

ABSTRACT

Title of Dissertation: AFROPOLITAN HACKERS: REDEFINING
ANGLOPHONE AFRICAN LITERATURE

Sara Faradji, Doctor of Philosophy, 2022

Dissertation directed by: Professor Sangeeta Ray, Department of English

In the twenty-first century, we are witnessing a resounding boom in the production and reception of Anglophone African literature. Novelists like Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, Teju Cole, Lauren Beukes, and Dinaw Mengestu have achieved critical acclaim in Africa, the U.S., Europe, and beyond. My dissertation examines how these writers are reshaping our understandings of African literature and criticism.

I explore how “African Boom” writers resemble computer hackers that break existing conventions and actively rebuild those systems for the better. They adeptly learn the “code” of Anglophone literature, but then they “break into” the literary canon, steal the master’s tropes, and modify the literature to be even more effective and resonant among academic and popular audiences. My dissertation specifically engages with the writing of authors who I call Afropolitan hackers. These writers distinctively reflect Afro-cosmopolitan sensibilities in both their fictional and critical works. As they receive high praise from reputable academic and

popular literary critics, Afropolitan hackers make bold, dynamic changes to the very literary canon they studied and disrupted.

In order to demonstrate how African Boom writers are Afropolitan hackers, I consider how they challenge past and present concerns in postcolonial literature. Specifically, I examine how some of them are “hacking” three classic literary tropes: the flâneur, the griot, and the scammer. By simultaneously debunking and extending traditional theoretical expectations of the African narrative, select Africa-based and migrant Afropolitan authors challenge the notion that their writing must epitomize a single story if they seek to appeal to a global audience.

AFROPOLITAN HACKERS: REDEFINING ANGLOPHONE AFRICAN
LITERATURE

by

Sara Faradji

Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of the
University of Maryland, College Park, in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
2022

Advisory Committee:

Professor Sangeeta Ray, Chair

Professor Zita Nunes

Professor Merle Collins

Professor Sharada Balachandran Orihuela

Professor Ryan Long

© Copyright by
Sara Faradji
2022

Table of Contents

Table of Contents	ii
Chapter 1: Introduction: The Rise of the Anglophone African Literary Boom and Afropolitan Hacker	1
Argument and Methodology	2
Dissertation Overview	9
Shaping the Anglophone African Literary Boom	15
Tropic Roots : Writing Back vs. Hacking in Anglophone African Literature	23
Boom or Bust ? Constructing a Theorization of Anglophone African Boom Literature	33
Chapter 2: Hacking the Flâneur: From a Man of Leisure to a Laborious Negator	35
Following the Flâneur : Literary and Cultural Origins	37
Cosmopression : A Closed Mind in an Open City	45
From Urban Renewal to Personal Denial: Tracking Trauma in The Beautiful Things That Heaven Bears	63
Finding New Followers : The Significance of the Hacked Flâneur's Legacy	83
Chapter 3: Hacking the Griot : From Soothsayer to Clickbaiter	86
A Jack of All Trades : The History of the Griot's Evolution	90
The Griot Blogger : Ifemelu's Local and Transnational Exchanges in Americanah	97
The Griot Journalist : Lomba's Non-Linear Political Reawakening in Waiting for an Angel	119
Soothsaying Clickbaiters : The Significance of the Neo-Griot in Africa	136
Chapter 4: Hacking the Scammer: From Local Street Thief to Global Digital Pirate	139
Tricksters, Prisoners, and Princes : A Brief History of 419	142
Weighing the Ethics of Scamming in I Do Not Come to You by Chance	148
Unraveling the Cyberpunk Scammer in Zoo City	164
Global Pirates : The Significance of the Hacked Scammer in Africa	179
Chapter 5: Hacking the Afropolitan : The Anglophone African Literary Boom's Intersection with National, Transnational, and Global Literature	184
Afropolitanism as Theory	187
Afropolitanism as Solidarity	203
Afropolitanism as Hacking	215
Bibliography	232

Chapter 1: Introduction: The Rise of the Anglophone African

Literary Boom and Afropolitan Hacker

No one pretended that he dispensed any spectacular insights, wisdom, or originality but his ability to turn a phrase in a way to delight our ordinary readers was remarkable. He was full of cliché, but then a cliché is not a cliché if you have never heard it before; and our ordinary reader clearly had not and so was ready to greet each one with the same ecstasy it might have produced when it was first coined. For Cliché is but pauperized Ecstasy. –Chinua Achebe, *Anthills of the Savannah*

In *Open City* (2011), Teju Cole's Nigerian-German protagonist, Julius, is the quintessential "worldly" intellectual traveler. He traverses continents, purposefully gets lost in the city, and ponders the actions of strangers. He epitomizes the African immigrant character whose commentary and observations are both global and local, such as in this single passage: "[On] a circuitous route to a poetry reading at the Ninety-second Street Y, I noticed the masses of leaves dying off in bright colors [...] Above a boxwood hedge, the swarm of hovering bees reminded me of certain Yoruba epithets for Olodumare, the supreme deity: he who turns blood into children, who sits in the sky like a cloud of bees" (Cole 42). In just a few sentences, there is a sudden shift from a poetry reading at a venue frequented by the New York literati to an ominous bee swarm that reminds the narrator of the most powerful Yoruba deity. There is something peculiar about this narration as demonstrated in this passage, which invokes African literature and culture in the most quotidian of settings in a Western city. It is this kind of peculiarity that fascinates me, as it manifests itself in numerous ways in contemporary Anglophone African literature.

African-born characters like Julius, who often have at least one prestigious university degree and engage with a diverse, urban, upper-middle-class milieu, populate novels that appear in global bestseller lists and nominations for prestigious awards. Nigerian author Helen Oyeyemi's first novel, *The Icarus Girl* (2005), has sold 20,000 copies as of a 2020 press release (Comerford). Ghanaian-American author Yaa Gyasi is a two-time nominee for the Andrew Carnegie Medal for Excellence in Fiction. Self-proclaimed Afropolitan writer Taiye Selasi's debut novel, *Ghana Must Go*, earned a spot on the *Wall Street Journal's* list of 10 best novels of 2013. Perhaps one of the most globally recognized faces of contemporary African literature, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, has seen her novel, *Americanah*, earn the 2013 National Book Critics Circle Award, appear on NPR's Paperback Best-Seller list for nearly 80 weeks, sell hundreds of thousands of copies, and become selected as New York's "One Book, One New York" book "aimed at getting all New Yorkers simultaneously to read a particular book" (Obi-Young). As the list of popular and often bestselling Anglophone African novels grows, this dissertation seeks to develop a theorization of why these novels are so globally resonant, accessible, and popular. My objective is to develop a methodology for what I call an emergent Anglophone African Literary Boom.

Argument and Methodology

To demonstrate the significance of Anglophone African Boom writing in shaping and expanding the global literary canon, I specifically analyze how boom

writers such as Teju Cole, Dinaw Mengestu, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, Helon Habila, Adaobi Tricia Nwaubani, and Lauren Beukes appeal to a global readership through the a unique reimagination of key literary tropes. Chapter one of this dissertation begins with Teju Cole's *Open City*, where the protagonist, Julius, represents an African reinvention of the flâneur, a key nineteenth-century literary figure. Like the flâneur, Julius is a disengaged observer of urban life. However, in contrast to his literary predecessors, Julius is the opposite of a leisurely stroller. His contemplative walks function as a coping mechanism, allowing him to lose himself in the city atmosphere so that he may forget the brutal past he left behind in Lagos, Nigeria. By focusing on the strategic reinvention of key literary tropes, I develop a methodology for how scholars can better identify Anglophone African Boom literature and understand what makes them so successful in bridging themes that are both local and global and simultaneously historical and contemporary.

These Anglophone African authors offer a fresh take on classic literary figures who migrate between worlds. And by worlds, I don't just mean national borders or the traditional binaries between Africa and the West. I am also referring to the worlds of differing cities, cultures, genres, and technologies. What we see in these transgressions of worlds is not simply a discussion of all-too-easily constructed binaries or migrations from point A to point B (and possibly back to point A again). As such, my dissertation examines how select contemporary Anglophone African writers better interact with a global readership by engaging with emerging scholarship on Afropolitanism, an ideology that encompasses various migrations among "worlds" and is evident in both the published novels and public writings of the authors. These

authors, like the characters in their works, often travel between urban centers in Africa, Europe, and North America—all the while describing their unique milieu and interaction with the people they encounter. But, beyond physical migration, I explore how African writers like Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, Adaobi Tricia Nwaubani, and Lauren Beukes engage with an Afropolitanism that reflects cybermobility.¹ My analysis explores Afropolitanism as it relates to contemporary world building, identity construction, and novel publication. I have developed a theorization of Anglophone African Boom literature by means of a focused examination of trope reinventions and through a theoretical lens of an emerging Afropolitan theory.

My dissertation pursues a particular intervention into the study of the publication and reception of Anglophone African literature. In the chapters that follow, I examine the novels of writers who are no longer “writing back” to the West in the same way that popular African authors did from the 1950s-1970s. British publisher James Currey’s *Africa Writes Back* describes the significance of the Heinemann African Writers Series in elevating the global dissemination of novels by Chinua Achebe, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, and Nuruddin Farah. Currey’s book title is clearly inspired by his citation of Achebe’s acknowledgement in *Home and Exile* of Salman Rushdie’s description of “the postcolonial” as “*The Empire Writes Back*” (Currey 24). These words typify a fitting motivation for postcolonial writers,

¹ Shola Adenekan claims that Koleade Odutola’s term, “cyberframing,” effectively positions tech-savvy Africans as the authors of their own dynamic, authentic representation in cyberspace. Cyberframing thus gives Africans “the chance to shape and reframe the way they and their societies are seen and perceived” (Adenekan, *African Literature in the Digital Age* 5). Moreover, Susanne Gehrmann argues that “[c]ybermobility is now just as important as mobility in the real world, a movement in a bid to become recognized Afropolitan” (63). Here she refers to the active engagement of Africans in Afropolitan discussions in online magazines like *The Afropolitan*, which show how Afropolitanism can be just as significant in and reflective of cyber literary publications, cultural exchange, and digital movement and discourse.

including and especially African writers, who wrote and published their works in the colonial languages of English and French. Currey adapts Achebe's phrase, "conspirator in the launch of African literature," to describe the assembly of African writers and British publishers to leverage Western publishing houses and Anglophone African writing to establish a kind of rebellious operation "to stimulate an explosion of creative writing in Africa" (24). In other words, Anglophone African writers effectively used the master's tools—English and publishing networks—to achieve the global publication and dissemination of their works. But they also used those tools to dismantle the master's house—to not simply placate Westerners with exotic stories of Africa, but to challenge whitewashed colonial narratives of African existence. This twentieth-century generation of postcolonial African writers sought to undermine the dehumanizing representations of Africans in Anglophone literature. Chinua Achebe's classic *Things Fall Apart* (1958) is the most obvious example of a harsh response to Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1899), while Tayeb Salih's *Season of Migration to the North* (1966) presents a critical rewriting of William Shakespeare's *Othello* (1604). In the twenty-first century, African writers are doing more than continuing to reassert an oppositional relationship between the West and Africa. Contributing to this prominent conversation in African Diaspora Studies, my dissertation theorizes how Afropolitan writers communicate with global audiences through a revised mode of "writing back." This mode continues to hold Western powers accountable for their historical and present actions to undermine the importance of African lives, while extending and revising the call to action of previous generations of African writers in their efforts to produce literature that is inclusive, persuasive, and challenging.

Boom writers are more interested in engaging with, challenging, and remaking central literary tropes. I call this process “hacking.” My connotation of the “hacker” is partially based on Douglas Thomas’ understanding of the term as one who “can help us understand the manner in which culture is both resistant to the transformation of knowledge and inevitably shaped by it” (xviii). From the 1950s-1960s—around the same time that Chinua Achebe and other African writers were publishing their first novels that triumphantly “wrote back” to global audiences—programmers like Richard Greenblatt were also challenging and redefining the parameters of computer science from secure technology labs at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Carnegie Mellon University, and Stanford University. In his 1984 book, *Hackers: Heroes of the Computer Revolution*, Steven Levy developed what was known as “the hacker ethic” that prioritized the democratic, decentralized access to technology and free information. The hacker ethic also advocates for a hands-on approaches to the study of computers and emphasizes how creative individuals can make art and improve people’s lives through hacking. But, as Kevin F. Steinmetz argues, the hacker’s desire to break existing computer hardware, software, or code and recreate those systems can lead to positive or more sinister outcomes (26). As personal computer technology became more widespread in the 1980s and 1990s, the act of hacking shifted toward a more negative connotation associated with criminality that still persists today.²

² In their profile on the adversary group, Anonymous, the FBI distinguishes between the two terms, “hacker” and “hacktivist”—which are both attributed to illegal actions. They describe a hacker as one who “conducts cyber instructions to obtain trade secrets, financial information, or sensitive information,” while a hacktivist “conducts a cybercrime to communicate a politically or socially motivated message” (qtd. in Deibert 226).

With the widespread news of common malicious hacker tactics such as ransomware attacks, wire fraud, virus injection, IP address spoofing, and spam emails, a public interest also developed in subcultures involving hacking and cyberpunk, as evidenced in films like *Hackers* (1995) and *The Matrix* (1999). My literary analysis of Lauren Beukes' *Zoo City* for example traces a continuation of that exploration in a cyberpunk South African novel involving 419 email scamming. The hacker ethic and methodology is most easily applied to this novel and chapter on 419 scamming, for, as Steinmetz argues, hackers have been associated with "trickster figures [...] such as Loki in Nordic mythology or the Greek Dolos" (8). Although a subset of malicious adversaries may be the most dominant examples of hackers, leading to the word's negative connotation, it is important to keep in mind Gabriella Coleman and Alex Golub's argument that the "good/bad," "criminal/non-criminal," and "hero/villain" binaries are not appropriate means of defining or understanding the nature of hacking (qtd. in Steinmetz 31).³ An ethically ambiguous trickster element persists, as well as a notion that the act of hacking implies a myriad of actions that may be positive for some, negative for others, and ultimately transgressive of authoritative and traditional boundaries.

Breaking down the binary logic, the root of a hacker's identity and craft is well-described by Robert J. Deibert: one who "[does] not accept technology at face value, and who experiment[s] with technical systems, exploring their limits and

³ Even in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's novel, *Americanah*, the act of hacking is referred to in a negative way when Ifemelu's nephew, Dike, is accused by his school of "hack[ing] into the school's computer network" (443). He is accused of a criminal action he did not commit in this situation. I look toward a different definition of hacking that incorporates both productivity and mischievousness or even criminality.

possibilities” (227). The novels that I examine feature protagonists who have ethically ambiguous motivations, and depict a curiosity about the world around them. The Anglophone African Boom authors of these novels replicate the maneuvers of computer hackers as they adeptly learn the “codes” of Anglophone literature. But, as they “break into” the literary canon, they steal key tropes and modify the literature to be even more resonant among academic and popular readers. I utilize “hacking” to analyze works by African authors who are a part of an already canonical global Anglophone literary world. Writers like Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie have quite the following in the West. As such, their “hacking” is an overt and self-conscious address to a global audience.

The deployment of the term, “hacking,” also allows for a shift in the understanding of the reception of Anglophone African writers and their works. In the different chapters I consider how authors appear to be less burdened, unlike earlier African writers who “wrote back,” by the demands for deconstructive approaches to cultural representation. Anglophone African Boom writers, even as they appeal to cosmopolitan tastes, are largely critical of global power systems and Western ambivalence to injustice. Often representing uniquely Afropolitan perspectives, Boom writers humorously and often archly challenge readers to discern the complex representations of the contemporary African inhabitant or immigrant who is able to inhabit and negotiate a globalized society. Unlike most twentieth-century African literature, these new works do not convince readers to necessarily feel anger or resentment toward imperial and neo-imperial powers. We meet diverse characters who transverse the same physical, economic, and digital spaces, prompting audiences

to reflect upon the Afropolitan's distinctive position in a global milieu. These transnational encounters are becoming even more common for well-educated Africans who have greater access to technology and the means to travel. As such, African diasporic scholarship needs a comprehensive theorization of how Anglophone African Boom writers are uniquely depicting the contemporary global moment in Anglophone African literature.

Dissertation Overview

This dissertation is divided into five parts, including the introduction, three literary chapters that each examine two distinctive novels, and a concluding chapter that synthesizes those analyses to advocate for a forward-thinking application of Afropolitan literary theory. First and foremost, I contend that the authors I am writing about in this dissertation—whose novels are commercially successful on a global scale and/or engage with contemporary Afropolitan themes—are instrumental in facilitating a twenty-first century Anglophone African Boom. Much like the twentieth-century “Latin American Boom,” characterized by the successful reception of Latin American novels throughout the Western world, the Anglophone African Boom marks another developing shift in global literary markets. This boom has been made possible by popular Afropolitan authors who write for global audiences, as well as translators who have made non-Anglophone works like Fiston Mwanza Mujila's Congolese novel, *Tram 83* (2014), even more successful and accessible for a global readership. The Anglophone African novels that I critique in my project are

transcending both traditional literary production and reception models as they contribute to their own consolidation as part of this boom.

The dissertation synthesizes Anglophone African literature across a variety of genres from different national origins (Nigeria, Ethiopia, and South Africa) through an examination of three reemerging tropes. I discuss Teju Cole and Dinaw Mengestu's revisiting of the flâneur as a dissociative wanderer, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie and Helon Habila's reimagining of the griot oral storyteller as a popular journalist, and Adaobi Tricia Nwaubani and Lauren Beukes' play with the trickster thief in the form of a 419 email scammer. My dissertation argues that by assuming the revised figurative roles of roaming vagabonds, sensational writers, and petty criminals, the protagonists in the novels I've chosen exemplify their status as "hackers." Thus, they function in opposition to the idealized images of the sophisticated commuters, insightful columnists, and tech gurus of the globalized, internet-savvy, and urban milieu that they inhabit. By tracing these three figures from the classic works of Chinua Achebe and Ama Ata Aidoo to present-day novels by Teju Cole and Lauren Beukes, I show how contemporary Boom writers have "hacked" these tropes to present complicated portrayals of Africans engaging with new information communication technologies and increased mobility.

Chapter two focuses on the flâneur, a French literary figure popularized in the nineteenth-century poetry of Charles Baudelaire and later studied by Walter Benjamin. The flâneur is, put simply, a sophisticated urban loiterer. Yet, Benjamin notes a certain complexity behind this character trope. For him, the flâneur is more than just a man of leisure and a window-shopper; he is also an "unwilling detective"

(Baudelaire 40) who actively keeps all people in the city crowd, including criminals, within his sights. In an even darker, less dandy-esque interpretation of this figure, Benjamin claims that Edgar Allan Poe's version of the flâneur seeks the comfort of the crowd because he "does not feel comfortable in his own company" (Baudelaire 48). While analyzing the reemergence of the flâneur character in contemporary African novels, I consider the extent to which the authors build upon and depart from these classic iterations. As Pieter Vermeulen aptly notes, wandering characters like Julius in Teju Cole's *Open City* appear to be more like the nineteenth-century literary counterpart to the flâneur: the fuguer ("mad traveler"). Building on Vermeulen's notion, I examine how Cole "hacks" the European flâneur character in his postcolonial interpretation. Rather than an exemplary cosmopolitan flâneur who leisurely walks through the city, he represents what Freud would call a negator: he wanders about in order to negate and forget about his brutal past. Likewise, I argue that Dinaw Mengestu further reveals the willfully forgetful mindset of an economically disadvantaged flâneur in *The Beautiful Things that Heaven Bears*. As Sepha meanders through Washington, D.C. and reflects upon how the city has changed, he also hopes that he can blend in with the new, upper-class crowds and feel at home among them. Yet, when he returns to his dilapidated store and sees the eviction signs, he is reminded of the reality that he, as a poor, Black African in America, will never be allowed to become the enviable cosmopolitan elite. I consider how the characters temporarily escape from the sites of individual and national trauma while venturing into the urban crowds. What, then, might this suggest about the Western reader who seeks enjoyment or escape by actively consuming narratives

of world literature? The dissertation focuses on the positioning of the individual African flâneur within the Western metropole, who, while trying to free himself from trauma by walking or shopping, writes to global readers located in diverse spaces of global access and privilege.⁴ In the process, this reader becomes a kind of flâneur, who may initially consume world literature as a means of escaping from the reality of neocolonial economic exploitation or privileged social guilt. By the novel's end, both the flâneur protagonist and the Western-oriented reader come to a striking realization that they cannot escape the traumatic truth through consumption or negation.

Benjamin also argues that “the social base of flânerie is journalism” because the literary flâneur “ventures into the marketplace to sell himself” (*The Arcades Project* 446). In this sense, the flâneur shares commonalities with another classic trope in African literature and culture: the griot. The third chapter examines this griot trope. In West African cultural history, griots are bards who perform songs, retell local legends, and orally deliver the news in both urban and rural public spaces. In my analyses of Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah* (2013) and Helon Habila's *Waiting for an Angel* (2002), I argue that the depiction of the African writer, blogger, and journalist in literature is a type of twenty-first century griot. I extend my examination of the griot figure to show how select authors of Anglophone African literature function like contemporary avatars of the griot for a global and predominantly younger generation of popular readers. Today, the griot may appear to

⁴ I stray from simply saying that the ideal reader is from the West and/or the Global South. As these literary works become more globally popular, they are able to reach a range of literate readers across different continents. I conceive of “global readers” as readers based largely in the West, but also in numerous other geographic spaces. What is of interest to me is not only geographic location, but also class position. Global readers, in my imagination and in the context of this dissertation, are largely concentrated in middle-and-upper-middle-class communities worldwide.

be a reliable truth-teller in a news cycle owned by corporate conglomerates. However, the new griot is also in danger of becoming a hackneyed source, who will spin any story for clicks, comments, and cash. The contemporary griot, like the flâneur, offers a unique commentary on the commodification of the individual in an urban society. By tracing the flâneur and griot characters from the works of Achebe and Aidoo to present-day novels by Cole and Adichie, I show how contemporary Anglophone African writers have “hacked” these tropes and emphasized their roles as the “hacks” of society. Beyond the tropes themselves, these griot characters reflect the interests of Afropolitan authors who have simultaneously taken on the roles of public intellectuals. While it is easy to dismiss writers like Adichie as profiting from a capitalization in all things African, it is far more interesting to reimagine the African writer as simultaneously a soothsayer and a hacker of global literature and criticism.

My third trope of interest is the trickster or thief, who has evolved into the virtual 419 or advance-fee fraud email scammer in the two novels I analyze in chapter four, Adaobi Tricia Nwaubani’s *I Do Not Come to You by Chance* (2009) and Lauren Beukes’ *Zoo City* (2010). To some degree, technology, in particular, information communication technology (ICT) has always featured a strong narrative component. Building upon Bryan Pfaffenberger’s concept of the “technological drama,” media scholar Finn Brunton argues in *Spam: A Shadow History of the Internet* that “technologies are statements about the distribution of needful things such as power, status, access, wealth, and privilege, for good and for ill” (xvi-xvii). The technological modes and hardware may change, but this technological narrative of power and exploitation remains consistent, but not homogenous, in contemporary

global literature and culture. Brunton discusses how the 419 scammer is particularly narrative-driven. What emerges as a cliché line, “Hello! I am a Nigerian prince...” (102) devolves into a persuasive, complex story based in part on the classic “Spanish prisoner” tale (103). The reader of the emails can unlock the different parts of the story by falling for the scam, and thereby contributing money at different checkpoints in order to effectively advance the storyline. Despite political promises to strengthen national security and physical borders, the online scammer takes advantage of a deregulated online commercial world and the persuasive power of literature to influence a new chapter in the postcolonial African narrative. I show how, in spite of the push for STEM-oriented education and technology job growth in Sub-Saharan Africa, it is a continued reliance on literature and literary tropes that allows the contemporary 419 scammer to succeed. I examine how these power dynamics are enacted in literature and in reality, in order to demonstrate what facilitates the growth of an African “boom,” both in literature and in economics.

By further demonstrating how the “hacked” tropes of the flâneur, griot, and scammer underscore persistent social and economic conflicts in Africa, my final chapter discusses how contemporary Anglophone African writers revisit the literary styles and themes of their predecessors to engage a new generation of global readers. I examine how literary depictions of the consequences of travel from Africa to the West and back to Africa are distinctive from earlier twentieth-century African novels that explored similar migratory themes. By drawing upon scholarship that distinguishes between the postcolonial and transnational, I approach the question of how new African Boom writers address national and transnational concerns that

previous generations of writers could not discuss. Yet, my interest in the transnationalization of African literature takes Hamish Dalley's cautionary words to heart and provides a lens to examine what lies between and beyond the binary opposition of the "national" and the "global."⁵ I contend that select contemporary Anglophone African writers "hack" the notion that their work must epitomize a single story for a singular place. When writers such as Sefi Atta and Aminatta Forna are openly skeptical of the classifications that publishers, scholars, and bookstores assign to them, it is important that literary scholars seriously engage their resistance to sticky labels.

Shaping the Anglophone African Literary Boom

In order to better contextualize my theorization of the Anglophone African Literary Boom, it is important to first define what a boom is. In "Conjectures of World Literature," Franco Moretti describes the popularization of world literature using the metaphor of a wave, where one dominant language (i.e. English) or market (i.e. Hollywood) dominates a global industry (67). In order for a sizable global audience to have knowledge of and access to a work, that work must be chosen and engulfed by the wave. One might initially imagine the Anglophone African Literary Boom as a kind of wave, because the wave of Western publishers has essentially scooped up particular novels written by African authors to be disseminated to a global

⁵ Dalley challenges such an easy binary model that separates the national and global or other divisions between time and space that scholars have previously applied to works of postcolonial fiction. He supports a reimagining of these constructs, particularly as they apply to contemporary Afropolitan or "third generation" Nigerian fictional works like *Open City* and *I Do Not Come to You By Chance*—which explore both national and cosmopolitan themes (Dalley 33).

audience. But this is too simplistic of a metaphor to describe the dynamic nature of boom literature. Challenging Moretti's wave metaphor, Roanne Kantor argues that "booms appear not like ripples out of a single center but as seemingly independent shoots that are linked rhizomatically beneath the surface" (467). My dissertation acknowledges the fact that Western publishing houses and audiences do play a significant role in the facilitation of the boom. At the same time, I lean more toward Kantor's decentered approach to understanding the nature of boom literature that connects different authors of various national backgrounds who are linked by a geographical interest in one continent and the thematic reinvention of key tropes.

My theorization of the twenty-first century Anglophone African Literary Boom expands upon considerable research on the twentieth-century Latin American Literary Boom. Born out of the 1960s and 1970s, the Latin American Boom was characterized by the widespread publication and translation of predominantly magical realist, modernist Latin American novels throughout the U.S. and Europe. Building upon Cold War politics, Deborah Cohn argues that the boom "[symbolized] the region's cultural autonomy and the end of literary colonialism" (5), as well as sparked the emergence of a cosmopolitan pan-Spanish American cultural identity. I explore the distinctive ways in which Anglophone African novelists are facilitating a turn-of-the-millennium literary boom of their own. Echoing Tim Brennan's 1989 book chapter, "Cosmopolitans and Celebrities," which delves into the ways that Western publishers marketed postcolonial writers like Salman Rushdie, I examine the contemporary global resonance of what I call Anglophone African Boom writing.

The Latin American Boom of the mid-twentieth century is marketed as a story of the popularization of a “new novel” that captivated global audiences in its synthesis of the personal and political. One of the most quintessential boom texts is Colombian writer Gabriel García Márquez’s *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, which was published in the original Spanish in 1967 and was continually sold out in Latin America. The 1970 English translation of the book achieved critical acclaim and made the *New York Times*’ bestseller list (Cohn 1). Other notable Latin American boom writers included Julio Cortázar, Mario Vargas Llosa, and Carlos Fuentes. What characterized boom writing was a non-linear modernist novel style that, as Gerald Martin argues, explored themes of mythology, language, consciousness, and “the relation between urban and rural, high and popular, written and oral culture” (59-60). But, as Martin also notes, the boom novel wasn’t entirely new. These novels were highly influenced by a generation of early-twentieth-century Spanish-language modernist writers such as Jorge Luis Borges, Alejo Carpentier, and Mário de Andrade. The realist, introspective, and wandering approaches to the novel bear similarity to Anglophone modernist works as well. Venezuelan critic Manuel Pedro González intimated in 1969 that the boom novels were merely imitations of James Joyce’s work (Martin 55). Brett Levinson, too, remarks that Latin American Boom writing does little to diverge from the Western modernist tradition that succeeded in disrupting and disturbing the bourgeois reader on a technical level through maddening, non-linear, or difficult-to-read passages (23). This conversation extends in the following chapter, where I discuss a similar focus on Anglophone African literatures exploring realist, modernist, Joycean, and flâneur-type themes that are

appealing to global audiences. While one may challenge the newness and originality of Global South boom literature, I contend that such literature extends the formal complexity of modernist literature to engage further with global Anglophone readers' complicity in allowing racial and national prejudices to persist.

What made the Latin American Boom so successful, and what catapulted writers like Márquez to a celebrity status that earlier and even later generations of Spanish-language modernist authors did not possess for quite some time, is largely a matter of widespread dissemination, translation, and marketing of key texts into the global mainstream at the right place and time. Deborah Cohn explains that the American embrace of translated Spanish literature can be traced back to Franklin D. Roosevelt's Good Neighbor policy that promoted a positive, non-interventionist cultural exchange with Latin America up until the Cold War. But it was the Cuban Revolution from 1953-1959 and evolving U.S.-Cuban relations throughout the 1960s and 1970s that furthered the boom's escalation (Cohn 4). There was greater Anglophone public interest in Latin American culture and society at this time, which made it an optimal moment for writers, publishers, and translators to capitalize on this curiosity. Boom writers cultivated a kind of pan-Latin American solidarity. As Gabriel García Márquez stated in 1967, the boom writers are "writing one great novel...we're writing several novels, but the outcome...will be a total vision of Latin America...the first attempt to integrate this world" (Márquez vi). Furthermore, in "The Boom, The Literary, and Cultural Critique," Juan Pobleto argues that Márquez's *One-Hundred Years of Solitude* combined national mythology with personal biography in a way that transcended "the simple opposition between the regional and

the cosmopolitan, the national and the universal” (207). It is this turn toward worldliness that may capture the global reader’s attention. Boom writers successfully appealed to the world by continuing a modern, realist tradition that Western middle class readers were familiar with. Anglophone companies such as Knopf and Grove, Harper and Row, and Farrar, Straus, and Giroux took risks in translating and publishing Spanish literature after the Cuban Revolution, but this risk paid off in the sense that Anglophone readers in both academic and non-academic circles became captivated by Latin American stories that engaged with historical, political, and magical realist undertones (Cohn 14).

The Latin American Boom is part and parcel of a larger conversation on the popularization of post-war postcolonial literature throughout the Anglophone literary world. In his 1989 book, *Salman Rushdie and the Third World*, Tim Brennan argues that Gabriel García Márquez, as well as Saint Lucian writer Derek Walcott and British-Indian author Salman Rushdie, are cosmopolitan celebrities who Western reviewers “seemed to be choosing as the interpreters and authentic public voices of the third world” (viii). Through these celebrities’ works, global Anglophone readers can learn about national histories and cultures that they have not always been readily exposed to in Western literature. They exert what Brennan calls a kind of “familiar strangeness” (viii)—foreignness through a familiar language and novel form. Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children* (1981) provides context on Indira Gandhi’s Emergency period in India and other watershed moments in India’s history over a sixty-year period, while simultaneously evoking *Arabian Nights*. Mario Vargas Llosa takes the reader on a meandering, multiperspectival, forty-year journey through a

Peruvian jungle, brothel, a monastery, and other locales in his novel, *The Green House* (1966), and as a public intellectual he reveals his inspiration by and interest in the works of Flaubert. Cosmopolitan celebrity writers effectively decenter the literary focus on the Western metropole by capturing life in cities that Western readers may not have visited, such as Accra or Mumbai. At the same time, they prompt readers to see familiar Western metropolises like New York and London in a new, often darker light from the perspectives of immigrants and exiles who experience racial double-consciousness and a complex sense of cultural hybridity. These writers challenge positive, surface-level connotations of the cosmopolitan as a citizen of the world who wanders through cities without borders, has an open-mindedness toward strangers, and indulges in worldly aesthetic and consumptive practices. There is a sense of overwhelming alienation that they share with their readers in what Rushdie calls a problem of coming from too many places—an “excess rather than absence” (qtd. in Brennan 3).

From a disciplinary perspective, as we move from a study of the Third World to postcolonial to an emerging (but not necessarily a replacement) category of global novel, it is important to further examine why these novels are so appealing for Anglophone publishers and audiences. In 1994, Arif Dirlik argued in “The Postcolonial Aura” that even though the postcolonial intellectual succeeded in implementing Edward Said’s theory of orientalism to decenter and challenge Eurocentric depictions of non-Western stories, the widespread global publication and dissemination of these stories was more closely a result of a Western academic market’s capitalization on a desire for stories of “the Other” (334). Graham Huggan

takes this argument a step further in 2001, when he describes the “postcolonial exotic” as a phenomenon of commodification in which a global reader is enticed by the strategic inclusion of exotified, foreign elements in postcolonial literature. He claims postcolonial studies turns marginality “into a valuable intellectual commodity” (viii). However, it is inaccurate to say that the current success of postcolonial literature derives from the marketing and consumption of exoticism alone. As with the Latin American Boom, what drives the popularization of the literature is not only the exotic, but also the familiar. Mark McGurl’s study of the postwar program era explores how the American creative writing program influenced global literary production trends. He discusses how writers emerging from these MFA programs sought to capture “authentic experience and observation” (23) and exploit a unique tension between realism and radicalism (33), which explains the popular post-war turn toward modernist, realist novels. McGurl addresses an interesting predicament for the “high cultural pluralist writer” (56) of a non-white or other non-dominant cultural group. These writers developed their writerly voices as the interlocutors and translators of their culture “with the elevated idiom of literary modernism” (57).

Kalyan Nadiminti extends McGurl’s study to reveal the centrality of the American MFA program in facilitating a “globalizing middle-class voice as the bedrock of non-Western anglophone writing” (377) in the post-9/11 era. Looking at some of the most popular anglophone African writers, we can note that Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie received her MFA from Johns Hopkins, Dinaw Mengestu from Columbia, and Yaa Gyasi from the University of Iowa. Nadiminti claims that the American MFA program serves as a sort of incubator for global writers who

successfully appeal to a broad yet predominantly middle-class readership by developing urban bourgeois characters in a realist narrative style. What results, they argue, is an easily consumed and highly commodifiable global novel that differs from the more challenging and revolutionary postcolonial novel (376). Nadiminti's argument is worth considering in the context of Anglophone African writing. Sarah Brouillette describes the NGOization of African literature as the process in which Anglophone African writing has gained a mass readership not through African publishing, but through private donors and a transnational network of editors and prize judges who market the works to British and American milieus. Many of the protagonists in these novels mimic the immigration paths of the authors themselves who relocate to the U.S. or the U.K., such as the main characters in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah*. These works capture more of a sense of mobility and cosmopolitanism than they do localism, anti-Eurocentrism, or a "dying for the nation" mentality that their postcolonial predecessors emphasized. In a 2005 *LIP* magazine article, "Bye-Bye Babar," writer Taiye Selasi popularized the term "Afropolitan," which she playfully describes as "not citizens, but Africans of the world; the newest generation of African emigrants, coming soon or collected already at a law firm/chem lab/jazz lounge near you." She cites statistics that by 1984, 30% of Africa's skilled workers had migrated from the Continent to Western countries. This new generation of professional Afropolitans is changing the global conversation about depictions of Africa, not only in practice but also in writing. Popular African writers like Minna Salami and Kari Mugo have praised Afropolitanism as a mode for uniting African diasporic people and thought in a way that pan-Africanism does not address as fully

in an internationalist sense. However, other African writers like Binyavanga Wainaina and even Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie have criticized Afropolitanism for being a commodified, elitist, apolitical, and Western-centric approach to African writing and culture. In a similar way that Kalyan Nadiminti argues that popular global literature produced by non-Western writers educated in American creative writing programs may potentially be watered-down with strategic appeals to Western audiences, critics of Afropolitanism claim that writers run the risk of promoting a sanitized “Africa lite” to the world (390). We see some truth to such arguments in the Anglophone African novels that I analyze in this dissertation, which blend familiar realist and modernist formal styles with the challenging narrations of African characters. But as my dissertation demonstrates, there is a valid counterargument to be made to the notion that African writers are merely dangling postcolonial exoticisms from the hats of contemporary James Joyce narrator-protagonists.

Tropic Roots : Writing Back vs. Hacking in Anglophone African Literature

On the one hand, I argue that the contemporary boom is unique in how its encompassing writers appeal to a global audience. This new generation of Anglophone African Boom writers is more open than previous generations in both its inclusivity of more diverse writers and intended global audiences, as well as its innovative “hacking” of classic tropes to facilitate a more dynamic and reflexive relationship with the global reader than ever seen before in African literature. On the other hand, I also contend that these common themes we are seeing in Afropolitan writing are not entirely new. Canonical twentieth-century Anglophone African writers

such as Chinua Achebe and Ama Ata Aidoo famously engaged with realist and modernist narrative styles that appealed to broad audiences, as well as depicted African characters who traveled to Western countries and offered both appreciative and biting observations. The introduction contextualizes how this first generation of Anglophone African writers approached the themes that we continue to see in African literature, including migration and flânerie; public writing as a mode for community solidarity and resistance (à la griot); and corruption and scamming. I do this to lay the groundwork for the arguments I expand upon in the individual chapters about how contemporary Anglophone African writers are reinventing these familiar tropes for a new generation of global readers. What we see, therefore, is how the new Anglophone African Boom is a natural continuation of the work that the first generation began.

The differences between the two generations are thus subtle and strategic. While the initiative of the first generation was to “write back” to the West and present stories written about Africa by Africans instead of colonizers, the mission of contemporary boom writers is to “hack” existing Anglophone literary traditions and assumptions about African literature. To achieve this, boom writers uniquely continue to challenge global readers who have likely already read novels like Chinua Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart* and are more familiar with some harmful stereotypes about Africa than readers were in the 1960s-1980s. To draw a simple comparison, I interpret “writing back” as a paradigm developed primarily by twentieth-century postcolonial writers to (1) directly address a Western or colonial center, (2) overtly resist colonialism and neocolonialism in both policy and practice, and (3) cultivate

distinctive and often nationalistic stories in the English language that refuse to be written by Westerners. What I call the emerging, contemporary paradigm of hacking extends some of these initiatives to address injustices caused, in part, by colonialism and to challenge global readers to rethink their own inherent biases and expectations for postcolonial literature. Diverging from “writing back,” however, I argue that Afropolitan hackers (1) write more inclusively to the world instead of a center, (2) enact a form of resistance that is less overtly directive and more reflexive, and (3) defy both nationalist and national/global paradigms as they make experimental modifications to canonical literary conventions in an effort to both appeal to and disrupt the desires of global readers. To develop this theory, I have extended and revised the argument of Evan M. Mwangi, who wrote in *Africa Writes Back to Self: Metafiction, Gender, Sexuality* that African authors since the mid-1980s are drifting away from the “writing back” paradigm to “[focus] their gaze on local forms of oppression that are seen to parallel classic colonialism” (1). I contend that Afropolitan hackers engage with global readers of diverse geographic and educational backgrounds as they reimagine classic literary tropes to creatively explore local, cosmopolitan, social, and/or ethical concerns.

I provide a brief analysis of two exemplary twentieth-century African novels—Ama Ata Aidoo’s *Our Sister Killjoy: or Reflections from a Black-eyed Squint* (1977) and Chinua Achebe’s *Anthills of the Savannah* (1987) to make my case. These novels both “write back” to the colonial, Western center and criticize the newly-formed postcolonial African nations by deploying the flâneur, the griot, and

the trickster. This chapter highlights how the paradigm of “writing back” functions a bit differently from the other novels under consideration in this dissertation.

One could argue that Sissie, the protagonist of Ama Ata Aidoo’s *Our Sister Killjoy: or Reflections from a Black-eyed Squint*, is an early iteration of the postcolonial migrant flâneuse figure. Sissie travels from her home country of Ghana to Germany for educational purposes. She most closely resembles the classic nineteenth-century flâneur figure when she describes her observations of the marketplace spectacle in Frankfurt. Here, “she walked along in her gay, gold and leafy brown cloth, looking, feasting her village eyes. Cloths, Perfume. Flowers. Fruits. Then polished steel. Polished tin. Polished brass. Cut glass. Plastic” (Aidoo 12). It is interesting that her descriptions include succinct, one-word identifications of items, and her primary concern seems to be the various materials that the objects are made out of. In a similar way that the nineteenth-century flâneur reduces fancy objects to mere commodities on display, Sissie goes a bit further by stripping the objects down to their raw (and perhaps imported) materials. The reader does not even recognize what some of the objects are in their final form, for Sissie prioritizes the organic matter over the product. She effectively draws attention to the fact that the reader can neither see nor even consume what is on display in this European marketplace. More calculating than the nineteenth-century flâneur, Sissie is careful about what she reveals and withholds in her descriptions of people, places, and objects during her European encounters.

From Sissie’s diary-like narration, the reader learns her critiques of the educated African’s mimicry of European society. She specifically describes one such

mimic named Sammy, who “carried a somewhat permanent look of well-being on his face, supported by a fixed smile [...] He spoke [the Europeans’] language well and was familiar with them in a way that made her feel uneasy” (9). Focusing more on these detailed portrayals of the people she encounters, rather than on dialogue exchanges, Sissie’s account appears to be observant and personal in nature. In addition to discussing people, she questions the trend of African migration to the West more generally: “Don’t talk to me of the Brain Drain—Which of us stays in these days? But those of us who fear we cannot survive abroad, one reason or another? While at home, wherever that may be, limbs and senses rot leaving clean hearts to be transplanted into white neighbors’ breasts” (32). Through Sissie’s candid descriptions of Europeans and this controversial issue of the Brain Drain, Aidoo “writes back” to the colonial center. In passages like these, Sissie provides what many 1970s Anglophone readers had not yet encountered to a large extent: a poetic yet discontent critique of the experience of African migration to Europe from the perspective of an African woman. Like the nineteenth-century *flâneur*, she concentrates on the people and surroundings that she observes within a specific European urban locale. However, her account as a twentieth-century African woman migrant in Europe is less idyllic (but no less poetic) than the classic *flâneur* depicted by Charles Baudelaire. Rather than spread the word about the joyful paradises of other city destinations that readers may not have visited or observed in detail, Sissie is a “killjoy.” She provides a wakeup call to Western and African readers who seldom consider the pitfalls of abandoning the pride in one’s homeland to embrace the customs of the former European colonizer nation. Sissie is thus a critical embodiment

of the classic flâneur figure, using her experiences to provide a meta commentary on what it means to inhabit the streets of a twentieth-century European city as an African immigrant woman.

Chinua Achebe, perhaps the most widely recognized African writer in the world, also experiments with classic tropes in his final novel, *Anthills of the Savannah* (1987). This text incorporates and extends several of the themes that he has written about in all of his novels published up until this point. An allegorical novel, *Anthills* captures the weakness of military rule in Nigeria—even though the story is set in the fictional African nation of Kangan. Within the first pages, the military dictatorial leader of Kangan, Sam, is already being cautioned by comically inept and deceptive advisors that his trusted friends – Chris Oriko, the Commissioner for Information, and Ikem Osodi, editor of the state-controlled newspaper, the *National Gazette* – are not to be trusted. Featuring four different narrators who each share introspective depictions on the state of the state before its imminent downfall, Chris, Ikem, Beatrice Okoh (the Ministry of Finance), and an omniscient narrator provide a dynamic conclusion to Achebe’s work. Achebe, like contemporary Anglophone African writers, communicates to the global reader through what I see as a revisiting of the flâneur, griot, and trickster-scammer tropes within the scope of the “writing back” paradigm.

Anthills of the Savannah explores flânerie not in the traditional sense of walking through the city, but in the more sinister, Foucauldian mode of discipline and punishment. Crowds in the independent nation gather to observe public spectacles and watch the brutality of public executions. Like Teju Cole’s flâneur narrator, Julius,

Ikem takes his time to observe the simultaneous ritualism and perverseness of the crowd, stating:

By two o'clock there was no standing room on the beach, neither on the hot white sand nor on the black granite boulders of the great breakwater wall stretching out to sea. On ordinary days only suicidal maniacs climbed those giant rocks that halted the galloping waves as the fierce horsemen at the durbar are stilled by an imaginary line before the royal pavilion. But this was no ordinary day. It was a day on which ordinarily sane people went berserk. The crowd on the perilous sea-wall had a fair sprinkling of women. And even children. The camera crew from the national Television perched on their mobile tower were much admired by the crowd. As they swiveled their machine from one side of the amphitheater to another taking in all that colour in the brilliant sun—the yellow and red and white and blue—especially the blue—of Kangan indigo dyes, the people smiled and made faces and waved to the camera (36).

Ikem further explains his great discomfort regarding what he is witnessing – the eagerness of Kangan society to gleefully watch public killings at the hands of the state and film them for all to watch again later on. Rather than hide or seek refuge in the crowd, as the classic *flâneur* would have done, Achebe's *flâneur* feels repulsed by the crowd. He rewrites the *flâneur* figure to draw the readers' attention to a twentieth-century society and, specifically, a neocolonial nation, that enjoys watching violence. Achebe deploys the observational, *flâneur*-like trope to write back to the center in a disturbing portrayal of the city or crowd in a postcolonial nation-state under military rule. In the second chapter, I explore how Anglophone African Boom hackers would take this type of trope revision a bit further to effectively hold a mirror up to the reader. Expanding upon the *flâneur* imagery, they would likely draw the reader into such scenes more frequently and for a longer period of time as they implicitly question the extent to which the reader, like the bloodthirsty crowd, craves a story of violence in popular postcolonial literature. This dissertation aims to further address

how these hacked tropes force readers to reckon with their own literary desires and expectations.

Achebe's multi-narrational approach in *Anthills of the Savannah* lends itself to a collectivist form of storytelling that is reminiscent of some of the traditional griot's oral performances and stories. As I discuss in the third chapter, Helon Habila's *Waiting for an Angel* also allows multiple narrators to capture the transformation of the state and society during a time of political turmoil in Nigeria. As Niyi Akingbe states, this "multiple-narrative mode" heightens the significance of storytelling and its significant connection to politically-charged protest (116). Moreover, Omar Sougou shares my view that the narrators in the novel bear a resemblance to griot figures (40). In *Anthills*, Ikem produces public writing that is deeply personal, poignant, literary, and ominous. He begins one piece, which he calls, "Hymn to the Sun," by evoking the "Great Messenger of the Creator! Take care that the ashes of the world rising daily from this pyre may not prove enough when they descend again to slit up the canals of birth in the season of renewal" (28). Ikem's language here mimics that of a traditional griot, rather than that of a modern journalist. He continues in this same essay:

And now the times had come round again and out of storyland. Perhaps not as bad as the first times, yet.. But they could easily end worse. Why? Because today no one can rise and march south by starlight abandoning crippled kindred in the wild savannah and arrive stealthily at a tiny village and fall upon its inhabitants and lay them and take their land and say: I did it because death stared through my eye. So they send instead a deputation of elders to the government who hold the yam today, and hold the knife, to seek help of them (30).

With his winding sentences, vivid imagery, and biting commentary on how colonial governments are effectively bribing and coercing postcolonial African governments

to invade indigenous African territories, Ikem's writing sounds quite similar to the delivery of the traditional griot. His friend Chris critiques him for these lofty, passionate, and what he calls "counter-productive" (35) essays, which—as I will discuss later in this dissertation—are similar to the critiques levied against traditional griots as their political relevance waned in African society by the twentieth century. Ali Erritouni has called this character, Ikem, "Achebe's alter ego" ("Contradictions and Alternatives" 53), which I would also argue mirrors the assumption that Helon Habila's political journalist narrator in *Waiting for an Angel*, Lomba, is Habila's alter ego. The significance of this argument is that these popular Anglophone African authors via their passionate, politically-charged narrator-griots are actively engaging global readers in the narrative fight against colonialism and related forms of oppression. However, in comparing the two uses of the griot trope, I argue that Achebe's is more pessimistic and reflective of the "writing back" paradigm in his focus on unearthing persistent forms of corruption in the neocolonial state. In contrast, Habila's griot is ultimately rather hopeful and persistent in his objective to "hack" existing political and literary conventions to enjoin others in destroying the root of political injustices and rebuilding state structures for the better.

A final trope that *Anthills* engages with is the trickster figure, who evolves into both a civilian criminal and a corrupt leader in the novel. Back at the public execution spectacle, Ikem witnesses the state killing of a career criminal who had murdered 3-4 people and had managed to evade authorities for years. But this criminal lacks shame as he stands before the crowd cheering for his death. Ikem observes that the man continually exclaimed, "I shall be born again" moments before

“his white lace reddened with blood and his hooded head withered instantly and dropped to his chest” (38). In finding the robber to be prophetic, Ikem implicitly suggests that the criminal, similar to the classic African trickster figure, embraces the mentality of powerful mythological figures who have the intellect to keenly understand, predict the actions of, and manipulate society. Such is the case here, where the words “I shall be born again” imply that theft, murder, and state executions will persist. This is what happens at the end of the novel, when Sam’s increasingly suspicious and maddening reign of terror results in the assassination of Ikem, followed by a coup that leads to Sam’s death and, finally, Chris’ murder by a police officer who took offense at Chris’ insult. As I will examine in chapter four, the reincarnation of the prophetic trickster in Achebe’s novel is also seen in contemporary literature like Lauren Beukes’ *Zoo City*. Whereas Achebe’s trickster follows the “writing back” theme in his attempt to convey the persistent ills of neocolonialism in Africa, Beukes’ “hacked” trickster evolves into a more complex, dynamic, and cunning character trope. She envisions a dystopian world in which criminals are visibly condemned with animal figures attached to them—leading to their public shaming and disenfranchisement. Plus, in Beukes’ novel, African 419 email scammers cunningly extend and warp the webs of history to shame and disenfranchise white Western victims who fall for the scammers’ promises of untold riches. Moreover, this trickster figure prompts the global reader to reflect on their own curiosity about and expectation of narrative exoticism in postcolonial literature. How does the trickster figure turn the tables on these anticipations that both attract and repel the reader? The dissertation argues that this particular trope reflects a

compelling commentary not just on global society as a whole, but also on the particular relationship between the Anglophone African Boom writer and the global reader.

Contemporary boom writers are no doubt indebted to earlier generations of Anglophone writers. Contemporary writers of any nationality and culture continually expand upon popular tropes and techniques. Two popular African novels, *Our Sister Killjoy* and *Anthills of the Savannah*, revise key tropes for global readers of their time. In the following chapters, I continue to historicize the popularization and modification of these tropes. At the same time, I show how contemporary Anglophone African and Afropolitan Boom writing successfully engages a new generation of readers and publishers.

Boom or Bust ? Constructing a Theorization of Anglophone African Boom Literature

What has emerged in the contemporary Anglophone African Boom is a mode of writing that is not as simple as an “Africa writes back” critique of the West, a story of alienation and assimilation, or an anxious “return to Africa” narrative. Take Teju Cole’s 2011 novel, *Open City*, in which the Nigerian-born protagonist, Julius, initially appears to the reader as an erudite citizen of the world who indulges readers in his musings about Mahler. Yet, he fails to adapt to an easy cosmopolitanism in New York. Rather than exhibiting Kwame Anthony Appiah’s approach to the cosmopolitan as someone who is kind toward strangers, Julius rebuffs Africans and African-Americans who call him “brother.” He readily admits to the reader that he tells his girlfriend a harrowing story of an African immigrant named Saidu so that he

can appeal to her sensitivities. But does this not sound like the depiction of the eager Western consumer of the non-Western text? To what extent is Julius not only the Afropolitan subject, but also a reflection of the reader? In this novel, much like other popular twenty-first Anglophone African texts, the author does not present an exotic yet easily consumable non-Western narrative.

In my dissertation, I explore how Anglophone African Boom writers initially establish a sense of intrigue or comfort with the reader before prompting the reader to question their complicity in supporting a questionable expectation for cosmopolitan performativity in Anglophone African literature. Boom writers thus provide an avenue to explore transnational Afropolitan solidarity from a more global diasporic perspective without a turn to nativism or nationalism. While Anglophone African Boom novels may appear to be readily accessible and appreciated by global readers, the authors lure the readers into a challenging position that calls for a continued reexamination of the relationship between writers and readers in global Anglophone literary spaces.

Chapter 2: Hacking the Flâneur: From a Man of Leisure to a Laborious Negator

“I floated in the dark, anonymous to myself, lost in the sensation that the world existed but I was no longer part of it.”—Teju Cole, *Open City*

“Somnambulists, all of us. Someone else said it better: we wake to sleep and sleep to wake.”—Dinaw Mengestu, *The Beautiful Things That Heaven Bears*

“Dialectic of flânerie: on one side, the man who feels himself viewed by all and sundry as a true suspect and, on the other side, the man who is utterly undiscoverable, the hidden man.”—Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*

In twentieth century Western literature, we have seen numerous iterations of urban walking figures. Through the eyes of characters such as James Joyce’s Leopold Bloom (*Ulysses*, 1922), Marcel Proust’s unnamed narrator (*In Search of Lost Time*, 1908), and Italo Calvino’s representation of Marco Polo (*Invisible Cities*, 1972), the reader vicariously consumes the sights, sounds, and smells of the bustling city. The contemporary predominance of cars, bikes, buses, subways, and other forms of transportation has disturbed or reshaped the thoughtful walking figure. For instance, Eric Packer reflects upon traffic, pedestrians, and other surroundings while inside his limousine in Don DeLillo’s *Cosmopolis* (2004). The observant, walking protagonist still plays a significant role in twenty-first-century literature, however. While the classic modernist narrators typically present us with images of city life from the standpoint of white men at home and abroad, select contemporary urban narratives featuring non-white, foreign characters allow Western readers to see a city through a distinctive and often uncomfortable perspective.

In this chapter, I trace the trajectory of one particular representation of the

urban walking character—the flâneur. This French literary figure, popularized in the nineteenth-century poetry of Charles Baudelaire and later studied by Walter Benjamin, has a variety of connotations that range from the sophisticated, leisurely observer to the aloof, ambivalent prowler. Upon examination of the different definitions of this figure, I focus on how the flâneur has become an essential symbol of cultural modernity and literary modernism. Amidst the new wave of twenty-first century modernity—globalization—it is evident that certain elements of modernist literature, including the use of the realist mode, the reflective and sometimes unreliable narrator, and the allusion to psychoanalytic theory, are once again becoming more popular. In turn, the flâneur, who Graeme Gilloch calls a “true hero of modernity” (157), reappears to some degree in contemporary literature. I demonstrate how new representations of this traveling figure provide readers with insights into and anxiety about the local impacts of urbanization and globalization.

In my analysis of *Open City* and *The Beautiful Things That Heaven Bears*, I argue that Anglophone African writers such as Teju Cole and Dinaw Mengestu are respectively “hacking” the flâneur by transforming him into a Black African “Othered” character, whose walks through Western metropolises appear more laborious than leisurely. In the process, they offer compelling, nuanced, and timely critiques of urban liberal cosmopolitan attitudes in a globalized moment. Through the eyes of the modified, “hacked” version of the classic flâneur character, select Anglophone African writers provide Western readers with windows with a window into a world that is both familiar and unfamiliar. Readers may recognize the acute descriptions of monuments, city streets, and architectural styles, yet they are also

abruptly confronted with the disturbing images of alienation, madness, and poverty that many urban pedestrians overlook or seek to avoid on their strolls through the city. The writers therefore prompt us to consider the darker, less traveled paths of the cosmopolitan milieu.

Following the Flâneur : Literary and Cultural Origins

The French word, “flâneur,” typifies the personified form of the verb, “flâner” and the noun, “flânerie.” In the verb iteration, “flâner” means “to stroll, to loiter, to dawdle” (Kramer and Short 324), or, more specifically, “to wander aimlessly, slowly, while stopping frequently, like an idle man” (*Larousse* 436, translation mine). While the pedestrian is “a purposeful but ordinary urban walker” (14), as Jo Vergunst claims, the flâneur wanders about and gets lost⁶ within the urban sprawl. Also unlike the pedestrian, the flâneur has a recognizable personality type. In Anke Gleber’s view, the flâneur possesses a “seemingly disinterested, yet highly visually invested perception of the styles of others” (23).⁷ While walking and observing, he becomes fully immersed within yet emotionally detached from the city. Like an ethnographer (Jenks and Neves 4), the flâneur allows the movements and stories of the city to flow through him, instead of using the streets as a means to an end of a journey.

⁶ As described by Darren Carlaw, the streets of Paris, unlike those on the grid system in places like New York City, almost invite the walker to get lost. Within one of the main Paris thoroughfares, the Boulevard Périphérique, presents “a tangle of crisscrossed boulevards intertwined with meandering *ruelles*” (54) and “navigation is improvised” (55).

⁷ Beyond his disposition as an urbane loiterer, the flâneur may also function as an artist or writer who is collecting informal research while walking through the city streets. In terms of personality, Charles Baudelaire also claims that the dandy acts more supercilious and “blasé” than the “passionate” flâneur (Baudelaire, *The Painter of Modern Life* 9).

The flâneur made his public debut in an anonymous 32-page pamphlet published in 1806, titled *Le Flânerie au salon ou M. Bon-Homme...* (Ferguson 26), and it was here that his interest in commodities became prevalent. According to Elizabeth Wilson, when M. Bon-Homme is not dining in restaurants or cafés populated by writer and artist-types, he spends his time “shopping or window-shopping, looking at books, new fashions, hats, combs, jewelry and novelties of all kinds” (Wilson 62). The flâneur is consequently an early nineteenth-century representation of the window-shopper who browses but does not purchase items on display, just as he observes but does not engage with the crowd. The descriptions of his leisurely walks may help us to gain insight into the bourgeois urbanites’ emerging consumption patterns during the Parisian transition into a mass consumer culture.

Despite appearances, the flâneur does not exactly blend in seamlessly with the crowd.⁸ Rather, as Darren Carlaw asserts, he is “an outsider with sufficient critical distance to dissect particular segments of the cityplace” (75). In addition to being an “outsider,” the negative implications of the flâneur as a wasteful idler turn him into a “deviant” in the eyes of the Parisian bourgeoisie (Ferguson 24-25). Yet, rather than retreat from the bourgeois crowd, he seeks refuge in it; as Zygmunt Bauman claims, the crowd becomes “a wall protecting his solitude” (139). This interpretation challenges the perception of the flâneur as a leisurely, cultured aesthete. Contrary to the idea that he desires to see and be seen, he actually wants to mask his isolation, insecurity, and/or strangeness by becoming a loner in the crowd. Both the lighthearted

⁸ As revealed in Louis Huart’s sketches in *Physiologie du flâneur* (1841), the flâneur wears a black top hat, a double-breasted mackintosh or vest, and black dress shoes.

and darker approaches to this figure will become essential in later analyses of the flâneur by Walter Benjamin and other scholars.

The acclaimed French poet, Charles Baudelaire, contributed some of the most well-cited writings depicting the flâneur figure. In his essay, “An Artist, Man of the World, Man of Crowds, and Child,” originally published within an essay collection called *The Painter of Modern Life* in 1863, Baudelaire discusses the enigmatic painter and illustrator, Constantin Guys (1802-1892). Referred to in the essay as Monsieur G., Guys is “[a] passionate lover of crowds and incognitos,” “a great traveler and cosmopolitan,” and “a *man of the world*” (*The Painter of Modern Life* 5-6). What is interesting here is that, in Baudelaire’s interpretation, the flâneur character embodies a fusion of the local and the global. He feels most at home within a localized city crowd, and yet his personal tastes suggest an appreciation of global cultures and mobility across nations. The flâneur thus became one of the earliest literary figures to epitomize the essence of cosmopolitanism. Speaking of the privilege of someone of his own profession in “Crowds,” an essay from *Paris Spleen* (1855), Baudelaire argues that the poet can wander through any desired social setting he pleases. In turn, he can inform and humble his readers when describing for them a “more vast, more refined” (22) world. As a flâneur, the poet, in Baudelaire’s view, thoroughly appreciates “solitude” and “multitude”—which he views as synonymous with each other—while happily meandering through the crowd (22). Defying selfishness, however, he shares his observations on the world’s beauty with the world—thereby offering a (perhaps tinted) mirror to the reader and the crowd. Appreciating the emergence of modernity during a time before hyper capitalism and mass consumer

culture truly sets in, Baudelaire's flâneur is an idling, productive, and generous member and artistic translator of society.

Walter Benjamin demonstrated an evident interest in and appreciation for Charles Baudelaire—especially in his exploration of flânerie. Benjamin first references the flâneur in “The Return of the Flâneur” (1929), a review of Franz Hessel's *Spazieren in Berlin* (Rignall 9). Noting that the flâneur is a “creation of Paris” (264) and appears in the writings of Baudelaire and Apollinaire, he argues that the city has a “mnemonic” and “conjur[ing]” effect on the flâneur—allowing him to recall and narrate a personal or local history (263). Benjamin underscores how the intellectual flâneur uses the sidewalks for the more nostalgic purposes of reflecting and remembering the city's history. In *Charles Baudelaire, A Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism*, Benjamin further contextualizes the social and historical impact of Baudelaire's poems and essays on the flâneur. One significant part of his analysis is his historicization of Paris' growth as an urban center. Namely, Benjamin developed an interest in the Parisian arcades, which first emerged during the late eighteenth century and flourished in Paris during the Second French Empire from 1852-1870 (Featherstone 912-913; Richards 150; Hartmann 77). Although the carriage-filled Parisian streets themselves were not exactly conducive for comfortable strolling until 1870, the “glass-covered, marble-panelled passageways” (von Gall qtd. in Benjamin CB 36-7) offered well-lit paths and shops. Moreover, the arcades are a decorative, captivating place for crowds to walk through and get lost in, which is why they are the perfect grounds for the flâneur.

The flâneur's walks through the city have direct socio-historical implications. Following the end of the French Revolution in 1799, France underwent multiple revolutions and shifts in power throughout the nineteenth century. After the July Revolution of 1830, the characteristically bourgeois July Monarchy (1830-1848) assumed power (Tombs 354-376 qtd. in Hartmann 113). An increasingly mobile, democratic, capitalistic, culture began to cultivate in Paris. During the 1830s-1840s, the Parisian bourgeoisie started to migrate from private to public settings for shopping and socialization.⁹ In nineteenth-century Paris, the flâneur emerged as someone who would observe, mentally document, and ambivalently involve himself in the new city spectacles—paying especial attention to the increasingly modern urban milieu of the bourgeois crowds and their consumption practices.

Furthermore, when Baron Georges-Eugène Haussmann redeveloped the city streets in a large-scale urbanization plan from the 1850s-1870s, the crowds had an ample and more inviting outdoor atmosphere for walking. While the renovations were most conducive for the city's growing capitalist economy, because pedestrians could walk to work or to purchase goods, Benjamin argues that the flâneur walked the streets in leisurely defiance of industrialization (Benjamin CB 54). Although some might be in a hurry to run errands or return to work, the flâneur would take his turtles for a walk and "have [them] set the pace for [him]" (Benjamin CB 54). Shrinking him

⁹ Richard D.E. Burton argues that, in the aftermath of the July Revolution in France, "the bourgeoisie secured its victory of 1830" and "began to dream of an urban environment in which it could display itself and its wealth to its advantage and, above all, in conditions of complete security" (Burton 63). As a result, in the 1830s and 1840s, the bourgeoisie began to encroach upon the territory that was once dominated by the working class, thereby contributing to the "Otherization" of the latter (Burton 65). Raymond Williams' *The Country and the City* (1973) comes to mind when reflecting upon this societal shift. He associates the country with the past and the city with the future; the "undefined present" (R. Williams 297) is the moment that the flâneur is examining during his lengthy strolls, in my view.

further, Benjamin interprets the flâneur as a commodity himself (Benjamin AP 42). Ironically, the figure who reduces other walkers and objects to commodities is also on display for visual consumption in the modern marketplace.

The flâneur could play the role of the unsettling stranger, criminal or psychotic. Benjamin draws attention to the darker side of the flâneur, who walks about with an “anamnestic intoxication” (Benjamin AP 417). Moreover, Benjamin claims that the flâneur embodies the dialectic of being openly, publicly perceived on the city street as a suspect on the one hand, and, on the other hand, remaining “utterly undiscoverable” (Benjamin AP 420) while hidden within the crowd. For Benjamin, “[t]he crowd is not only the newest asylum of outlaws; it is also the latest narcotic for those abandoned” (Benjamin CB 55). The detective-like observer and the criminal therefore become compelling foils that share the same movement, observation, and stalking strategies within the urban space. Due to an overstimulation of the senses as a result of the endless commodities he sees displayed on his walks, he ultimately becomes apathetic to all that surrounds him. Yet, rather than retreat and embrace the slower pace of the country, he continues to seek out the city crowds—as though he suffers from an addiction.¹⁰ Unlike Baudelaire’s cosmopolitan flâneur, who marveled in the spectacle and appreciated the values of the world’s objects, select twentieth-century critics see the flâneur as a brilliant yet bordering-on-psychotic victim of capitalism and commodity fetishism.

¹⁰ Alternatively, the flâneur may also take a more agoraphobic approach and seek solace from the crowd by returning to the private, four-walled realm. As Evgeny Morozov asserts in “The Death of the Cyberflâneur,” some flâneurs were forced “into a sort of ‘internal flânerie’ that reached its apogee in Marcel Proust’s self-imposed exile in his cork-lined room (situated, ironically, on Boulevard Haussman)” (Morozov).

The death of the flâneur ties directly to the aforementioned mid-nineteenth-century Haussmannization of the Parisian streets. The more organized, clearly delineated streets and sidewalks certainly attracted both pedestrians and carriage riders. While dodging vehicles and keeping up with the pace of the hurried, destination-oriented crowd, the leisurely flâneur does not exactly have the time or the space to walk his turtles (Benjamin AP 547; Buck-Morss 344). More significantly, Haussmannization effectively killed the flâneur by replacing the arcades with more expansive department stores (Morozov; Featherstone 914). According to Benjamin, the department store represents the “last haunt” (Benjamin PW 562) of the flâneur. Here, it is more difficult for the flâneur to browse inconspicuously on a daily basis without making any purchases. As Helen Richards contends in her qualification of Benjamin’s argument, “when one is shopping [at the department store], one is not a detached observer but an involved consumer” (151).

Since the flâneur’s “death,” several critics argue that we have seen various resurrections of the flâneur in twenty-first-century literature and culture. In the revived form, I argue that the flâneur has been “hacked” for the contemporary historical moment of globalization. Francisco Martínez is one of the first scholars to connect late modern flânerie with the work of hacking. His argument in this regard is twofold. Citing Gabriella Coleman’s argument that “hacking is where craft and craftiness converge” (qtd. in Martínez 409), he asserts that meandering flâneurs and the hackers within the “Anonymous” group are both playful, imaginative tricksters. Furthermore, Martínez argues that flâneurs and computer hackers share the common goal of “infiltrating abandoned places, inaccessible areas and the derelict” (409).

Building upon this argument, I argue that the “hacked” flâneur is a fresh play on the nineteenth-century wanderer figure. In distinctive iterations, the twenty-first-century flâneur can be a female flâneuse¹¹, a gay cruiser¹², a web-surfing cyberflâneur¹³, or a leisurely driver.¹⁴ These new flâneurs help audiences to make sense of society’s spectacles, consumption patterns, and feelings of alienation.

In these newer iterations, he or she is no longer restricted by gender, race, class, place, national origin, or mode of transport. While the dandy-like flâneur of the nineteenth century may be passé, the urban wanderer has been resurrected to serve an important role in twentieth- and twenty-first-century fiction. I examine how Teju Cole and Dinaw Mengestu, have “hacked” the traditional flâneur figure in order to underscore the uniquely precarious situation of the contemporary African migrant living in the changing landscape of the Western metropolis.

¹¹ Helen Richards claims that Carrie Bradshaw from the HBO television show, *Sex and the City*, is a new take on the flâneuse. Carrie’s column often emphasizes the urban spectacle and the psychology of the crowd (those who enter her life). Moreover, Bartholomew Ortega illustrates how Gwendolyn Brooks’ African-American female narrator takes the reader on a journey through a part real, part imagined location in South Side, Chicago, during the 1960s. Rather than walk the streets of Chicago, she describes her encounters primarily within one apartment building called the Mecca.

¹² Darren Carlaw argues that works such as Allen Ginsberg’s “Mugging” (1974) offers one example of a gay flâneur.

¹³ For Maren Hartmann, a cyberflâneur is someone who browses different webpages—effectively exploring “digital cities” (105). However, Evgeny Morozov states that the cyberflâneur may be approaching a kind of death due to the popularization of Facebook. This is because Facebook promotes a social online interaction, where users broadcast their personal details and directly interact with others without anonymity or discretion.

¹⁴ Jack Kerouac’s Beat novel, *On the Road* (1957), Che Guevara’s *The Motorcycle Diaries* (1995), Dennis Hopper’s *Easy Rider* (1969), and Jean-Luc Godard’s *Pierrot le Fou* (1965) come to mind. In Ayi Kwei Armah’s novel, *Fragments* (1970), a Puerto Rican psychiatrist named Juana immigrates to Ghana sometimes describes the leisurely, unexpected detours she takes in her car. With a larger field of vision and quicker attention span than the walking flâneur, she spatially expands and temporally restricts her quotidian observations.

*Cosmopression : A Closed Mind in an Open City*¹⁵

In Teju Cole's *Open City* (2011), a Nigerian immigrant and psychiatry student named Julius takes readers on long, vivid walks through the streets of New York City. Devising unique metaphors for urban movement, he compares Sixth Avenue commuters to "rush-hour gladiators testing each other's limits" (Cole 40). Readers become captivated as Julius observes human behaviors that are often overlooked during the daily rush. He describes how he "fell in with a lithe man with graying sideburns who carried a plastic bag with a tag on it and was visibly exhausted, limping on slightly bowed legs" (15). Through these precise and dynamic images, Julius beguiles readers as he takes them on a journey through a familiar city from a renewed perspective. He particularly entices a global readership, which I define in this context as a geographically diverse audience composed of readers in middle-and-upper-middle-class milieus. Julius appeals to their desire for cosmopolitan explorations.

Cosmopolitanism has become a key component of postcolonial migrant novels. As Robert Spencer asserts, cosmopolitan themes of empathy and knowledge of otherness can help readers understand people's aspirations and struggles in a post-imperial world (3). In the African context, scholars such as Akin Adesokan and Delphine Fongang, respectively, address how contemporary cosmopolitan novels featuring economically privileged African migrant protagonists challenge readers' expectations of what it means to be African or postcolonial (Adesokan 3; Fongang

¹⁵ Parts of this chapter will be adapted into a forthcoming journal article: Faradji, Sara. "A Walk to Forget: The Postcolonial Flâneur's Negating Journey in Teju Cole's *Open City*." *ARIEL: a Review of International English Literature*, vol. 53, no. 3, 2022.

153). To an extent, Cole feeds readers' desires through an intellectual narrator-protagonist who describes and appears to show empathy for the traumas, racial violence, and historical atrocities many immigrants endure. He fulfills the expected obligation of contemporary postcolonial writers who market their novels to a global audience. Superficially, a reader can easily consume Julius' cosmopolitanism. At first glance, Julius cultivates a positive image of himself as a cosmopolitan flâneur. He embodies the ancient Greek definition of cosmopolitanism as a "citizen of the world" (Kleingeld and Brown).

Yet, in order to distance himself from past crimes and traumas, Julius performs the psychoanalytic process of negation (*Verneinung*). According to Freud, negation results in the "intellectual acceptance of the repressed" and the persistence of that repression (236). I am interested in how Julius' performance of cosmopolitan flânerie is a defense mechanism for his escape from guilt. Ultimately, Cole hacks the flâneur trope. While the classic flâneur is already an alienated figure who consumes with his eyes as he walks alone through an urban space and minimally engages with society, Cole's postcolonial flâneur undergoes a double alienation. Because of Julius' own guilt-ridden trauma and his descriptive witnessing of violent scenes that a flâneur typically would not comment on, it is impossible for him to achieve the detachment of the Benjaminian flâneur. Not only does Julius physically look different from older representations of the flâneur but he is also more self-aware and strategic in how he tells his story. Engaging in more than mere observation, he is cognizant of how he shapes the global reader's impressions of the city and of himself as a narrator. Cole presents a flâneur whose discerning eye both entices and deceives the reader. Julius'

mobile, transitory experiences allow insight into the mind of a fragmented cosmopolitan. Externally, he is an open city—known as a safe, demilitarized zone (Horne 133). Internally, he is at war with his own violent history. His cosmopolitanism is thus superficial—a façade cultivated to negate his own imbrication in brutality. The novel’s sudden introduction of the past disturbs the complacent reader who simply wants to consume literature from other worlds. *Open City* invites readers to adopt a critical postcolonial view of cosmopolitanism that recognizes the global reader’s complicity in the voyeuristic and complicated pleasure derived from the exoticism, trauma, and violence that texture numerous African novels.

Cole introduces the reader to Julius as a cosmopolitan flâneur who shares how a walk from Morningside Heights might lead him to Central Park or Harlem depending on the path he takes. Yet, it is also apparent that Julius struggles with his memories of his birthplace, Lagos, Nigeria. Seeking distance from his recollections of his estranged mother, deceased father, and abusive instructor, he longs for an existence in which he can hide what he calls his “half-caste” identity that is half-German and half-Nigerian (Cole 132). Minimizing his Nigerian self, he even views his rarely-used Yoruba middle name, Olatubosun, as “something that belonged to someone else” (78). At the same time that he disregards his Africanness, he leans into his white identity, which is seen by Nigerians as indicative of “unimaginable wealth and privilege” (223). Leaving Nigeria for a more heterogeneous Western city reveals his desire to eradicate this duality.¹⁶

¹⁶ Julius indicates his plan to leave Nigeria for the U.S. just after explaining how his instructor, Musibau, beat him due to his own insecurities. He believes that Musibau saw him as “a half-Nigerian,

During Julius' meandering journeys, the reader gains unique insights into Julius' perspective as an African in New York because he makes connections that a white New York flâneur would not. After seeing a few men with different disabilities on the subway, he is reminded of the Yoruba legend that disabled people were made by the god of human creation, Obatala, during a drunken stupor. According to this belief, Julius claims, "people who suffer from physical infirmities . . . worship Obatala in accusation" (25). He describes how curious it is that these worshippers dress in white clothing to match the white palm wine that Obatala drank, and yet they feel aversion to, and not adoration for, the god who gave them disabilities. Julius' observation of people getting on and off the subway is complex. He draws comparisons that the classic flâneur would not. Cole appeals to an audience who is interested in learning more about a non-Western person's impressions of New York, even though the reader might sometimes be puzzled or disturbed by his perspective. Moreover, it is in these instances of wandering that New York transforms into Julius' open city, which most obviously connotes the idea of a city of free movement, communication, and cultural or economic exchange. He states that "New York City worked itself into [his] life at walking pace" (3), and that the "inconsequential" (7) choices he makes during his transient journeys give him a sense of freedom. During his walks, he enacts what Vincent Kaufmann and Bertrand Montulet call a "cosmopolitan mobility" (40): he travels without bounds. With little regard for time or any borders that may limit free movement, he makes this city his own. The global reader can certainly find value in Julius' flânerie, but it is also important to be aware

a foreigner," and therefore someone more privileged than he (83-85). Julius thus presents the idea that envious people treat him unfairly, and he longs to leave this society.

that these walks are more than just a pastime. As Julius admits, they are a form of therapy (Cole 7).

Julius' observations are not only focused on the things and people he sees. He also comments on what lies beyond or beneath the spectacle—such as the historical significance of a landmark or the architectural design of an apartment complex. In one moment, for example, he takes note of the Wall Street subway station. Initially shocked by the extensive, visually intricate space that reminds him of Gothic architecture, he realizes upon closer inspection that “[t]he columns could have been wrought from recycled plastic chairs, and the ceiling seemed to have been carefully constructed out of white Lego blocks” (46). This deflation of a subway station that culturally signifies the peak of financial capitalism reminds the reader of what Karen Newman calls the notorious American “political economy of monopoly, speculation, enclosure, and colonial expansion” (126). Beneath the stately gleam lies a hidden ugliness. While walking on a side street, Julius notices that, hidden among “office buildings, shops [...] all the endless hum of quotidian commerce and government” (Cole 220) is a small and barely noticeable African memorial gravesite where 15,000-20,000 Black people's remains were buried in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. A classic flâneur would likely not unearth this fact of the city's erasure of a largely enslaved population of Black bodies to make room for new construction. As Alexander Hartwiger observes, Julius channels but also challenges the observant flâneur figure and in doing so “inverts the point of view of the Parisian flâneur, moving away from the totalizing colonial gaze to a more critical one that recognizes the complex flows of capital and people” (5). While Julius critiques capitalism, an

undertaking that a discerning reader might appreciate, his thoughts foreshadow the alternative guise that he displays as a cosmopolitan flâneur with a hidden secret.

Julius' cosmopolitan flânerie is additionally complicated by his Blackness. Although he seems to enjoy experiencing the diverse sights and sounds of New York as he attempts to selectively negate parts of himself, he cannot simply erase the fact that he is still a Black person in an American city. Julius' position as a Black postcolonial flâneur entices global readers who want to read about a familiar cosmopolitan city through the lens of a foreign, racialized Other who is radically distinct from the classic modernist flâneurs who are more common in Western literature. Julius' identity as a Black flâneur is also problematic for him since every time he is marked as Black and African by both peers and strangers it makes it that much more difficult for him to forget his past. Darren Carlaw writes that the flâneur walking through the highly trafficked and racially diverse city of New York "struggles to match his Baudelairian counterpart in terms of remaining incognito" (22). This is especially the case for a Black man like Julius, whose aimless wandering is more likely to stand out as suspicious. He states that his presence as a "dark, unsmiling, solitary stranger" (Cole 106) makes him an easy target for racists. While he observes the AT&T Long Lines building, for example, a security officer demands that he move (219). Sarah Jane Cervenak argues that for racially minoritized groups, "physical wandering is often subject to external policing and arrest" (149).¹⁷ Thus,

¹⁷ Cervenak draws attention to the 1983 US Supreme Court case, *Kolender v. Lawson*. The issue at hand was that Edward Lawson, an African American activist who liked to take walks in his predominantly white San Diego neighborhood at night, was arrested for violating California Penal Code section 647(e), which forbid "wandering upon the streets or from place to place without apparent reason or business and who refuses to identify himself and to account for his presence when requested by any peace officer so to do" (qtd. in Cervenak 5). The Supreme Court ruled that this law was vague to an unconstitutional degree. Nonetheless, later cases such as *State of Florida v. George Zimmerman*

Julius must be more on guard and self-aware than a white flâneur. This is no doubt an obstacle for someone who is attempting to forget a part of himself.

Julius' lack of flâneur-like invisibility is often highlighted in the novel. While he is riding the subway home, for instance, children taunt and provoke him at random and repeatedly ask if he is a gangster. He notes, "They...flashed gang signs, or their idea of gang signs...He's black, said the girl, but he's not dressed like a gangster. I bet he's a gangster, her brother said, I bet he is... They continued flicking their fingers at me for several minutes" (Cole 31-32). His experience is reminiscent of a situation that Frantz Fanon discusses in *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952), wherein a white child's repeated exclamation of "Look! A Negro!" (89) when first encountering Fanon awakens him to the fact that he is seen as a Black man in a white man's world. He is reduced to a visual representation of stereotypical Black history and culture. While the classic flâneur may enjoy the opportunity to silently reduce fashionable items or even people to commodities, it is unsettling when a stranger verbally reduces the Black flâneur to a skin color and a stereotype.

Julius' flânerie is also interrupted within predominantly Black spaces. One evening during a walk through Harlem, where he notes that no white people are present, he observes local activity: "Young men in hooded sweatshirts, the denizens of an informal economy, passed messages and small nylon-wrapped packages... enacting a choreography opaque to all but themselves" (Cole 18). Breaking this thoughtful description of Harlem nightlife, an elderly man on the street startles Julius

prove that police concerns about Black people wandering at certain times and places can lead to wrongful arrests and worse.

when he greets him. Before returning that greeting, thoughts rush through Julius' mind as he wonders whether he has seen this man before. He fears "that the speed of these mental dissociations might knock [him] off [his] stride" (18). This is the first of several encounters in which Black male acknowledgements and polite expressions catch Julius off guard. Kenyan author Mukoma Wa Ngugi describes the proverbial Black nod in the African-American context as a unifying gesture of Black male solidarity in white spaces (86). But for Julius, the Black nod is not comforting but anxiety-inducing since he does not want to be recognized as he wanders the streets. Furthermore, the novel illustrates that sometimes the Black nod gives only the illusion of safety. Julius nods to two Black teenagers while on a walk, but later those same teenagers return to beat and rob him. The brief, brotherly Black nod does not protect Julius from being seen and targeted. He is not immune to what Bernard D. Headley calls the "'situational matrix' brought on by the capitalist mode of production" (52) in which Black youths overwhelmed by systemic poverty might resort to violent crime in order to survive. Julius may reflect on the racial and socioeconomic disparities that make up the fabric of New York, but the reality of these injustices makes it difficult for him to merely be a flâneur.

Despite the fact that he is othered as a Black person in New York, he nonetheless aims to escape his past in Nigeria and "begin life in the new country, fully on [his] own terms" (Cole 85). Developing worldly interests since moving to New York, he name-drops Friedrich Nietzsche and Albert Camus in his observations, and he describes the complexities of *Mahler's Symphony No. 9* with ease. He thereby reinforces his desired status as an elite cosmopolitan flâneur with an interest in fine

arts and aesthetics. This particular focus of cosmopolitanism represents what Amanda Anderson describes as “a complex tension between elitism and egalitarianism” (73). This cosmopolitan may respect “standards assumed to transcend any locale” (73), such as an appreciation of worldly high culture and a shared sense of universal human values. But Anderson points out that the eighteenth-century cosmopolitan ran the risk of embracing a “global community” while only socializing with a small community of intellectual, mobile elites (73). It is this type of narrow, elitist cosmopolitanism that Julius finds himself drawn to when he makes astute observations that evoke classical music. He evokes the Baudelarian flâneur who captures his sophisticated local milieu through worldly observations. Nonetheless, as he relays his sophisticated musings, he ironically resembles what Benjamin refers to as the late-stage “sandwichman” iteration of the flâneur (*Arcades Project* 448). Rather than casually observing their surroundings, sandwichmen place advertising signage on the fronts and backs of their bodies in order to attract urban customers to a business, hence “wearing their own identity like a sandwich board” (Buck-Morss 113). Like the sandwichman flâneur, Julius becomes a commodity—selling a new version of himself to people in New York. Cole strategically hopes that Julius will catch the eye of the global reader with his worldly name-dropping and short cultural analyses.

While an uncritical cosmopolitanism might deemphasize the role of the nation in order to support a more global vision of humanity, the postcolonial flâneur cannot escape the primacy of the nation in their movement and interactions.¹⁸ It is not a

¹⁸ Adebayo Williams contends that the postcolonial emigrant intellectual represents “an alienated alien” (826) in both host and home countries.

coincidence that Julius chooses to begin the next phase of his life in the U.S., a nation that mythically guarantees success. For many, the American dream narrative has never been more than just a dream.¹⁹ Julius recognizes this hypocrisy of the nation. He remarks that while Ellis Island symbolized hope for European immigrants, Black people “had known rougher ports of entry” (Cole 55).²⁰ Julius acknowledges that America negates its brutal history in order to sustain its narrative of progress. However, he fails to recognize his own personal replication of this process of simultaneous negation and self-elevation. *Open City* illustrates how the individual becomes an enduring metonym for the nation in contemporary postcolonial literature. Julius’ cosmopolitanism is never quite separate from nationalism or the ensuing process of forgetting past brutality.

Julius pursues his own unique version of the American dream, which is based not on stereotypical expressions of patriotism or upward social mobility but on developing and maintaining the veneer of cosmopolitanism. That veneer is shattered when he meets Saidu, a Liberian who, despite years of attempted naturalization,

¹⁹ One need not look far to see the countless stories of US immigrants who spend their lives earning minimum wage or less. Yet immigrants continue migrating to the US. Over a million people obtained US permanent residence status in 2019 (Baugh 1). Berlant calls the persistent pursuit of the American Dream an example of cruel optimism, which they define as “the condition of maintaining an attachment to a problematic object *in advance* of its loss” (21; emphasis in original).

²⁰ With this statement, Julius criticizes the historic city structure that perpetuates the idealistic, distorted narrative of America’s welcoming acceptance of all immigrants. Behdad would support this concern: he argues that the monumentalizing of Ellis Island “[relegates] to a distant past any negative sentiment toward immigrants or the state’s exclusionary practices of immigration control” (2). America persists in forgetting, although many US immigrants and racially minoritized groups cannot help but remember. Renan’s essay, “What is a nation?” (1882), is also relevant here; he not only argues that the act of forgetting “is a crucial factor in the creation of a nation” (11) but stresses that the individual and the nation are linked in their selective forgetting (19). A person, like a nation, represents a collection of stories—the worst of which are sometimes minimized for the sake of stability, patriotism, or unity. Like Renan states, “[u]nity is always effected by means of brutality” (11).

remains trapped in an immigration detention facility. Initially, the reader is fooled into believing that Julius is an empathetic listener. He pays close attention to Saidu's harrowing story of his failed attempt to escape from warfare in Liberia. However, Julius does not keep his promise to Saidu that he will return to visit him. Instead, he repeats Saidu's story to his then-girlfriend in order to present himself as "the listener, the compassionate African who paid attention to the details of someone else's life and struggle" (Cole 70). This is the type of cosmopolitan attitude that Tim Brennan critiques as "blinded...by the euphoria of a good will that is conveniently good business for [the cosmopolitan]" ("Cosmo-Theory" 673). Saidu's bad business is good business for Julius. His disingenuous compassion strengthens his cosmopolitan persona, as the ethical cosmopolitan, as Anthony Appiah argues, advocates for kindness toward strangers (*Cosmopolitanism* 155). By recounting another's struggle, he also further represses his own trauma. In Julius' mind he is the good-natured and fortunate African, while Saidu carries the burden of a traumatic past. This is also a wakeup call for readers who might initially see Julius' interactions with Saidu as sympathetic. When they realize that Julius is not going to visit Saidu again, they must step back and check their own complicity in an insincere act of sympathy that leads to no more than consumption of another's trauma. This is how Cole is successfully able to "hack" the flâneur and turn the tables on the reader who might share Julius' sympathies.

While Julius is on a spontaneous trip to Brussels, a Moroccan-born Internet café and phone shop owner named Farouq further exposes Julius' hypocritical expression of cosmopolitanism. Farouq senses the falsity of Julius' behavior

throughout their exchanges, particularly with regard to Julius' literary tastes. While Julius praises Moroccan writer Tahar Ben Jelloun's storytelling, Farouq criticizes the author for generating poetic, Oriental myths that appeal to global readers. Writers who stay in Morocco and continue writing in Arabic, Farouq says, speak more directly to the condition of Moroccans on the ground (Cole 103).²¹ Ironically, Julius mails Farouq a copy of Kwame Anthony Appiah's *Cosmopolitanism* after returning home to New York. Julius thereby clings to the vestiges of a Western cosmopolitanism that sees people like Farouq as provincial. It is here that Cole's hacked flâneur figure most explicitly alludes to his own attempt to challenge global readers who seek self-gratification in their intellectual pursuits, while othering those who they read about.

By the end of Cole's novel, one realizes that a secret he left behind in Nigeria is much larger than the death of his father or local judgments of his race. Julius raped Moji, his childhood friend's sister, not long before immigrating to New York. This is an event he has strategically neglected to tell the reader amidst his bouts of flânerie, but Moji reminds him of his crime toward the end of the novel. Although he does not confirm this explicitly, it is *this* event that led to his distancing from his past. Cryptically, he claims his memories of Nigeria were "mostly forgotten, except for those few things that [he] remembered with an outside intensity" (155). Yet, even vivid memories, such as his front-seat view of his driver hitting a child and likely killing her on the way to school in Nigeria, fade away to the extent that they appear

²¹ His thoughts echo those of critics of cosmopolitanism, like Brennan, who asserts that cosmopolitan writers include global South intellectuals living in the West who "translate" national stories into a highbrow literary mode ("Cosmopolitanism and Celebrities" 7).

dreamlike rather than factual (226). Similarly, Julius does not recognize Moji when she approaches him in New York. He responds with silence to her recounting of the rape (245). Like many of his Nigerian memories, this disappears into the hazy recesses of his mind. Julius forgets the rape through defense mechanisms disguised as cosmopolitan behaviors. Julius' crime thereby undercuts his performance as a long-suffering yet fortunate immigrant who becomes a cosmopolitan flâneur.

After Moji first recognizes Julius in a Union Square grocery store, his past begins to unravel. She playfully admonishes him for not remembering her at first, and this moment represents the beginning of the more climactic interruption of Julius' flânerie. In recalling this moment, he explains, "The sudden reencounter, in the present, of something or someone long forgotten, some part of myself I had relegated to childhood and to Africa [agitates] a secure vision of the past that I had been constructing since 1992" (155-56). Although others' recognition of him as Black or as African disturbs the safehouse that Julius has constructed to protect himself from his past, his reconnection with Moji initiates the shattering of the entire foundation. Not long after his initial encounter with Moji in New York, Julius draws attention to his growing forgetfulness. Despite recalling minute details of musical scores, he describes, in the chapter following the one in which he meets Moji again, a day on which he is especially forgetful. First, he forgets to bring his checkbook before leaving to meet and pay his accountant. Then, while attempting to withdraw the cash needed to pay the accountant from the ATM, he forgets his PIN that he has not changed since he got the card six years ago (161). The following day, when a representative from his bank contacts him regarding all of the failed withdrawal

attempts, he is stunned to recall the whole ordeal after having already forgotten it. As the weight of the experience is more intense now after the reminder, he thinks to himself, “The strange feeling was harder to dispel, the memories of standing alone, standing in Wall Street, my memory gone, a pathetic old-young man padding about in the grip of some nervousness” (166). Julius’ casual and detached narrative tone changes in this instance. He becomes more perplexed and self-aware as he struggles to recall his PIN throughout the day and into the next week. Why the sudden erection of this border—in an open city, no less?

Pieter Vermeulen’s characterization of Julius as a fuguer masquerading as a cosmopolitan flâneur is valuable when assessing Julius’ more erratic and less refined moments (“Flights of Memory” 42). The fuguer is a nineteenth-century literary counterpart to the flâneur—a “mad traveler” who walks about in a confused, forgetful, and panicked state (Hacking 27-28 qtd. in Vermeulen, “Flights of Memory” 42). From a more psychological standpoint, the fuguer is someone who suffers from dissociative fugue disorder. Someone in a fugue state, like Julius, may suddenly abandon his home, struggle with personal identity, and suffer from amnesia (Cervenak 121; Vermeulen, “Flights of Memory” 54). Although the fact that Julius forgets his ATM PIN number may seem like an innocuous bout of absent-mindedness, this incident reveals a fuguer side that has been a latent part of his character all along. He remarks early on in the novel that his walks have gradually grown longer and more exhaustive, so much so that “One night I simply went on and on, walking all the way down to Houston Street, a distance of some seven miles, and found myself in a state of disorienting fatigue, laboring to remain on my feet” (6). He

is not a leisurely, introspective flâneur in this light, but rather a laborious fuguer with a psychological tic. Julius does not walk through the city for amusement; he walks to forget.

Julius' forgetting of his own history mirrors the actions of his mother, Julianna Müller. Conceived from rape in 1945 in Berlin, she carries the burden of a brutal history. She rarely discusses her past with her son, but Julius wonders about her upbringing. "It was an entire vanished world of people," he says, "a world that, in some odd way, I was the unaware continuation of" (80). This unaware continuation is apparent when he rapes Moji and later forgets the incident. When Julius purchases a one-way ticket to New York, he replicates the journey of his mother, who moved to the U.S. in her early twenties to escape her traumatic past (78). It is of significance that Julius' name is similar to his mother's, not only because he continues her path of migration and negation but because he hides behind a European name as he escapes from his Nigerian self. While neither Julianna nor Julius explicitly denies their past, they minimize, repress, and eventually forget certain experiences. I acknowledge that comparing Julius' experience to his mother's is problematic since the former is a rapist and the latter is a rape victim. Yet their similar behaviors are often overlooked in critical scholarship on *Open City*. Both characters seek to overcome their fraught histories through negation. The unnerving relationship between victimhood and perpetration in regard to trauma is paramount in Julius' case, for he is a perpetrator who benefits from his witnessing and retelling of others' stories of suffering—including the experience of his mother—to his peers and to himself. In relaying these accounts to the global readers, Cole challenges the reader who consumes such

unpleasant stories for pleasure. By concentrating on people's traumatic narratives during both frenzied and therapeutic walks, Julius strengthens his persona as a compassionate listener and negates the reality of his past.

When the reader finally comes to understand the violent act that Julius has been negating throughout the duration of the novel, he prefaces Moji's revelation with a contemplation on self-perception. He indicates that he, like many people, views himself as a generally good individual (Cole 243). He comes to an understanding that Moji never had "the luxury of denial" (244), even though she, like Julius, migrated away from the site of trauma to New York. In one of the most insightful statements of *Open City*, Moji asserts that "[t]hings don't go away just because you choose to forget them" (245). This statement changes the meaning of Julius' flâneur narrative. As I have shown, his meandering walks through the city and continual appreciation of worldly artistic and cultural interests may initially signal to the global reader that he is a good cosmopolitan. Yet, it is these same behaviors that allow him to overcompensate for and negate his past actions. One may initially read *Open City* as Julius' search for meaning and fulfillment in a global world, but the text begs for a re-reading after Moji exposes him as her rapist. His performance of flânerie then becomes a confessional. *Open City* builds up to the horror of Julius' action in a winding and unexpected way—through meandering walks and the gradual loss of memory—until his confrontation with Moji. Readers, too, transform from passive consumers of a hacked flâneur's narrative to a group that is shocked that they have been seduced by the narrator.

Not long after Moji reminds him of the rape, Julius finds himself locked outside of a performance of *Mahler's Symphony No. 9*. Looking down from the fire escape, he contemplates suicide (Cole 255). Wouldn't Mahler's farewell symphony be a fitting cue for his own end? Yet in this moment, he is surprised to see the stars shining above. He reflects that in "the dark spaces between the dead, shining stars were stars I could not see, stars that still existed, and were giving out light that hadn't reached me yet, stars now living and giving out light but present to me only as blank interstices" (256). Vermeulen's interpretation of this passage is sharply accurate: Julius acknowledges that "the light as well as darkness" of history must both be acknowledged when trying to understand our present condition (Vermeulen, "Flights of Memory" 55). Will Julius finally recognize the darkness of his own history? It appears that the answer is yes, because a re-reading of the novel reveals Julius' narrative to be more of a confession than the diary of a flâneur. According to Anke Gleber, Freud recommended that his depressed patients take flâneur-like walks and keep a detail-oriented "sociological log" (Gleber 136) in the hopes that their recorded observations and thoughts could help him to better understand and psychoanalyze them. Julius the psychiatrist is now sitting on the shrink's couch, allowing the reader access to his confessional flâneur log. Perhaps this is the first forward-thinking step in his recognition of and atonement for the sins that he refuses to acknowledge earlier.

Cole creates a "hacked" version of the classic nineteenth-century flâneur. Julius is not a white European poet-aesthete who leisurely walks through city spaces, but he is instead an African migrant psychiatrist who constructs a cosmopolitan persona in order to negate his past. Both iterations of the flâneur take an interest in

the arts and in the economic-oriented spectacles that draw crowds to an urban center. What sets Julius apart from the original flâneur figure is that he thoughtfully considers how Western cities and the people within them rewrite their brutal pasts—a gesture that he himself replicates. In the end, he finally appears to come to terms with the fact that his flânerie is more accurately a sign of psychosis. Perhaps the reader, too, realizes that the discerning eye controlling the narrative was actually less in control and less sympathetic than we imagined. Cole’s “hacked” flâneur prompts global intellectual audiences to further question how we understand the often deceptively innocuous, uncritical, and negating practices of cosmopolitanism. Uncritical cosmopolitan theories emphasize compassion for strangers, sophisticated consumption habits, or limitless mobility in a world beyond nations. Yet, we cannot eschew the fact that nation-states harbor persistently brutal histories. We also cannot lose ourselves by forgetting our pasts. What we need is a cosmopolitanism that recognizes the light and darkness. By acknowledging one’s history, a critical cosmopolitan can break the cycle of negation.

*From Urban Renewal to Personal Denial: Tracking Trauma in The Beautiful Things That Heaven Bears*²²

Scholars such as Pieter Vermeulen, Louis Chude-Sokei, and Alyson Massey have respectively examined Dinaw Mengestu's *The Beautiful Things That Heaven Bears* alongside Teju Cole's *Open City*.²³ Both novels feature first-person, reflective African male narrators who have migrated to—and enjoy walking within—U.S. cities. Furthermore, Kathy-Ann Tan has also labeled Mengestu's protagonist, Sepha Stephanos, as a flâneur who “walks and quietly observes” (208) the daily happenings and changes within his city. However, Julius and Sepha pursue flânerie differently. Although Julius of *Open City* ultimately reveals a manipulative side to a flâneur persona that he assumes to conceal his past, Sepha is a more innocent flâneur. During his walks through the increasingly gentrified Washington, D.C. streets in 1997, he uncovers local histories, as well as personal traumas. In the process, he comes to the harsh realization that he can escape neither the painful memories of the Ethiopian Red Terror that took the lives of his family members, nor the present disappointments of

²² Parts of this chapter will be adapted into a forthcoming *South Atlantic Review* journal article to be published in the summer of 2022. It will be titled, “Walking While Black: Can There Be an African Flâneur?”

²³ See Pieter Vermeulen's “Reading alongside the market: affect and mobility in contemporary American migrant fiction” (2015), Louis Chude-Sokei's “The Newly Black Americans: African immigrants and black America” (2014), and Alyson Massey's “Revealing Your Delusions: Perspectives on American Values in Contemporary African Fiction” (2016). Massey claims that Julius and Sepha are both “solitary wanderer[s]” (45) who experience loneliness as they walk through crowded urban areas while Chude-Sokei similarly argues that both characters are socially withdrawn and generally dislike being racially or culturally labeled (66). Vermeulen explores how Cole and Mengestu's respective novels “fit the template of literary migrant fiction” (“Reading alongside the market” 278) in their examination of the individual melancholia experienced as a result of African (self-)exile to the U.S. Moreover, according to him, the intersection of the walking narrator-protagonists with the capitalist “rhythms of the market” (278) does not facilitate the expected emotional identification of the reader with the characters.

disenfranchisement as an African immigrant in the U.S. I argue that Sepha's flâneur-like walks through the changing neighborhoods of Washington, D.C. allow him to wander within an in-between space that Homi K. Bhabha would call an "third space"—which contribute to his sense of enlightenment as well as disillusionment about his place in the world.

The reader first meets Sepha in-medias-res. His two fellow African immigrant friends of seventeen years, Joseph from Zaire (now known as the Democratic Republic of the Congo) and Kenneth from Kenya, are visiting Sepha's Logan Circle convenience store—where much of the story takes place. Whether walking in the neighborhood or working and socializing at the store, Sepha is both a mobile and a stationary flâneur. He examines the new customers who come to his store after moving into renovated homes: "They stop in during an afternoon stroll with their children dangling around their necks like amulets to ward off age, sickness, unemployment, rain, death" (4). It is a striking, unusual simile that captures urban life in a way that the urbane, romantic Baudelarian flâneur would not have done.

Sepha offers a reflective and often uncomfortable portrayal of Washington D.C.'s Logan Circle neighborhood at the height of an 'urban renewal' period in 1997. Today in 2022, Logan Circle is currently a growing, active neighborhood full of renovated Victorian-style homes, an Ernest-Hemingway-themed brunch spot, and trendy performance venues. But Sepha, from his viewpoint as the owner of a struggling convenience store, draws attention to the calm desertion and quietude during the sleepy D.C. mornings. While roaming the neighborhood, he notices what most commuters overlook, such as the fresh coat of paint on the benches across from

the General Logan statue. With his eye moving past the paint, he remarks, “behind the benches are thick layers of startling fresh green sod where only dust and scattered clumps of crabgrass and weeds used to grow” (35). Such subtle nods to gentrification pervade Mengestu’s novel. Pointing out the springtime blooms, moreover, Sepha unearths a foreboding sentiment beneath the beauty of D.C.’s famous cherry blossoms: “There is something unsettling about spring in D.C., a cautionary tale of overindulgence and inflated expectations that seems embedded in the grass and in the trees” (44). As he moves about the city and provides such puzzling, ominous observations, the reader observes the changing, late 1990s neighborhood that is both captivating and threatening to an African immigrant like Sepha.

As Sepha describes his surroundings, the story of gentrification becomes more prominent. He claims that the majority of his customers these days are “stay-at-home moms or dads who’ve moved into one of the newly refurbished houses surrounding Logan Circle,” (4), and that the once decaying, excrement-covered General Logan statue was restored with a “glimmering sheen of a privately funded cleaning job” (4, 36). Meanwhile, his African-American neighbor, Mrs. Davis, has been a resident of Logan Circle for twenty-three years. She has only recently begun expressing her disdain over rent increases, which are pricing the longtime Black residents out of the neighborhood so that the properties can be renovated and resold at a higher price to predominantly white buyers. However, Sepha rather precisely notes the small, progressive changes the neighborhood has undergone in a decade. He recalls when he first began to see white people strolling through the area two years ago, and when he witnessed professional movers hauling furniture into a nearby home on a Sunday last

July (23-24). Sepha's critical surveys of the modern world, capturing minute changes and detailed evolutions, bear similarities to the astute gaze of the flâneur. Despite the fact—or perhaps because of the fact—that he is an immigrant, he is especially discerning of his immediate surroundings. As a result, the reader is encouraged to trust his informal timeline of structural and demographic changes.

Sepha resembles the nineteenth-century Parisian flâneur in that they both recount their observations of the city during a time of 'urban renewal.' Historically, the flâneur's walks through the city and interactions with the urban public have captured socio-cultural shifts. During the 1830s-1840s, the Parisian bourgeoisie began to migrate from private to public settings for shopping and socialization (Burton 63-65). The flâneur emerged as someone who would observe and ambivalently involve himself in the new city spectacles—paying special attention to the urban milieu of the bourgeois crowds and their consumption practices. The flâneur not only studies the people in the crowd, but also “the spectacle provided by the processes of commodification and urbanization” that draw the crowd to the city center (Vermeulen “Flights of Memory” 41). By accounting for the items on display, as well as the people who are shopping for these items, the flâneur engages with the changing nature of socioeconomic development and bourgeois growth in urban spaces—or, paraphrasing Rob Shields, the evolution of empire into the emporium (74). This characterization of the flâneur epitomizes Sepha's role in *The Beautiful Things That Heaven Bears*. He is not only a mobile flâneur, but he also recounts daily interactions in a changing neighborhood from the vantage point of his store.

In Sepha's corner of Logan Circle, like most gentrified areas, the 'renewal' of the city is often dependent on white, upper-middle class migration to the neighborhood. And to attract this type of buyer or renter, neighborhood walkability and accessibility to retail are prioritized. This phenomenon, sometimes called "boutiquing" (Zukin 48) or "retail gentrification" (Sullivan and Shaw 413), highlights the centrality of shopping and commerce in the *flâneur*'s journey through a gentrified neighborhood.

While sharing his observations of the changing community, Sepha links modern and classic forms of *flânerie* that revolve around moments of social change. In *The New Urban Question* (2014), Andy Merrifield argues that numerous cities have been undergoing a "neo-Haussmannization" process in the twentieth century and beyond. With the growth of the mid-nineteenth-century Haussmann redevelopment in Paris, the construction of restaurants, cafés, shops, and wider boulevards encouraged the *flâneur* to walk through the streets and observe the crowds. However, Merrifield, who builds upon the research of Walter Benjamin, draws attention to another side of the Haussmann narrative of urban renewal. Noting his "immense hatred of the masses, of the poor, of rootless homeless populations," Merrifield explains that Haussmann redeveloped Paris in an effort to drive such disenfranchised people out of the city and replace their presence with more bourgeois societal figures like the *flâneur* (36). Rising rent costs and political gerrymandering prompted the lower- and working-class Parisians to move elsewhere, and therefore the demographics of the city permanently changed (29). Neo-Haussmannization, for Merrifield, constitutes the contemporary process of "altering and upscaling the urban physical environment to

alter the social and political environment,” which has been occurring in cities across the globe since the 1980s (x).

As Mengestu’s novel depicts, Logan Circle is one of those cities that has been subject to ongoing gentrification, which started in the mid-twentieth-century and became most noticeable during the 1980s-1990s.²⁴ Sepha moved to Logan Circle because it was inexpensive, but also because he “secretly [...] loved the circle for what it had become: proof that wealth and power were not immutable, and America was not always so great after all” (16). During his walks through the city, Sepha remarks that the urban blight he remembers has been replaced with newness. In 1980s D.C. and beyond, residential homes like the Victorian houses in his Logan Circle were renovated for resale (P. Williams 9); the median values for homes in D.C. increased 79% between 1990-2000 (Hyra 64). In Sepha’s case, a wealthy white woman, Judith, moves in next door to him in a decades-long-abandoned mansion and has the home extensively renovated to include, among many other upgrades, a bathroom on every floor (16-7). For the time being, Sepha is in a curious position of being able to do what the new, wealthier transplants to the city are coveting in the 1990s. He is a pedestrian commuter to his self-run business, as well as a flâneur who is a witness to the shift in the nature and demographics of the urban milieu.

²⁴ The *Bolling vs. Sharpe* decision (1954) prompted the desegregation of D.C. schools and the relaxation of other Jim Crow laws. As a result, the African-American population in D.C. rose from 1950-1970 (Prince 45). The District began to decline after the 1968 riots in D.C., but the Board of Trade and other civic planning committees engineered plans to develop blighted neighborhoods in order to encourage more retail consumption and simultaneously expand tax revenues (Clement 53). New retail and dining attractions transformed these neighborhoods into what Derek S. Hyra calls a “gilded ghetto” (7). These ‘revitalized’ districts met the desires of young, white collar professionals who wanted to walk from home to work as well as stroll through other parts of the city (McGovern 201 qtd. in Hyra 65).

Because Mengestu focuses on this gentrification or “neo-Haussmannization” effect in *The Beautiful Things That Heaven Bears*, he further connects Sepha with his nineteenth-century flâneur counterpart. As Sepha observes the city, he notes that white people used to only come to the neighborhood “to deliver official notices, investigate crimes, and check up on the children of negligent parents,” but now white people come to his store and even live next door to him (18). While prostitutes used to frequent Logan Circle, they have mostly disappeared by the time Sepha narrates the story, prompting him to ask what many tourists or new neighbors might not question while walking in the area: “what happened to all the hos?” (38). With neo-Haussmannization looming as the novel’s backdrop, Sepha observes that those who once roamed the streets of Logan Circle have been disenfranchised and pushed out to make room for white wanderers. At the time of the novel, Sepha remains as a lower-middle-class Black person living, working, and walking in the neighborhood. But he may only be able to do this for so long, because he is months behind on his rent and receives a letter from a law firm that gives him his thirty-day notice to vacate his store (67). Mengestu captures the fact that in an increasingly gentrified neighborhood, there can be a limit to Black wandering, commerce, and entrepreneurialism.

As Sepha faces his own impending eviction, he is also a witness to the public spectacles of Logan Circle eviction days. From inside his store, Sepha has a front-row seat to the eviction and the surrounding crowd who watches in dismay as another family suddenly becomes homeless. The crowds often grow in size as the eviction proceeds, and people also leave their nearby houses to join the crowds or watch from their stoops. Interestingly, Sepha profits from the gentrification of the neighborhood,

for the crowds turn away from the evictions at some point to make purchases at the store. He is eager for their patronage, for he thinks to himself, “I watched them from my store and waited for them to come in, and they did” (193). Thus, Sepha is in a precarious position as a resident of Logan Circle and a business owner who stands to make a financial gain from the evictions of his neighbors—most of whom are Black.

Sepha remains a detached observer of these scenes—not only because he capitalizes on the evicted people’s misfortune, but also due to the fact that he does not feel a solid kinship with them. Reflecting upon his position in the progressively gentrifying neighborhood, he notes, “I had never really been a part of Logan Circle [...] at least not in the way Mrs. Davis and most of my customers were. I had snuck into the neighborhood [...] I had used it for its cheap rent, and if others were now doing the same, then what right did I have to deny them?” (189). Sepha resembles the nineteenth-century *flâneur* in this moment, because he chooses to remain an impartial, disconnected observer of the city and crowds. Unlike the classic *flâneur*, however, he directly interacts with the crowd in economic transactions. Sepha is a witness to a pivotal moment of disenfranchisement for African Americans in D.C. He is also a Black resident, but not an African-American one. Therefore, his outsider-insider perspective adds a level of nuance to the *flâneur* figure and the narrative representation of Logan Circle.

Building upon this nuance, Sepha might even be seen as more like a white person—a foreign threat to African-American stability in the neighborhood—rather than a fellow Black ally. Further examining Sepha’s unease, Louis Chude-Sokei makes a broader argument that Africans in America “are expected to assimilate into

either a white American and/or a ‘black’ social world that may exhibit its own prejudices against them” (55). This is a unique struggle for Sepha that the classic white male iteration of the flâneur would not have experienced. Sepha’s presence on the streets and inside his store at Logan Circle cannot go unnoticed. He is visibly Black and is expected, at least by Mrs. Davis, to show solidarity with other Black people in the fight against gentrification. But he also must reckon with the fact that as an African, he has not equally suffered from the segregation, racial profiling, and police brutality that his African-American neighbors have likely grappled with.²⁵ As a flâneur, Sepha cannot merely observe; he must situate himself and contemplate his role within this changing urban space.

To an extent, Sepha exudes a cosmopolitan sensibility that resembles that of the classic flâneur. He is well-read, and he always keeps a book such as V.S. Naipaul’s *A Bend In the River* by his side “so that every hour of even the quietest day has been filled with at least one voice other than [his] own” (39). The fact that Joseph gave him Naipaul’s novel and calls him Salim is meta in itself, considering the fact that both Salim and Sepha are store owners who give a kind of immigrant outsider view of their changing neighborhoods.²⁶ By telling the reader these astute observations of how the city is changing from a small, local vantage points in merchant areas, Sepha and Saleem are both unconventional yet nonetheless worldly flâneurs. But, Sepha goes a step further than Saleem as a “hacked” flâneur who

²⁵ In the article “The D.C. City Council vs. Police Brutality, 1967-69,” John W. Hechinger, Sr. and Gavin Taylor outline such injustices that especially occurred in the late 1960s, including police shouting racial slurs at Black residents and beating them with a nightstick for no reason (5).

²⁶ In *The Beautiful Things That Heaven Bears*, the character Salim’s name is spelled ‘Saleem.’

engages more with the intersection between cosmopolitanism and psychological insecurity or distress.

Sepha's cosmopolitan attitude is most notably challenged in comparison with the conventional flâneur after he meets his new next-door neighbor, Judith. She is a well-educated white woman with a biracial daughter named Naomi. Sepha initially observes her from afar as a kind of voyeur rather than a flâneur—watching even her most subtle street interactions from his bedroom window. He first meets Judith when he is dressed for a cousin's wedding, and she states, "What a beautiful garment" (18). Judith's use of the word "garment" strikes Sepha as though it "had been inserted into her sentence at the last possible moment out of an instinctive sense of cultural diplomacy" (18). Her simple phrase thereby indicates, for Sepha, that she sees him as a foreign 'Other.' This is a fleeting yet critical moment in the text. Sepha's walk to his destination is interrupted by his Africanness. He is noticed because he looks different from both the lower-income, longtime residents and the new, wealthier neighbors in the Logan Circle crowd. He therefore brings a new twist to Benjamin's argument that "[t]he flâneur still stands on the threshold—of the metropolis as of the middle class. Neither has him in its power yet. In neither is he at home" (*AP* 10). Recognizing this uncertainty is part of what makes Sepha a unique *flâneur* who further embodies this outsider persona that Benjamin imagined.

Sepha's pursuit of a friendship with Judith underscores his inclusive and cosmopolitan nature, but he gradually realizes that he does not meet her standards. Before he meets her, he is open about the fact that he moved to Logan Circle because he could not afford to make ends meet elsewhere in the city. Rather than feel ashamed

of his surroundings, he embraces them. He indicates that his store, which he bought for two-thousand dollars, is a place that he can “sit back and look proudly upon” (3). Yet, when Judith’s daughter, Naomi, calls the store “filthy,” Sepha decides to repaint walls, repair shelves, and replace lightbulbs in order to “make it a place [he] wasn’t afraid to look at” (106, 110). Furthermore, after having dinner at Judith’s house, he suddenly finds his own home to be “shabbier, smaller, and more desolate than [he] remembered” (59-60). He is especially ashamed when he visits her house again and, upon revealing that he has “small and cheap” aesthetic tastes, Judith responds, “That’s too bad [...] It looks like you’ve gone and picked the wrong family” (134). Although he accepts Judith’s reassurance that her comment was meant in jest, this does not shake Sepha’s self-realization: “Judith, without knowing it, had hit that central nerve [...] that when tapped, sent a sudden shock of shame and humiliation beneath which everything else crumbled” (135). His discomfort comes to a head when Judith reveals that her ex-husband is a Mauritanian economics professor. Sepha imagines that he is a refined African man with the financial and cultural capital to succeed in an intellectual, cosmopolitan, upper-middle-class American milieu—to which Sepha could never measure up (135-36). Sepha realizes that no matter how much he aspires to fit into Judith’s world, he simply cannot achieve the expectations that he believes she has. This insecurity highlights his deep-seated impression that he, as a lower-income African immigrant, will never escape his past or find a sense of belonging within the United States.

Sepha not only fails to fit in within Judith’s intellectual, affluent milieu, but also within African-American social circles. He primarily interacts with Black

neighbors transactionally at the store by selling them products. There is a tension and unfamiliarity between him and local youths. He recalls walking down the street and startling a group of teenagers, who he says, “turned their attention to [him] briefly, but once they recognized [him] for the harmless man [he] knew [himself] to be, they moved on” (137). Sepha may not explicitly draw attention to the dangers he faces as a Black man in America, but he ultimately accepts the fact that even though he is African and not African American—he is still Black in America. He states, “I was poor, black, and wore the anonymity that came with that as a shield against all the early ambitions of the immigrant” (41). Here there is a sense not of solidarity, but of resignation. While straddling between the two worlds of Ethiopia and the U.S., of Black and white America, of rich and poor D.C., and of the store and the sidewalk, he often experiences isolation. Flânerie thereby provides an outlet for him to passively observe and actively narrate the story of his life in relation to his equally dynamic surroundings.

Sepha’s eagerness—and self-perceived failed attempt—to meet what he imagines to be Judith’s high standards stems from his desire to transcend his traumatic past. In Sepha’s non-linear narrative, he weaves through three distinctive time periods: the present-day in late 1990s D.C., the time when he first immigrated to the D.C. area to live with his uncle in the early 1980s, and his childhood in Ethiopia. About halfway through the novel, the reader learns about the circumstances that forced him into exile in the U.S. While looking through old letters in his uncle Berhane’s home in suburban Maryland, Sepha finds a copy of one letter that his uncle wrote to President Jimmy Carter. In this heartfelt plea, he tells President Carter that

his brother-in-law, Shibrew Stephanos, was a good man who was attacked in front of his family and later killed by Ethiopian government soldiers during the Red Terror campaign of the late 1970s (123-25).²⁷ Reading this letter prompts Sepha to recall the horrors he witnessed during this time. The troops beat his father, Shibrew, because they found SFD (Students for Democracy) flyers in his bedroom—flyers that then-sixteen-year-old Sepha had naively offered to help distribute before his protective father hid them (126). And this is the source of Sepha’s trauma.

The flyers that Sepha brought home provided a catalyst for his father’s murder at the hands of the state, and it was not long after that he fled Ethiopia forever. He may never feel truly at home in America, but he cannot return to his home country. Moreover, despite all attempts to escape his past and to create a new name for himself, he carries this trauma with him and is continually reminded of where he came from. When he attended community college in Virginia for a year, fellow students would immediately regard him as foreign. Upon learning that he was Ethiopian, they would conjure up the distressing images of the starving children they had seen in the news. Sepha thinks to himself, in response, “what did I know about any of this? I was a student, studying engineering. All I wanted was to tuck my books under my arm and stroll across the campus lawn with that permanent grin stretched

²⁷ In summary, the Red Terror (1976-1978) started after an urban, Marxist-oriented opposition movement ended Emperor Haile Selassie’s reign by means of a military junta in 1974. A militaristic group called the Dergue assumed political power, with Chairman Mengistu Haile Mariam leading the movement. Growing factionalism and threats of coup d’états led Mengistu to incite a war against one of the largest opposition groups, the Ethiopian People’s Revolutionary Party (EPRP), in 1976 (Tareke 185-194). This ideologically based, brutally violent, and genocidal war led to hundreds of thousands of deaths, with some reports indicating a death toll of up to 250,000 (Babile qtd. in Tareke 197). Although EPRP members and affiliates were initially targeted, youths with even partial education were quickly suspected as counterrevolutionaries (USCIS).

across my face” (98). His reluctance to think about these distressing images of Ethiopia reveals his desire to mask the pain of his own past. His reflective walks across a college campus, of course, differ from the city strolls of the classic *flâneur*. The campus space is more open and less centered on intersections of urban commerce. Yet, Sepha’s choice to walk about the campus in a carefree manner—despite all of the judgment he experiences as a “foreigner” at school—underscores his primary coping strategy: walking.

Sepha’s appreciation of walking was instilled in him by his father at a young age. During the summer, Shibrew would take his son on silent, reflective afternoon walks through the busy city streets and quieter park spaces of Addis Ababa (216-217). Moreover, whenever Sepha was a passenger in his father’s car, he would observe the people descending from the buses and wish that he could be “swallowed whole by the crowd” (167). Once he moves to the U.S., he fulfills this desire of blending in with the crowd during his frequent city walks. At first, these strolls take him back mentally to his walks in Addis Ababa, for he claims that he “searched for familiarity wherever [he] went” and that his “hallucinations of home became standard” (175, 176). Thus, the practice of *flânerie* has a nostalgic effect upon him, wherein he imaginatively remaps his homeland of Addis Ababa onto the landscape of the D.C. streets he walks upon. He continually compares D.C. to Addis, as they have a similar size and are both, interestingly, “a vast urban slum built around the fringes of a few important city centers” (173). He considers not only the histories and geographies of the two cities, but also subtle nuances—such as the same way that the sunlight hits at a certain hour. Another comparison between Sepha and Salim from A

Bend in the River is obvious here, for Erica L. Johnson indicates that “[Salim’s] gaze, as he moves through the city as something of a postcolonial *flâneur*, takes in not the foreignness of a European city, but the familiarity of Africa” (220). That quality of what Johnson calls postcolonial *flânerie* is evident for Sepha. Recalling the familiarity of Addis through *flânerie* functions as a coping mechanism that allows him to mask his homesickness and painful final memories of Ethiopia. While walking through the city, he extends his memories of home in Addis to match and encompass his new home in Logan Circle. This is his process of finding comfort and familiarity in spite of the fact that he is perceived by many as a foreigner.

Sepha’s daily walks gradually become a form of relief that focus more on D.C. itself than on Ethiopia. One day, in a passage that is reminiscent of the turtle-walking *flâneurs* of mid-nineteenth-century Paris, Sepha leisurely walks behind an older woman and “admir[es] the deliberation that seems to come with every step” (218). He wishes that he had taken more time to walk at this pace while retracing the usual paths he took upon first moving to D.C. Sepha thereby implies that walking through the streets of D.C. while reflecting on his past is a positive pastime, rather than a trauma-inducing one. *Flânerie* is a form of therapy for Sepha, just as it is for Julius in *Open City*. On another occasion, Sepha speaks briefly with an elderly tourist couple at his store, only to temporarily abandon his store to slowly follow them. While taking note of every street corner and providing a visual guided tour for the reader, he also begins to imagine different personal scenarios and backstories for the couple. For instance, he remarks, “I’ve begun to think of the couple as old friends whom I’m admiring from a distance. I can see their children, slightly estranged but

still loving, and their home, a split-level ranch in the suburbs of some midsize city” (78). Therefore, in a similar way that Sepha projected his past Ethiopian home onto his present city of D.C., he imagines a home for this tourist couple walking in D.C. Although these tourists are not immigrants like himself, he still likes to consider where they might have come from. By focusing on more positive—both real and imagined—aspects of the city and people in the crowd during some of his walks, Sepha is able to shape a happy, therapeutic narrative for himself and his surroundings.

Whenever Sepha suffers from a painful or shameful experience, he typically starts to walk through the city—often in the late hours of the evening. Recalling an earlier memory from when he was still working at the Capitol Hotel, he indicates that he walked for miles one night until he reached the Memorial Bridge. Ashamed of the fact that his father had died while he himself had nothing to live for except to work at a menial job, Sepha considered taking the plunge and ending his life here (143). He ultimately chose to quit his job instead, but it is worth noting that his walks can take such a dark turn at night. On another evening, he takes a walk after he learns the disappointing news that Judith and Naomi will not be spending Christmas in D.C. Oddly, he indicates that “[i]t seemed like an appropriate night for walking down the middle of the street,” and he ventures into an empty, neglected area near his neighborhood (162). Drawing attention to the decaying, abandoned structures that he implies are the remnants of the 1968 riots, he explains: “There was a unique fear that came with feeling that it was the inanimate objects around you that frightened you most” (162-63). During these night walks, it appears that Sepha still pursues *flânerie* as a way to seek relief. However, rather than reflect upon the more cheerful aspects of

the city and society, he instead gravitates toward the darker facets. It is as though he desires to conjure painful memories of the past—both in D.C. and in Ethiopia—as he brings out a more grim side to himself. Sepha is eager to conceal his suffering while weaving a pleasant imagined narrative of city life during his daytime strolls. But he walks toward his deep-seated, longstanding trauma when confronted with the harshness of his surroundings during the late-night hours.

This duality underscores my argument that he is a unique, “hacked” flâneur who reveals his state of double-consciousness as he walks within a “third space.” The contrasting pictures of the city that Sepha describes at different points during the night and day highlight his sense of double vision, or double-consciousness. W.E.B. Du Bois and Frantz Fanon respectively argue that Black people in the Western world, whether born in the West or not, must view themselves doubly from the points of view of both Black and white people (Du Bois 3; Fanon 17-18). Sepha demonstrates his double-conscious instinct when he expresses his comfort with his exiled African friends, yet admits his fear of inadequacy as a foreign, intellectual, and socio-economic “Other” in relation to the white, wealthy, and well-educated American, Judith. As other postcolonial figures do, Sepha can become plagued with paranoia or self-doubt when continually confronted with the idea that he is “almost, but not quite” someone who can assimilate into a certain community. After all, he remarks to himself, “What was it my father used to say? A bird stuck between two branches gets bitten on both wings. I would like to add my own saying to this now, Father: a man stuck between two worlds lives and dies alone” (228). While straddling between the two worlds of Ethiopia and the U.S., of Black and white America, and of rich and

poor D.C., he often experiences isolation. Nonetheless, his solitary walks provide him with the opportunity to productively confront and reimagine his traumatic and nostalgic thoughts. Flânerie thereby provides an outlet for him to passively observe and actively narrate the story of his life in relation to his equally dynamic surroundings.

Walking is not only therapeutic for Sepha, but it also exemplifies the fact that he exists within a “third space.” Homi K. Bhabha adapts this psychological term to illustrate a state of mind that the marginalized, postcolonial individual is compelled to assume. Within the third space, “the negotiation of incommensurable differences creates a tension peculiar to borderline existences” (218). Central to this idea, too, is the feeling of ambivalence, which, expanding upon Bhabha’s connotation, underscores one’s simultaneous attraction to (and mimicry of) and repulsion from one’s cultural Other. During his walks, Sepha explores these feelings of attraction and repulsion in relation to the U.S., Logan Circle, Ethiopia, and strangers of various racial and socio-economic backgrounds. Through his narrative lens, the reader sees a multitude of brightened and darkened images of these places and people. Despite the idea that he is a postcolonial ‘Other’ who is unwillingly trapped within a third space that causes him to constantly reassess himself, he also crafts a unique, complex, and unpredictable path within this space. As a flâneur, he has the freedom to ruminate on the changing cityscapes of D.C. and Addis Ababa, his sense of (non-)belonging, and the real or imagined paths that pedestrians or tourists take. Furthermore, he permits readers to retroactively witness 1997 D.C. from the intensely personal lens of an African immigrant.

On the surface, Mengestu's novel ends on a solemn note. A displaced, former resident of Logan Circle causes a fire that destroys Judith's home, prompting her and Naomi to leave D.C. Now without his white, affluent friend to inspire him to dream bigger and improve his circumstances, Sepha is essentially back to where he was at the start of the novel, before he met Judith. Coming full circle, the beautiful mansion that she had renovated has reverted to its pre-gentrified, abandoned, and decaying state. But it is important to recall that Sepha initially found charm in Logan Circle when her home was in that state; he appreciated the fact that the power of wealth had not spread to every surface of the American nation's capital. Although the reader does not know how his journey continues from this point, his final thoughts in his story are positive. As he begins to walk the "approximately 883 steps" that he has carefully estimated as the less-than-ten-second sprinting distance between Judith's (former) house and his store, he thinks to himself: "Right now, I'm convinced that my store looks more perfect than ever before [...] Through the canopy of trees that line the walkway cutting through the middle of the circle is a store, one that is neither broken nor perfect, one that, regardless of everything, I'm happy to claim as entirely my own" (228). It is important that Sepha's final reflections are centered on the store, which he may have to relinquish soon due to rent increases and an eviction notice. Although he once felt ashamed of it, he now embraces the store and all of its imperfections—which suggests that he also has more self-confidence. He does not have overambitious plans to aspire to uphold a stereotypical version of the American dream narrative. He realizes that he cannot perfectly blend in a crowd of either poor Black Americans or white, affluent people like Judith. He cannot save his store from

being taken away from him and then suddenly become a successful storeowner. But, through his form of therapeutic *flânerie* that embraces realism over idealism, he is happy.

During this last introspective walk in the novel, Sepha effectively echoes his friend Joseph's hopeful rereading of select verses from Dante's *Inferno*: "Through a round aperture I saw appear,/Some of the beautiful things that Heaven bears,/Where we came forth, and once more saw the stars" (99). Joseph argues that these verses are particularly special for an African, who has a profound understanding of what it is like to emerge from a place that he describes as "[h]ell every day with only glimpses of heaven in between" (99-100). Joseph, Kenneth, and Sepha have each lived through intense traumas resulting from warfare and poverty in Africa. In addition to the childhood traumas that Sepha experienced in Ethiopia, Joseph's middle-class upbringing in the Congo was shattered by militant fighting between government and rebel forces (219), and Kenneth was a street beggar in Nairobi (185). During the present-day time of the novel, they do not exactly make the transition from heaven to hell. Now they struggle with xenophobia, racism, and a lack of opportunities for upward mobility in a gentrified city. But at the end of the novel, Sepha nonetheless witnesses his little bit of heaven as he gazes upon his flawed yet beautiful store that is still standing in a changing neighborhood. Considering the image of the store in relation to himself, he accepts that that he will never be able to assimilate fully into a cosmopolitan or a wealthy, white American culture. He also recognizes that he cannot change the past or his traumatic relationship with Ethiopia. He may still have insecurities at times, and he may, like Judith, lose everything he owns at any given

moment. However, he is generally pleased with the autonomous, self-sufficient life he has made for himself up until this point. During this last documented instance of flânerie, Sepha appears to have found a reasonably comfortable, satisfying niche within his third space. Mengestu offers a complex depiction of the contemporary African flâneur living in an increasingly gentrified American city. He effectively “hacks” the flâneur figure to provide readers with a renewed perspective of what it is like to walk through a progressively diverse, dynamic, politically influential metropolis as a Black, lower-income, African immigrant.

Finding New Followers : The Significance of the Hacked Flâneur's Legacy

In tracing the history of the flâneur—from its classic, nineteenth-century Parisian iteration to its global reinventions in the past few decades—I have aimed to emphasize how this multifaceted figure steadily contributes a crucial, timely understanding of city life. Haussmannization altered Parisian metropolitan movement and culture in a similar way that neo-Haussmannization is changing the nature of cities such as Chicago, New York City, and Washington, D.C. As globalization has expanded its reach since the mid-to-late twentieth century and beyond, people are migrating more than ever before; in the process, they are contributing to the diversification and gentrification of cities. Moreover, numerous cities are becoming more accommodating and encouraging of pedestrian traffic. It is an ideal time for the flâneur figure to reintroduce himself or herself in literature and in popular culture. The flâneur's observations of his or her experiences within changing urban spaces permits the reader to live vicariously through the narrator, as well as gain insight on how a city looks differently from the perspective of a woman, a person of color,

someone with a lower income, a cosmopolitan, and/or an immigrant. Although the new flâneur often maintains an air of detachment while walking through the city, one can still empathize with and feel inspired or disturbed by the way that a place looks through unfamiliar eyes.

Contemporary Anglophone African writers who I believe have “hacked” the flâneur figure, such as Teju Cole and Dinaw Mengestu, are producing multilayered narratives of urban life for a global audience. No longer does the flâneur figure always take the form of a white, bourgeois male on his introspective journey through the aesthetically pleasing parts of the city. Despite Benjamin’s idea that urban street congestion and mass consumption killed the leisurely flâneur, the contemporary Anglophone African migrant flâneur is able to adapt to the new environment while maintaining a detached, observant attitude.

The African migrant flâneur in the Western city also offers a type of postcolonial critique. The Western reader in particular may initially view the new flâneur’s narrative as an opportunity for an escapist fantasy into the mind of a postcolonial “Other.” Yet, one is often transported along with the flâneur from places of aesthetically pleasing, poetic descriptions to grittier moments of suffering and disillusionment. Beneath the narrator’s seemingly casual observations about local architecture and fellow pedestrians, the reader can access the flâneur’s fragmented sense of personal identity, cosmopolitan desires, and laborious negating of past traumas. His or her personal journey through the streets prompts readers to reflect upon how old, global power structures and divisions have impacted the landmarks, neighborhoods, cultures, and individuals within a specific city. As masters of luring

and surprising the reader, these contemporary Anglophone African Boom writers effectively challenge audiences to question classic intellectual theories on cosmopolitanism, double-consciousness, and trauma, in addition to local, non-academic concerns about urban development and historical whitewashing. Although they may seem like a person of leisure, the contemporary Anglophone African flâneur is engaging readers with the productive, necessary work of cultural criticism in an increasingly globalized world.

Chapter 3: Hacking the Griot : From Soothsayer to Clickbaiter

“[The griot] emerges as a “time-binder,” a person who links past to present and serves as a witness to events in the present, which he or she may convey to persons living in the future.”—Thomas A. Hale, *Griots and Griottes: Masters of Words and Music*

“Sometimes she wrote some posts expecting ugly responses, her stomach tight with dread and excitement, but they would draw only tepid comments. Now that she was asked to speak at roundtables and panels, on public radio and community radio, always identified simply as The Blogger, she felt subsumed by her blog. She had become her blog.”—Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, *Americanah*

“You see, every oppressor knows that wherever one word is joined to another word to form a sentence, there’ll be revolt. That is our work, the media: to refuse to be silenced, to encourage legitimate criticism wherever we find it.”—Helon Habila, *Waiting for an Angel*

Within the global blogosphere and broader world of media publication, the figure of the popular writer often evokes a unique persona. By capturing heartfelt stories, exposing hidden truths, and employing an accessible style, the writer can engage readers in a persuasive way. In contemporary Anglophone African literature, the figure of the writer as a protagonist in a novel has become a popular choice. J.M. Coetzee’s *Elizabeth Costello* (2003), Sarah Ladipo Manyika’s *In Dependence* (2008), and Helon Habila’s *Oil on Water* (2008), just to name a few, all chronicle the lives, observations, and writings of characters who are authors. Although it is obvious that the authors of these novels may draw upon personal experience when creating these protagonists, I am also interested in how the writer character serves as a fitting conduit between the world of the author and that of the reader. How does the Anglophone African author, through the eyes of the writer-protagonist, capture an environment and reveal certain truths for the readers to internalize and pass on?

In this chapter, I consider how the griot, a classic African oral storyteller and literary trope, becomes reimagined as a blogger in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah* (2013) and as a journalist in Helon Habila's *Waiting for an Angel* (2002). As characters document their interactions with people, narrate intriguing stories, uncover harsh realities, and strategically appeal to audiences in the hopes of a profit, these contemporary writer characters harken back to the griot storytellers who performed for their royal or diplomatic patrons. Although the griots have become less essential over time for purposes of political diplomacy, historical documentation, and entertainment, I argue that contemporary Anglophone African authors like Adichie and Habila have transformed the griot character—making the figure even more vibrant, engaging, and informative for the twenty-first-century global literary audience. Transcending the conventional boundaries between orality and literacy, the neo-griot lures Western and African audiences alike with their approachable and globally resonant narratives. Readers have much to learn from this Afropolitan figure who travels to other countries, investigates different trends, and/or interviews locals. Because this neo-griot character can be especially honest about the injustices that he or she witnesses, the contemporary global reader eventually gains something that classic griots could not always depict: a harsh awareness of the taboo stories that traditional patrons would not want to be passed on. Instead of a patron, today's neo-griot needs the reader to be more critical and self-aware. Is the hacked neo-griot truly an honest soothsayer, or a clickbaiter striving for the audience's attention and possible donations? This question, which also reflects the ambiguous relationship between the Afropolitan author and his or her readers, will underscore the premise of

this chapter. I aim to unravel how the neo-griot figure challenges readers to be more skeptical of dominant narratives about Africa, develop a deeper connection with new African literature, and think more critically about their roles as consumers of African stories.

In order to understand how the contemporary blogger or journalist figure represents a new kind of griot, a consideration of the relationship between orality and literacy is necessary. It is well-documented that the rich practice of African oral storytelling represents a popular topic of research in modern African literary and communication studies. Twentieth-century authors such as D.O. Fagunwa, Amos Tutuola, and Ben Okri have all incorporated narrative iterations of centuries-old Yoruba oral tradition into their written works. One may argue that oral and written communication in storytelling are mutually exclusive to some degree. Walter Ong distinguishes between the “primary orality” of a completely oral communication with a live audience and “secondary orality” associated with print and electronic forms of communication technologies (Ong 10-11). While this primary orality may evoke images of the distant past, Eileen Julien contends that one should not insist on establishing an oppositional or linear hierarchy between orality and literacy (*African Novels and the Question of Orality* 2). Rather than valorize the oral tradition as a purely African form of communication that belongs in a separate category from literacy, I agree with Julien’s implication that orality and literacy can overlap within the same conversation. Such a mindset will ideally encourage scholars to not regard the European novel as a kind of placeholder for literacy. Although the neo-griot writer is to some extent a literary iteration of the more traditional oral griot, I will also

explore how the neo-griot extends more participatory oral practices through interactions with comments on their blog posts and articles.

The griot figure has a significant cultural history in numerous African countries. The first mention of the griot dates back to 1352, when a Moroccan traveled to the Mali empire and found griots at the Mansa (i.e. King) Sulayman's court (Hale, *Griots and Griottes* 1). Although "griot" is a French term used to identify the Francophone bard-like performers in Mali, the Wolof word, "géwél" and Mandinka term, "jali," are also commonly associated with this same figure (Hale, "Roots" 251). The griots are not restricted to one region or nation on the continent, although their influence was greatest in North and West Africa. Traditional griots, many of whom were travelers, occupied parts of Mali, Niger, Senegal, Guinea, The Gambia, Ghana, and Nigeria, among other countries (Hale, *Griots and Griottes* 12). The two novels that I will analyze, *Americanah* and *Waiting for an Angel*, take place in Lagos, Nigeria to a large extent—where the classic griots did not have as strong of a presence. Nevertheless, as I will discuss further, the figure of the griot has become universalized and popularized to a large extent throughout the African diaspora. I see the hacked neo-griot as a more global character that has a unique resonance in contemporary Afropolitan literature. I will begin this chapter with a historical overview of the griot's evolution within African societies and the greater African diaspora. Then, I will analyze how the modern literary "neo-griot" figure represents a transformed version of the classic griot. By taking on a quasi-ethnographic approach to acquiring research and source material, composing engaging narratives that take on rather conversational or lyrical tones, and creatively engaging with intended

audiences, the neo-griot reinvents the classic oral griot to be an African cultural oracle and storyteller for a contemporary global audience.

A Jack of All Trades : The History of the Griot's Evolution

The traditional griot served in numerous political, cultural, and historical capacities. Their most widely known role is that of a praise singer, who memorizes and recites oral chants and legends before a live audience. Historically, the griots would perform for the nobility, but over time they have engaged more with the broader public in Africa and beyond. Many of them not only composed their own music and lyrics, but they also played a harp-like instrument called the kora. Within their praise songs, the griots often tell the histories of noble families—thereby serving as genealogists who preserved the memories of these family legacies. Because they were the keepers of this history, they appeared at most important societal functions—from births to weddings and beyond—and served as an official witness. Additionally, the griots became trusted advisors and diplomats on behalf of the nobility. Thomas Hale argues that they might have lent their services as translators or spokespeople in significant negotiations (*Griots and Griottes* 57), while Isabelle Leymarie points out that griots' extensive knowledge of family histories and local gossip could be employed as leverage against competing noble households (74). The griots could be seen as positive, multifunctional contributors to society on the one hand, but their obligation to know, report, and at times profit from everyone's business evoked some disdain from various people. This somewhat controversial status of the griot is of particular interest, for the modern-day African literary characters that I will analyze.

In 1778, a French colonial administrator named Le Brasseur described his observations of the West African griot in more detail as an “actor whose theatrical costume resembles that of Harlequin [...] The [griots] are liked and despised by people just like actors in Europe” (qtd. and trans. in Hale, “Roots” 252). This passage underscores the ambiguous status of the griot within African societies. According to a Wolof legend, the first mythical griot committed the grave crime of fratricide. Although he symbolically fell from grace because of this, he makes up for his transgressions by becoming an artist for the court and the public (Leymarie 23). Within and outside of Africa, however, the negative connotation of the griot persists. In France, words like “*griottage*” signify the low-end work of “empty praise or praise for pay” (Hale, *Griots and Griottes* 15).²⁸ This dual perception of the enigmatic griot figure will be of particular interest to this project, for the modern neo-griot also walks the fine line between a writer with journalistic integrity and someone who only writes what people want to hear in order to earn a profit.

Although griots are still living, respected members of their communities, the significance of their role within regal and governmental circles has declined over the years. Whereas griots once performed at all local political and personal milestone events in certain societies, public officials and renowned families eventually grew to see the employment of the griot as too excessive an expense for numerous occasions. Moreover, the gradual growth of literacy rates and written documentation of historical events, administrative affairs, literature, and the news threatened the essentiality of

²⁸ Traditional griots did not necessarily earn a salary, as it was their obligation and birthright to perform for local royals and nobles (Ashworth 92). However, as time has passed and neither the nobility nor the government provides their living essentials, many griots have turned to the public “praise-for-pay” model in order to earn a living.

the griot. As a result, the patrons gradually stopped paying for the griots' living expenses and calling upon them for advice in diplomatic affairs (Schulz 448). This led griots to seek other ways of making a living. In urban areas, some would perform in the city streets like modern-day buskers, which Ousmane Sembène depicted in his short film, *Borom Sarret* (1963). For a time, select griots also tried to persuade wealthy families to hire them as praise-singers or advisors. However, potential patrons had not established the traditionally long-term, trustworthy bonds with these griots and many therefore questioned the credibility of their narratives (Schulz 449). Although griots still offer an inherent cultural value to their communities, their once integral diplomatic roles are no longer essential for the state or the wealthier echelons of society in the twenty-first century. The popular writer neo-griots depicted in the novels that I examine, however, hack and revitalize the griot traditions for a new era.

While the griot occupied a rather centralized position within select African societies, the figure has gained widespread attention in the Western world within the past few decades. The primary catalyst for this phenomenon was Alex Haley's highly popular novel, *Roots: The Saga of an American Family* (1976), and the subsequent television miniseries, *Roots* (1977) and *Roots: The Next Generations* (1979). This account is not without controversy, for it was revealed that Haley plagiarized the story from *The African* (1967) and lacks concrete evidence to support his claims (Dugdale). Nonetheless, Haley claims he traveled to a remote Gambian village called Juffure in 1967. Here, a Mandinka griot (known as a *jali* in this region) named Alhaji Bai Konte informed him of his ancestral relationship to Kunta Kinte—who would become the protagonist of Haley's narrative. By telling the story of this encounter and

how the griot's tale inspired his novel in the second miniseries, Haley helped to introduce worldwide audiences to the griot figure (Hale, *Griots and Griottes* 1-2).²⁹ Since the late 1970s, the griot has been featured in numerous popular contexts—from Ababacar Samb Makharam's 1981 film, *Jom—ou l'histoire d'un peuple* (1981) to the contemporary African-American online news and blog community, *TheGrio.com* founded by NBC in 2009.³⁰ The griot has therefore been transformed from a localized, regional African figure to a globalized one that reflects the interests of the broader African diaspora.

As the griot's popularity grows, it is important to consider how the figure's depiction has evolved—as well as how the Afropolitan neo-griot borrows from historical and contemporary griot traits. Classic griots traditionally inherited their roles and prolonged their-lineage through intensive training. Today, however, one could be born a griot or choose to work as one for profit (Fofana 256). Some African griots who inherited their role, like Alhaji Papa Susso from the Gambia and Youssou N'Dour of Senegal, are still in practice and have transformed their praise-songs into popular world music that they share across the globe through world tours and album sales.³¹ Moreover, neo-griots come from a variety of personal, professional, and

²⁹ Thomas Hale regards the popularization of Haley's works as the "Roots phenomenon," drawing attention to the 1.5 million readers and 130 million viewers of his *Roots*-related projects (Pace 1992, Anonymous 1977 qtd. in Hale, "Roots" 249).

³⁰ Eva Jørholt indicates that the griot in Makharam's Senegalese film, *Jom—ou l'histoire d'un peuple*, helps to convey that he is but an individual witness who represents the entire community of people to whom he speaks (109).

³¹ Cornelia Panzacchi indicates that three types of griots exist today: the purists who study and perform in the same way that griots have done historically, those who have inherited the griot role but do not practice the profession at all, and those who have created a kind of hybrid griot profession that combines traditional and popular styles (192). The latter group may engage with broader global audiences by releasing music for profit and public consumption.

geographical backgrounds. Mary Carter Smith, Alice McGill, and Elmira M. Washington present themselves as Baltimore-based chef-griots who utilize food as a vehicle to engage customers with African diasporic stories, while Amiri Baraka identifies her narrator as a griot in her poetry collection, *Wise Why's Y's* (Hale, *Griots and Griottes* 4). The appropriation of the griot figure as an artist working with literary and visual media forms is not altogether a new phenomenon. Even twentieth-century writers like Aimé Césaire and Maryse Condé, as well as filmmakers like Ousmane Sembène, regarded themselves and others within their respective professions as griots (Hale, *Griots and Griottes* 322; Fofana 257). Such acclaimed African diasporic figures do resemble classic griots in the sense that they tell stories that inform and connect audiences. Through the use of new technologies and creative storytelling techniques, contemporary neo-griots are finding unique ways to expand upon a significant African tradition.³² The evolution of the griot necessitates a shift from what Ong calls primary orality to secondary orality to some degree (Ashworth 10), which replaces the direct audience communication with an indirect one.

Despite the fact that Alhaji Papa Susso and other griots recognize the broader appropriation of the griot term as a positive extension of Afrocentric tradition and culture (Ashworth 131-133), others feel that the word is now becoming too commodified. Speaking of the aforementioned news website called “The Griot,” Robin Rison Ashworth argues that the featured op-eds and news stories are primarily geared toward “redirecting the oppressive narrative history of the African American

³² Alhaji Papa Susso has released CDs, iTunes digital music downloads, and YouTube and other social media performances (Ashworth 22). Although the traditional griot would only convey stories orally before a local audience, without any technological mediation, some contemporary griots like Susso are embracing digital technologies in order to sustain and expand the tradition.

into contemporary narratives of professional and educational success” (42-43). In the process, Ashworth claims that such sites significantly reduce the complex, multifaceted role of the griot to a simple conveyer of Afrocentric stories and news (43). There is always the danger that the fluid appropriation of the griot figure will erase the historical and cultural specificity of their nature and function.

I may run the risk of this same type of reductionist classification when I identify contemporary popular blogger and journalist characters in Afropolitan literature as griots. After all, these neo-griots are quite different from the classic figure. However, I see value in examining how these griot-like figures communicate stories, truths, and advice to their readers. The neo-griots may not recite classic praise songs or epics, but as Jan Jansen argues, the memorization and performance of these songs were not even the most important responsibilities of the griots. Jansen emphasizes that “good speech skills,” “construction of metaphors,” and interest in “social memory” (38) all represented even more valuable griot talents, which the neo-griots that I examine have skillfully appropriated in their writing. Furthermore, as Walter J. Ong asserts, West African griots have always adjusted their narratives to some extent depending on their audience. If performing on behalf of the nobility, the griots would likely praise this family (Ong 48). Likewise, if asked to lend their services at a military-related event, the griots would address triumphant war stories. The gradual move toward more literary and digital modes of information transmission does not signal the death of the traditional griot. Rather, the neo-griot’s use of these technologies signals yet another way in which the griot has successfully adapted over time. While hacking the classic griot figure to symbolize a literary trope, Afropolitan

writers are permitting global readers to potentially reconnect with the art of African storytelling in a relatable way.

As previously mentioned, the neo-griot can assume different forms—including storytellers, musicians, poets, chefs, writers, and more. For the purposes of this project, I am most interested in how the popular writer epitomizes a new version of the classic griot. In *Americanah*, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's blogger protagonist, Ifemelu, I claim acts as a neo-griot. The potential turn toward blogging represents a natural progression for the griot, for news and opinion blogs have become rather popular in various African cities. Nigeria in particular, where *Americanah* partially takes place, has seen a significant increase in internet, social media, and blog use. Nigerianblogawards.com reported that 885 blogs existed in Nigeria in July 2011, and bloggers often use their platforms to spread news and personal stories to niche audiences (Akoh and Jagun 36-38).³³ The number of Nigerian blogs has continued to rise over time, and some full-time bloggers like gossip writer Linda Ikeji receive hundreds of thousands of page views per day. Even more localized journalists and storytellers who do not use contemporary digital technologies, like Lomba in Helon Habila's *Waiting for an Angel*, are also mimicking the actions of griots to some extent as they search for the truth and aim to communicate these stories to an audience in an informative and sometimes even lyrical or metaphoric manner. What becomes lost in the direct oral transmission of

³³ Around this same time in 2010, the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) indicated that nearly 50 million Nigerians were internet users (Adenekan, "Transnationalism and the Agenda of African Literature" 135), which constituted about 40 percent of the total number of internet users on the African continent (Akoh and Jagun 16). As digital technologies become more widespread and popular throughout Africa, especially in the urban areas, the reliance on bloggers and online journalists will continue to rise.

stories is regained in other forms of audience interaction—letters to the writer from readers, viewer comments on blog posts, etc. Moreover, while the traditional griot often focused on retelling and preserving ancient stories of the past, the neo-griot uniquely fuses the past with the present in a way that creatively engages readers within and outside of Africa. I do not wish to argue that all journalists and bloggers are necessarily griots, but I see significant comparisons between the griot and the representations of the writer in twenty-first-century Anglophone African novels like *Americanah* and *Waiting for an Angel*. I seek to explore how these popular writers are revitalizing the griot figure to be even more culturally resonant and interactive with their audiences. At the same time, I will show how the creators of these neo-griots—the Afropolitan writers themselves—function as new types of griot-like cultural informants for global readers.

The Griot Blogger : Ifemelu's Local and Transnational Exchanges in Americanah

In *Americanah*, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie tells the story of a young Nigerian woman named Ifemelu who immigrates to the U.S. to attend college. She pursues a couple of serious romantic relationships and becomes a successful blogger. But, after thirteen years in the U.S. she realizes that she would rather move back to Nigeria. The title of the novel, as Serena Guarracino notes, is “a mock epithet for been-tos” (12), or Africans who have been abroad. The reader first notices this reference when Ifemelu’s childhood friend Ranyinudo remarks that their friend Ginika, who is going abroad, will “come back and be a serious Americanah” (Adichie 78). By titling her novel *Americanah*, Adichie playfully acknowledges that Ifemelu’s

story is a twist on the classic Anglophone African “been-to” story of an African’s migration to (and, in some cases, return from) a Western country. In some ways, Ifemelu’s migration story mirrors that of Adichie herself, for they both immigrate to the U.S. for educational purposes, live in a few of the same cities for some time (Hartford, Baltimore, and Princeton), and have careers as writers (Coffey 156). Although Ifemelu is not an autobiographical representation of Adichie, I would argue that Adichie is a griot author who tells her global audience stories about being an African in America via the perspective of Ifemelu, the griot blogger. I will demonstrate how Ifemelu captures the spirit of the griot in three distinctive ways. First, she is a traveler who shares her stories with diverse audiences, but in her heart she always remains loyal to her local community—where she returns in the end. Second, she employs a realist, ethnographic style of storytelling that documents her present history. Third, she informs fellow non-American Black people about the history of African Americans and their interactions with other members of the Black diaspora in America. By using her blog as a platform to share her truths that many others might be too timid to voice publicly, as well as taking note of users’ comments and interactions with her posts, Ifemelu effectively makes the classic griot ~~to be~~ more transnational and technologically savvy.

Americanah is a non-linear novel that begins around the time that Ifemelu has made the decision to move back to Nigeria after having lived in the U.S. for thirteen years. Before we follow her journey home, the novel jumps backward to when she was a young girl in Nigeria—chronicling her life there and migration to the U.S. It is interesting that we are first introduced to Ifemelu during a time when she is rather

disillusioned by the “American dream” narrative and desires to move back home to her country of origin. The reader therefore does not follow Ifemelu’s journey on the traditional path of numerous African “been-to” novels, where the naïve protagonist looks forward to living abroad and doesn’t experience the sense of alienation until the climax. According to Serena Guarracino, Adichie’s unconventional storytelling structure “allows for a double take on many of the character’s experiences as a black migrant in the US, so that the reader confronts the young Ifemelu’s sense of bewilderment and emotional pain together with the older Ifemelu’s more distanced elaboration of the same episodes and issues” (13). This argument underscores how the neo-griot can creatively portray the personal experiences of migration using literary techniques that the purely oral griot cannot. Although the audience may not directly hear the stories from the neo-griot’s mouth, the jarring nonlinear perspective allows one into the complex, fragmented mind of the migrant.

The conceptual inspiration for Ifemelu’s first blog is detailed in chapter 31, when she sends an email to her friend in Nigeria, Wambui, about how she had witnessed numerous racially sensitive images and actions in her daily life in the United States. Feeling frustrated by the fact that she did not feel comfortable with voicing her concerns in public—especially to her white boyfriend, Curt—she pours her heart out to Wambui, who responds with, “This is so raw and true. More people should read this. You should start a blog” (366). Taking this advice, Ifemelu starts a new Wordpress blog that she initially titles *Raceteenth or Curious Observations by a Non-American Black on the Subject of Blackness in America*.³⁴ Interspersed within

³⁴ “Raceteenth” represents a hybridization of the subjects of “race” and the African-American “Juneteenth” cultural holiday celebrating the abolition of slavery in the United States on June 19th,

various chapters, the blog posts enrich the novel with Ifemelu's personal observations of African-American life from a non-American Black perspective. These reflections read like the interjections of the neo-griot who offers particularly informative insights as a double-conscious migrant and a Black person in the United States.

As a migrant, Ifemelu resembles the traveling griot who would collect and spread stories across a region. Although traditional griots are most often associated with a localized West African milieu, they traveled on occasion to perform for patrons and audiences in different communities (Ashworth 48). Because the traditional griots moved around often, his or her sense of cosmopolitanism proved to be distinctive within their local societies. Thomas Hale indicates that the griots "appear as both insiders and outsiders" (*Griots and Griottes* 206) due to the fact that they are especially knowledgeable about local families but also integrate themselves within foreign communities as they spread their narratives. In *Americanah*, Ifemelu similarly occupies this liminal existence of the African griot who travels abroad. In one of her blog posts, "Traveling While Black," she addresses the sense of double-consciousness that she and other Black diasporans feel when visiting certain countries that are not predominantly Black. Quoting her African-American friend, she writes:

They tell you in the guidebooks what to expect if you're gay or if you're a woman. Hell, they need to do it for if you're recognizably black. Let traveling black folk know what the deal is [...] People act funny when I'm walking to the first-class line at the airport. Kind of funny, like you're making a mistake, you can't look like that and fly first class. I go to Mexico and they're staring at me (410).

1865. She later changes the title to *Raceteenth, or Various Observations About American Blacks (Those Formerly Known as Negroes) by a Non-American Black*. She decides to add "Those Formerly Known as Negroes" in parentheses after a conversation with her father, who casually uses the term "American Negro" to classify American Blacks. Ifemelu jokingly chides her father that this dated term is no longer used, before modifying her blog title. As Meredith Coffey argues, Ifemelu alters the title in order to appeal to an African audience who might be more familiar with the "Negro" word and may need to be informed that this terminology is dated (186).

In this post, Adichie draws attention to the unspoken problems faced by Black travelers and migrants. While echoing the sentiments of various African-American friends throughout her post, she assembles a short series of collected stories—much like the traveling griot would do. Classic griots may have felt a similar sense of being an outsider when traveling to various villages and regions. The contemporary neo-griot experiences this perception of being an “Other” even more evidently as a Black traveler in mostly non-Black spaces. The focus of Ifemelu’s blog on race in relation to migration is especially fitting, because the contemporary Afropolitan neo-griot is no longer as interested in stories about localized familial relations and wartime accomplishments as she is in the day-to-day encounters between Black diasporans and others she meets abroad.

Griots expand their repertoires and audiences by traveling abroad, but they always make a triumphant and lasting return home. After spending time with twentieth-century Mande griots, Manthia Diawara remarks how the griots’ performances continually encourage audiences to reflect upon their West African ancestral past and home. She notes,

Despite our attempts to catch up with the modern world, they have trapped us in a narrative of return [...] We are like disenfranchised clans when we travel overseas; foreigners have no idea how noble we are, how much history we have. We say that no matter how well we do abroad, we belong in Mande; our homeland is Mande. We must return to build our homeland; we must return to claim our inheritance (26-27).

This griot sentiment of wanting to return home to West Africa and build a life there after spending time abroad resonates with Ifemelu. While browsing Nigerian websites, blogs, and social media profiles, she feels a sense of jealousy whenever she

sees the stories of Nigerians returning home after living abroad for some time. She thinks to herself, “They were living her life. Nigeria became where she was supposed to be, the only place she could sink her roots in without the constant urge to tug them out and shake off the soil” (7). What makes her story stand out from those of historical griots is that when she returns home, both she and Nigeria have changed to some extent. Upon her initial arrival in Nigeria, she remarks how “Lagos assaulted her” (475), as she is particularly surprised by the rudeness, dilapidation, and begging that she sees in the city (475-477). Anxious about adjusting back to Nigerian life, she thinks, “She was no longer sure what was new in Lagos and what was new in herself” (478). It is evident that her return after thirteen years in the United States is a much different and more daunting transition than it was for the classic griots who would come home after a few weeks or months in another (likely African) country. Nevertheless, Ifemelu gradually learns to embrace Nigeria and become an even more poetic writer in the process.

After moving to Nigeria, Ifemelu starts a new blog called *The Small Redemptions of Lagos*, which focuses on her observations of the people and places she encounters in Lagos. While her previous blog was more concentrated on race relations and the frustrations that she and others experienced as Black diasporic people in the United States, her Nigerian blog has a more sentimental and melodic tone. In one post, she writes about how a group of men “walk under a cluster of trees which, only hours ago, housed the livelihoods of food hawkers [...] But now the shacks are gone. They are erased, and nothing left, not a stray biscuit wrapper, not a bottle that once held water, nothing to suggest that they were once there” (585). This

elegiac passage captures Ifemelu's observational reflections upon what is lost, which also relates to her own poignant feelings of loss. It is also this post that receives the anonymous comment: "This is like poetry" (584), which she suspects was written by her childhood love, Obinze. By starting this new life and blog in Nigeria, Ifemelu reconnects with and embraces her past. She adopts a new style of writing that the person she loved most in Nigeria responds well to. As a neo-griot, Ifemelu may be more global as she migrates across farther distances, but she nonetheless mirrors the classic griot in her eventual return and reconnection with her home country in Nigeria.

In addition to bridging the national and global, Ifemelu reinvents the griot figure by modifying the traditional griot form of communication. Comparing the voice of a griot to that of a blogger must necessarily involve some disambiguation. As Ong argues, "the original voice of the oral narrator took on various new forms when it became the silent voice of the writer, as the distancing effected by writing invited various fictionalizations of the decontextualized reader and writer" (Ong 1977, 53-81 qtd in. Ong 1982, 146). Although there is more of a distance between the reader and writer than between the oral storyteller and listener, the literary neo-griot takes advantage of this distance to articulate more blunt yet necessary truths to an intended audience. Moreover, the readers of Adichie's novel can picture themselves and others as readers of Ifemelu's blog. This layered readership invites unique reimaginations of the relationship between the author and audience. One can infer that Ifemelu is addressing her immediate intended audience of African diasporic people, but within these blog posts we continually wonder if it is Adichie speaking to an African or

Western audience. The blog-within-a-novel form, coupled with the griot-like style of observational and often historically grounded storytelling, prompts a compelling discussion on the audience reception of the Anglophone African novel.

What is particularly compelling about the success of Ifemelu's blog (and Adichie's novel) is the fact that she simultaneously revives two "dead" forms: the ancient griot story and the blog. The griots' power in local affairs diminished over time, and their figurative societal death was effectively cemented in Niger in 1979, when President Seyni Kountché argued in his national address that griots were a waste of money and resources for both administrative and personal purposes (Hale, *Griots and Griottes* 14). Returning to the orality vs. literacy discussion, Samba Diop asserts that "the griots are doomed to disappear altogether because of new forms of entertainment such as cinema, radio, television, and videotape, but most of all because of the impact of schooling and literacy" (Diop 12, 43 qtd. in Kaschula and Diop 17). Unless they have the means to travel and disseminate their music across a wide variety of technological platforms, the contemporary griot will likely have to financially support oneself by taking on another job that is seen as more economically viable.³⁵ Likewise, the blog medium has declined in popularity since the mid-2000s. With the growing popularity of social media sites like Instagram and video content creation platforms such as YouTube, Jodi Dean argues that "[t]hroughout the ostensibly dead blogosphere, word spread rapidly that blogs had been killed by boredom, success, and even newer media" (33). The corporatization of blogging

³⁵ Griots have survived up until the present day throughout West Africa, but they are no longer the paid staff of royal families. Because some griots do continue to practice, Isabelle Leymarie distinguishes their legacy from the bards of medieval Europe who did not continue to practice after they were relinquished of their courtly duties (6).

became a concern for users seeking authentic content as well, with 70% of bloggers promoting brands by 2009 (Dean 34). Despite the fact that literacy essentially killed the griot, while video and micro-blogging killed the original blog, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie manages to revitalize both forms. As a neo-griot, the blog represents an ideal interactive medium for Ifemelu to communicate with her immediate audience, as well as the real-life audience of the novel. Through the blog, Ifemelu successfully tells the history of African Americans to others within the African diaspora, creates a collection of familiar character tropes, reestablishes the blog medium as a realist form for describing daily observations and takes on an ethnographic mode of storytelling.

Ifemelu communicates the historical and present struggles of African-Americans to her audience in a manner that is simultaneously critical and relatable. In one post entitled, “Friendly Tips for the American Non-Black: How to React to an American Black Talking About Blackness,” she writes, “Dear American Non-Black, if an American Black person is telling you about an experience about being black, please do not eagerly bring up examples from your own life...Everyone in the world has suffered. But you have not suffered precisely because you are an American Black” (403). She both addresses a non-Black audience while reassuring her Black readers. She understands that many Black people have encountered frustrations when trying to discuss personal racial issues with non-Black people, yet they may not feel comfortable voicing such concerns. Ifemelu becomes the voice for these Black people—the one who will commiserate with other Black and African diasporic readers while calling out non-Black people who do not understand that racial

suffering is not on an equal playing field in America.³⁶ Speaking to the non-Black people who might contend that their ancestors have suffered as well, she says, “what matters is you are American now and being American means you take the whole shebang, America’s assets and America’s debts, and Jim Crow is a big-ass debt” (404). Proceeding to list numerous scenarios in which African Americans are still often regarded as inferior to white people—from seeking a mortgage to applying for a job to driving a car—she aims to enlighten, overwhelm, and remind various readers of the African-American double-consciousness. She then closes her post with advice for her non-Black readers: “Try listening, maybe. Hear what is being said. And remember that it’s not about you...If you don’t understand, ask questions” (406). Although she reprimands non-Black readers who might improperly try to compare their struggles with the race-oriented ones faced by African Americans, Ifemelu also offers them a hand so that they can join the conversation about race in the USA. In one post such as this one, she is able to connect three distinctive groups: the African Americans whose experiences she is writing about, the non-Black Americans that she is addressing, and the non-American Blacks like herself who become inevitable participant-observers in American racial discrimination encounters while living in the

³⁶ Ifemelu’s blog echoes the sentiments of other popular race bloggers within the “Afrospear” or Black blogosphere (Pole 26). In her analysis of several race-oriented blogs by Black writers, Catherine R. Squires finds that the bloggers often commiserate with readers about discriminatory personal experiences or news stories, while also initiating productive or reflective discussions about the reality of a so-called “post-racial” America. In one post by Danielle Belton, author of the blog, *The Black Snob*, she recaps the story of the arrest of Henry Louis Gates for trying to enter his own home in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Belton compares the situation to her grandfather’s experience in the 1960s, when a police officer found it suspicious that he and his brother had a lot of furniture in their truck bed. She argues that in their encounters with police officers, Black people “are supposed to be *apologetically black* [saying statements such as] *I’m so very sorry for being born black in America. How can I make this up to you, Mr. Officer*” (qtd. in Squires 182). This personal, informative, and political tone is similar to that of Ifemelu’s. Both of these “Afrospheric” or race bloggers discuss realities that are often not fully addressed in the mainstream media, as well as employ a style that might disturb but not alienate readers.

U.S. She represents a successful neo-griot in her attempt to inform others about a contentious yet interconnected racial history, while also seeking to unite a global audience in a necessary discussion about this history. She is not only telling her audience a story, but she encourages them to continue the conversation beyond the blog.

What also makes Ifemelu's blog appealing to the reader of the novel is its descriptive and observant realism. Although their narratives gradually incorporated more embellishments, the classic griots initially sought to develop unbiased, realist oral stories. Isabella Leymarie argues that because the griot is somewhat of a societal outsider, he or she becomes "the witness of exchanges that take place between individuals and groups" (149). The griot has always been a close observer and communicator of everyday life. In its conception in the early 1990s, the form of the blog (initially called a "weblog") was also intended to be a platform for documenting and presenting neutral information to all users. The first blog generated by Tim Berners-Lee in 1991 and numerous others that followed included "a log of links that chronicled visits to various websites" (Pole 10). As user-friendly blog sites with pre-programmed templates gained popularity in the early 2000s, such as LiveJournal, the number of blogs grew from about 50 total to several thousand—eventually reaching over 10 million blogs by 2005—and the blog form placed more emphasis on user commentary in conjunction with logging and documentation (Pole 10). At first, bloggers primarily supplemented their lists of logged website links with general summaries of their content. Since blogs have become more focused on the documentation of experiences, rather than links, various scholars have grown to

identify blogs as outlets for journalism, storytelling, and social engagement (Dean 42-45). It is with this technological evolution in mind that the blog form represents a fitting written successor to the classic griot's oral storytelling. Both mediums focus on the realistic documenting or logging of information and daily encounters in a way that is informative and engaging for audiences, both present and future.

By allowing readers to understand Ifemelu's world through the first-person blog device, as well as the third-person narration within the novel itself, self-described realist fiction writer Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie introduces a unique approach to realism that incorporates both African and Western genre elements. Ian Baucom argues that *Americanah* encompasses two types of literary realism, including "the sweeping historical vision Lukács attributed to the genre [...] and the painstaking attention to the details of everyday life..." As Baucom notes, much of Anglophone African fiction beginning with Chinua Achebe has concentrated on a realist depiction of human interaction and cultural practices. Such narratives permitted global audiences (particularly Westerners) to better understand what life was like in a part of the world that they had likely not traveled to and had only heard negative stories about in the headlines. However problematic this may be, popular Anglophone African novels and African works that have been translated into English have been interpreted by numerous Western readers as what Eileen Julien calls "an unmediated reflection of life in Africa" ("The Extroverted African Novel" 695) due to the accessibility of this fiction and lack of thorough African news coverage in the Western world. By acutely describing her observations of and encounters with people in the United States, Ifemelu (as the protagonist of the novel and narrator of the blog)

continues the tradition of African realism in a nuanced and surprising manner. Caroline Levine argues that *Americanah* revisits the trend of nineteenth and twentieth century realist novels, which often challenged readers' perceptions that quotidian activities were uninteresting. Rather than use literature as a means of escaping everyday life, realist fiction asks audiences to realize the extraordinary in the ordinary. Levine particularly compares Adichie's work to that of Charles Dickens. Dickens would focus on the daily lives of the nineteenth-century impoverished English children, who the people of London saw on the streets every day but typically disregarded. As Levine contends, "The crucial challenge for Dickens here is not just to make the ordinary feel shocking but also to make shocking the fact that it feels ordinary" (591). Echoing this sentiment, Yogita Goyal claims that the America we see through the eyes of Ifemelu (and Adichie) is simultaneously alarming and obvious—and alarming because these uncomfortable racial encounters are so obvious and recognizable, especially for African Americans ("Africa and the Black Atlantic" xiii). Through both the blog device and the novel, Adichie is able to emphasize the long-standing and ever-present realities of being Black in America. As a neo-griot, Ifemelu informs her African readers about what it's like to live abroad in the U.S., while also prompting her Western readers to confront and give more serious thought to the racial inequalities that constantly surround them but are rarely addressed.

Ifemelu nonchalantly yet emphatically discusses the overtness of racism in America in one blog post entitled, "Understanding America for the Non-American Black: A Few Explanations of What Things Really Mean." She includes a brief numerical list of certain concepts that have different tacitly known meanings for

white and Black Americans. Noting the distinctions between definitions of the word, “diversity,” she asserts, “If a white person is saying a neighborhood is diverse, they mean nine percent black people. (The minute it gets to ten percent black people, the white folks move out.) If a black person says diverse neighborhood, they are thinking forty percent black” (435-436). Like select nineteenth-and-twentieth-century realist writers, she calls attention to the evident yet rarely discussed reality of how diversity is perceived differently for people of dissimilar races, classes, and neighborhoods in America. Readers—especially non-Black ones—may not have seen someone articulate this known observation in such a direct, matter-of-fact way. As a result of Ifemelu’s blunt, realist, and griot-like narration of her observations, they can reflect upon the strange and uncomfortable nature that is their lived reality.

It is also valid to critique the fact that Ifemelu is able to make such statements about Black American experiences and the indifferent U.S. acceptance of racial inequality in her blog because she is viewing American society from her perspective as an outside observer. As Shan, the Black American sister of Blaine, argues, “She’s writing from the outside [...] It’s all quaint and curious to her. So she can write it and get all these accolades and get invited to talks. If she were African-American, she’d just be labeled as angry and shunned” (418). Yogita Goyal also points out that this criticism is true of the novel itself, for Adichie is writing about the experiences of someone who, like her, is an African living in the U.S. Goyal argues that despite this privilege that both Ifemelu and Adichie have as outsiders who can perhaps speak more freely and safely about American racial issues than African-Americans, “the novel self-consciously foregrounds its own reception as a new kind of black novel, an

exploration of blackness that does not highlight injury or trauma, but focuses on romantic love, hair, and nostalgia” (“Africa and the Black Atlantic” xiv). Although Ifemelu’s (and Adichie’s) writings on race in America do not carry the same weight or subjective experience that a work by an African-American author would, they nonetheless succeed in creating unique African diasporic literature. As neo-griots for the twenty-first century, they challenge the expectations that informative writing on the subject of race or the African diasporic experience must necessarily involve violence, or a somber or didactic tone.

By using her blog as a platform to describe African-American life in both a terse and poignant way, Ifemelu grows to become an ethnographic griot blogger to some extent. An ethnographer typically represents an outsider who travels to a different country in order to become a participant observer and analyst of a particular society. Although Ifemelu is not an academic writer like an ethnographer, she is documenting and interpreting her outside observations in a way that somewhat reflects the ethnographic mode of research. The griot has been tied to the ethnography profession as well. Paul Stoller argues that ethnographers and filmmakers are contemporary griots, an idea that the Songhay griots agreed with. In his view, the ethnographic account of a present sociocultural history should reflect the classic griot’s “historically conscientious and respectfully decentered conception,” while maintaining “the tension between the political and the poetic” (354). Ifemelu’s descriptive and political posts underscore this kind of tension espoused by the ethnographic griot. Her migratory “fieldwork” for the blog consists of her daily commutes through the city and encounters with people while traveling. As it is

described in the novel, “she would often sit in cafés, or airports, or train stations, watching strangers, imagining their lives, and wondering which of them were likely to have read her blog” (5). Her blog is centered more on others than on herself. This is something that causes some tension in her relationship with Blaine, who feels that she should use her blog as a vehicle for more thoughtful academic-style discourse. But, as Ifemelu argues, “I don’t want to explain, I want to observe” (386). As a neo-griot, she is more interested in observing, documenting, and revealing this information to her audience—who can then interpret the experiences as they wish. By remaining a relatively anonymous figure in society, she can fairly easily blend into the crowd and become a participant-observer. Other times, however, her identity as a Black person, an African woman, and simply a fellow passenger in a small space cause her to stand out more. While waiting in line at the grocery with a bag of chips, a man tells her, “Fat people don’t need to be eating that shit” (6). Like the Black flâneur in America, the Black (and “fat”) woman griot in America cannot always simply blend in. The offensive interruption of her anonymous shopping experience and observation of American life still worked to her professional advantage to an extent, for she planned to write a blog post about this brief encounter.

Ifemelu’s quasi-ethnographic, realist approach to blogging is successful in America, but she realizes that she must change her style once she returns to Nigeria and starts her *Small Redemptions of Lagos* blog. After Ifemelu submits one post about a woman whose expenses are all paid by her wealthy lover, her friend, Rayinudo, calls her out for obviously writing the post about her. Although Ifemelu initially dismisses privacy concerns, Rayinudo remarks upon the hypocritical and judgmental

nature of Ifemelu's comments in the post, such as, "I worry that she will end up like many women in Lagos who define their lives by men they can never truly have..." (521). When Ifemelu blogs about her friends in Lagos, and not strangers in America, she can no longer simply observe and write about others under the general safety of anonymity. Her later posts from Lagos are often less focused on the people she encounters, and more on general behaviors and environments she observes. In these entries, "She wrote of a fashion show she attended, how the model had twirled around in an ankara skirt [...] She wrote about the views from her bedroom window [...] the waterlogged neighborhood crammed with zinc houses" (585). Although the blog is no less observational, Ifemelu's tone becomes less condescending, matter-of-fact, or tongue-in-cheek. She no longer seeks to inform African and broader global audiences about racism in the U.S. As she phrases it, she is now blogging "just about life" because "Race doesn't really work here" (586). Without the burden (and privilege) of being an outsider living in a foreign country, she develops a more relaxed less political writing style.³⁷ Returning to the conception of the realist writer as one who finds the extraordinary in the ordinary, Ifemelu is seeing her home country through fresh eyes as someone who has lived abroad for over a decade. Her insights are therefore fresh and valuable to fellow Nigerians who may overlook certain puzzling

³⁷ As a part of the promotional materials for *Americanah*, a public blog entitled *Small Redemptions of Lagos* was released with several published entries. Although it has not been confirmed that Adichie herself wrote these posts, they appear to be written in a similar style as the post excerpts from the novel. Ifemelu blogs about everything, from her relationship with Obinze to skincare advice to the positive African response to the Ebola crisis (contradicting the Western savior narrative). She also transforms her blog from an individualistic project to a collective one, for she invites several friends to be guest bloggers. The blog supports a positive emphasis on the Nigerian and greater African diasporic community. The more politically oriented posts often reassure African audiences that their efforts and experiences are significant and should not be whitewashed by dominant Western narratives that Africans are all starved, diseased, and helpless.

or remarkable images during their daily commutes. By focusing almost exclusively on the colorful sights and experiences of Lagos, rather than on racial and class conflict, Ifemelu is now directing the conversation to fellow Nigerians, rather than to a global audience necessarily. She is the griot who has happily returned from abroad and can continue to share her experiences with her smaller and primarily local community.

Griots and bloggers differ in how they create their content with audience expectations in mind. Because traditional griots can physically see their audiences' faces and reactions, they are also quick to alter their stories or performance styles to fit the mood of the environment (Goody 10). Ifemelu does not have this advantage and must more simply write what she thinks is best for her and her predictive audience. However, there are times when she does try to conceal parts of herself, such as when she writes of an encounter "as the experience of someone else, careful not to let on whether she was African or Caribbean" (256). This is because she only reveals to her audience that she is a non-American Black, and she likely wants to represent and appeal to a broader African diasporic collective. The more that she confesses about her identity, the less anonymous she becomes—which increases the likelihood of people recognizing her and potentially weakening the authenticity of her chance encounters with strangers. Relatedly, Adichie herself contends with diverse audience expectations as she composes her novel. She states in an interview with Aaron Bady that some Nigerians will not understand the references she is making about American culture and vice-versa. Additionally, she risks the fact that some audiences may be

offended by Ifemelu's sarcastic writing approach to her encounters with Westerners and Africans alike.

In addition to understanding and anticipating one's audience, griots must interact with their audiences in distinctive ways. The traditional griot is gifted in the art of facilitating a lasting impact on listeners, encouraging what Amadou T. Fofana calls the creation of an "emotional relationship that binds audience and performer together" (259). The griot desires for listeners to learn about and remember the presented historical content, but the performance is key in helping the audience to "witness" the telling of this history and read the emotions in the griot's movements. The collective as opposed to private consumption of this knowledge is important as well, for the audience members are all essentially held captive together for the duration of the unique performance and can discuss the events afterward. Moreover, some griots even encourage their audience members to join in during certain chants, which further facilitates the memorization of historical details (Wynchank 13). In comparison, engagement with a blog audience is also an interactive experience, but bloggers enable community interaction in a different manner from the classic griot. Online communities can be just as if not more social than a real-life audience. This is because they have virtually unlimited time to respond to others, and they may feel more comfortable doing so in a shared space that is largely anonymous (Okome 287). Those who respond to blog posts can help to continue the discussion that the original post raises. This interaction between author and audience cannot be achieved so easily in the original context of the performative griot. Such a direct response from the audience can both enlighten and disturb the author. Reflecting upon the comments

of one user, Ifemelu notes, “Readers like SapphicDerrida, who reeled off statistics and used words like ‘reify’ in their comments, made Ifemelu nervous, eager to be fresh and to impress...” (5-6). Whereas the griot receives nonverbal cues from the audience about how well the performance is going, Ifemelu reads much more direct written feedback that makes her feel self-conscious. The comments can be especially anxiety-inducing for people like Ifemelu, who prefer to be a more observational than debate-oriented commentator.³⁸ The digital griot can more easily understand what certain vocal audience members think about the author’s content. However, the griot can also fall into the trap of taking these comments too seriously or wanting to write more for these users than for oneself.

This concern about authenticity is shared by both classic and contemporary griots. The Gambian equivalents of griots, called *jali*, were sometimes called “beggars” because they were seen as people who would conjure and exaggerate stories for a profit (Ebron 129), and Isabelle Leymarie similarly argues that certain societies regarded the griot as “a trickster ready to use any means to con people out of their money” (128). Ifemelu similarly has to contend with such criticisms from herself, her readers, and her partners. She relishes the fact that she’s receiving more worldwide blog viewers and offers for paid sponsorship and speaking opportunities on a regular basis. However, in order to continue to grow and support herself, she sometimes feels that she must present herself in a way that her audience expects.

³⁸ Comparing Ifemelu to Teju Cole’s *Julius*, Jasmin Back points out that Ifemelu only deletes explicit comments instead of responding to them. Just as Julius prefers to walk the city streets and narrate his observations of the people without directly talking to them, Ifemelu applies a similar logic to her online community as she narrates select comments for the readers of the novel without actually replying to the comments (Back 43). This shows that even though the digital griot can moderate and be impacted by user feedback, they can still be more like the traditional griot in the way that they maintain a degree of distance from the audience.

Moreover, if she wants to branch out and attract a larger readership, she could run the risk of resorting to “clickbait” techniques that garner more viewers in overly spammy or solicitous ways. Ifemelu succumbs to this baiting attitude to some extent. She remarks because her audiences at the “diversity workshops [and] multicultural talks” are not familiar with her blog and only seek to hear inspirational commentary, she just fed them what she believed they wanted to hear from a prominent race blogger (377). Such an attitude frustrates her boyfriend, Blaine, because he laments the idea that she sees the blog and all the financial opportunities that stem from it as all part of a capitalistic endeavor. He begins to view the blog as a “game that you don’t really take seriously” (427), rather than an authentic representation of Ifemelu’s politically active lived experience. Both old and new griots have to contend with the fact that they earn money based on the assumption that they are effective storytellers. Even though one can assume that their narratives are true, the question of authorial authenticity becomes more apparent as our globalized world becomes increasingly reliant on transnational capitalism.

Although someone in Ifemelu’s position may eventually receive backlash for trying to please a broader Western audience and “sell out” for more sponsorships and recognition, there is also potential to write more honestly from her personal perspective. As Shola Adenekan and Helen Cousins argue, “cyberspace presents an opportunity for the making of an authentic identity, one that is Nigerian and enshrined in ‘global’ middle-class values, of which individuality is an important aspect” (5). The desire to appeal to readers with certain values while maintaining a sense of uniqueness can be challenging, but Ifemelu manages to find such a balance when she

begins her new blog in Nigeria. For this project, she forgoes racial discussions for more observational pieces that include short articles, photos, and interviews relating to local Nigerian issues. With proposed entries that include “a fashion article about clothes that women could actually afford” (514), an interview series called “Lagos from an Insider” (545), and a travel venture involving photos and descriptions pertaining to each state of Nigeria (539), she is much more interested in positive, engaging representations of her local and national environment. Instead of establishing a goal of informing and persuading readers of the cultural idiosyncrasies faced by non-American Black people living in the U.S., she seeks to unify her Nigerian readers in a project of a mutual (re)discovery of their country. After making this blog a reality, she appears to be content as a creator, without worrying about audience expectations or reactions.

Americanah thoroughly explores the rewards and challenges of being a neo-griot blogger who can directly review and engage with audience feedback in the digital sphere. By extension, Adichie uses her layered narrative to communicate her observations of and frustrations with American and Nigerian society. The use of the blogger as a contemporary replication of the griot trope permits Adichie to hack African literature. Through the dual narration of Ifemelu’s blog posts and her actions within the novel itself, American and Nigerian readers especially can see layered critiques of their own societies. In *Americanah*, Adichie incorporates and challenges the archetypal African “been-to” story, where an African immigrant travels to the West in search of a better life and suffers from a sense of disillusionment about assimilating into the “American dream” narrative. Rarely does the protagonist move

back to Africa in such novels, but Ifemelu finds professional and personal solace upon her return. Adichie thereby asks other contemporary Afropolitan writers to think more deeply about engaging with local African audiences, rather than solely writing with the West in mind. In this way, the African writer is more akin to the griot who gathers research and spreads one's stories to a larger audience while abroad, but always returns home to Africa and primarily serves the community there.

The Griot Journalist : Lomba's Non-Linear Political Reawakening in Waiting for an Angel

In addition to the blogger, it is worth discussing how other types of writers—such as the journalist, diarist, and poet—are also griots for the modern era. Lomba, the protagonist of Helon Habila's critically acclaimed first novel, *Waiting for an Angel* (2002), practices all three of these forms of writing as he struggles to communicate his lived reality to both himself and a broader public. The chapters of this non-linear novel each focus on the dilemmas of different characters who are somehow related to Lomba, and the stories all take place during the years of General Sani Abacha's brutal military rule over Nigeria during the 1990s.³⁹ Because of the significant restrictions placed upon the press and creative writers within this period, it was nearly impossible—and even deadly in the case of intellectuals such as Ken

³⁹ Habila further indicates in this afterword that although the military arrived in the 1960s to help restore order in the postcolony and curb ethnonational conflicts, dissent only became stronger. Nigerians witnessed the brutal Nigeria-Biafra Civil War from 1967-1970, as well as a series of coups. General Abacha's brief yet merciless five-year regime from 1993-1998 was arguably the worst in terms of its censorship and punishment of the Nigerian people (225-228).

Saro-Wiwa—to publicly address the horrors inflicted by the Nigerian government. In the novel’s afterword, Habila states that during this time, “Most intellectuals had only three options: exile, complicity, or dissent” (228), with the latter being the most perilous option. In the aftermath of the Abacha regime, African writers have widely discussed their experiences among fellow Africans and international audiences (Egya 110). Published four years after Abacha’s death, Habila captures the internal and external conflicts of a writer during this era who resembles the author himself to an extent. Through the use of multiple historical, community-oriented narrative techniques; emphasis on the truthful and creative documentation of society; and commitment to protecting the interests of future generations of Africans, Habila crafts a novel that serves as a contemporary griot’s story.

In this work of historical fiction, *Waiting for an Angel* takes creative narrative liberties while simultaneously drawing attention to real-life figures and events. As Rebecca Fasselt also points out, characters in the novel discuss the suspicious deaths of General Yar Adua and businessman M.K.O. Abiola (Habila 43), as well as the assassinations of writer Ken Saro-Wiwa (160) and *Newswatch* editor Dele Giwa (Habila 199 qtd. in Fasselt, “Reassessing Thematic Crossings...” 37). The novel further references the arrests of the editors of the *Concord* and *Sunday Magazine* publications, in addition to the existence of a political resistance organization called the National Democratic Coalition or NADECO that meets secretly in Lagos (Habila 212). However, each of the characters that the seven chapters are named after represent fictional individuals and narratives. Habila himself describes the synthesis of fact and fiction in his novel as an endeavor to creatively

capture the real, resonant feeling of life in Nigeria during the Abacha administration, especially “the despair, the frenzy, the stubborn hope, but above all the airless prison-like atmosphere that characterized them” (Habila 229). Like the classic griot, he informs his audience of actual historical facts, while also presenting this information in a manner that appeals to the audience’s interest in a narrative they can relate to and more easily recall when passing down the story. In the words of David Cockley, Habila’s novel “does not attempt to rewrite the past but relies on learning the lessons of history for inspiration, not blame” (149). It is with this in mind that we can approach *Waiting for an Angel* as a historical fiction narrative that particularly gives Nigerian readers a sense of awareness about what has shaped their present political and literary moment.

The formal arrangement of Habila’s novel further resembles a series of interconnected stories that could have been narrated by a griot. The story begins at the end—with Lomba composing first-person diary entries as he serves his indefinite prison sentence for attending a political protest in Lagos. In each subsequent chapter, Habila presents the reader with different narrators, including an unknown person encountering the mythical Angel of Death in chapter three, a third-person omniscient narrator in various parts, and, in the sixth chapter, a young politically active man named Kela who encourages Lomba to join the protest. Thus, the reader does not fully learn how and why Lomba decided to participate in the demonstration until the novel almost reaches its end. Moreover, the novel experiments with different forms, as the first chapter includes several diary entries and poems, while chapter three replicates unsent love letters (or more diary entries) directed toward a lover named

Alice who ends up marrying a wealthier man. The final chapter concentrates on the third-person narration of “James,” the editor of *The Dial*—a publication that Lomba decides he wants to work for in the fifth chapter. This part documents Lomba’s attempt to help James flee from arrest after publishing a controversial anti-Abacha headline, as well as Lomba’s commitment to becoming a political writer in the short time before the reader knows he will attend the protest and get arrested. This non-linear, multi-narrator approach prompts the reader to understand the story of the Abacha regime from a variety of perspectives that each highlight political, personal, and even mythical aspects of the time period. The reader begins at the end of Lomba’s story in order to understand the surface level plot that he was arrested and imprisoned for protesting, and each subsequent chapter delves into the nuances of how even the most seemingly apolitical of writers might find themselves standing in solidarity with others in the community in the hope that they would finally receive justice.

The complex unpredictability of the novel’s narrative structure uniquely maintains a focus on Lomba—the writer who most closely resembles Habila himself—while also allowing other voices to tell different parts of the story in various forms. Rebecca Fasselt further considers the significance of the novel’s distinctive narrators, leading her to equate Habila’s work with what Brian Richardson calls a “multiperson narration” that alternates between different narrators and narrative voices while avoiding a dominant, centralized narrator (qtd. in Fasselt, “Reassessing Thematic Crossings...” 38). In Fasselt’s view, “Habila’s polyvocality thus defies the monovocality of the postcolonial ruler’s voice and fractures hegemonic ways of

seeing” (39). It is this focus on the collective multiplicity of voices, rather than on an individual narrator speaking for an entire community, that most notably connects Habila’s writing style to that of the griot’s speaking style. Even though Habila is the sole author of the book, just as the griot is the only speaker when communicating before an audience, both of these individuals seek to document, discuss, and directly engage with others in the local community. David Cockley compares *Waiting for an Angel* to works by first-generation Nigerian author Amos Tutola, for they both combine a series of short stories to form a novel. Moreover, Cockley argues that the narrative structure of Habila’s novel is reminiscent of oral storytelling, in the sense that the narrative “mixes past and present to abolish a firm conception of time” and “conveys a lack of ownership or authority over the stories, leaving them open to the idea that the characters could be any resident of the city” (166). As the writer of one of the first Nigerian novels depicting the Abacha years for a global audience, Helon Habila takes on the role of the griot in order to give readers a sense of the collective chaos and emotional turmoil experienced by Nigerians during this time. By framing the book in a series of interrelated yet non-linear stories, he permits the narrative to be consumed and retold in pieces—rather than as a single story by one “author.”

The first chapter of Habila’s novel, entitled “Lomba,” includes dated entries from Lomba’s 1997 prison diary.⁴⁰ Because it is such a personal type of writing, the diary form may initially seem antithetical to the traditional griot style of narrative, which is performed in front of a live audience. As Lomba indicates in his first entry, “Today I begin a diary, to say all the things I want to say, to myself, because here in

⁴⁰ The publisher’s note of *Waiting for an Angel* indicates that Habila originally published this chapter separately as a short story called “Love Poems” in a collection called *Prison Stories* (2000).

prison there is no one to listen” (13). With his acute descriptions of prisoner abuse, wardens’ unsteady command of spoken English, and poetic musings about a life of freedom, his writing may appear to be personal and unintended for a wider audience. Yet, punctuating these entries are third-person omniscient background details about when Lomba began the diary, when the diary was found, and other general comments about his whereabouts at the prison. This narrator concedes that there were numerous entries in the found diary, some of which included original and recited poems, letters, and soliloquies (16), but not all of these excerpts are included in the chapter itself. Therefore, the narrator carefully selects entries that tell a concise story and are most resonant with the audience. Despite the intention of the author, Lomba, to write for himself, his writing is transformed into a griot narrative about the futility of Nigerian prison life and the possibility for hope beyond its walls. Habila fuses the private and public to give the reader a sense of the hollow yet sometimes perseverant experiences of an intellectual in prison.

The prioritization of the collective over the individual is further emphasized in the chapter’s conclusion, which abruptly ends with an omniscient narrator’s note about how the diary is the last proof of Lomba’s existence—for “no record of him” exists after the final entry (43). This allows the remainder of the novel, which is narrated by Lomba and a number of other voices, to piece together the rest of the story without the singular control of one narrator-protagonist. David Cockley compares this narrative choice to oral storytelling, because the other voices permit the narrative to be told and read beyond the prison itself (167). Moreover, Anindyo Roy states that this decision marks a decisive shift from the earlier to more contemporary

generations of Nigerian writers, for the latter group, the sense of realism in the highly non-linear or polyvocal novel is often “haunted by a certain ghostliness [and even] when this form of realism harnesses the power of African oral tradition, it moves towards a more eclectic form of the novel” (21). By adapting the griot trope to highlight a collective, non-linear, and “ghostly” form of realism that extends far beyond the scope of the narrator-griot himself, Habila successfully “hacks” the style of canonical African literature to be both nostalgically reflective and socially resonant for a contemporary global audience.

Poetry also becomes particularly significant in this diary chapter, for Lomba begins to write poems not only for himself, but also for a specific audience. After one of the prison superintendents finds and confiscates Lomba’s poems, he asks Lomba to write some poems on his behalf so that he can effectively woo and eventually propose to his girlfriend, Janice. After writing a few original works, Lomba starts to lift some material from other authors, including “Ode” by Sappho, as well as hide “cryptic messages” in the poems (31). Janice comes to visit Lomba in prison to chat with him after recognizing these “S.O.S.” notes, such as the repetition of “Save my soul, a prisoner...” (38). When she brings up the subject of these messages, he thinks to himself, “But how could I tell her that the message wasn’t really for her, or for anyone else? It was for myself, perhaps, written by me to my own soul, to every other soul, the collective soul of the universe” (38). This sentiment underscores Lomba’s position as a modern griot. Even though he may have written these coded lines of poetry for himself alone, he also writes in a way that represents and communicates to a larger collective audience. The art of seemingly hiding messages and then teasing

them out through the use of repetition and alliteration is, according to Marie-Soleil Frère, a common technique of both the classic griot and the contemporary African writer, including poets and even journalists. This is because such stylistic repetition helps the reader to emotionally connect with important material and recall it for longer (Frère 24). Furthermore, the technique facilitates a greater connection among readers who have all read a particular line multiple times. In Lomba's case, the line, "Save my soul, a prisoner..." communicates a pleading yet also optimistic idea to the reader. As David Cockley argues, "Habila's use of poetry as the means of hiding a message to the outside world [...] leads to art's central role in providing hope to the people" (173). Lomba finds the ability to write poetry even in the most oppressive conditions, and he empathizes with all of the fellow prisoners—literal and figurative—who tried or struggled to create art during the Abacha era. Now that Habila has found his voice in the aftermath of this regime, he utilizes his modern griot-protagonist, Lomba, to send this hidden message of hope and determination amidst injustice to fellow Africans and the broader international community.

Habila extends this simultaneously grave and hopeful signal to the reader into the second chapter, entitled "The Angel." The first-person narrator is an unknown friend of Lomba's who only appears in this part of the novel. Because the narrator is out at a bar past curfew, a soldier shoots him to death. However, at the moment he is shot, he sees the soldier transform into an angel, lift him from the floor, and fly him outside onto the street. The narrator then looks up from the ground to see a giant bird "[ascend] with the sound of a thousand wings" (52) before disappearing into the heavens. The featured narrator commentary in the first diary chapter, too, makes

reference to a similar mythical, *deus ex machina* figure. The narrator theorizes that although Lomba's whereabouts were unknown, it is possible that following Abacha's 1998 death, "Liberty" opened the door to his prison cell and said, "Come. It's time to go" (43). Chielozone Eze proposes that although this is not explicit in the text itself, it is likely that "Liberty" also represents an angel figure ("Cosmopolitan Solidarity" 102). It is interesting that the angel who encounters the unnamed narrator in the second chapter appears as a kind of Angel of Death, whereas the angel greeting Lomba frees him from prison—which may or may not signify a death in jail. In both cases, despite the somber implications of a possible death, there is nonetheless a greater sense of hope that the angel frees them from the substandard conditions that they are living under in Nigeria. This notion explains the significance of the novel's title, *Waiting for an Angel*, as the characters all await this angel to save them from their suffering.⁴¹ Moreover, Habila strengthens the value of the collective, perseverant struggle of Nigerians who witnessed and overcame these brutal years of military rule. By integrating magical realist imagery into the novel, Habila harkens back to the ancient griot stories that creatively fused history and myths. At the same time, he unites the characters, fellow African intellectuals, and readers in their desire to find a hopeful escape from the regime.

In addition to writing diary entries and poems, Lomba develops a gradual interest in journalism. The journalist, like the blogger, has some qualities in common with the classic griot. Giulia Pizzolato notes their similar roles as communicative

⁴¹ Ikechukwu Emmanuel Asika expresses a similar viewpoint that the novel's title implies the act of Nigerians' figurative waiting for an angel who would remove them from the chains of the Abacha regime. Because General Abacha planned to be president for life, Nigerians were essentially hoping for a miracle to free them from his dictatorship (Asika 283).

conduits between the public and the government (489). Marie-Soleil Frère also emphasizes how they both effectively shape history by crafting relatable stories using strategic stylistic techniques, which allow audiences to more easily remember such events that they can pass down to others (14, 18). Both of these comparisons reflect Lomba's own position as a primarily creative writer who becomes a journalist documenting his surroundings in Nigeria. Looking for work while stalling on his long-term novel project, he starts to write for the arts section of a magazine called *The Dial*. As Owojecho Omoha indicates, this mirrors Habila's own path as someone who was "arts editor of the *Vanguard* newspaper in 2000" (309) just before publishing his first novel, *Waiting for an Angel*. We do not get to read much of what Lomba writes for *The Dial*, other than his description of an observational piece he wrote about fuel scarcity in his impoverished neighborhood on Morgan Street. For the reader of the novel, he explains how he crafts the story:

"...in front of the petrol pumps I place the ubiquitous gun and whip-toting soldiers, collecting money from drivers to expedite their progress towards the pumps. I place the potbellied, glaucomatous kids of Morgan Street, with their high-defined ribs, beside the open gutters where they usually play [...] To conclude, I use the kerosene-starved housewives of Morgan Street. I make them rampage the streets, tearing down wooden signboards and billboards and hauling them away to their kitchens to use as firewood" (118).

Highlighting both Pizzolato and Frère's respective arguments, Lomba addresses the local problem of a fuel shortage caused by a mismanaged government, but he tells this story in a way that focuses more on compelling observational imagery than on the detailed presentation of facts. His editor, James Fiki, believes that the final part of the narrative that depicts the housewives seems too heavy-handed. However, sometime later Lomba witnesses a group of women resembling housewives stop traffic as they

use tools to pry a billboard from the ground. Despite the fact that he does not truly know why the women make this decision, he prefers to assume that they are gathering firewood—just as his prophetic proposed magazine article revealed (119). It is reasonable to assume that he thinks the women will tear down existing structures because they will continue Nigerians' collective, resolute battle to provide for their families, which may mean slowly resisting and dismantling the corrupt state. Lomba thereby replicates the griot's keen ability to not only tell an engaging story, but also to have such a firm grasp of history and observational awareness that one can accurately apply this knowledge to the present (and future) moments. Like Thomas Hale states, the griot is a "time-binder" (*Griots and Griottes* 23) who can help audiences to better comprehend the progressive present moment and consider ideal future choices through a clear knowledge of the past. It therefore starts to make more sense as to why the non-linear narrative is so appropriate for the contemporary African novel featuring a griot-as-writer. Such stories are so effectively able to demonstrate the significance of key events through a creative manipulation and "binding" of time.

Although Lomba initially sees himself as more of a novelist and arts-oriented writer who does not have a particular interest in politics, he comes to realize that being a writer in Nigeria during the Abacha era is an inherently political act. As James tells him, "You can't escape [politics]. In this country the very air we breathe is politics" (113). He advises Lomba to write about the disillusionment that the Nigerian people feel during military rule, for one subsequent leader after another always perpetuates the problems of national corruption at the expense of the impoverished citizens. This style of journalism is distinctive from the griot narratives,

which often tended to glorify their patron kings, nobles, and government officials. However, Habila hacks this traditional griot for the contemporary era, as the new griot cannot justifiably praise leaders who obviously cause direct harm to the local communities comprising the griot's audience. As a "hacked" modern journalist griot, Lomba most noticeably differs from the classic griot in his commitment to the free press rather than a government leader; the political necessity of him to challenge a corrupt authority; and his desire to rhetorically appeal to a local, national, and global audience.

Like the classic griot who gradually faced increasing diplomatic obsolescence in African government and society, the neo-griot during the Abacha era encounters difficulties with finding work. Lomba is hesitant to fully pursue a career as a journalist, because he is holding on to the idea that he will finally complete and publish his novel. Yet, James illuminates him on the harsh reality of publishing literature in Nigeria during this period of military rule: no publisher would take the economic risk of publishing a novel that the largely impoverished, uneducated, and fearful people of Nigeria would not purchase. Moreover, because Nigeria was expelled from the Commonwealth of Nations and received considerably negative press attention following the state murder of Ken Saro-Wiwa, a Nigerian writer would not be eligible for the Commonwealth Literary Prize and other global honors (195). The fact of the matter is that the Abacha regime greatly fears a free press; James compares government administrators to former slave masters who wanted to prevent any kind of discussion among slaves—knowing that communication would lead to a collaborative riot (198). He encourages Lomba to temporarily abandon the

utopian book project and join the political protest in Lagos for a journalism assignment because “You can’t write with chains on your hands” (195). During this time of extreme political oppression of free speech, the novel is not a lucrative or practical endeavor for the writer or the community. As Sule Egya writes in an analysis of this situation in *Waiting for an Angel*, “The novel as a creative entity is suspended, untextualized, giving way to journalism, pamphleteering, and activism desperately deployed to deal with the present circumstances” (120). In such desperate times, the journalist and activist griot can more quickly communicate concerns to the public. Thus, Lomba makes the shift to a form of discourse that is more akin to orality than literacy so that he can collaborate in solidarity with fellow Nigerians from all educational backgrounds whose voices are also being suppressed.

Lomba’s move from a self-assumed apolitical aspiring novelist to a political journalist mirrors the necessary professional shift of the classic griot. Griots not only worked side-by-side with kings and accompanied soldiers on the warfront during the pre-colonial era, but they also transmitted their songs across the radio waves to generate public support for government efforts (Hoffman 10). However, in a postcolonial Africa where the public is more aware of government corruption and disregard for the people, artists began to question the relevance of the griots’ praise songs that harken back to a history of patriotic or noble glory. In an analysis of Ousmane Sembène’s “Borom Sarret,” a short film about a poor Senegalese wagoner who gives all of the little money he has to a griot, Amadou T. Fofana argues, “The griot is portrayed in the film as one of many other forces that conspire to keep the cart driver and the likes of him in a condition of slavery [...] What good does it do [the

cart driver] if [his] ancestors were kings and queens?” (258). A similar sentiment applies in Lomba’s case. Although it would be overreaching to say that Lomba’s initial plan to write a novel would keep Nigerians oppressed, it is nonetheless more futile and self-serving to want to live as an apolitical intellectual who prefers to write for an incredibly narrow audience in Abacha’s Nigeria. This is why the writer-griot is most effective to society as a political activist in times of extreme duress.

Traditional griots have become more anti-establishment over time in order to better serve the interests of a disillusioned public. Wolof griots especially were encouraged to always be honest with their patrons and the public, without any fear of retaliation or suppression of thought (Kaschula and Diop 21). However, in some cases, griots did not always feel comfortable speaking so freely about political subjects. According to Elizabeth Gunner, the Xhosa griots of South Africa, who are called “imbongi,” encountered the dilemma of being ridiculed if they declined to comment on or voiced support for problematic political issues on the one hand, or being imprisoned or worse if they publicly protested the government’s actions (34). *Waiting for an Angel* explores this sense of danger as well, noting the real-life government-related killings of journalists such as Dele Giwa and fictional warrant for James’ arrest. Despite such safety concerns, several characters continue to assert that resistance is the only logical and ethical option for informed citizens. One activist, Sankara, quotes Amilcar Cabral at a protest to say, “‘Every onlooker is either a coward or a traitor.’ That is why we are here today—we can’t continue to be onlookers...” (Habila 55). Moreover, another activist nicknamed “Mao” addresses the crowd to say, “Let me tell you why they hanged Saro Wiwa. He was the only one

who understood the economic aspect of the struggle [...] He told Abacha, I know how much you and the foreigners are making—the billions you are drilling out of our soil. Give us some of it” (161). Although Lomba is more of an observer than an orator at the protest, Habila allows these other more political voices to come through in this novel that synthesizes collective griot stories. Just as journalism is becoming more partisan and critical of the government, so, too, is the neo-griot. Habila underscores the notion that the act of being a public intellectual writer or speaker during a time of injustice is necessarily a political endeavor.

In taking on a provocatively political tone, Habila, like Adichie, reveals how the neo-griot’s message can appeal to a broader audience and actually shape the future of society, rather than simply recite old legends. Jan Jansen argues that the classic griot is responsible for maintaining, strengthening, and transforming local social relations (59, 81). Similarly, even though his plan is ultimately thwarted due to his arrest, Lomba chooses to participate in the political protest and write an article about the event so that he can inform a global public about the injustices taking place in Nigeria. The aforementioned article he wrote years ago about rising oil prices and poverty on Morgan Street had a lasting impact on the community, for a young activist named Joshua tells Lomba that the piece inspired them and accurately represented their “abject condition” (Habila 193). By hacking the griot figure as a journalist embracing community-oriented storytelling, Lomba is able to quickly reach more people than he ever could as an orator or a novelist. Moreover, David Cockley applies an analogous logic to Habila’s role as a post-Abacha era writer for an international audience, because global engagement will allow the novel to be even more popular

and impactful in Nigeria—both within society and among opposing national leaders (Cockley 173). Just as Adichie is a novelist griot who essentially tells her story of Nigeria through a blogger griot, Habila also seeks to reach a broad audience through a persuasive writer griot figure who is determined to document and help improve local Nigerian society.

Habila delves further into this emphasis on the powerful role of the writer in the final chapter of his novel, entitled “James.” As he attempts to flee imprisonment, James takes Lomba to a hidden NADECO refuge for creative people living under threat. Upon informing the group that the headquarters of their newspaper, *The Dial*, had been burned to the ground in a likely act of arson, different individuals at the residence say they will incorporate a reference to this incident in their works—including poems and novels (218). Thus, they plan to support one another in the resistance effort by serving as collective witnesses of injustice. As the narrator describes the scene, the reader begins to realize that the names of the individuals at the gathering are representative of real-life Nigerian creative writers and journalists.⁴² One person even introduces himself as Helon Habila (218), and this cameo of sorts reveals that Habila sees himself as an active part of the intellectual resistance of the Abacha regime. Adélékè Adéèkó also indicates that all of the writers in attendance, including Habila, became well-known from the twentieth century onward (14). This suggests that Habila sees himself as a member of this new generation of writers who stand in solidarity as fighting survivors of the Abacha era in Nigeria. As political ne-

⁴² Adélékè Adéèkó notes that these prominent figures include “Akin [Adesokan], Ogaga [Ifowodo], [Nduka] Otiono, Maik [Nwosu], [Obi] Nwakanma, and Mike Jimoh” (14).

griots, these intellectuals are determined to collectively document and eventually release the full stories of their oppression to the public.

Given its narrative creativity, thoughtful manipulation of storytelling tropes like the griot, and unique emphasis on political themes, *Waiting for an Angel* marks a decisive turning point in African fiction. Chielozone Eze argues, “Unlike the generations of writers before him, Habila is neither nostalgic about an essentialized African past nor does he believe in monolithic, immutable tropes of identity (“Cosmopolitan Solidarity” 101). On the one hand, Habila is united with earlier generations of African writers in his intention to describe and critique a corrupt authority. Whereas authors such as Chinua Achebe and Wole Soyinka highly criticized colonial powers, Habila and the newer generations are undermining the neocolonial and neoliberal authorities of African political figures. At the same time, Habila and his contemporaries are not seeking a utopic future with a primary solution to dismantle the current administration, as some authors expressed before the decolonization period. Diverging from the “writing back” method of previous generations, younger griot-like writers are less interested in national policy than they are in collective unity and expression. Through the hacked griot trope, Habila aims to unite readers in a new sense of post-war solidarity centered on reflection. Although Habila could not have published a book like this during the Abacha era, in the novel he embodies Lomba, a young intellectual who persistently writes despite the severe dangers and punishments he faces. Perhaps this is the person he wished he could have been during those years, but if he had been, then he could not have published this novel. With the worldwide popularity of *Waiting for an Angel*, Habila unites not only

the people of Morgan Street and Nigeria, but also scores of people within the African diaspora and beyond who can empathize with this story of struggle and perseverance. His hacked African griot figure seeks to bring audiences together and provide them with a mutual sense of knowledge and reflective compassion for the people that the story depicts.

Soothsaying Clickbaiters : The Significance of the Neo-Griot in Africa

Both *Americanah* and *Waiting for an Angel* reimagine the griot trope for a technologically advanced and socially conscious African society. Like the traditional griot, these neo-griots appeal to local and more expansive audiences by telling historical truths in persuasive rhetorical styles. Instead of speaking on behalf of rulers and nobles, however, the neo-griots write more directly for themselves and their intended audience. At the same time, globalization and capitalism can impact their professions, leading them to sometimes write in styles or forms that they know will garner more public attention. Writing with profit in mind can lead the griot to be seen as more of a “clickbaiter” in today’s society, even though their ultimate goal may still be to tell personal, historical stories. What is perhaps most significant about the reemergence of the griot trope is the idea that the figure helps readers to understand particular historical moments in conjunction with present ones. Scholars such as Thomas A. Hale have emphasized the exceptional ability of griots to manipulate time within a narrative so that stories of the past appear to be interwoven with the present and foreshadowing of the future (*Griots and Griottes* 23). *Americanah* and *Waiting for an Angel* each feature non-linear narratives, as well as shifts from third-person

omniscient to first-person narration styles. This is not only more common for contemporary African writers, but it also reflects the similar technique of classic griots who can play with time in order for readers to better understand history as cyclical and present—rather than solely linear and in the past. Such a conception of history further encourages audiences to consider what they can do to keep shaping the history addressed in the griot's story—whether it is working to call out and correct racial prejudices or standing in solidarity with those suffering from civil rights abuses under corrupt government administrations.

The griot trope is not only applicable to the blogger and journalist protagonists in the novels, but also of the authors of the novels themselves. Because their characters are writers who have similar professional pathways and/or journeys of migration, they reflect the interests of the authors to some degree. The griot traditionally transmits one's message in an oral form that would certainly not be as lengthy as a novel. Nonetheless, the interspersed blog and diary entries, as well as shorter chapter lengths, help the reader to process the novel's information in more concise blocks of text that are somewhat more akin to the lengths of the griot praise songs. More importantly, the use of the griot trope to tell us a story twice—once through the contexts of the griot character's writing itself, and second through the narration of the character's behavior—allows the reader to understand history as a multilayered experience. Just as Ousmane Sembène was labeled a neo-griot of his generation, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie and Helon Habila are the literary griots of the contemporary era. Through their novels that contain observational societal commentary and historical fiction, they represent the soothsayers of African society

as they enlighten the world of their collective struggles and hopes. Moreover, they run the risk of looking like sellouts or clickbaiters who reference certain well-known, controversial racial or political perspectives in order to garner more press and book sales from Western audiences. Regardless of this concern, these literary neo-griots are changing the face of African fiction. Ali Erritouni encapsulates this well when he says that earlier generations of African writers wrote to support specific political outcomes such as decolonization or proletarian efforts. Although writers like Adichie and Habila are politically conscious, they are less interested in promoting specific causes that in the past have not always turned out as well as planned (“Political Despotism” 158). As griots, they are primarily interested in informing audiences of their lived realities as Africans in persuasive, memorable ways. The objective is for readers to learn about and complicate their understandings of what it means to be an African, a Nigerian, and/or an African immigrant. By adapting the relatable griot trope, experimenting with different non-linear storytelling styles, and arriving at conclusions that are more hopeful than didactic, contemporary African authors effectively “hack” postcolonial African literature to make it more engaging for a global audience.

Chapter 4: Hacking the Scammer: From Local Street Thief to Global Digital Pirate

“This 419 thing had always been like a game to me—hooking mugus, making hits, returning to the scene of the crime, and making more hits.”—Adaobi Tricia Nwaubani, *I Do Not Come to You by Chance*

"And I have a whole outbox full of messages promising untold riches. How do you know you're not just another moegoe, pinning everything on a dream that's patently impossible?"—Lauren Beukes, *Zoo City*

“The systems that could lift the majority out of poverty are undercut at every turn. Precisely because everyone takes a shortcut, nothing works and, for this reason, the only way to get anything done is to take another shortcut.”—Teju Cole, *Every Day is For the Thief*

Most historical and cultural scholars would agree with the idea that, throughout history, Africans have largely been “scammed,” or defrauded, by the Western world. From the transatlantic slave trade that persisted from the 15th-19th centuries, to the “scramble for Africa” that permitted European nations to exploit natural resources and subjugate locals to colonial authority from the late 1800s until 1914, to the twentieth-century crippling “structural adjustment” loans imposed upon African nations by institutions such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF), it is evident that the West has prompted and benefitted from Africa’s hardships. This parasitic relationship between Europe and Africa has been thoroughly explored in modern Anglophone African literature. In his famous “African Trilogy,” which includes *Things Fall Apart* (1959), *No Longer at Ease* (1960), and *Arrow of God* (1964), Chinua Achebe critiques the many ways in which Western culture helped eradicate Africans (especially Nigerians) from their traditional cultural values and

hindering them from individual and national growth. South African writer J.M. Coetzee's *Waiting for the Barbarians* (1980) and *The Life and Times of Michael K* (1983) depict the bleak, dystopian atmospheres that colonial and apartheid governments cultivated.

This “Africa Writes Back” narrative popularized in postcolonial literature and scholarship critiqued Western intervention into African nations during the colonial era and its aftermath. Furthermore, the literary movement transcended the conventions of a Western canon dominated by predominantly white European writers (Currey 296). This narrative persists in twenty-first-century novels—albeit in a fresh, playful manner. Rather than “writing back” to the West and explaining how the West has continually deceived Africans throughout history, select twenty-first century writers depict contemporary African characters that successfully scam Westerners.

In this chapter, I concentrate on the representation of the 419 email scammer. Also known as “advance-fee fraud,” these ubiquitous confidence schemes utilize elaborate, persuasive narratives (such as the popular “I am a Nigerian prince” hook) to convince predominantly Western readers that they will eventually receive millions of dollars if they can first wire funds to pay for alleged processing or tariff fees (Brunton 102-103). This scammer character reworks cultural characterizations of the trickster or thief that have been popularized in African literature, such as the street thief in Yoruba author Oladejo Okediji's *Atótó Arére* (1981). The 419 scammer is an effective and realistic literary representation of the contemporary thief in the global Internet age. Select popular Anglophone African writers who focus on 419 scammers have compellingly “hacked” the thief trope in order to create a new, prescient chapter

in the “Africa Writes Back” narrative; not only does Africa “write back,” but it *scams* back, too.

This chapter is divided into two sections. The first will examine the narrative history and global significance of 419 scams, and the second will analyze how Nigerian writer Adaobi Tricia Nwaubani’s *I Do Not Come to You by Chance* (2009) and South African author Lauren Beukes’ *Zoo City* (2010) underscore African narrator-protagonists’ participation in 419 fraud. It may appear at first glance that the protagonists scam people in the West in order to benefit economically. However, in my readings of the two novels I analyze how the 419 scam functions as a narrative device for capturing the Western readers’ desire to consume stories about Africans’ misfortune, as well as play “savior” roles for personal gain. The African characters justify their scams because they are financially desperate and unable to earn enough money an “honorable” way. In the process, they seek karmic retribution against Westerners, whose manipulative actions and harmful stereotyping have over time kept Africans at the bottom of the global economic totem pole. Moreover, the authors of these novels “scam” Western readers who, like the gullible 419 victims, may seek to consume African literature to indulge in fantasies of trauma and poverty. Nwaubani and Beukes’ protagonists are far from pitiful, suffering characters. Rather, they actively resist their systemic social and economic disadvantages by scamming Westerners. The readers are thereby “scammed” into supporting these active thief protagonists, instead of the woefully tragic characters they have come to expect from Anglophone African novels that become successful in Western literary markets.

Tricksters, Prisoners, and Princes : A Brief History of 419

Before delving into the historical narrative significance of the 419 scam, it is important to examine how the Anglophone African scammer figure embodies a contemporary reimagining of the folkloric African trickster. In the ancient tradition of African oral storytelling, the trickster most often took the form of an animal: Ananse the spider in Asante culture, Wakaboko the hare in Kikuyu legends, or Àjàpá the tortoise in the Yoruba context (Owomoyela ix). As an animal with human characteristics, such as the ability to speak, the trickster is a key presence in animist or magical realist African fiction. In terms of his behavior, according to the eighteenth-century denotation, the trickster represents “one who deceives or cheats” (Hynes and Doty 14). This is a fitting definition when one considers the trickster’s role as one seeking to attract friends and foes with his manipulative, sweet-talking words so that he eventually robs them of their food, money, or other coveted items. As Oyekan Owomoyela asserts, the tricksters “often blithely reward their benefactors’ generosity with sometimes deadly betrayals” (x). With the sly ability to use persuasive words to steal from someone, the 419 scammer character is an obvious reincarnation of the trickster. Building upon classic iterations of this literary trope, contemporary Anglophone African authors reveal how the modern trickster utilizes new, widely accessible digital technologies and persuasive writing techniques to scam people out of fortunes.

Nwaubani and Beukes’ protagonists both engage with the growing industry of “419” in Africa. In legal terms, “419” connotes Section 419 of the 38th chapter of the Nigerian penal code. The law stipulates that “Any person who by any false pretence,

and with intent to defraud, obtains from any other person anything capable of being stolen [...] is guilty of a felony” (qtd. in Igwe 4). This code was expanded in 1995 with Presidential Degree No. 13, which specifically mentions the nature of the “advance-fee” scam popularized through electronic communications and transactions (Adogame 552). However, 419 crimes became popular scamming methods decades before the Internet was widely accessible to the public. According to various historical accounts, 419 activities emerged in Nigeria in the late 1970s and gained traction throughout the 1980s (Adogame 557). Not coincidentally, this type of crime increased as the country transitioned to the Second Republic from 1979-1983, when Shehu Shagari’s leadership normalized economic and political corruption. Moreover, Ibrahim Babangida’s military rule from 1986-1993 continued this precedent of governmental exploitation and corruption, which prompted further economic decline (Igwe 13-16). Alongside this political strife, the bust of the long-successful oil boom in Nigeria facilitated this dramatic fiscal slump—causing inflation and unemployment levels to rise (Brunton 108; D. Smith *A Culture of Corruption* 19). Disillusioned by the political and economic corruption that surrounded the nation only two decades after colonial independence, some financially desperate Nigerians ended up mimicking government leaders’ fraudulent methods through 419 scamming in order to survive in a struggling economy.

The 419 scamming process is a complex, multilayered one that often functions like a hierarchical business. In Nigeria, the person who earns the highest cut from scams is known as the “oga,” which is the Nigerian term for boss, while a team of “catchers” who compose the scam letters and interact with the clients receive about

20-30% of the funds from each transaction (Igwe 25). Through professional yet pathos-laden stories, the catchers aim to convince readers that they are the lucky, suitable ones chosen to receive a massive fortune—if they can only pay a few fees to help the catcher to access the funds from a secure vault. After a payment is made, the catcher introduces a new hurdle requiring another advance fee—each of which may be described as a “transfer tax,” performance bond,” or something of the sort (Stevens 14). Like a high-stakes “choose your own adventure” story, where the reader must pay a large fee to unlock the next chapter, the scam victim finds that one must continually pay quite a bit of money upfront in order to get closer to obtaining the pot of gold.

Adaobi Tricia Nwaubani accurately accounts for the spiraling nature of these 419 emails and financial transactions in *I Do Not Come to You by Chance*. In the novel, one scam victim paid “16,000 for lawyer’s fees, \$19,000 for a change of beneficiary certificate, \$14,500 for a security company tariff, \$21,000 for transfer of ownership, \$11,900 for courier charges, \$23,000 for customs clearance, \$17,000 for Hague authorization, \$9,000 for ECOWAS duty, and \$18,700 for insurance fees” (232). The scammer will milk the victim for as long as one reasonably can before suspicion arises, wherein the scammer must pivot the story or abandon it altogether in a final email that provides closure without disclosing any of the promised riches. A large number of Westerners might immediately recognize a fraudulent “I am a Nigerian prince” scam email and file it in the spam folder alongside the male enhancement and magic weight loss messages that one has likely seen creep past a spam filter. Nevertheless, it is evident that 419 scams are still quite successful,

considering Brian Wizard’s estimate that they may be the “third to fifth largest industry in Nigeria” (Wizard ii qtd. in Glickman 476). Beyond Nigeria, the 419 industry has expanded throughout South Africa (Stevens 78) and other parts of the world. The appearance of the 419 scam in fiction is thus not surprising.

Although 419 is often associated with electronic scamming, it is important to note that the effectiveness of the fraud is more positively correlated with the nature of the narrative than the technology. The earliest successful 419 scams took the form of oral storytelling performances and snail mail letters. On the street level, youths disguised as entrepreneurs would physically stop people in busy urban areas and convince them to invest in fraudulent pyramid schemes—sometimes even working in groups, so that fellow scammers disguised as eavesdroppers would convince victims that the narrative of the operation sounded like a formidable opportunity (Adogame 557). Other scammers utilized forged or fabricated letterheads, as well as postage, when sending a massive number of individual letters designed to convince readers to mail or wire money (Brunton 108-109).⁴³ The persuasive techniques practiced by both types of scammers, including the impersonation of Nigerian business elites, diplomats, and royalty, continued to garner success when the predominant means of scamming shifted to the online realm. In a digital world where socially legitimized entrepreneurs can make as much of a profit as criminal ones and “cowboy capitalism” subsequently thrives (Glickman 476), Anglophone scammers in Nigeria, South Africa, and elsewhere took advantage of the Internet’s legal loopholes, relative

⁴³ According to Finn Brunton, 2.3 million of these 419-style letters were seized in three months as they traversed through JFK airport in 1998 (Brunton 108-109).

anonymity, and ability to instantaneously send a massive number of duplicate emails in order to more efficiently and effectively appeal to global audiences.

Scams have a long history, of course. The first well-documented, popular advance-fee fraud story took the form of the “Spanish prisoner” scam, which dates back to the 1920s (Adogame 553). The malevolent King of Spain imprisons a wealthy, innocent person (sometimes a young boy or a lovely woman) as a part of a political scheme; the prisoner’s family reaches out to the scam victim in the hopes that one will facilitate the captive’s escape—for the handsome reward, no doubt (Brunton 103; Adogame 554). Similar to modern 419 scams, the con relies on the cumulative donation of funds that will allegedly be used to overcome various obstacles that the prisoner’s rescuers encounter along the way—bribes for the authorities or prison guards, necessary materials for those who will breach the remote prison grounds to save the captive, etc. (Brunton 103). What is interesting about these narratives is not only the elaborateness of the scheme, but as Finn Brunton argues, “the remoteness and romance of a location, a pliantly vague background for tropes from fairy tales and popular thrillers,” as well as “strength [drawn] from current events, particularly war and political chaos” (104). Such trope-laden, persuasive stories are the templates of modern frauds.

While the executors of the “Spanish prisoner” con played upon early twentieth-century tensions in Spain and strategically sought empathy from readers, the contemporary 419 scams spin stereotypical tales about tensions in Africa and fairy-tale endings. It is thus not a coincidence that one of the scam catchers in *I Do Not Come to You by Chance* ends up back in Nigeria after months of torture in a

Spanish prison (Nwaubani 205). Nwaubani playfully alludes to the classic prisoner scam that has clearly helped to shape contemporary 419 narratives.

Newer 419 scams take a variety of forms, which may argue that the reader has won the lottery, inherited a large fortune from a distant relative, or will receive a substantive fee for helping a member of royalty escape from a corrupt regime (Stevens 13). Although most 419 scams are now conducted via email, it is worth noting that the most advanced and successful scams eventually transition from the digital to the old-fashioned, face-to-face performative cons. In fact, *Zoo City* and *I Do Not Come to you by Chance* depict both online and in-person iterations of 419 scams—several of which, like the Spanish prisoner con, rely on sympathetic yet marginalizing stories of African poverty and administrative corruption.

Both Nwaubani and Beukes reveal the accurate notion that, once scam victims have contributed a considerable amount of money at multiple intervals in the long duration of the con, the scammers feel compelled to speak with the victims in person so that they may uphold their sense of trust. Thus, the victim will travel to an African or European nation in order to meet a team of scammers who continue their deceptive performance (Glickman 469). *I Do Not Come to You by Chance* features one particularly popular version of this in-person scam, which is often referred to in real life as “the wash” or the “magic money” con. In this scenario, the scammers show the victims that their long-awaited share of the fortune they’ve been promised is finally within arm’s reach. However, there is yet another problem: the bills in the briefcase had to be covered in a black fluid for security reasons, and the substance can only be removed with a rare, expensive chemical solution (Stevens 61). The narrator of

Nwaubani's novel realistically explains that the black notes in the briefcase are all counterfeit, save for a few on the front row that the scammer cleans with a simple, inexpensive solution (Nwaubani 239-240); the scammer, like a magician, fools the victims into believing the illusion that they see before their eyes. By addressing such in-person iterations of the scamming process, Anglophone African writers like Nwaubani reveal how the performance of 419 can be both anonymous and global, personal and local. The style and form of the narrative may alter toward the end of the scam, but the persuasive strategies and constant work to maintain the victim's trust remain consistent.

Contemporary 419 scams, like those that I will explore in the *Zoo City* and *I Do Not Come to You by Chance* involve persuasive written, oral, and visual narrative techniques. Moreover, the scammers rely on the greed, gullibility, ignorance, sympathies, and trust of the victims as they base their storytelling on classic, cliché historical and romantic tales, as well as magic tricks. 419 scamming offers a fresh, relevant twist on the crime fiction genre for authors to draw upon in their own explorations of the relationships between Africans and their nations, in addition to the Western world.

Weighing the Ethics of Scamming in I Do Not Come to You by Chance

Adaobi Tricia Nwaubani's *I Do Not Come to You by Chance* provides a humorous and poignant approach to understanding the value of 419 scamming for young Nigerians. The protagonist, Kingsley, does not initially seem like he could become a 419 scammer. He is an intelligent, second-generation college graduate with

a degree in chemical engineering. Surrounded by a loving family, he has the support of his parents, siblings, and girlfriend. He possesses a strong sense of integrity and dismisses people with gaudy, high-end cars as tasteless criminals who likely amassed their fortune quickly through 419 (38). Yet, as his job search continually fails to lead anywhere fruitful, and the costs of his ailing father's medical care mounts, Kingsley eventually finds himself as the author of this (partial) email:

I DO NOT COME TO YOU BY CHANCE [...] FOLLOWING THE SUDDEN DEATH OF MY HUSBAND, GENERAL SANI ABACHA, THE FORMER HEAD OF STATE OF NIGERIA, I HAVE BEEN THROWN INTO A STATE OF UTTER CONFUSION, FRUSTRATION AND HOPELESSNESS BY THE CURRENT CIVILIAN ADMINISTRATION [...] SOMETIME AGO, I DEPOSITED THE SUM OF \$58,000,000.00 CASH (FIFTY EIGHT MILLION USD) OF MY LATE HUSBAND'S MONEY IN A SECURITY FIRM [...] I WILL BE VERY GRATEFUL IF YOU COULD RECEIVE THESE FUNDS FOR SAFE KEEPING. FOR YOUR KIND ASSISTANCE, YOU ARE ENTITLED TO 20% OF THE TOTAL SUM (152-153).

Regarding the nature of the text itself, here is one of several instances in which Nwaubani reproduces a scam email in order to engage readers with this style of narrative. Like with numerous real-life scam emails, the text is presented in all-caps in order to attract the reader's attention and to appear distinctive from the recipient's non-all-caps text, should one reply. It is evident that Kingsley borrows from an aforementioned canonical scam template that underscores stereotypes of African political corruption and unrest, as well as promises the reader a large percentage of a currently inaccessible fortune. As one can see, the opening statement of Kingsley's email mirrors the title of the novel itself, thereby humorously suggesting that the reader of the novel is, to some extent, reading a scam narrative.

Although Nwaubani is not overtly scamming the reader in the same way that Kingsley scams his readers, she nonetheless challenges a global audience's predominantly negative perception of those who participate in 419 scams. A focus on 419 scamming allows Nwaubani to create a unique, culturally relevant, and globally resonant story that explores the struggle for young, well-educated Nigerians to meet the social expectations established by earlier generations; the positing of the scammer as a modern, "hacked" version of the magical African trickster figure; the African karmic revenge against Westerners and corrupt African administrators for centuries of scamming (and the guilt that accompanies this); and the subversion of the Western reader's possible expectations that a successful Anglophone African novel should depict trauma and globalization in certain, strategically sympathetic ways.

In the prologue, Nwaubani establishes the generational conflicts present within twentieth-century Nigerian society. It is here that we are also introduced to Kingsley's parents. His mother, Augustina, comes from a traditional Isiukwuato village family who does not initially see the value in their daughter pursuing a secondary school education. However, a white Anglophone nun convinces her father otherwise in what Nwaubani calls "[a]nother five years of the white man's wisdom" (2). The tension between traditional and Western-influenced values is reinforced when Augustina relocates to Umuahia, the capital of Abia State, Nigeria. Here, she meets her future husband, Paulinus, an urbane man who obtained a college degree in the U.K. Returning to Umuahia as a "been-to," or someone who has lived abroad in a Western country before returning home to an African nation, he is identified by locals as his profession, "Engineer." Gossip spreads within the community that he is "no

longer an African man” (5) because he has now adopted a Western style of speech and mannerisms. He marries Augustina, and the two of them live in the U.K. before returning to Nigeria “armed with Masters degrees” (13). They embody a typical educated African success story and hope to pass down this luck to their own children—but, as times change, this ideal becomes more utopian.

Nwaubani clearly alludes to a common theme that first- and second-generation Anglophone African authors like Chinua Achebe and Tsitsi Dangarembga have also stressed: the tension between continuing African village traditions and adopting a Western education and cultural practices in an increasingly modernized world. Nwaubani effectively captures this focal point in early canonical African literature within the first few pages of her novel, before dedicating the remainder of her story to the next chapter of this generational conflict. While Paulinus argues that the root of widespread corruption in Nigeria is an educational problem, asking himself, “How can we have people ruling us who didn’t see inside the four walls of a university?” (36), education fails to prevent his son from continuing this cycle of corruption as a 419 scammer.

The pressures for Africans to obtain a Western education and career in the late twentieth century have allowed for an overproduction of tertiary degree-earning young graduates—all of whom are facing heightened competition for science and technology jobs during a moment of high inflation and unemployment in countries like Nigeria. This is the primary dilemma that Augustina and Paulinus’ son, Kingsley, faces after obediently fulfilling his family’s wishes to obtain a chemical engineering degree from the prestigious Federal University of Technology, Orwerri, in Nigeria.

He is much like the young, well-educated protagonist of Chinua Achebe's *No Longer at Ease* (1960), Obi Okonkwo, who reluctantly takes bribes because he feels that he cannot reasonably escape Nigeria's cycle of corruption that he long sought to avoid and deescalate. Echoing this sentiment, Kingsley asks himself, "My father never gave bribes, no matter for how long the police detained us at their checkpoints, but what did my father know about survival?" (248). Following a series of unsuccessful job interviews, Kingsley begins to wonder if he is not worthy enough to continue the high moral and ethical expectations set by his parents in order to financially support his family.

When it seems like life cannot get any worse for Kingsley, his Paulinus' health suddenly declines and the quality of his medical treatment is dependent on how much they are able to pay, one unlikely hero comes to their rescue: Augustina's infamous half-brother and 419 kingpin, Uncle Boniface also known as "Cash Daddy." As the illegitimate son of Augustina's father, he is an outcast. Boniface dropped out of high school and used his outsider status to his advantage as he climbed the ranks within the criminal 419 industry—eventually becoming an incredibly wealthy "oga" living in a mansion with a team of catchers to assist him with operations. Boniface initially provides Kingsley with an instant, no-strings-attached donation in order to help continue his father's medical treatment. During Kingsley's visit to his uncle's mansion and hub for 419 operations, he notices but is not entirely envious of Cash Daddy's exorbitant, materialistic lifestyle—adorned with luxury Mercedes vehicles in the driveway and lavish furniture throughout the compound. However, what does

inevitably impress him is the fact that his uncle has plenty of funds to be able to generously provide for his immediate and extended family.

When Paulinus becomes ill and eventually dies, Kingsley rises as the “opara,” or father figure and provider of his family. Throughout the novel, Kingsley emphasizes his role as the opara, thereby underscoring the value he places upon this traditional family title. Without a proper job, Kingsley feels disappointed that he cannot fulfill his inherited duty according to familial and societal expectations. As a result of his self-doubt during an economically and personally challenging time, when Boniface offers him the opportunity to work for him as an apprentice in his 419 business, Kingsley begrudgingly accepts. He eventually justifies his actions by declaring, “I was not a criminal. I had gone into 419 so that my mother could live in comfort and my siblings have a good education” (321). Unlike stereotypical depictions of criminal characters, who become initiated within a life of crime as a result of their greed and lust for power, Kingsley is somewhat ironically driven by his desire to be a family provider in the traditional Nigerian sense. Although he quickly earns thousands of dollars from his scams, becomes addicted to the thrill of successfully deceiving victims, and eventually gets carried away with his newfound wealth—indulging himself in a new house and a Lexus—his ultimate goal is always to give his mother and siblings whatever they may need. Nwaubani thus subverts the role of the Nigerian criminal figure so that he appears more sympathetic and justifiable in his actions.

It is Kingsley’s compassionate nature that makes him paradoxically a successful scammer. In a similar way that he seeks to gain the admiration and trust of

his family, he must persuade his scam victims—which the characters in the novel identify as “mugus,” a slang Nigerian term for fools or scam victims—that he can be trusted with thousands of their dollars. As he explains his goal:

I had to make him think that he was special, that Fate had recognized his significance in the universe and had decided to reward him at last. I had to make him see how vulnerable I was. I had to make him know how desperately we needed his help, how grateful we would be for any action he took on our behalf. I had to finetune him into believing that every word of my story was true (172).

By referencing “Fate” and the cosmos, Kingsley evokes the traditional trickster figure who uses magic and charm to trick naïve people (Glickman 475). The classic trickster also enjoys deceiving those in a position of financial, social, and political power. This is why, according to Thomas Jay Lynn, first generation Anglophone African writers like Chinua Achebe and Wole Soyinka have introduced trickster-like characters that attempt to subvert colonial and neocolonial authority in their stories (154). For instance, Lynn points out the persuasive power of the Tortoise’s “sweet tongue” in Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart* (157). In a twenty-first century version of the classic trickster, Kingsley similarly uses his “sweet tongue” to convince predominantly wealthy, white, Western readers that his magical narrative can become a reality for them.

Building upon research by Jean and John Camaroff, Andrew Smith argues that the abundant presence of fraudsters like the 419 scammer in contemporary Nigerian society reflects “the apparent resurgence of occultism in Africa and elsewhere” (37). In a globalized world of growing economic inequality, the increasingly desperate 99% are modernizing ancient persuasion techniques for a complacent 1%. Moreover, Smith asserts that 419 scams, like horoscopes and other mythological concepts that

continue to attract contemporary audiences, underscore what Theodor W. Adorno calls the “reborn animism” that successfully manipulates a supposedly logical yet incessantly curious, modern capitalist society (Adorno 239 qtd. in A. Smith 30). Kingsley’s adept skill as a 419 scammer highlights the persistent desire to suspend rational belief and trust magic, even in the midst of a renewed narrative tension between tradition and modernity in Anglophone African literature.⁴⁴ The 419 scammer is a suitable character choice for Nwaubani, as this figure exposes the unique confluence of greed, faith, and humanitarianism in the current global capitalist society.

Kingsley effectively establishes a sense of trust with his 419 scam victims not only by emphasizing the magically fated nature of the email encounter, but also by playing upon Westerners’ communication styles and stereotypes. One scammer within Cash Daddy’s crew, Wizard, appeals to readers with his fluent “gonna-wanna American-speak” (162), which he perfected by studying the slang used in American movies. Although various iterations of 419 scam emails convey a more formal tone, especially if the writer is claiming to be an administrator or member of royalty, some rely on a friendlier, conversational approach. Like many real-life 419 scammers, Wizard pursues fake romantic relationships with Americans in online chat rooms before making monetary requests. Because random emails from Nigeria have become so synonymous with fraud, select scammers proclaim to be from the U.S. As Hamish Dalley argues in his reading of *I Do Not Come to You by Chance*, “Kingsley is impressed by the 419er’s capacity to mimic the speech patterns of a society he has

⁴⁴ The African magical realist theme is particularly being explored in contemporary novels such as *The Icarus Girl* (2005) by Helen Oyeyemi.

observed only through its commodified objects and by the fact that a real American cannot recognize the simulation” (162). Although Nwaubani does not justify 419 scamming, she shows how surprisingly simple it can be for scammers to successfully mimic and entrap gullible victims.

Beyond the relationship between some Westerners’ failure to recognize authentic representations of people from their own culture, Nwaubani highlights how Nigerian 419 scammers feel when scam victims marginalize Africans. When a fake love interest from an online chat room tells Wizard that he should be careful when in Nigeria, because the mugu is under the assumption that nearly everyone in Africa has AIDS, Kingsley admits that comments like these make him feel less sympathetic for those who are scammed (164). In another instance, Kingsley marvels at how ignorant Western people are of Nigerian ethnicities that a scam victim would believe Cash Daddy’s lie that his name is Alhaji Mahmud—which sounds like a Hausa name and clearly doesn’t match Cash Daddy’s Igbo appearance or accent (201). The scammers must consequently tread a fine line between assuaging their victims’ discriminatory assumptions about Africans, while also entertaining their ignorance of Africa, in order to effectively defraud them.

This predicament underscores Jenna Burrell’s claim that African 419 scammers demonstrate a sense of double-consciousness (22). Like the African immigrant flâneur figures examined in the first chapter of this dissertation, who walk through urban American city streets with a dual understanding of themselves as Black people within predominantly white spaces, the African scammers walk a similarly conscientious path while navigating the web or negotiating face-to-face with a scam

victim. In the process, as Finn Brunton asserts, Western stereotypes about Africa and ignorance of cultural nuance are ignored or reinforced (107). Scammers like Kingsley thereby may appear to have the last laugh because they profit from these encounters, but Nwaubani nonetheless encourages readers to question the ethics of a practice that extends stereotypes of Africans as disease-ridden thieves who all look alike.

Despite the fact that the scam victims may “deserve” to be scammed, the women in Kingsley’s life are skeptical of his work. His mother resents the fact that he has gained his wealth through fraudulent means, and she even refuses several expensive gifts that she offers him. Moreover, his former girlfriend, Ola, who breaks up with him early on in the novel because she and her family do not believe he can provide for her without stable employment, later expresses surprise at his new career choice. She asks the central questions that many pose when reflecting upon the 419 issue: “How do you cope with swindling all those white people of their money? Don’t you feel guilty?” (258). Kingsley, Cash Daddy, and numerous real-life 419 scammers justify their actions beyond the need for income or the inability to transcend corruption in order to survive in Nigeria. They claim that 419 scamming allows Africans to seek revenge against Westerners and African administrators after centuries of mistreatment, thereby permitting a new generation of trickster Africans to craft a unique version of the African success story.

For many 419ers like Cash Daddy, scamming represents the only practical, justifiable manner of retaliating against the generations of mugus responsible for the present condition of numerous African countries. According to the scam-baiting website, “419eater,” whose purpose is to document 419 scams and ideally warn

internet users about common scam narratives, scammers argue that their crimes are defensible because the Western world historically disrupted the tranquility of Africa when they initiated the slave trade and colonialism. Furthermore, Western oil companies continued unsavory practices when they robbed African nations of their resources (qtd. in Chang 74). The accused multimillionaire 419 kingpin who self-identifies as “the black Robin Hood,” Fred Ajudua, claims that he was justified in stealing from the white men (Glickman 478). In Nwaubani’s novel, *Cash Daddy* employs a similar logic when he attempts to permanently lure an initially guilt-ridden Kingsley into the 419 business. Cash Daddy argues that Westerners did not appear to express any sense of guilt when they enslaved Africans and stole their resources, and payback time is long overdue (158-159). As long as Western national administrators do not seriously entertain any proposals for economic reparations for descendants of colonial oppression, people like Cash Daddy argue that Africans will need to find more creative ways of collecting on their loans.

Ironically, of course, 419 scammers acquire their funds by convincing mugs that they as Westerners are the ones who rightfully deserve to prosper. Thus, as Finn Brunton implies, 419ers have effectively taken the narrative that Africans are continually exploited—which they emphasize in recurring scam narratives like the “Nigerian prince” scam—and transformed it into a tool to exploit those who historically robbed them (105-106). Furthermore, Jenna Burrell claims that the new, younger generation of 419 scammers could potentially improve their self-perceptions as Africans (22), which is a worthwhile argument if one considers how they “hack” the Western narrative that hard work, fate, or genetics allowed them to succeed

globally while Africans could not effectively self-govern. In this new chapter of the classic “Africa Writes Back” story, which might be appropriately called “Africa Steals Back,” scammer figures like Kingsley are essentially reclaiming their long overdue financial and narrative reparations from Westerners.

Although Western mugus represent the primary targets of generational retaliation in the 419 scamming business, the characters in Nwaubani’s novel also place some blame on African administrators for their recurring misfortune. He and his catchers may mostly steal from American or European mugus, but Cash Daddy acknowledges that the Nigerian government earns billions in oil profits that should rightfully belong to the nation’s citizens (179). Finn Brunton contends that 419 scams duplicate these negotiations that Nigerian politicians made with oil companies, only now the corrupt scams are “replayed on behalf of the people who got nothing from those deals” (105). Moreover, 419 scammers challenge the authority of leaders who scammed their own people when facilitating these oil negotiations and other profitable deals with Western institutions. While Nwaubani does not directly promote criminal activity, it is nonetheless interesting that 419 scammers are breaking the laws enforced by corrupt government officials who become rich at the expense of impoverished and underemployed locals. As Kingsley discovered the hard way, if the state cannot adequately provide resources or employment opportunities for its citizens, including the well-educated ones who older generations hope will lead the nation, then citizens may have to pursue less ideal means of earning income. But, more than a last resort, the 419 industry could represent a profitable organization of

resistance against a national government that fails to provide sufficient assistance for underprivileged citizens.

Given the 419 scammers' effectiveness in stripping away the power of Western mugus and governmental authorities, it is worth considering how these "criminals" are actually improving the quality of life for fellow Africans. Kingsley claims that, despite the fact that 419ers have developed a negative societal reputation, Cash Daddy has made a significant effort to help local Nigerians.⁴⁵ In addition to improving the roads in his mother's neighborhood, he provides scholarships to all incoming law students from the Isiukwuato Local Government and contributes to the maintenance of a community orphanage housing hundreds of children (226, 318). Nwaubani's characters essentially propose that illegal 419 fraud can actually do more good than harm for Nigerians. Through these generous acts, the scammer recreates the actions of the trickster figure, who, according to Thomas Jay Lynn, is sometimes motivated by a more socially just or at least karmic cause (158). To a certain extent, the scammer is thereby a more benevolent character than one might assume.

The notion that 419 scammers like Cash Daddy give back to the local community has important economic and political implications. As Hamish Dalley states, this charitable attitude supports the idea that the money fraudulently earned from 419 scamming can actually "trickle down" and help to alleviate long-standing

⁴⁵ According to Daniel Jordan Smith, the basis of the Nigerian public's distaste for 419 stems from the idea that these scammers violate a traditional moral code based on mutual respect and reciprocity in economic exchanges (*A Culture of Corruption* 24). Furthermore, he argues that the successful scammer's often flagrant displays of wealth in their stylistic choices connote more of a corrupt, wasteful image than a benevolent Robin Hood figure would offer ("Ritual Killing, 419, and fast wealth" 805). Thus, for many, the idea of the altruistic scammer is yet another scam in itself, as some 419ers flaunt their riches before impoverished masses, while reinforcing global stereotypes that Nigerians and Africans writ large are corrupt thieves.

local infrastructural and socio-economic problems (24). As a result of these benevolent acts, it is worth considering how 419ers are effectively continuing early twentieth-century Pan-Africanist Marcus Garvey's "Africans for Africans" movement that endorsed African self-sufficiency and colonial independence. Refusing to rely on Western or Nigerian governmental financial aid, which does not often trickle down to the citizens due to corruption, 419 kingpins like Cash Daddy choose to support the community.

However, despite Kingsley's emphasis on the positive implications of 419 scamming, the consequences of his actions negatively impact his relationships with his family. As indicated earlier in this chapter, his primary motivation for becoming a scammer alongside Cash Daddy was to fulfill his inherited "opara" role and provide for his family. But, what he doesn't anticipate is that his younger siblings will become so attracted to his new lifestyle that they will want to emulate him and focus less on pursuing an education. After watching Kingsley rise up in the 419 industry, his younger brother, Godfrey, announces that he would like to drop out of school and "[go] into business" (321). Appalled by this proposal, Kingsley argues that his siblings should not aspire to pursue the same career that, in his view, he did not accept by choice. Such a dilemma prompts readers to reflect upon the ongoing ethical generational conflicts that place the pursuit of a Western education and the continuance of a cycle of corruption at the center of African literature.

It is Kingsley's mother, Augustina who has the strongest criticism of Kingsley's scammer business. Though she never mentions the word "419," as though she cannot verbally admit that her son is a criminal, she knows that he earns "dirty

money” (327) and asserts that his father would be ashamed of his behavior. Kingsley tries to reassure her by claiming that he is only temporarily assisting his uncle with accounts until he can find a more permanent, suitable job, but she is disgusted that months turn into years and he continues to work for Cash Daddy. She refuses the new car and television that he purchases for her. Even when her health begins to falter, she declines Kingsley’s money. In moments like these, Kingsley becomes aware that he has failed to please and provide for his family. In the end, his skills do not allow him to become a respectable “opara” or to extend the legacy that his father established.

In her nuanced depiction of Nigerian 419 scamming, Nwaubani may sympathetically portray characters who must deal with impending poverty and corruption, but she refuses to resort to a clichéd stereotyping of characters and conflicts. Though she relies on the “Africa vs. the West” binary conflict in order to demonstrate the complex relationships between 419ers and mugus, she does not depict all scam victims as one might expect. Mr. Winterbottom, who Kingsley and Cash Daddy continually scam for quite some time in a “Spanish prisoner” style approach, is not a clueless white American, but rather a well-educated English businessman who was born in Uganda and grew up in Argentina (200). Mr. Winterbottom mistakenly sees Cash Daddy’s scam as a legitimate business opportunity that would help to strengthen Nigeria’s relationship with foreign companies like his. Another person who falls for one of Kingsley’s scams, Edgar Hooverson, is also a businessman with such a fondness for Africa that he names his dog Kunta Kinte. He even begins his email exchanges with, “Aluta Continua,” the gradually bastardized Portuguese phrase meaning, “The struggle continues,” which

served as the slogan for the anticolonial Mozambique Liberation Front before it was adopted by other African protesters in their own national liberation movements (Parrott 21-22). Kingsley does not view these mugs as ignorant people who would fall for any false advertising scam. He states, “Any intelligent, experienced expert could become a mugu. It was all about the packaging” (Nwaubani 271). Nwaubani realistically illustrates the patron-client relationship in the 419 industry; each scam victim is distinctive, and some may even appear to be as worldly and intelligent as the discerning reader.

The conclusion also belies a simple ending, as Kingsley essentially chooses both paths. In the epilogue, it appears that he has established a reputable, successful Internet café business called “Kings Ventures International.” He impresses his mother by giving her a tour of one of the cafés and promising her that he is still planning to pursue an MBA degree. However, when she is out of earshot, he takes a phone call and effectively gives the person on the other line the runaround about why his funds have not yet been deposited into his bank account—no doubt the continuation of another 419 scam. Nwaubani once again tricks the reader who might assume that Kingsley must pursue one morally conscious path or lose everything. On the contrary, he continues to provide for his community and his family through an honest business, while also becoming the next Cash Daddy. The epilogue thus functions as an allegory for scamming and money laundering.

Rather than evoke sympathy for Kingsley, as some tragedy-oriented African novels might aim to do, Nwaubani lightheartedly shows that they have been scammed into believing that Kingsley must face a dramatic consequence for his fraudulent

behavior—or, more broadly, that an Anglophone African novel must conclude with a resounding tragedy, didactic critique, or uplifting moment of hope. Her novel metaphorically ends with a comma rather than a period—pulling back the layers of the scammer trope until the end.

Unraveling the Cyberpunk Scammer in Zoo City

Lauren Beukes' *Zoo City* introduces readers to a science fictional yet contemporarily recognizable Johannesburg, South Africa. The novel is formally unique, in that the main story is continually interrupted by chapters that expand upon the supernatural elements of the narrative in the forms of newspaper articles, encyclopedia entries, research abstracts, message boards, and book and DVD reviews. These textual excerpts, some of which are humorous while others are more academic, help to unravel the world of the narrator-protagonist, Zinzi December. At age 32, Zinzi is a former pop culture journalist who developed a drug addiction. Her immersion in this world of vice indirectly caused her brother to be murdered in a drug-related conflict, and she is jailed for three and a half years. Like anyone else who commits a serious crime in this dystopian world, Zinzi becomes “animalled,” forever accompanied by an animal not of her choosing.⁴⁶ Everyone who possesses an

⁴⁶ According to one of the textual excerpts in the novel, an online movie review for *The Warlord & the Penguin: The Untold Story of Dehqan Baiyat* (2003), it is revealed that the first animalled cases emerged in the mid-1980s, but an animalled outbreak grew in Afghanistan due to nuclear testing in Pakistan in 1998 (Beukes 72-74). Clearly borrowing from science-fiction tropes, an Iranian-American “film student turned machine gun-toting, motorcyclering Afghan warlord” became known as “Patient Zero” because he was the first famous zoo case—known for the penguin that always accompanied him. In a scenario that is comparable with the tensions surrounding the 1980s AIDS epidemic, people around the world initially feared the “zoo plague” and became convinced that zoos were deviants, inhuman, and/or participants in black magic. It is therefore evident that Beukes draws upon actual historical events and problems that especially impact South African society.

animal is known as a “zoo.” In Zinzi’s case, her animal is a sloth, who constantly clings to her body and represents a public reminder that she is what society considers to be a criminal. Her sloth cannot die, for the murder of an animal results in the human’s immediate descent into the “Undertow,” which is described as “a psychic equivalent of dark matter” (Beukes 181). Zinzi eventually grows quite fond of her sloth and views him as both a comfort animal and protector who physically warns her of impending danger. Nonetheless, to most of South African society, the sloth signifies a burdensome representation of her past mistakes.

In addition to acquiring an animal, the animalled people earn a unique talent, or “mashavi.” Zinzi develops the power to visualize items that people have lost and easily find these possessions. In the world that Beukes designs, the “criminals” have both a visual marker of their past misdeeds, as well as an opportunity to perform good deeds. In my analysis, I will focus on Zinzi’s participation in 419 as a plot point within this larger storyline on how she navigates various ethical dilemmas and struggles to find her moral compass after her prison release. Her engagement with a world of crime reflects both a personal and national battle with fulfilling social expectations in a hierarchized world, while also approaching a dark side of African traditionalism and futurism.

Like Kingsley in *I Do Not Come to You by Chance*, Zinzi initially justifies her work as a scammer by presenting her societal disadvantage, which prevents her from attaining upward social mobility. As Zinzi phrases it, “The truth is we’re all criminals. Murderers, rapists, junkies. Scum of the earth [...] Because nothing says guilty like a spirit critter at your side” (15-16). Like former prisoners who may find it

difficult to reintegrate as a result of a criminal record, zoos in Johannesburg are marginalized and often turned down from housing and job applications. Due to this division, zoos are especially segregated within the local community and end up living in high-crime neighborhoods or becoming squatters in gentrified ones (51). Zinzi is able to acclimate well within this world and even feel at home in her neighborhood of Zoo City.⁴⁷ Unable to return to her career as a journalist, as a zoo she is able to earn some money through her unique mashavi talent of helping people find lost items. But she is unable to live on this freelance job alone, especially considering that her former drug dealer is still calling to collect back payments. Thus, she reverts back to a life of crime—this time, within the 419 email scamming industry. Unlike some 419ers, she has no inclination to become wealthy; she simply seeks to repay the debt accumulated during her last bout with crime. While *I Do Not Come to You by Chance* reveals the difficulties that young, college-educated Nigerians face when attempting to find employment, *Zoo City* shows intelligent South Africans who are perceived as criminals face similar challenges. In both novels, it is evident that national economic pressures and social stigmatizations prompt Africans to turn to the growing 419 industry as a way to support themselves. This sentiment echoes the dilemma of the

⁴⁷ Zinzi's reflection upon the dynamics of her neighborhood is worth further consideration. As Molly Brown argues, Zinzi seems comfortable in a place where she "nonchalantly compare[s] [the sounds of gunshots] to 'cicadas in the countryside' or 'microwave popcorn' (Beukes 49; Brown 35). While Konstantin Sofianos claims that Beukes offers a dystopian yet romanticized depiction of the ghetto as a community (118), it is also evident that Beukes underscores the inevitable normalization of violence within a high-crime neighborhood in Johannesburg. Echoing Brown's statement that *Zoo City* "seems to speak directly to white South African readers in its assertion that guns cannot be contained by walls or ghettos" (36), one can see how Beukes implies a critique of a post-apartheid yet still segregated society. Rather than eradicate violence, the state only fosters it by failing to provide adequate opportunities for upward social mobility. White readers from South Africa and the broader Western world can thereby witness and perhaps empathize with those who are the most ridiculed and marginalized in Johannesburg.

mythical African trickster figure, who has always been portrayed as “an intruder to proper society” (Vecsey 106) that turns to scamming out of financial necessity and a desire to spite the system that keeps him marginalized. The fact that a “criminal” and scammer like Zinzi carries an animal suggests a mythical connection to the trickster animals.

Before delving into the significance of 419 scamming within Beukes’ novel, it is important to explore the crimes that dominate the primary storyline: muti murders. While searching for a client’s lost items, Zinzi inadvertently finds herself caught up in a missing-persons investigation. What she eventually discovers is that a wealthy gangster and music executive is leading a muti murder industry. An uncommon but growing real-life concern in Southern Africa, muti murders consist of the fatal dismembering of a live person in order to extract body parts that will be mixed with other ingredients in a medicinal (known in the Zulu language as “muti”) form (Labuschagne 191). Deriving from traditionalist beliefs, muti is considered to be extremely potent and effective in warding off evil or granting special powers to the consumer (Scholtz, Phillips, and Knobel 117). This gruesome plot climax suggests a dark side to African traditionalism. While the 419 scammer performs a type of magic to lure and deceive the victim, a small population of African healers are using their own persuasive techniques to profit from a growing organ trafficking industry.

Although traditional healers operate quite differently from modern 419 scammers, the two industries are intertwined in a world of vice that is governed by a capitalistic, survival-of-the-fittest worldview. Muti killings may have some roots in ancient healing practice, but Gérard Labuschagne contends that “[t]imes of political

unrest, periods of competition for resources, and conditions of a power vacuum have all been associated with increased evidence of muti murder” (194). Despite the fact that a majority of traditional healers condemn muti killings, it is evident that economic pressures have influenced the spread of crime in various sectors of African society, including the healer community. Thus, some healers, like 419 scammers, are taking advantage of gullible consumers in a competitive, greedy atmosphere in order to earn profits. Moreover, the fact that the murderers believe that they gain powers from the “life essence” (Labuschagne 193) of successful people that they kill connotes a unique kind of cannibalism that seems apt in Beukes’ foreboding world, where envious people seek to usurp others’ youth, wealth, and fame.⁴⁸

While the centrality of the muti murders within *Zoo City* highlights the dark side of African traditionalism, Zinzi’s side job as a 419 scammer reveals the dark side of Africa’s more future-oriented technological growth. As previously mentioned, Zinzi becomes involved in 419 not out of greed or a desire to scam people, but because she cannot find suitable work as a zoo and needs to pay off the drug debt she accumulated before her time in prison. Unlike the more brazen Cash Daddy, who is not afraid of being recognized in public and boasts a flashy lifestyle, Zinzi’s mysterious 419 “catcher-man” boss, known as Vuyo, is particularly discreet. Zinzi argues that he is not like the 419 bosses in Nigeria who may spend time in an Internet café, for Vuyo is likely holed up in an old, cramped apartment (39). He primarily communicates with her online via Skype instant message in a “carefully

⁴⁸ Two primary victims of the muti murders within Beukes’ novel include young superstar musician twins who are taken under the wing of Odi Huron, the music executive who enables the killings. This storyline no doubt connotes the idea that authorities within the music industry feed off of the youthful energy and success of their musician protégés.

decentralised” (39) enterprise. As a professional scammer in this futuristic world, Vuyo is hyper-paranoid and aware of attempts to hack into or bust operations. Like Shane Graham argues, “Vuyo shares this strategy of decentralization with both the modern multinational corporation and the criminal-terrorist syndicate such as Al Qaeda” (74). This acute comparison, reminiscent of Benjamin Barber’s “Jihad vs. McWorld” juxtaposition, underscores the nature of how select 419 scammers are adroitly capitalizing off of an increasingly globalized world dominated by technological growth and democratization.⁴⁹ Although corporations, jihadists, and 419 scammers strategically exploit laborers, consumers, and/or technologies in distinctive ways, the latter two groups are publicly recognized as agents of vice and may consequently adapt to secretive lifestyles. Beukes accordingly establishes an equally realistic and compelling portrayal of African 419 scammers, which differs to some extent from Nwaubani’s depiction of the same industry in Nigeria.

In a unique play with form, Beukes displays the Skype instant messages between Zinzi and Vuyo. It is within these messages that the reader comes to understand how Zinzi is coerced to carry out 419 scams. Below is an excerpt from one of their exchanges:

>>Vuyo: This deal will bring in 50 Titos. If u do well, it is worth 10% to u.

⁴⁹ Building upon William Butler Yeats’ claim that we are living in a modern world divided by “that of race reflecting our tribal past [and] that of soul anticipating the cosmopolitan future” (Barber 29), Benjamin Barber argues that the “Jihad vs. McWorld” phenomenon emerges from the ongoing dialectical competition between forces of “civilization,” now governed by corporations like McDonalds, and “tribalism” to use cutting-edge technologies in order to attain global dominance. For instance, both groups use digital technologies to communicate to global audiences, whether the purpose is to advertise to or threaten the masses. In Barber’s view, Jihad and McWorld are foils of one another in that “Jihad forges communities of blood rooted in exclusion and hatred,” while “McWorld forges global markets rooted in consumption and profit, leaving to an untrustworthy, if not altogether fictitious, invisible hand” (31). The Western world may find McWorld to be more benevolent and preferable to the violent threat of Jihad, each group uses digital tools and advertising techniques to homogenously mobilize supporters or consumers.

>>Kahlo999: And if I don't?
>>Vuyo: Of course u will do well. U R practically a pro. Ur dealer told us about all the stories u came with, crying about ur mama with cancer + ur dead granny + being mugged just when u were coming to pay for ur coke. This will b easy for u.
>>Kahlo999: I mean, if I don't do it at all.
>>Vuyo: I will have to add a penalty to ur total. 20% + usual interest. So that is ... let me work it out.
>>Kahlo999: I got it, thanks” (41)

One sees how Zinzi, despite her best intentions, cannot fully escape her criminal past. Mirroring the numerous fictional and real-life representations of prisoners who find themselves reentering a life of vice after a prison release, *Zoo City* underscores how difficult it is for marginalized ex-convicts to escape the cycle of crime. Moreover, Vuyo exploits Zinzi's desperation by essentially arguing that she will be an effective scammer because she was able to craft convincing lies as a drug addict, when she couldn't produce the funds for her cocaine purchases. His assumption is correct, as I will discuss shortly, but for now it is important to note how Vuyo exerts his influence over Zinzi and regards her as a hopeless, indebted beggar. Whereas the relationship between Cash Daddy and Kingsley is familial, the one between Vuyo and Zinzi reflects a more disproportionate power dynamic that is common within the 419 industry. Although 419 is a less violent field of vice than muti trafficking, it is evident that both crime industries use exploitative means to deceive, coerce, and/or harm people.

Beyond the contextual themes of the Skype messages between Zinzi and Vuyo, it is also worthwhile to study the style of the exchange. Through the use of recognizable Internet slang, these messages help to strengthen the highly digitized, cyberpunk feel of the novel. Zinzi's turn from the drug trade to 419 reflects what

might actually become a fitting transitional trend in global crime. After all, according to research conducted by Juniper Networks, cybercrime is quickly becoming more profitable and popular than drug trafficking (Dethlefs). As a result of the democratization of personal digital technologies throughout the world, including African nations who seek to integrate themselves within global markets by investing in the Information Communication Technology (ICT) industry, the general accessibility and anonymity of digital crime is becoming more attractive. Because there is currently less criminal regulation on the worldwide web, it is likely that digital crime like 419 will only continue to proliferate throughout Africa. Beukes is therefore quite accurate in her assessment that 419 scamming will continue to become prominent in South Africa, and it may be an applicable industry for those who are tied to the drug trade and want to branch out into a more profitable, inconspicuous line of nefarious work.

Vuyo is correct in his assumption that Zinzi will assimilate well into the 419 scamming business due to her adept storytelling skills. As she says herself, she is “a master builder in the current affairs sympathy scam” who can take on the role of “[a] Chechnyan refugee fleeing the last Russian pogroms with her family’s diamonds in tow” or “[a] Somali pirate who has found Jesus and wants to trade in his rocket launcher and ransom millions for absolution” (37). Like the most fruitful scammers, she succeeds in transforming stereotypical African current events narratives into convincing scam hooks. This explains why she receives 661 interested replies to the 49,812 emails she instantaneously sent out in one instance—which she indicates is a formidable reply rate, considering the prevalence of spam filters (38). In one scam

email, which is printed in full as an entire intermediary chapter within the novel, Zinzi takes on the persona of an impoverished 13-year-old orphan from the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), whose parents were killed amidst civil war strife. The character she creates within this narrative, named Eloria Bangana, dresses as a boy in order to work in the DRC's illegal coltan mines. In an appeal to the Western reader who may be unfamiliar with this real-world problem in the DRC, she elaborates:

They say coltan makes cell phones. I do not know how you make cell phones from mud. Also computers and video games. All your technology runs on mud. Isn't that funny? [...] I get seven cents American for every kilogram of coltan. The rebels weigh it on the scales but they cheat. The lady at the mission station, Sister Mercia, says coltan is worth 100 times what they pay. She says they use us like slaves (25-26).

She further explains that militant rebels have captured Father Quixote, who operates the orphanage in which she resides. He has conveniently stored all of the orphanage's money in an American bank account, and the reader can keep \$80,000 of the profits if one helps to unlock these funds and save poor Eloria in the process. What is striking about this creative take on the 419 scam narrative is that the scammer persona is not a royal prisoner, but a destitute child who is trapped within a nation that is known for violent conflict.

Zinzi's elaboration on the real, growing coltan mining conflict is particularly thoughtful and relevant to present-day politics. Coltan is a common mineral used to construct mobile phones, gaming consoles, and numerous other electronic devices. The DRC contains 80% of the world's coltan reserves (Montague and Berrigan 2001). These minerals are often mined illegally because of the high demand for coltan-based products in the West, the large profits that can be earned as a result, and

the limited regulation of the DRC mining industry. Due to the limited or absent regulation in this practice, underpaid laborers, many of whom are children, often risk their lives to work long hours in these dark, cramped mines. Most Westerners are unaware that they are indirectly supporting this highly dangerous, illegal, and exploitative mining business by purchasing popular electronics like cell phones. Hence, Zinzi's email scam informs and evokes sympathy from her intended audience.

Like Kingsley in *I Do Not Come to You by Chance* and other real-world 419 scammers, Zinzi builds upon actual African conflicts and the recurring image of Africans as impoverished, helpless people in order to craft a convincing scam narrative. Lauren Beukes creatively designs a world of vice in which Zinzi is unconventionally (and often indirectly) placed at the center of the African illegal drug, 419 scamming, muti murder, and coltan mining conflicts. In a clever move, Beukes criticizes the gullibility of a Western reader who falls for scam narratives about a destitute, crime-ridden Africa, while simultaneously informing Western readers of her novel of a contemporary, multifarious intersection of African vice activities.

Much like Cash Daddy's business, Vuyo's 419 operation encourages face-to-face meetings between scammers and traveling moegoes (the South African iteration of "mugus") who have already contributed a significant amount of money to the scam. In one such scenario, she and Vuyo meet in person to swindle a pair of scam victims at a place called the Rand Club. As Zinzi explains, this real-life South African historical venue was a popular destination for Cecil Rhodes and fellow nineteenth-century "colonial slumlords" who would use the space to plan the fate of African

colonies (41-42). In a perfect “hacking” of this setting, non-white South Africans like Zinzi turn the tables on Western visitors looking to increase their wealth. Rather than allowing them to live out their colonial fantasies by capitalizing on a chance boon available in Africa, Zinzi and Vuyo scam them out of a fortune. The premise of the scam follows the Spanish prisoner template, in which a former African royal has been stripped of her title and cast aside as a refugee. If the moegoes—a middle-aged Midwestern American couple making their third trip to Africa as a part of this scam—can help her to regain her rightful throne, then they will receive a generous \$2.5 million gift as thanks. It is formidable that Vuyo has been able to sustain the scam for such an extended period, but the anxious moegoes would now like to meet the person who they are theoretically both rescuing and eventually profiting from. Enter Zinzi, who is playing the role of the riches-to-rags character named Frances. Zinzi initially resents the fact that she now has to be an actor, when Vuyo claimed he hired her because her journalism skills suggested she could be a promising email scammer. But, unfortunately for her, she still has debts to pay and the 419 scamming business includes a variety of spontaneous responsibilities.

In a similar way that Cash Daddy falsely assumes a Hausa name in order to appear even more foreign and perhaps “exotic” to the scam victims, Zinzi has to look and act the part for this face-to-face scam at the Rand Club. However, because she is a woman impersonating someone who is technically both a royal princess and a refugee—not to mention the fact that she has a sloth poking out from her bag—her performance is more of a challenge. She carefully dresses in what she sarcastically calls “refugee chic” attire, wearing simple clothing, beaded jewelry, and a headwrap

(43). On the one hand, she plays up the sense of exoticism that Western tourists may want to indulge in when visiting Africa, stating, “You never know where you might find hidden treasure in Africa” in her “best Queen of Sheba voice” (44). On the other hand, because the exoticism may have worn off on the couple during this third trip to South Africa for the purpose of this scam, Zinzi also exhibits sentimentality. In order to convince the frustrated couple to continue contributing their pensions to the scam, she tears up as she recalls the horrors experienced at the refugee camp. Using her persuasive techniques, she convinces the American couple to continue supporting the effort, despite the long wait for the deposit that Vuyo essentially blames on “Africa as usual.” Thus, as Jennifer Schmidt argues, Zinzi is “well-attuned to the mechanisms of the gaze that objectifies and fragments women’s bodies” (150). With this in mind, Beukes reveals that the use of a desperate, traumatized, and/or alluring feminine persona within the scam can be particularly persuasive for Western audiences. Echoing Gayatri Spivak’s notion that colonial or Western figures are often moved by the imperialist ideal of “white men saving brown women from brown men” (297), Beukes shows how the American moegoes are attracted to the idea of “saving” an African woman from the cruel leaders who oppressed her—while earning a multimillion dollar fortune in the end, of course. Both as a writer and as an actor within the 419 scam business, Zinzi reinforces African stereotypes while hacking these narratives in order to swindle gullible victims.

Zinzi has ambivalent feelings about her fundamentally forced participation in these scams. She notes to herself that she feels both repulsed by and excited about the royal-to-refugee scheme, a kind of addiction. The tension becomes evident when

Zinzi's Rwandan-born partner, Benoît, discovers the scam emails that she has been keeping a secret from him. He is furious that she appears to be neglecting the personal and economic conditions of the people she is scamming. Moreover, he is hurt because he, as someone who became a reluctant participant in mid-1990s militant violence as a Rwandan youth, feels that he "knows" real people just like the fictional ones she mentions in her scam narratives—such as a child who is shot in one of her stories (257). He recognizes that the tragic tales that Zinzi has conjured up in order to simulate a stereotypically violent portrayal of Africa are grounded in the grim reality of many Africans. Moments like this confrontation with Benoît prompt readers to further reflect upon the damage that 419 scamming can inflict upon Africans.

Although Zinzi has always justified her participation in the 419 industry due to her substantial drug debt and lack of economic opportunities as a zoo, it is not long after this conversation with Benoît that she realizes she has more of a choice in the matter than she initially thought. She decides to send a mass reply to 3,986 new email messages that likely indicate an interest in pursuing the scam opportunity she previously offered. In her message, she writes:

This is a scam.
No one is going to give you millions of dollars for nothing.
Save your money.
Spend it on ice-cream.
Go out to dinner.
Take your loved ones away for the weekend.
Pay off your credit cards.
Have an adventure.
Blow it on skydiving lessons or drink or hookers or
gambling.
But please, don't send it to me or anyone else involved in this ugly little
fiction.
And next time, don't be so fucking naïve (276-277).

Although Zinzi knows that Vuyo will be angry with her, she reasons that because he is not a zoo, he will not risk harming her and becoming animalled in the process. As she sends this message, she rejoices at the weight that has been lifted off her shoulders. On one level, she knows Vuyo and other scammers will be able to trick many more moegoes in the future, and therefore she hasn't exactly made a significant change in the broader cybercrime industry. Nevertheless, she feels a sense of relief due to the fact that she has finally broken the personal cycle of crime that she has contributed to since commencing her drug habit. Unlike Kingsley, who secretly continues his 419 ventures while operating an Internet café, Zinzi takes Benoît's words to heart and decides to end her association with this industry once and for all. Moreover, she hacks the premise of the 419 email—thereby positively hacking the entire game of hacking Western moegoes—for she tells her audience to stop believing in these 419 fictions.

In the novel's conclusion, Zinzi continues her personal path toward self-reinvention and benevolence. At the novel's climax, Zinzi and Benoît uncover the truth about the muti murders, but Benoît dies in the violent confrontation that takes place at the home of the culprits. Thus, in a distressing turn of events, Zinzi once again becomes indirectly responsible for the death of a loved one—even though she is actively trying to put a stop to crime rather than sustain it in this instance. While her brother died as a result of a drug-related conflict tied to her addiction, Benoît dies while trying to assist her on a final mission in her discrete missing person's inquiry that evolved into a serial muti murder case. In the immediate aftermath of this investigation, Zinzi finds herself at a unique crossroads. She no longer has a family,

partner, or stable career to return to. In the end, she decides to continue her new, altruistic path by initiating a new quest to help the refugee family (including his wife and children) that Benoît left behind in Rwanda to seek asylum in South Africa. As she states in one of the last sentences of the novel, “It’s going to be the best thing I’ve done with my miserable life” (309).

Despite her forthcoming act of kindness, it is evident that she cannot yet fully escape the cycle of crime that she has chased up until this point. Because she is forbidden from leaving South Africa while the serial murder investigation that she was independently involved in continues, she persuades a long-time criminal friend to create fake identification papers and an accompanying passport for her—threatening to pin one of the murders on him if he doesn’t comply with her request. Now assuming the false identity of a Zimbabwean U.N. aid worker, she effectively turns another page in her 419 scammer playbook by illegally assuming a new role. Like Kingsley, there is a part of her that does not fully evade the work of scamming, even though both of them aim to pursue more respectable work. This time, however, Zinzi compellingly reverses the part she played in her royal-to-refugee scam: now, like a more self-aware Western moegoe, she has become the benevolent benefactor who plans to rescue the refugee. In this “hacked” scam narrative, she does not seek to gain anything financially. Rather, she only desires to sincerely help the real-life suffering Africans that her 419 scam narratives fictionally exploited for a profit.

Zinzi’s final decision in the novel has significant implications for the future of the Anglophone African narrative. Throughout the course of *Zoo City*, Zinzi uniquely hacks the narrative of the uneven relationship between Westerners and Africans twice

over. In the final, renewed iteration of the story, she pursues a still illegal yet somewhat more equitable version of the aforementioned “Africans for Africans” narrative that select 419 scammers claim to do when they donate portions of their riches to worthwhile African causes. Rather than assisting them financially, Zinzi seeks to help fellow Africans to find safety during national strife. Moreover, as Neville Hoad asserts, Beukes’ novel offers a renewed, forward-thinking direction for the Anglophone African literary protagonist. For Hoad, “Zinzi imagines her trajectory as embarking on another kind of Afropolitan journey, neither a homecoming nor a pilgrimage” (305). Indeed, Zinzi does not know what will await her when she arrives in Rwanda and meets Benoît’s family. However, her decision to travel there and to reach out to Africans from another nation suggests an unpredictable yet positive direction for an African character—a new kind of internal Afropolitanism.

Global Pirates : The Significance of the Hacked Scammer in Africa

Both *I Do Not Come to You by Chance* and *Zoo City* hack classic African tropes in order to present fresh, nuanced narratives for a contemporary global audience. They each revisit the types of storylines that Chinua Achebe, J.M. Coetzee, and other popular mid-twentieth-century Anglophone African writers introduced: the struggle between traditionalism and modernity; the entrapment of the individual within a cycle of violence, disenfranchisement, and corruption; the dangers of societal segregation, etc. Although Adaobi Tricia Nwaubani and Lauren Beukes build upon these tragic, recurrent themes—thereby appearing to conform to Western audience expectations of African literature—the authors hack these narratives through the use

of sardonic humor and twisted tropes. By transforming the poor African street thief or hapless victim of generational economic corruption into a manipulative yet sympathetic 419 scammer, Nwaubani and Beukes defy canonical norms. They create powerful protagonists who challenge the stereotype that Africans do not have any opportunities for upward social mobility. Moreover, the authors cleverly integrate 419 scammer narratives that are especially relevant and appealing to technologically literate global audiences.

To some extent, these Anglophone African Literary Boom authors allow Western readers to engage with ever-present scam emails in a new way. As Oluwole Coker argues, “Internet fraud, a twenty-first century social vice as thematized provides an opportunity to interrogate the paradox of society’s quest for development and the emerging global village” (37). With this idea in mind, the 419 scammer figure essentially represents a renewed, hacked trope that engages readers with an age-old yet constantly evolving system of global empire-building. In this postcolonial era, Anglophone African writers are confronting neo-colonial relationships between Western and African nations. While African unemployment levels increase as a result of state corruption, national indebtedness to the IMF and the World Bank, and the Western exploitation of natural resources, the emerging 419 scammer figure is an appropriate symbol of tentative African individual socio-economic growth amidst moral insecurity. In thinking about the scammer as a Robin Hood figure who steals from wealthy Westerners that presumably inherited wealth, property, and societal privilege from those who cheated and oppressed Africans, the scammer becomes both a canonically unlikely yet culturally relevant hero(ine).

By following the evolution of the 419er protagonist, who represents a globally recognizable “criminal,” readers in both Africa and the rest can begin to see real-life scammers and financially struggling Africans more generally in a new light. As Afe Adogame asserts, if select debt-ridden African countries continue to be plagued by socio-economic strife, then fraudulent activities such as 419 will persist. Additionally, the more that this cycle of poverty and corruption endures, the better the likelihood that “we may just yet be waiting to witness greater sophistication in this global, transnational organised crime” (Adogame 573). Especially in a futuristic, cyberpunk novel like *Zoo City*, we see how global crime linkages begin to emerge among the illegal drug, 419 scamming, coltan mining, and muti murder industries. As popular Anglophone African novels become more intended for worldwide audiences, including Westerners, globally recognizable figures like the 419 scammer are ideal characters to explore. This is because the 419 scammer is a particularly current staple of contemporary culture whose presence will only grow so long as the world proceeds to invest in ICTs. Moreover, the scammer reflects uniquely African concerns and perspectives in a way that is relatable to Western audiences who are familiar with 419 email scam narratives. The scammer further underscores central economic problems that place Westerners and Africans in direct conversation with one another. The Western reader can thereby comfortably approach a 419-oriented novel, while also entering an indirect confrontation regarding Westerners’ exploitation of African narratives. As one sees the scammer “hacking” this narrative and “scamming back” the mugus, Western readers can reflect upon the nuances of this larger, real-world story of neo-colonial African oppression and the desire to transform this narrative.

The 419-centric “hacking” of the Anglophone African novel could have a substantial impact on how Western readers perceive those who turn to scamming, as well as the nature of contemporary African literature more generally. On the one hand, one may certainly still express sympathy for the hapless scam victim or blame the 419 industry to some degree for continuing to provide the world with a catalyst for stereotyping Africans. On the other hand, one can enjoy a bit of satisfaction that the perpetual global victims of corrupt, multigenerational scams—the Africans—are adopting and transforming the marginalizing narratives about them into tools for profitable revenge. In addition to Adaobi Tricia Nwaubani and Lauren Beukes, another Anglophone African Literary Boom writer, Teju Cole, recognizes the literary and cultural value of these scam emails. Focusing specifically on the significance of 419 in Lagos, Nigeria, Cole argues in his fictional work, *Every Day is for the Thief* (2007) that these scam emails “are such enterprising samples of narrative fiction that I realize Lagos is a city of Scheherazades. The stories unfold in ever more fanciful iterations and, as in the myth, those who tell the best stories are richly rewarded” (27). Indeed, beyond the aforementioned comparison of the scammer to the African trickster, it is evident that the figure also appears to be a contemporary, hacked version of the ancient Persian Scheherazade character—who continues to weave a persuasive story in order to survive and eventually achieve a position of socio-economic power. Furthermore, the Anglophone African Literary Boom authors themselves replicate the clever techniques of their scammer protagonists to some extent. They harness the stereotypical perception that an African novel is dominated by stories of trauma, poverty, and corruption. However, authors like Nwaubani and

Beukes gradually transform this typified narrative into uniquely engaging stories where the African scammer characters assume a position of narrative power over Western readers. In the process, real-life Western audiences begin to see African characters and people not as perennial victims in global society, but instead as empowered, intelligent individuals. By playing upon and then hacking traditional African tropes and storylines, while featuring a creative take on the relevant 419 scammer character, select Anglophone African Literary Boom writers are setting a positive new precedent for world literature.

Chapter 5: Hacking the Afropolitan : The Anglophone African Literary Boom's Intersection with National, Transnational, and Global Literature

“Were you to ask any of these beautiful, brown-skinned people that basic question – ‘where are you from?’ – you’d get no single answer [...] ‘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.” – Taiye Selasi, “Bye-Bye Babar”

“In an attempt to overturn predominant readings of Africa, we need to identify sites within the continent, entry and exit points not usually dwelt upon in research and public discourse, that defamiliarize commonplace readings of Africa” – Achille Mbembe and Sarah Nuttal, “Writing the World from the African Metropolis” (352)

“The discourse around Afropolitanism foregrounds questions of class in ways the ‘I’m not Afropolitan’ crowd don’t want to deal with and in ways the ‘I’m Afropolitan’ crowd are often too blithe about. Collectively, we could do better. The phenomena described - Afropolitanism, pan-Africanism – are real, and interesting, and discomfiting, and for very many of us, no matter how we squeal, the shoe fits.” – Teju Cole, *Post45* Interview

The analysis of “hacked” tropes in contemporary Anglophone African Boom literature, including the flâneur, the griot, and the trickster in the last three chapters, complicates the figure of the Afropolitan. Teju Cole’s Julius is a Nigerian-born psychiatrist masquerading as a cosmopolitan aesthete in New York, while Helon Habila’s Lomba is literally a prisoner in Nigeria as a result of his political activism. The authors likewise come from diverse backgrounds. Dinaw Mengestu is an Ethiopian-American MacArthur Fellow whose family fled the Red Terror, while Lauren Beukes is a white South African popular science fiction writer. Moreover, the publication histories and visibilities of these authors and their texts differ.

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie is one of the most recognized Nigerian authors and TED Talk speakers, while Adaobi Tricia Nwaubani is a Nigerian novelist whose works are not as globally or even locally widespread as a result of the limitations within the Nigerian publishing industry.⁵⁰ I selected these texts not only to show how contemporary Anglophone African writers are successfully “hacking” central tropes in order to appeal to a global readership, but also to offer a more complex view of the Afropolitan figure.

This concluding chapter synthesizes the analyses of the novels that I have discussed in a theoretical examination of how Anglophone African Boom literature intersects with theoretical and popular conversations on Afropolitanism. When I began writing this dissertation in 2016, the term was more of a popularized word in magazines. Now, as I finalize my dissertation in 2022, the “Afropolitan” is ubiquitous. There are numerous theoretical studies, popular articles, blog posts, and even designated rooms on the ClubHouse social networking application that discuss conceptions of Afropolitanism. My objective in this chapter is to address the ongoing debates about the term: whether it is superficial and elitist or ethical and inclusive; whether it is a social movement or an identity; whether it is political or cultural; and whether it is Western-embracing or a continuation of Pan-Africanism. I develop my own theorization of Afropolitanism as a seemingly utopian and Western-centric, but ultimately a more nuanced approach to identity. I argue that Afropolitanism is not

⁵⁰ Adaobi Tricia Nwaubani has described the problem of how the majority of Nigerian writers are self-published and are financially responsible for all of the printing and promotion of their novels. She claims that success in Nigerian publishing is dependent on wealth, notoriety, and connections. In 2014, Nwaubani wrote that her novel, *I Do Not Come to You by Chance*, was only physically accessible in Nigeria “at a few bookstores in highbrow areas of about five cities” (“African Books for Western Eyes”).

inherently centered on privilege, success, or even migration. Rather, it is a contemporary African solidarity movement that could foster new, engaging conversations on African culture and identity. While such conversations are currently centered in upper-middle-class, migratory, and tech-savvy cosmopolitan spaces.⁵¹

My approach to Afropolitanism draws attention not only to emigrant authors like Teju Cole, Taiye Selasi, and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie—who Tim Brennan might call the “Afropolitan celebrities” of this generation of Anglophone African writers—but also to the more localized African writers like Lauren Beukes and Adaobi Tricia Nwaubani, whose works focus on continental issues and are not as widely discussed on a global scale. In this chapter, I will underscore the significance of Afropolitanism in contemporary Anglophone African literary theory and show how it is an extension of existing debates in postcolonial, transnational, and global literary scholarship. Second, I will discuss how Afropolitanism forges a continental and transnational diasporic solidarity among Africans that extends and strengthens the existing movements of Pan-Africanism and Afrocentrism. Third, I will provide an overview of current debates around the term in academic and popular scholarship and advocate for an expanded, inclusive understanding of the term as it applies to Anglophone African Boom writing.

⁵¹ Selasi rejects the use of Afropolitan as an adjective to describe her own novel, *Ghana Must Go*, in the same speech in which she stresses the limitations of the “African literature” category when most world literature is broken down by nation or theme and not an entire continent (“African Literature Doesn’t Exist”).

Afropolitanism as Theory

Afropolitanism has an important place in critical theory that intersects African postcolonial, world literary, and global theory. Although Taiye Selasi was not the first person to ever use the term Afropolitanism, she is often credited for initiating the public conversation and debate on the subject.⁵² She has become a pioneer for the term's popularization, even though the discipline itself has long evolved since the time she first wrote about it in her 2005 popular article, "Bye-Bye Babar," in a small UK magazine called *LIP*. Early in the article, Selasi presents a vivid picture of the Afropolitan generation, many of whom are children of the nearly 100,000 African emigrants that left Africa between the 1960s-1980s, as "the newest generation of African emigrants, coming soon or collected already at a law firm/chem lab/jazz lounge near you." These Afropolitans, she argues, have a multitude of different accents and vernaculars, impressive educational accolades, and find themselves to be "not citizens, but Africans of the world." Her objective in describing the financial and educational success, as well as the aesthetic cosmopolitanism of this group of people, is to elevate the single-story of Africa from Eddie Murphy's stereotypical *Coming to America* (1988) character to what she has found to be a more realistic and aspirational image of worldly Africans living abroad. In terms of philosophy, Selasi states that Afropolitans aim to "engage with, critique, and celebrate" different parts of the African experience. In the continual negotiation of the "national, racial, [and] cultural" dimensions that inevitably comprise the Afropolitan conception of identity,

⁵² Sarah Balakrishnan finds an even earlier mention of Afropolitanism in a discussion between Sarah Nuttall and Mark Gevisser in 2004, when Gevisser describes "an Afropolitan city" as "a place where you can eat fufu or Swahili curry or pap en vleis" (qtd. In Balakrishnan 2).

the Afropolitan movement is an enthusiastic, exploratory, and positive turn for African studies. But it is also self-reflexive and seeking meaningful change.

However, if we can look past Selasi's descriptions of happy, wealthy Africans waltzing their way from the boardroom to the ballroom as they elegantly transcend borders, we can look more seriously at how Afropolitanism is a fitting framework through which to analyze the trajectory of the contemporary Anglophone African Boom writers. Selasi has certainly received her fair share of criticism for bringing this term into greater circulation, with Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie herself telling me at a roundtable that she didn't quite understand the term, nor did she feel the need to embrace or embody a term that superimposed itself over the word, "African"—which she felt sufficiently described her identity.⁵³ Yewande Omotoso, too, hesitates at the idea of self-identifying as an Afropolitan because she feels that the term implies that the writer is some kind of oracle between Africa and the West who provides an easily consumable African story for predominantly Western readers, even though she has no desire to leave the continent or express any conflicting loyalties despite having traveled often (qtd. in Fasselt, "I'm not Afropolitan" 5). But, for other African diasporic writers like Minna Salami, Afropolitanism is an empowering and inquisitive school of thought. It involves the collection of theories and expressions of literature and culture, which lays the groundwork for boots-on-the-ground social justice initiatives (*Ms. Afropolitan*). Taking a more middle-ground approach, Sefi Atta says that while she is ambivalent about her own novels being labeled Afropolitan, she does

⁵³ Marta Tveit, too, contends that she doesn't see why an African living in a city or in another country needs a special new term all to herself. She likens the concept to an all-too-familiar "call to arms of African intellectual diaspora, of a certain socio-economic class, educated in the West, and ready to charge off and save Africa" ("The Afropolitan Must Go").

not want Afropolitanism to turn into a kind of genre that excludes African novels from the conversation just because they do not engage with cosmopolitanism, urban spaces, or interactions between Africa and the West. She also argues that Afropolitan themes are not exactly new or groundbreaking, despite Western publishers' capitalization of the term to promote the writing of a new generation of African writers (qtd. in Knudesen and Rahbek 185).⁵⁴

Afropolitanism was first discussed at an academic conference in September 2011, when “the Afropolitan generation” was described as a group of contemporary Anglophone African writers, artists, and other creatives who marked a new era in the production, circulation, and reception of African culture (Hasan 2012, 3 qtd. in Wasihun 391). Achille Mbembe advanced existing theories of Afropolitanism to form a more comprehensive academic theorization of what I am calling a new disciplinary mode. Mbembe describes Afropolitanism as the keen ability to recognize foreignness in oneself and in others—to empathize with the foreigner in a way that those who simply move from point A to point B do not (28). Although this identification with the foreigner can be alienating, the Afropolitan also takes comfort in that foreignness—which many first-generation African writings from the 1960s-1970s did not sufficiently address. In the same 2007 publication where Mbembe published his initial article on Afropolitanism, Clive Kellner also argues that contemporary African diasporans are doing away with the double in W.E.B. Du Bois' double-consciousness

⁵⁴ James Hodapp supports this view of Afropolitanism as a continuation rather than a revolution of African literature in conversation with cosmopolitan themes. He argues that Afropolitan literature should be studied as part and parcel of early foundational African texts like Chinua Achebe's *No Longer At Ease*, as well as “been-to” novels such as *Season of Migration to the North* that focus especially on African characters' travel overseas and return to Africa. As Hodapp states, Afropolitanism continues the tradition of African writers who “[engage] the world through literature in ways that circumvent, ignore or problematize the nation” (132).

as they more acutely understand and navigate African consciousness (24). He advocates for forward-thinking scholarly conversations of “a new Africanity” that minimizes the nation and location in general, while advancing conversations about “how you think and what you do” (25). This is at the heart of Afropolitan theory, where investigations of the self and of African literature focus less on the role of place and more on the frictions of cultural difference and theoretical complexity of cosmopolitanism.

Helon Habila describes the contemporary generation of African literature, which I argue intersects largely with Afropolitanism, as “a culmination of historical moments about Africa” (“Tradition and the African Writer”). This dissertation has sought to underscore that argument by illustrating how contemporary Anglophone African Boom writing is transgressive, yet cumulative in how it builds upon familiar forms, styles and tropes. This particular section connects Afropolitan theory to its predecessors—beginning with postcolonialism. Postcolonial scholarship was historically a discipline of resistance within the academy in response to conservative, nationalist, capitalist, and interventionist foreign policy in the Western world beginning in the late 1970s and continuing through the 1980s (Lazarus 9; Chrisman 183). Although we can categorize different bodies of literature by continent or country, non-Western literature written by authors from formerly colonized countries often fell under the “postcolonial” term. Anne McClintock makes a compelling argument about the weakness of the term in that it is “haunted by the very figure of linear ‘development’ that it sets out to dismantle” (86). When we emphasize chronology and regard colonialism/postcolonialism as a binary construct, this results

in limited, linear thinking. The term also feels dated, since many contemporary writers were already born in the postcolonial era and therefore may not focus on all of the often nation-centric subjectivities or a West vs. East mentality. Approaching postcolonialism in a more forward-thinking way, Ella Shohat advocates for postcolonial scholars to concentrate more deeply on “the relationship of difference and sameness, rupture and continuity” (104) that is applicable far beyond the temporal labeling of the “postcolonial” in the mid-twentieth century. Moreover, Ato Quayson extends the definition of postcolonialism to not only involve interactions with colonialism, but also look toward “more general global developments thought to be the after-effects of empire” (2). It is here that postcolonial studies becomes more applicable to the contemporary moment, as we engage with uneven power dynamics that extend far beyond the colonial era.⁵⁵

African literature has an integral presence in postcolonial studies. As Simon Gikandi argues, “the political and cultural force of colonialism in Africa was so enduring that writers concerned with the nature of African society could not avoid the trauma and drama that accompanied [colonialism]” (“African Literature and the Colonial Factor” 380). A large part of early Anglophone African literature, such as

⁵⁵ It is worth noting that although African literature is often at the forefront of postcolonial studies, some African writers criticize the discipline for prioritizing the study of literature in colonial languages. Karin Barber argues that postcolonial writing is “conveniently articulated in English and consolingly preoccupied with his or her relations to the center—‘writing back’ in a language the ex-colonizers can understand” (3). This argument can be connected to the African language debates that Chinua Achebe and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o have fostered over whether it is better to write first in colonial or indigenous African languages. Barber also indicates that postcolonial studies often distorts the history of African literature to create a linear timeline that places the development of written literature after the cultivation of oral literature. However, we cannot so easily place oral, written, “traditional,” or “modern” African literature into these neatly packed timelines (7). So even with African literature often at the center of the postcolonial discussion, there are debates about whether postcolonial studies is the best discipline for the study of African literature.

the classic *Things Fall Apart* by Chinua Achebe and *A Grain of Wheat* by Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, explore these distinctive traumas that colonialism wrought on Africans. Such literature, which continues to be widely taught in Western academic and secondary school settings alike, plays a pivotal role in introducing readers to colonialism from the African perspective. But Gikandi also emphasizes that Anglophone African literature plays such a pivotal role in postcolonial studies because the exploration of African continental, national, and diasporic cultures themselves had to be directly negotiated with colonialism. How could African writers understand and authentically describe their situations—as well as effectively communicate that information to others—in a colonial language? Even more interestingly, how could these writers use colonial languages to their advantage to challenge Western readers to think more deeply about how their actions (or inactions) and stereotypes facilitated the project of colonialism? Against Audre Lorde's famous warning, could African writers dismantle the colonial master's house using the master's tool of the English language?⁵⁶ As Gikandi writes, "It was at this point—the point where western notions about nation, culture, and self were turned against the project of colonialism—that the largest body of work by African writers was produced" ("African Literature and the Colonial Factor" 385). Because of this influx in African literary production, and because African literature and postcolonial literary

⁵⁶ At "The Personal and the Political Panel" for the Second Sex Conference in 1979, Audre Lorde made the provocative statement, "*For the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house*" (112, emphasis in original). The root of the statement's meaning is that space needs to be made for truly inclusive, intersectional thought. We cannot continue to use old tools, forged in a prejudiced society, to deconstruct those very systems of oppression. Frustrated by the lack of diverse and intersectional thinking represented at the conference, as well as the notion that women of color, especially Black women, are held responsible for educating a predominantly white male academic body about the truth of their oppression. As she argues, "This is an old and primary tool of all oppressors to keep the oppressed occupied with the master's concerns" (113).

theory coupled so well together, it is evident that the foundational Anglophone African literary texts published from the 1950s-1960s laid the groundwork for what would evolve into the contemporary Anglophone African Literary Boom.

Contemporary Anglophone literature published after the year 2000 may not be as concerned with colonialism specifically. But this growing body of popular African novels is still moving these questions about nationalism, culture, and identity forward in new contexts. The ongoing textual dialogue between African writers and Western readers is still apparent. In several of the novels that I have written about in this dissertation, from Teju Cole's *Open City* and Adaobi Tricia Nwaubani's *I Do Not Come to You by Chance*, we see African authors writing in such a way that we can almost visualize the narrators breaking the fourth wall and staring directly at the global reader. How is the reader, reading a book while enjoying a nice cup of tea, a passive consumer who casually benefits from colonial-era problems that have evolved into neoliberal problems? What does it mean to read novels for pleasure that describe the perils of the refugee crisis or the disenfranchisement of African youths? We could not so readily have these discussions about readership and consumption in African literature today without the foregrounding efforts of postcolonialism. But the postcolonial term itself is still situated too much on the broad "after." As disciplines continue to shift and evolve, Afropolitanism emerges as a fitting mode for analyzing a number of postcolonial themes in African literature from a perspective that focuses even less on temporal or binary constructions.

Postcolonial literature, in its initial conception, captured the role of the nation-state in ways that Fredric Jameson infamously labeled as always-already national

allegories (69). But by the 1970s and 1980s, when it was realized that a dream of cultivating African national, ethnic, and cultural identities—free of colonial influence and corruption—was not feasible, the disillusionment of African writers set in.⁵⁷ But in today’s Afropolitan era, the role of the nation is represented as just one part of one’s identity.⁵⁸ It would not be fitting to call *Open City* allegorical, for it is neither a national allegory of Nigeria or America, nor is it encompassing of any kind of traditional moral allegory. This does not mean that the nation is unimportant or forgotten. As Madhu Krishnan argues, it is in contemporary African literature that the nation is actually depicted in a more engaging, realistic, and nuanced way—inviting “the myriad, discrepant manifestations of national affiliation through which contemporary African subjectivities are formed” (78). Afropolitan characters like Julius in *Open City* have no obligation or desire to die for the nation or romanticize a “return to Africa” narrative.⁵⁹ And even African characters living abroad who do return to Africa, like Ifemelu in *Americanah*, explore that experience of return in a different way than the twentieth-century “been-to” narratives like Chinua Achebe’s *No Longer at Ease* and Ayi Kwei Armah’s *Fragments* do. While these latter novels focus on the dichotomies between Africa and the West, as well as the disillusionment

⁵⁷ Obi Nwakanma writes that in the Nigerian context, it was the secession of Biafra that was a catalyst for this sense of disillusionment among Igbo writers in particular. These years were indicative of “deep Igbo ambiguity about the nation” (Nwakanma 7). The “dying for the nation” sentiment becomes less appealing when more and more people are tragically dying for the nation with no end in sight or promise for a better future.

⁵⁸ As Adélékè Adéékó claims, the contemporary protagonist of the Nigerian novel especially “[suffers] no debilitating psychological angst about the singular and unified nature of their being and destiny within a modern nation state” (10).

⁵⁹ Alpha Abebe claims that Afropolitanism is “a new form of Pan-Africanism,” “a contemporary response to ‘Afro-pessimism,’” and a call for a “*reinterpretation* rather than *return* to African culture and values” (“Afropolitanism: Global Citizenship with African Routes,” emphasis in original).

that Africans feel upon returning to Africa and realizing that they have changed too much to be able to assimilate back into African culture or make a difference in society as they had imagined, twenty-first-century novels like Adichie's *Americanah* do not dwell on such failed hopes or anxieties. Ifemelu does not return to Nigeria with big ambitions or delusions of grandeur. She arrives fully aware that Nigeria has changed, and that she, too, has changed. And, unlike twentieth-century African writers who emphasized a "return to Africa" narrative as a return home, Adichie does not make that return trope so simple. Ifemelu does indicate that she feels more at home in Lagos than in any American city she lived in. But I would argue that her journey, as well as the journeys of other Afropolitan characters, cannot so simply be defined as a return. These acts of relocation are studies of movement—of negotiation. Afropolitan characters are not yearning for the past, nostalgizing African nations as home, or taking on a personal call to action to save Africa. They are living in the here and now, trying to survive and navigate a globalized world that they have been born into.

The contemporary Anglophone African novel—especially in the Afropolitan sense—uniquely extends and revises efforts of classic mid-twentieth-century African postcolonial novels to "write back" to the colonial power. The distinctions between white and Black and African and Western are evident in novels where postcolonial power relations are top of mind, such as in *Things Fall Apart* and *Nervous Conditions*. Contemporary novels like *Americanah* and *The Beautiful Things That Heaven Bears* certainly acknowledge and critique Western-led global conflicts that have left their African immigrant characters displaced, discriminated against, or

disenfranchised. The characters in these novels are unable to neatly adapt to American society and do not possess the same means for upward social mobility that their white neighbors have. They are not solely writing back to the center and blaming Americans, white people or Westerners for any injustices they suffer from. Evan Mwangi writes more about this in *Africa Writes Back to Self*, where he argues that “[since] the mid-1980s, African novels have been more markedly self-reflexive in the way they rewrite one another and draw attention to their own fictionality” (1). I would agree that contemporary African novels are more interested in writing to fellow Africans as well as Westerners in the same conversation, without the same kind of nationalistic vengeance as we have seen in previous generations of literature. Even in a novel like *I Do Not Come to You by Chance*, where Kingsley reflects on how he “scams back” Westerners as a criminal form of social justice, he also thinks more deeply about his own pride, shame, and desperation that cannot so easily be tied to one direct root cause. Afropolitanism is interested in this self-reflexive thinking that recognizes difference.

Where the postcolonial discipline can run the risk of being too temporal, linear, or nation-centric, the emerging discipline of global literature can also help fill in the gaps as we shape our understanding of Afropolitanism. Global literature can be a more apt discipline than postcolonialism in some aspects when analyzing contemporary Anglophone African literature, for there is a greater consciousness of the multiple types of audiences and locations that the author may be writing for or within. We need a scholarship that does not overlook the historicization and the continued effects of cultural Othering that postcolonial studies provides. But, this

scholarship should also look more broadly at global concerns that do not fit within these constructs. Olabode Ibironke looks further at the category of “global literature” as a discipline that looks more specifically at the values and interests of the target audience that authors and publishers are marketing to (46). Moreover, Vilashini Cooppan states that reading literature through a globalized lens is an appropriate way to think about how authors and readers navigate these different worlds in literature. This methodology “entails the learning (and teaching) of a kind of relational thinking in which we see the nation through the local yet as part of the global” (Cooppan 26). But what exactly does it mean for a work of literature to be global? For Adam Kirsch, “The novel is already implicitly global as soon as it starts to speculate on or record the experience of human beings in the twenty-first century” (11). After all, how can a writer capturing the present moment, in our globalized world where they are connected to the Internet and global news stories and products, not be engaged with the world—and not just the concerns of a city or a nation? The inevitable fact of globalization prompts literary scholars to reconsider and revamp our methodologies—which Afropolitanism seeks to do within the context of global literature.

Many scholars are hesitant to embrace the concept of global literature. The scholar could be led down a slippery slope in which the global eschews the nation. From the production perspective, too, there is a concern about writing easily consumable literature for “any” reader, who might not understand the nuances of the

writer's native language or particular national culture.⁶⁰ This concern can be taken more deeply as a critique of the cult of the writer in a global context. With writers potentially competing to be noticed not only on a national, but also on a world stage, what makes one a "great novelist"?⁶¹ How does one become an Afropolitan celebrity? An author whose works are continually assigned on world lit college syllabi? If the author writes for the globe, then to what extent must difference be collapsed or, as Emily Apter asserts, reduced to cookie-cutter ethnic differences that are "niche-marketed as commercialized 'identities'" (2)? Despite the fear of a McDonaldization of literature and criticism, we must accept that globalization and capitalism are a fact of life that will influence the production, dissemination, and reception of literature. If literature is more easily produced in English and translated into Western languages and enjoyed by global audiences, this does not mean that the literature is necessarily inauthentic or lacking in intellectual rigor. *Open City* interacts with the globe—taking place in New York, Brussels, and Nigeria—but it can hardly be construed as an easily consumable novel catering to a broad audience. It actually challenges its readers—Western and African ones alike—to rethink their appreciations of cosmopolitanism and the ways that they desire and consume literature. Today, it is best to study popular Anglophone African literature by coupling the interest in global literature with the postcolonial focus on cultural difference resulting from or in comparison

⁶⁰ Adam Kirsch explains that such concerns have been voiced by the editors of *n+1* in their 2013 publication, "World Lite," as well as by Pascale Casanova in his 1999 book, *The World Republic of Letters* (13-20).

⁶¹ Tim Parks, in his New York Review of Books article, "The Dull New Global Novel," dwells further on this quest to be a "great" writer in a global rather than merely a national context. He claims that once a writer begins to write for a global audience, his or her writing must change to "remove obstacles to international comprehension."

with the imperial, colonial, or Western power. Plus, it is important that we think about how popular Anglophone African literature is a product of its production and reception; the most fruitful literary critiques will take these factors into serious consideration.

My dissertation has sought to examine this conundrum that Damrosch points out is a crucial focal point of scholars of world literature: “Writing for publication abroad can be a heroic act of resistance against censorship and an affirmation of global values against local parochialism; yet it can also be only a further stage in the leveling process of a spreading global consumerism” (18).⁶² We see both sides of this coin when examining *Waiting for an Angel*. On the one hand, Helon Habila is writing a story of censorship, injustice, and political activism that, when written and disseminated in English, carries a powerful message of resistance. On the other hand, by writing for a global audience beyond Nigeria, does he run the risk of creating what Tim Brennan calls a “ready-made” work of fiction that is more focused on broader appeal than local action (*At Home in the World*, 203, qtd. in Damrosch 18)? Is this question even relevant in this context, when Habila, like many globally popular African writers, is a scholar of English living outside of Africa, whose knowledge and experiences cannot help but be shaped by the world within and beyond Nigeria? Afropolitanism seeks to continue this conversation about African and African diasporic writers who write within and about multiple “worlds.”

⁶² Damrosch does clarify here that he separates world literature from “global literature,” which he imagines as easily consumable literature “to be read solely in airline terminals, unaffected by any specific context whatever” (25). I would argue that contemporary discussions on global literature have evolved more considerably since Damrosch published *What Is World Literature?* in 2003, which situate global literature as encompassing far more self-aware works beyond “airport literature” or travel writing.

As we delve further into this conversation of Anglophone African literature as it interacts with broader scholarship on postcolonial and global literature, it is also important to consider the role of the novel form itself as inherently intertwined with these concerns regarding audience and consumerism. Mariano Siskind claims that any theory on the globalization of the novel must take into consideration how the novel form has historically been tied to “the *bourgeoisification* of the world” (345, emphasis in original). Akin Adesokan, too, claims that the novel form is a site of privilege (6). The novel was made to be read within an upper-class milieu. I would argue that, despite the greater global access to literature, many novels are still often marketed to be read by educated, upper-class individuals who have the time to read a long work for leisure or for school. We cannot ignore the power dynamics at play here in the creation and intended reception of the novel. According to Siskind, “the globality of the novel-form is the result of a historical process of global hegemony—the product of the universalization of its bourgeois and European particularity (341). It is of no coincidence that the Anglophone African authors who I have written about in this dissertation are also part of an educated, upper-middle-class literati. Even though they were not all born into wealthy families, by luck or perseverance, they managed to earn degrees at top schools and develop novels that appeal to academic and popular critics alike. However I would argue that the concerns that critics often have about Afropolitan, Anglophone African, or global literature more broadly with regard to pandering to a Western audience are not always as much of an issue of content as one might think. If the novel is inherently bourgeois, and the global novel is automatically a product of hegemony, then when an African writer makes use of

this medium, they are already writing for a certain type of imagined audience before they even start typing. Those who are quick to criticize the global novel as pandering must acknowledge that this argument intrinsically places an unfair burden on a writer whose experiences are naturally shaped by globalization and who may indeed be writing for an audience whose milieu they are well acquainted with.

One last major discipline that intersects with Afropolitanism is transnational literary studies. This discipline intersects with all of the others that we have discussed in this chapter, including postcolonialism and global literature. But “transnationalism” specifically implies movement or transcendence across national borders. It is a more contemporary discipline focused more on immigration, mobility, and cross-cultural communications and identity concerns. It is in this vein that Bill Ashcroft claims that transnational writers are interested in how center-periphery and self-other binaries become complicated and begin to erode (“Transnation” 73 qtd. in Dagnino 148). But it is this lack of a fixed location, which is also evident in Afropolitanism, that presents a problem. Anna-Leena Toivanen argues that the entire concept of Afropolitanism is contradictory in this particular engagement of Africa within a transnational cosmopolitan study. This is because, for Toivanen, Africa replaces the “cosmos” and gives it a regional specificity instead of leaving the term truly borderless and transitory (195). Afropolitanism extends discussions of transnationalism into what Taiye Selasi calls a “multi-local” point of view (“Don’t Ask Where I’m From...”). Afropolitan literature does not prioritize the African immigrant experience, nor simply the interaction of characters across national borders. It is more concerned with the multiple—not just of national borders, but of

particular local experiences that include but are not restricted to urban areas. Transcending the nation, Afropolitanism is most apparent in virtual spaces such as Ifemelu's blog in *Americanah* and in the narrative intricacies of 419 scam email exchanges in *I Do Not Come to You by Chance*. These spaces are inherently transnational, but they are more than that. In these digital spaces where Afropolitanism thrives, there is less regard for national borders. It is all about the multiplicity of voices and the communication exchange. Indeed, James Yékú expands upon Achille Mbembe's point in the *Chimurenga Chronic* that it is the digital space that is most central to Afropolitanism's goal to decentralize African literature and culture "from a discourse of victimhood and reclaim it for a [democratized] sphere" (Yékú 244). This being said, the nation can still not so easily be erased or diminished even in the cybersphere. Individuals from different nations can communicate about their own national origins and discriminate against others on the basis of those origins. Under the guise of anonymity, such discrimination and discussion about the nation can sometimes be more rather than less apparent. We see this in Ifemelu's blog, where many of the user comments referenced their national identities or accused the author of prejudice. Thus, while it may be the goal of Afropolitans to democratize exchange and think more about what Africans share rather than what national divisions exist, they must reckon with the fact that such distinctions will always be present in some form.

Although Taiye Selasi and other writers initially conceived of Afropolitanism as a way of defining identity, rather than a literary or scholarly discipline, I see potential in its broader application to literary and cultural studies. As Ryan Thomas

Skinner states, “The right question is not so much ‘what or who are the Afropolitans?’ but ‘what work can Afropolitanism do to illuminate and enhance our understanding of Africa and Africans in and of the world today?’” (17).

Afropolitanism requires that we as literary scholars be more flexible with our conceptions of African diasporic identity, locality, and temporality (in the sense of no longer anticipating a “post” like in postcolonial). But Afropolitanism does not eschew the nation or neglect historicization. It is asking readers and scholars to think more deeply about African identity not centered on a location of origin or shared trauma, but on a flexible notion of Africanness. In the next subsection, I will explore how this becomes the starting point not just for a deeper introspection into Anglophone African literature, but into the actual lived experiences and formed solidarities among African diasporans.

Afropolitanism as Solidarity

Critical scholarship in African diasporic studies center on questions of African rootedness, homelands, and preservation amidst a history of forced removal and dispersal.⁶³ Kim D. Butler identifies three branches of the modern African diaspora: “the Afro-Atlantic (dispersed via the trans-Atlantic slave trade), the Afro-Asian (dispersed via the Indian Ocean slave trade), and the African national (émigrés from the continent to other parts of the world)” (Butler 127). The novels that I have analyzed feature African characters who have been dispersed in different regions by

⁶³ Commonalities of diasporic groups, according to Kim D. Butler, include (1) the “scattering” (126) of the group in more than one destination; (2) a “relationship to the homeland” (126), whether or not the land itself exists; and (3) the existence of the diaspora over more than one generation (126).

family history or personal choice. My goal with this dissertation project has been to examine the extent to which we can draw comparisons among these characters of different national, diasporic, socioeconomic, and racial backgrounds. Moreover, I ask whether Afropolitanism can serve as a criteria that brings together various African diasporic peoples alongside Africans and African Americans.

For example I have already noted how in *Americanah*, the Nigerian-born Ifemelu encounters resistance toward the idea that she can write about Black Americans in her blog. Julius in *Open City* often looks down upon and rejects any notion of brotherly solidarity with Black Americans, including a cab driver and postal worker. Though Black Americans are technically part of the diaspora, they are distinctive from the new African diasporans (who may live in America). William Safran states in the first issue of *Diaspora* in 1991 argues that the Black American diaspora is distinctive from other diasporas, in the sense that there is less of an emphasis on “the homeland myth” that would theorize a nostalgic desire to return to Africa (90). Since Black American history is tied to the history of slavery, the term African American or Black American is more significant as a kind of national or ethno-national identity. Brent Hayes Edwards argues that conversations about the African or African American diaspora should focus less on the notion of “origins” and more on conversations of cultural connections amidst difference (64). Ashraf H.A. Rushdy further examines how an “African diasporic discourse” deriving from 1960s nationalism “romanticized an easy connectedness to Africa and things African” (64), but he ultimately contests the notion of such an easy diasporic connectedness to

the continent of Africa.⁶⁴ As noted before, it is important that scholars further explore the relationship between Black Americans and African immigrants in America—without generalizing any kind of connection to a place or culture. It is therefore necessary to assess how a sense of Afropolitan solidarity can be forged in a way that does not resort to such generalizations or romanticizations.

Afropolitanism extends and challenges key points of the conversations on African diasporic solidarity that the twentieth-century *Négritude* and Pan-Africanism movements popularized.⁶⁵ These global literary, political, and cultural movements, according to Imanuel Geiss, prioritized an Africa-wide sense of solidarity, commonality, consciousness, and nationalism (8). Embraced largely by African diasporic intellectuals such as Frantz Fanon, Léopold Senghor, and W.E.B. Du Bois, it is evident that these movements were centered in privileged spaces—where individuals sought a connection to and intellectual reinvigoration of Africa without necessarily traveling “back” to the continent. As Geiss argues, Pan-Africanists emphasized African diasporic solidarity in the sense that “Afro-Americans [looked] upon Africa as their real ‘homeland’, without necessarily thinking of a physical return to Africa” (3). This notion generates a sense of nostalgia for a homeland that does not exist in the same way as it does in one’s imagination, and therefore it is also

⁶⁴ Jenny Sharpe perhaps describes the term “African diaspora” in academic discourse best as a synthesis of civil rights, postcolonial, and pan-African discourse. She notes that a turning point in the use of the term occurred in the 1990s, when African diaspora was included in conversations about globalization. This turning point signals the shift from “signifying cultural survivals, commonalities, and continuities to denoting cultural hybridities, difference, and discontinuities” (Sharpe 261).

⁶⁵ In this context, I refer to *Négritude* as the 1930s francophone and anglophone movement that largely emphasized anti-colonial resistance and African diasporic solidarity—especially in the contexts of the arts, identity, self-evaluation, and resistance. One proponent of *Négritude*, the acclaimed poet and first President of Senegal, Leopold Senghor, classifies *Négritude* as “rooting oneself in oneself” (27), “the African personality” (27), and “the sum of cultural values of the black world” (28).

distinctive from the idea of one's home as a place of residence. But it also challenges the "Back-to-Africa" movement of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, which assumed that former African slaves would emigrate back to Africa.⁶⁶ While the physical repatriation argument was championed by activists like Marcus Garvey, it was ultimately considered a failed effort. Négritude and Pan-Africanism, too, may initially seem dated and romanticized. However, they were successful in stimulating a shared sense of African pride and solidarity, despite differences in language, ethnicity, and location. With words of powerful protest and poignant literature, these movements' leading scholars gave African diasporans the motivation to internalize self-love rather than the self-hatred that colonizing and enslaving nations had instilled in them. So the notion, as Geiss points out, that "The more successful and wealthier an Afro-American became...the greater his inclination to avoid being identified with Africa" (29) was effectively critiqued by Du Bois, Garvey, Césaire, Senghor, and others who proclaimed the value of African roots.

I see Afropolitanism as a continuation of the intellectual conversation that Négritude and Pan-Africanism started. From a literary perspective, as demonstrated in *Americanah*, the "Back-to-Africa" concept is examined in a self-conscious way. In the text, Ifemelu and Obinze do physically "return" to Africa after seeming to achieve the surface-level, stereotypical African immigrant dream of relative stability in a Western country. But it is not as simple as "going back," when both Ifemelu and Obinze, as well as the Africa that they knew growing up, have both changed. There is a sense of taking pride in African origins and a refusal to fully assimilate to or fully

⁶⁶ Although there was resettlement of emancipated slaves in countries like Sierra Leone and Liberia (Geiss 46), it was mainly socio-economically disadvantaged people who returned (Geiss 29).

embrace all Western norms, which is at the heart of my understanding of Afropolitanism. But, the question that we must ask as scholars is whether Afropolitanism really marks as decisive of a cultural shift as we often see it made out to be. Achille Mbembe argues that “cultural mixing” or “the interweaving of worlds” that often define Afropolitanism have actually been a part of African identity-making for decades (28). But, as Betiel Wasihun also notes, Mbembe distinguishes Afropolitanism from Pan-Africanism and Négritude because unlike these earlier movements, Afropolitanism “[refuses] on principle any form of victim identity,” which he clarifies does not mean an ignorance of or refusal to acknowledge the injustices brought upon Africa by the Western world (Mbembe 29 qtd. in Wasihun 393). In “Pan-African Legacies, Afropolitan Futures...,” Mbembe further contends that Afropolitanism, unlike Pan-Africanism, is finding a new center that is not exclusive to Blackness (Mbembe and Balakrishnan 30-31). I will further explore this argument, but for now it is important to note the decentralization that is inherent to Afropolitanism. There is an emphasis on inclusively building African solidarity without centering on a singular race, geographical origin, lived experience, or historical moment. The “African” in Afropolitan has a flexible connotation that is designed to comprehensively capture the varied histories and identities that comprise the African diaspora.. As Kwame Anthony Appiah contends, Afropolitanism, unlike Pan-Africanism “does not make the [same] mistake of supposing that solidarity is a natural, guaranteed thing. Afropolitanism understands that you have to build it and that, if you want to work with people, you have to negotiate” (qtd. in Knudsen ad Rahbek 148). That prioritization of the negotiation, rather than on specific racial and

ethnonational characteristics, is what makes Afropolitanism a logical, realistic, and engaging means of exploring African diasporic identity and solidarity in the twenty-first century.

Before fully examining the implications of Afropolitan solidarity and identity, it is important to further discuss roles of race, nationality, and ethnicity in the conversation. Paul Gilroy's *The Black Atlantic* (1993) is especially significant as a framework for contemporary discussions of Afropolitanism. In the turn to a transnational approach to the Black Atlantic, Gilroy deemphasizes scholarly rhetoric that privileges the categories of nationality, race, and ethnicity (Gilroy 1-2). Rather than reduce or divide people into limiting identity boxes, Gilroy asks scholars to think more deeply about how generations of African diasporans are physically and culturally impacted by their forced uprooting and transatlantic migration. Eva Rask Knudsen and Ulla Rahbek, in addition to other scholars of Afropolitanism, believe that Afropolitanism does just that in its embrace of transnationalism and reluctance to cling to ethnonational identity categories or a limiting view of history (Knudsen and Rahbek 31). We can therefore think of *The Black Atlantic* as a springboard and precursor to Afropolitan scholarship.⁶⁷ This prompts us to question how Afropolitanism envisions a decentralized solidarity. Betiel Wasihun argues that the emphasis on global African cultural solidarity in Gilroy's work is more aligned with the goals of Afropolitanism, but she also draws attention to criticisms that Gilroy's

⁶⁷ We see a divergence here from Pan-Africanism and Négritude, for as Betiel Wasihun states, these two movements were "reactions against colonialism and racism—primarily carried by the idea of African solidarity worldwide, [while] the black Atlantic...advocates cultural hybridity in the Afropolitan sense" (Wasihun 393). As Wasihun notes, "Gilroy's idea of cultural hybridity between origin ('roots') and destination ('routes') is developed further—away from the legacy of slavery to the transnational mobility of elitist Africans" (Wasihun 394; Gilroy 19).

work is too “caught up in the narratives and imageries of the transatlantic slave trade” (394). This is where Afropolitanism differs in its emphasis on more positive, contemporary connotations of African transnational solidarity.

By turning away from the centrality of slavery in African diasporic solidarity, Afropolitanism is, as Simon Gikandi and other scholars have argued, a turn away from Afro-pessimism in African literature and culture (Gikandi “On Afropolitanism” 9). This is an argument that Teju Cole would disagree with, for he states in an interview with Taiye Selasi that he is fine with being labeled an Afropolitanism “as long as [he can] be a pessimistic one” as he discusses the pains of being African (especially a Black African) in America. But, even if viewed in a more optimistic light, Afropolitanism does not—and actually refuses to—ignore the history of slavery and the generational trauma that it has fostered throughout the African diaspora. We see in *Open City* and *The Beautiful Things That Heaven Bears* how African immigrant characters must be conscious of African-American struggles with “walking while Black,” and they deeply reflect upon the history of slavery and gentrification as they roam the streets and look at the monuments. It is especially evident in *Americanah* that African immigrants in the U.S. cannot ignore the fact that they are Black in America, and everything from interracial relationships to day-to-day microaggressions must take into account the history of Black disenfranchisement that, of course, has its roots in slavery. But today, in order for both African and African diasporic human connections to be encompassed in a cosmopolitan cultural solidarity, then slavery should not be the center of the narrative for Africans who are not directly impacted by the same narratives of trauma that some African diasporans are. For

writers like Adaobi Tricia Nwaubani, a Nigerian novelist, and Lauren Beukes, a white South African author, who have never (to my knowledge) lived outside of Africa and focus their writing more on local, digital intersections with the global—the decentralization of slavery in the Afropolitan narrative is logical and in a way, globally inclusive.

It is important to consider how these intersections, through the lens of Afropolitanism, specifically impact the analysis of African literature. Quoting Sam Roberts, Yogita Goyal points out that in the twenty-first century, “more blacks are coming to the United States from Africa than during the slave trade” and that a third of Black people living in New York City are immigrants (qtd. in Goyal, *Runaway Genres* 1). What this means is that not only is the study of contemporary African culture changing to reflect this greater transnationalism, but popular Anglophone African literature is likewise changing. Now we see more novels like *Open City* and *Americanah*, where the interactions and contentions between different African diasporas are explored. Goyal claims that contemporary African diasporic fiction strays away from traditional Anglophone African tropes and plots, including “the ethnic bildungsroman or the immigrant plot” (*Runaway Genres* 2) and move toward stories rooted in realism, especially involving middle-class anxieties, education, and familial dysfunction (Goyal, *Runaway Genres* 4). It is with this in mind that Taiye Selasi argues that she would love to see her novel, *Ghana Must Go*, appear not necessarily in a “world” or “African” literature section of the bookstore—but instead somewhere next to white American author Jonathan Franzen’s *The Corrections*, a fellow novel about the breakdown of the contemporary American upper-middle-class

family (“African Literature Doesn’t Exist”). As I will discuss in the next section, this shift in the focus of content and style of African literature allows for global readers from all parts of the African diaspora, as well as those outside of the diaspora, to better relate to the novels and join the conversation.

I have discussed how the African in Afropolitanism can be expanded to capture a sense of solidarity. It is also important to consider how the cosmopolitanism in Afropolitanism contributes to that solidarity. In “Cosmopolitan Patriots,” Kwame Anthony Appiah argues that cosmopolitanism was historically “rooted” and nationalist (618), but by 1997, the “cosmopolitan idea” consisted of a “take your roots with you” approach (622). This speaks to what Rebecca Walkowitz argues is reflective of the primary late-twentieth-century schools of cosmopolitan thought, which include “detachment” from the nation, “flexible attachment” to multiple communities, and an interest in “consumer culture and urban mobility” (*Cosmopolitan Style* 9).⁶⁸ I synthesize a variety of different arguments to highlight how Afropolitanism is challenging and revising the notion of Africanness at the same time that definitions of cosmopolitanism are being revisited. With identity more

⁶⁸ Walkowitz specifically mentions *flânerie* as part of this interest in modern consumption and urban activities (*Cosmopolitan Style* 9). Moreover, Chielozone Eze states that for the Afropolitan, “identity is now relational” (“Rethinking African culture and identity” 235), instead of being bound by a certain type of variable center or quality that becomes more difficult to pinpoint as African in a changing diaspora. Rather than only experience double consciousness, the Afropolitan grapples with what Eze calls “multiple-consciousness,” or the conception of a sense of self that but envisions an even more plural sense of self that deals with a variety of contradictory and parallel notions of identity (“We, Afropolitans” 117).

unbound and with a turn to a more inclusive approach to identity, it becomes that much easier to form a sense of community or solidarity within Afropolitanism.

Some critics of Afropolitanism focus on the fact that Afropolitanism too easily focuses on the superficial, consumerist aspects of cosmopolitanism to highlight the lives of upwardly mobile African immigrants and their literature. But they overlook the fact that the novel—especially the global novel— inherently lends itself to superficial consumption. As Pieter Vermeulen argues, “literary cosmopolitanism” has been accused of being too focused on aesthetics to the extent that they “may satisfy sophisticated metropolitan tastes, but that leave real power divisions and inequalities that inflect the experiences of global subjects unaddressed” (43).

Afropolitan writers have actually come much farther than previous generations of writers in their thoughtful questioning of the predominance of aesthetics, class, and the urban metropolis in cosmopolitan literature. As I have discussed in chapter 1 of this dissertation, African writers like Teju Cole hack key tropes to encourage global readers to think more deeply about how misguided a superficial cosmopolitanism can be. Although Afropolitanism has been accused of pandering to a superficial sense of cosmopolitanism, I would argue that, in its original conception by Mbembe and even Selasi, it is moving toward what Walter Mignolo and Rebecca Walkowitz have advocated for: a “critical cosmopolitanism” (Mignolo 723; Walkowitz, *Cosmopolitan Style* 4) that transcends the quasi-hobbyist interest in multicultural aesthetics and actually seeks to form activist solidarity against the dehumanizing impacts of globalization. Technology plays a pivotal role in advancing this activist solidarity.⁶⁹

⁶⁹ Miriam Pahl claims that Afropolitanism is “a form of critical cosmopolitanism” that examines African diasporic literature and culture in a globalized world through a critical lens (74). The

For Adichie, a dialogue takes place through Ifemelu's blog, while Teju Cole uses Facebook and Twitter to initiate provocative conversations about global affairs and racial injustices. Both within and beyond their novels, Anglophone African Boom writers use their positions of intellectual power and influence to be more than just celebrities profiting from a wide global readership.

As Africa becomes decentered to some extent in the Afropolitan conception, it is important to further consider how and where Africa fits in within the narrative. According to Hlonipha Mokoena, Afropolitanism prefers a "winged" rather than "roots" approach to Africa, and instead of limiting themselves to a singular location "home," they see the world as their home (194-195).⁷⁰ While I think the "winged" approach is valuable, as we see a spreading of people and conceptions of home in a more globalized world, I am wary of romanticizing the notion that Africans can feel at home anywhere and everywhere. Often, of course, the characters that I have written about feel at home nowhere, rather than everywhere. This is not a new feeling that is unique to Afropolitans. We have seen it since Chinua Achebe's *No Longer at Ease* (1960), and, in Arabic-language African literature, *Season of Migration to the North* (1966). I find that these bleaker depictions of African "globetrotting" can often be more interesting to analyze in a novel, although I also acknowledge that the more positive conception of multiple homes is more valuable in the context of popular

negotiation of these critiques, she argues, are inherent in the technology that writers such as Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie and Teju Cole employ both in their novels and in real life (78-80).

⁷⁰ Mokoena further argues that Afropolitans extend the theory of Négritude as they "take it as a given" that they are essentially the "repository or custodian of a historically valid and culturally unique 'African civilization'" (195) or as I would call it, the griot of contemporary African culture. I would say that Afropolitans do naturally carry this responsibility to an extent, but it is becoming less of a burden as more readers grow familiar with global literature and stop pigeonholing stories by national or continental origin (which is an objective of Afropolitanism).

writing that is designed to uplift and empower African voices.⁷¹ Thus I would say the question of “home” is actually not so relevant in the study of Afropolitanism. What is more fitting and compelling to study is the question of ease or comfort. Depending on the place and the situation of the narrator, that comfort level can vary widely. When assimilation is minimized in favor of cultural blending and celebration of difference, then what exactly does this look like on the ground? How is such a strategy welcomed or not welcomed? Here is where the study of African literature and Afropolitanism become more complex and realistic.

A central critique of Afropolitanism is not only the assumption that it overlooks the centrality of Africa in African diasporic identity in favor of a more cosmopolitan approach, but also that it is focused on upper-middle-class immigrant experiences and not so much on lower-class ones. Taiye Selasi argues that Dinaw Mengestu’s Ethiopian immigrant protagonists in novels like *The Beautiful Things That Heaven Bears* would not be considered an Afropolitan character because characters like Sepha are refugees in the U.S. and not upwardly mobile or seeking advancement in the same way as Afropolitans (Selasi, “Bye-Bye Babar”). Yet, despite the fact that Sepha is not a high-income immigrant who pursues an Ivy League education and effortlessly mingles with multiethnic crowds in 1990s Washington, D.C., Betiel Wasihun points out that he is nonetheless “an avid reader of literature, intellectual, and sensitive” (404) and therefore does possess qualities of the Afropolitan figure. And even more interestingly, as Wasihun notes, a character who is

⁷¹ Tim Brennan offers a somewhat more realistic description of the “home” of the traveling “Third World” writer, positing that “The traveller feels at home everywhere, because she is never at home anywhere” (*Salman Rushdie* 39).

more readily labeled as cosmopolitan, Julius in *Open City*, “ultimately complies with neither cosmopolitanism nor Afropolitanism due to an insurmountable disconnectedness from others” (405). Focusing on the social class of African and African diasporic characters as a litmus test for Afropolitanism can therefore be limiting and flawed.

I contend that if Afropolitanism is to be taken more seriously as a movement in favor of African solidarity, then it needs to recognize and be more inclusive. It should focus less on class and more on intellectual interest in cosmopolitan encounters—including the denial of the characters to enter or blend within cosmopolitan spaces on account of their race or class. Afropolitanism does not only become more inclusive, but it lends itself to a more compelling conception of African solidarity. What could the African Rhodes scholar have in common with the African refugee? How would their interactions with white people in the crowd compare? I think these are more interesting questions to consider as we open the gates of Afropolitanism further to allow for such conversations.

Afropolitanism as Hacking

In previous sections, I have discussed some of the existing theories and critiques of Afropolitanism as they relate to academic scholarship and more practical facilitation of African diasporic solidarity. What we see is contention over the authenticity, newness or innovativeness, and inclusivity of Afropolitanism—as well as perceived blind spots. Such critiques are valid, and in this section I will demonstrate how Afropolitanism as a literary field and practical association should

ideally be shaped in order for it to develop into a sustainable area of study. I will also consider how the novels I have analyzed here are all representative of the kind of Afropolitanism I seek to advance. My objective is for us as scholars to begin thinking of Afropolitan as less of an adjective, and even as less of an “ism.” In a similar way that Ella Shohat advocated for a “flexible yet critical usage” (112) of the term “postcolonial,” I also support an expansion of the Afropolitan term to be a sometimes celebratory yet also conscientious study of African diasporic literature and experience in a globalized world. To achieve this balance, I argue that Afropolitan criticism needs to be “hacked” for a new century. As I have noted in my introduction, the original conception of the computer hacker does not involve malicious intent and instead is more centered on how someone can break and find flaws in existing code in order to ultimately improve the technology for continued use. Like computer hackers who do not fully recreate or reinvent the operating systems and code they use, scholars of Afropolitanism must naturally build upon classic scholarship that incorporates the postcolonial emphasis on difference and the significance of the nation in identity-construction, the prominence of individual world-building, Pan-African solidarity, and a decentering move toward cosmopolitanism. But, also like computer hackers, scholars need to break what is proving to be a barrier for them. Afropolitanism should ideally not be revelatory without also being self-reflexive. But it cannot focus on the concepts that may not necessarily be relevant in select contemporary Anglophone African novels, such as a desire for home and “writing back” to the West.

Critics may convincingly argue that we don't need a new theory for what I am advocating for. We could more simply extend existing postcolonial and African literary theory (including Pan-Africanism) to encompass these evolving realities, trends, and debates. But I argue that the cultivation of Afropolitanism is necessary—and not merely for optics. We need a body of scholarship to capture the contemporary moment in a way that postcolonialism and Pan-Africanism cannot fully address without the continual caveats and clarification of timelines. Afropolitanism also needs to be revamped and hacked, so that it does not fall into the traps of elitism, exclusionary thinking, and uncritical cosmopolitanism. This is why I argue that “hacking” is the appropriate term to use to describe the continual modification of dated and current theory. As I have studied in my professional collaborations with “ethical hackers” who emulate adversary behavior in order to help security teams enhance their threat defenses, the work of a hacker shares a lot in common with Afropolitan theory. A computer hacker's work, like the Afropolitan theorist's, is never quite done. Unlike their popular depiction in sci-fi movies such as *Alien: Resurrection* and *Iron Man 2*, hackers don't simply break something, triumphantly shouting, “I'm in the mainframe!” and complete their project. Hacking is not linear. It is a constant push and pull—a continual tactical battle between offensive and defensive strategists. Where one system is patched, another one is breached. Hacking takes place within cyberspace, a rootless space where “home” or “nation” are not prioritized, but are still significant when cybercriminal operations transcend national borders and impact legal questions of sovereignty. All of this is to say that while the world of hacking is often conveyed in popular media as lawless, completely open,

and criminal, it is sometimes overlooked how strategic, productive, and evolutionary (rather than solely deconstructive and destructive) the practice can be.

The first problem of Afropolitanism, as alluded in previous sections and throughout this dissertation, boils down to the question of: Who speaks? Who has the privilege to share their story in the form of a novel, with the backing of a major publishing house, and distribute the work widely enough that global readers of all different national and cultural backgrounds not only have access to it, but also purchase it, relate to it, and enjoy it? Is Afropolitan writing only sharable from the ivory tower? We could argue that Afropolitanism has a celebrity problem, which Tim Brennan already alluded to over 30 years ago in *Salman Rushdie and the Third World*. He argues that cosmopolitan writers like Rushdie are “chosen” by critics as the spokespeople of the postcolonial world, who give global readers a sense of intrigue with their writing that offers “a familiar strangeness” (*Salman Rushdie* viii). But Brennan also stresses that it is not as though the rise of these celebrities was completely organic. With the wars abroad and waves of postcolonial independence taking place globally, it is strategic that Western publishers suddenly saw value in marketing postcolonial literature to curious Western audiences (*Salman Rushdie* ix). Today, with the local-turned-global concerns of Black Lives Matter and the refugee crisis taking center stage in world news, coupled with the greater demand for multiethnic and multicultural literature to be read in schools from the primary to tertiary levels, it should not be that much of a surprise to see history repeat itself as Anglophone African writing continues to gain popularity and marketability. And how convenient is it that African diasporic actors like David Oyelowo are gaining more

awards and recognition than ever before, after a wave of #OscarsSoWhite controversy? As Aaron Bady frames it, there is a fear that with the celebrification of African art, the African diaspora “can no longer serve as the perfect figure for the global proletarian struggle” (“Afropolitan”). Now Africa is, in theory, just another site of bourgeois glamor instead of abject poverty and struggle. But this is not a new phenomenon, nor is it indicative of a problem of authenticity that falls squarely on the shoulders of the writer. I argue that it is the responsibility of the reader and the critic to shape discussions of contemporary African literature in ways that advance the *longue durée* of postcolonial and African literary scholarship.

To further explore how the critic and reader might do this, it is worth examining the notion of “the postcolonial exotic” that both Graham Huggan and Sarah Brouillette have written about. According to Huggan, the postcolonial exotic refers to the “global commodification of cultural difference” that results from the surface-level readings of works like Chinua Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart* as anthropological studies of African societies (vii).⁷² This phenomenon, in turn, allows for “marginality itself [to transform into] a valuable intellectual commodity” (Huggan viii). Huggan places the responsibility on the discipline of postcolonialism for not only championing postcolonial works as literary catalysts for resistance, but also for creating the product of “postcoloniality,” which is “a global condition of cross-cultural symbolic exchange” (ix). Expanding upon Huggan’s theory, Sarah Brouillette likens the postcoloniality to the possession of “a touristic conscience,” in which the

⁷² This is also referred to as the regard for the African writer as the “native informant,” a term that also derives from ethnography. According to Serena Guarracino, contemporary Nigerian authors vacillate between their expected roles as native informants and local-to-global storytellers (6)

global reader is both delighted by some sights that the postcolonial narrator “tour guide” shows her, while being jolted by the detours that conjure the reader’s “pervasive guilt about the consumption of postcolonial products” (*Postcolonial Writers* 5). Likening the act of reading to tourism in the era of “global literature” is useful yet superficial. It is the task of the scholar to examine how the writer does more than just attract and repel. And how does the postcolonial discipline itself naturally invite this dichotomy? On the one hand, Afropolitan literature is part and parcel of the postcoloniality that Huggan argues carrying with it a “strategic exoticism” that both disrupts and pleases the global reader (x). Julius in *Open City* and Sepha in *The Beautiful Things That Heaven Bears* please the intellectual, neo-bourgeois reader with their erudite observations of urban life intersecting with classical music and canonical Western literature. But that allure is dramatically ruptured when it is revealed that Julius rapes Moji, and when prostitutes have casual sex with Sepha in exchange for free snacks. That rupture is key to Afropolitan literature. It does not simply aim to please, nor does it seek to constantly disturb or evoke sympathy. The discerning critic must recognize these moments and help convey to the reader that these texts cannot and should not be consumed as anthropological works.

But this push and pull—the pleasing and rupture—is precisely what Huggan, paraphrasing Gayatri Spivak, contends is a key goal of certain postcolonial scholars in their attempt to reject the exoticization of marginality that primarily benefits the “neo-colonial education system” that simply wants to assign postcolonial literature as a self-congratulatory pat on the back for showing that it suddenly welcomes diversity

(Spivak 1990: 223 qtd. in Huggan 23). In this scenario, Huggan claims that marginality is stripped of its subversive power and whittled down to “safe assertions of a [fetishized] cultural difference” (24). But this is not a trap that Afropolitan writers so easily fall into—largely as a result of their predecessors. Huggan describes African literature in particular as being “recuperative and destructive,” in that it revives both African and Western literary forms while also challenging readers to leave their comfort zone and think more deeply about their own sense of privilege (40). This move, I argue, is a central component of the Afropolitan mode of hacking the experience of consuming African literature. As Yogita Goyal contends when analyzing NoViolet Bulawayo’s novel, *We Need New Names*, Afropolitan literature “positions the reader as a voyeur and outsider, eliciting neither pity nor horror not even easy empathy” as the novel emphasizes “the conditions of production, circulation, and reception of African literature” (Goyal, *Runaway Genres* 12). Beyond the disposition of the writer, Afropolitan literature turns more attention to the role of the global reader—advancing a more forward-thinking and self-reflective examination of postcolonial scholarship and Anglophone African literary thought.

Sarah Brouillette describes the “recent renaissance in African literature,” or what I call the Anglophone African Literary Boom, a result of the efforts of publishing houses that largely rely on a transnational, individual financial contributions, mostly British and American (“On the African Literary Hustle”). Moreover, several Afropolitan writers, including Teju Cole, Taiye Selasi, and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, are courted and supported by Andrew Wylie’s literary agency (“On the African Literary Hustle”). For Birgit Neumann and Gabriele Rippl,

the global critical praise for Afropolitan writers represents an all-too-easy way for Western readers to assuage their own guilt, as they see more successful, cosmopolitan writers of African descent in positions of influence (182). The relationship between African writers and global readers will always be a precarious one as a result of these factors of privilege, guilt, and exoticism that remain an important part of the conversation on global literary consumption.

But is it necessary to scorn successful Afropolitan writers for discussing human suffering and championing social justice in their literature while mired in a dark web of a neoliberal commodity factory? Is a work of literature automatically pandering, elitist, and out-of-touch if it was written by an author who participated in the Iowa Writers' Workshop? While I acknowledge Ainehi Edoro's concern that publishers often lazily market African novels by "[tagging] a novel to a social issue," I also do not believe it is the responsibility of the African writer to constantly wonder if mentioning a social issue is too pandering. Unfortunately, if it is the publisher's goal to sell books, then it may be argued that such labels are necessary for marketability. It thus becomes the task of the critic and the reader to look beyond that label and approach the text with a discerning eye that does not simply consume the literature at face value like one would a news story about Africa.

My dissertation has analyzed a series of Western and African tropes utilized by Afropolitan writers to both attract and repel the reader. One might argue that the hacked flâneur, griot, and scammer are representative of strategic exoticism. Akin Adesokan labels marketable exoticism as "exoticist allures of the marginal," which he argues are complex in that they are "manifestations of reproducible difference" (3).

While it is valid to recognize the privilege of Afropolitan writers in comparison to other African writers who are not afforded the same worldwide publication opportunities, it is also not fair to simplify Afropolitan writing as commodified ethnic literature—when such charges would never be brought up in the same regard against white Anglophone celebrity writers like Jonathan Franzen and Margaret Atwood. I contend that scholars should recognize the background of the author of Afropolitan works just as they would with any other writing, but the critique of strategic exoticism should not be levied against writers with a heavy hand. Critics of Afropolitan writing should delve further into the complexities of the literature and tease out how the author uniquely experiments and transforms the familiar. As I have sought to do in my dissertation, how are the authors not simply inserting familiar tropes into a story to appeal to a Western reader, but hacking those tropes to require more contemplation, work, and emotion on the part of the reader that transcends mere guilt or exotic intrigue?

This debate about strategic exoticism is strongest within the Afropolitan writer community itself. In Helon Habila's 2013 review of Zimbabwean writer NoViolet Bulawayo's popular novel, *We Need New Names*, he accuses Bulawayo of, ironically, peddling the same type of poverty porn that she is critiquing when she depicts unfeeling NGO workers who seek photo-op of starving children to garner more donations from sympathetic Western audiences. Pointing out how Bulawayo seems to want to "cover every 'African topic; almost as if the writer had a checklist made from the morning's news on Africa," Habila bemoans the fact that Bulawayo's child narrator dwells in a world of poverty, child pregnancy, incest, scam prophets, absent

parents, AIDS, and political unrest. Based on Habila's critique, it is evident that he would accuse Bulawayo of taking advantage of strategic allures and exoticisms to evoke sympathy and intrigue from the global reader. But in response to his review, Taiye Selasi writes in "Stop Pigeonholing African Writers" that it is unfair for Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie to be criticized by Mũkoma Wa Ngũgĩ for writing too much about middle-class finery at Princeton, while Bulawayo is critiqued for highlighting too many problems in Zimbabwe. She aptly argues that none of the critiques are doubting the accuracy of the writers' work or the idea that they are creating complex characters that transcend anthropological interpretation or allegorical caricature. Such critiques, she claims, threaten the African writer's agency in a world where African publishing is sadly not an option if the writer wants global recognition. She writes, "It is precisely because there are so few novels by African writers in global circulation that we ask those novels to do too much"⁷³. Although she does not discuss Afropolitanism in this article, what she is drawing attention to is at the heart of the debate within Afropolitan scholarship. Although Afropolitanism is critiqued for being too elitist, in my conception, it is an appropriate disciplinary mode for the study of African diasporic literature that minimizes the focus on "too." Afropolitan scholarship should not resort to these tired debates about whether a work features too much poverty or too little mention of the working class. It asks for more

⁷³ Although not responding directly to Selasi's article, Ben Okri echoes the sentiment when he argues that African writers are unfairly expected to write about trauma, despite the fact that "lighter fare" is much more popular among African readers. When novels about slavery are deemed as more artistically worthy than stories about a man drunk on palm wine, Okri contends, a stifling of creativity and inspiration results ("A Mental Tyranny"). In response to Okri's article, Sofia Samatar asserts that Okri places too much of a burden on the African writer and critic to solve this problem, when she claims that the problem is the reader ("Black and African writers don't need instructions from Ben Okri").

invigorating analyses of how certain characters are deftly or unconvincingly navigating their worlds.

A second problem that Afropolitanism faces is the problem of forgetting. As I've discussed in this chapter, there is a risk in Afropolitan writing and criticism of minimizing the trauma and injustice of the African experience. In a similar way that Julius in Teju Cole's *Open City* negates his African identity to embrace what he believes to be a more Western cosmopolitan experience, Amatoritsero Ede also claims that the Afropolitan writer, in the presumed rejection of the "label of African writer," contributes to the "negation of the black group agency that Afropolitanism could have inspired" (97). Critics of Afropolitanism like Ede contend that the movement is so focused on aesthetics, cultural mixing, and transnational mobility that it strategically forgets or simplifies the African label and minimizes the call to resistance that popular African literature has traditionally embraced.

But, the expectation of trauma and injustice is also a reductive and stereotypical way of thinking that many Afropolitan writers themselves are critiquing. Just as Hollywood should not need to remake some iteration of *Twelve Years a Slave* every other year in order for Black artists to receive global recognition, African writers should not feel obligated to write about their experience through a lens of trauma that casts the African character as a victim. More interestingly, Julius in *Open City* is a perpetrator of violence that results in a woman's trauma—although he also suffers from childhood trauma. Kingsley in *I Do Not Come to You by Chance* is a "criminal" 419 scammer who suffers from the disillusionment of failing to achieve a success narrative in an increasingly globalized and economically stratified Lagos, but

finds a way to earn a fortune through a comical poetic justice. These authors are not as interested in creating narratives of resistance in the same way that authors like Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o sought to do with *A Grain of Wheat* (1967). Again, this is not a new phenomenon. As Tim Brennan argued in 1989, "By stressing the global nature of everyday life, [cosmopolitan Third World writers] consciously allude to the centre/periphery conflicts raised by decolonization, and modify them by enhancing the role of the 'West' as, alternately, foil and lure" (*Salman Rushdie* 52). I would argue that this move is replicated by contemporary Afropolitan writers in the form of hacking. Afropolitan writers engage with both Africa and the West, but not in the way of total resistance or the recreation of simple binaries. Instead, the boundaries of nations, identities, traumas, and cultures are constantly renegotiated and reconfigured. This is not to say that there is no resistance in Afropolitan literature. Zinzi in *Zoo City* and Kingsley in *I Do Not Come to You by Chance* use 419 scamming as a way to resist disenfranchisement and injustice. Julius in *Open City* and Sepha in *The Beautiful Things that Heaven Bears* use flânerie as a means of resisting their own selves and the painful memories of poor decisions they have made. Ifemelu in *Americanah* and Lomba in *Waiting for an Angel* use griot-like writing as a way to resist stereotypical "single-story" representations of African immigrant life and government censorship of free thought, respectively. These are not passive novels that refuse to fight the good fight. But they cannot so easily be labeled as works of resistance against clear-cut enemies. Afropolitanism "hacks" the resistance narrative and reshapes it not as a means to an end or a linear plot development, but as a continual struggle that is targeted toward systems of power, pointed internally, and

directed toward the reader as a way to question one's own assumptions about the obligation of resistance in African literature.

As contemporary Afropolitan literature embraces diverse, decentered, and mobile narratives, their global readership is encouraged to appreciate African diasporic culture through a lens that is not merely sympathetic or craving exoticism. Africanness is presented in a way that is not always so foreign or oppositional. As J.K.S. Makokha states, readers can more easily find commonality with the characters (20). In my own teaching of works like Dinaw Mengestu's *The Beautiful Things That Heaven Bears*, young undergraduate readers of diverse backgrounds can, sometimes to their surprise, see themselves in these narratives—even though they may not share their experiences. Like Kwame Anthony Appiah has also found, Afropolitan and Anglophone African Boom literature does not necessarily encourage global readers to do extensive research on pre-colonial African history and culture. Excluding Taiye Selasi's *Ghana Must Go*, Afropolitan novels typically include glossaries within the books to help readers become more familiar with phrases in the author's local lexicon, as early editions of Chinua Achebe's works did (qtd. in Knudsen and Rahbek 151). Thus, the texts are typically not intended to be didactic or educational in the same way that globally popular Anglophone African texts were in the twentieth century.

Although this trend is not exactly new, when characters are presented in ways that are more relatable and familiar to the global reader—emphasizing anything from compassion to intellectual curiosity to a struggle to fit in—readers are less likely to pigeonhole these narratives as single-stories of Africa or see African narratives as

always-already indicative of resistance, pity, exoticism, or other characteristics that have often been associated with African literature. This is not to say that Afropolitan literature cannot have those qualities, but it is welcoming and representative of *all* types of African diasporic experiences. The reader does not always identify with the characters, but they are encouraged to dynamically shift between identification and difference or even self-reflection and self-criticality. Global readers might not fully relate to Kingsley *I Do Not Come to You By Chance*'s in his resort to 419 scamming as a way to provide for his family and develop a conflicting sense of dignity through newfound wealth, but many people—both within and outside of the African diaspora—can find commonality in Kingsley's desperation, disillusionment, and desire to please and succeed in an increasingly competitive world. At the same time, readers continually reflect upon how colonialism contributed to the present-day inflation and corruption that has left Kingsley in despair, as well as the karmic retribution that 419 scammers seek when they trick people across the globe into sending them money. I do not want to make the argument that a reader could never relate to a character like Obi Okonkwo in Chinua Achebe's African trilogy, nor do I mean to say that relatability is essential or desirable in African writing. But in contemporary African literature, we are seeing an evolving consciousness of the reader. That consciousness reflects the criticality or strategic exoticism espoused by previous generations of African writers to some extent, but it also invites the reader to see themselves in the characters—whether they share similar identities or not.

In order for Afropolitanism to be successful and worthy of serious discussion, it must be flexible and inclusive. What we have at the core of the debate is the

comparison of Afropolitanism as a literary and cultural discipline, in addition to Afropolitan as an adjective to describe someone's identity. Simon Gikandi speaks to the latter, but he expands upon Selasi's initial conception of mobile, affluent Afropolitans to also include lower-income urban workers who cannot leave Africa but dream of doing so someday (Knudsen and Rahbek 50). This conceptualization extends Afropolitanism-as-an-adjective to include all of the different characters I have written about in my dissertation—from lower-income to upper-middle-class immigrant and all social classes in between. Afropolitanism in this sense is less about a social status and more about a longing to be a part of a global conversation. Moreover, Gikandi argues that it is not as though the lower-income Afropolitans are longing to be like the Afropolitans who live abroad. He points out that in the contemporary African immigrant novels by Teju Cole, Taiye Selasi, and other writers, what he sees is “anxiety” and “struggle” rather than “a celebration of living a global life” (qtd. in Knudsen and Rahbek 50). This struggle is also evident in other novels that I have written about in the dissertation, such as *The Beautiful Things That Heaven Bears* and *I Do Not Come to You By Chance*. Both respective protagonists struggle with their sense of self-worth and morality during a period where their worlds are becoming more global, and yet their possibilities for upward mobility are slim to none. This is where I distinguish Afropolitan as an adjective to describe identity from Afropolitanism as a scholarly discipline. Whether the African characters are rich or poor, immigrants or not, the focus of the conversation is more on the global exchange. How are Africans interacting with people of different nations, continents, and localities in digital spaces? Beyond the pages of the novels, how are

the authors playing with certain familiar tropes in order to surprise or challenge global readers?.

Afropolitan authors are not simplify advertising African excellence and wealth. They are not writing as though they are heavily pressured by their publishers to cater to a Western audience and provide them with just the right balance of seemingly anthropological exoticism. Nor are they entirely reinventing the wheel or forgetting the paths of twentieth-century African writers who laid the groundwork for them to become literary trailblazers. Using my motif of hacking, these writers are working within existing structures and frameworks to make strategic decisions in their writing that both appeal to and challenge a global readership. But more than this, the writers ask global readers to reflect upon their own interests in the consumption of African literature—their desires to read about immigrant trauma, postcolonial anxieties, double consciousness, and cosmopolitan Africans. Never before have global readers been quite so involved in this conversation as prompted by the authors themselves. In Adichie's *Americanah*, Ifemelu's blog allows a space for Africans and African-Americans to participate in a kind of cultural exchange and even solidarity that disturbs the predominantly white male landscape of the tech blogosphere.⁷⁴ Teju Cole's abrupt revelation that the cosmopolitan African aesthete is a brutal rapist positions the global reader as someone who must be more conscious of their reading consumption habits. Lauren Beukes and Adaobi Tricia Nwaubani respectively ask

⁷⁴ Shane A. McCoy argues that Ifemelu's "outsider within" perspective "illuminates the shift in power dynamics that characterize the 'technoscape' (Appadurai 34) controlled by technocrats who are overwhelmingly white and male [...] Ifemelu's presence [...] as a black female blogger disrupts a pernicious literary market that too often re-capitulates narratives of traumatic warfare for white Western readers of African literature" (McCoy 283). It is this dynamic that makes Adichie an effective literary hacker.

readers to reimagine how Africans can take advantage of democratic technologies and persuasive communications to join the cosmopolitan elite without ever leaving Africa (or even their rooms). Helon Habila emphasizes the continued importance of historical reflection and political activism in the African consciousness, while Dinaw Mengestu considers how an African immigrant can be thoughtful and worldly without being wealthy. All of these authors, and their works, have an important place in the conversation on Afropolitanism.

For Afropolitanism to succeed, scholars must continue to emphasize a diverse, decentered approach to African writing that is inherent in contemporary Anglophone African Boom literature. Scholars must also think of Afropolitanism not as a new revolution, but as an extension of the conversation that Chinua Achebe, Ama Ata Aidoo, Tsitsi Dangarembga, Kwame Anthony Appiah, Paul Gilroy, James Baldwin, and other African diasporic writers initiated in the twentieth century. With a flexible conception of “African” and critical understanding of “cosmopolitanism,” Afropolitanism has the power to be more than just the same old story of postcolonial scholarship or Pan-African writing in fancier packaging. Using my motif of hacking, which is especially fitting for writers who are capturing a predominantly digital milieu for contemporary cultural exchange, Anglophone African Boom writers are effectively hacking existing academic scholarship to make Afropolitanism more of a practical mode of literary and cultural analysis.

Bibliography

- Abebe, Alpha. "Afropolitanism: Global Citizenship with African Routes." *Oxpol: The Oxford University Politics Blog*, 10 April 2015, <https://blog.politics.ox.ac.uk/afropolitanism-global-citizenship-with-african-routes/>, Accessed 2 March 2020.
- Achebe, Chinua. *Anthills of the Savannah*, Doubleday, 1988.
- Adéèkó, Adélékè. "Power Shift: America in the New Nigerian Imagination." *The Global South*, vol. 2, no. 2, 2008, pp. 10-30.
- Adenekan, Shola. *African Literature in the Digital Age: Class and Sexual Politics in New Writing from Nigeria and Kenya*. Boydell & Brewer, 2021.
- . "Transnationalism and the Agenda of African Literature in a Digital Age." *Matatu*, vol. 45, no. 1, 2014, pp. 133-151.
- Adenekan, Shola and Helen Cousins. "Class Online: Representations of African Middle-Class Identity." *Postcolonial Text*, vol. 9, no. 3, 2014, pp. 1-15.
- Adesokan, Akin. "New African Writing and the Question of Audience." *Research in African Literatures*, vol. 43, no. 3, 2012, pp. 1-20.
- Adichie, Chimamanda Ngozi. "African 'Authenticity' and the Biafran Experience." *Transition*, no. 99, 2008, pp. 42-53.
- . *Americanah*. Alfred A. Knopf, 2013.
- Adogame, Afe. "The 419 Code as Business Unusual: Youth and the Unfolding of the Advance Fee Fraud Online Discourse." *Asian Journal of Social Science* vol. 37, 2009, pp. 551-573.

- Aidoo, Ama Ata. *Our Sister Killjoy: Our Sister Killjoy or Reflections from a Black-eyed Squint or Reflections from a Black-eyed Squint*. Longman Group, 1977.
- Akingbe, Niyi. "Assessing the Dilemma of a Nation at the Crossroads: Protest as Landscape in Chinua Achebe's *Anthills of the Savannah*." *Focus on Nigeria: Literature and Culture*, 2012, pp. 103-121.
- Akoh, Ben, and Abiodun Jagun. *Mapping Digital Media: Nigeria: A Report by the Open Society Foundations*. Open Society Foundations, 2012.
- Anderson, Amanda. *The Way We Argue Now: A Study in the Cultures of Theory*. Princeton University Press, 2006.
- Appadurai, Arjun. *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*. University of Minnesota Press, 1996.
- Appiah, Kwame Anthony. *Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in a World of Strangers*. W.W. Norton, 2006.
- . "Cosmopolitan Patriots." *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 23, no. 3, 1997, pp. 617-639.
- Apter, Emily. *Against World Literature: On the Politics of Untranslatability*. Verso, 2013.
- Ashworth, Robin Rison. "New Media, Oral histories, and the Expansion and Modification of West African Griot Culture: A Case Study of Alhaji Papa Susso." Diss. Virginia Commonwealth University, 2012.
- Asika, Ikechukwu Emmanuel. "Military Dictatorship in Nigerian Novels: A Study of Helon Habila's *Waiting for an Angel* and Chinua Achebe's *Anthills of the Savannah*." *African Research Review*, vol. 5 (3), no. 20, 2011, pp. 275-289.

- Babile, Tola. *To Kill A Generation: The Red Terror in Ethiopia*. Free Ethiopia Press, 1989.
- Back, Jasmin. “‘I’m African Just Like You’: Migration and Identity Construction in *Open City* and *Americanah*.” Master’s Thesis, Universiteit Leiden, 2016.
- Bacon, Katie. “An African Voice.” *The Atlantic*. Aug. 2000.
<https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2000/08/an-african-voice/306020/>. Accessed. 3 March 2019.
- Bady, Aaron. “Afropolitan.” ACLA.org, 8 April 2014,
<https://stateofthedisipline.acla.org/entry/afropolitan>, Accessed 2 June 2019.
- . “The Varieties of Blackness: An Interview with Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie.” *Boston Review: A Political and Literary Forum*, 10 July 2013,
<http://bostonreview.net/fiction/varieties-blackness>. Accessed 20 July 2018.
- Balakrishnan, Sarah. “The Afropolitan Idea: New Perspectives on Cosmopolitanism in African Studies.” *History Compass* vol. 15, no. 2, 2017, pp. 1-11.
- Barber, Benjamin. “Jihad vs. McWorld.” In *The Globalization Reader*, Eds. F.J. Lechner and J. Boli. Blackwell, 2004, pp. 29-35. Excerpted from “Introduction” in Benjamin Barber, *Jihad vs. McWorld*, Times Books, 1995, pp. 3-8, 9-10, 17-20.
- Barber, Karin. “African-Language Literature and Postcolonial Criticism.” *Research in African Literatures*, vol. 26, no. 4, 1995, pp. 3-30.
- Baucom, Ian. “A Study in African Realism.” *Public Books*, 1 Nov. 2013,
<http://www.publicbooks.org/a-study-in-african-realism/>. Accessed 25 July 2018.

- Baudelaire, Charles. "An Artist, Man of the World, Man of Crowds, and Child." *The Painter of Modern Life and Other Essays*. Translated and edited by Jonathan Mayne, Phaidon, 1964, pp. 5-12.
- Baugh, Ryan. "U.S. Lawful Permanent Residents: 2019." *Department of Homeland Security Annual Flow Report*, 2020, pp. 1-10.
- Bauman, Zygmunt. "Desert spectacular." *The Flâneur*. Edited by Keith Tester, Routledge, 1994, pp. 138-157.
- Behdad, Ali. *A Forgetful Nation: On Immigration and Cultural Identity in the United States*. Duke UP, 2005.
- Benjamin, Walter. *The Arcades Project*. Translated by Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin, Harvard UP, 1999.
- . *Charles Baudelaire: A Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism*. Translated by Harry Zohn, Verso, 1983.
- . "The Return of the Flâneur." *Selected Writings, Vol. 2, 1927-1934*, translated by Rodney Livingston and edited by Michael W. Jennings, Harvard University Press, 1999, pp. 262-67.
- Berlant, Lauren. "Cruel Optimism." *Differences*, vol. 17, no. 3, 2006, pp. 20-36.
- Beukes, Lauren. *Zoo City*, Angry Robot, 2010.
- Bhabha, Homi K. *The Location of Culture*. Routledge, 1994.
- Brennan, Timothy. "Cosmopolitanism and Celebrities." *Race and Class*, vol. 31, no. 1, 1989, pp. 1-20.
- . "Cosmo-Theory." *South Atlantic Quarterly*, vol. 100, no. 3, 2001, pp. 659-91.

- . *Salman Rushdie and the Third World: Myths of the Nation*. St. Martin's Press, 1989.
- Brouillette, Sarah. "On the African Literary Hustle." *Blind Field: a Journal of Cultural Inquiry*. 14 Aug. 2017, <https://blindfieldjournal.com/2017/08/14/on-the-african-literary-hustle/>. Accessed 5 April 2022.
- . *Postcolonial Writers in the Global Literary Marketplace*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2007.
- Brunton, Finn. *Spam: A Shadow History of the Internet*, MIT Press, 2013.
- Buck-Morss, Susan. "The Flaneur, the Sandwichman, and the Whore: The Politics of Loitering." *New German Critique*, vol. 39, 1986, pp. 99-140.
- Burrell, Jenna. "Problematic Empowerment: West African Internet Scams as Strategic Misrepresentation." *Information Technologies and International Development*, vol. 4, no. 4, 2008, 15-30.
- Burton, Richard D.E. *The 'Flaneur' and His City: Patterns of Daily Life in Paris 1815-1851*. Durham University Press, 1994.
- Butler, Kim D. "From Black History to Diasporan History: Brazilian Abolition in Afro Atlantic Context." *African Studies Review*, vol. 43, no.1, 2000, pp. 125-139.
- Carlaw, Darren. *The Flâneur as Foreigner: Ethnicity, Sexuality and Power in Twentieth Century New York Writing*. 2008. Newcastle University, PhD dissertation.
- Cervenak, Sarah Jane. *Wandering: Philosophical Performances of Racial and Sexual Freedom*. Duke UP, 2014.

- Chang, Joshua J.S. "An analysis of advance fee fraud on the internet." *Journal of Financial Crime*, vol. 15, no. 1, 2008, pp. 71-81.
- Chrisman, Laura. "Nationalism and postcolonial studies." *The Cambridge Companion to Postcolonial Literary Studies*. Edited by Neil Lazarus, Cambridge University Press, 2004.
- Chude-Sokei, Louis. "The Newly Black Americans: African Immigrants and Black America." *Transition*, no. 113, 2014, pp. 52-71.
- Clement, Bell Julian. "Primed for Development: Washington DC's Great Society Transitions, 1964-1974." *Capital Dilemma: Growth and Inequality in Washington*, edited by Derek Hyra and Sabiyha Prince, Routledge, 2016, pp. 45-65.
- Cockley, David. "Helon Habila's Neoliberal Nigeria: Free Markets and Subordinate Cultures in *Waiting for an Angel*." *Emerging African Voices: A Study of Contemporary African Literature*. Edited by Walter P. Collins, III, Amherst, Cambria Press, 2010, pp. 147-176.
- Coffey, Meredith Armstrong. "Narrow Nationalisms and Third Generation Nigerian Fiction." Diss. The University of Texas at Austin, 2016.
- Cohn, Deborah. *The Latin American Literary Boom and U.S. Nationalism During the Cold War*. Vanderbilt University Press, 2012.
- Coker, Oluwole. "Development Imperatives and Transnationalism in Third-Generation Nigerian Fiction." in *Tradition and Change in Contemporary West African Fiction*. Edited by Ogaga Okuyade. Rodopi, 2014, pp. 35-52.
- Cole, Teju. *Every Day is for the Thief*. Cassava, 2007.

- . "Interview: Teju Cole." Conducted by Aaron Bady. *Post45*, 19 Jan. 2015.
<https://post45.org/2015/01/interview-teju-cole>. Accessed 21 Feb 2022.
- . *Open City*. Random House, 2011.
- Comerford, Ruth. "Oyeyemi joins Faber for 'brilliant' novel." *The Bookseller*, 2 Oct. 2020, <https://www.thebookseller.com/rights/faber-scoops-oyeyemis-latest-brilliant-novel-1220632>. Accessed 2 April 2022.
- Cooppan, Vilashini. "World Literature and Global Theory: Comparative Literature for the New Millennium." *symplokē*, vol. 9, no. ½, 2001, pp. 15-43.
- Currey, James. *Africa Writes Back: The African Writers Series & The Launch of African Literature*. Heinemann, 2008.
- Dagnino, Arianna. *Transcultural Writers and Novels in the Age of Global Mobility*. Purdue University Press, 2015.
- Damrosch, David. *What Is World Literature?* Princeton University Press, 2003.
- Dalley, Hamish. "The Idea of 'Third Generation Nigerian Literature': Conceptualizing Historical Change and Territorial Affiliation in the Contemporary Nigerian Novel." *Research in African Literatures*, vol. 44, no. 4, 2013, pp. 15-34.
- Dean, Jodi. *Blog Theory: Feedback and Capture in the Circuits of Drive*. Polity Press, 2010.
- Deibert, Ronald J. *Black Code: Inside the Battle for Cyberspace*. Random House, 2013.

- Dethlefs, Robert. "How cyber attacks became more profitable than the drug trade." *Fortune*, 2015. <http://fortune.com/2015/05/01/how-cyber-attacks-became-more-profitable-than-the-drug-trade/>. Accessed 2 April 2019.
- Diawara, Manthia. "The Song of the Griot." *Transition*, no. 74, 1997, pp. 16-30.
- Diop, Samba. *The Oral History and Literature of the Wolof People of Waalo, Northern Senegal*. The Edwin Mellen Press, 1995.
- Dirlik, Arif. "The Postcolonial Aura: Third World Criticism in the Age of Global Capitalism." *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 20, no. 2, 1994, pp. 328-356.
- Ede, Amatoritsero. "The politics of Afropolitanism." *Journal of African Cultural Studies*, vol. 28, no. 1, 2016, pp. 88-100.
- Edoro, Ainehi. "How not to talk about African fiction." *The Guardian*. 6 Apr. 2016. https://www.theguardian.com/books/2016/apr/06/how-not-to-talk-about-african-fiction?CMP=share_btn_fb, Accessed 7 March 2020.
- Du Bois, W.E.B. *The Souls of Black Folk*, digital reprint by the Pennsylvania State University, 2006.
- Dugdale, John. "Roots of the problem: the controversial history of Alex Haley's book." *The Guardian*, 9 Feb. 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/books/booksblog/2017/feb/09/alex-haley-roots-reputation-authenticity>. Accessed. 2 November 2019.
- Ebron, Paulla A. *Performing Africa*. Princeton University Press, 2002.
- Edwards, Brent. "The Uses of Diaspora." *Social Text*. Vol. 19, no. 1, 2001, pp. 45-73.
- Egya, Sule. "Idiom of Text: The Unwritten Novel in Recent Nigerian Fiction." *English in Africa*, vol. 39, no. 1, 2012, pp. 109-124.

- Erritouni, Ali. "Contradictions and Alternatives in Chinua Achebe's *Anthills of the Savannah*." *Journal of Modern Literature*, vol. 29, no. 2, 2006, pp. 50-74.
- . "Political Despotism from a Postmodern Standpoint: Helon Habila's *Waiting for an Angel*." *Research in African Literatures*, vol. 41, no. 4, 2010, pp. 144-161.
- Eze, Chielozona. "Cosmopolitan Solidarity: Negotiating Transculturality in Contemporary Nigerian Novels." *English in Africa*, vol. 32, no. 1, 2005, pp. 99-112.
- . "Rethinking African culture and identity: the Afropolitan model." *Journal of African Cultural Studies*, vol. 26, no. 2, 2014, pp. 234-247.
- . "We, Afropolitans." *Journal of African Cultural Studies*, vol. 28, no. 1, 2016, pp. 114-119.
- Fanon, Frantz. *Black Skin, White Masks*. Translated by Richard Philcox. Grove, 2008.
- Fasselt, Rebecca. "'I'm not Afropolitan—I'm of the Continent': A conversation with Yewande Omotoso." *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, 2014, pp. 1-16.
- . "Reassessing Thematic Crossings between South Africa and Nigeria: Postcolonial Leadership and Power in Mandla Langa's *The Lost Colours of the Chameleon* and Helon Habila's *Waiting for an Angel*." *ARIEL: A Review of International English Literature*, vol. 46, no. 3, 2015, pp. 23-53.
- Featherstone, Mike. "The *Flâneur*, the City and Virtual Public Life." *Urban Studies*, vol. 35, nos. 5-6, 1998, pp. 909-25.
- Ferguson, Priscilla Parkhurst. "The *flâneur* on and off the streets of Paris." In *The Flâneur*. Edited by Keith Tester, Routledge, 1994, pp. 22-42.

- Fofana, Amadou T. "Sembène's 'Borom Sarret': A Griot's Narrative." *Literature/Film Quarterly*, vol. 39, no. 4, 2011, pp. 255-265.
- Fongang, Delphine. "Cosmopolitan Dilemma: Diasporic Subjectivity and Postcolonial Liminality in Teju Cole's *Open City*." *Research in African Literatures*, vol. 48, no. 4, 2017, pp. 138-54.
- Frère, Marie-Soleil. "Le journaliste et le griot. Les traces de l'oralité dans la presse écrite africaine." *Afrika Focus*, vol. 15, no. 1-2, 1999, pp. 13-47.
- Freud, Sigmund. "Negation." *The Standard Edition of the Complete Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. 19. Translated by James Strachey, Hogarth, 1925, pp. 235-39.
- Gehrmann, Susanne. "Cosmopolitanism with African roots.. Afropolitanism's ambivalent mobilities." *Journal of African Cultural Studies*, vol. 28, no. 1, 2016, pp. 61-72.
- Geiss, Imaneul. *The Pan-African Movement*. trans. Ann Keep, Methuen and Col., Ltd., 1974.
- Gikandi, Simon. "African Literature and the Colonial Factor." *The Cambridge History of African and Caribbean Literature, Volume 1*. Edited by. F. Abiola Irele and Simon Gikandi, 2004, pp. 379-397.
- . "On Afropolitanism." In *Negotiating Afropolitanism: Essays on Borders and Spaces in Contemporary African Literature and Folklore*, Eds. Jennifer Wawrzinek and J.K.S. Makhokha, Brill, pp. 9-11.
- Gilloch, Graeme. *Myth and Metropolis: Walter Benjamin and the City*. Polity Press, 1996.

- Gilroy, Paul. *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*. Verso, 1999.
- Gleber, Anke. *The Art of Taking a Walk: Flanerie, Literature, and Film in Weimar Culture*. Princeton University Press, 1999.
- Glickman, Harvey. "The Nigerian '419' Advance Fee Scams: Prank or Peril?" *Canadian Journal of African Studies/Revue canadienne des etudes africaines*, vol. 39, no. 3, 2005, pp. 460-489.
- Goody, Jack. "From Oral to Written: An Anthropological Breakthrough in Storytelling." *The Novel, Volume 1, History Geography, and Culture*, edited by Franco Moretti, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006, pp. 3-36.
- Goyal, Yogita. "Africa and the Black Atlantic." *Research in African Literatures*, vol. 45, no. 3, 2014, pp. v-xxv.
- . *Runaway Genres: The Global Afterlives of Slavery*. NYU Press, 2019.
- Graham, Shane. "The Entropy of Built Things: Postapartheid Anxiety and the Production of Space in Henrietta Rose-Innes' *Nineveh* and Lauren Beukes' *Zoo City*." *Safundi*, vol. 16, no. 1, 2014, pp. 64-77.
- Guarracino, Serena. "Writing <<so raw and true>>: Blogging in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah*." *Between*, vol. 4, no. 8, 2014, pp. 1-27.
- Gunner, Elizabeth. "A Dying Tradition? African Oral Literature in a Contemporary Context." *Social Dynamics*, vol. 12, no. 2, 1986, pp. 31-38.
- Habila, Helon. "Tradition and the African writer by 2014 Judge, Helon Habila. CainePrize.com. 11 June 2014, <http://caineprize.com/blog/2015/12/1/tradition-and-the-african-writer-by-2014-judge-helon-habila>, Accessed 5 March 2020.

- . *Waiting for an Angel*. W.W. Norton & Company, 2002.
- . "We Need New Names by Noviolet Bulawayo – review." *The Guardian*, 20 Jun 2013, <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2013/jun/20/need-new-names-bulawayo-review>, Accessed 2 March 2019.
- Hacking, Ian. *Mad Travelers: Reflections on the Reality of Transient Mental Illnesses*. U of Virginia P, 1999.
- Hale, Thomas A. "From the Griot of *Roots* to the Roots of *Griot*: A New Look at the Origins of a Controversial African Term for Bard." *Oral Tradition*, vol. 12, no. 2, 1997, pp. 249-278.
- . *Griots and Griottes: Masters of Words and Music*, Indiana University Press, 1998.
- Hartmann, Maren. *Technologies and Utopias: The Cyberflâneur and the Experience of 'Being Online.'* 2004. University of Westminster, PhD dissertation.
- Hartwiger, Alexander Greer. "The Postcolonial Flâneur: *Open City* and the Urban Palimpsest." *Postcolonial Text*, vol. 11, no. 1, 2016, pp. 1-17.
- Headley, Bernard D. "'Black on Black' Crime: The Myth and the Reality." *Social Justice and Social Policy*, no. 20, 1983, pp. 50-62.
- Hechinger, Sr., John W. and Gavin Taylor. "The D.C. City Council vs. Police Brutality, 1967-69." *Washington History*, vol. 11 no. 2, 1999/2000, pp. 4-23.
- Hoad, Neville. "Dystopian Futures, Apartheid, and Postapartheid Allegories: Contemporary Imaginings of Johannesburg." *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*, vol. 36, no. 2, 2016, pp. 293-306.

- Hodapp, James. "The Proto-Afropolitan *Bildungsroman*: Yoruba Women, Resistance, and the Nation in Simi Bedford's *Yoruba Girl Dancing*." *The Global South*, vol. 10, no. 1, 2016, pp. 130-149.
- Hoffman, Barbara G. *Griots at War: Conflict, Conciliation, and Caste in Mande*, Indiana University Press, 2000.
- Horne, Frank S. "The Open City—Threshold to American Maturity." *The Phylon Quarterly*, vol. 18, no. 2, 1957, pp. 133-39.
- Huart, Louis. *Physiologie du Flâneur*. Aubert et Cie, 1841.
- Huggan, Graham. *The Postcolonial Exotic: Marketing the Margins*. Routledge, 2001.
- Hynes, William J. and William G. Doty. "Historical Overview of Theoretical Issues: The Problem of the Trickster," *Mythical Trickster Figures: Contours, Contexts, and Criticisms*. Edited by William J. Hynes and William G. Doty. The University of Alabama Press, 1997.
- Hyra, Derek S. *Race, Class, and Politics in the Cappuccino City*. The University of Chicago Press, 2017.
- Ibironke, Olabode. "African Writers Challenge Conventions of Postcolonial Literary History." *Rethinking African Cultural Production*. Edited by Frieda Ekotto and Kenneth W. Harrow, Indiana University Press, 2015.
- Igwe, Chidi Nnamdi. *Taking Back Nigeria from 419: What to Do about the Worldwide E-mail Scam—Advance-Fee Fraud*. iUniverse, Inc., 2007.
- Jansen, Jan. *The Griot's Craft: An Essay on Oral Tradition and Diplomacy*, Transaction Publishers, 2000.
- Jenks, Chris and Tiago Neves. "A walk on the wild side: Urban ethnography

- meets the Flâneur.” *Cultural Values*, vol. 4, no. 1, 2000, pp. 1-17.
- Johnson, Erica L. “‘Provincializing Europe’: The Postcolonial Urban Uncanny in V.S. Naipaul’s *A Bend in the River*.” *JNT: Journal of Narrative Theory*, vol. 40, no. 2, 2010, pp. 209-230.
- Jørholt, Eva. “Africa’s Modern Cinematic Griots—Oral Tradition and West African Cinema.” *Same and Other: Negotiating African Identity in Cultural Production*. Edited by Maria Eriksson Baaz and Mai Palmberg, Nordiska Afrikainsitutet, 2001, pp. 95-118.
- Julien, Elieen. *African Novels and the Question of Orality*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992.
- . “The Extroverted African Novel.” *The Novel, Volume 1, History Geography, and Culture*. Edited by Franco Moretti, Princeton University Press, 2006, pp. 667-702.
- Kantor, Roanne L. “A Case of Exploding Markets: Latin American and South Asian Literary ‘Booms’.” *Comparative Literature* vol. 70, no. 4, 2018, pp. 466-486.
- Kaschula, Russell H. and Samba Diop. “Political Processes and the Role of the Imbongi and Griot in Africa.” *South African Journal of African Languages*, vol. 20, no. 1, pp. 13-28.
- Kaufmann, Vincent, and Bertrand Montulet. “Between Social and Spatial Mobilities: The Issue of Social Fluidity.” *Tracing Mobilities: Towards a Cosmopolitan Perspective*. Edited by Sven Kesselring, Weert Ganzler, and Kaufman, Routledge, 2012, pp. 37-56.

- Kellner, Clive. "Notes from Down South: Towards Defining Contemporary African Practice." In *Africa Remix: Contemporary Art of a Continent*. Edited by Simon Njami, Johannesburg Art Gallery, 2007, pp. 22–25.
- Kirsch, Adam. *The Global Novel: Writing the World in the 21st Century*, Columbia Global Reports, 2016.
- Kleingeld, Pauline, and Eric Brown. "Cosmopolitanism." *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, edited by Edward N. Zalta, Fall 2014 Edition, 23 Feb. 2002. plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2014/entries/cosmopolitanism/. Accessed 1 May 2015.
- Knudsen, Eva Rask and Ulla Rahbek. *In Search of the Afropolitan: Encounters, Conversations, and Contemporary Diasporic African Literature*. Rowman & Littlefield, 2016.
- Kramer, Kathryn and John Rennie Short. "Flânerie and the globalizing city." *City*, vol. 15, nos. 3-4, 2011, pp. 322-342.
- Krishnan, Madhu. "Affiliation, Disavowal, and National Commitment in Third Generation African Literature." *ARIEL: a Review of International English Literature*, vol. 44, no. 1, 2013, pp. 73-97.
- Labuschagne, Gérard. "Features and Investigative Implications of Muti Murder in South Africa." *Journal of Investigative Psychology and Offender Profiling* vol. 1, 2004, pp. 191-206.
- Larousse, Pierre. *Grand Dictionnaire Universel du XIXe Siècle*. Vol. 8. Paris: Great Universal Dictionary Administration, 1872.
- Lazarus, Neil. *The Postcolonial Unconscious*. Cambridge University Press, 2011.

- Levine, Caroline. “‘The Strange Familiar’: Structure, Infrastructure, and Adichie’s *Americanah*.” *MFS Modern Fiction Studies*, vol. 61, no. 4, 2015, pp. 587-605.
- Levinson, Brett. *The Ends of Literature: The Latin American “Boom” in the Neoliberal Marketplace*. Stanford University Press, 2001.
- Levy, Stephen. *Hackers: Heroes of the Computer Revolution*, Project Gutenberg (ebook), 1984. <https://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/729/pg729.html>.
- Lewis, Thomas. “Transatlantic slave trade.” *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. Encyclopaedia Britannica, inc., 7 April 2017.
- Leymarie, Isabelle. “The Role and Functions of the Griots Among the Wolof of Senegal.” Diss. Columbia University, 1978.
- Lorde, Audre. “The Master’s Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master’s House.” *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches by Audre Lorde*, The Crossing Press, 1984, pp. 110-113.
- Lynn, Thomas Jay. “Postcolonial Encounters Re-Envisioned: Kojo Laing’s *Woman of the Aeroplanes* as Trickster Narrative.” *Tradition and Change in Contemporary West African Fiction*, Ed. Ogaga Okuyade, 2014.
- Makokha, J.K.S. “In the Spirit of Afropolitanism.” *Negotiating Afropolitanism: Essays on Borders and Spaces in Contemporary African Literature and Folklore*. Edited by Jennifer Wawrzinek and J.K.S. Makokha. Rodopi, 2011. pp. 13-24.
- Martin, Gerald. “Boom, Yes; ‘New Novel, No: Further Reflections on the Optical Illusions of the 1960s in Latin America.” *Bulletin of Latin American Research*, vol. 3, no. 2, 1984, pp. 53-63.

- Martínez, Francisco. "Beautiful Transgressions: Thinking the *Flâneur* in Late modern Societies." *Hopeless Youth!* 403-434.
- Mbembe, Achille. "Afropolitanism." In *Africa Remix: Contemporary Art of a Continent*. Edited by Simon Njami, Johannesburg Art Gallery, 2007, pp. 26-40.
- Mbembe, Achille and Sarah Balakrishnan. "Pan-African Legacies, Afropolitan Futures: A conversation with Achille Mbembe." *Transition*, no. 120, 2016, pp. 28-37.
- Mbembe, Achille and Sarah Nuttall. "Writing the World from an African Metropolis." *Public Culture* vol. 16, no.3, 2004, pp. 347-372.
- McClintock, Anne. "The Angel of Progress: Pitfalls of the Term 'Post-Colonialism'." *Social Text*, no. 31/32, 1992, pp. 84-98.
- McCoy, Shane A. "The 'Outsider Within': counter-narratives of the 'New' African diaspora in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah* (2013)." *Journal of the African Literature Association*, vol. 11, no. 3, 2017, pp. 279-294.
- McGovern, Stephen J. *The Politics of Downtown Development: Dynamic Political Cultures in San Francisco and Washington, D.C.* University Press of Kentucky, 1998.
- McGurl, Mark. *The Program Era: Postwar Fiction and the Rise of Creative Writing*. Harvard University Press, 2009.
- Mengestu, Dinaw. *The Beautiful Things That Heaven Bears*. Riverhead Books (Penguin Group), 2007.
- Merrifield, Andy. *The New Urban Question*. Pluto Press, 2014.

- Mignolo, Walter D. "The Many Faces of Cosmo-polis: Border Thinking and Critical Cosmopolitanism." *Public Culture*, vol. 12, no. 3, 2000, pp. 721-748.
- Mokoena, Hlonipha. "'Carpe Diem': Seizing the Afropolitan Day." *Current History*, vol. 119, no. 817, pp. 194-196.
- Montague, Dena and Frida Berrigan. "The Business of War in the Democratic Republic of Congo," *Dollars and Sense Magazine*, July/August 2001.
Reprinted on ThirdWorldTraveler.com.
http://www.thirdworldtraveler.com/Africa/Business_War_Congo.html.
Accessed 3 April 2019.
- Moretti, Franco. "Conjectures of World Literature." *New Left Review* 1, 2000, pp. 54-68.
- Morozov, Evgeny. "The Death of the Cyberflâneur." *The New York Times*. 4 Feb. 2012. <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/02/05/opinion/sunday/the-death-of-the-cyberflaneur.html>. Accessed 4 June 2017.
- Mwangi, Evan Maina. *Africa Writes Back to Self: Metafiction, Gender, Sexuality*. SUNY Press, 2009.
- Nadiminti, Kalyan. "The Global Program Era: Contemporary International Fiction in the American Creative Economy." *Novel: A Forum on Fiction*, vol. 51, no. 3, 2018, pp. 375-398.
- Neumann, Birgit and Gabriele Rippl. "Celebrating Afropolitan Identities? Contemporary African World Literatures in English." *Angalia*, vol. 135, no. 1, 2017, pp. 159-185.

- Newman, Karen. *Cultural Capitals: Early Modern London and Paris*. Princeton University Press, 2007.
- Nwakanma, Obi. "Metonymic Eruptions: Igbo Novelists, the Narrative of the Nation, and New Developments in the Contemporary Nigerian Novel. *Research in African Literatures*, vol. 39, no. 2, 2008, pp. 1-14.
- Nwaubani, Adaobi Tricia. "African Books For Western Eyes." *The New York Times*, 28 Nov. 2014.
- . *I Do Not Come to You by Chance*, Hachette Books, 2009.
- Obi-Young, Otosirize. "As Sales Approach the Million Mark, Is *Americanah* Now Adichie's Signature Novel?" *Brittle Paper*, 27 March 2017, <https://brittlepaper.com/2017/03/sales-approach-million-mark-americanah-adichies-signature/>. Accessed 2 April 2022.
- Ogunyemi, Olatunji. "Representation of Africa Online: Sourcing Practice and Frames of Reference." *Journal of Black Studies*, vol. 41, no. 3, 2011, pp. 457-478.
- Okome, Mojúbàlú Olúfúnké. "Immigrant Voices in Cyberspace: Spinning Continental and Diasporan Africans into the World Wide Web." *Gendering the African Diaspora: Women, Culture, and Historical Change in the Caribbean and Nigerian Hinterland*. Edited by Judith A. Byfield, LaRay Denzer, and Anthea Morrison, Indiana University Press, 2010, pp. 285-311.
- Okri, Ben. "A mental tyranny is keeping black writers from greatness." *The Guardian*. 27 Dec. 2014, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2014/dec/27/mental-tyranny-black-writers>, Accessed 5 March 2020.

- Omoha, Owojecho. "Fictional Narrative and the Reflective Self in Helon Habila's *Waiting for an Angel*." *Tradition and Change in Contemporary West and East African Fiction*. Edited by Ogaga Okuyade, Rodopi, 2013, pp. 295-313.
- Omotoso, Yewande. *Bom Boy*. Modjaji, 2011.
- Ong, Walter J. *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word*. Routledge, 2002.
- Ortega, Kirsten Bartholomew. "The Black Flâneuse: Gwendolyn Brooks's 'In the Mecca'." *Journal of Modern Literature*, vol. 30, no. 4, 2007. 139-155.
- Owomoyela, Oyekan. *Yoruba Trickster Tales*, University of Nebraska Press, 1997.
- Pahl, Miriam. "Afropolitanism as critical consciousness: Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's and Teju Cole's internet presence." *Journal of African Cultural Studies*, vol. 28, no. 1, pp. 73-87.
- Panzacchi, Cornelia. "The Livelihoods of Traditional Griots in Modern Senegal." *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute*, vol. 64, no. 2, 1994, pp. 190-210.
- Parks, Tim. "The Dull New Global Novel." *The New York Review of Books*, 2010.
<https://www.nybooks.com/daily/2010/02/09/the-dull-new-global-novel/>,
 Accessed 3 March 2019.
- Parrott, R. Joseph. "A *Luta Continua*: radical filmmaking, Pan-African liberation and communal empowerment." *Race & Class* vol. 57, no. 1, 2015, pp. 20-38.
- Pizzolato, Giulia. "From Casamance to Turin Lao Kouyate's Modern Traveling "Griot": The Creation of a Space for Discursive Mobility. *Cahiers d'Études Africaines*, vol. 54, no. 213/214, 2014, pp. 475-498.

- Poblete, Juan. "The Boom, The Literary, and Cultural Critique." *Journal of Latin American Cultural Studies*, vol. 28, no. 2, 2019, pp. 195-213.
- Pole, Antoinette. *Blogging the Political: Politics and Participation in a Networked Society*. Routledge, 2010.
- Prince, Sabiyha. *African Americans and Gentrification in Washington, D.C.: Race, Class and Social Justice in the Nation's Capital*. Routledge, 2014.
- Renan, Ernest. "What Is a Nation? (1882)." *Nation and Narration*. Edited by Homi K. Bhabha, Routledge, 1990, pp. 8-22.
- Richards, Helen. "Sex and the City: A Visible Flaneuse for the Postmodern Era?" *Continuum*, vol. 17, no. 2, 2003, pp. 147-57.
- Rignall, John. *Realist Fiction and the Strolling Spectator*. Routledge, 1992.
- Rushdy, Ashraf H. A. "An Apology for the African Diaspora: Race, Regret, and Reconciliation." *PoCoPages*, 2014, pp. 57-74.
- Safran, William. "Diaspora in Modern Societies: Myths of Homeland and Return." *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies*. Vol. 1, No. 1, 1991, pp. 83-89.
- Salami, Minna. "My views on Afropolitanism." *Ms. Afropolitan*. nd.
<https://www.msafropolitan.com/my-views-on-afropolitanism>, Accessed 2 November 2020.
- Samatar, Sofia. "Black and African writers don't need instructions from Ben Okri." *The Guardian*. 30 Dec. 2014.
<https://www.theguardian.com/books/booksblog/2014/dec/30/african-writers-instructions-ben-okri>, Accessed 2 March 2020.

- Schmidt, Jennifer M. "The girls who don't die: subversions of gender and genre in recent fiction by Lauren Beukes." *Safundi* vol. 17, no. 2, 2016, pp. 137-155.
- Scholtz, H.J., V. M. Phillips and G.J.Knobel. "Muti or ritual murder." *Forensic Science International* vol. 87, 1997, pp. 117-123.
- Schulz, Dorothea. "Praise without Enchantment: Griots, Broadcast Media, and the Politics of Tradition in Mali." *Africa Today*, vol. 44, no. 4, 1997, pp. 443-464.
- Selasi, Taiye. "African Literature Doesn't Exist." Internationales LiteraturFestival Berlin, 2013,
https://www.literaturfestival.com/medien/texte/eroeffnungsreden/Openingsspeech2013_English.pdf. Accessed 21 Feb. 2022.
- . "Bye-Bye Babar." *LIP*. 3 Mar. 2005. <http://thelip.robertsharp.co.uk/?p=76>,
Accessed 1 February 2019.
- "Don't Ask Me Where I'm From, Ask Where I'm a Local." TEDGlobal 2014,
https://www.ted.com/talks/taiye_selasi_don_t_ask_where_i_m_from_ask_where_i_m_a_local?language=en. Accessed 21 Feb. 2022.
- . "Taiye Selasi: stop pigeonholing African writers." *The Guardian*. 4 Jul. 2015.
<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2015/jul/04/taiye-selasi-stop-pigeonholing-african-writers>, Accessed 2 March 2020.
- . "Teju Cole talks to Taiye Selasi: 'Afropolitan, American, African, Waterver'." *The Guardian*. 5 Aug. 2016.
<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2016/aug/05/teju-cole-taiye-selasi-interview-known-strange-things>. Accessed 20 Feb. 2017.

- Senghor, Léopold Sédar. "Negritude: A Humanism of the Twentieth Century." *Colonial Discourse and Postcolonial Theory: A Reader*. Eds. Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman. Columbia University Press, 1994, pp. 27-35.
- Sharpe, Jenny. "Cartographies of Globalization, Technologies of Gendered Subjectivities: The Dub Poetry of Jean 'Binta' Breeze.'" *Minor Transnationalism*. Edited by Françoise Lionnet and Shu-mei Shih. Duke University Press, 2005. pp. 261-282.
- Shields, Rob. "Fancy Footwork: Walter Benjamin's Notes on *Flânerie*." *The Flâneur*. Edited by Keith Tester, Routledge, 1994, pp. 61-80.
- Shohat, Ella. "Notes on the 'Post-Colonial'." *Social Text*, no. 31/32, 1992, pp. 99-113.
- Siskind, Mariano. "The Globalization of the Novel and the Novel of the Global. A Critique of World Literature." *Comparative Literature* vol. 62, no. 4, 2010, pp. 336-360.
- Skinner, Ryan Thomas. "Why Afropolitanism Matters." *Africa Today*, vol. 64, no. 2, 2017, pp. 2-21.
- Sofianos, Konstantin. "Magical Nightmare Jo'burg." *Safundi* vol. 14, no. 1, 2013, pp. 111-120.
- Sougou, Omar. "Language, Foregrounding and Intertextuality in *Anthills of the Savannah*." *Critical Approaches to Anthills of the Savannah*, Ed. Holger G. Ehling. Matatau, 1991.
- Smith, Andrew. "Nigerian Scam E-mails and the Charms of Capital." *Cultural Studies*, vol. 23, no. 1, 2009, pp. 27-47.

- Smith, Daniel Jordan. *A Culture of Corruption: Everyday Deception and Popular Discontent in Nigeria*, Princeton University Press, 2008.
- . "ritual killing, 419, and fast wealth: inequality and the popular imagination in southeastern Nigeria." *American Ethnologist* vol. 8, no. 4, 2001, pp. 803-826.
- Spencer, Robert. *Cosmopolitan Criticism and Postcolonial Literature*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2011.
- Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. "Can the Subaltern Speak?" *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*. Edited by Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg. University of Illinois Press, 1988, pp. 271-313.
- Squires, Catherine R. *The Post-Racial Mystique: Media and Race in the Twenty-First Century*. New York University Press, 2014.
- Steinmetz, Kevin F. *Hacked: A Radical Approach to Hacker Culture and Crime*. New York University Press, 2016.
- Stevens, Andrew. *419: The Story of Advance Fee Fraud*, Publishamerica, 2006.
- Stoller, Paul. "Ethnographies as Texts/Ethnographers as Griots." *American Ethnologist*, vol. 21, no. 2, 1994, pp. 353-366.
- Sullivan, Daniel Monroe and Samuel C. Shaw. "Retail Gentrification and Race: The Case of Alberta Street in Portland, Oregon." *Urban Affairs Review*, vol. 47, no. 3, pp. 413-432.
- Tan, Kathy-Ann. *Reconfiguring Citizenship and National Identity in the North American Literary Imagination*. Wayne State University Press, 2015.
- Tareke, Gebru. "The Red Terror in Ethiopia. *Journal of Developing Societies*, vol. 24, No. 2, 2008, pp. 183-206.

- Thomas, Douglas. *Hacker Culture*. University of Minnesota Press, 2003.
- Toivanen, Anna-Leena. "Cosmopolitanism's new clothes? The limits of the concept of Afropolitanism." *European Journal of English Studies*, vol. 21, no. 2, 2017, pp. 189-205.
- Tveit, Marta. "The Afropolitan Must Go. *Africa is a Country*, 28 Nov. 2013, <https://africasacountry.com/2013/11/the-afropolitan-must-go/>, Accessed 2 March 2018.
- Vecsey, Christopher. "The Exception Who Proves the Rules: Ananse the Akan Trickster." In *Mythical Trickster Figures: Contours, Contexts, and Criticisms*. Edited by William J. Hynes and William G. Doty. The University of Alabama Press, 1997.
- Vergunst, Jo. "Key figure of mobility: the pedestrian." *Social Anthropology*, vol. 25, no. 1, 2017, pp. 13-27.
- Vermeulen, Pieter. "Flights of Memory: Teju Cole's Open City and the Limits of Aesthetic Cosmopolitanism." *Journal of Modern Literature*, vol. 37, no. 1, 2013, pp. 40-57.
- . "Reading Alongside the Market: Affect and Mobility in Contemporary American Migrant Fiction." *Textual Practice*, vol. 29, no. 2, 2015, pp. 273-293.
- Walkowitz, Rebecca. *Cosmopolitan Style: Modernism Beyond the Nation*. Columbia University Press, 2006.
- Wa Ngugi, Mukoma. "The Black Man's Nod." *Callaloo*, vol. 36, no. 1, 2013, pp. 86-88.
- Wasihun, Betiel. "Afropolitan Writing." *Handbook of Transatlantic North American*

- Studies*. edited by Julia Straub. De Gruyter, 2016, pp. 391-410.
- Williams, Adebayo. "The Postcolonial Flaneur and Other Fellow-travelers: Conceits for a Narrative of Redemption." *Third World Quarterly*, vol. 18, no. 5, 1997, pp. 821-42.
- Williams, Paul K. *Images of America: The Neighborhoods of Logan, Scott, and Thomas Circles*. Arcadia Publishing, 2001.
- Williams, Raymond. *The Country and the City*. Oxford University Press, 1973.
- Wilson, Elizabeth. "The Invisible Flâneur." *Postmodern Cities and Spaces*. Edited by Sophie Watson and Katherine Gibson. Blackwell, 1995, pp. 59-79.
- Wizard, Brian. *Nigeria 419 Scam: Game Over*. Starguill International, 2000.
- "The WSJ Best Fiction of 2013." *The Wall Street Journal*. 13 Dec. 2013, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/the-wsj-best-fiction-of-2013-1386972763>. Accessed 2 April 2022.
- "World Lite: What is Global Literature?" *n+1 Magazine*, 2013. <https://nplusonemag.com/issue-17/the-intellectual-situation/world-lite/>, Accessed 2 March 2019.
- Wynchank, Anny. "The Cineaste as a Modern Griot in West Africa." *Oral Tradition and its Transmission: The Many Forms of Message: Papers Given at the Fourth International Conference on Oral Tradition, University of Natal Durban, 27-30 June 1994*, Durban: The Campbell Collections and Centre for Oral Studies, University of Natal, Johannesburg: Thorold's Africana Books, 1994, pp. 12-26.

Yékú, James. "Anti-Afropolitan ethics and the performative politics of online scambaiting." *Social Dynamics*, vol. 46, no. 2, 2020, pp. 240-258.

Zukin, Sharon. "New Retail Capital and Neighborhood Change: Boutiques and Gentrification in New York City." *City & Community*, vol. 8, no. 1, 2009, pp. 47-64.