Is Afropolitanism a Colonial Mentality?

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Abstract

Afropolitanism has emerged as a notable platform that aims at not just imagining an African futurity, but also one whose protagonists exude confidence in its future via the praxis of a movement. Afropolitans appear eager to create a new species of Africans that would embrace the rest of the world with or *without* an African identity. This posturing has led to sustained criticisms by scholars like Binyavanga Wainaina and Grace Musila who are unimpressed by what they see as a self-flagellating effort to *sell* a commodified, identityless and exotic Africa to the world. This article extends this kind of criticism explaining why Afropolitanism might be viewed as the very manifestation of an incautious, colonial mentality. More than this, it will show how Afropolitanism as a platform for imagining an African futurity seems ignorant of Africa's political history especially around the imagination of Africa-centred futures. In the end, it will prove that Afropolitans are trying to create an African futurity without Africans, based on an image of Africa acceptable to non-Africans.

Keywords: Africa, Afropolitanism, cosmopolitanism, identity, Pan-Africanism.

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Introduction

Arguments in favour of conceiving Africa-centred futures rest on the well-founded belief that despite the continent's enormous potentials, Africa has struggled to make an impact in the current global order. That is why it is thought, in some quarters, that an African futurity or an Africa-centred future ought to transcend existing ideologies and platforms like pan-Africanism and negritude. An African futurity is expected to occur in the areas of culture and identity; cultural production: morality, arts, and aesthetics; politics, governance, and place. Afropolitanism is one of such efforts at not just imagining an African futurity, but also an attempt to live in that future via the praxis of a (mainly) diasporic Movement. The problem, however, is twofold: (1) Afropolitans are attempting to tie African futurity to the contemporary notion of cosmopolitanism in the west, in what seems, in the last analysis, like a desperate attempt to create an African version of cosmopolitanism. (2) Consequently, Afropolitans appear eager to create a new species of Africans that would be acceptable to non-Africans

(Europeans and Americans in particular) and embrace the rest of the world *without* an African identity. Or more correctly, Afropolitans are trying to create an African futurity without Africans. The rest of this article explains the bases of these claims.

The Uneven Afropolitan Path

As recent debates on the future of Africa *in* the world catch the light, a movement and theoretical standpoint has now become prominent: Afropolitanism. Emerging from the crucible of wider attempts at theoretical and historiographical representations of the African experience in the new Millennium, Afropolitanism has risen to prominence as a platform for theorising Africa, for imagining African futures. As seen in the works of the Nigerian-Ghanaian writer, Taiye Tuakli-Wosornu (now Taiye Selasi), Finnish Nigerian journalist, Minna 'Ms Afropolitan' Salami, and the academic theorist, Achille Mbembe, the neologism Afropolitianism accommodates an expanded account of African citizenship and identity, taking multiracialism and the state of being an African diaspora into account. In the Afropolitan imagining of African present and future, there can be no need for a unique African Personality, no need to protect a cultural integrity, no centre for an African civilisation, only fluid networks and unbounded energy flows. This also means that Afropolitans valorise exposure and travel experience, especially if that mobility translates into a measure of success, while downplaying, and rejecting victimhood and abjection.[25]

On many accounts, 'Afropolitanism' is probably a term coined into theoretical lexicon by Taiye Selasi.[26] In a famous article in *The Lip Magazine* in 2005 entitled 'Bye Bye, Babar', Selasi deploys Afropolitanism to try and make sense of her own complex identity. She attempts to find commonalities of behaviour, dress styles, music and values that could help to make sense of and possibly create a new identity – no matter how fluid – for peoples of Africa's many diasporas, in the new generation. If her project is successful, and she believes it is self-evidently so, then, it would equally make sense to speak of this new generation of morphed Africans, which she identifies with, as a people who are 'not citizens, but Africans of the world', as 'Afropolitans'. Afropolitans, Selasi further tells us, are mainly 'the newest generation of African emigrants' with no enduring ties to any particular geographical location in Africa or in the world, but rather are 'cultural mutts' that exude an African ethos. Curiously though, Selasi adds:

> There is at least one place on The African Continent to which we [Afropolitans] tie our sense of self: be it a nation-state (Ethiopia), a city (Ibadan), or an auntie's kitchen. Then there's the G8 city or two (or three) that we know like the backs of our hands, and the various institutions that know us for our famed focus (Selasi 2005).

The foregoing immediately points us to a certain sense of identity crisis that pervades the Afropolitan agenda and the coming disavowals of the concept.

[25] I believe that these are mostly laudable objectives; but the uncomfortable question remains: why only Africans?
[26] This is true, despite her seeming self-effacing denials.

Selasis sets herself to the pragmatics of Afropolitanism, and tries to place her narrative in historical context, and in doing so, the unavoidable drawbacks of her project become increasingly apparent. She writes about the evolution of Afropolitans thus:

> Some three decades later this scattered tribe of pharmacists, physicists, physicians (and the odd polygamist) has set up camp around the globe. The caricatures are familiar. The Nigerian physics professor with faux-Coogi sweater; the Kenyan marathonist with long legs and rolled r's; the heavyset Gambian braiding hair in a house that smells of burnt Kanekalon. Even those unacquainted with synthetic extensions can conjure an image of the African immigrant with only the slightest of pop culture promptings: Eddie Murphy's 'Hello, Babar.' But somewhere between the 1988 release of Coming to America and the 2001 crowning of a Nigerian Miss World, *the general image of young Africans in the West transmorphed from goofy to gorgeous.* Leaving off the painful question of cultural condescenscion [sic] in that beloved film, one wonders what happened in the years between Prince Akeem and Queen Agbani? (Selasi 2005; emphasis added).

Selasi's depiction of 'Africans of the world' in the above passage is problematic in many ways. Not only is the African identity and place in the world completely dependent on the affirmations, institutions and categories of the cultural west, there is an almost unmistakable tincture of self-flagellation; some kind of apology for the 'un-Euro-Americanised' or the pristinely local, untraveled Africans without 'a famed focus', and who are, perhaps, yet to write themselves into existence. For how do we, for example, explain her celebration of Agbani Darego's triumph at the Miss World contest as the mark of Black Africans' ascendancy in the global order? It appears, only then did 'the general image of young Africans in the West [transmorph] from goofy to gorgeous'! The situation does not get much better even if it were implied that Darego's triumph happened *because* the African global image got better. It is hard to mask Selasi's elitism at this point.

Worryingly, this trend continues to bedevil the Afropolitan path. For example, in trying to place Africans and the African continent in a globalising world system, one staunch Afropolitan asserts that: 'Globalization has shrunk the world to the size of one's palms in the forms of cell phones or iPads. It is now possible to experience, in most African villages, lifestyles hitherto unknown to them thanks to these modern means of mass communication' (Eze 2014: 235). Comments like this reinscribe the elitism, if not Africa-demeaning posture already present in 'Bye Bye Barber' (note that this Afropolitan implies that Africa is made up of (uncivilised?) *villages* and curiously mentions *iPads* specifically, as one of the means of connecting the African rural life to the rest of the (iPad-linked) modern world!). Apart from talking down on Africans, one wonders why this Afropolitan failed to also mention the fact that the same technologies are also being utilised to bring African lifestyles to Europeans, Americans, and the rest of the world. At best, this could be read as a subtle denial of the existence of an African culture or more specifically, a denial of African contributions to global culture, an ironical endorsement of Eurocentrism by the Afropolitan. It appears *lifestyles* are things *African villages* must now experience via modern/western technology, and Africans are never in a position to export to others by any means. Or if ever Africa is conceived in the Afropolitan

imagination as able to give back to the west, it is only via the self-destructive path of opulent consumerism and the marketisation of African culture. From here, it is easy to follow Grace Musila to emphasize with Simon Gikandi that Afropolitanism is a concept which, '…is rich in conceptual and ideological promise, in countering certain forms of Afropessimism; but seems also to be a concept that was expected to run before it had been allowed to crawl and find its feet. This partly opened up the term to extensive appropriation, commoditization and association with conspicuous consumption, with an African flavour' (Musila 2016: p.110).

Returning to Selasi, her general sense of a positive-negative self-split along a glowing Euro-American upbringing/connection and a regrettable African descent soon returns: 'Few of us escaped those nasty 'booty-scratcher' epithets, and fewer still that sense of shame when visiting paternal villages. Whether we were ashamed of ourselves for not knowing more about our parents' culture, or ashamed of that culture for not being more 'advanced' can be unclear' (Selasi 2005). Again, Musila is right in deploring Selasi's passage of thought here:

> … Selasi seems to celebrate cultural integration and, in some ways, cultural passing. [But] … she underlines the difficulty of growing up while painfully aware of '"being from" a blighted place, of having surnames linked to countries which are linked to lack, corruption'; and all the while remaining haunted by a feeling of shame 'for not knowing more about our parents' culture and being ashamed of those cultures for not being more "advanced"'…. These anxieties about Africa mark Afropolitanism as another mode of integration into a mainstream that appears to remain uneasy with cultural difference, hence the need to tone it down, or what Rob Nixon, in a different context, terms 'botox out'… its wrinkles, and only leave enough of this difference for strategic exoticism, and marketability (Musila 2016: p.111).

Furthermore, this split between a (more) advanced, and a less advanced culture is disturbing for many reasons, and I hesitate to draw out the full implications for Selasi and the Afropolitans, for I doubt that she was thinking deeply about this. In all events, Selasi could not help but celebrate the fact that the Afropolitan self is, to use her exact wording, blissfully 'lost in transnation'.

Conversely, Selasi's attention to the ways in which the new generation of African emigrants have expanded their interests beyond traditional disciplines and professions like Medicine and Law to diverse global humanities' disciplines reads like the beginnings of something good. But as I show in the next section, that does very little in placing Afripolitanism in the hallowed chambers of Black African liberatory movements. Afropolitanism very likely proceeds from a colonial mentality, an unhelpful approach to conceiving an African futurity. The rest of this analysis helps to illustrate why we should already be looking beyond Afropolitanism in our quest for a path to an Africa-centred futurity.

Debating Afropolitanism

Based on the foregoing critical exposition, there may be a few things to celebrate about Afropolitanism, but there is clearly plenty to be concerned about, even as its traction as concept and movement continues to ebb and flow. While delivering a plenary address during the African Studies Association UK 2012 conference at Leeds, on the title, 'I am a Pan-Africanist, not an Afropolitan', the Kenyan writer, Binyavanga Wainaina expressed strong reservations about the Afropolitan agenda, stating that Afropolitanism has become the latest contrivance in the hands of the neoliberal capitalist West to not just commodify African arts, culture, and identity, but also to transmogrify African ethics and values to the advantage of the West and to the detriment of Africans. Wainaina could see that Afropolitanism purports to overcome Afropessimism precisely by shading and blunting the historical and continuing work of Afro-centrists, pan-Africanists and negritudists aimed at holding high an African identity and standing up against an unjust global order. Two years later, he found he was no longer as upset as he was at ASAUK 2012, but he continues to query the relevance of Afropolitanism as a platform for imagining and advancing the African self. For he argues that *cosmopolitanism* is not new to the average African who lives in an urban city in Africa and has long ago become comfortable with the multiplicity of languages, the diversity of cultures and the reality of peoples of contrasting identities always coexisting in a common home (Soles interview with Wainaina 2014). Here, Wainaina implies a distinction between the new sense of cosmopolitanism to which Afropolitanism hankers, with an older sense of cosmopolitanism – by which I think he meant, a pre-Enlightenment sense of cosmopolitanism – that existed in Africa, untheorised, and was only later put in words by anti-colonial intellectuals like Kwame Nkrumah (see Uimonen 2019).[27]

What is even more interesting about this, in Wainaina's words, 'very very old and very enduring' African cosmopolitanism is that it is in tandem with pan-Africanism, because the old African cosmopolitanism encourages open borders, intra-African trade and mobility – values that represent Agenda 2063. The new and wrong kind of cosmopolitanism (that Afropolitanism is linked to), Wainaina points out, gives you immunity to Africa, shields you from responsibility and the reality on the continent while you have access to the major cities in Europe and North America. To my mind, this new African cosmopolitanism seems keen on removing Africa from the map, so that Africans can truly become global citizens. As the Liberian academic and activist, Robtel Pailey points out in a different context, the Africanist's contribution should not stop at publishing in top journals in Europe and North America, rather the emancipatory project for the Africanist should be to follow the footsteps of scholars like Walter Rodney and Samir Amin, to be engaged with the political struggles on the continent, engaging with the people in the street and when necessary, even the politicians. For one cannot distance one's self from the people one claims to be helping to liberate (Pailey 2019).

Gladys Akom Ankobrey (2019) defends Selasi and other Afropolitans against charges like those in the preceding paragraph by insisting that Afropolitanism gives African agency a shot

[27] Note that this older sense of cosmopolitanism is not the same, in fact, it is opposed to the sense meant by the likes of Susanne Gehrmann in 2016, Cosmopolitanism with African roots. Afropolitanism's ambivalent mobilities.

in the arm, alongside other diasporic benefits. Paraphrasing Simon Gikandi, and others, Ankobrey writes

> Taiye Selasi's Afropolitanism offers a refreshing counter-narrative against the overexposure of stereotypical images of Africa that prevail in the Western public discourse…. Contrary to the "single story" … of Africa as a poverty-stricken country, Afropolitanism seems to provide visual evidence of the "Africa Rising" narrative. This Afro- optimistic perspective mostly focuses on booming economies and growing middle classes in Sub-Saharan Africa…. It challenges the view of an isolated and marginal Africa by showing its involvement in global processes that shape our everyday reality…. Moreover, while Africa has a passive role in Gilroy's Black Atlantic, Africa appears to reconfigure diasporic connections in Selasi's framework actively (Ankobrey 2019).

I agree that in Afropolitanism, Africa comes alive in dialogic ways unbeknown to the African diaspora discourses. But Emma Dabiri is right when she argues that Afropolitanism, in so doing, silences the voices of many Africans. For example, what is the meaning of Afropolitanism to Africans who live and struggle with xenophobia, racism, and ethnicity in countries on the continent and in many cases even within their countries of origin? Pan-Africanism does a better job of uniting and accounting for the experiences of all Africans both at home and in diasporas. While Afropolitanism seeks to discover how Africa would look good to the rest of the world, Pan-Africanism, on the other hand, asks: how will Africa look good for Africans within the continent and Africans in diasporas? For if Africa and Africans look good to fellow Africans, before too long, the rest of the world would begin to find Africa attractive in a consistent, mutually beneficial manner. Part of the Afropolitan agenda is to *sell* Africa/Africans to the world, where Pan-Africanism seeks to unite African peoples on the continent and in the Diaspora for the purpose of, at first, *selling Africa* to Africans. Also, it is ironical that Chielozona Eze concedes that 'the idea of mobility and the "subtle tensions in between" national, racial and cultural belongings, … [do] not have to be exclusively between Africa and the West. It can be between one African city and another, or even within an African city' (2016: p.115). Yes. But going by the arguments of his earlier essay in 2014, that would hardly be Afropolitan, it would be pan-African.

Furthermore, Wainaina's criticisms imply that the new African cosmopolitanism or Afropolitanism carries with it a baggage of irresponsible, colonial mentality, after all. For a colonial mentality is an internalised attitude orchestrated by colonisation about wishing you were like someone else or something else because you feel inferior and unsatisfied about who you are or who you have become. This is even more true when that desire to resemble or imitate is towards the coloniser or what is purportedly *their* culture.[28] The mistake of the Afropolitans is to move from the fact of their connection to geographical locations in G8 countries to assume that they have been accepted in those spaces as bona fides, as co-equals. Conceivably, this might happen in some distant utopian future, but there is currently very little indication to suggest that the global order is moving in the direction of unmitigated social equality for all.

[28] See Mba 2018 for further clarification of the sense in which culture is used here.

Beyond Wainaina's criticisms and several others like his, Afropolitanism has continued to gain some currency among African scholars in the last decade, especially among those in the diaspora in Europe and North America.[29] One scholar has gone so far as to argue that Afropolitanism marked 'a radical shift in the history of African emancipatory politics', though, as she admits, 'not without certain dangers', since there are risks of the Afropolitan idea 'creating a redemptive narrative for the societies guiltiest of historical violence' (Balakrishnan 2018: 575). Where writers like Balakrishnan show some restraint, others, like the self-styled postmodern-Afropolitans have had fewer worries. Postmodern-Afropolitans like Chielozona Eze argue that the emancipatory politics of Afropolitanism is 'the negation' of 'the oppositional, rigid identity construction in Africa' (Eze 2014: 235). For this reason, Eze celebrates Selasi for distancing herself and Afropolitans from 'African' as a tag of identity. He relishes Afropolitanism or the need to be more nuanced about our definition of African identity as 'a welcome development that more Africans are acknowledging' (Eze 2014: 235).

I think that the alternative to the oppositional shaping of identity exclusively by geography or blood, or culture (anywhere in the world), as Eze argues, is definitely relationality, but not necessarily Afropolitanism. The fact that we have strangers or immigrants among us, or that we travel to different geographical locations outside our place of origin does not necessarily translate into the absence of an identity; migration and intermingling simply enrich that identity. A people's identity does not necessarily disappear because of migration and intermingling, or an expanded experience of the world. People may have a right to choose how to be identified at different points in time, but mutations in identity do not legislate a people's identity out of existence by a fiat. Africans are yet to make that choice because it is unnecessary to do so. Africans have always been comfortable with diversity, relationality, and cosmopolitanism in its older sense as the basis of our identity. So, to suggest that because we now live among Asians and Europeans, even as some of them now identify as Africans (as they do have a right to), that we should now become non-Africans or rootless cosmopolitans, as post-modern Afropolitans suggest, is to say the least, naïve. Other people can justifiably – via relationality or contact – become a part of us and identify as Africans, but Africans cannot cease to exist or become Africanless cosmopolitans or Selasi's Afropolitans. For it is absurd to argue that to have multiple identifiers translates to having no identity. Just because there have been migrations, intermingling and diversity (which is a good thing) does not commit us to a political correctness of historical oblivion. These mutations do not eliminate or transmogrify 'African' as an identity mode, they just enrich and expand its routes of expression.

We can follow Eze, for the sake of argument, to assert that we should aim to be a part of the multiracial, globalised world. But to think in this way is to exude ignorance of the consequences of such held beliefs in the political history of the continent. Bantu Steve Biko in the early days of his political career bought into an ideology similar to Eze's Afropolitan desiderata. He thought he could hang the future of Black (South) Africans on "non-racialism" and the idea of a common society or what Desmond Tutu was to christen the "Rainbow Nation". But as events soon revealed, he and his comrades could not have been more mistaken,as white South African

[29] This could be put down to Achille Mbembe's influence (for even Wainaina admits that Mbembe's version of Afropolitanism is not quite the same as the version that was first popularised – that he had criticised at ASAUK 2012 – the consumerist, irresponsible version).

only mouthed non-racialism in order to invisibilise white privileges and power. To correct that mistake and create a different path for (South) Africa, Biko had to follow the convictions of Black Consciousness, Black Power and Negritude. Soon enough, he and many of his comrades found out, in the most brutal manner, that it was too much for the Apartheid regime to countenance Black people's imagining of an African existence based even on the simple principle of humanity, or the powerful argument that Black people should be seen and treated as human beings just like their white compatriots. Biko and his comrades then "set out on a quest for true humanity…" to ensure that every single African who has lost their personality recovered it, "to make the black man come to himself; to pump back life into his empty shell; to infuse him with pride and dignity" (Savage 2018). He held that this was the only route to Black African emancipation that would secure the future of Africans, when they all come to realise the truth in the slogan he had coined for the South African Student's Organisation, SASO: "Black man, you are on your own". Biko was brutally murdered by the Apartheid regime that felt affronted by his determined effort to create an Africa-centred futurity, long before he could bring his vision for (South) Africa into fruition.

Earlier in his political development, Patrice Lumumba like early-Biko, imagined the possibility of a post-racial world, hoping that Africans would henceforth be treated equally as their European counterparts. When he awoke to the rude shock of his mistake, he was brutally murdered by the same people he thought Africans could emulate, even as second-class citizens, or as lower-class European cultural humans: as *évolués*. To be sure, Lumumba was at first convinced of the civilising mission of colonialism, and thus imagined that the future of Africa lay in that moment when colonialism would have completed its task, and every African becomes a cultural European, anticipating Selasi's cultural mutt. However, he soon fell out with the west when he began to author and make speeches "…critical of the colonial system and its exploitative, repressive, and oppressive characteristics…" and to imagine a confident Congolese personality (Nzongola-Ntalaja 2015:23). We know how the rest ended: as soon Lumumba began to imagine an Africa-centred future, it proved impossible for western powers to allow him to live.

Frantz Fanon longed for and fought for human dignity and freedom. His burning desire was to bring about a world populated by a new species of humanity, where, he thought, toward the end of *Black Skin, White Masks*, that people, especially people of colour, could love and cherish other human beings regardless of the perceived and actual fundamentals of racism and historical wrongs against Black people. As this desire reached its peak, Fanon elected to fight on the side of the Free French Forces in order, as he claimed, to 'fight for human dignity'. Thereafter, despite being mistreated alongside other soldiers of colour along racial lines by the very people he fought to liberate, *he thought that Africans could look beyond Negritude, nativism, and a unique African Personality to become, in future, a part of universal humanity*. But as Fanon fought to grind out even the right to stay alive for himself and his comrades, and the rest of the African continent caught on the wrong side of the violent, binary opposition of the colonial situation, he realised, in the end, like Biko would find out after him, that indeed, the Black person was on her own. He concluded that a radical upheaval had to occur if humanity were to overcome the binaries and Manicheism that racism and colonialism have introduced in humanity. Fanon realised with much disappointment, that he and other Africans needed to

make superhuman sacrifices to stand any chance of being a part of his own imagining of a futurity. He found that the only route left for him to imagine a future humanity where Black Africans' existence could be accorded equal gravitas is that of radical mutations of *all* of humanity that would quite literally, lead to a new species of human beings that have finally weaned out old prejudices. These old prejudices include the usual suspects: racism, tribalism, and ultra-nationalism, as well as other forms of alienating ontological binaries ('Good-Evil, Beauty-Ugliness, White-Black' and so on) and scapegoathing arising from a certain kind of colonially induced psychopathology which Fanon called *Manichean delirium* (Fanon 2008, p.141; Pithouse 2017). Thus, Fanon prefigured the outcomes of Lumumba's and Biko's quest for an equal humanity for Black Africans and concluded that those wishes were only possible in a hard fought *compossible* world. A realization that eventually came to the trio as they pushed to the limits, the praxis of conceiving an Africa-centred future.

What the foregoing suggests is that an African future or a conception of it, must transcend the received wisdom of the time. An African future imagining cannot coincide with a purportedly global – read Euro-American framework that would benefit mostly those who stand to gain from African naivety. Put simply, Afropolitans seem to be repeating mistakes that have been transcended in the African struggles for liberation and ought to be in the past. In addition, the globalised world Eze speaks of sounds too much like a neoliberal world where what matters the most is the market and marketability. My wider contention is that we need not strive to be a part of the commodified world as mannequins in the hands of a dummy artist. We do not have to be compelled to change our real names for example (as African writers like Teju Cole found out), in order that our cultural production and contributions to human existence be allowed into the purported new cosmopolitan world order that Afropolitans seem to valorize. We should be able to enter the world and be allowed to exist with 'African' as an inalienable tag of identity, and capable of expressing our mode of being in multiple ways, rather than as self-loathing Europhiles that have finally washed away our Africanity, and so become Afropolitans. For doing the latter would amount to a colonial mentality that Biko, Lumumba, Fanon and other icons of Black African liberation have overcome. The real issue is that Europeans and North Americans are the ones who need to embrace a truly multiracial, multicultural, and global world in which Africans, as Wainaina points out, already lived, live in and have long been accepted almost by default (Cf. Mbembe 2007, 26 – 27). Most Euro-American governments and people as Biko, Lumumba and Fanon found out, are opposed to various degrees, to a multiracial world where people of colour, Africans especially, might become equal claimants to a universal human family.

Again, criticisms against the need to introduce yet another term to describe Africa and the African reality have continued to mount, even as the likes of Eze have been forced to admit that

> The term Afropolitanism is troubling. It is difficult to think of it without thinking of some people of African descent who seem to evade the responsibility that comes with being African today. Are Afropolitans the African versions of western trust fund kids? Are they privileged snobs who carry one or more international passports and jet from one global city (in Africa) to another (in the West)? (Eze 2016: p.114).

Nonetheless, the above realisation does not hinder Eze from defending Afropolitanism both as a concept and neologism whose right to continued usage ought to be guaranteed. According to him,

> We need new names not because we are new – we are not; rather, we need new names because we have new stories to tell about our world. These stories acknowledge those of our ancestors, but seek to expand them in order to contain our extended arc of existence. Unlike most of our ancestors, we have white husbands/wives, Asian brothers/sisters – and all of this takes place on the African continent (2016: p.116).

But this is all very strange. So we need new names because we have new stories to tell about our world? It is difficult to unpack this without arriving at absurd conclusions. If Africans need new names because we now have multiracial families and the like, it must then follow that every human group once they encounter new experiences like intermarriages, must surrender their names and abjure their identity and history for that reason. Be aware that when Eze requires Africans to come up with new names, he is not speaking about individual names for our multiracial, interreligious children, for example, he means that Africa as a whole needs new names to describe ourselves as a collective, new names such as Afropolitans or Afroglobalists and the like. Again, be aware that these neologisms or coming neologisms do not seek to describe a segment of African populations occupying a particular geographical location, in the same way one can speak of Eastern European Turkey or European Jews. These new names are meant to help distinguish all Africans and simultaneously make them acceptable to other people especially in urban cities, in G8 cities

Due to some irritation, Marta Tveit had wondered: 'I don't understand why a person with African roots in an urban environment needs a term to set her apart from the rest of the young people in an urban environment. Why separate African urbanites from the rest of the urbanites? How can that be constructive?' (Tveit 2013).

If the Afropolitans are right, then, mobility permitting, in some near future, Africa and Africans would disappear and be replaced by Afropolites/Afropolitans, Afroglobalites or Afropeans, or whatever new term the new generation might deem sexy enough and acceptable to the rest of the world. The question is why is Africa always required to make these kinds of sacrifices? Why not Europeans, Americans, or Indians? Why always Africa and Africans? And when Eze says 'our world', whose world exactly? The current world order created in the image and interest of the cultural west, or the African world which has been struggling in the shadow of an insatiably exploitative west since colonial occupation? Or a future world where African identity and interest will finally begin to matter and matter equally? A new world where Africans are finally able to tell their own stories, as *Africans*? I suspect Eze had the last possibility in mind, and if so his endorsement of Afropolitanism to make sense of that new world becomes even more absurd. Were he to have any of the preceding two options in mind, then, Afropolitanism becomes a self-flagellating joke. In reality, only a conquered people are usually required to change their names and relinquish their identity, names and contributions, so that there is never a chance of nostalgic rebellion by a new generation of the conquered. In the light of the foregoing, it is hard to show that Eze and the Afropolitans are on the positive

side of the iconic Fanon's quote that he (Eze) invokes here: 'each generation must, out of relative obscurity, discover its mission, fulfill it, or betray it'. Afropolitanism is almost certainly a clear example of mental capture, a colonial mentality, rather than a discovery of this generation's mission, to say nothing of fulfilling it.

Towards the end of Eze's 2016 article, in a bid to justify the disappearance of an African identity he writes: 'For those of us who survived colonization, apartheid, racism, wars or military dictatorships there is every reason to love the world: nothing worse can ever happen to us' (2016: p. 117). The false assumption here is that these factors are now in the past, which is even more absurd for an African living in Trump's America in the era of Black Lives Matter! For many Africans, neocolonisation, racism and military dictatorships (often backed by the west) in different guises constitute the bases of daily struggles. We may have no reason for bitterness and hate, but we definitely have every reason to know who we are, to demand for better in our world.

Another key setback for Eze and other Afropolitans (which I have been implying) is that they treat cosmopolitanism as unproblematic. But the truth is that cosmopolitanism has deep roots in Western thought, with many complicated meanings as well as both positive and negative connotations. When the Cynic, Diogenes of Sinope answers upon being queried about where he comes from 'I am a cosmopolitan', meaning that he feels at home everywhere; surely his retort can be understood positively or negatively. For if you are able to live among various kinds of people or accommodate various kinds of people, that would be a good thing. But being able to live anywhere might not always be a good thing, surely? For if you feel comfortable in a community of rapists and lynchers, because, err, you are a cosmopolitan, that cannot be a good thing, especially if your continued acceptance in their fold depends on you condoning their terrible conduct, turning a blind eye to, or even aiding and abetting acts that amount to very serious violation of truly universal human rights. So cosmopolitanism is not always a good thing after all. In the very least, cosmopolitans, or the new African cosmopolitans have to raise voices of condemnation against societies that frequently attack, oppress and kill people of colour. Afropolitanism insofar as it ties its roots to European cosmopolitanism is simply another theory by (non-) Africans about Africa and Africans for non-Africans. Or to borrow Molefi Kete Asante's wording, Afropolitanism becomes '…just another assertion of Eurocentric ideas as universal when in fact they arise from a specific history and culture' (Asante 2020: 203).

Conclusion: African Futures Beyond Afropolitanism

In the end, it would seem that Afropolitanism is meant to be in the interest of an aspiring middle class, wishing to take the master's place in Fanon's post-independence prefiguration. Afropolitans want to resemble 'the master' at all costs and want to be loved by the master. The Afropolitan is like the immatriculation evolue that Lumumba found, was inadequate for securing full middle-class privileges for the Congolese, to say nothing of the very survival of the average person in the street. For the evolue is never a historical and inalienable part of the society or a particular iteration of global culture that s/he seeks to be a part of, the

evolue/Afropolitan perceives that she is only being done a favour as she strives to be 'really really good' as one such Afropolitan put it in a private conversation, in order to be accepted even in their own profession in a whitely world. Do not forget that the Afropolitan feels a sense of belonging in the metropolitan society only in being seen, in an artistic sense, as 'cultured' and if they could make themselves to be seen as ideal citizens. This is why it is mostly cultural-brokers — writers, visual artists, musicians, dancers, and so on, one might say cultured people who occupy a venerated social stage because of their valued and acquired symbolic capital— who identify as Afropolitan (Eaton 2019: p.8). The key test of your acceptability in any society lies not in how you are received when you are thought to have done something praiseworthy or thought to possess a (neoliberal) creative capital; but the acid test for your position or belongingness in a society lies precisely in how you are treated when you are thought to have done something blameworthy or accused of a serious crime, when your immediate or long-term potential contribution is in doubt. Are you treated, in such a scenario according to the laws of the land in which your livelihood has been bound all along? Or are you immediately pounced on and thrown under the bus because of your now accented difference?

One of the most worrying things about Afropolitanism as a means of conceiving African futurity is that it is hard to show that Africans in Africa can ever become Afropolitans, no matter how cosmopolitan they have become in outlook, travel, and willingness to live with others unlike them, in that much older sense of cosmopolitanism that Wainaina explains. Grace Musila muses with a well-placed concern: 'Ironically, despite its celebration of broadmindedness, thanks to its embeddedness in Euro-American affluence and cultural normativity, Afropolitanism, hardly embraces similar forms of mobility and cultural eloquence when these Africans are in, China or Saudi Arabia, or indeed, within Africa' (Musila 2016: p112). Finally, 'Why the need to qualify one's cosmopolitanism? The very necessity of qualifying Africans' being in the world only makes sense when we assume that, ordinarily, Africans are *not* of the world' (Musila 2016: p.112). This article has tried to question why an African futurity should be hung on a high-sounding rhetoric that again has its origins in western reality?

Now, if Afropolitanism as the contemporary dominant approach to conceiving an African future is fraught, how really should we conceive African futures? If we agree that globalisation has become a key issue in thinking of Africa's place in the world today, does conceiving African future primarily entail making the African continent a better place or making the world a better place for Africans? Does an African future lie in an Africa-centred global order or should Africans rather hope for a better world where African interests are better protected, regardless of Africa's positionality in terms of history, values, identity, ideological reference and perhaps even geopolitical relevance? How really, can Africans hope to create a present that would usher in a much more satisfactory future? These are questions worth exploring, but well beyond the scope of this piece.

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