

Reviving Afropolitanism: The Negotiation of African Global Identity:
What Is Lost in Trans-nation?

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Kristen Lucken, Advisor

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by

Linda Phiri

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Abstract

In this paper, the novel concept of Afropolitanism is analyzed through the lens of three interdisciplinary categories-- transnationalism, cosmopolitanism, and Africanism. These frameworks allow us to clarify how Afropolitanism is being constructed and understood by its various supporters and detractors

Afropolitanism seems to disengage from the construct of nationality and geographical belonging, and moves us to notions of fluidity, ambiguity, and global identity. Those who adhere to the identity share an understanding that there is a deeper connection that, we, as humans create through our experiences, rather than from predetermined and socially ascribed identities.

However, this paper acknowledges that to embrace global citizenships, is to also understand the specific implications it has for globally mobile Africans. I argue that Afropolitan theory is struggling to find a bridge between collective African identity and the individual rooted in post-modern theories of the self, namely by Viktor Gecas (1994), who presented a postmodern framework that views the self-searching for authenticity through experience rather than assigned roles.

This is a work that still remains in negotiation within my personal and academic exploration. My findings result in an emergence of new discourse on the futurity of African identity and development. This argument serves as the beginning of a much larger conversation about navigating African identity in the global framework.

CONTENTS

Preface.....	4
Introduction.....	10
Chapter 1: Defining Afropolitanism	20
Chapter 2: Multiplicity: Framing Afropolitanism.....	27
2.1 Negotiating Global Mobility: Transnationalism	27
2.2 Cosmopolitanism: Freedom, Connection and Humanity.....	38
2.3 The Harsh Truth: How the World Views Africa	45
Chapter 3: Ways of Seeing: Afropolitanism in Digital Media.....	54
3.1 Where it all began: Categorizing Lived Identity and Global Citizenship.....	54
3.2 A Trendy Topic: Cultural Commodification.....	61
3.3 I am Not Afropolitan: Ideologies of Geography and African futurity.....	65
Conclusions.....	74
References.....	83

Preface

The novel term Afropolitanism has been morphed into a trend in the entertainment industry, serving as the name of a top selling Afrocentric magazine, “The Afropolitan.” It has also been featured as a title within various fashion shows, such as “The Rise of Afropolitan Fashion’ at the V&A Museum in London, England in 2011. Partly in light of its linkage to Western-style consumerism it has unfortunately faced an early dismissal by various scholars and academics on African identity, such as prominent Nigerian writer, Binyavanga Wainaina and Nigerian-South African novelist Yewande Omotoso. Despite its controversial nature this term that combines African heritage and cosmopolitan identity, has created language for an existence that I, and many others had only experienced and never had the ability to articulate. The term leaves room to unpack studies on the intersection of transnational background, cosmopolitan experience and African heritage and identity.

Having been born in postcolonial Malawi, and brought up in the neighboring country of Mozambique, I experienced two distinct cultural landscapes. On the one hand was the British colonial legacy in Malawi, where people embodied conservative lifestyles and families gathered for their daily four o’clock tea, and on the other was the Portuguese influence in Mozambique, that praised a vibrant Lusophone beach life, one that could only be described as ”scandalous” by my Malawian relatives. Living between these juxtaposed worlds began a process of cultural hybridization within me that I had only realized when searching for a topic for my college application essay. Furthermore, being enrolled in an International School in Maputo, Mozambique for twelve years, where over 90 countries were represented, accelerated and

amplified a sense of worldliness. My constant engagement with children from various nationalities, such as Denmark, El Salvador, Brazil, Argentina, the Philippines, Italy, South Africa, Norway, the United States, allowed me to subconsciously understand and adopt foreign customs and cultural scripts, or at least find comfort in foreignness. Many international school students, and I normalized the “other”, as we spent an ample amount of time in each other’s homes, sharing various aspects of our lives such as stories, toys, food and most of all our family dynamics. I clearly remember being more than shocked when my Danish friend referred to both his parents by their first names, and how when this was attempted in my home, it was the biggest indiscretion possible at that age, perhaps only second to having bad grades on your report card. In those early days, race, ethnicity and national background were identity markers that did not play pre-eminence in our sociability, admittedly probably more so for us younger children. Through these interactions, I chose customs that I liked, and others that I did not, and I felt just as part of their world as I did mine. Researcher Helen Fail’s article, “Why Business needs our third culture kids (TCKs),” depicts this existence as children who become global nomads because of their parent’s decision to live and work overseas for an extended period of time, with an affected sense of national identity and belonging (Fail 2002). Those twelve formative years had begun an existential crisis for my identity that I now I have the privilege to interrogate through the Afropolitan lens.

Living a transnational life, I currently visit Malawi (my passport country) every two to three years, and have not spent more than a month and half there ever since I was five years old. I now call Brazil, where my parents reside, home. When at college in the United States, I miss

our house in Recife, Brazil, the beach, the corner store where I bargain for fruits, and my relationships. The ease in which I acclimated to the society in the summer of 2014, made countless memories, and fell in love with the space, showed me that there is something to be studied in that narrative. Although I love Brazil in all its complexity, I simultaneously long for my childhood homes, time with my older brother in South Africa, where he has now settled, and my older sister in England, who has formed her life there.

Given this background, when people ask me “Where are you from?” and I wonder, do you want the single word, simple and intelligible answer, or can I tell you, as Taiye Selasi, the writer who coined the term Afropolitan said, to rather ask me, “Where am I local?” Selasi was born in London to a Nigerian mother and Ghanaian father, and raised in the United States and currently lives in Rome. She is most prominently known for her award winning novel *Ghana Must Go*, which was published in 2013. By coining the term Afropolitan in 2005, Selasi was satisfying the human need to identify and define oneself, and she, like myself, felt that she found home everywhere, yet truly belonged nowhere (Sy:2015). In this spirit, I too would rather share about the multiple spaces in which I have built my lived experience and how my transnational network has shaped my view of the world and the self. Thus, the term Afropolitan has provided a conversation about something that transcends assimilation into a national border, as Taiye Selasi eloquently articulates in her TED talk:

I'm not multinational. I'm not a national at all. How could I come from a nation? How can a human being come from a concept? It's a question that had been bothering me for going on two decades. From newspapers, textbooks, conversations, I had learned to speak of countries as if they were eternal, singular, naturally occurring things, but I wondered: to say that I came from a

country suggested that the country was an absolute, some fixed point in place in time, a constant thing, but was it? In my lifetime, countries had disappeared -- Czechoslovakia; appeared -- Timor-Leste; failed -- Somalia. My parents came from countries that didn't exist when they were born. To me, a country -- this thing that could be born, die, expand, contract -- hardly seemed the basis for understanding a human being. (Selasi 2014)

Inspired by this, I sought to further understand the African within this global existence. I use this analysis to map the trajectory of the conversation that Selasi began and to discover patterns that have now been newly formed and exist within the Afropolitan discourse. I also want to see in turn how those patterns bring new meaning to the identity that at first just pictured a personal experience. Individuals negotiating Afropolitanism have provided a necessary space for social inquiry, and a nuancing of what it means to be African and cosmopolitan. Selasi in her article “Bye-Bye Babar” where she debuts the term Afropolitan, appropriately exemplifies the baffling reality of mobile individuals within the discourse of citizenship, homeland and belonging. In her introduction of “Bye-Bye Babar,” Selasi describes a scene at a bar in London with various individuals whom she dubbed as “Afropolitan” because of their western-African fused clothes, hybridized music tastes and mannerisms. She writes:

The whole scene speaks of the Cultural Hybrid: kente cloth worn over low-waisted jeans; ‘African Lady’ over Ludacris bass lines; London meets Lagos meets Durban meets Dakar....Were you to ask any of these beautiful, brown-skinned people that basic question – ‘where are you from?’ – You’d get no single answer from a single smiling dancer. This one lives in London but was raised in Toronto and born in Accra; that one works in Lagos but grew up in Houston, Texas. ‘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. They (read: we) are Afropolitans – the newest generation of

African emigrants...we are Afropolitans: not citizens, but Africans of the world.
(Selasi 2005)

Finding this description of the 'Afropolitan' is liberating because it has provided language for the complex understanding of an African cultural identity, and has begun a necessary conversation about fluidity in national identity. I am unsure of whether I label myself an Afropolitan, but I do believe that the term should be justly interrogated. Through Afropolitanism, we can begin to unpack a vivid phenomenon. Selasi does not fully interrogate the constraints on African identity in a global world in her conversations on Afropolitanism, however, one cannot talk of multi local narratives without acknowledging the history of race, regional background and the current reality of colonial legacy. How do these factors affect one's movement and how one is coded? For example, academy award winning actress, Lupita Nyong'o, of Kenyan background was ridiculed by the Mexican public for being referred to as a Latina, although having spent most of her formative years in Mexico. How does African heritage and blackness complicate one's global identity?

The reason why I see Afro-Politian as an essential term is because, throughout my adolescent life, I have asked myself or have been questioned as a black African woman, the most globally marginalized identity, as to how I can claim citizenship of a world that has been structured for my dismissal? By my fellow Africans, I am asked, who are you to negate your roots? The answer that allows me to unapologetically accept and understand my existence, is that before anything else, I am a human, therefore, the world is my home, and second of all, to embrace the globe does not serve as a negation of my "roots", but rather serves as an understanding that there is a deeper connection that, we, as humans create through our

experiences, rather than from predetermined and socially ascribed identities. I am a very proud African, it is experiences within the continent and with its people that have shaped much of who I am, however, my sense of belonging is linked to multiple spaces that have produced a complex and multi-layered identity that I can no longer ignore. I find it impossible to pledge my full allegiance to one geography, and after this research I am adamant that one must not feel obliged to do so.

Introduction

To revive the term ‘Afropolitanism’ is to take a seemingly elusive concept and attempt to momentarily package it in different frameworks of understanding. It is to organize and compartmentalize a term that inherently asks us to rest in the ambiguity of identity. In this paper, the concept of Afropolitanism will be analyzed through the lens of three interdisciplinary categories-- transnationalism, cosmopolitanism, and Africanism. These frameworks will allow us to clarify how Afropolitanism is being constructed and understood by its various supporters and detractors. In this multilayered discourse, these three frameworks form the basic conceptual categories embodied by the term. First is the idea of transnationalism that speaks to a nation-state and cultural hybridity. Next is the concept of cosmopolitanism, which signifies openness and fluidity. Finally, the ideological framework of Africanism addresses post-colonial legacies and African nationalism. These conceptual categories often overlap in the discourse of actors utilizing the term. Therefore, the theoretical framework will be nuanced in order to clarify how it is being used and by whom. By demystifying Afropolitanism, the primary theoretical components embodied by this concept will be highlighted. They will then aid in the analysis of the underlying questions of identity politics and lived experience.

Hazel Rose Markus, a social psychologist, provides insight on studies of identity that will partly underline this discussion on Afropolitanism. She writes that, “Developing an identity requires selectivity and allows for considerable creativity, and to a large extent this depends on you.” On the other hand, she states, “our individual identities are, in part, given to us by others.” Here she is alluding to the interplay between our individual selves, and our social selves (Markus

and Moya 2010:181). Afropolitanism is being put to rest as a serious topic of discourse because, although it may be accepted by individuals such as Selasi who identify Afropolitanism as a lived experience, it is being rejected by many who refuse to allow the younger generations to claim ownership over their African identities and to choose Afropolitanism as a part of their individual selves. Identity constantly seeks validation from the outside world. This explains why the emergent Afropolitan discourse provides new ways of understanding different vantage points about what it means to be African.

Defining Underlying Concepts: Cultural Hybridization and Narrative Identity

Afropolitanism is derived from the theory of cultural hybridization, which has been a term used frequently in talk of identity, globalization and diversity. Among postcolonial theorists, cultural hybridity is considered the interplay of differences between colonizers and the colonized, which produces new categories of identity (Yazdiha 2010). Contemporarily, the movement of peoples, companies and technology make this process more frequent and faster. Homi Bhabha, the father of hybrid theory, argued that colonizers and the colonized are mutually dependent in constructing a shared culture. His book, *The Location of Culture*, suggests the in-between space that allows for cultural recodification. He aimed at complicating the then simple modes of understanding culture and the self. Bhabha says, it becomes crucial to distinguish between the uses and meanings of symbols across diverse cultural experiences, such as literature, art and ritual. The social specificity of these productions of meaning, as they circulate as signs within specific contextual locations and social systems of value must be evaluated. This analysis

will play a major role within the Afropolitan discourse because the meaning of Afropolitanism is transformed within different contexts, and Afropolitanism at times can be viewed as a symbol of freedom or stand as a threat to others. According to Bhabha, there is cultural transformation that happens in the transnational dimension of movement such as migration, diaspora, and relocation. These, make the process of cultural translation a complex form of identity formation. Bhabha writes that, “The natural(ized), unifying discourse of nation, peoples, or authentic folk tradition, those embedded myths of cultures particularity, cannot be readily referenced. The great, though unsettling, advantage of this position is that it makes you increasingly aware of the construction of culture and the invention of tradition” (Bhabha 1994:247). To this effect, Afropolitanism presents multiple versions of hybridization where individuals represent their own hybridity formed through various transnational experiences that create new social traditions and a culture centered on the individual self.

Each cultural hybrid forms a personal narrative-infused identity that is inspired by various spaces in the world. It is not surprising that Afropolitanism, because of its founder who is herself a writer, alludes to the studies of narrative identity that describe the narration of the self, and how individuals communicate their biographies. The Afropolitan has diverged from the typical form of self-narration in regards to national identity. In line with sociological studies on narrative identity from researchers such as Bridget Byrne (2002) who studies gender, feminist political theory, and media, it becomes evident in this analysis that our narratives are our own but are simultaneously informed by our social groups and environments. The “self” created from our narratives are in part informed by other people. These narrative constructions are mostly

fictitious and not always based on facts. Similarly, it will be exemplified throughout the discussion that Afropolitanism defines a lived experience for some but is constantly negotiated and reinterpreted by others. Selasi by saying, “ask me where I’m local,” places her value on experience rather than fixed geographies. She wants to narrate her biography, and not leave it to be interpreted in relation to one “nation” or “origin”. This process of self-narration can provide meaning for her.

Afropolitanism like its “people” is a hybrid word that necessitates deconstruction in order to interrogate the components of this concept that is being laid to rest. There is something profound in this process of identity formation as we discover that we are products of our own interpretations as much as those of the world place and ascribes to us. Afropolitanism seems to disengage from the construct of nationality and geographical belonging, and moves us to notions of fluidity, ambiguity, and global identity. This idea of change as being the normative state for Afropolitans is frightening to some because it asks people to become comfortable with uncertainty and the unknown. Afropolitanism is informed by multiple lived experiences. This process possess fundamental questions about how aspects of national identity are formed and perceived through social scripts rather than by citizenship roles. It suggests that it is no longer sufficient to base our understanding of others on their “national origins.” This identity discourse fits into the larger phenomenon of the social construction of the self in a globalized world where national attachments have lost some of their gravitational pull. Our societies have a need to label people in order to define “who we are.” Although the concept of the nation is still useful, it

places the conversation about identity at a lower level of a much broader, global framework of dialogue. Afropolitanism does not exactly ridicule attachment to national identity, but rather extends its parameters, attempting to create more trans-national fluidity.

As an individual who has moved and spent my formative years in a number of countries, in Africa, South America, and other “Western” nations, I will momentarily ask a question of all mankind of all persuasions--whether of European, Latin American, Asian, Middle Eastern, or African descent: are we not *all* among the diaspora? Our blood is not fixed to a place, but a people, and those people moved around the world throughout history. If we were to trace the lineage of our ancestors, we would find that global notions of autochthony and nationalism are typically essentialist constructs. If belonging to a nation is imagined then our fixation with where we are “from” is one that needs to be questioned and deconstructed and not merely accepted.

Afropolitanism is a term emphasizing that, while African citizens are tied together by their respective country’s history, political structures, and cultural values and traditional beliefs, Africans are also global citizens. “We are not citizens of the world, but Africans of the world,” said Taiye Selasi. This research finds that the oversimplification of African global identity is itself problematic, in that the African global citizen navigates the world very differently than other regional counterparts. To embrace global citizenships, is to also understand the specific implications it has for globally mobile Africans. An underlying phenomenon here is the struggle to interpret our individual selves versus our social selves. Sociologist John P. Hewitt in “Socialization and the Self” illuminates the theory of the construction of self and processes of

socialization during which “we seek to behave in ways that will preserve, protect and defend ourselves. We want to feel positively toward ourselves, to value what we are” (Hewitt 1991:93). Drawing on Hewitt’s analysis, we can imagine why understanding the Afropolitan concept and its revival is so crucial for the Afropolitan. Behind all the labels, jargon and discourses are people, bodies and lives attempting to make sense of themselves. Revival of Afropolitanism is a plea for understanding and recognition--free of the labor of constant self-explanation. It is a form of protection, defense and self-affirmation.

Methodology

For the purpose of this thesis, data will be analyzed from the conversation about Afropolitanism within the digital media landscape. It is a growing phenomenon that identity is constantly being negotiated on social media, as communities are built. Digital media is crucial to this specific discourse because the term Afropolitan was debut on an online essay, and consolidated in Taiye Selasi’s TedEx Talk which was shared across social media platforms. Furthermore, the most prominent speaker on Afropolitanism, Minna Salami, is a blogger. The conversations and statements by scholars and non-scholars alike will be analyzed through online articles created for the blogosphere.

In “Strategies for effective communication in the new digital media landscape”, various authors from the City Council Ad Hoc Committee on Technology explain how digital communication technologies have transformed nearly every aspect of the information and media landscape. This form of communication has changed the way that people expect to find, share,

and discuss information, and has opened whole new models for engagement and participation. People are now able to receive and discover up-to-date information instantly online. Online communities are formed, and people use these spaces to share, rate and discuss content, as opposed to simply consuming it. Therefore within the Afropolitan discourse, although prominent figures are discussing their views, the readers are not passive, but active in either contesting or perpetuating and negotiating Afropolitanism. The internet is filled with various dynamic blogging platforms where new and interesting content is added daily, and where social sharing and commentary is integral. There are many voices informing one identity. The digital space is metaphoric for the ever changing nature of identity.

It is apparent, as we will be shown in the analysis, that public discourse is increasingly occurring online and in social networks, as opposed to government spaces. Because wireless internet and smart phones have also become widespread, people now expect to be able to access and share information on a wide variety of computing devices. However, these gadgets are only accessible to those who can afford them, which is a limitation to who can have a voice within much discourse, which highlights the elitist sentiment in the Afropolitan model that will be discussed (Mangini et al, 2016).

This social media revolution, is not only driving communication, but also is being used to challenge communication skills. “Online tools and technology have not only mediated communication in countless ways, but that the very ways we communicate and even the ways we talk and think about communication are changing as a result.” Social media has the potential to

fundamentally change the character of our sociability, both at the interpersonal and community level (Baruah 2012). Throughout the analysis in Chapter 3, we will see how Afropolitanism can be viewed as a conversation that takes place online in real time without much in person contact.

In Chapter 1 Afropolitanism will be defined, followed by Chapter 2 where the framework for transnationalism, cosmopolitanism and African identity will be developed. Then in Chapter 3 patterns found within the online Afropolitan discourse will be analyzed. My research finds that primarily, Afropolitanism is rooted in identity as a lived experience, albeit one that is seemingly lived by privileged elites who commodify their homeland, which they've left behind. Thus, this term brings about negative political connotations, particularly from the generation of Africans who fought for independence against colonial powers. This paper will argue that Afropolitan discourse operates from multiple conceptual categories that do not easily coexist together because of ideological conflict. To some it exists as a political category that identifies Africans who unwittingly replicate colonial legacies by commodifying African culture for Western consumption. While others view Afropolitanism as a fluid, lived experience in which Africa is imagined alongside other geographies as being central to identity. All these views have connotations within this complex phenomenon. It becomes evident that Afropolitans exist as citizens of the world who must come to terms with the politically charged stereotypes associated with colonialism and underdevelopment. They recognize that African identity evokes images of the exploited and maltreated peoples of this continent under the foot of colonial powers. However, various bloggers and writers, as we will see, argue that Afropolitanism offers a way to

create new and positive narratives for Africans in which mobile, educated Africans become the agents of their own destiny.

In sum, this paper will argue that Afropolitanism is an imagined community that although seeking for identity that values experience over national background, still heavily relies on the concept of nationhood, but rather than being from one nation, it seeks for people to connect to any they choose and it values the movement between nations, known as transnational ways of being. Through discussion it is found that building identity while living abroad and valuing global plurality and believing in the cultural, political and economic development of the continent seem to be mutually exclusive processes. To be Afropolitan, perhaps, is to live in between these goals. Afropolitan theory is struggling to find a bridge between collective African identity and the individual rooted in post-modern theories of the self. Viktor Gecas (1994), a sociologist who studies the concept of the “self,” describes that “being true to oneself, or even knowing oneself, has become increasingly problematic in modern times” (Turner, Platt and Gordon 1994:143). There has been a rise in individualism and therefore implications on the “self.” The Enlightenment and rapidly changing social structures have, according to Gecas, “dislodged the self from moorings in social status” (Turner, Platt and Gordon 1994:144). The securities and constraints felt from the doctrine of tradition have receded in modern times, “presenting individuals with greater choice, freedom and possibilities of action, as well as new insecurities and challenges for the self” all in the quest of authenticity (Turner, Platt and Gordon 1994:144-145). Afropolitanism lies within this theory of postmodernism and understanding of self as being less role-driven and based on meta-narrative and more individual fluid structures of

self, open to pluralistic and un-indoctrinated collective views of identity. This complex formulation is defined in relationship to experiences and less bounded to stereotypes such as roles (nation). It can initially be perceived as exciting and easily commodified, but also can serve as name for African postmodern global citizens, that embraces more than one continent or country. Through the lens of Gecas' analysis of the post-modern self, it is found that although Afropolitanism presents the option of freedom for those who see themselves in the identity, it also opens the doors to insecurities in a world that does not yet fully comprehend it.

Chapter 1

Defining Afropolitanism

Following its inception by Taiye Selasi, the term Afropolitanism has been redefined by a few others. Because of its interdisciplinary nature, it can be viewed through various lenses. This section seeks to analyze the building blocks of the term, in order to understand their essence and theoretical significance within Afropolitanism. However, prior to analyzing Afropolitanism from these vantage points, it is important to gain a firm understanding of how the term has been interpreted to date. This will be done through a compilation of the views of those that have critically engaged within the discourse.

Selasi's words in "Bye-Bye Babar" resonated with many, when she identified the Afropolitan consciousness. Selasi wrote, "what distinguishes this lot and it's like (in the West and at home) is a willingness to complicate Africa – namely, to engage with, critique, and celebrate the parts of Africa that mean most to them" (Selasi 2005). Here, Selasi outlines a seemingly specific phenomenon that is paradoxically unique to each individual who experiences it; paradoxical, because to be Afropolitan is to seek and embrace cultural complexity and continuous hybridity. In sections of "Bye-Bye Babar," Selasi expresses the unglamorous feelings of insecurity and alienation experienced by the Afropolitan, in ways that many who have not experienced a multi-local African life cannot. In her description of the Afropolitan she writes: "Most were once supremely self-conscious of being so 'in between'. Brown-skinned without a bedrock sense of 'blackness,' on the one hand; and often teased by African family members for

‘acting white’ on the other – the baby-Afropolitan can get what I call ‘lost in transnation’ (Selasi 2005). In light of these facts, it is paramount to emphasize that Afropolitanism is not age sensitive, but can be incepted throughout childhood experiences. Unfortunately, many children do not have the language to express their positionality to those who render their identity unintelligible, and therefore dismissible. From childhood, the Afropolitan innocently expresses their complex identity within multiple ethnic, racial and national spaces, where many around them become frustrated because of the Afropolitan’s inability to fit into an ideal image of what an African (insert country name here) child is. For example, the child may live in Uganda, speak with a British accent while demanding fufu (a Staple Ghanaian dish) at least once a week. In accordance with this, Selasi states, “the project can be utterly baffling – whether one lives in an African country or not. But the process is enriching, in that it expands one’s basic perspective on nation and selfhood... Without that intrinsically multi-dimensional thinking, we could not make sense of ourselves” (Selasi 2005). Throughout Selasi’s work, it is made clear that Afropolitanism, unlike an identifiable physical or geographical marker, is an experience. You cannot spot an Afropolitan by looking across the room, but rather, you need to listen to a narrative, and each anecdote shared enables you to gain a better understanding of what localities formed that particular individual. The difficulty is that, people do not interpret what’s happened to you, they interpret what you look like, your age, and in this case, your “nationality”. The danger in this is that it is a highly limited perception of someone’s personhood based on their “national culture,” and geographic borders are then perceived to embody inherent knowledge or truth about the people they contain (Yazdiha 2010:36).

An aspect that is clearly defined by Selasi and is a source of angst among critics of Afropolitanism is the elite category that the Afropolitan seemingly exists within. In “Bye-Bye Babar,” she writes,

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

Here Selasi makes two claims that must be evaluated. The first is that an Afropolitan is an “emigrant” mainly in the physical sense, which discounts those who gain outside influences without having moved from the continent. It negates the experience of the individual who may experience ‘immigrant’ hybridity without physically moving because of their social relations in other global spaces in the form of family living abroad, education systems or media. These “Afropolitans” are ones who are primarily driven by cosmopolitan consciousness. The second is that the Afropolitan occupies an elite category. It is important to ask whether the initial elitism associated with the Afropolitan image is an overly exclusive classification, and if it is, should this factor be grounds for denouncing critical analysis. Not only is it an exclusive category, but one that mainly exists mainly outside the continent in “G8” cities, seemingly dictating African futurity outside its geography. Selasi’s introduction that details lawyers and people in lounge

bars makes it is easy for many to gain a narrow view of Afropolitanism. However, there is a caveat in Selasi's essay because of an important paradox of the "young African professional" archetype versus the "baby Afropolitan" that she describes as discussed earlier. The experience of the Afropolitan child negotiating cross cultural hybridity shows that this identity is not exclusively dictated by career choice or the Afropolitanism class, although presented as an elite category. Through the theoretical framework, we will see other ways one can fulfill the Afropolitan identity, suggesting that there are different categories of Afroplitans that will consciously change as individuals transform and navigate new experiences.

Selasi's essay can be viewed as the genesis of discovering the meaning of Afropolitanism, and other scholars can be seen as creators of new dimensions of critique that add meaning that perhaps Selasi did not recognize. One such attempt was conducted in *Negotiating Afropolitanism essays on borders and spaces in contemporary African literature and folklore* by researchers Wawrzinek and Makokha and. In this work, the authors attempt to nuance and extend Selasi's description of Afropolitanism. There are some similarities as well as prominent differences. The authors theorize Afropolitanism as "rethinking African identities as both rooted in specific local geographies but also transcendental of them" (Wawrzinek and Makokha 2011:10). Although similar to Selasi's account, it is interesting to note how she does not use the term "roots" in her analysis. In "Bye-Bye Babar", Afropolitans are painted as fluid and multi local, therefore the idea of being "rooted" metaphorically constricts a mobile identity. Selasi says that an Afropolitan chooses the places that "mean most to them," so would perhaps rather use the word "linked" than "rooted". The authors continue to describe Afropolitanism in terms of its abstract nature as being

“connected to knowable African communities, nations, and traditions; but it is also to live a life divided across cultures, languages, and states” (Wawrzinek and Makokha 2011:10). The authors agree with Selasi, in that Afropolitanism reflects a new consciousness, as an “idiom that embraces movement across time and space as the condition of possibility of an African way of being” (Wawrzinek and Makokha 2011:10).

Wawrzinek and Makokha explicitly claim to interpret and expand the ideas of Afropolitanism first proposed by Selasi, and a crucial idea that is well articulated by them is the political nature of the Afropolitan identity in relation to African statehood. They write:

“[Afropolitanism is the] paradoxical situation in which the withering or delegitimation of the African state has given credence and authority to both the idea of a global Africa and its particular localities. Once seen as the major threat to the authority of the postcolonial state, the vernacular and the region have become, together with the transnational, the only sites in which African futures can be guaranteed.” (Wawrzinek and Makokha 2011:10)

While Afropolitans did mostly arise from their ancestors’ movement away from the various failing African States, mostly in search of economic opportunities, or fleeing war, Afropolitans fulfill a broader spectrum of causes for migration. They are not only persons who move to the West, but also individuals who are mobile within the continent. Additionally, to view the identity within this framework, is to deny the joy and free-will that is experienced by those who choose to explore or migrate for reasons beyond the scope of the narrative of the “failing continent.” Also, as will be exemplified in a later chapter, the idea of African futurity outside the continent is problematic for those who identify as pan-African and view it as the main path towards African progressive futurity.

For a term as arbitrary as Afropolitanism, it is helpful to identify who might be considered an Afropolitan. Wawrzinek et al. name notable Afropolitans in the fields of culture and literature. However, in their description, they included individuals who have openly denied the identity, such as famous Nigerian novelist Chimamanda Adichie and influential Kenyan writer Binyavanga Wainaina (2012), who wrote the article, “I am a Pan-Africanist, not an Afropolitan.” The name has also been adopted by various online platforms and magazines. Therefore, I arrive at the Afropolitan discourse when various icons have denounced the term and negated the identity, while many industries have embraced it. There is a paradigm of responses of individuals, versus responses from industries, where Afropolitan easily satisfies the commercial realm but antagonizes individuals. Viewing Afropolitanism through the lens of cosmopolitanism, transnationalism, and Africanism alongside analyzing the digital media space in which it is negotiated, will allow for a better understanding the nature of these responses, and what motivated these reactions. Understanding the underlying theories that Afropolitanism is composed of will allow for a clearer picture of how aspects of the identity can either serve as a source of empowerment or be considered a threat, depending on who is engaging with it.

Finally, although it is accepted that Afropolitans are “Africans at home and abroad who subscribe to anti-nativist and cosmopolitan interpretations of African identities” (Wawrzinek and Makokha 2011:18), it is argued that Selasi’s view was limited because it particularized Afropolitanism as a novel experience. This view was spearheaded by prominent African scholar, Achille Mbembe. He suggests that Afropolitanism is an ancient phenomenon evident across centuries of continental history. This argument presents Afropolitanism:

As a term that has probably existed in Africa for a long time, expressed in the vocabulary of the hundreds of languages and dialects across the continent, or preserved in the memories of forgotten and living griots. In order for one to enthrone Afropolitanism as a new critical term within the purview of African literary and cultural criticism today, it is important, as we have argued, to recognize that its currency and value obtains from its phenomenal rather than conditional quiddity. (Wawrzinek and Makokha 2011:19)

Although this argues for the valuation of Afropolitanism, it places it within a realm of commonality. The given definition of a historical essence of Afropolitanism is serves as a disservice to Selasi's initial account in "Bye-Bye Babar." of the novel and modern group. It forgets the feelings of estrangement that is experienced by the Afropolitan who occupies an undefined space of cultural identity: the idea that one can be at home everywhere but not belong anywhere. This definition negates the fundamental aspect that Afropolitanism is characterized by the ease of global navigation in this contemporary age, and that the identity is highly rooted in ideas of mobility. This is in line with Gecas (1994) post-modernism that encompasses ideas of freedom of self-identification that are centered upon goals of pursuing authenticity through experience (1994:145). Most of all, it forgets the *quintessential idea* that began this conversation, being the mere but grand inability to answer the seemingly simple question, "Where are you from?"

Minna Salami, award winning blogger of the site MsAfropolitan, pleads for the serious academic and social inquiry of Afropolitanism. She expressed that she views Afropolitanism as a theory rather than as an identity, label or movement. Within this framework, I will begin to nuance how transnationalism is essential to understanding Afropolitanism, although it is an inherent part within Afropolitan experiences.

Chapter 2

Multiplicity: Framing Afropolitanism

2.1 Negotiating Global Mobility: Transnationalism

A characteristic of the Afropolitan, as presented by Selasi, is one who has had multi-local experiences that have produced their hybridized sense of self. Therefore, the understanding of movement of peoples between nations is an integral aspect of the Afropolitan discourse. This analysis will present how research on transnational activity has framed the process of identity formation. As one of the categories that is seemingly inherent in the Afropolitan discourse, transnationalism will be defined, especially because transnational theory contains components that must be interrogated in order to understand the paradoxes that arise within the Afropolitan discourse. For example, in a contradictory manner, Selasi simultaneously embraces transnationalism while problematizing the nation-state. She accepts that one can move between nations and have connections to them, but argues that one cannot be “from them.” Selasi has lived in the United Kingdom, the United States and Italy, and was born to Ghanaian and Nigerian parents, but claims to be from neither locations. Therefore, the process of grouping people into “nations” and the concept of the “nation-state” are laden with various meanings and must also be defined for the purpose of this work.

Influenced by works such as “Imagined Communities” by Benedict Anderson (1991), Selasi placed emphasis on the imagined nature of the nation and its social construction, deeming it a human creation and non-essential. In her TedTalk, she declares, “I’m not a national at

all. How could I come from a nation? How can a human being come from a concept?”(Selasi 2014). The term “nation” itself is a complex phenomenon that is defined differently by various scholars. In *Nationalism: Five Roads to Modernity*, Liah Greenfeld (1992) outlines the complex evolution of the idea of the nation within scholarly literature. She provides an overview of how the term nation has evolved and transformed into what it is perceived as to date. The current perception of the nation according to Greenfeld was coined in the early sixteenth century. Before this, the nation was applied to the idea of a population within a country and made synonymous with the word “people,” more specifically meaning “the elite category.” This semantic transformation, according to Greenfeld, signaled the emergence of the first nation in the world-England that was then considered the “bearer of sovereignty” of one place (Greenfeld 1992:6). The term “nation” then came to mean “unique sovereign people,” and was used to apply to other countries as well, within their political, territorial, ethnic qualities that then distinguished each nation. The nation then became described as either geo-political or ethnically driven. The concept of nationhood informs how we have perceived national identity and consciousness and its ability to define and differentiate groups of people.

In *Nationalism* John Hutchinson and Anthony Smith point out the conflicting notions of the nation based on different disciplinary understandings (1994:4). Like Greenfeld, they outline the nation as either unified based on civic imaginary (state) or one based on ethnicity (nation). These contesting views of the nation, according to Hutchinson and Smith create a “balance between the ‘subjective’ elements like will and memory, and more objective like territory and language” (Hutchinson and Smith 1994:4). The Afropolitan discourse, which is said

to value lived experience, seems to align with the subjective realms of will and memory rather than with more tangible objects such as territory or language. Therefore, it is not necessarily the concept of nationhood that disconcerts Selasi, but rather the idea that the nation-state is perceived as being an objective object with which to identify. In the same anthology, Walker Connor's work on nationalism describes the nation-state as "the major political subdivision of the globe" (Hutchinson and Smith 1994:36). He argues that the nation-state is readily defined and is easily conceptualized in quantitative terms. Perhaps the "Where are you from?" question that Selasi interrogates is generally answered in terms of national belonging. This way of attaching identity to a geographical territory make an individual easily definable and conceptualized. The nation within this framework implies "a sense of homogeneity" that unites and defines people as one within a shared community. This way of imagining 'nation' creates particularism, distance, and estrangement among nations. It sets up unspoken rules by which global citizens cannot abide. The nation was set up as a social contract among people of shared ethnicity whose identities aligned consistent with their state, however, nations are pluralistic in reality. Conner points out only 12 states in his 1971 study fitting the description of true nation states (Hutchinson and Smith 1994:38). Historian, Elie Kedourie defines how statehood informs identity formation: "doctrine divides humanity into separate and static nations, claims that such nations must constitute sovereign states, and asserts that the members of a nation reach freedom and fulfillment by cultivating the particular identity of their own nation and sinking their own persons in the greater whole of the nation" (Hutchinson and Smith 1994:48). This is exactly the ideal within nationhood that Afropolitanism seeks to contest. The formation of the post-modern

Afropolitan self, linked to experience and self-determinism asks that personal identity should be accentuated by African heritage not driven by it. Kedourie quotes August Schleicher, German linguist from the mid-1800's:

How little worthy of respect is the man who roams about hither and thither without the anchor of national ideal and love of fatherland; how dull is the friendship that rests merely upon personal similarities in disposition tendencies, and not upon the feeling of greater common unity for whose sake one can offer up ones' life; how the great source of pride is lost by the woman that cannot feel that she also bore children for her fatherland and brought them up for it..." (Hutchinson and Smith 1994:49)

Although seemingly archaic, this sentiment expressed by Schleicher still holds true among contemporary phenomena. In his text, themes within the theory of nationalism are clearly expressed, such as unity, loyalty, patriotism and the importance of the formation of relationships in terms of nationhood.

The nation state has been formed and invented over time. The Afropolitan emerges within an imagined community spanning invented borders and peoplehoods. The Afropolitan concept is derived from imaginings about African traditions by individuals and influences living outside of the continent. Because the nation-state is imagined, it does leave ample room for contestation. Afropolitanism provides a theory that promotes the elevation of experience within nation-states rather than people belonging to any. The identity questions how belonging is defined. It is trying to provide belonging that may not be connected to place of birth, ethnicity or genealogy. All these "fixed" factors do play a role in identity, but the primary driver according to the Afropolitan, is where one has been and where their relationships are located. In her dissertation on "Transnationalism, Home and Identity: Personal Essays" Natasha Garrett (2011)

doctorate of Philosophy introduces the problem of identity for transnationals from literature and her personal narrative. She uses her work to examine how national cultural and ethnic identity is negotiated by transnationals. She in parts focuses on International Students in the United States to identify significant aspects of the transnational experience, such as issues of identity, language, space/place and family, and explores the ways in which transnationalism as a postmodern phenomenon has transformed the perspective on those categories (Garret 2011:iv). She argues that because defining the identity of a sovereign nation is itself a process of conscious public debate, the lines that separate peoples between “us” and “them” are mostly driven by unexamined prejudices, historical injustices, and institutional structures (Garrett 2011:12). Meanwhile, Haj Yazdiha (2010) suggests that theories of hybridity clarify the shifting and indefinite nature of culture and can serve as a tool that complicates the nationalist exclusionary practice of determining who has claim to a nation.

The movements between nations and settling in new countries is known as transnationalism. Sociologist Peggy Levitt writes, “[T]he assumption that people will live their lives in one place, according to one set of national and cultural norms, in countries with impermeable national borders, no longer holds” (Levitt 2004). She argues that many will be navigating their lives in more than one place. Levitt places emphasis not only on the migrants and their mobility, but also on their “social fields.” She discusses how migrants are connected through the networks of social relations they sustain across borders. This is a key factor for the Afropolitan, because it is not only the mover who is affected. Their movement influences friends

and family that engage with these new ideas, customs and settlement imagery shared by the mover. This complicates the idea of the causal relationship between transnationalism of the mobile agent and hybrid identity, because some are hybridized without moving. Therefore, an Afropolitan may have never left their country of origin, but for example, has had years of connection with a sister in Norway, who sends books, chocolate and has a home there. A sense of belonging is then created because of a familial bond.

In “Beyond Home and Return: Negotiating Religious Identity across Time and Space through the Prism of the American Experience,” Levitt, Lucken and Barnett (2011) write that,

When children are raised in households, communities and organizations where people, goods, ideas and practices from their parents’ countries of origin circulate on a regular basis, they are not only socialized into the rules and institutions of the countries where they live but also into those of the countries their families come from. They acquire social contacts and skills and gain access to social networks that are useful in both settings. They master several cultural repertoires that they can selectively deploy, if and when they want to, in response to the opportunities and challenges that confront them. (Levitt, Lucken and Barnett 2011)

Afropolitanism can be viewed as an attempt to construct a new African identity encompassing the narratives of transnational Africans formed in or through other parts of the world. The Afropolitans can deploy aspects of their identity that resonate both with their home country and also their new host community. These new narratives, according to Selasi, began to form in the years of African independence:

It isn’t hard to trace our genealogy. Starting in the 60’s, the young, gifted and broke left Africa in pursuit of higher education and happiness abroad. A study conducted in 1999 estimated that between 1960 and 1975 around 27,000 highly skilled Africans left the Continent for the West. Between 1975 and 1984, the number shot to 40,000 and then doubled again by 1987, representing about 30% of Africa’s highly skilled manpower. Unsurprisingly, the most popular

destinations for these emigrants included Canada, Britain, and the United States...The Africans that left Africa between 1960 and 1975 had children, and most overseas. Some of us were bred on African shores then shipped to the West for higher education; others born in much colder climates and sent home for cultural re-indoctrination....redefining what it means to be African. (Selasi 2005)

Although poignant and true, Selasi misses the effect that Africans within the continent are also influenced from the West through media, relationships and westerners who move to Africa. This complicates the idea of transnationalism as a cause of Afropolitan identity because the Afropolitan African may not have moved, but may have encountered people from abroad who are engaging transnational ways of being in an African nation. For example, as I shared earlier, I grew up in a predominantly international community in the city on Maputo in Mozambique. Afropolitans may be formed even within the continent because of these interactions. Especially in International schools where African children engage with other children from across the globe.

The Afropolitan by stemming away from identity connected to one nation-state, attempts to merge behavior with imagination. The Afropolitan wants to freely identify with wherever it is that they feel or think that they belong, not necessarily their “homeland.” This could be multiple countries and spaces. To be Afropolitan, among other characteristics, is to choose to belong to a transnational community, to diverge from classifying mobility as just an act of movement, but rather a role and valid identity. Which is difficult for many to accept or comprehend because it runs contrary to the concept of national identity that we have established. Some hesitate to belong to the transnational because doing so places an individual within an ambiguous identity realm.

In *Where are you from?*, Raj Dhooleka Sarhadi an anthropologist whose research has addressed how transnational identity is experienced at the intersection of the family and the nation state writes that transnationalism is a modality of lived experience in which migrants constantly and subtly (re-)create globalization through their choices and negotiations of identification. The articulation of a “third space” disrupts any easy understandings of identity (2003:184). Afropolitans embrace this negotiation and assert power and agency over the spaces they inhabit. With this power also comes a sense of uneasiness throughout the negotiation of a third space by the Afropolitan. The formation of the theory arose from the struggle to understand oneself in an attempt to create language for an unidentified experience. In an extension to this analysis, Sarhadi argues that time and space rework identity, ethnicity, and community as constantly changing, negotiated, and existing in moments (2003:184). This suggests that identity is a form of transformative experiences and therefore, the ‘the only constant is change’, while identification linked to a nation-state is seemingly definitive and stagnant. The Afropolitan embraces the changes in conversations about locality and appreciates the complexity that may be formed as a result of transnational movement. Transnational activity is like a work or art that is never quite completed. Another move, like a new brush stroke on a painting will create a completely new picture and image. Another moment of inspiration, allows for another story to be told.

Anthropologist, Nadia Lovell (1998) in *Locality and Belonging* explores the merger of territory and ideas of belonging and their role in shaping a sense of community. Lovell and other contributors, interrogate the question of whether one can belong to a group with no territorial

reference point. In accordance with Sarhadi, Lovell argues that different local notions of global consciousness quickly change as new information comes in and so challenge the power and selectivity of collective memories. In her introduction, Lovell poignantly notes, belonging is a contestable way of remembering and of constructing a collective memory of places that one has lived.

Natasha Garrett highlights the experiences of the contemporary migrant, notably, the frequency of impermanent migration, where people migrate more than once. Examination of the Social Science Abstract Database indicated that almost two-thirds of the articles that mention “transnationalism” or “transnational” were published from 1998 to the early 2000s. This increase in the term usage coincides with the increased inquiry into the phenomenon of globalization (Garrett 2011:9). The possibility of living across two (or more) countries, and cultures changes the way migrants position themselves in relation to their home and host country, and the way they understand the concepts of home, family and identity (Garrett 2011:4). Also, due to the relative ease of communication and travel facilitated by modern technological advances, migrants communicate frequently with people back home, or engage in homeland customs and duties while living abroad. Meanwhile they are actively integrating into their new host society. The role of technology and digital media in transnational life is important. For this reason, digital media is a primary source of data for this thesis as. African identity is continuously negotiated through online activity, especially Afropolitanism because all of its prominent voices that inhabit different spaces around the globe. The ease and speed of communication is necessary in this highly mobile diasporic community.

Furthermore, Garrett in her study of international students in the United States, like Selasi, argues for the need to revise traditional understandings of identity. “A world that allows for a transnational life also requires a new understanding of one’s place in it. Nobody I know has ever called themselves a transnational” (Garrett 2011:10). There is a tendency to restrict transnationalism to a process, rather than extending it to an identity. Garrett argues that this mobility has caused national boundaries to lose their past significance, if not gradually dissolve in the minds of many transnationals (Garrett 2011:62). The complexity of conceptualizing transnational identity comes from the fact that people normally form their identity based on a common place of origin, such as a home country. Transnationalism, on the other hand, intrinsically embraces more than one place. In a sense, “transnationalism and identity are concepts that inherently call for juxtaposition” (Garrett 2011:13). There is an experienced tension, of living bi-nationally, of being in-between. It’s important to understand that it can be a challenging position to hold. By not fully belonging to one place or single community, one risks not belonging anywhere (Garrett, 2011:14). Furthermore, when migration is voluntary, observers may discount the many challenges that accompany it. There may be a false assumption that choosing to leave makes the immigration experiences less daunting, as much of the Afropolitan dialogue suggests (Garrett 2011:15). Within Afropolitanism, the negative consequences of transnationalism especially that of estrangement of Africans abroad must be considered. Transnational Africans face a host of difficulties as they try to overcome their otherness in foreign landscapes. There are deep cultural anxieties that often make host spaces, especially in Europe or the United States that become sites of cultural fundamentalism and ethnic prejudice.

Additionally, from the Afropolitan lens, the idea of allegiance to another place is something that will be further explored (Wawrzinek and Makokha 2011:10).

Finally, although outlining the transitional aspect of Afropolitanism is critical, the identity is not limited to the causal effects of physical movements between or among nations. Within this scholarship, it is helpful to identify cosmopolitan practices by analyzing the interactions that are not based on ethnic or national commonality. Anthropologist, Nina Glick Schiller argues that many transnational studies have only occasionally addressed notions of cosmopolitanism (Schiller Darieva, and Gruner-Domić 2012:406).

Afropolitanism embraces the imagined and non-essential view of the nation. While Selasi does advocate for us to imagine identity beyond the “nation,” her analysis of the Afropolitan identity is mainly constricted by the movement between these nations. Her analysis then risks being slightly timid and rooted in current perceptions of the nation-state. It is within the discourse of cosmopolitanism that Afropolitanism becomes a consciousness. Selasi focuses mainly on the effects of movement on people, and embraces experiences rather than rooted communities. She moves away from the erroneous notions of homogeneous spaces yet refuses to participate in the process of othering. This gap can be filled with an in-depth understanding of cosmopolitanism.

2.2 Cosmopolitanism: Freedom, Connection and Humanity

Award winning blogger and self-ascribed Afropolitan, Minna Salami, who is also known by her blogger alias 'Ms.Afropolitan', provides an overview of cosmopolitanism, an essential component of Afropolitanism. Salami writes:

Cosmopolitanism dates to the Cynics of 4th century BC and to Diogenys in particular, the ancient Greek philosopher who coined the expression. Diogenys's brainchild was that people did not simply belong to one single community, as was commonly assumed at the time. Rather, he believed that to be a citizen of a civilized community was to be a citizen of both the "cosmos" and the "polis" – meaning the world and the city." (Afropolitanism Complete 2014:9)

It can be argued that the soul of Afropolitanism lies within the framework of cosmopolitanism. The cosmopolitan model, as will be exemplified in this paper, may possibly be the primary driver of the Afropolitan model, and is also the focus of many critics of the term. The Afropolitan occupies a new sense of self identification, drifting from a self-image bound to an African nation to one that actively connects and identifies with the world at large. Thus, the question "Where are you from?" is not only difficult to answer as presented in the section on Transnationalism, but it becomes less relevant. The diminished emphasis of an identity rooted to a nation state stems from the idea that humanity is far more fluid and complex and cosmopolitan. In this section, three relevant but varying definitions of cosmopolitanism will be analyzed: Cosmopolitan Sociability, Cosmopolitan Patriotism and Critical Cosmopolitanism.

Schiller defines cosmopolitanism as "a simultaneous rootedness and openness to shared human emotions, experiences and aspirations rather than to a tolerance for cultural difference or a universalist morality" (Schiller Darieva, and Gruner-Domić 2012). In her work, "Defining

cosmopolitan sociability in a transnational age,” Glick Schiller outlines the theory of Cosmopolitan sociability, which arises “from the human competencies that create social relations of inclusiveness” (Schiller Darieva, and Gruner-Domić 2012:3). Her analysis on cosmopolitan sociability will aid in the understanding of the development of the Afropolitan in regards to their interactions within society, that in-turn shape their view of the self. Schiller briefly mentions that “some situations impose limitations and transience on sociability” (Schiller Darieva, and Gruner-Domić 2012:3). This can be attributed to the idea, as previously discussed, that Afropolitans are not easily understood which causes tensions in various social situations, such as returning to visit extended family, where one may be told that they are not ‘African enough,’ or as an Americanah (how I was referred to when spending two months in Ghana in 2015). However, according to Schiller, rootedness and openness cannot be seen in oppositional terms. For example, the Afropolitan, can feel both liberated in the world, yet connected to their African locality.

It is important to understand the trajectory of time in which Afropolitanism enters the cosmopolitan discourse. The cosmopolitan idea is said to have emerged in the context of long-distance missions, in times like the trading among empires. However, after the Enlightenment, “cosmopolitanism was linked primarily to elites, intellectuals, exiles or others who for reasons of politics or philosophy were citizens of the world rather than of a particular place.” (Schiller Darieva, and Gruner-Domić 2012:401). Afropolitanism is perceived as parallel to the post enlightenment cosmopolitanism theory. This connection to elitism, as previously discussed in chapter 1, has been a factor that has led to scrutiny by various African scholars. Everyone mentioned as an Afropolitan has been famous or successful, as a working professional. Selasi

writes, “You’ll know us by our funny blend of London fashion, New York jargon, African ethics, and academic successes” (Selasi 2005). This idea of exclusivity and elitism runs contra to the African romantic nationalism that will be discussed in depth further on.

Furthermore, similar to cosmopolitanism, the concept of Afropolitanism is in ways viewed as a threat to nation-state projects that have become politically dominant and depend on national allegiance and patriotism. Therefore, the multi local loyalties, whether formulated by society or the individual have been, according to Schiller “cast as treacherous,” (Schiller Darieva, and Gruner-Domić 2012:401). This identity confronts everyday realities that demand exclusivity in nationality and “authenticity”. Because of its openness, cosmopolitanism is viewed as opposing pure nationalism. Similarly, Afropolitanism can easily be viewed by many as disowning true or authentic African identity because of the ability to embrace other global spaces and nations, and moreover to acknowledge the influence that these new spaces have on the Afropolitan’s identity. However, Schiller, did not only intend the formulation of cosmopolitan sociability to “move beyond analytical perspectives that highlight binaries of difference and radical alterity, but rather to examine where shared commonality and global sensibility do not necessarily override, but coexist and compliment fixed communities and heritage” (Schiller Darieva, and Gruner-Domić 2012:401). She explains that,

Cosmopolitan sociability refers to interactions that are deemed purely social and therefore domains of play rather than specifically purposeful to humans. As such they constitute interaction in which we assert our common humanity ‘where one “acts” as though all were equal, as though the esteemed everyone. (Schiller Darieva, and Gruner-Domić 2012:402)

This is an appraisal of human interactions beyond or prior to ascribed identity markers such as national background or ethnicity. This form of interaction that seems almost impossible under the structures that govern our everyday sociability. Glick Schiller argues that this perspective moves researchers beyond the binaries of inclusion vs. exclusion, and sameness vs. difference. She defines cosmopolitan sociability as a set of practices in which people are not passive consumers but active participants in the creation of common places (Schiller Darieva, and Gruner-Domić 2012:403). These common places outlined by Schiller, in terms of Afropolitanism, are created by people encountering new experiences, cultural or personal; then integrating “foreign” practices into their own lives, which then produce new facets of their identity. The Afropolitan transports this novel sense of self to new or old spaces, therefore creating and participating in different ways of seeing and being. The more of these changes, the easier it becomes to develop an immediate acceptance of difference, and an ability to form instant connections with fellow Afropolitans and cosmopolitans. Not only are they able to connect with those likeminded groups, but also with those who have not experienced trans-local life. Their ability to move between spaces becomes almost effortless and natural. Like a chameleon, the Afropolitan is able to easily adjust and blend in, if they so choose.

Afropolitanism like cosmopolitanism moves beyond the technicalities of migration but is also a mindset. It is also worthy to note that transnational mobility, although allowing for possibilities of openness, does not necessarily produce cosmopolitan consciousness or sociability (Schiller Darieva, and Gruner-Domić 2012:404). Schiller goes on further to share that cosmopolitan goals and identities cannot be understood solely as selfless humanitarianism.

Commitment to self-improvement and career development can be part and parcel of an individual's cosmopolitanism (Schiller Darieva, and Gruner-Domić 2012:414).

Kwame Appiah (1997), African scholar and cosmopolitan theorist, extends the idea of national allegiance, which Schiller briefly referred to in her work, in his theory of Cosmopolitan Patriotism. Appiah begins by sharing a formative story about a time when his father told him and his siblings that "remember that you are citizens of the world." His father went on to tell them that this meant they could surely choose to live anywhere, but they should make sure they left that place "better than they found it." Appiah argues that, the favorite slander of the radical nationalist against cosmopolitans is that they are rootless. What his father believed in, according to Appiah, was a rooted cosmopolitanism that he dubbed, "cosmopolitan patriotism". He writes about various critiques and objections that cosmopolitan's face:

[Some] have complained that our cosmopolitanism must be parasitic: where, they ask, could [we] have gotten our roots in a fully cosmopolitan world? Where, in other words, would all the diversity we cosmopolitans celebrate come from in a world where there were only cosmopolitans? The answer is straightforward: the cosmopolitan patriot can entertain the possibility of a world in which everyone is a rooted cosmopolitan, 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... In a world of cosmopolitan patriots, people would accept the citizen's responsibility to nurture the culture and the politics of their homes. (Appiah 1997:619)

Perhaps like cosmopolitan patriots, Afropolitans, contrary to popular belief, is an appreciation of all the experiences that can be located in the individual's biography. However, the Afropolitan may not necessarily, as Appiah presented, nurture the culture and politics of their home, but they would acknowledge it and use it if that is where they felt most connected. The Afropolitan

cannot be called a patriot because that definition may not always remain true, and the identity is inherent in being “loyal” to more than one geography. Questions of loyalty tend to appear when speaking of nationalism, and patriotism is a world that elevates allegiance to a nation. Appiah continues by saying,

Many would, no doubt, spend their lives in the places that shaped them; and that is one of the reasons local cultural practices would be sustained and transmitted. But many would move; and that would mean that cultural practices would travel also (as they have always travelled). The result would be a world in which each local form of human life was the result of long-term and persistent processes of cultural hybridization: a world, in that respect, much like the world we live in now. (Appiah 1997:619)

A complicated and misunderstood aspect within the Afropolitan model is that instead of diluting or eradicating culture, Afropolitans, like this section of Appiah’s analysis, calls for the embracing of culture that one chooses, and for that learned culture to be spread around the world. These actions do cause hybridity, but yet also aid one in maintaining and preserving those customs that could easily be lost in the process of assimilation. Unlike the first part of his analysis, Afropolitanism is not always politically driven or connected to the country of “origin”, but is rather a choice, a connection with the spaces that shaped them. A crucial point by Appiah is that this process reflects the world we live in now, which makes it paramount to understand the formation of these identities.

In order to summarize the depth of cosmopolitan inquiry, which by no means has been exhausted here. Sociologist, and editor of the European Journal of Social Theory, Gerard Delanty (2006) developed a theory of critical cosmopolitanism. According to Delanty, critical cosmopolitan social theory proposes that the very notion of cosmopolitanism compels the

recognition of multiple kinds of cosmopolitanism...and Cosmopolitanism refers to the multiplicity of ways in which the social world is constructed in different modernities” (Delanty 2006:27). According to Delanty, the dominant conception of cosmopolitanism is moral cosmopolitanism due to the strong emphasis in it on the universalism. This has proven to be valid because although new ways of seeing were brought forth by both Schiller and Appiah, both alluded to the idea of universalism and the loyalty to humanity first (Delanty 2006:28). Questions of loyalty come up as we have seen in Appiah’s explanation of cosmopolitan patriotism. The Afropolitan seems not to necessarily have a loyalty to nation as “a patriot” might or nor the universal, as a cosmopolitan would, but rather to the self. Afropolitanism at its core seems to value experiences and moments, whether in the world at large or even in one country. The Afropolitan model operates within the post-modern framework of the self. Selasi when explaining the term took pride in what our narratives tell about us. It was more about the individual understanding their story in order to navigate a world where these transnational narratives are not easily intelligible. Delanty moves further within his analysis, and here, encompasses much that is embedded in Selasi’s account in “Bye-Bye Babar” which is the importance of understanding the self and realizing that the world is not certain in its structures and that it will continuously change. He explains that the notion of critical cosmopolitanism sees the world in terms of openness rather than in terms of a universal system. “The term cosmopolitanism signals a condition of self-confrontation, incompleteness; modernity concerns the loss of certainty and the realization that certainty can never be established once and for all” (Delanty 2006:38).

In the merger of cosmopolitan theory, we have understood the role that it plays within Afropolitanism. Schiller in cosmopolitan sociability, Appiah with the cosmopolitan patriot and Delanty with critical cosmopolitanism all present avenues for how Afropolitanism can holistically engage with the theory. Although, cosmopolitanism is only half of the word Afropolitanism, it is in itself a difficult and robust theory, heavy with meaning and nuance. Cosmopolitanism can be seen as the consciousness, the heart and essence behind of Afropolitanism, it is the complication that was added to the seemingly “simplify” African” identity.

2.3 The Harsh Truth: How the World Views Africa

Natasha Garrett presents a grievance that is articulated by many:

Only Americans, British, Canadian, Australian and Japanese are expatriates when they live abroad; everyone else is an immigrant. Expatriate and immigrant are terms with a lot of class baggage: An immigrant is an unwanted job stealer, while an expat is a foreigner who could be leaving any day now. An immigrant is on a desperate search for a better life. An expat is on an adventure. (Garrett 2011:9)

In the same ethos, this section will build an understanding about how Africa is coded and engaged within the world. Often treated as a less desirable, weak and patronized continent, a discussion of the implications of the “Afro” in the word Afropolitan, will be explored. This paper will analyze how the African component complicates and at times encumbers a transnational-cosmopolitan identity. It is worth noting how impossible it is to construct a foundational understanding of Africa; a diverse, complex and multicultural continent, where even a single country holds many languages, ethnicities, customs and beliefs. This section seeks to articulate

the main connotations of Africa, more specifically by the dominant western gaze. It will also present the dreams of futurity by prominent voices on Africa in history, voices that still echo in these contemporary times.

In the “Inventions of African Identities and Languages: The Discursive and Developmental Implications,” Malawian historian, literary critic, novelist, and former president of the African Studies Association, Paul Tiyambe Zeleza (2006) writes that African identities, like African languages, are inventions. He shares that, the word invention implies a history, a social process; it denaturalizes culture, stripping it of essentialism. According to Zeleza, the advent of the “posts”—postmodernism, poststructuralism, and postcoloniality, further reinforced the constructivist view of social processes. He writes that,

The idea of “Africa” is a complex one with multiple genealogies and meanings, so that extrapolations of “African” culture, identity or nationality, in the singular or plural, any explorations of what makes “Africa” “African,” are often quite slippery as these notions tend to swing unsteadily between the poles of essentialism and contingency. Describing and defining “Africa” and all tropes prefixed by its problematic commandments entails engaging discourses about “Africa,” the paradigms and politics through which the idea of “Africa” has been constructed and consumed, and sometimes celebrated and condemned. (Zeleza 2006:14)

He argues that Africa is as much a reality as it is a construct whose boundaries geographical, historical, cultural, and representational have shifted according to the prevailing conceptions and configurations of global racial identities and power. To Zeleza, the subject of African identities, therefore, is as vast and complex as the continent itself (Zeleza 2006:14). He brings up an important idea that will be raised throughout our analysis, which is “the fact that something was socially constructed--virtually every aspect of human life since we evolved from the hominids or

invented elsewhere does not mean it is not “real” (Zezeza 2006:15). According to him, the pages of history drip with blood shed over invented identities. Indeed, African historians have long known about the invention of “Africa” as a “sign” with multiple and conflicted spatial, political, and cultural referents, but that has never stopped them from writing about “Africa” as an organic spatio-temporal configuration (Zezeza 2006:15).

In this light, in a brief, but powerful essay, Binyavanga Wainaina, Kenyan journalist, novelist, and anti-Afropolitan, brings to light how Africa has been mainly patronized, brutalized, demeaned and ostracized by the West and much media. In this satire, he picturizes the legacy of dominant colonial legacy and writes about how Africa is regarded in the world. His analysis is crucial in that it provides the working model for how African mobility is treated and how the idea of African global citizenship is made more complex and how the African experience is complicated within and outside the continent. Wainaina begins by writing, “Always use the word ‘Africa’ or ‘Darkness’ or ‘Safari’ in your title. Subtitles may include the words ‘Zanzibar’, ‘Masai’, ‘Zulu’, ‘Zambezi’, ‘Congo’, ‘Nile’, ‘Big’, ‘Sky’, ‘Shadow’, ‘Drum’, ‘Sun’ or ‘Bygone’. Also useful are words such as ‘Guerrillas’, ‘Timeless’, ‘Primordial’ and ‘Tribal’. Note that ‘People’ means Africans who are not black, while ‘The People’ means black Africans” (Wainaina, Online 2006). The list of words presented here are characteristic of the texts that are most written about Africa, mainly those produced in the West. From an ethnocentric positionality, it is common to write in terms of what people romanticize Africa to be from the “savior complex,” that many well-meaning westerners enter the continent with. The danger in this, as prominent novelist, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie said, is the single story inherent in this

rhetoric. “The danger of a stereotype is not that it is untrue, it is that it is incomplete” (Adichie 2009). Seldom do writers mention other versions of Africa that are just as valid as the ones they constantly stick to. The narrow view of Africa even in this day and age is one of disease, war and hunger. Ever since I arrived in the United States for college, I have often been asked “How come you are so articulate?”, or “How did you get to the United States.” Not only implying that intelligence and being African are mutually exclusive, but also that speaking English is a sign of intelligence and also that there are in Africa no technologically modern means of transportation to get me to the U.S. The people making these assumptions are beloved peers and friends. Their questions stem from the information that is at hand in a world led by Hegemonic media conglomerates, who continue to portray versions of Africa that Wainaina so carefully presents. He continues, to write “never have a picture of a well-adjusted African on the cover of your book, or in it, unless that African has won the Nobel Prize. An AK-47, prominent ribs, naked breasts: use these. If you must include an African, make sure you get one in Masai or Zulu or Dogon dress” (Wainaina, 2005). Here, he alludes to the “token African,” the one who everyone can claim to know in order to prove their “understanding” and “love” for the continent. He then mentions the parts of Africa that are commodified and presented in tourism brochures. “In your text, treat Africa as if it were one country...Don’t get bogged down with precise descriptions. Africa is big: fifty-four countries, 900 million people who are too busy starving and dying and warring and emigrating to read your book” (Wainaina, 2005). This is the depiction of the commodification of Africa, and how those who are described are not consulted or cared for. His analysis also brings forth the problematic nature of this thesis; talking about “African” identity is

driven by the globally based view of the continent as one homogenous region, unlike someone who is French or Italian who are very rarely referred to as “European.” There is a lack of accountability as to how the continent is framed, despite these damaging and dehumanizing generalizations. This imagery then translates to the mobile African, who then instead of being Ghanaian or Kenyan, becomes African when abroad. A culmination of the imagery that Wainaina presents is what the person is associated with. Wainaina closes by writing that,

Among your characters you must always include The Starving African, who wanders the refugee camp nearly naked, and waits for the benevolence of the West. Her children have flies on their eyelids and pot bellies, and her breasts are flat and empty. She must look utterly helpless. She can have no past, no history; such diversions ruin the dramatic moment....suffering....Blame the West for Africa’s situation. But do not be too specific...African characters should be colourful, exotic, larger than life—but empty inside, with no dialogue, no conflicts or resolutions in their stories, no depth or quirks to confuse the cause....Always end your book with Nelson Mandela saying something about rainbows or renaissances. Because you care. (Wainaina, 2005)

This troubling, but true account of how Africa is usually perceived and imagined in the global psyche is crucial in understanding Afropolitanism. The African is dehumanized, pitied and ripped of their agency and narrative identity in much literature, media, which translates to their interactions abroad. This Imaginary view of Africa has been prevalent throughout history, in some of the “greatest works out our time,” such as the novel *The Heart of Darkness* by Joseph Conrad published in 1899, where imperialism was treated as benevolent acts of the West in Africa. In this work Conrad describes his reservations in believing that he shared humanity with Africans (Conrad Kimbrough 1988). Africans exhausted of this harmful rhetoric, have for years developed plans to reinvent, reclaim and empower the continent though social and political

movements, namely through Pan-Africanism. This political or cultural movement has many varieties, Pan-Africanists envision a unified African nation where all people of African descent, can live in the continent and thrive. Pan-Africanism was pioneered by influential thinker and Sociologist, W.E.B. Du Bois (2007). Du Bois was an advocate for the study of African history and culture in the United States and an activist with a belief that Africa should be ruled by Africans. He famously said, “The problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color line”. Du Bois was aware that, not only was racism a problem in the West, but many Africans living on the African continent suffered under the European colonial rule. The most influential figure of this period was Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana, who believed that European colonial rule of could be eradicated if Africans could unite politically and economically. Nkrumah went on to lead the movement for independence in Ghana in 1957, which became the first African country to gain independence (“Pan Africanism”: Britannica 2015).

Ideas, inspiration and the inaugural Pan-African strategies can be found in the *History of The Pan-African Congress*. Du Bois writes that this works contains “messages which must not die, but should be passed on to Mankind and to inspire the darker races of Man to see themselves of one blood with all human beings.” He continues to write about the pride in having the pan-African movement alongside the movement to African independence. Pan-Africanism was pioneered by some of Africa’s first presidents, such as Jomo Kenyatta of Kenya and Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana. This is paramount because Pan-Africanism is a founding principle of many African nations. In 1900 the word Pan African was placed in the dictionary for the first time when a conference was held because of the realization that Africa had to be united in thoughts

and ideals, at that time seeking for self-determinism (Abrahams and Padmore 1963:13,14). In an extension to this, Nkrumah (1963) wrote what can be called the pan-African manifesto, *Africa Must Unite*, his words continue to echo in present day. In his book, he acknowledges that Africa is composed of varying cultures, languages, divided in arbitrary boundaries. However he points out that in spite of this “He is convinced that the forces making for unity far outweigh what divide Africa” (Nkrumah 1963:132). According to Nkrumah, “The Pan-African movement had become an expression of African nationalism. Unlike the first four congresses, which has been supported by middle class intellectuals and bourgeoisie reformists, the fifth Pan –African congress was attended by workers, trade unionists, farmers and students, most whom came from Africa” (Nkrumah 1963:173). This movement that included everyone, despite class, which is unlike the elite Afropolitan image painted by Selasi. Then Nkrumah warned of the new wave of brutality that was dawning post-colonial Africa which was neo-colonialism which began when African countries began making allegiances to great powers during the cold war period (Nkrumah 1963: 173). He described this as creating manipulation from a distance. In his introduction he writes “They took our lands, our lives, our resources, and our dignity. Without exception, they left us nothing but our resentment, and later, our determination to be free and rise once more to the level of men and women who walk with their heads held high” (Nkrumah 1963). Although historical, these ideals and goals are still relevant within African popular discourse to date. Because of the reasons set up by Wainaina, this movement bleeds into modern day strategy; with heavy meaning and historical relevance. There is a sense of urgency and feeling of hope that this ideology will bring about positive change for the continent. Immanuel

Wallerstein (1967), historical social scientist and developer of the World-System Theory, analyzes contemporary social movements and argues that they need “the social climate which allows the movement freedom to organize, to propagate its idea among followers and its opponents, and ultimately bargain in the political arena” (Wallerstein 1967:237). Can it be said that Afropolitanism is operating contrary to this dream of African Nationalism? Does the existence of Afropolitanism dismember the spaces that can allow for pan-Africanism to be “prorogated”? Then finally, can one be both Afropolitan and Pan-African?

African independence is a perfect example of the constructivist nature of the nation-state. It is important to discuss whether Afropolitanism is at odds with this African romantic nationalism that desires unity within the continent. To date, Africa still suffers from brutal colonial legacies. It is believed by many leaders that African loyalty needs to be focused on debunking the impertinent African myths as outlined by Wainaina, and on developing the continent. Could it be true that the idea of global humanness and citizenship that Afropolitanism presents is threatening this agenda? Furthermore, is it possible that because of the way in which Africa is portrayed, many struggle to fully accept common humanity with the African, who in many texts, is rendered one dimensional? However, in *Negotiating Afropolitanism essays on borders and spaces in contemporary African literature and folklore*, Wawrzinek and Makokha argue that “the stories Africans tell themselves as they respond to transnational challenges, of the complicated relationships between regions and traditions within Africa, and of the role of the so-called “Africans of the world” is building cultural bridges between countries, languages, and

localities” (Wawrzinek and Makokha 2011:16). Meaning that Afropolitans may play a crucial role in the betterment of society as whole.

The Open Society Initiative for West Africa (OSIWA), a West African civil society advocacy organization, featured Afropolitanism as its main topic. They wrote that,

This edition is a conscious attempt to show Afropolitanism as a “way of being in the world”; how it can offer new, albeit not overly optimistic nor simplistic views of Africa; a narrative that helps reposition the continent’s place, perspective and voice in a global context, one not solely relegated to victimhood, poverty, disease, war/ conflict, corruption, or aid-dependence, and one not necessarily at odds with Pan-Africanism nor entirely connected with African Renaissance. (Afropolitanism Complete 2014)

Complex and filled with ambiguity, Afropolitanism seems in many instances to not only occupy the “in-between” space within identity discourse but also within the political implications for the African continent. If it neither contradicts nor aids Pan-African thought, it must be seen through categorized lenses that aid us in viewing the various points on the Afropolitan spectrum that have been identified to date.

Chapter 3

Ways of Seeing: Afropolitanism in Digital Media

In this section, the findings will reveal the constructed narrative of Afropolitanism. It will track the main developments within the Afropolitan discourse primarily within the digital space. Various patterns of understanding have been formed, which will assist in clarifying what may be lost in translation when parties who discuss Afropolitanism tend to view it from different vantage points. The ways of seeing Afropolitanism inform whether it is embraced or rejected. The established categories that form major differences in perspective make it necessary to constantly identify which aspects of Afropolitanism are being alluded to and the possible reasoning behind it. As an imagined and constantly changing community, with no firm rules or guidelines the voices informing the discourse stem from various backgrounds as we will see.

3.1 Where it all began: Categorizing Lived Identity and Global Citizenship

The most prominent voices that have embraced the philosophy of Afropolitanism are Taiye Selasi and Minna Salami (MsAfropolitan). The conversation was started by Taiye Selasi in her essay “Bye-Bye Babar,” and well-articulated in her TedEx Talk in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. Selasi said:

In 2005, I wrote an essay, "What is an Afropolitan," sketching out an identity that privileged culture over country. It was thrilling how many people could relate to my experience, and instructional how many others didn't buy my sense of self. See, "Taiye Selasi comes from the United States," isn't the truth. I have no relationship with the United States, all 50 of them, not really. My relationship is with Brookline, the town where I grew up; with New York City, where I started work; with Lawrenceville, where I spend Thanksgiving.... What makes America

home for me is not my passport or accent, but these very particular experiences and the places they occur. Despite my pride in Ewe culture, the Black Stars, and my love of Ghanaian food, I've never had a relationship with the Republic of Ghana, writ large. My relationship is with Accra, where my mother lives, where I go each year, with the little garden in Dzorwulu where my father and I talk for hours. These are the places that shape my experience. My experience is where I'm from. . . . Now, think of your relationships, of the people who shape your days. To whom do you speak at least once a week, be it face to face or on FaceTime? Be reasonable in your assessment; I'm not talking about your Facebook friends. I'm speaking of the people who shape your weekly emotional experience. My mother in Accra, my twin sister in Boston, my best friends in New York.

Of course, when we ask, "Where are you from?" we're using a kind of shorthand. It's quicker to say "Nigeria" than "Lagos and Berlin," and as with Google Maps, we can always zoom in closer, from country to city to neighborhood. But that's not quite the point. The difference between "Where are you from?" and "Where are you a local?" isn't the specificity of the answer; it's the intention of the question. Replacing the language of nationality with the language of locality asks us to shift our focus to where real life occurs. (Selasi 2014)

Similar to ways in which Levitt and Lucken present transnational lives grounded in one national context, Selasi suggests that mobility is at the center of lived experience (Levitt, Lucken and Barnett 2011). Through this speech, Selasi expresses her innermost thoughts and views on her world view. She identifies three important points: she is not "from" any particular country; she is a sum of her relationships; and the last but less obvious, she can maintain these relationships through technology and social media. She challenges the long tradition of national identity. Identifying a homeland carries with it meaning and belonging. Selasi is clear to state this attachment to place does not resonate with her. Here, she mentions the fact that her ideas were both embraced and rejected. It is important to understand her positionality within this discourse. She is known as the embodiment of "Afropolitan." Born in London, to a Nigerian mother and Ghanaian father, she is a writer and photographer who grew up in the United States and now

lives in Rome. Her father went to Saudi Arabia, where he has lived for most of her life. Her identity becomes the formation of her relationships within multiple contexts. She mirrors the self-rooted in the post-modernist search for “authenticity under institutional conditions that constantly work to undermine the self,” (Turner, Platt and Gordon 1994:150). At this stage her analysis, as we have seen throughout this thesis, is valid. The idea of nationality she interrogates is a social construct. However, because of her U.K. and American passports, Selasi can afford not to allow her Africanness to play a heavy role in her identity. She does not have to cross borders on a passport and be instantly suspected to be an asylum seeker or refugee. It is easier to be global citizen when mobility outside of the continent is facilitated by a ‘powerful’ passport. Citizenship then becomes central to the amount of freedom of movement an Afropolitan can enjoy while traveling around the globe.

Similar to Selasi, Minna Salami who began the blog Ms.Afropolitan, was born in Europe. She is a Nigerian-Finnish writer, blogger and commentator on African feminism, society and culture and Guardian writer for London and Lagos. Salami is a dedicated advocate for Afropolitanism. In her blog posts titled “My Views on Afropolitanism,” She writes:

Last month, I took part in a panel discussion about Afropolitanism. The panel, moderated by Tega Okiti, consisted of Emma Dabiri and Chardine Taylor-Smith, both opponents of Afropolitanism, and myself – a proponent of it. When I chose the name for my blog, I didn’t intuit becoming a proponent of Afropolitanism. The term simply appealed to me. However, names are prognosticative, and over the years the concept has indeed shaped the direction of this blog in ways that I can only describe as ‘destiny’.

As a shaper of the concept, I’m frequently asked to share my views about it, especially by students and academics who are exploring its sphere. So I thought I’d share and build on the arguments that I made during the panel, so that I can easily refer to them when necessary. (Afropolitan Complete 2014)

In this, Salami alludes to a poignant fact, that at the onset, the term had simply “appealed” to her, which takes lightly a term that has power, thus undermining the legitimacy of the concept. Many tend view it as a trendy topic not worthy of nuance, as we will see. Also, Salami considers herself as a shaper of the term. Rightly so. It is important to understand that this term is being negotiated, and will continue to be negotiated, as new voices are heard. It is a term that empowers those who resonate with it. In an interview with Stephanie Sy on Aljazeera, Selasi comments that she found herself in a position where she was told, 'You're not really American. You're not really black. You're not really British. You're not really Nigerian. You're not really Ghanaian.' And she said to herself, “Enough with the nots. I am this.”(Sy 2015) Hence the term Afropolitan was inspired. As with any identity, its content will forever evolve. In an attempt to pacify those who seek to understand an Afropolitan’s perspective, Salami provides a brief overview of what the term means to her. Afropolitanism describes a part of her identity, but also describes her philosophical understanding of the world. She presents Afropolitanism as a conceptual space in which African heritage realities are interrogated, conceptualized, managed, and claimed with the tools and nuances of a modern-day global citizen.

After the word began to take flight many became curious as to what this identity stood for. CNN Online conducted a feature on Afropolitanism, titled “Young, urban and culturally savvy, meet the Afropolitans” Author Mark Tutton Z (2012) described them as a new generation of Africans and people of African descent with a very global outlook. He recognized in his article that it is something of a buzzword made popular among the transnational Africans –

embraced by New York hipsters and trendy Europeans, as well as by inhabitants of Africa's own multicultural megacities. In presenting a snapshot of the type of person who constitutes Afropolitanism, Tutton featured, Brendah Nyakudya, editor of Afropolitan Magazine, a Zimbabwean based in Johannesburg who has lived in London. Nyakudya shared a perspective on her life, stating, "I have African roots but I've kind of been raised by the world, and that's helped form my identity," she says, reiterating the Afropolitan notions presented by Salami and Selasi. According to Tutton, Nyakudya's magazine is aimed at successful urban, educated, upwardly mobile and politically aware members of the African diaspora, most of whom she says can be described as Afropolitans. She asserts:

An Afropolitan is someone who has roots in Africa, raised by the world, but still has an interest in the continent and is making an impact, is feeding back into the continent and trying to better it," according to Nyakudya. She also believes the term can apply to non-Africans. "We like to think that it doesn't matter where you were born, if you find yourself on the continent and you love the continent, that makes you an Afropolitan," says Nyakudya. (Tutton, Online 2012)

Her framing of the Afropolitan is imbedded with an elitist sentiment, many who may be Afropolitan do not identify with elitism. This is especially true of "elites" who do not wish to use class as the primary driver of identity. However, her position, as a business woman perhaps informs her vantage point. Also, the idea that the term can be loosely applied to non-Africans creates the danger of neglecting the reality of the African identity, which operates at the level of being a brown person either born in African or with direct African heritage. If simply loving this continent was enough to constitute as an Afropolitan, this dialogue would be rendered useless. Tutton also interviewed Salami, and explains that for her it's a movement that is politically aware

and has an obligation to correct decades of Africa being misrepresented. It can be argued that the focus on fixing the global representation of Africa forgoes the importance of developing the continent from within. She says that, "Afropolitans are a group of people who are either of African origin or influenced by African culture, who are emerging internationally using African cultures in creative ways to change perceptions about Africa" (Tutton 2012). This may be true of people who deem themselves as Afropolitan, however, this idea of changing western perceptions of Afropolitanism runs contrary to the Pan-African thought that believes that Africa's action should not be for the benefit of the West, but for the continent. Pan-Africans suggest that Western perceptions of Africa can remain stagnant, however the reality of Africa must be transformed. Afropolitans of this category who believe it's their duty to change Western perceptions of Africa are in danger of unwittingly using African culture for the benefit of the West. This type of Afropolitan can be best understood through the lens of neo-colonial theory that was outlined by Kwame Nkrumah in chapter 2.3.

Salami also adds that social media has been key to the movement, "creating global citizens who are in tune with the same cultural trends and political issues" (Tutton 2012). To this effect, *The Afropolitan Network* was created as a blog in 2007, which later evolved into an online boutique named *The Afropolitan Shop*. As stated earlier, the term is trendy and is embraced in commercial spaces. In the 'About Us' section, the founders describe Afropolitanism as "a sensibility, a culture and a worldview". The Afropolitan Shop is an online boutique that desires to a growing global brand specializing in handmade and designer accessories such as jewelry, bags and shoes aiming to celebrate African designers and artists while giving them access to the

global market (The Afropolitan Shop 2016). AfriPOP! is another online space and producer of Afropolitan cultural content. In February of 2015, AfriPOP! partnered with the Caribbean Cultural Center (CCCADI) and The Weeksville Heritage Center to produce *After Afropolitan: A Multimedia Exhibition Deconstructing Contemporary African Diaspora Experiences, and Probing the Socio-Economic, Cultural, and Aesthetic Equity of the Afropolitan Identity*. The event in New York, was a month long art exhibition and culminated in a full-day conference entitled *Redefining 2015: After Afropolitan*, which featured notable Afropolitan devotees and critics including Taiye Selasi and Binyavanga Wainaina (Abebe 2015). The online space has also been instrumental in organizing in-person discussions and events. What is promising about this is that people, although not in accordance, are able to discuss their perspectives.

Through this analysis of the initial Afropolitan discourse, the first category of Afropolitanism becomes evident; one of lived identity and experience. Through these voices, Afropolitanism alludes to a way of life experienced by African who has been in ways shaped in a global world, and has formed a new philosophy of life. It is an inherently post-modern identity linked to individual experience. According to Viktor Gecas, to operate in this post-modern framework of identity is to have authenticity act as a fundamental self-motive. He argues that “by virtue of having a self, one will seek to experience it as meaningful and real.” Therefore, people will then be encouraged to protect their sense of authenticity and resist threats to it. Resistance can take forms, such as, struggling against the social forces threatening the self (Turner, Platt and Gordon 1994:145). The Afropolitan by seeking to define their identity based

on experiences is seeking to understand the self in order to validate their sense of authenticity in a transnational African experience.

Within this category, Afropolitan elitism appears as a sub-category. Individuals such as Salami who have identified as Afropolitan are elite or middle- class-based global citizens, who are bloggers, writers, and world travelers. They consider themselves fashionable and trendy and desire to ‘give back’ to the continent. They choose to take liberty with African culture by making it their own and translating it in their own transnational way, usually through creative means such as writing or fashion.

3.2 A Trendy Topic: Cultural Commodification

It can be argued that the appealing nature of the term Afropolitan can be appropriated, commodified and used for commercial purposes. The Afropolitan Magazine uses the tag phrase “signal of African sophistication.” This online magazine is decorated with bold aesthetics, a busy interface, and is filled with advertisements for various products, such as cars and travel packages. It’s a fusion of *Cosmopolitan* magazine and *The Atlantic*—featuring articles on fashion, literature, art, health, business, politics, and travel smoothly blended with an African twist. Both serious and whimsical, articles target young, upwardly mobile global professionals. It also provides articles about the world and, of course, about Africa, which lies at the heart of its narrative. Those who come to know the term Afropolitan by reading this magazine will be left with an impression of highly mobile elites with money and access. Among the top trending

articles was one on, “Top Easter Breaks -Discover these incredible local spots which offer relaxation, luxury:”

By the time Easter rolls around, the December holidays are a distant memory, your bank balance has just recovered from the strain of Christmas, New Year’s and an extra-long January and you’re feeling the need to escape from the humdrum of daily life in the city. Madikwe Safari Lodge Candles flicker over your boma dinner in the bush as night settles. There’s no better way to encounter Africa than at the five-star Madikwe Safari Lodge which promise luxury and exclusivity. (Afropolitan Magazine 2016)

Although pleasing to the senses, this journal echoes sentiments embodied in Wainanina’s satire, “How to Write about Africa.” The exact phrasing that concerned him about the exploitation of Africa is expressed within this advertisement. A clear disconnect appears between Afropolitan rhetoric of commodification and its proposed aims value the continent. One must ask-- which Africans can afford these types of vacations, and aren’t these elite trips usually targeted toward Europeans? In my own experience while growing up in middle-class Malawian family, I visited these resorts and encountered few other black families there. In fact, many white families appeared to be surprised at our presence, as if the resort were a throwback to the country’s colonial past. As a child, it never bothered me particularly; I was able to bridge gaps and make friends. However, in hindsight, I am haunted by the writings of Du Bois and Khruma, advocating for a progressive Africa, free from the crippling legacies of colonialism. This commodified version of Afropolitanism promoting luxury for Western elites runs counter to the Pan-African ideologies of an older generation. Was I, a young, transnational African, a participant in the undermining of African progress? I ponder- how can Africans enjoy popular tourist sites without feeling complicit in the exploitation of the continent?

Not all of the Afropolitan Magazine articles explicitly run counter to the dream of a progressive Africa. One of the articles titled, “Breaking Ground- Ghana’s Growing Film Industry,” suggests:

Despite the fact that some internationally recognised filmmakers have hailed from Ghana, including Kwaw Ansah, Shirley Frimpong-Manso and John Akomfrah, it’s the star combination of Idris Elba and Cary Joji Fukunaga that has put Ghana’s film industry in the spotlight. (Afropolitan Magazine 2016)

This feature points out the double standards that exist in the global film industry, where African artistry is undermined. This article tackles economic challenges faced by talented Ghanaian filmmakers, and the desire to produce transnational content for an audience that crosses many borders.

Others have embraced Afropolitanism, including artist and blogger Elvira Dyangani Ose, whose blog is titled “Are you an Afropolitan?” In one post, Ose analyzes the meaning of Afropolitanism as seen through the framework provided by philosopher Achille Mbembe:

Afropolitanism, Mbembe clarifies, is not the same as Pan-Africanism. Afropolitanism is an aesthetic and a particular poetic of the world. It is a way of being in the world, refusing on principle any form of victim identity — which does not mean that it is not aware of the injustice and violence inflicted on the continent and its people by the law of the world. It is also a political and cultural stance in relation to nation, to race and to the issue of difference in general. (Ose 2012)

Mbembe’s analysis explicitly places Afropolitanism at odds with ideas of Pan-Africanism, which he describes as a movement based on “victim identities.” Here, we see the transformation of the concept of Afropolitanism—from an identity label to a cultural stance. Mbembe describes this as new lived identity that empowers grass-roots efforts to break old stereotypes associated with

nation and race. However, the fact that Afropolitanism is being reshaped and politicized in this manner threatens the ideals that governed the identity in the first place—ideals of individual openness, and connection to personal experience, rather than a continental mission.

Throughout this section, a second category of Afropolitanism based on economics and the commodification of African culture emerges. This category is in ways concerned with Western notions of the exotic that reproduce old patterns of exploitation. By exploiting African culture the legacy of colonial activity is reasserted, as was illustrated in Afropolitan Magazine's travel advertisement. On the other hand, politically engaged individuals embracing commodified Afropolitanism, such as Ose, see an opportunity to re-imagine Africa in their own terms. This sense of creative agency doesn't necessarily inhibit Africa's economic progress, they argue. However, to owners of the Afropolitan magazine, this commodification of Africa simply reproduces Western systems of patriarchy and oppression. Thus, Afropolitans may be seen as disloyal Africans who only engage with the continent when it is convenient and trendy. Alternatively, they may represent a new generation of Africans whose lived identities are agentic and transnational, and who have no personal memories of colonial rule.

3.3 I am Not Afropolitan: Ideologies of Geography and African Futurity

The commodifying version of Afropolitanism can be seen as a threat to the principles of Pan-Africanism, a movement that began in the early twentieth century. African scholar, W.E.B. Du Bois, organized the first Pan African Congress in Paris in 1911 with the intention of galvanizing political unity among African nations seeking independence from colonial rule. The Pan-African ideology advocates for a united Africa, free of colonial rule, to develop the continent under the leadership of black Africans. In the ensuing years, Pan-Africanism has become a normative political stance viewed as inherently good because it advocates for an Africa for Africans. This ideology advocates for definitive role of the nation in identity and institutions, such as the African Union that promote the ideology for political purposes. These modern structures, according the Gecas, make it difficult for people to maintain a sense of authenticity and personal integrity, constantly working to undermine the individual self (Turner, Platt and Gordon 1994:145,150). Today's youth, who have no personal recollections of colonialism, are expected to affirm the Pan-African worldview to prove allegiance to the progressive futurity of the continent. However, the younger Afropolitan generations find themselves in a new geopolitical context that no longer reflects the experiences of their elders.

Those openly opposed to the idea of Afropolitanism often reflect ideological discourses exemplifying a third Afropolitan category--Afropolitanism as a political movement. While voices of Mbembe and Salami argue that Afropolitanism can potentially overturn stereotypes of Africa, thereby transforming rhetoric from victimhood to empowerment, those advocating for pan-Africanism understand African identity as being overlaid with political meaning. It no

longer remains available for personal interpretation, but becomes an identity with a political purpose and message. The desire to empower Africans by changing patterns of exploitation is explained by Hazel Rose Markus in her edited volume, “Doing Race: 21 Essays for the 21st Century” (Markus and Moya 2012).

Afropolitans identify as African. Markus writes that whenever someone participates in a community, it will have an influence on them whether or not they feel that particular category is central to their identity. This is true especially when the categories of belonging are associated with the distribution of power, resources, status, respect, knowledge and other cultural capital. Seeing Afropolitanism through Markus’ lens, it becomes clearer why Afropolitans often maintain strong ties to the continent they want to protect and “save.” Through the Markus analysis, perhaps these motivations are an inherent or sacred duty. Yet, how is this duty to homeland balanced with a post-modernist duty to the self? Markus also argues, that while racial, ethnic and [regional] identity can be the basis of discrimination, they can also serve as a source of meaning and belonging. This suggests, perhaps, that the Afropolitan belongs to an imagined community that is inclusive of but not exclusive to Africa.

Similarities and differences among those who embrace the Afropolitan moniker are clear. However, many interrogate the term and fail to resonate with current definitions. Writer Yewande Omotoso discussed in an interview her emigration from Nigeria to South. She claims her family chose to remain on the African continent rather than emigrating to the UK or US, like many others of her generation. Migration within Africa has given her a distinct diasporic experience, she explains, yet the notion of Afropolitanism does not capture her experience.

What is interesting is Omotoso's resonance with the word, "experience," the term Selasi uses most often to express the Afropolitanism point of view. This opens up the question: is Afropolitanism limited only to those who migrate to the West? The interviewer asked Omotoso whether narratives of migration to the south provide us with a novel perspective in relation to the older narratives of migration to the north? Omotoso replied:

While some writers, including myself, might feel they aren't really writing for a particular audience, at the same time when I read, for instance works of those writers who settled overseas, it often appears to me that they are writing for a particular kind of audience, an overseas audience. At least they write something applicable enough that all people from many walks can identify with it. And those writers who left their home countries and settled somewhere more stable but still upon the continent, I wonder if they don't write differently, have a slightly different audience they write for, again regardless of whether Americans or the British might buy, read, and identify with their books too. That the gaze is different because even though they migrated, they did not go north. Again, I don't know where this fits but it's something recent that I think about and, as yet, have no answers to. (Fasselt 2014)

Omotoso references here something that concerns those who believe in African empowerment and nationalism. Creations made in African, similar to the vacation location advertised in the Afropolitan Magazine, are often developed for consumption by Western audiences. This statement is revealing. It suggests that the commodification of African ideas and identities is not solely the failing of "Afropolitans" living abroad. Diasporic Africans remaining on the continent may also participate in cultural production for economic means. While Omotoso does not view herself as an Afropolitan, her close friend claims the label applies. Her adamant denial of this identity category illustrates negative connotations she associates with the term:

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. My mother was from the

Caribbean, so I'm multicultural anyway, not only Nigerian. But I feel this doesn't mean I'm Afropolitan... I've travelled to places and I've learned things, but I'm still African. It doesn't mean I'm less African, and that's why the term is problematic. Why do we have to have another distinction? You have class, language and so on and now another special group of Afropolitans. Many of those Africans who travel and get educated overseas have the money and the means to do that. So they are of a privileged class, that's all. (Fasselt 2014)

Clearly, Omotoso fears being associated with elitism and the "privileged class." The irritation that this category causes for many is palpable, particularly when they move among the educated, cultured class. Scholars and prominent novelists such as Omotoso may not want to look further into the meaning of Afropolitanism if she views the term in such a negative light. It can be argued that Africa is bound to have elites, but this is not the point. The Afropolitan moniker is simply off-putting or offensive to some. This revulsion toward the label may curtail critical engagement with this concept. Omotoso also makes an assumption that to be Afropolitan means to be less African, which is a possible fear for individuals who share a desire to develop their love for the continent. She says that she has travelled and learned new things, but her experience has not made her feel a new level of consciousness. Perhaps being Afropolitan means embracing cosmopolitanism; a perspective that values lived experience and geographical movement over fixed localities. If Omotoso is empowered by a fixed a "pure" African identity, that is her choice. Again, this resonates with the Afropolitan desire to embrace empowerment and validation.

Selasi briefly refers to these concerns and the complicated nature of the African component of Afropolitanism in her TedEx Talk. However her analysis is generalized and not on par with the critiques that are presented by avid pan-Africanists and writers such as Omotoso. In her attempt to address the subject Selasi stated:

[Someone asked] How can Selasi claim to come from Ghana," one such critic asked,"when she's never known the indignities of traveling abroad on a Ghanaian passport?...We're local where we carry out our rituals and relationships, but how we experience our locality depends in part on our restrictions. By restrictions, I mean, where are you able to live? What passport do you hold? Are you restricted by, say, racism, from feeling fully at home where you live?

She does acknowledge that there are certain uncontrollable aspects that may limit one's ability to be Afropolitan, or someone's ability to travel the world as wished. However this does not pacify the most vocal critic of Afropolitanism Binyavanga Wainaina. He was very clear about this in his speech on, "Exorcizing Afropolitanism: I am a Pan-Africanist, not an Afropolitan", delivered at September's African Studies Association UK 2012 conference. Writer Stephanie Bosch Santana shares her argument in accordance with him:

Wainaina's address was a kind of exorcism in its own right, an attempt to rid African literary and cultural studies of the ghost of Afropolitanism, a term that perhaps once held promise as a new theoretical lens and important counterweight to Afro-pessimism, but that has increasingly come to stand for empty style and culture commodification... For Wainaina, Afropolitanism has become the marker of crude cultural commodification—a phenomenon increasingly "product driven," design focused, and "potentially funded by the West." Through an Afropolitan lens, "travel is easy" and "people are fluid."... Afropolitanism, it seems, is a portmanteau in more ways than one: it is a general brand of cosmopolitanism cloaked in African style, as well as a literal "coat hanger" for changing. (Santana 2013)

Santana is obviously not a fan, and does not reserve her criticism. Like Wainaina, she argues, that the commodifying category of Afropolitanism is rudimentary and unimportant. In ways that echo Minna Salami's blog, she presents Afropolitanism as being shallow. The categories of Afropolitanism formed within this chapter influence and overlap one another, yet must be discussed separately for clarity. Wainaina's Pan-African ideological lens causes him to become

irritated by the emergence of commercialism that Afropolitanism can sometimes promote.

Commercializing Africa has its own political ramifications, such as continuing the practice of African exploitation.

In a response to this criticism, Minna Salami writes a blog post titled “Can Africans have multiple subcultures? A response to “Exorcising Afropolitanism”

Stephanie Bosch Santana in an article on *Africa in Words* reckons that the Afropolitan should be exorcised (metaphorically speaking, I hope) for what she mistakenly sees as its attempt to replace pan-Africanism... At its core, Bosch Santana’s article seems to take issue with modern-day Africans taking steps to ensure that we, if anyone, are at the forefront of selling African cultures. In fact, reading about her dislike of Afropolitanism makes me wonder which part of the contraction African and cosmopolitan she wishes to “exorcise?” (Salami 2013)

In this blog post, Salami uses language that possibly irritates the political nature of pan-Africanism. The ideas of “selling” one’s culture is exactly what pursuers of empowerment for the African continent seek to avoid because the act of profiting from the continent has mostly benefitted the West-- whether it be selling people through slavery or commodities in the present day. This idea of commodification of Africa is frowned upon, and in Salami’s attempt to redeem Afropolitanism, she inadvertently ostracizes many potential Afropolitans. She continues to write that, “Don’t get me wrong, the delivery of Afropolitanism should certainly be up for discussion, scrutiny and critique....What rocks one Afropolitan’s boat, capsizes another’s.”(Salami 2013).

Salami’s words point out inherent contradictions embodied by African identity. Perhaps some of these contradictions are generational. The idea that needs to prevail and circulate is that Afropolitanism allows for discourse, and for many different voices to re-imagine and redefine what it means to be African. It is necessary for everyone who may identify with the term

Afropolitan to feel they can inhabit a space within the identity or at least aid in the shaping of them term.

Wainaina's analysis that opposes Afropolitanism and Santana in her article expressing support for the exorcism of the term, may be missing a full understanding of what cosmopolitanism actually means. Cosmopolitanism gives power to one's personal narrative, which is the essence of Afropolitanism. Afropolitanism, within its discourse, has become locked in the politics of identity. Each figure who discusses the identity has a personal, vested interest in what they need the identity to be or an interest in eradicating what they fear most about it. This is why the term evokes such passion. These conversations are necessary to work out modern ways of being African, however, it is important to return to the source of the term. Afropolitanism was first coined by Selasi *as an experience*, so it was Selasi's privilege to narrate for herself what the term means. She offers an achieved identity that she has constructed to explain her lived experience in the world. In her Ted Talk Selasi made clear that:

[I am] not suggesting that we do away with countries. There's much to be said for national history, more for the sovereign state. Culture exists in community, and community exists in context. Geography, tradition, collective memory: these things are important. What I'm questioning is primacy. All of those introductions on tour began with reference to nation, as if knowing what country I came from would tell my audience who I was. What are we really seeking, though, when we ask where someone comes from? And what are we really seeing when we hear an answer? (Selasi 2014)

In this conversation, Selasi negotiates the complex idea she has formulated. In the beginning she deconstructed the idea of the nation, however still believes in their relevance and weight on identity. It is the primacy of national identity that is a cause of discomfort for the Afropolitan.

National identity, as we previously discussed, carries with it meaning and usually one of homogeneity that makes it easy for society to “understand” the individual who they are interacting with. The Afropolitan cannot be understood within this framework.

The digital space mined for data has presented multiple views of Afropolitanism. Clearly, no single authority on Afropolitanism exists, though all these different perspectives contain relevant voices—some crying out louder than others. It is a conversation in the blogosphere that is constantly being negotiated. We have found that individuals occupying elite spaces do not always claim this term, perhaps because Afropolitanism implies they enjoy privileges that others are denied. Elitism is not politically correct in the eyes of the pan-African cohort, a group that represents the continent’s elders—its founding fathers. This group is often given the power to dictate the rules, and therefore influences how Afropolitanism is interpreted and judged.

Yet, Afropolitanism is the experience of the younger generation, that didn’t experience colonialism. Instead, their experience is one of liminality as they negotiate global spaces and lifestyles, and maintain ambivalent relationships with their homeland. This can be seen in an interview in which Selasi describes her experience of going to Ghana for the first time with her sister:

And I think when we first went to Ghana, I thought we were going to feel sort of this open-armed embrace. Like, "Welcome home, prodigal whatever. Have some keke and fish." But it wasn't like that. There was no instantaneous sense of belonging. In fact, I felt the same combination of belonging and unbelonging in Ghana that I did in England and in the States. And I think for a time that was rather heartbreaking, because it occurred to me that there is no place in the world that I can go and say, "This place is mine." And I started thinking of myself as a sort of deterritorialized brown person. And it was only when I got to graduate school and I started thinking about that experience of being a deterritorialized

brown person, of knowing yourself home in many places but not wholly at home in any, it suddenly occurred to me, "This is not just my experience." (Sy 2015) Selasi transports us back to the in-between space that the first category of Afropolitanism inhabits, one rooted in experience. It reminds us of the "Baby Afropolitan" that was lost in "transnation." If the Afropolitan cannot own or claim a national space, the individual claim this identity in ways that defines them and provides meaning in an uncertain and ever-changing world. As Salami shares in her blog, Afropolitanism makes her feels like she was "writing herself into existence" (Salami, Online 2013).

People tend to understand themselves within networks, and because of the pluralistic networks that Afropolitans inhabit, they may transform their "Africanness" according to context. When Africans find themselves in transnational networks with other cultures such as Jewish, Caribbean, European and others, these networks are usually not imbedded in the Pan-African ideology. The Afropolitan then becomes influenced by the types of conversations that emerge within these networks. They begin to master the scripts and tailor their behavior to several different spaces. Resonating with Glick Schiller's theory on "cosmopolitan sociability", the Afropolitan becomes a sum of their relationships, and this very post-modern way of building identity is their way of seeing and being. This digital space has presented multiple views and left an array of questions. These questions are necessary especially when dealing in the realm of complexity and ambiguity.

Conclusions

Afropolitanism is an idea encumbered by layers of meaning. To describe Afropolitanism without first laying out the parameters of meaning that encompass the term is fruitless. This paper views this concept through three interdisciplinary frameworks: transnationalism, cosmopolitanism, and Africanism. It finds that Afropolitanism is first and foremost a construction of an imagined community that spans borders constructed by the nation-state system. The Afropolitan is a product of the post-modern world generated by globalization. This generation embraces mobility and experience, and freely identifies with new geographies and relationships that move beyond their “homeland.” Like other third culture kids described by Helen Fail, living in multiple nations and spaces has shaped their sense of self and ideas about belonging. Through their transnational lives they form global relationship networks. Afropolitans negotiate cultural codes, attach to various localities, and find agency as they move through and within the many spaces they inhabit. With this power also comes a sense of uneasiness associated with the historical, political and ideological constructs associated with the African continent.

Viktor Gecas provides a generational understanding of self throughout history, illustrating how the self is grounded differently by successive generations. While the generation of adults living in the fight for freedom against colonialism, were bound by modern roles rooted in the nation in order to encourage support for independence. The current generation finds itself in a post-modern framework, embodied by pluralism and multiple frames of meaning, where one

can pursue authenticity and individualistic notions of the self despite institutional conditions that work to undermine the self (Turner, Platt and Gordon 1994). Gecas illustrates the power of relationships over these roles, and the tendency to attach to experience over place. Moreover, how individuals such as Nyakudya, the owner of the *Afropolitan Magazine* can use culture as a selling point, is a choice to behave in ways that are rooted in her identity as a business woman who sees an opportunity through the Afropolitan name. Gecas' theoretical framework illuminates the generational nature of Afropolitan identity, and it reflects different lived experiences and goals. This generation of transnationals have exchanged roles and nationalistic structures for relationships and a pursuance of authenticity.

As Natasha Garret argues, "A world that allows for a transnational life also requires a new understanding of one's place in it" (2011: 10). We have found that Afropolitans, like cosmopolitans, move beyond the logistics of migration and embrace migration as a way of life. As Nina Glick Schiller points out, that while transnational mobility allows for possibilities of openness, it does not necessarily produce cosmopolitan consciousness or sociability (2011:404). Cosmopolitanism, it seems, embraces a mindset of movement and relationships with the world while constantly negotiating identity. Cosmopolitanism nurtures a certain "loyalty" to multiple geographies. "The term cosmopolitanism signals a condition of self-confrontation, incompleteness; modernity concerns the loss of certainty and the realization that certainty can never be established once and for all," signifying openness and fluidity (Delanty 2006:38).

African identity carries Pan-Africanism as a normative ideology and understands it to be inherently good. In *Africa Must Unite*, Nkrumah (1963) writes that because of Africa's exploited

past by European powers, those who identify as African must unite within the continent to elevate its people. However, some argue that “Africans of the world” should work on building cultural bridges among countries, languages, and localities (Wawrzinek and Makokha 2011:16). This suggests that Afropolitans may play a crucial role in the betterment of society as whole, not just on the African continent. Granted, Pan-Africanism was created when there were political pressing needs requiring collective African action to rid the continent of colonialism. Pan Africanism as discussed, is constructed, but as Zeleza (2006) argued that constructions begin to hold with them social and political meanings that need to be addressed. However through their own narratives, Afropolitans re-work the social scripts they’ve learned and construct new meanings about themselves and their relationship to the continent. Therefore, pan-Africans and nationalists view the self as a collective. If we draw on Gecas’ theoretical framework, we see that the older generations of Africans view themselves in terms of citizenship and membership roles with inherent obligations toward this group. Meanwhile, young Afropolitans inhabit a new post-modern generation that is global, fragmented, and focused more on relationships than on geographies. The challenge that young Africans face is to develop new forms of identifications through a post-modern lens where the Self represents a collection of memories, experiences, and relationships to people and spaces. Through this new mobile lens, comes further complexity in the African narrative. “It is only recently that the mobilities of disempowered people have been examined through the optic of cosmopolitanism” (Schiller 2012:402). As a region that carries narratives of disempowerment, Africa is rarely afforded the opportunity to be analyzed outside

the lens of poverty and underdevelopment. Afropolitanism provides a new worldview, and a new globalized narrative that looks towards lived experiences embodying choice and agency.

Furthermore, the Afropolitan myth that creates discomfort, is that this identity is reserved for African elites, who move to study, work, or travel. This concept of a mobile, globalized elite is based on some level of truth; migration, education, and cultural exposure is usually experienced by the middle-upper class. However, the Afropolitan does not have to be a lawyer or a writer. It is someone who, in my opinion, has migrated or perhaps not. Some travelled elites such as Omotoso, may not wish to inhabit a global identity. Afropolitanism is less about physical travel and more about reimagining the world as a place that they can call their own outside the bounds of the nation-state. To be Afropolitan is to experience a globalized consciousness, similar to how I experienced a sense of global citizenship before I left the African continent at the age of 19. The unfortunate reputation of elitism associated with mobility should not serve as grounds for the concept's dismissal.

This analysis has found that Afropolitanism has debuted on the global stage as an experience with Africa at the center. The elitist sentiment and supposed commodification of African culture for consumption by the West mirrors the colonial legacy that must be "exorcised." All these views have connotations within this complex phenomenon, as Afropolitanism exists within these different spaces. Although primarily reflecting personal experience, identity is narrated in conjunction with the world. This paper did not seek to debunk or eliminate any of these categories, rather, it was aimed at exemplifying the inherent complexity within this concept and showing how Afropolitanism is negotiated from differing vantage points.

The inspiration for this work was to gather further insight on a term that has been taken as frivolous and therefore dismissible. It was aimed at showing that there is complexity embedded in Afropolitanism, and that should not be taken for what remains at face value. It is an identity that was first used to describe an in-between space negotiated by people whose lives crossed borders physically and theoretically. Living transnationally and literally “beyond the nation” takes a toll on one’s ability to belong. As Selasi illustrates, Afropolitans are not American (Western) enough, not African enough. Out of frustration, Afropolitans took revenge on views of the self based on national origins. Thus, Afropolitanism provides a sense of freedom to Africans who inhabit a globalized space, but possibly to anyone who realizes that their identity is rooted in experience rather than in geography. Understanding Afropolitanism is important for scholars, because it exemplifies a new global consciousness that is not ubiquitous but is growing. Providing vocabularies and permission to discuss the self in relation to Africa, but not necessarily part of Africa, is imperative for African transnational identity formation. So, when someone asks, “Where are you from?” knowing Afropolitan scripts equips members of the diaspora with tools to begin conversations about their complex lived identities. This research can change how people view themselves and how they begin to share their lived experiences with others. Language tends to mirror behavior and new language can also change behavior. Placing the word “Afropolitan” in our diction many change how people understand their own lived identities, and those of others.

Like the Afropolitan, throughout this analysis we have taken a journey. We have walked through historical constructions of Pan - Africanism that continue to hold preeminence in

contemporary times. Afropolitanism has been illuminated through several frameworks and vantage points, and the patterns found were categorized. After this analysis, the question arises: why is this knowledge of importance? Since the post-modern self values self-determination over societal structures, as Gecas argues, we then understand better the impetus for Africans to move across the globe. It is likely that “cosmopolitanism” begins to play a role in these cases. As we have discussed, narrative identity is constantly changing as new experiences and relationships significantly influence our lives. Our identities are based on imagined notions of the world and the agentic self. Afropolitanism is a new way of seeing and being that empowers global Africans to experience this in-between identity that spans borders and lives beyond the nation.

Afropolitanism can also be lucrative to those who can profit from the concept. It is an imperfect classification-complex and messy, as we have seen through the remarks of those claiming or dismissing it. Most detractors fear its apolitical nature may pull Africans away from the long years of struggle against Western domination. Within this Pan African paradigm, Afropolitans may be placed in the opposite corner from Africa’s founding fathers, who struggled to create a unified, political entity out the diverse nations, regions, and tribes inhabiting the continent. Pan-Africanism, as we heard through the voices of Du Bois and Nkrumah, is rooted in in the tremendous struggle against colonial rule. This paradigm demands the submission of self to the group. However some Afropolitans, such as Mbembe, do not want to walk in the shadow of Pan-Africanism. Whether Afropolitanism will help to build a prosperous future for the African content is still a topic of interest and cannot be easily answered. The Identity was constructed

from a need for self-knowledge, while Pan-Africanism had a different goal rooted in political ideology.

More importantly, the discovery of Afropolitanism brings to light the joy of self-knowledge, and with new knowledge comes freedom and also boundaries. This process can be best depicted through Plato's "The Allegory of the Cave." In this story, Socrates teaches his student Glaucon about enlightenment by detailing how the process of new thought and sight affects prisoners. Socrates begins the dialogue by describing an allegorical cave in which humans are chained from their childhood to a wall with no ability to look around. In terms of this research project, the chains represent our societies' tendencies to view and interpret identity through the concept of the nation-state. However when a prisoner who has lived in the cave is first released, liberation and exposure to light in the upper-world can cause pain and distress. This allegory details the experiences of estrangement and struggle encountered by Afropolitans who navigate liminal space beyond national identity. In response to the struggle, Selasi gravitated towards learning more about nations, imagined communities, and like the prisoner in the allegory of the cave, when she moved out of the shadows of her former state, she could see things much more clearly. Afropolitanism stands for a clarified vision of the self, realized after the pain of not knowing and not having a lens or language for the experience. Like the prisoner trapped in the cave, the Afropolitan must accustom herself to the vision in the upper-world made clearer through discussions and negotiations with the old world. According to Socrates, the prisoner eventually "will be able to see the sun, and not mere reflections of him in the water, but he will see him in his own proper place, and not in another; and he will contemplate him as he

is.” (Jowett 1991). Like this process of seeing newness, identity formation is processual, the Afropolitan finds confidence in the self after this enlightenment. Finally, the Afropolitan finds themselves at this point within the allegory: “After gaining reason the prisoner would pity the old ways and also facility in himself the new change.” The old ways, in this case, are the ways in which people valued national identity. Socrates then explains to Glaucon that there will be those who remained in the cave who try to dictate over what the prisoner has experienced, even if they themselves have not experienced it. These are the rulers who are “able to draw conclusions as to the future” (Jowett 1992). These rulers could signify all the voices in conversation about Afropolitanism, either those attempting to cut its life short or to propel it into the future. The self is negotiated in conjunction with the world, leaving us with multiple meanings and outcomes. Socrates’ student, Glaucon says that he “thought that the prisoner would rather suffer anything than entertain these false notions and live in this miserable manner” (Jowett, 1991). To this effect, the Afropolitan will remain in this experiential world and will understand their lives through this new paradigm of Afropolitanism. Though the name, itself, can be the source of controversy and ridicule, those who use it as a narrative descriptor will continue to carry it forth. Just as the prisoner that could no longer live in systems of darkness, the Afropolitan can never return to previous notions of selfhood as embodied by a single geographical or conceptual space.

First and foremost, I argue, we must return to the source who inhabits that in-between hybrid geographical and political existence. It is difficult position to be in, but the agentic nature of the Afropolitan can easily navigate the complexities of the world. When others realize they, too, have complicated identities embedded in experience, they will discover newfound

knowledge of themselves. This process does not take place without a struggle. They will be at odds with those who fail to see, but experience cannot be argued away so easily. For the Afropolitan, like Selasi, realization of this new identity or consciousness presents an urgency in a world that does not provide language for the transnational diasporic existence. Everyone should have the opportunity to define their own experiences and how these lived journeys impact their points of view. The impactful thing about this journey, however, is that a single answer does not exist.

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