of *The Book of Negroes* in Dutch in 2011, the message was signed by Roy Groenberg, a Surinamese Dutch activist, and the reason for the announced burning was the use of the word 'negro' in the title. Hill's polite reply in explanation goes unheeded, and the book covers are publicly burnt in Oosterpark in Amsterdam, the event recorded and disseminated via social media. Aside from the symbolic violence of the act, Hill's shock stems from the conviction that 'Mr Groenberg and I should have been on the same side of issues having to do with the treatment and depiction of people in the African diaspora' (Hill, 2013: 6). Hill provides a reasoned and passionate defence against book burning and the more general practice of censorship as the main subject of the lecture. Crucially for our purposes, however, his response is hugely affected by the transnational identification that he feels should exist between the perpetrators and himself, as fellow diasporic Africans:

One emotional challenge for me, in dealing with the issue, was that the Dutch book burners, albeit small in number, were people of Surinamese descent. Suriname, in South America, was one of the most important slave colonies of the Dutch. In the broader Diaspora of African peoples, these are my own people. And it hurts, frankly, when your own people reject you, or tell you that you don't belong, or challenge *the very identity that you have shaped for yourself*. (10, my emphasis)

In making an effort to understand the motives for the painful attack on his book by a group with whom he disagrees but empathises (11), he interprets their action within the context of the unacknowledged racism of the Netherlands: 'Canadians and the Dutch have one unusual point in common. We both tend to deny, or sweep under the rug, the history of slavery as carried out by our own countries' (23). As proof of this Dutch colonial past, Hill refers to archival documents on the Dutch slave trade, the anti-Muslim remarks of politician Geert Wilders (which unfortunately have found further echo since) and two symbolic aggressions against which Surinamese activists have campaigned: the racist adverts for Negerzoenen ('Negro kisses') chocolates and the perpetuation of the 'traditional' figure of Swarze Piet, a clownish Black helper of Saint Nicholas, revived every Christmas in his colonial, Sambo-style, sometimes Surinamese-accented incarnation, despite antiracist protests. Hill acknowledges Groenberg's merit in forcing a name change on the chocolate company, but while suspecting they would agree 'on nine issues out of ten with respect to the history and current situation

of peoples in the African diaspora' (31), he cannot but dissent in the book-burning strategies.

This episode told by Hill is particularly relevant to our discussion because it hinges on a specific term, 'negro', which, as the author concedes, has taken a derogatory turn in certain localities, particularly in the US, where the title of his book had to be changed before publication. Hill is driven to reflect, however, on the contingency of meanings, as he recalls his own Black activist father, whose PhD, written in the 1960s, was entitled 'Negroes in Toronto: A Sociological Study', and who proudly referred to himself as a 'negro' – even if he would not do so today, when Lawrence confesses to cringing at the hip-hop use of 'Nigger' or 'Nigga'. 'Racial terminology will always fail, because it is absurd to try to define a person by race' (30), Hill argues, as he wonders what terms for self-definition the future holds, beyond 'Black' and 'African Canadian', and how new generations might scorn these currently acceptable denominations.

This is not to say that the contingency of meaning turns naming, particularly self-designation, into a futile exercise, as our focus on the term 'Afropolitan' demonstrates. Whether the word under discussion is 'Negro' (originally, of course, meaning only 'black'), African Canadian, Africadian, Black, Aphroperipheral or Afropolitan, the choice is not neutral, and in a world order which still evidences a heritage of colonialism and its associated racisms, naming is far from banal. Names may, however, serve a temporary cause. I will therefore return to the term 'Afropolitan' and the basic alliances and subversions that it has implied, in order to draw possible parallels with African Canadian practices, distinctly set within the frame of a declared multicultural nation. I sustain that shifting and contradictory alliances are better illuminated by recent theorisations on diaspora and cosmopolitanism which break the binary divides between home/host and national/transnational, as well as between singularity and communality.

Afropolitan, diasporic, cosmopolitan agencies: ways of being (African) in the world

As explained in the introduction, my concern is not so much with the precision of the term 'Afropolitan' as an analytical category,⁴ as with the reasons for its creation, its usefulness as perceived by those who embrace it, and the links with similar strategies across the African diaspora. My focus here will be on possible connections with 'Africanness' as performed by Canadian writers.

A crucial reason for embracing the term 'Afropolitan' seems to be its contribution to the redefinition of 'what it means to be African' (Selasi, 2005). It does this by working very markedly against the oversimplification of the continent, too often conceived and represented in reductive terms, treated as 'a country' despite the intricacy of its nations and peoples. Furthermore, the concept of the Afropolitan implicitly contradicts the expectations that 'African literature' should address such stereotypes, as conveyed in Binyavanga Wainaina's ironical 'How to Write about Africa' (2005), published in the same year as Selasi's 'Bye-Bye Babar', and part of a comparable rebellion – even if Wainaina aligns himself with Pan-Africanism rather than Afropolitanism (Bosch Santana, 2013). 'Bye-Bye Babar', like Esi Edugyan's *Dreaming of Elsewhere* (2014), deals prominently with the concept of home, which for Selasi's Afropolitans is multilocal. The article also focuses on cultural hybridity and issues of the triple ('national, racial, cultural') identifications required of her proposed new category

of Africans. The contradiction inherent in the term 'Afropolitan', which declares its cosmopolitanism while locating itself in the African continent, foregrounds an affective attachment to Africa (specific or imagined), but may also betray the as yet inescapable, and therefore determining, question of estrangement through racialisation. This is represented in Selasi's experience, once again, by the interpellation 'Where are you from?' Her 'Bye-Bye Babar' reply to this question, perhaps more nuanced than is generally acknowledged, was qualified almost a decade later by a piece published in the *Guardian* (Selasi, 2013) narrating how a particularly harrowing interrogation about her origins shook her routine assumption of Afropolitan identity, and urged a 'return' journey to Ghana; a journey made 'not "to find myself" in Africa but to be myself on African soil'; travelling as her artist self, rather than the '(illegitimate) Prodigal Daughter'. For this journey she abandons the mediating figures of her parents as a lens through which to contemplate Africa ('that static site of hurt and home'), and finds/creates for herself a dynamic Africa, not some 'real' west Africa, but 'my west Africa, my version of home, not just a place but a way to be in – a way to know – the world' (emphasis in the original). While the description of this new version of Selasi's Africa is subject to criticism, being too close to the privileged social scene described for the Afropolitan milieu, the account tempers the sense of unproblematic affiliation of her earlier piece. One could argue that there is a 'real' Africa, mostly formed by less privileged people than Selasi describes, but it is equally true that, as has rightly been argued about the concepts of 'Asia' (Spivak, 2008) or 'America'/'the Americas' (Taylor, 2007), Africa is 'not a stable place or object of analysis, but a highly contested practice – physically, politically, artistically and theoretically' (Taylor, 2007: 1419). Defining one's 'Africa' is a complex and ongoing task.

In Edugyan's and Selasi's accounts of un/belonging, there is what they both describe as an 'uneasy' relationship with the African continent and the localities of their parents, where they have distinctly *not* been brought up. But there is also an instigating interpellation by others, even in places where they 'are local' (to put it in Selasi's terms, 2014), to 'explain' their origins owing to their perceived 'race'.⁵ This reiteration of being interpellated as a stranger in your own place is a common feature in stories of identity formation by Black (minority) writers, the subject of much literature, and part of the sense of commonality, often of solidarity, of the African diaspora. It is present in the stories told by Selasi, Hill and Edugyan, all of them recent accounts of living and thinking transnationally. The ambiguous and complex alliances that these authors display confirm the reasons that move diasporic theorists to complicate the classic interplay between 'home' and 'host' countries so as to match contemporary realities. Only a modified view of diaspora, which takes into account enhanced mobility and connectivity (Tsagarousianou, 2004), with a distinctly triangulated pattern, what Vertovec (2009: 4) calls a 'triadic relationship' between homeland, hostland and diasporic members in other locations, can begin to encompass today's identifications. It is that third dimension, the transversal relationships with other diasporic subjects, that informs both Afropolitan and other 'transnational' African alliances, bound as they are by mobility and connectivity. As we have seen in the Canadian cases discussed, this does not exclude a distinctly 'indigenous hostland' component. Not only does Clarke claim the right to national belonging for long-established Africadian citizens, second-generation Lawrence Hill also uses the inclusive 'we' in describing Canadians' denial of their own slave history (as quoted above), thus embracing his national culture while claiming the diasporic identity that he has shaped for himself.

Such shatterings of binary divisions (national/transnational, roots/routes) are anything but unusual. Michelle Wright perceives Black diasporic identities as moving between the extremes of the 'hypercollective, essentialist' and the 'hyperindividual', and argues that a useful diasporic definition means constantly negotiating between these, to account for singularity and diversity while demonstrating connection and commonality (Wright, 2004: 2). The complex ways in which this negotiation takes place are illustrated in the Canadian authors discussed here, who move between individual and nationally/regionally located histories to the commonalities of being Black/African, an experience still too often shaped by racialisation, as verified in Hill's and Edugyan's texts.

This social persistence of racialising thought, against all scientific and multiculturalist odds, added to the reductive thinking about 'Africa', must contribute to the preference for the 'marked' term 'Afropolitan' (versus the unmarked cosmopolitan), since its very structure allows an emphatic claiming of the Afro- side of a subjectivity while denying, in the second half of the term (-politan), the preconceived ideas about the first. The term thus acquires an empowering response value as self-definition. Its use instead of 'cosmopolitan' or even 'African cosmopolitan' would constitute a contingent strategy, which perhaps in future will be regarded as pointless as the past revaluation of 'negro', but which is at present used in a manner akin to the 'strategic essentialism' once described by Gayatri Spivak, a counter-discourse to an externally imposed identity.

The worrying effect of social prejudice and racialisation on subjectivities, regardless of formal citizenship, is a sustained Canadian preoccupation in the context of multiculturalism. David Chariandy's 'The Fiction of Belonging' (2007) opens with the results of a contemporary survey showing the disaffection of second-generation visible minorities for Canada, their country of birth, in contrast to the much stronger Canadian affiliation of first-generation Black immigrants, or of white immigrants in general (2007: 818). Chariandy relates this disaffection to the manner in which, following international terrorist attacks by 'natives', multicultural anxieties shifted from the figure of the immigrant to that of the 'discomfortingly intimate stranger born here' (819). While offering second-generation writers and their nuanced critiques as alternative renderings of this uneasy belonging, he poses a pertinent doubt:

it's also possible that we have erred in assuming that the ideal of multicultural citizenship could entirely assuage the painful, affective legacies of diasporic displacement and racialization, or else adequately address the *material* obstacles towards security, social acceptance, and dignified labour that many visible minorities continue to face. (828, emphasis in the original)

Chariandy's insightful comment identifies the affective complications of diasporic living, even within multicultural inclusive societies, but also importantly addresses the materiality of the obstacles, thus reminding us of a social class not usually included in the affluent vision of the 'Afropolitan' (Ede, 2016).

This fraught relationship between multiculturalism and its designated beneficiaries, as well as the multiple manners in which creative writing engages with such unease, and may offer alternative, complex perspectives that break the 'us' versus 'them' binary, is essential to any analysis of the Canadian cultural context and to that of Black Canadian writers in particular. The shortcomings of multiculturalism policies, together with the potential of 'post-multicultural' writers, are in part the subject of Sneja Gunew's recently published *Post-Multicultural Writers as Neo-Cosmopolitan Mediators* (2017). Gunew revises recent debates on (neo-)cosmopolitanism, describing them as 'attempts to imagine a new critical framework that is more culturally inclusive and to think in "planetary" rather than "global" terms' (Gunew,

2017: 1). She aligns her methodology with a number of neo-cosmopolitan perspectives, such as Walter Dignolo's critical cosmopolitanism (2000), and the 'post-western' meaning of the concept, defined by 'a condition of openness to the world and entailing self and societal transformation in light of the encounter with the Other' (Delanty, 2012: 41), that is, a form of denaturalisation enabling receptivity to other ways of 'being at home in the world'. In this sense, it is a decolonial project influenced by Walter Dignolo, who, Gunew reminds us, frames cosmopolitanism in an ethical context, linking it to a dialogue among civilisations, and emphasises its pedagogical dimension: 'Cosmopolitanism ... is not something that is just happening. Someone has to make it happen' (Dignolo, 2012, quoted in Gunew, 2017: 2). Gunew advocates a return to the concept of 'vernacular cosmopolitanism' (coined by Homi Bhabha, 1996) in order to depart from elitist or banal (consumerist) cosmopolitanisms, and to define a neo-cosmopolitanism that is local, subaltern and peripheral, one that makes visible the cosmopolitan nature of groups marginalised by the nation. Within this framework, she overturns established expectations about diasporic/multicultural writers, giving them a major role in moving towards the understanding and practice of cosmopolitanism:

if we engage seriously with the terms offered by the debates in neo-cosmopolitanism, such [diasporic, immigrant, multicultural and ethnic minority] writers would be given critical recognition as mediating figures that facilitate new relations between national cultures and the global or, in the more felicitous term suggested by Spivak, Gilroy and Cheah, the *planetary*. The very elements that have been traditionally deployed to illustrate their constitutive suffering and oppression (the 'migrant condition'; *migritude*), the belief that they are at home nowhere or in more than one place (and thus constitutively disloyal and 'unpatriotic'), could be rethought to comprise their greatest attribute – that they can navigate the structures of belonging in numerous ways, not least by putting into question the complacent assumptions or self-evident universalisms that undergird many forms of both nationalism and globalization. (Gunew, 2017: 5)

Gunew's project also proposes a revisiting of multiculturalism, a salvaging return, inspired by Lyotard's conception of 'the future anterior' (1986), to examine what was left out of – but existed in – multiculturalism. She concludes that 'what was left out of multiculturalism was the cosmopolitan element', and contends that 'post-multicultural writers offer a cosmopolitan mediation and translation between the nation-state and the planetary', destabilising fixed identifications. Multicultural or ethnic artists 'provide a "hinge" between national cultures and globalization as well as putting those concepts into crisis' (Gunew, 2017: 11). This perspective validates a creativity and way of knowledge too often presented as fraught with trouble. Cosmopolitanism understood in these terms revalues the multiple manners of belonging and the differing approaches to writing from the margin, not as an exotic object to be 'flaunted', as Edugyan put it, for the benefit of readers, publishers and reviewers, but as signifying worlds that exist fluidly, moving between the local and the transnational. While this may constitute a utopian objective (and one which may again appear to lay a further representational burden on writers), it has the value of making structurally compatible – indeed interdependent – the apparently divergent demands for national belonging/indigeneity (as claimed by Clarke for Afriadians) and the transnationalist/diasporic allegiance defended by Rinaldo Walcott or Dionne Brand, and collectively practised in writing.

Conclusions: reading and writing singularity and likeness

The specific Canadian context of the African diaspora produces a variety of affiliations and self-namings that can be seen to combine, in varying degrees, some form of rootedness in

the national (Canadian) with a transnational, Afrodiasporic outlook. Whether the link to Africa is mediated by a previous national origin (the US, in Hill's case; a Caribbean nation, in Walcott's and Brand's), or directly through migrant parents, as in the case of Edugyan, their production shows a clear historical awareness, often focusing on Canadian Black history (in Vancouver, in Alberta, in the Maritimes), which is never independent of transnational connections. The historical subject-matter allows writers to combine a sense of communal responsibility with the uniqueness of human existence and of creation, a tension which is an intrinsic part of writing, but which may be enhanced by the burden of representation in 'minority' writers. In conversation with Amatoritsero Ede (perhaps the only critic fully engaging in the Afropolitan discussion from Canadian soil), Esi Edugyan rejects the idea of defining herself as an Afropolitan or through any other label, arguing that her sense of otherness has always led her to 'distrust the collective path, and to lurk on the sidelines' (Ede, 2015). In the same conversation, she alludes to the problem of 'being regarded as a hyphenated writer, an Afro-Canadian, etc., as if there were some special topic or subject required, and some special audience expected, rather than simply being seen as a writer telling stories about the world'. This formulation of the desire to be read simply as a writer, free to approach any subject, is also common to racialised or peripheral writers, however politically committed their work. Ede (2016) has argued that the Black political agency of Afropolitanisms is cancelled out by its privileged class dimension and its disengagement with historical issues that underpin Black history. I would argue that the way in which most Canadian authors elude this limitation is precisely by their strong engagement with the historical. In response to criticism of her book *Half-Blood Blues* as 'un-Canadian' in setting and time, Edugyan claims, on the one hand, the 'Canadianness' of her story by virtue of her being Canadian, and, on the other, the freedom to write unrestricted by citizenship or any other imposed definition.

The pull between singularity and commonality described by diasporic theorists (Wright, 2004) is particularly powerful in writers (Gunew, 2017), and in the genre of the novel, whose early history embodies the representation of individualism but has always allowed the collective into its malleable form. The Canadian texts discussed here bridge these polarities by their engagement with history, but also through the act of imagination and empathy involved in recreating otherness. Such acts of empathy, trying to imagine oneself as the other or the stranger, are described in both Hill's and Edugyan's Kreisel lectures (the Surinamese book burner; Amo and the taxi driver) and most fully in the extended acts of imagination of their novels, the recreation of Aminata and Hiero, which required from the authors a crossing of boundaries in terms of time, space and gender, among others.

Both Esi Edugyan and Lawrence Hill conclude their Kreisel lectures claiming a role for literature in the world of human relations. Edugyan, who declares herself 'a firm believer in the power of stories to affect and alter the realities of our world' (2014: 31), ends with a condensed manifesto which defines writing as an exploration of 'what it means to be alive in the present moment' (32), and a belief in the power of empathy, however insufficient:

We have always dreamed of elsewhere. It is our privilege as creatures of language who exist within a narrative space, that is, who are trapped inside time. And it is our responsibility, as well. We owe it to each other to see past those differences which separate us. 'Where are you from, *really?*' Here. If every act of empathy is a leaving of the self, then such journeys are more necessary than ever in this world. Dreaming of elsewhere is one of the ways we struggle with the challenge of what it means to be *here* – by which I mean at home, in ourselves. (32, emphasis in the original)

Lawrence Hill, for his part, concludes his lecture by denouncing the act of intimidation that book burning represents, arguing that it runs counter to the very nature of literature:

The very purpose of literature is to enlighten, disturb, awaken and provoke. Literature should get us talking – even when we disagree. Literature should bring us into the same room – not over matches, but over coffee and conversation. It should inspire *recognition of our mutual humanity*. Together. (Hill, 2013: 32, my emphasis)

These declared aims in the writing of literature, and the imaginative and ethical practices of both writers in their Kreisel lectures and the related novels, are very much in tune with the utopian perspective of cultural neo-cosmopolitanisms, which value literature as ‘a type of world-making activity that enables us to imagine a world’ (Cheah, 2012: 138). While it is doubtful that racialised writers should be charged with the obligation of (consciously) bridging the local and the global, I do believe that a cosmopolitan reading practice, receptive to difference beyond limited ‘ethnographic’ approaches, giving writers – African, Afropolitan or AfroCanadian – their due as complex artists and communicators, may constitute the first appropriate response to the strategic self-designations of Afrodiasporic writers, who ultimately, as Rinaldo Walcott argues, claim the world as home. As Sid, the narrator of *Half-Blood Blues* puts it, ‘You talk about this sea and that sea ... Atlantic. Pacific. But it all one water, ain’t it? Why divide it up?’ (Edugyan, 2011: 172). This intellectual denial of affiliations is echoed in Edugyan’s Kreisel lecture, when she argues that ‘not belonging, also, can be a kind of belonging. There are all sorts of nations on this earth. It is a lonelier citizenship, perhaps, but a vast one’ (2014: 25). Such advocacy of cosmopolitan citizenship from writers of recognised historical awareness reveals a determination to negotiate the singular and the communal, together with the utopian desire for broader and more open encounters, both human and creative, which underpins Canadian and Afropolitan debates.

Notes

1. Although aware of the complications of using the umbrella term ‘Black’, I choose it here owing to the explicit identification of a number of Canadian authors when interpellated on identity. It is used in this article only in reference to African descendants who identify as Black.
2. For a detailed history of the Black diaspora in Canada, see Joseph Mensa’s *Black Canadians: History, Experiences, Social Conditions* (2002). See also Tettey and Puplampu (2005).
3. For a recent discussion of Black Canadian writing and its relation to history, see Siemerling (2015).
4. The complex reception of the term ‘Afropolitan’ and its implications for African writers, as well as its value as an analytical category, are covered in depth by other contributions to this special issue, in particular Toivanen, and Knudsen and Rahbek.
5. Selasi’s traumatic trigger for her visit to Ghana is a question asked of her at the ‘white’ wedding of her best friend in Jamaica, when, after she ‘explains’ her background, the man assumes her father to be polygamous.

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5 Transforming the body, transculturing the city

Nalo Hopkinson's fantastic Afropolitans

Miasol Eguíbar Holgado

ABSTRACT

This article explores the intersections between Afropolitanism and the speculative fiction of Afro-Caribbean Canadian writer Nalo Hopkinson. Interpreting her work under the theories of Afropolitanism brings to the foreground and problematises the disjunction between the modern African diaspora (Afro-American/Afro-Caribbean) and the contemporary African diaspora, the one Taiye Selasi addresses in her conceptualisation of Afropolitanism. In aligning the Afro-Caribbean fantastic context with the figure of the Afropolitan, the author addresses some of the incompatibilities that may arise between them, as well as the productive and creative possibilities of their conjunction for the definition of emerging, transnational African identities.

The concept of Afropolitanism, developed to designate a transnational ontology and artistic ethos shared by people connected to Africa, has recently attracted considerable attention both from the context of cyberspace and from academia. Born of the need to address and articulate fluid identities rooted in Africa, Afropolitanism speaks to experiences of migration and translocality in a globalised world. As a phenomenon which is only recently beginning to be theorised, several aspects of its applications and implications are yet to be debated in depth. Whereas current criticism has mostly focused on the class restrictions entailed in Taiye Selasi's original formulation of the concept in *LIP Magazine* in 2005, questions such as the scope of the term or the positionality of the body within its parameters remain under-discussed. This paper examines the work of Jamaican-Canadian writer Nalo Hopkinson and the ways in which a close analysis of representations of (non)racialised bodies in the global city may benefit from an Afropolitan approach. Equally, concentrating on Hopkinson's speculative fiction reveals how the discourse of Afropolitanism may be expanded and conferred with a more nuanced reading. Selecting texts from an Afro-Caribbean literary tradition instantly raises fundamental questions, such as the appropriateness of deploying the idea of Afropolitanism to describe shifts in Caribbean-Canadian identities. The term 'Afropolitanism' is most commonly used to refer to a contemporary experience, historically and conceptually detached from previous (forced) migration experiences of the African diaspora. Does this mean that Afropolitanism may exclusively imply a unidirectional movement, diasporic or otherwise, from the continent to other parts of the world? Would the presence of

Afro-Caribbean subjects and their experiences disrupt the social patterns and geographical movements around which Afropolitanism is constructed? I argue that the dynamics of cross-cultural contacts in modern metropolises, which can be conceptualised through Fernando Ortiz's ideas on 'transculturation', play a central role in defining Afropolitanism, to the point where a carefully appraised inclusion of Afro-American and Afro-Caribbean ontologies becomes a necessary step in the theoretical development of the concept.

In the article where she first introduces the term, Selasi defines the Afropolitan subject as follows:

They (read: we) are Afropolitans – the newest generation of African emigrants, coming soon or collected already at a law firm/chem lab/jazz lounge near you. You'll know us by our funny blend of London fashion, New York jargon, African ethics, and academic successes. ... There is at least one place on The African Continent to which we tie our sense of self: be it a nation-state (Ethiopia), a city (Ibadan), or an auntie's kitchen. ... We are Afropolitans: not citizens, but Africans of the world.

(Selasi, 2005)

Her attempt to encompass an emerging African cosmopolitan identity within this neologism can be framed within the recent wider movement towards self-definition in which diverse African groups (usually young, middle- or upper-class artists) give name to their own experiences of hybridism and culture and identity transformations. As Belinda Otas points out, 'terms like Afropolitan, Afro-Optimism, Afro-Klectic, Afro-Phile, Afro-Centric, and Afri-Capitalist' proliferate within a 'savvy generation living in a new-media village' (2012: 38). This miscellaneous terminology refers to the multiple strategies through which particular African subjects position themselves within the multicultural, globalised world of which they are part. Furthermore, the flexibility of the meaning-making process implies an equally flexible range of identities to which the terms can be ascribed. In this sense, Meruschka Govender, born in South Africa and of Indian descent, affirms that, in using the term Afropolitan to define herself and people like herself, 'I want to complicate Africa. I want people to realise how multi-dimensional the continent and the experiences of the people are' (quoted in Otas, 2012: 41). Nevertheless, the element that prevails in all these different modes of identity articulation is the reference to Africa as an ultimate site of identification. Selasi's proposal, as well as later critical texts reconsidering the concept (see Ede, 2016; Eze, 2014), all point towards Africa as a relatively immediate point of origin or departure. Achille Mbembe's important contribution to the heuristic applications of the term reconfigures part of the scope of Afropolitanism to speak about Africa as long since participating in global socio-cultural dynamics and therefore highlighting even more the central role of the continent (2007: 27). Even in those texts where the African diaspora is mentioned as one of the groups affected by processes of globalisation and cross-cultural contexts, the moment of migration is positioned in the time after the 1950s. It is people of African descent, but more specifically first-, second- or perhaps even third-generation African migrants who have developed the concept of Afropolitanism to define their transnational, cultural and identity-formation experience. There is thus a pervasive emphasis on the newness and contemporaneity of Afropolitanism.

In light of this tendency to associate Afropolitanism with recent migration movements, it is not surprising that discourses on Afro-Caribbean or Afro-American diasporas are left largely underrepresented. In an interview in 2015, Selasi herself even goes as far as to establish a distinction between the old African diaspora and the new one whose experiences she was seeking to describe: 'There is an African diaspora, not the original one; there is a new one, a smaller one' (quoted in Santana, 2016: 122). Her conceptualisation comes from the

impulse to address a kind of African transnationality that differs from that of the previous, centuries-old African diaspora (which I will call from now on, and for clarity's sake, the 'modern' African diaspora). However, the modern African diaspora has been widely theorised as transnational from at least the last decades of the nineteenth century. Salah M. Hassan aligns 'the Afropolitans to an earlier generation of African diasporic intellectuals, writers and artists – Frantz Fanon, Stuart Hall, Léopold Sédar Senghor and Aimé Césaire, among others – who in the process of inhabiting the Western metropolis have shaped our thinking of Western modernity and postmodernity' (2012: 24). Paul Gilroy's defining theoretical work *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (1993) is notable in its attempts to situate this African diaspora within a modern, global paradigm. He redesigns the diaspora as a space where it is possible to go beyond nationalistic claims of a pure, essentialist identity. Gilroy's approach emphasises diasporas as transnational frameworks, in which 'routes', rather than 'roots', are what join diaspora members. He both interrogates the 'significance of the modern nation state as a political, economic, and cultural unit' and posits that diasporas and their transnational nature can be used as tools to transcend the notions of ethnic absolutism associated with monolithic nationalisms (7). In a sense, it could be argued that Selasi's paradigms of identity politics are propelled by this principle. Her urgency to represent an African experience of cosmopolitanism is closely connected to Gilroy's deconstructions of fixed identities limited by nationalist exclusionary binaries. Teleologically, therefore, both Gilroy's and Selasi's ideas point to similar boundary-breaking processes in the formation of African-based identities.

However, it is in the origins of these two diasporic waves (the modern and the contemporary African diasporas) that the main distinction between them can be found. It is in its being a product of slavery, first and foremost, and of later subsequent intra- and inter-continental migrations, that the modern African diaspora differs from the contemporary diaspora, epitomised in the figure of the Afropolitan, who has relative freedom of mobility and an element of choice in their migration. Diasporic identities within these two broad groups are constructed upon completely different experiences of migration, displacement and cultural contact. Given the great distance between these starting points, the ontologies of the modern and contemporary diasporas will necessarily be disparate, and a careful evaluation of their divergences becomes equally important in the task of developing and exploring new dimensions of Afropolitanism. As dispersal from Africa and settlement elsewhere has taken such contrasting forms throughout history, it is with caution that any overarching terms should be approached. In the Canadian context, Wisdom Tettey and Korbla Puplampu indicate that 'the term *African-Canadian* is often used in everyday parlance and in the academic literature as an uncontested signifier of identity capturing all peoples of African origin in Canada' when, in fact, 'it is a very complex and contested concept that defies the presumed consensus of meaning implied in its usage, as well as the homogeneity of shared origin that members of the group have' (2005: 6). The entangled landscape of African-Canadianness includes socio-cultural manifestations from both the modern and contemporary African diasporas, as well as from times in between. There exists a settled community which has been present in Canada since the eighteenth century. It is a product of slavery and migrations from the US, and George Elliott Clarke designates this segment of the modern African diaspora in Canada as 'Africadia', which he defines as 'an ethnocultural archipelago consisting of several dozen Black Loyalist – and Black Refugee – settled communities (including some in and about the Halifax-Dartmouth metropolitan region), whose foundings

date back to 1783 and 1815 respectively' (2002: 107). Definitions of Africadia often depart from the cosmopolitan, transnational ethos, and are instead read as part of an indigenous or nationalistic movement. At the other end of the spectrum are those groups who arrived from continental Africa during recent migration movements, a part of the African-Canadian population that can perhaps be more easily aligned with the Afropolitan. The Afro-Caribbean diaspora in Canada, for its part, combines aspects from the modern and the contemporary diasporas.

The Caribbean diaspora in Canada originates as part of an immigration programme which encouraged people from the West Indies to migrate there during the 1960s, usually to act as cheap labour. As such, their contemporary diasporic experience can be framed within the scope of Afropolitanism, in that their displacement constitutes a contemporary reality and the push/pull factors involve a (to a certain extent) voluntary migration. It must be emphasised that class disparities can, and indeed do, play a fundamental role in ultimately self-defining as Afropolitan, since the concept has been conceived within a specifically upper-middle-class collectivity. However, it is also true that, as happens with current Afropolitan migration movements, processes of settlement in and contact with the hostland in the Caribbean-Canadian context take place, mostly, in post-Fordist urban spaces during a time of capitalist expansion and the consolidation of global socio-economic forces. The recentness of these movements from the Caribbean to Canada usually results in the migrants' and their descendants' detachment from the kind of personal or collective identification with Canada articulated by groups such as the Afropolitans. The national implications involved in this identity positioning contravene some of the agendas and ontologies conveyed in the works of Caribbean-Canadian writers such as Dionne Brand and M. NourbeSe Philip. These writers adopt a transnational point of view, clearly identifiable with the Afropolitan stance, whereby African diasporans cannot be fully accommodated within the limits of any nation-state structure. Philip argues that the New World African is in constant search of a lost homeland: 'where is home? And for those of us who belong to what I call the Afrospora, do we go back to the Caribbean ...; do we go "back" to Africa; do we stay in North America?' (Thomas, 2006: 206). This is part of the reason why some Caribbean-Canadian authors are wary of using vocabulary like 'homeland' or 'belonging' within a black Canadian context, let alone acquiescing to a particular national identity. For them, the African diaspora is defined through a multiplicity of locations and experiences; and this self-placement strategy is not far removed from the basis of movements such as Afropolitanism whereby

The African is no longer understood as being in opposition to the European, but as incorporating Europeans, Asians, and the rest of the world. Being African is no longer anchored in the narratives of autochthony. ... Identity, like culture, is delocalized. Place and origin are no longer exclusive markers of identity.

(Eze, 2014: 238)

The emphasis on hybridity and transnationalism that can be observed in this Caribbean-Canadian segment of the African diaspora responds to very much the same predicaments of contemporary cultural and border crossings faced by Afropolitan subjects.

On the other hand, the Afro-Caribbean diaspora traces its early origins back to the slave trade, the essential point of rupture with contemporary diaspora movements. Migration in the modern African diaspora is different from any other migration in history: thousands of African men and women travelled between continents; however, it was not of their own volition, and they were moved, or rather transported, in deplorable conditions. The crossing

of the Middle Passage, the breach between worlds, is often invoked as a powerful experience whose enduring imprint has influenced African diasporans for generations, and into the present day. Dionne Brand transforms this trauma into the embodiment of in-betweenness, a space that destabilises notions of origin and leads to a state of unbelonging that later becomes voluntarily accepted. What she calls the 'Door of No Return' is an impossible reality, the Middle Passage is a lived history for slaves that becomes a metaphor for elusive origins:

The door signifies the historical moment which colours all moments in the Diaspora. ... The door exists as an absence. A thing in fact which we do not know about, a place we do not know. Yet it exists as the ground we walk. ... The door casts a haunting spell on personal and collective consciousness in the Diaspora.

(Brand, 2001: 24–25)

In this sense, rather than celebratory attitudes towards a multicultural background, as has become the central paradigm of Afropolitanism, the trauma and violence which triggered modern African dispersion permeate current African- and Caribbean-Canadian identity and cultural expressions.

Once it is acknowledged that there exist fundamental differences between the modern (Afro-Caribbean) and the contemporary (Afropolitan) diasporas, the question that needs to be asked is whether these differences are irreconcilable. For this, I turn to the debate on the politics of representation of Afropolitanism which has recently taken place in academic contexts. A consistent number of the critiques against Afropolitanism concentrate on its ostensible association to a capitalist, upper-middle-class experience. The Afropolitan is seen as a privileged subject who, in his/her celebration of a kind of elitist multiculturalism, fails to address the hardships endured by the majority of African peoples. In Amatoritsero Ede's words,

The culture of Afropolitanism, as it is now mostly configured, can be regarded as short-sighted because of its individualistic political effects. This is exhibited through Afropolitan individual self-empowerment that ideologically mutates into an ironic and symbolic collective black self-negation, couched as a celebration of cultural hybridity and transnationalism.

(Ede, 2016: 90)

Here the shift in individual and collective identity constructions promoted by Afropolitanism, towards consumerism and the West, is read as a rejection or denial of socio-cultural and economic realities in Africa. Therefore, it is not only regarded as an alternative vehicle for expressing articulations of identity and aesthetic values, some scholars rather consider it an ontological departure from or a rupture with Africa. For these reasons, critics such as Emma Dabiri refuse to use the label 'Afropolitan' and choose to self-identify instead through a contemporary form of Pan-Africanism 'that does not seek legitimacy via detours through our Anglo-American "superiors", but instead fosters a continental internationality' (2016: 107). Class restrictions, freedom of mobility and a highly commodified artistic style are regarded as the most crucial limitations of Afropolitanism, which can thus be seen to fail to represent a significant part of Africa's population. In contrast to these positions I argue that Afropolitanism has emerged as a reaction in itself, a reaction against certain nativist essentialising discourses, those which Mbembe identifies as 'institutionalised and ossified' (2007: 26), and which hinder further theorisations about Africa and the African subject as part of a global scheme. Despite the fact that Afropolitanism has been discussed within highly visibilised contexts of Western academia, which are arguably foci of discursive

authority, it should not be assumed that it attempts to represent experiences and identities beyond its scope. Rather, it would be more productive to align it with a series of tendencies that are necessary to deconstruct monolithic readings of Africa, to underscore its complexity in terms of class, gender, race and ethnicity. The epistemological potential of the concept lies precisely in the fact that it does not claim to present itself as 'the master narrative for African progress, or the single story of African success' (Dabiri, 2016: 107), but as one more facet of the multiple socio-cultural dimensions of Africa. Furthermore, as some critics have noted, Afropolitanism's resolution to move away from an ethos and narratives of victimhood (Mbembe, 2007: 29) does not imply blindness to 'the injustices and violence that have been inflicted on the continent and its people throughout its modern history' (Hassan, 2012: 20). Whereas emphasis on transnationalism and its acquiescence to multiple geographical locations and cultures as sources of identification may apparently point to a crippling of allegiances to Africa, in Afropolitan discourses (along with other recent attempts to redefine African identities) Africa features prominently and is, if not the centre of these narratives, at least an inescapable, *sine qua non* element. When interrogating the choice of the term 'Afropolitan', Eze asks: 'If it is an African way of being cosmopolitan, what do you call a European or Asian way of being cosmopolitan, Europopolitanism or Asiapolitanism? Why can an African not just be cosmopolitan?' (2014: 239, 240). To my mind, the preservation of the signifier 'Africa' indicates a disposition on the part of the concept's producers and users to acknowledge the role of the continent as a distinctive, fundamental aspect of their cosmopolitan practices. This is clearly going against commentaries branding Afropolitanism as anti-African, and demonstrates how deeply ingrained the tensions are in Afropolitan conversations between constructive, positive attitudes towards a contemporary breakthrough in the continent and the contrastingly grim realities of poverty, the effects of (neo)colonialism and the pervasiveness of racial hegemonies.

Nalo Hopkinson's work parallels some of the quandaries put forward by Afropolitanism and the debates it has engendered. Speculative fiction, a term which includes subgenres such as science fiction, horror and fantasy, is perhaps the most appropriate way to describe Hopkinson's stories as they mingle elements from all these categories as well as from folklore and Afro-Caribbean story-telling. It is essential to emphasise that, in terms both of authorship and of narrative representation, people of African descent constitute a minority within these genres. Hopkinson belongs to a narrow (although much-celebrated) tradition of black speculative fiction writers such as Olivia Butler, Samuel Delany and Ben Okri, among others. Joshua Yu Burnett points out, drawing on Hopkinson's own conclusions, that speculative fiction has 'long and deeply problematic histories of depicting conquest and colonialism as glorious enterprises, and they also often engage in the othering of indigenous people to the point where the latter become non-human: that is to say, they appear only as aliens' (2015: 134). When ethnicities other than white are at all present in mainstream speculative fiction texts, it is often through narrative techniques that replicate othering processes whereby binary oppositions are established: human/non-human, white/non-white, us/them, self/alien or civilised/uncivilised. This displacement and the encapsulation of the black (read as racial other) body as part of an oppositional ontology parallel racist hegemonies currently in operation in Canadian society. Tetey and Puplampu assert that, despite the conspicuous enhancement of the politics of multiculturalism that has taken place in Canada over recent decades, still African-Canadians are read 'as perpetual outsiders and eternal immigrants, no matter how long they have been legal citizens' (2005: 41). The estrangement suffered by

those subjects who are targets of racism and alienation leads scholars to affirm that ‘the black experience [is] fundamentally speculative’; a condition that

can be applied not only to African Americans, but also to Afro-Caribbeans and other members of the African diaspora, who share similar historical experiences of dislocation, isolation, and alienation. Arguably, we might even apply it to the nations of sub-Saharan Africa, ... through the experience of colonialism.

(Burnett, 2015: 136)

Thus, even though speculative fiction may appear far removed from contemporary social struggles (be it because these narratives tend to be set in distant chronotopes or as a result of the imaginative, unreal content they often display and engage with), clearly this is one of the ways in which the genre mirrors elements from real life, even if it is through manifestations less straightforward than those of realist literature. Whereas the fantastic may utterly deflect from real and knowable scenarios, still writers ‘are bound and constructed by numerous other forces, including their own culture and experiences and their publisher’s expectations and target audience’ (Leonard, 2003: 253), and these limiting paradigms are consciously or unconsciously conveyed to literary productions.

In addition to functioning as a somewhat distorted mirror on reality, speculative fiction also bears the potential to transform it. In this sense, the genre may be considered a subversive form of writing in which received social discourses and cultural impositions are interrogated and challenged. Talking about her own creative experience, Hopkinson reveals:

one of the things I can do is to intervene in the readers’ assumptions by creating a world in which standards are different. Or I can blatantly show what values the characters in the story are trying to live out by making them actual, by exaggerating them into the realm of the fantastical, so that the consequences conversely become so real that they are tangible.

(Quoted in Nelson and Hopkinson, 2002: 101)

Freedom to create new worlds and to manipulate the parameters of known reality implies the possibility to undermine racial constructions such as the location of the black subject as other, both in real social contexts and in literary representations. In her first novel, *Brown Girl in the Ring* (1998), Hopkinson presents a near-future dystopic Toronto where the downtown area, known as the Burn, has become a shattered, extremely depopulated space with the majority of the city’s inhabitants having retreated to the suburbs. This spatial and social disruption

has been caused by events memorialized in a series of familiar headlines, referring to native land claims, international trade embargoes, federal government cuts in transfer payments, jumping jobless rates, budget cuts forcing downsizing, jobs leaving Toronto, rapid transit breakdowns and riots in the streets.

(Brydon, 2001: 76)

Even though the city’s eventual decay and the action of the novel are purely imaginative, the circumstances leading to this situation are close to contemporary realities. In this way Hopkinson emphasises the urgency and denounces the menace of these very current real-world struggles through the strategy of connecting them to a dystopic scenario. Furthermore, in making the Burn a place dominated by a Caribbean mafia, whom the protagonist, Ti-Jeanne, also of Caribbean descent, has to defeat, Hopkinson deconstructs racial dichotomies between self and other which are so pervasively consolidated in mainstream fantasy literature. Paralleling the suspension of disbelief effect, whereby the reader is willing to believe what is unbelievable, she applies what I call ‘suspension of othering’. The particularity

of this narrative technique is that the imagined alternative reality does not explicitly address racism. Hopkinson chooses not 'to write yet another plea to the dominant culture for justice' and what she does instead is 'to simply set the story of the "othered" people front and center and talk about their (our) lives and their concerns' (Nelson and Hopkinson, 2002: 101), which is not the same as negating the existence of these conflicts. This heuristic function of speculative fiction resonates with some of the tensions faced by Afropolitanism which I mentioned above. In opening the possibilities for African identities to be anchored outside models of victimhood, and to locate them instead within a fluid network of cultural sites, Afropolitanism is interpreted as a blatant denial of the disturbing realities of Africa, and even as a rejection of African values themselves. These two opposing aspects in the politics of identification and the development of collective allegiances have to be negotiated both in discourses of Afropolitanism and in black speculative fiction, where the fact that racism may not be an explicit concern does not entail a negation of its effects.

It is at this point that I would like to establish what I believe to be the most productive connection between Hopkinson's fiction and the concept of Afropolitanism. They both constitute new spaces for self-definition and, most importantly, they design strategies to supersede racial hegemonies imposed on black people (and other, non-white ethnicities). As Ede asserts, 'Afropolitanism, as cultural politics, can be viewed as a coping mechanism against the nausea of history' (2016: 93). In the same way, speculative fiction written by authors of African descent may work to revise history, to counteract processes of erasure and underrepresentation, and to open new creative paths towards inclusion and self-assertion. The differences in diasporic materialisation that emerge between the Afro-Caribbean and the Afropolitan diasporas should not polarise both ontologies as mutually exclusive. While these distinctions must be acknowledged, it is precisely in the contemporary experience of hybridism and transnationalism, and the departure from traditional paradigms of identity constructions, that the Afropolitan and the Afro-Caribbean diasporans find a common ground that can be appropriately explored and exploited through speculative fiction. In Hopkinson's words:

For people from diasporic cultures there's more than a double consciousness. It's occupying multiple, overlapping identities simultaneously. Throw in identities formed around politics, gender, class, sexual preference, etc. and you have quite the stew. There is no solid ground beneath us; we shift constantly to stay in one place. ... We are the people who have more than one place or identity or culture that's home, and we're struggling to find modes of expression that convey how we've had to become polyglot, not only in multiple lexicons but also in multiple identities. The classical forms of artistic expression give us a base from which to work, but from there we have to break the codified forms and create new voices for ourselves.

(Rutledge and Hopkinson, 1999: 599)

This statement largely coincides with Selasi's description of the Afropolitan when she says that:

'Home' for this lot is many things: where their parents are from; where they go for vacation; where they went to school; where they see old friends; where they live (or live this year). Like so many African young people working and living in cities around the globe, they belong to no single geography, but feel at home in many.

(Selasi, 2005)

Both writers demand (and in demanding, also conceive) spaces where this form of deterritorialised consciousness and creole identity can flourish and be expressed. That is why the intersection between speculative fiction and Afropolitanism, as two vehicles that convey

emerging transnational patterns of identity, becomes a desirable, if not necessary, alliance. Placing black speculative fiction within an Afropolitan context allows for its inclusion in a theoretical, contemporary framework which is currently defining the directions for future African (and African-derived) cultures. Conversely, studying Afropolitan approaches through the analysis of speculative fiction texts contributes to expanding and enriching the concept in terms of the multiplicity of characters and experiences portrayed. To further explore this intersection in the work of Nalo Hopkinson, it is useful to turn to the idea of transculturation, first introduced by Fernando Ortiz in his *Contrapunteo Cubano del Tabaco y el Azúcar* (1995 [1940]). As opposed to 'acculturation', which refers merely to the acquisition of another culture, transculturation implies a merging and a transitional process such that 'the result of every union of cultures is similar to that of the reproductive process between individuals: the offspring has something of both parents but is always different from each of them' (Ortiz, 1995: 102, 103). Whereas this proposal implicitly attributes certain purity to the cultures that come into contact with each other, what I find useful from Ortiz's idea is the mutually transformative influences that cultures have between themselves. Thus, within the context of the Afro-Caribbean diaspora, Caribbean culture is not effaced when migrants establish in the hostland, nor does Canadian culture remain uninfluenced by these migrations; rather, the diaspora-hostland relationship produces a multidirectional metamorphosis which is always reciprocal. Ortiz considers this phenomenon a negative situation (102), although, aligned with celebratory assessments of transnationalism and border-crossing (as in Afropolitanism), it may be regarded as a fruitful circumstance, a product of the fluidity and flexibility of cultural production. It is true that the past four decades have witnessed what Virinder S. Kalra, Raminder Kaur and John Hutnyk call 'the advent of hybrid forms of culture' (2005: 1), together with the emergence of various theories which have attempted to define and describe these non-essentialist cultural manifestations – Gilroy (1993), Stuart Hall (1997) and Homi Bhabha (1994) are some of the most conspicuous examples. While they could also be used in the present context, like Ortiz's original theorisation of transculturation, these articulations of hybridity may equally be said to rely 'upon the proposition of non-hybridity or some kind of normative insurance' (Kalra, Kaur and Hutnyk, 2005: 72). I want to retrieve the concept of transculturation, furthermore, because I believe this term is particularly well suited to be applied to diasporic contexts. The term refers to a process, rather than a complete product or final state. As such, it may be used to describe processes of cultural, identity or spatial transformation (as is my intention here). These processes, it must be borne in mind, are not cumulative or progressive, but multidirectional and dialogic. This aspect of transculturation is essential to understand the Caribbean-Canadian diaspora, and more specifically Hopkinson's fiction, in Afropolitan terms, as it emphasises the transformative and transitional elements in the concept both of diaspora in general, and of Afropolitanism in particular.

Hopkinson's imaginative connection to Africa takes, primarily, the form of folklore and allusions to Afro-Caribbean religions and spiritual figures. Being products of transculturation themselves, these become further transcultured in the contemporary Canadian context. Afro-Caribbean religions are syncretic constructions, born out of colonial slave societies, and as such include elements from Africa, Europe and the Caribbean. Hopkinson's works, also in a syncretic fashion, incorporate aspects that can be associated to different spiritual practices, from Vodou and Obeah to the Orisha tradition. One of the most conspicuous and compelling ways in which Hopkinson brings Afro-Caribbean religions into her stories is through the act of the possession of some of her characters (especially in the novels I address here, *Brown*

Girl in the Ring and *Sister Mine*) by Iwas, or spirits. In Vodou practices, Margarite Fernández Olmos and Elizabeth Paravisini-Gebert explain, possession is

the most vital manifestation of the reciprocity that marks the relationship between Vodou devotees and the spirits that guide them. The *crise de loa*, the mystic trance of possession, when the Iwa communicate with their children by incarnating themselves in one of them, is the most fundamental element.

(Fernández Olmos and Paravisini-Gebert, 2003: 119)

In *Brown Girl in the Ring*, young Ti-Jeanne, who is only gradually and reluctantly awakening to her supernatural powers in order to defeat Rudy, the mafia leader, is both aided by spirits and possessed by them. At the first ritual she attends, she is unexpectedly ridden by the Prince of the Cemetery, a manifestation of Eleguá (in Santería)/Papa Legba (in Vodou), master of the crossroads and keeper of the borders between life and death (Fernández Olmos and Paravisini-Gebert, 2003: 213). The transformation her body undergoes is described as follows:

She rose smoothly to her feet and began to dance with an eerie, stalking motion that made her legs seem longer than they were, thin and bony. Shadows clung to the hollows of her eyes and cheekbones, turning her face into a cruel mask. She laughed again. Her voice was deep, too deep for her woman's body. Her lips skinned back from her teeth in a death's-head grin.

(Hopkinson, 1998: 93)

The science-fiction scenario conjured up in this novel provides, however, not only the grounds on which to condemn current socio-political practices of injustice and, to a certain extent, overcome them. If, as Bettina E. Schmidt argues, 'religions can be seen as location of memory (*lieux de mémoire*) in order to conserve information about Africa in new surroundings' (2006: 237), then Hopkinson's integration of religion in her texts produces a (post) modern narrative continuum, both creative and ontological, which connects Toronto to the Caribbean and Africa. Furthermore, the relevance of Hopkinson's extensive references to Legba should not be overlooked as, among the Caribbean deities (all born of processes of creolisation), this one is perhaps most closely connected to the Middle Passage. Elizabeth M. DeLoughrey argues that '[u]nlike most theories of Caribbean creolization which root the process in the plantation system', the reading of certain cultural elements such as the Limbo dance (linked to the figure of Legba) are examples of creolisation clearly taking place in the transitional context of the Middle Passage (2007: 94). Thus, the use of these African creolised figures as narrative devices and their incorporation into a dystopic urban future provide a transcultural addition to the landscape of Afropolitanism.

The fantastical is, moreover, a channel through which African spirits become literally corporeal, adopting the form of those they ride (Ti-Jeanne in this case), but also affecting the outer appearance, voice and even physical strength of that person. Hopkinson's characters thus morph into hybrid entities, combining dimensions from different worlds and blurring the lines between them, ambiguous in terms of corporeality as well as gender, age and other identity markers. This strongly signifies the transformative capacity of the African spirits which is further explored in *Sister Mine* (Hopkinson, 2013). The protagonist of this novel, Makeda, is an ambivalent character herself, in the sense that she is the daughter of a human (claypicken) woman and the deity of nature and living things, Boysie. Her uncle, Uncle John (referred to as Master Cross or even Death), can, once again, be linked to Eleguá or Legba, as he is the keeper of the crossroads and functions as the vessel moving between life and death. Although her twin sister, Abby, has supernatural powers, Makeda does not possess

any kind of magic (mojo), or so she is led to believe, which makes her constantly feel like an outsider in her mighty family. At one point in the story when their father is in trouble, Makeda and her sister visit their 'Family' (whose members can be equated to both Orishas and the Iwa pantheon of Vodou) to ask for their help. The spirits are described as constantly shifting shape: 'Uncle Hunter was carrying a briefcase in this instant. He wore a snappy suit, had a cell phone clipped to his waist in a tasteful leather hard-shell case'; and later '[h]e flipped the cuff of the suit off his wrist to check his watch, just as his form changed: leather outback hat, khakis' (Hopkinson, 2013: 97, 98). The identities of the spirits and the people they ride thus fuse and become one and, paralleling the effects of transculturation, a different being emerges from this contact: a fluctuating combination of the deity and the worshipper.

In this other world, it is not only physical appearance that changes and is confused. The protagonist describes the place as 'a space both enclosed and infinite' (92), and the spirits as 'simultaneously doing an infinity of things in an infinity of locations in the present, the past, and the future' (99). This imaginative conceptualisation of the Afro-Caribbean spirit world as a disrupted spatio-temporality constitutes an important creative and ontological mechanism with which to redress certain aspects of the African diaspora. Linear history and geographical distances are two central elements in Western articulations of diasporas in general and of the African diaspora in particular. When these dimensions of reference are narratively nullified as Hopkinson does in her interpretation of Afro-Caribbean religion, traditional notions of the diaspora as bound by history and regional dispersion are equally displaced. Robin Cohen's work, in tune with the theory of the Black Atlantic, refers to the Afro-Caribbean diaspora as a deterritorialised diaspora, that is, as 'ethnic groups that can be thought of as having lost their conventional territorial reference points, to have become in effect mobile and multi-located cultures' (2008: 124); an approach that, although progressive with respect to previous theories, still moves within a framework restricted by borders and the cultures contained within them. Hopkinson's shift in perspective, on the contrary, represents the ultimate frontier-crossing, where time-space boundaries are both transcended and disappear altogether, replaced by change, transformation and possibility. Significantly, the world of possibility that Hopkinson creates, the spirit world, is referred to as Guinea Land in *Brown Girl in the Ring*: "Every time a African die," Mami intoned, "them spirit does fly away to Guinea Land. Is the other world, the spirit world" (1998: 103). Thus, even though territories are traversed and time superseded in figurative terms, the element of Africa remains a constant within a multiplicity of cultural variables.

Preserving Africa as a cultural, spiritual or creative referent clearly connects this part of Afro-Caribbean speculative fiction to Afropolitanism. The next step is, then, to explore the other component of this dual term, the element of cosmopolitanism. Afropolitanism's critical description by Selasi and others (see Gehrman, 2015) relies heavily on the Afropolitan subject's presence in and mobility through (usually Western) urban spaces, the consumption of a diversity of cultural as well as commodity products and, in terms of artistic creation, an eclectic sense of aesthetics composed of various elements from these plural worlds. While this is precisely the dimension of Afropolitanism which has received the most criticism, as mentioned before, cosmopolitanism serves as the space where restricted notions of fixed identities are debunked; or, as Abbas Ackbar puts it, it function as 'a modernist argument against the tyranny of 'tradition' as narrow parochialisms and ethnocentrism' (2000: 770). In heuristic terms, therefore, cosmopolitanism points to the experiences of transnationalism

and multiculturalism inherent to the Afropolitan ontology. In this context, Mbembe argues, Afropolitanism is attached to a powerful cosmopolitan ethos, represented in the

[a]wareness of the interweaving of the here and there, the presence of the elsewhere in the here and vice versa, the relativisation of primary roots and memberships and the way of embracing, with full knowledge of the facts, strangeness, foreignness and remoteness, the ability to recognise one's face in that of a foreigner and make the most of the traces of remoteness in closeness, to domesticate the unfamiliar, to work with what seem to be opposites.

(Mbembe, 2007: 28)

Understood in these terms, cosmopolitanism becomes a multidimensional negotiation of difference. Its complexity is enhanced within today's global urban centres as loci where difference is densely concentrated. Hopkinson, in populating Toronto and other metropolises with hybrid, fantastic characters connected to an Afro-Caribbean milieu, opens up possibilities for new and transgressing readings of the Afropolitan.

Her short story collection, *Falling in Love with Hominids* (2015), presents a vast array of speculative fiction characters, most of which embody cosmopolitanism in their own experiences and through the spaces they inhabit. Of these, modern, urban versions of Caliban told from Ariel's point of view, ghosts trapped in a mall for eternity or pre-adolescent werewolves-to-be surviving in a post-apocalyptic city, stand out as examples of fantastic characters that are re-incorporated into globalised contexts. 'Blushing' tells the story of a newly wed couple who have just moved to a luxurious house in Bellevue Park in Toronto. As the husband presents the bride with the keys to the rooms of the house, he warns her not to enter into his secret room. When later the bride wanders around Toronto (probably in the Kensington Market area, although the name is not explicitly mentioned) in search of a copy of the key to the secret room, the numerous multicultural spaces of the city and the market are referenced: a Jamaican patty shop, the Chinese market, an import store run by a Goth girl where the husband had bought antique locks and keys from India. The question of sexual harassment is introduced in the story through allusion to pictures of missing women stuck to telephone poles and in the warnings the bride receives from people: 'It's getting dark' and 'You be careful out there' (Hopkinson, 2015: 182, 183). When she finally returns home with the copy of the key, she finds a bloody scene in her husband's secret room: bodies of women, butchered and dismembered. The story, which until this point constitutes a version of the tale of Bluebeard set in a contemporary context, takes a turn when the husband finds the bride in the room. Rather than running away in terror, the bride, in an ironic reversal of the horror component of the tale, laughs and says to him 'It's alright. ... I'll play your games with you' (184). This reinterpretation of gender roles and stereotypes from 'Bluebeard' to 'Blushing' is an example of transculturation in that Hopkinson utilises a traditional French story and re-adapts its moral to her own subversive purposes within a cosmopolitan context, thus creating a cross-cultural network of narrative influences and mutual transformations. Indeed, in the transnational condition endorsed by cosmopolitanism, and in the cultural contamination it implies (Appiah, 2006: 111), transculturation emerges as an unavoidable effect. Perhaps the best exponent of transculturation within the works of Hopkinson that I am exploring here is to be found in the ending to *Brown Girl in the Ring*, where Ti-Jeanne finally confronts Rudy. In the dystopian Toronto of the novel, the CN Tower has become Rudy's headquarters and it is there that their final battle takes place. On the verge of collapse after the fight, Ti-Jeanne notices the resemblance between the tower and the pole her grandmother used in possession rituals:

Ti-Jeanne thought of the centre pole of the palais, reaching up into the air and down toward the ground. She thought of the building she was in. The CN Tower. And she understood what it was: 1,815 feet of the tallest centre pole in the world. Her duppy body almost laughed a silent *kya-kya*, a jokey Jab-Jab laugh. For like the spirit tree that the centre pole symbolized, the CN Tower dug roots deep into the ground where the dead lived and pushed up high into the heavens where the oldest ancestors lived. The tower was their ladder into this world.

(Hopkinson, 1998: 221)

Upon this realisation, she proceeds to invoke the spirits: Shango, Ogun, Osain, Shakpana, Emanjah, Oshun, Oya and Eleguá, some of which coincide with the Seven African Powers as identified by Fernández Olmos and Paravisini-Gebert (2003: 195), who finally come to help her overthrow Rudy. The fact that the spirits travel from Guinea Land to the world of the living through the CN Tower, the most iconic building in Toronto, a Western symbol of modernity and a product of contemporary, global and industrial momentum, has very significant connotations. This conjunction illustrates the multidirectional influences of transculturation: traditional figures adapt and appropriate modern urban spaces, which are in turn transformed by their presence, acquiring new meanings and displaying imaginative and representational possibilities. As this analysis demonstrates, Hopkinson's speculative fiction combines a cosmopolitan context of transnationalism and transculturation with an African connection. These two elements come into play to broaden the cultural scope and creative meanings of Afro-Caribbean diasporic fiction in their intertwining in the genre of the fantastic. As such, the contemporary experience of these fundamentally hybrid and Africa-derived characters both fits into and refines ideas of Afropolitanism, which may be easily expanded to accommodate this ontology.

This article has explored some aspects of Afropolitanism which are often excluded from current academic discussions, i.e. the points of departure and overlaps between the modern and the contemporary African diasporas, so as to theoretically incorporate literary manifestations of the former into the idiosyncrasy of the latter. Whereas differences between the origins and expansion of these dispersals (slavery and subsequent migrations vs privileged mobility in recent times) are a contrasting point, the Afro-Caribbean diasporan and the Afropolitan are not placed in diametrically oppositional locations owing to those disparities. It could even be said that in their own particular ways, both Afropolitanism and, in this case, Afro-Caribbean speculative fiction share a conflict and aim to undermine traumas and identity displacements, all of which are related to issues of race and class. One way in which these paradigms therefore complement each other is in their departure from victim attributions, and in the negotiation of a willingness to move forward while still appreciating and acknowledging the obstacles that assail black peoples in Africa and elsewhere. As mobile subjects, even if this mobility has been triggered under different circumstances, both Afro-Caribbean diasporans and Afropolitans need to find routes for the articulation of their experiences that are alternative to traditional, nationalist approaches of cultural inclusion/exclusion within fixed territorial and identity borders. Hopkinson's speculative fiction offers a figurative space where these alternatives may be conceived and enacted, thus adding new dimensions to Afropolitanism. This connection is further reinforced by the presence of Africa as a central entity in processes of identification, even when Hopkinson deploys it in the form of syncretised Afro-Caribbean religions and folklore. While this may be read as too weak an attachment to an African past, the fantastical narrative strategies through which she represents African legacies, as itinerant, adaptable and border-crossing cultural artefacts, align her approach

to Afropolitan ontologies of transnationalism, identity flexibility and hybridity. In addition to the struggle for recognition, the erasure of 'othered' readings of the racialised body, and the recurrence of Africa as a creative and identity signifier, the cosmopolitan element also underlies both Hopkinson's work and Afropolitanism. In the contemporary dynamics of cultural contact and negotiation of difference which I have addressed through the concept of transculturation, a cosmopolitan sensibility emerges which permeates Selasi's proposal as well as Hopkinson's speculative fiction. All in all, in their subversion of limited conceptions and representations of African (and African-descended) subjects, and the deconstructions of monolithic notions of identity, both Afropolitan discourses and Afro-Caribbean speculative fiction constitute fertile grounds on which to address contemporary African identities in their attempts to be visibilised within global, cosmopolitan social and literary contexts. Combining these tendencies in theoretical terms, therefore, contributes to the development of alternative and nuanced discussions on the potential of the figure of the Afropolitan.

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6 Cosmopolitanism's new clothes?

The limits of the concept of Afropolitanism

Anna-Leena Toivanen

ABSTRACT

Despite all the attention it has received, Afropolitanism remains undertheorised. Afropolitanism, inspired by the concept of cosmopolitanism, includes an explicit link to the African continent, which may result in promoting racialised and territorialised biases. It is also often conceived as an identity position, which tends to result, firstly, in unfruitful debates on who qualifies as 'Afropolitan' and, secondly, in generating critical interest in a mere handful of 'Afropolitan' star authors. This article argues that, instead of introducing a 'new' concept, it would be more useful to continue to revisit the concept of cosmopolitanism in order to explore its potentials in the analysis of African literatures.

Afropolitanism is a currently fashionable concept both within and beyond academia. It draws on cosmopolitanism, which is a complex concept invested with elitist, ethico-utopic, popular/vernacular and critical meanings. Cosmopolitanism most commonly refers to world citizenship. In the past, it has had an elitist ring to it, as the focus has mostly been on affluent travellers who can truly claim the world as their home (Robbins, 1998: 1). Moreover, the traditional Kantian version of cosmopolitanism has been accused of promoting Eurocentric and universalist biases (2).¹ Recently, however, the definition of cosmopolitanism has changed. It is no longer uniquely seen as 'a luxuriously flee-floating view from above', but 'as a fundamental devotion to the interests of humanity as a whole' (1). This ethico-utopian content of cosmopolitanism can be understood as 'a plea for cross-cultural and cross-national harmony', as outlined by Ulrich Beck (2008: 26), or as 'planetary consciousness', as formulated by Paul Gilroy (2005: 290). The growing emphasis on the ethico-utopian dimensions of cosmopolitanism has also diversified and democratised the ways in which the concept can be understood. As a consequence of this diversification, the meanings of cosmopolitanism have been extended to cover 'transnational experiences that are particular rather than universal and that are underprivileged – indeed, often coerced' (Robbins, 1998: 1). As such, cosmopolitanism can be understood not as simply a 'latent but unrealised' condition (Spencer, 2011: 11), but as an ongoing process of 'cosmopolitanisation', described by Beck as 'the growing interdependence and interconnection of social actors across national boundaries' (2008: 26). Formulations of cosmopolitanism as an ongoing process have also

drawn attention to what could be called popular or 'vernacular' cosmopolitanisms (see Bhabha, 1996). Moreover, as the idea of process suggests, the ethico-utopian goals of harmony and boundary-transgressing dialogue are certainly not currently entirely achieved. Understanding the processes of cosmopolitanisation as incomplete manifestations of cosmopolitanism draws attention to 'the structural obstacles and relations of domination preventing [cosmopolitan] ideals from being presently achieved' – this forms the core of an approach that Fuyuki Kurasawa calls 'critical cosmopolitanism' (2011: 280).

If because of its elitist, Eurocentric and universalist roots, cosmopolitanism has the tendency to evoke 'mixed feelings' (Clifford, 1998: 362), then the same applies to Afropolitanism: it is both welcomed and celebrated, but is also subject to strenuous criticism and has inherited at least some of the complexity often identified with cosmopolitanism. Nevertheless, it should be emphasised immediately that the concept, despite all the attention it has received, remains rather poorly defined in terms of theoretical exploration. In consequence, it may well be 'a concept that was expected to run before it had been allowed to crawl and find its feet', as Grace Musila (2016: 110) expresses it. For example, Taiye Selasi's 'Bye-Bye Babar' (2005), often considered to be the inaugural text of Afropolitanism, is not a theoretical text. This can be problematic if it is used as a main reference in scientific texts addressing the concept: Selasi's essay lacks conceptual depth and promotes a rather simplistic understanding of the concept of cosmopolitanism from which her Afropolitanism is derived. Another often-cited text, Simon Gikandi's (2011) foreword to the volume *Negotiating Afropolitanism: Essays on Borders and Spaces in Contemporary African Literature and Folklore* – a collection which, despite its title, fails to address the question of Afropolitanism in a consistent manner – barely covers three pages. The concept was discussed by Achille Mbembe in an essay entitled 'Afropolitanism', published in both French and English respectively in 2005 and 2007, and later included in an extended version in the volume *Sortir de la grande nuit* (Mbembe, 2013). The latter has not been translated into English, which, according to Stephanie Bosch Santana, has contributed to a certain '*décalage* between discussions of Afropolitanism in Francophone and Anglophone spheres' (2016: 121).² A recent issue of the *Journal of African Cultural Studies* (28.1, 2016) represents an effort to 'reboot' the concept (Coetzee, 2016), and while some of the articles and essays in it seem at least partly convinced about the usability of the concept, the overall impression is, nonetheless, not particularly enthusiastic.

By drawing on current theoretical and less-than-theoretical discussions, I set out to tackle the fashionable, yet problematic, concept of Afropolitanism, with the primary intention of drawing attention to what I consider its main weaknesses. As to the usability of the concept, I will argue that, while in its current form Afropolitanism may well be an applicable tool for analysing such extra-literary phenomena as authorial images, the concept of cosmopolitanism has greater interpretative power in text analysis. This article also challenges the alleged newness of the concept itself. It seems that Afropolitanism's sole contribution to the concept of cosmopolitanism is the link to the African continent. While it is certainly a well-intentioned, empowerment-driven gesture, it nevertheless risks promoting territorial and even racial biases that cosmopolitanism should ideally avoid. It will be my argument that the enthusiasm surrounding Afropolitanism is exaggerated. Instead of continuing to develop the concept of Afropolitanism, which seems problematic from the very beginning, I argue that it would be more useful to stick to the concept of cosmopolitanism and to continue revisiting it so that it can accommodate specific African articulations, that is, assuming that for some reason it is currently unable to do so already.

Following this critical discussion, I move on to a short analysis of Sefi Atta's *A Bit of Difference* (2014), Aminata Sow Fall's *Douceurs du bercail* (1998) and Brian Chikwava's *Harare North* (2009). I show how the concept of cosmopolitanism – rather than that of Afropolitanism, unconvinced, as I am, of its usability – can be used in their analysis. I am interested in cosmopolitanism not as a literary category or an authorial identity but as a thematics that articulates the idea(l) of world citizenship (which obviously entails some form of mobility), critical self-awareness, openness to otherness and, eventually, the limits that such idea(l)s face in globalised postcoloniality.

'Beautiful black people': Selasi's affluent Afropolitan

In Selasi's (2005) account on Afropolitanism, the concept is understood as an identity embraced by an affluent class of African world citizens cherishing an alleged link – no matter how tenuous – to what some earlier identity discourses seem to have referred to as 'the original continent'. Interestingly enough, the elitism informing Selasi's formulation resonates with traditional understandings of cosmopolitanism. Elitism, together with an articulately consumerist posture, has made Selasi's formulation subject to criticism. The fact that commercial actors such as lifestyle magazines and web shops have equally claimed the term 'Afropolitan' consolidates the consumption-oriented dimension.³ Stephanie Bosch Santana has drawn attention to the importance of appearance in Selasi's Afropolitan, and argues that 'the attempt to begin with style, and then infuse it with substantive political consciousness ... is problematic' (2013). The centrality of style as it is pictured in Selasi's Afropolitanism highlights the fact that being an Afropolitan is a stance enabled by socio-economic privilege. Emma Dabiri maintains that the issue of privilege per se is not a problem, but that 'at a time when poverty remains endemic for millions, the narratives of a privileged few telling how great everything is, how much opportunity is available, may drown out these voices of a majority who remain denied basic life chances' (2016: 106).

From the perspective of global injustice, the question of style, which betrays the Afropolitan's socio-economic privilege, is obviously irrelevant in its superficiality. It could be added, however, that when it comes to literary studies, style and aesthetics are far from irrelevant, and neither should they be, even when one is primarily preoccupied with literature's political or ethical dimensions. Hence, even though Selasi's focus on style in terms of appearance gives her account a superficial air, style itself, understood in a wider sense, is an aspect that is not always given the attention that it deserves in postcolonial/African literary scholarship. In other words, style, understood as the aesthetic dimensions of a literary text, is an important aspect of literary analysis: it is essential to give critical attention to literariness in order to avoid reducing fictional texts to mere sociological 'proofs'. In this sense, Selasi's preoccupation with style can be seen to indicate, albeit unwittingly, an important concern.⁴

In the field of literature, this fashionable aspect of Afropolitanism finds its articulation in the writing of such celebrated Anglophone African diasporic authors as Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, Teju Cole and Selasi herself. These writers come across as Afropolitans. The fact that some of them, like Adichie, reject the banner (see Pahl, 2016: 79) or claim, like Selasi, that Afropolitanism is not a literary style but an identity (see Gehrman, 2016: 69), does not seem to be sufficient to disassociate them from the category. By focusing on authorships and the alleged features of 'the Afropolitan novel', theoretical discussions tend to concentrate on a

handful of currently fashionable Anglophone Afropolitan writers. Even more than in the case of Selasi's work, scholars interested in Afropolitanism have focused on Cole's authorial image and his *Open City*, thus contributing to the paradigmatisation of the novel as *the* Afropolitan novel (see, e.g., Ede, 2016; Eze, 2016; Gehrmann, 2016; Pahl, 2016). Cole's novel has also been analysed from the perspective of cosmopolitanism, but many of these readings frequently adopt a critical approach to cosmopolitanism by exposing its limitations (see, e.g., Hallemeier, 2014; Krishnan, 2015; Vermeulen, 2013). In comparison, Afropolitanism, as represented by its advocates, comes across more often as a concept of empowerment and a celebration of identity.

While Cole, Adichie and Selasi often feature as paradigmatic Afropolitan authors, studies of cosmopolitanism in African literatures tend to focus on the work of two South African authors, namely J.M. Coetzee (see, e.g., Hallemeier, 2013; Spencer, 2011) and Phaswane Mpe and his novel *Welcome to Our Hillbrow* (2001) (see, e.g., Davis, 2013; Frassinelli and Watson, 2013; Hoad, 2007). In the case of Coetzee and of Mpe, cosmopolitanism is understood as an idea(l) that informs the texts themselves rather than functioning primarily as a marker of authorial identity. The point, then, is not whether Coetzee or Mpe are cosmopolitans but, rather, how their texts address concerns that are relevant from the perspective of cosmopolitanism.

With its emphasis on the identity and public person of the Afropolitan author, the concept of Afropolitanism may come across as particularly 'self-absorbed and individualistic' (see Ede, 2016: 96). The declaration of individual authors – or scholars, or Internet celebrities, etc. – that they either are or are not Afropolitans is illustrative of this self-absorbed essence. Such personified titles as 'I Am a Pan-Africanist, not an Afropolitan' (Wainaina in Bosch Santana, 2013), 'Why I Am not an Afropolitan' (Dabiri, 2014), "'I'm not Afropolitan – I'm of the Continent": A Conversation with Yewande Omotoso' (Fasselt, 2015a), 'Why I Am (still) not an Afropolitan' (Dabiri, 2016) or 'We, Afropolitans' (Eze, 2016) convey the idea that one either rejects or embraces the appellation. Of course, these declarations should be read as responses to Selasi's (2005) text in which she refers to Afropolitans as 'we'. Some of these authors have wanted to distance themselves from or offer an alternative to Selasi's initial formulation, which sets out to define a 'community' of Afropolitans. This has certainly added to the person-centred dimension of the concept. In any case, the sometimes self-congratulatory postures of self-declared Afropolitans – and *non*-Afropolitans, for that matter – is illustrative of what Marianna Papastephanou calls 'the self-centredness of the contemporary globalized self' (2012: 125).

Another – although admittedly less obvious – variation of the 'individualistic' (Ede, 2016: 96) or person-centred dimension of Afropolitanism can be identified in discussions in which scholars criticising Afropolitanism's elitist biases reflect on the concept's limits in terms of 'which Africans qualify [and] who is excluded' (Musila, 2016: 111). It seems to me, however, that discussions on who *is/is not* an Afropolitan are not that fruitful: they adhere to Selasi's definition of the concept as a mere identity issue, rather than expanding its scope by discussing what Afropolitanism might be about. A similar dilemma of self-centredness informs the concept of cosmopolitanism as well (Papastephanou, 2012: 125). As David Hansen expresses it, 'a cosmopolitan sensibility is not a possession, a badge, or settled accomplishment. It is an orientation that depends fundamentally upon the ongoing quality of one's interactions with others, with the world, and with one's own self' (in Papastephanou, 2012: 124). Cosmopolitanism, then, is comprised of utopian thinking, ethics, self-awareness (Spencer, 2011: 4), and also of a critical spirit that aims at exposing the limits that

cosmopolitan idea(l)s encounter in the present (Kurasawa, 2011: 280). It is not really a question of identity, and hence attempts to 'identify' who is a cosmopolitan may be considered misguided. In the case of Afropolitanism, it seems that discussions tend in the wrong direction because critics react primarily to Selasi's text, which conceives of Afropolitanism as an identity discourse. It should be underlined that Selasi's essay is not primarily about ideals, ethics, utopias or criticism – and these are the true components that make up cosmopolitanism. In effect, in her essay, Selasi does not refer to Afropolitanism at all. Her focus is plainly on *the Afropolitan*.

While the question of who is not counted as an Afropolitan is a pertinent one, it should be acknowledged that Selasi's essay draws a very specific picture of *the Afropolitan* identity. She defines the concept as having clear limits, and there seems little point in extending it to cover all mobile Africans. This is not to say that juxtaposing the Selasian Afropolitan with such underprivileged mobile Africans as coerced migrants – referred to as 'rejects of failed states' by Simon Gikandi, who considers the refugee as the 'Other of the cosmopolitan' (2010: 23, 26) – would not be an important critical exercise; indeed, it efficiently exposes the (admittedly evident) limits of the concept as formulated by Selasi. My concern about this line of reasoning, however, is what comes *after* the realisation that Selasi's account is exclusive. Further: did it ever pretend to be an all-inclusive model? Even if Selasi refers to a 'we' in her text, it is evident that the community she constructs with her use of the first-person plural is a community with clearly defined limits, not an all-inclusive one. In short, as a superficial re-interpretation of cosmopolitanism as an Africa-affiliated identity position, Selasi's account of the Afropolitan is an easy target of criticism. Nevertheless, it seems unclear whether criticising it will actually help us develop the rather shallow concept into something more consistent, applicable and viable.

Afropolitanism goes local

If Selasi's formulation is problematic because of its elitist and identity/author/person-centred emphasis, then Achille Mbembe's (2005; 2007) account of Afropolitanism may appear more appealing and applicable for analytical purposes. For Mbembe, Afropolitanism denotes the processes of hybridisation and transculturation that have informed the construction of Africa and its identities all along. According to Mbembe, Afropolitanism includes an 'awareness of the interweaving of the here and there, the presence of the elsewhere in the here and vice versa' (2007: 28). Like Selasi's account, Mbembe's Afropolitanism is based on the idea of mobility and the transcultural encounters that mobility generates. However, while Selasi's formulation highlights diaspora and movement from the African continent to the cities of the G8 countries – and thus promotes a 'concept of globalization that erases Africans who live on the continent from its purview', as S. Okwunodu Ogbecchie (2008) argues – Mbembe's historically attuned understanding foregrounds the idea of local/vernacular cosmopolitanism. This means that the transculturation that lies at the core of Afropolitanism does not necessitate physical travel away from the continent. According to Mbembe (2013: 227–228), the continent's history is profoundly marked by mobility and itinerancy in terms of both immersion (people from elsewhere living in Africa) and dispersion (African diasporas). These mobility-enabled phenomena enhance transculturation and produce local forms of cosmopolitanism informed by 'an awareness of the transnational and/or the universal situated within a condition of local embeddedness', as Ranka Primorac (2010: 52) states. These local,

vernacular, popular and practical forms of cosmopolitanism often lack the glamour inherent in the diasporic Afropolitan à la Selasi jet set. Understanding Afropolitanism (or cosmopolitanism) as a phenomenon of a transculturation that is not the monopoly of diasporic spaces outside the African continent has challenged what Simon Gikandi calls the 'Eurocentric narrative of cosmopolitanism' (2002: 600). Eurocentrism here refers to the idea that cosmopolitanism necessitates cultural encounters between Africa and Europe and that intra-continental forms of cosmopolitanism are not possible – or at least not equally valuable.

While 'the Afropolitan condition' is most often equated with its extra-continental, metropolitan articulations, literary scholars have also given attention to cosmopolitanism's local manifestations. This represents an important contribution to the diversification of understanding of the concept by applying it to texts and genres that may not be that obviously cosmopolitan because of their local and non-metropolitan settings and circulation. Examples of such efforts to render local cosmopolitanisms visible include Ranka Primorac's (2010) article on cosmopolitanism in a Zambian thriller, Rebecca Jones's (2014) article on translocal heterogeneity and cosmopolitanism in Nigerian domestic travel writing, Rebecca Fasselt's (2015b) analysis of cosmopolitanism in Yewande Omotoso's novel about Nigerian migrants in South Africa, and Maureen Moynagh's (2015) analysis of contemporary African (intra-continental) travel writing from the perspective of Afropolitanism. Such analyses can be said to 'allow ... for the possibility of addressing the ways in which subjects who have not historically been included in cosmopolitan taxonomies [and how they] might express cosmopolitan worldviews in places that have typically been ignored in this critical paradigm' (Johansen, 2014: 6).

This local dimension and critical awareness informs Simon Gikandi's discussions of cosmopolitanism and Afropolitanism. Gikandi defines Afropolitanism as a 'new phenomenology of Africanness – a way of being African in the world' (2011: 9). He foregrounds the local dimension of Afropolitanism by emphasising connections with the continent, its nations and its languages. Moreover, he also warns against uncritical celebrations of Afropolitanism by recalling 'the negative consequences of transnationalism' that can be observed in 'the difficulties [that Africans] face as they try to overcome their alterity in alien landscapes, the deep cultural anxieties that often make diasporas sites of cultural fundamentalism and ethnic chauvinism' (11). Elsewhere, Gikandi has discussed the limits of cosmopolitanism in the postcolonial context, arguing that coerced migrants and refugees represent 'a mote in the eye of cosmopolitanism' (2010: 23). They are the abject Other of the freewheeling, elite postcolonial *flâneur* identity embodied, for instance, in Selasi's Afropolitan and, as Gikandi underlines, in members of the academic elite like himself. What is interesting in Gikandi's criticism of cosmopolitanism is that he does not simply draw attention to the ways in which underprivileged African mobile subjects are denied cosmopolitan world citizenship by Western societies, but also how some of these overtly anti-cosmopolitan mobile subjects themselves refuse to embrace cosmopolitan idea(l)s by resorting to nationalist parochialism and even to terrorism. This is the case of Gikandi's example of young, diasporic Somalis 'who leave the comfort of American suburbs to go and fight for Islam in a state that now is nothing but a remnant of the collapsed heap of whatever was imagined to be the modern nation state' (25). In this way, he pointedly suggests that 'routes and journeys across boundaries and encounters with others do not necessarily lead to a cosmopolitan attitude' (24).

Gikandi's discussion also points to the fact that Western metropolitan spaces are often considered as places where, so to speak, cosmopolitanism happens. Big cities are sites where,

thanks to migration and the consequent multiculturalisation, one becomes easily exposed to transcultural encounters, which, in turn, may enhance cosmopolitan aspirations. Yet, as Emily Johansen asks, 'is cosmopolitanism primarily, or even properly, about demographics?' (2014: 12). The answer is obviously no: cosmopolitanism is not simply about being passively immersed in an environment that enhances the possibility of transcultural encounters (see Papastephanou, 2012: 119). Rather, cosmopolitanism is an active engagement and an attitude that comprises such ideals as self-awareness, openness to otherness and global responsibility 'to individuals and groups outside one's local or national community' (Spencer, 2011: 4). While 'mobility is the essence of cosmopolitanism' (Sheller, 2011: 349), cosmopolitanism is by no means a mere by-product of mobility. Being on the move or living in a 'multicultural' environment is insufficient for the individual to embrace a cosmopolitan vision and ideals. Cosmopolitanism does not simply 'happen'.

Cosmo lost

One of the main problems – if not *the* main problem – arising from the concept of Afropolitanism has been formulated by Grace Musila as follows: 'Why the need to qualify one's cosmopolitanism?' (2016: 112). Similarly, Chielozone Eze, one of the advocates of the concept, poses the question, 'Why can an African not just be cosmopolitan?' (2014: 240). Significantly enough, Eze leaves the question unanswered despite the fact that he actually emphasises Afropolitanism's debt to theories of cosmopolitanism. If the omission and replacement of 'cosmo' in Afropolitanism is considered in a wider context, it is clear that concepts such as 'Europolitan' or 'Europolitanism' do not (as yet) seem to make much sense. Indeed, as Simon Gikandi (2011: 9) admits, Afropolitanism itself 'may sound awkward as a term' – an awkwardness to which the critic may by now have become deaf. To erase the notion of cosmos by replacing it with a place-specific initial element results in a formulation in which something essential to the original concept is irrevocably lost. The concept of cosmopolitanism captures the idea(l) of world citizenship; that of being at home in the world. It entails a sense of belonging and responsibility that exceeds the boundaries of region, nation, race and culture. While traditional forms of cosmopolitanism have often been accused of pseudo-universalism, Eurocentrism and elitism, the concept has been subject to constant revision, and this has resulted in a wider understanding of what cosmopolitanism can be (see, for instance, Breckenridge et al., 2002; Cheah and Robbins, 1998; Dharwadker, 2001a). In their revision of the concept of cosmopolitanism, scholars have been particularly interested in cosmopolitanism's limits in the era of globalisation, and whether the concept 'can ... expand its geocultural repertoire ... [and] dissociate itself from class, hierarchy, and affluence' (Dharwadker, 2001b: 10–11). In other words, contemporary scholarship on cosmopolitanism 'participate[s] in and comment[s] on the term's scaling down, its pluralizing and particularizing' (Robbins, 1998: 3). As a consequence of this diversification, scholars argue for cosmopolitanisms in the plural in order to avoid a 'pregiven or foreclosed' understanding of the concept (Pollock et al., 2002: 1).

Given that cosmopolitanism has already gone through this sort of critical democratisation which allows for more nuanced interpretations and appropriations, it is somewhat difficult to see what changing the initial part of the word 'cosmopolitan' from 'cosmo' to 'Afro' is actually attempting to achieve. This point is not really clarified in Eze's (2014) article, nor in Mbembe's (2013) extended essay on the topic. What adds to the confusion in Mbembe's case is that in

his essay he uses not only the concept of Afropolitanism but also, on a couple of occasions, that of cosmopolitanism, and it is done in such a way that it does not seem to differentiate between the two concepts.⁵ On a general scale, it seems that the element 'Afro' in Afropolitanism simply suggests that 'ordinarily, Africans are *not* of the world' (Musila, 2016: 112; emphasis in original). The articulated link to the continent can, of course, be understood as a gesture of empowerment – even Selasi's (2005) text points to this sort of interpretation. According to Eze, African cosmopolitans 'need new names because we have new stories to tell about our world', and because 'we allow ourselves the freedom to inflect cosmopolitanism the way we have done to reflect a fundamental ideological and perceptual shift in African self-inscription' (2016: 116). Likewise, Ede considers Afropolitanism to be a concept of black agency that 'owes a debt to the Black Atlantic and to Black Paris' (2016: 89–90). And finally, according to Mbembe, Afropolitanism is 'a particular poetic of the world ... refusing in principle any form of victim identity' (2007: 28–29; see also Mbembe, 2013: 224, 232). Moreover, for Mbembe, Afropolitanism connotes post-racial citizenship, and such an understanding of 'Africanness' he argues, is absolutely necessary in order for non-black Africans to be able to claim African identity (232). From this perspective, the idea of Afropolitanism is, indeed, relevant: it represents an effort to see beyond taken-for-granted nativist and racial identities on a continent that continues to be haunted by the 'fetishism of origins', and the violent processes of racialisation inherited from the colonial project (222, 232; my translation). Yet here one is tempted to ask: why Afropolitanism, why not simply transculturation or hybridity? Is it Afropolitanism simply because of the academic world's thirst for newness?

While the empowerment-driven aim of renaming African forms of cosmopolitanisms as Afropolitanism is understandable, I remain rather unconvinced that such renaming actually serves a purpose. By tying the concept to the African continent, Afropolitanism inevitably ends up promoting territorialised and even racialised biases, which the concept of cosmopolitanism should be free of. Moreover, the link to the continent together with the idea of belonging – conveyed in the use of the first-person plural for instance in Selasi's (2005) and Eze's texts (2016) – entails a moral duty towards Africa (see Eze, 2014). Moral and ethical duties are also inscribed in the concept of cosmopolitanism, but for obvious reasons they are not restricted to one specifically defined geographical area. In this sense, then, the concept of Afropolitanism misses the point of boundary-transgressing solidarity which is explicitly articulated in cosmopolitanism. In Afropolitanism, the Afropolitan's moral duties are first and foremost directed towards one specific continent, one to which they are supposed to experience some sort of a mythical link – a link which Marta Tveit crudely ironises in her critical essay 'The Afropolitan Must Go' by stating, 'I do not have a drum beating inside me. The motherland is not calling me home' (2013). The aspect of moral duty informing the concept of Afropolitanism may actually end up neglecting the *very complexity of affiliations* it is supposed to be calling for. Why could not an Afropolitan's moral duties and sense of affinity be directed towards all the other places to which s/he is equally connected?

So rather than elaborating a new concept, I argue that it is theoretically more fruitful to continue to work on the concept of cosmopolitanism so that it could accommodate African articulations and specificities – if for some reason it fails to do so as it stands? Eze (2016: 116) maintains that it is 'African history' and 'a fundamental ideological and perceptual shift in African self-inscription' that necessitate a new concept. What seems to be forgotten here is that, as Ulrich Beck notes, 'there is no cosmopolitanism without localism' (2002: 19), or that 'cosmopolitanism ... begins at home', as Robert Spencer (2011: 15) expresses it. This simply

means that true cosmopolitanism, 'a cosmopolitanism worthy of the name' (Brennan, 1997: 309), always starts from the local: it implies a sense of self-awareness concerning one's own positionality in the world. This is an extremely important and essential aspect which is *already* inscribed in the concept of cosmopolitanism. When one acknowledges this, the 'new' concept of Afropolitanism seems all the more pointless. Indeed, if the alleged newness of the concept of Afropolitanism lies in its articulate link to the continent, its contribution to current theories of cosmopolitanism proves to be somewhat misplaced since it mistakenly suggests that the concept of cosmopolitanism, as currently theorised, would somehow exclude local specificities. With the concept of Afropolitanism, the idea of particular universalism central to cosmopolitanism is lost. Moreover, the explicit link to Africa in Afropolitanism may in fact be responding to a call for exoticism in the sense that the concept can be seen as a spiced-up variation of cosmopolitanism – this phenomenon can already be seen in the ways in which certain Afropolitan star authors are being marketed. So, for all the reasons outlined above, I agree with Marta Tveit's assertion that 'it is time to outgrow [Afropolitanism]' (2013). Thus, to argue my case, I will use the concept of cosmopolitanism, rather than Afropolitanism, in the following text analysis.

Reading cosmopolitanism in African (diasporic) novels

For the rest of this article, I concentrate on reading cosmopolitanism in three African/African diasporic novels: Sefi Atta's *A Bit of Difference* (2014), Aminata Sow Fall's *Douceurs du bercail* (1998) and Brian Chikwava's *Harare North* (2009). While all these novels are set in Afro-European contexts of mobility, this is not to imply that cosmopolitanism necessarily involves transnational or transcontinental physical mobility. I have chosen texts embedded in the Afro-European context because their settings in the highly regulated mobility between the two continents expose the limits of a cosmopolitan world citizenship that is often tied not only to the racial but also to the socio-economic background of the travellers.⁶ Moreover, these texts exemplify different scales of cosmopolitanism, starting from what I would call an affluent 'business class' cosmopolitanism in Atta's novel, ultimately moving on to the gradual failure of cosmopolitan ideals in Chikwava's work, with Sow Fall's complex novel occupying the middle ground. I am not, as such, interested in discussing the extent to which these novels or their authors may be cosmopolitan – or Afropolitan for that matter. In this sense, I share Robert Spencer's approach of being 'interested less in cosmopolitan texts than in cosmopolitan readings' (2011: 7).

I start with Atta's *A Bit of Difference* (2014). The novel, like Sow Fall's and Chikwava's, opens with an airport scene, introducing the unnamed protagonist as 'an arriving passenger' from London to Atlanta wearing 'an Afro, silver hoops the size of bangles in her ears and ... a pin-striped trouser suit' and carrying a 'handbag and laptop' (1). A Nigerian living in London, she works as an auditor in an international charity organisation and is on a business trip in the USA. From the very first page, Deola Bello can be identified as belonging to an affluent class of mobile Africans, and could easily qualify as a Selasi Afropolitan: she crosses cultural boundaries with a particular ease. The airport scene also conveys the idea that crossing 'thresholds of nations' (Manzanas and Sánchez, 2011: 112) is not a problem for her either: as a holder of a British passport, her mobility is far more effortless than that of Sow Fall's and Chikwava's protagonists. From the perspective of Atta's protagonist, the airport 'is a preeminent site of ... social inclusion' (see Huggan, 2009: 11), not exclusion. The novel is interesting in the sense

that while, through its sophisticated and open-minded protagonist, it articulates – at least at first glance – an effortless cosmopolitan state of being at home in the world (Brennan, 1997), it simultaneously conveys a strong sense of national identity and belonging. Thirty-nine-year-old Deola Bello has lived in the UK since she was a student, and because of her job she travels frequently to numerous parts of the world. This, however, has not affected her sense of belonging: she considers herself Nigerian and ‘has never had any doubts about her identity’ (Atta, 2014: 7) – she is far from being a self-declared Afropolitan. She experiences a feeling of restlessness, which is due to a sudden desire to have a child and a longing to return to Nigeria. Deola Bello is a singleton who ‘feels nationalistic about love’ (62), because of which her British friend Tessa thinks she is ‘daft’ (60). While all the external factors suggest that the protagonist might feel herself at home wherever she pleases, her yearning for belonging and for a partner with whom to have ‘a shared history’ (60) in terms of nationality results from experiences which have made her aware of her alterity in the UK. At work, she stresses her English accent ‘so that people might not assume she lacks intelligence’ (21), and she has started to understand that in Nigeria, unlike in the UK, ‘she is virtually colour free’ (78). While her UK-based Nigerian friends are familiar with similar practices of othering, they do not cherish the idea of unconditional belonging and even less that of returning. For Subu, who works in the finance sector, Nigeria is home but also ‘a place to escape from’ (34), and Bandede, Deola’s complexed writer friend, is particularly ruthless when it comes to ridiculing the protagonist’s pronounced sense of national affinity.

Despite Deola’s strong sense of national belonging and the feeling of outsidership informing her diasporic life, the novel articulates an awareness that can be identified as cosmopolitan. While this awareness is enhanced by her position as a privileged traveller, it cannot be attributed to mobility alone. One aspect of this cosmopolitan awareness is the protagonist’s critical understanding of her own positionality: her figure is informed by ‘self-awareness, ... and sensitivity to the world beyond one’s immediate milieu’ (Spencer, 2011: 4). In her articulately Nigerian identity, there is no room for the parochialism or national pride that often inform nationalist thinking. The protagonist’s attitudes and visions resonate well with Kwame Anthony Appiah’s (1997) concept of cosmopolitan patriot. This is a figure who is ‘attached to a home of one’s own, with its own cultural particularities, but taking pleasure from the presence of other, different places that are home to other, different people’ and is ‘first to suffer their country’s shame’ (Appiah, 1997: 618, 622) when they see malpractice or ethically questionable behaviour or opinions. Indeed, there is a strongly critical aspect in the protagonist’s national affiliation. This can be observed in passages in which she makes critical observations about Nigerians. Sometimes her observations are made tongue in cheek: ‘Nigerians are as prejudiced as the English, and more snobbish. ... Nigerians would snub aliens if they encountered them’ (Atta, 2014: 65). The text frequently uses irony, which is illustrative of the critical distance that marks the novel’s cosmopolitan vision. The protagonist also raises issues that entail ethical concern, when, for instance, her hairdresser starts to denigrate homosexuals, and the protagonist asks, ‘Nigerians ..., [w]hy are we like this?’ (111). Her ability to criticise springs from her diasporic experience, which has provided her with a wider perspective. This is underlined in a passage in which she discusses race-related issues with her siblings, who have not lived abroad as long as she has. ‘Their lack of awareness doesn’t surprise her’, claims the narrator; ‘She was exactly like them when she was ... surrounded by other Nigerian students who were the same way’ (78). Because of her own experiences in the diaspora, Deola has also become aware of her own privileged status in

Nigeria. At her mother's house in Lagos, she spots her brother's driver taking his lunch break in the garage, and greets him: 'She might not have noticed him had she not lived overseas and had the experience of being ignored at work' (176). As part of her work she is sent to Nigeria to evaluate whether the charity she works for should support specific NGOs. When she uncovers that one of the NGOs may be involved in fraud, she feels embarrassed that her observations confirm the stereotype of how Nigerians are seen abroad: 'All they know is Nigeria, corruption, 4-1-9, Internet crime' (130). Cosmopolitanism in Atta's novel, then, is above all a gesture of recognising one's own positionality as well as seeing oneself from others' perspective (see Spencer, 2011: 4). The text also conveys the idea of 'rooted cosmopolitanism', or 'cosmopolitan patriotism' (see Appiah, 1997) in its subtle treatment of how national affiliation may be mixed with global awareness. In terms of her socio-economic status, the figure of Deola Bello could also easily pass for a Selasian Afropolitan, but, then again, there is nothing self-congratulatory in her. Instead, Atta portrays her as a (self-)critical and complex figure with a strong sense of self-reflective irony.

Sow Fall's novel *Douceurs du bercail* (1998) gives voice to how cosmopolitan ideals – which the text explicitly articulates – fail in the Afro-European context of mobility. The novel's Senegalese protagonist Asta Diop is on a business trip to Paris. Asta Diop is portrayed as having cosmopolitan sensibilities as witnessed by her idea that the fact that they may be different 'has never stopped people from living together' ('n'a jamais empêché les gens de vivre ensemble' [101]).⁷ She also believes that 'the awareness of one's own identity is the best guarantee of an integration based on respect for the integrity of others' ('[l]a conscience de sa propre identité est le meilleur garant d'une intégration fondée sur le respect de l'intégrité d'autrui' [185]). This is an expression of self-awareness that forms an important dimension of cosmopolitan ethics. Asta belongs to the Dakarian urban middle class, and her privilege is constantly compared to the situation of illegal immigrants. The narrative highlights Asta's socio-economic status by pointing out that she travels for professional purposes and has no aspirations to migrate. Yet, with regard to the discrepancy between Asta's privilege and her travelling companions' lack thereof, it is worth noting that Asta, who is described as someone always stylish and well dressed, features in the airport scene in a rather shabby appearance as if to underline 'the potential fragility of her mobile subjectivity' (Toivanen 2016: 366). This detail is interesting because of the centrality of style or what could be called the 'Afropolitan chic' in Selasi's *Afropolitanism* (Toivanen 2016: 366). Asta's shabby appearance disturbs the idea of ease associated with an elite cosmopolitan mobile position.

The airport is a central setting in the first part of the novel. It plays a contradictory theoretical role: it potentially fosters cosmopolitan encounters but also condemns them to failure. As Graham Huggan argues, international airports are not only 'global crossroads', but also sites which remind us 'of the social inequalities off which globalization feeds, and which it in turn produces' (2009: 2). The *dépôt* stands in stark contrast to the consumerist façade of the airport, with its inviting 'cute little shops' ('mignonnes petites boutiques' [Sow Fall, 1998: 68]). It also underlines the utter shallowness of the airport's liberal cosmopolitanism as articulated in 'colours, nuances, gestures and rhythms reflecting the diversity of the world' ('[d]es couleurs, des nuances, des gestes et des rythmes à l'image de la diversité du monde' [30]). The *dépôt* is a strong symbol for the failure of cosmopolitan ideals: it contains racial Others who pose a threat to French nationhood through their 'ways that do not exactly conform with theirs' ('manières qui ne cadrent pas exactement avec les leurs' [101]). During her stay in the *dépôt*, Asta starts to see the importance of local traditions in empowering repatriated

African migrants. She invents a communal agriculture project, which she carries out with other deportees. While the agricultural project can be interpreted as an empowering return to the 'roots', from the perspective of cosmopolitanism, however, this strategy is problematic. It represents a withdrawal from cosmopolitan encounters by retreating to an idealised locality and promoting a vision of the world where the local and the global are opposed forces. In the course of the novel, then, the cosmopolitan sensibilities embodied in the figure of Asta suddenly turn into 'an anti-cosmopolitan strategy that can be read as an antagonistic reaction to the injustice that denies African travellers the possibility to claim a cosmopolitan identity' (Toivanen, 2016: 368). Towards the end of the story, the articulations of cosmopolitan ideals are restricted to botany, as Asta and her team set out to diversify the local flora by cultivating plants from elsewhere. This is a rather ironic ending with respect to the cosmopolitan idea(l)s articulated by Asta earlier in the novel.

The last text to which I apply a cosmopolitan reading is Chikwava's *Harare North* (2009), which takes the reader to a terrain where the idea(l) of cosmopolitanism is lost sight of. The novel exemplifies how mobility and a multicultural metropolitan setting do not automatically lead to cosmopolitan sensibilities – a phenomenon to which Simon Gikandi (2010) draws attention in his discussion on the limits of cosmopolitanism in the context of underprivileged postcolonial mobilities. The unnamed protagonist-narrator, a devout Mugabe supporter, travels from Zimbabwe to London – a mere global extension north of Harare, as suggested by the title – where he lives clandestinely. His only motivation for being in London is to raise enough money to buy his way out of the trouble that he has got himself into as a member of the youth militia. From the viewpoint of cosmopolitan ideals, such a setting is unpromising. The ideals become increasingly jeopardised as a result of the protagonist's precarious, abject mobility and his refusal to abandon his aggressive nationalist ideology, which the narrative repeatedly ridicules.

The protagonist-narrator's condition positions him as the abject Other of the affluent cosmopolitan. As Peter Nyers points out, while 'the cosmopolitan is at home everywhere, the abject have been jettisoned, forced out into a life of displacement' (2003: 1073). Indeed, the protagonist in *Harare North* is uncannily detached from his new environment. Many of the events take place in what could be conceived of as a sort of twisted domestic sphere, consisting of the other Zimbabwean irregular migrants with whom he shares a squat. Outside the house, the protagonist frequently finds himself in situations where people are looking at him in an awkward manner, which in turn reminds him that he is far from being at home in his new world. The narrator-protagonist's interactions with others are marked by unease and abjection. On his arrival in the UK, he is detained by the immigration officers at the airport, and only after eight days of detention does his cousin's reluctant wife come to fetch him. Here, the airport comes across less as a 'global crossroad' (Huggan, 2009: 2) than as a site of national exclusion which also captures the idea of involuntary dwelling rather than transit and movement. Indeed, the detention passage points at the interrupted nature of the protagonist's mobility and is illustrative of his inability to cross borders smoothly. The narrator's cousin's wife looks at his 'suitcase in a funny way', as it is 'one of them old-style cardboard suitcases' (Chikwava, 2009: 5), and she throws away the groundnuts he has brought as a gift as she thinks they may carry disease. This imagery conveys the idea of the protagonist being a *persona non grata*, not only from the perspective of Fortress Europe, but also in terms of his ostensibly embarrassing provinciality, his lack of education, and his being a supporter of an authoritative and regressive political regime. The narrative's method of

resorting to grotesque imagery pertaining to excrement, bottoms and anuses underlines this abject dimension. At times, the protagonist seems to be aware of his own abjection, as he often juxtaposes 'natives' like himself to 'proper people'. His self-appellation as a 'native' has an ironising ring to it: it acknowledges the stereotypical ways in which uneducated African migrant newcomers are seen by other diasporic Africans in particular. Simultaneously, however, it can also be interpreted as the protagonist himself embracing the identity of an outsider. This idea of outsidership is conveyed in the language: the broken English of the novel transmits not only the idea of a lack of education but also a provinciality that cannot easily be adapted to the new situation. Here one observes a strong contrast to Atta's protagonist's witty use of language and her ability to fit in whenever she feels like it.

There is an instance where the protagonist articulates a seemingly cosmopolitan awareness: 'In foreign place, sometimes you see each each with different eyes for the first time and who you are and your place in the world' (127–128). Yet it does not seem that such an awareness would ever make an impact on the protagonist himself: being abroad and seeing the state of his home country in a less biased light does not drive him to question his nationalist ideology. Indeed, he continues to refer to himself as a 'son of the soil' (112–113), as militant members of the youth militia do. At one point, he is convinced that he and his fellow compatriots should 'acquire what they call culture' (146) in order to fit in better and not 'get embarrassed in the company of proper people' (146). It turns out that 'culture' for the protagonist and his peers means learning to identify brands 'like Tommy, Diesel, Levi, iPod, Klein and all them such kind of people that stick their names on people's clothes' (147). There is also a passage in which the protagonist goes to an African music concert. The audience consists of 'them Africans in they colourful ethnic clothes it make you feel you is not African enough' (137). These diasporic, 'lapsed Africans' (137), as the protagonist dismisses them, evoke the figure of the Afropolitan, celebrating their connection to the continent. Diasporic Africans' dismissal as 'lapsed Africans' (137) is telling of the protagonist's parochialism and anti-cosmopolitan attitudes, but can also be read as a mockery of shallow and consumerist re-interpretations of cosmopolitanism such as Selasi's (2005) Afropolitanism. As a whole, the cosmopolitan aspirations in the novel are a mere travesty.

Conclusion

I have argued that the concept of Afropolitanism has several weaknesses, some of which become evident when contrasting it with the concept of cosmopolitanism from which it has been derived. The novelty per se of Afropolitanism is questionable, and in literary analysis the concept lacks the analytic force of cosmopolitanism. One of the major problems with the concept of Afropolitanism is that it is, at least in Selasi's formulation, an identity that one either has or has not. This person-centred approach may, at worst, lead to unsurprising readings of texts which we would in any case consider to be Afropolitan simply because they feature "Afropolitan" characters and have been written by "Afropolitan" authors. The person/self-centred approach misses the point of cosmopolitanism. And even when the focus is not on an identity discourse as such – this is the case in Mbembe's formulation of the concept – the problem of the erasure of 'cosmo' from the concept persists. While the change to the initial part of the word 'cosmopolitan/ism' from 'cosmo-' to 'Afro-' can be understood as an empowerment-driven gesture, this renaming may not actually serve its purpose. Afropolitanism ends up promoting territorialised and potentially racialised biases of which

the concept of cosmopolitanism should be free – a lot of critical work has already been done with respect to its diversification and particularisation. Moreover, the main point of the Mbembean formulation of Afropolitanism seems to be to highlight the interconnectedness of Africa with the rest of the world. Yet it is unclear how the concept of Afropolitanism in this sense differs from such concepts as hybridity or transculturation. As my brief readings of the novels by Atta, Sow Fall and Chikwava exemplify, cosmopolitanism can be used in a variety of ways to analyse African literary texts: it allows us to draw attention to ethical ideals of transculturation, self-reflectivity and the eschewed forms of cosmopolitanism in the present. Afropolitanism, on the other hand, is, in many respects, simply cosmopolitanism's new and fashionable clothing: a lot of excitement surrounding little viable content.

Notes

1. It should be noted that in history, the term 'cosmopolitanism' has also been invested with negative meanings in order to denote 'a viciously derogatory scapegoat of impurity and degeneracy', as in the case of anti-Semitic or anti-homosexual ideologies (Cheng, 2004: 50–51). Also political opponents, both in Stalin's communist regime and in McCarthy's anti-communist witch-hunts, were often referred to as 'cosmopolitans' (50–51).
2. In the Anglophone context, Afropolitanism is mainly discussed in the light of Selasi's (2005) text as an identity position of affluent, diasporic Africans. Mbembe's account of Afropolitanism as a form of hybridity and transculturation marking the history of the African continent, on the other hand, has gained more visibility in the Francophone context. Two recent Francophone and Anglophone conferences addressing the concept of Afropolitanism (*Panfricanisme, cosmopolitisme et afropolitisme dans les littératures africaines*, organised by the Association pour l'étude des littératures africaines [APELA] in Dijon in September 2015, and the African Literature Association [ALA] annual conference in Bayreuth in June 2015, both with numerous panels on Afropolitanism) attest to this observation. While at the ALA conference the (Anglophone) panels on Afropolitanism consisted mostly of critical reactions to Selasi's formulation, at the APELA conference, scholars seemed to be more interested in Afropolitanism's philosophical dimensions, and in linking or juxtaposing it with Pan-Africanism, traditional cosmopolitanism or such recent concepts as the *Afropea/afropéan* (see, e.g., Hitchcott and Thomas, 2014).
3. *The Afropolitan* magazine, <<http://www.afropolitan.co.za>>; The Afropolitan Shop, <<http://www.theafropolitanshop.com>> and Mr. Afropolitan, <<https://mrafpopolitan.com>>.
4. The question of style is also central in Achille Mbembe's (2005) Afropolitanism, which, according to him, is '[a stylistics], an aesthetic and a particular poetic of the world' (2007: 28). While Selasi's focus on style has been criticised, no scholar has considered the centrality of style/aesthetics in Mbembe's formulation to be a problem. This discrepancy in reception probably results from the fact that because of his academic background, Mbembe has more intellectual authority than Selasi. Moreover, in Selasi's account, the question of style is reduced to clothing and appearance, while Mbembe's 'style' seems to also have a philosophical sense to it.
5. At the beginning of the essay, Mbembe (2013: 208–210) uses the concept of cosmopolitanism. He identifies two different types of African cosmopolitanism: a vernacular cosmopolitanism, which he calls 'petits migrants', and a form of elitist cosmopolitanism made up of the affluent classes (209–210). For the rest of the essay, he talks about Afropolitanism. If there is a reason behind this terminological shift, it is not addressed explicitly. An earlier version of this part of the essay was published in the edited volume *Readings in Modernity in Africa* (2008) under the title 'The New Africans: Between Nativism and Cosmopolitanism'.
6. Different EU-scale mechanisms aimed at border controls and restrictions to mobility that concern mobile subjects from Africa strongly signal that the concept of Fortress Europe is particularly relevant today (see Thomas, 2014).
7. The translations from Sow Fall's novel are mine.

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