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Afropolitanism and the end of Black nationalism

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Since the 17th century, a central question of Black emancipatory thought has concerned the connection of Blackness to Africa and the fate of this historical tie. Until recently, Afro-liberation campaigns had upheld a *politics of reclamation* that viewed re-embracing Africa to be foundational to Black resistance. (Edwards 2001; Moses 1998; Kelley 2002).[2] These struggles took many forms in the 20th century: among them Garveyism, *Négritude*, Pan-Africanism, and Afrocentrism. And whereas each found sustenance in racial solidarity, sedimented by the restitution of a distinct African epistemology or "African personality," several critiques have recently emerged that advocate abandoning this legacy known as the Black nationalist tradition (Appiah 1992; Gilroy 2000; Mbembe 2002).

At the forefront of these movements is a concept called *Afropolitanism*. Coined by Taiye Selasi (2005) and Achille Mbembe (2007), the term refers to an Afro-cosmopolitan ethos of transcending national differences to forge multiracial communities. Fostered by recent histories of migration and globalization as well as by enduring colonial and imperial architectures, a cosmopolitan and "planetary" Africa is said to be coming into being (Mbembe and Nuttall 2004). Afropolitanism corresponds to both a description of Africa's worldly entanglements as well as an ethic against preserving parochial "native" identities over diversity. Implied, too, is an African modernity defined by its willingness and openness toward the global: a state of becoming.

Afropolitanism, then, is not a nationalist struggle. It is not Pan-Africanism or *Négritude*. Rather, it marks an attempt to reconceive of African identity – and ergo, of Africa – outside of racial terms. This effort dovetails with a broader reimagining of a world without nations, or what has been called *post*-cultural pluralism (Salmon and Charbonnier 2014: 572). The belief (e.g. per Mamdani 1996) that collective identities arise from political fictions, not biology, has reframed recent ethnic conflicts, migration crises, and xenophobic policies around the intrinsic violence of nationalist agendas (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2009). Undeniable too is the persistence of anti-Black prejudice which, despite Africa's independence, has not abated. The combination of these three perspectives – the fiction of nation; its inherent intolerance; and the global endurance of racism – has led to fundamental shifts in African liberation philosophies. Freedom, it seems, can no longer be expressed simply in terms of the desire for *self*-sovereignty. Instead, it must be an ethic in reference to, and in relationship with, those who are *different*.

Yet whereas many African artists, activists and academics have embraced Afropolitanism as an African philosophy of difference *par excellence*, the nature of its radical break from Black nationalism has not been fully underscored. For example, some scholars have proposed, paradoxically, that Afropolitanism might constitute a Pan-Africanism for the 21st century, uniting Africans and diaspora around their intrinsic diversity, not racial unanimism (Awondo 2014). Others have suggested the concept's metamorphosis from the "African personality" framework of Edward Wilmot Blyden, now suited to contemporary conditions of globalization and transnationalism (Sterling 2015). These descriptions have failed to reckon with the transformative challenge that Afropolitanism poses to ideas of racial unity and African identity (Eze 2014; Afolayan 2017). Whereas the Black nationalist tradition had rested on the twin pillars of racial solidarity and African nationalism, Afropolitanism instead seeks to reimagine an Africa apart from Blackness. This begs the question: if racial autochthony no longer defines Africa – the land of the Black – then what becomes of the relationship of Blackness to Africa? Who constitutes the African, or the diaspora? What is the future of racial struggle?

The basic purpose of this essay is to demonstrate Afropolitanism's departure from a long genealogy of Afro-emancipatory thought. It argues that, contrary to the fundamental unity proposed by Pan-Africanism, Afropolitanism reopens the question of who constitutes the African, especially regarding the ancestors of those dispersed from the continent by slavery. In disentangling Blackness from Africa, Afropolitanism disavows longstanding racial solidarities that have cohered diaspora for the sake of liberation. The motive behind this turn has largely laid with the need to formulate an ethos for the multiracial postcolony and the 21st-century migrant. However, this essay concludes by arguing that Afropolitanism can never account for an ethic of migration until it deals first with the inverse problem – that is, the *question of diaspora*.

The Afropolitan idea

It is typically said that the concept of Afropolitanism originated with Ghanaian novelist Taiye Selasi's essay "Bye-Bye, Babar" (2005), and was subsequently developed by scholars like Achille Mbembe and Simon Gikandi. However, this belief is incorrect. In fact, Afropolitanism represents a synthesis of two separate sets of ideas, stemming from two different genealogical origins in the mid-2000s (Balakrishnan 2017). The first, based in South Africa, concerned multiracialism as both a social reality and as an ethical practice: an African cosmopolitanism (Gevisser and Nuttall 2004; Mbembe 2007). The second, outlined by Selasi (2005), referred to a diaspora experience defined by transnational self-styling and cultural liminality. Thus, both contexts outlined a certain African worldliness, or global entanglement. Both, too, attributed a modernity to this polyvalent and multiracial African image.

Consequently, Afropolitanism has come to refer to a set of ideas related to the production of African modernity in the world. Yet whereas many scholars have therefore seen Afropolitanism as a *positionality* – the experience of being African in the world (Gikandi 2011) – few have considered the concept in relation to the racial discourses that had been the explicit concern of Afropolitanism's early theorists (e.g. Mbembe 2002).

For example, Selasi (2005) described a generation of postcolonial diaspora whom, having been raised across cultural hemispheres and diverse nations, considered Africa only as much of a home as France, Canada, or the United Kingdom. The Afropolitans were not "all African," nor indeed all Black. Whereas the implication of Paul Gilroy's (1993) diaspora formulation was that, given the existence of diaspora, Africa itself need no longer be the epicentre of African activity, Selasi's configuration suggested that Black identity, too, was no longer a prerequisite for being African.

In her words, the Afropolitans "see . . . race . . . as a question of politics, rather than pigment; not all of us claim to be black" (2005). What defined the Afropolitans was their willingness to break from received racial molds: a dispensation grounded in the emphasis of individual self-fashioning over collective solidarity.

Given that Achille Mbembe's "Afropolitanism" (2007) broadly echoed Selasi's call to open the racial boundaries of African identity, scholars have suggested that the concept has always had an internal coherence. However, South African circles had seen Afropolitanism emerge earlier, in a context substantially removed from Selasi. Mbembe's Afropolitanism embodied a set of concerns both particular to, and generalizable from, South Africa: namely, the idea of nativism as related to xenophobia, and the future of race after apartheid. The xenophobic attacks that had imperilled South Africa's rainbow nation in 2008 had occurred concomitantly with the flourishing of Cape Town and Johannesburg as new frontiers of global migration (Nuttall and Mbembe 2008). From within South Africa's own fraught history of multiracialism, Mbembe's essay posed a response to the manifold crisis of South African pluralism.

Like Selasi, Mbembe emphasized the need to reconfigure African identity outside of Blackness – a concept that he tied to political nativism. In Mbembe's words, Afropolitanism differed from Pan-Africanism and *Négritude* in that both of these were racialist philosophies that made the dissolution of race impossible (Mbembe and Balakrishnan 2016). If the problem of xenophobia not only concerned the existence of social difference but also its implication in territorial birthright (*autochthony*), then Afropolitanism marked an attempt to rethink African history outside of indigenous terms. As Mbembe writes: "As soon as contemporary Africa awakens to the form of multiplicity (including racial multiplicity) which are constituents of its identity, Negro solidarity alone becomes untenable" (2007: 29). By placing diversity at the centre of the question of African belonging, Afropolitanism marked a way of reimagining African identity that left its constitutive elements open-ended.

Afropolitanism has since come to have implications for Africa's own political self-image. For example, Gauteng, South Africa, has recently declared itself to be an Afropolitan province, as has the University of Cape Town an Afropolitan University (Price 2008). These claims have elided more broadly with a concept of Afropolitanism as a multiracial modernity, connected to various ideas about urbanism, migration, and the development of a common humanity.

In the realm of the social, Afropolitanism is said to describe the transnational transformations occurring to the "ethnoscapes" (Appadurai 1996) of African states and cities, as well as to individual experiences, especially of recent diaspora (Simbao 2008; Gehrmann 2016). Since the fall of the Berlin Wall and the progressive cessation of Africa's revolving doors of dictatorships, new waves of commerce, capital, and culture have increasingly traversed the borders of the continent. Afropolitanism corresponds to this "worlding" of African identity, also associated with new methods of African self-making (Ede 2016).

Second is a positive relationship presumed between cultural pluralism and cosmopolitan universalism (e.g. Hall 2006). Insofar as human empathy is believed to develop from the close elision of diverse cultures, the increasing pluralism of African nations has been interpreted, almost *prima facie*, as evidence of political cosmopolitanism. This emphasis on the revolutionary power of demography is also tied to a politics of intimacy, which presumes the capacity of social contact to upheave prejudices scaffolding the interrelationships of groups for decades, some for centuries (Hoad 2007; Nuttall 2004).

Third, in respect to space, these processes are tied to what has been called a *cosmopolitanism from below* (Appadurai 2014). Contrary to the presumption that cosmopolitanism always constitutes an elitist vantage (Bosch Santana 2016), for many of Africa's poor, both movement and mobility have become ordinary facts of life. The influx of people across borders into city centres occur

largely without state sanction, but are the foundations for Afropolitanism. In many circumstances, survivalist pressures to cooperate cause new breaches of social difference (Landau and Freemantle 2010; Sichone 2008), whereas *en masse*, the cosmopolitan poor exercise increasing influence over the spatial development (and, therefore, the political life) of cities (De Boeck and Simone 2010; Chatterjee 2004). This *subaltern cosmopolitanism* is associated with both a spatial decentring of power, and the primacy of dispersed agency.

Finally, the modernity of Afropolitanism coheres in the openness and indeterminacy suggested by multiracial circumstances. Cultural pluralism's capacity to provoke alternative political imaginations or creative self-styling defines Afropolitanism's emancipatory vision around a provocative unknown. Its refusal of colonial parameters for belonging (e.g. the state, the tribe) coincides with its divestment also from the perverse "anti-racist racism" (Sartre 1948) of anticolonial Pan-Africanism. And thus, in the end, it may be said that Afropolitanism's symbolic potency – of these disparate elements – reduces to one: its abdication of nationalism as a political project.

Genealogies of the Afropolitan state

The identitarian *imaginaire* that justifies statehood on the basis of popular self-expression and popular sovereignty has become increasingly imperilled by contemporary migrations and globalization. However, repudiations of African nationalism had begun even earlier than this. Two canonical junctions, in particular, marked the development of African anti-nationalisms, which today reach their apogee in the Afropolitan tradition. The first arose in the disappointment of Africa's early independence era: a period marked variously by dictatorships, *coup d'états*, civil wars, mass expulsions, economic collapse, and a pervasive departure of diaspora. The second concerned an internal revolt against a particular textual corpus that claimed to speak to what was African and to what was not.

In the first circumstance, opposition occurred against state nationalisms that had precipitated in political independence, ossifying postcolonies around central "chronotopes" (Bakhtin 1981), sometimes characterized by Marxist struggle, other times by the heroism of the Big Man (Piot 2010). Whereas in the 1960s, Western political scientists had lamented the "tribalism" supposedly riddling African nations (Mafeje 1971), the 1970s unveiled a state nationalism increasingly indistinguishable from tribalism. One difference concerned the capacity of the state to exercise power widely in the form of genocide, xenophobia, war, or a *tyranny of the social*, such as in passing laws (Bayart, Ellis, and Hibou 1999). Another difference was the recession of this nationalism from a recognisably "nationalist" character and instead into a dispersed system of symbols and signs, which Achille Mbembe has referred to as the "banality of power in the postcolony" (1992). This dispersal not only elided the separation of natural and positive law, which distinguished means from ends (Mbembe 2001: 24–65). It implied that dissent occurred not against laws, but against the telos of freedom that had brought the state into being. In this way, dissent was always unpatriotic. The African state, with its disaggregated baggage of political emblems and revolutionary verve, nevertheless revealed itself as fundamentally resistant to change.

Afro-pessimist indictments of this era included, amongst other factors, the revolutionary nationalism that had calcified into patronage politics and rendered a public body incapable of unity, revolt, or critique. This latter claim coincided with a self-reflexive movement amongst scholars of the continent between the 1970s and 1990s regarding that cultural current now called *ethnophilosophy*. The term "ethnophilosophy" (Houtondji 1976; Towa 1971) described a set of traditions pertaining to indigenous African worldviews which, during decolonization, had become a fundamental grammar of resistance (Masolo 1994). The existence of a proper African

philosophy, first, contributed to the claim that Africans were equally human, being the possessors of high culture. Second, several of these currents, foremost *Négritude*, perceived itself at the fulcrum of world revolution, as the dialectical opposite to Eurocentrism, and ergo, its self-shattering mirror (Sartre 1948; Fanon 1963; Diawara 2009; Wilder 2014).

Yet the role of ethnophilosophy in revolutionary genealogy did not endure long after independence. One set of objections concerned ethnophilosophy's detraction from the diverse views that had always characterized Africa in favour of a false depiction of racial unanimism. Second, in being, as its political critics accused, little more than a set of mantras parsing the indigenous from non-indigenous, this "philosophy" was also intractably historicist (Appiah 1992). It could not be used as a framework for solving contemporary problems (Wiredu 1996), being complicit in the fetid nationalism of the postcolony (Houtondji 1976).

That these two currents had collectively disavowed parochial paradigms of the "archaic tribe," the "modern nation," and a trans-history of ethnophilosophy led to the inverse call to reconsider Africa's past within a broader philosophy of time (Mbembe 2001, 2002). A new understanding of Africa was needed, capable of navigating the present with respect to its past. This philosophy would have to account for the origin of Africa within imperial dialogues, while acknowledging the pre-existence and persistence of African political cultures without still subsuming them under the overwrought banner of "indigeneity." Africanity, in this view, would instead constitute a diverse set of ideas and practices, unified only by the frictions of encounter that had historically consolidated Africa as a symbolic repertoire, no different from Europe, Asia, America, and the like.

Among varying possibilities for such a framework, cosmopolitanism was favoured by Ghanaian philosopher, K.A. Appiah (1997), and later by Achille Mbembe (2002) and Paul Gilroy (2005). Cosmopolitanism proffered an apposite starting point for rethinking the meaning of diversity in locality, and an open ethic toward strangers.

But the unanswered question that haunted this discourse – like a belligerent ghost – was the relationship of Blackness to Africa, and the fate of this historical bond. For if nativism no longer defined Africa as the Home of the Black – if, instead, Africa's symbolic configuration emerged through historical processes indissociably tied to the beginnings of a mass diaspora within legacies of slavery, indenture, and imperial impressment – then were Black diaspora, in the Americas and elsewhere, "Africans" or not?

The question of diaspora

Recent movements to dissociate African identity from Blackness have led to fundamental shifts in the relationship of diaspora to the continent, including the question of who constitutes the diaspora, or what that claim means politically. Afropolitanism, indeed, is not Pan-Africanism or *Négritude*. Whereas the Black nationalist tradition has always considered the racial fission of The Black from The African as the central problem for emancipatory thought (thereby shaping revolutionary self-styling around a politics of reclamation), Afropolitanism denies the capacity of racialism or nationhood to frame a world without prejudice. By deliberately refiguring African identity – and ergo, Africa – outside racial autochthony, Afropolitanism challenges the ties that have cohered the diaspora historically, ethically, and politically.

Yet the exact nature of this challenge has remained, still, unclear. In dealing only with racialism's primary dimension (*autochthony*) and not its by-product (*diaspora*), advocates of Afropolitanism have obfuscated two sets of issues. The first is the obligation to slave ancestry which a rigorous philosophy of history, centred on the creation of Africa, might have normatively produced. The second is the capacity of Afropolitanism to act as a global ethic for the age of migration when it nevertheless has failed to explore the inverse relationship – that is, the question of

diaspora. If racial origin no longer defines Africa, then who is, or is not, African? To what forms of solidarities or kinship are slavery's ancestors entitled?

In the first respect, it should be remarked that Afropolitanism's diaspora politics are significantly shaped by two events. The first is the formation of a "new" diaspora following African independence from colonialism in the 1960s–70s. Of this, a few comments may be made. First, whereas the relationship of slave diaspora to the continent has been variously characterized by interconnection (Herskovits 1941; Matory 2005) or *natal alienation* (Patterson 1982), it is undeniable that today's postcolonial migrants live in intimate entanglement with the continent (Akyeampong 2000; Zeleza 2005). Their enduring involvement in African national affairs, frequent repatriations home and an expansive remittance economy have configured these emigrants not as African auxiliaries, but as active national agents: a type of *ghost citizenry*.

In the Pan-African age, diaspora politics had principally hypostatized in local alliances within communities of colour, thereby formulating a language of struggle regarding racial politics as a global problem. However, joint struggles across the Atlantic, the Mediterranean, or the Indian Ocean have waned considerably since the 1960s, and especially, since the fall of apartheid. Diaspora politics have shifted from bifurcated utopias of assimilation or separatism, toward paradigms more closely coinciding with the language of global economy. While during the 1970s–90s, Afrocentric thinkers invoked a centre-and-periphery metaphor to denominate contesting dynamics of domination and autonomy, or the possibility of multicultural coexistence, so too does Afropolitanism insinuate itself in the *flows*, *mobilities*, and *circulations* of globalization vernacular. Cosmopolitanism is said to have a "trickle down" effect facilitated by the movement of people, capital, and diaspora.

This emphasis on mobility, above all, underscores a liquidation of space, which, in turn, is said to undermine the primacy of territory as a political category. Whence the second significant event: the 2008 xenophobic attacks in South Africa and the legacy of apartheid upon the question of native belonging. In the South African context, the recent violence wrought against migrant workers from Zimbabwe, Somalia, and other foreign African countries has emphasized the absolute association of self-identity with broader social practice, and the consequent need to rethink collective belonging outside autochthonous terms. The variation of Afropolitanism shaped in South Africa is said to regard an ethic toward strangers that refuses distinction between native rights-bearing kin and the so-called illegitimate foreigner. It simultaneously also describes a set of real transformations that are said to be opening the African metropolis to the world, and by proxy, African society to new multiracialisms.

But this "becoming cosmopolitan of the world" has also sat uncomfortably alongside two other phenomena related to globalization and diaspora: a politics of witchcraft, and the re-nationalization of the civil scene. With regards to the first, the influence of diaspora's ghost citizenry has also undeniably manifested in discrete flows of wealth that, in certain contexts, appear as if from nowhere: *divine* (Geschiere 1997; Comaroff and Comaroff 2002). The remittance from faraway places to the proximate, the rich to the poor, have illustrated globalization not as a flattening of the mortal world (human-to-human) but instead as a rich theatre of sordid spirits that appear to act on the earth at random. Some Africans profit, while many others do not. Rather than heralding an ethic of mutual responsibility, the global era instead appears bound up in a politics of tribute and equally retributive tendencies.

Second, contrary to the hypothesis that multiracialism will diminish racial nationalism, in fact an increasingly racialist rhetoric has animated the politics of African uprisings. In the South African context, this discursive reality reaches its apogee in the Rhodes Must Fall movement. The leadership of this disaggregated party draws from the wellspring of revolutionary anticolonialism of the early African state leaders as well as American-based Afropessimism which sees Blackness

as a global anti-ontology. This combination of both pessimism and nationalism constitutes the new Dionysian dynamics of Afropolitics on both sides of the Atlantic – even as organizational solidarity is arguably less than ever before.

What can explain the endurance of nationalism long past its "logical" threshold? Is it simply the anachronism that refuses to die – the lifeless ghost that resurrects only to be banished again and again under the allegation of superstition? Or is there some other meaning at play? If we reconsider Black nationalism not according to its constructions of collective selfhood, but by its terms of interaction (*cultural pluralism*), what might explain the endurance of this tradition over centuries?

In fact, such an examination might lead us to conclude that Black nationalism has not solely, nor even foremost, been concerned with practices of the self. Its emancipatory politics have always lay in the ethical confrontation compelled by one's inhabitation of the world as a historical being. The "Africanization" of the Black, especially in the diaspora, emphasizes that countries like the United States are countries full of Africans. Black nationalism problematizes the African diaspora as an unsolved ethical problem, and hence, a history that cannot be forgotten.

The will to reconceive of an African identity outside race opens the question of whether slave diaspora constitute Africans, or not. What solidarity should slave ancestors be afforded? To what kinship, if any, are they entitled? A second set of histories contribute, more perniciously, to these interrogations. This is the role that Africans themselves played in the slave trades and their moral debt owed to diaspora. At present, it said that a state of amnesia surrounds this particular legacy of "brother" selling "brother" (Hartman 2007; Pierre 2012). Banished to the recesses of oral tradition or ceremony, the African memory of slavery exists not so much under repression, but in constant metamorphosis: a chameleon in plain sight (Shaw 2002).

For an African philosophy of history to account for the genesis of Africa apart from Blackness, it must also reckon with the agency of Africans in the dispersion of diaspora: the betrayal at the heart of the symbol "Black." But this has not occurred. Afropolitanism, by instead emphasizing that Blackness is not coterminous with Africanity, has alleviated a burden which could otherwise have served as a powerful point of reflection: a reckoning in the form of unity. But, now, those who were once sold are no longer kin. The guilt, which otherwise might have manifested in reparations of faith, support, and solidarity, has dissolved for the sake of an emancipatory future predicated on multiracialism.

Afropolis and Afropolitanism from below

But where does Afropolitanism take place? To a large extent, the discourses that have concerned African multiracialisms have regarded the African metropolis, or as it is sometimes called, *the Afropolis*. Here, a drama of cultural fission, fusion, transformation, and disavowal reach unprecedented scales in the form of a citywide *unfolding*. Here, too, Africa's evolution within a philosophy of history centred on its own being in time, its refusal for either prescription or proscription, destabilizes our understandings of the African present and, thereby, the meaning of its past. The role of colonial history in this dance of doing and undoing is uniquely apposite. The city's multiracialism – in many instances, the direct legacy of imperial incursion – appears to be a novel modernity. The romance of Afropolitanism, and the tragedy at its foundation, lays in the atonement for the past that this legacy performs.

All of the above dynamics, and much more, may be seen today in Johannesburg, South Africa. As "the centre of Afropolitanism, *par excellence*" (Mbembe 2007: 29), Johannesburg, which was founded in the 19th century as a labour reserve for the Witwatersrand gold mines, now bears witness to migration on a continental scale. The influx of the new and the metastasis of the old have transformed the social scape of the city in unprecedented, although not wholly unique,

ways. The growth of the African metropolis as an Afropolitan nexus corresponds to two interrelated phenomena, each equally observable in Accra, Dakar, or Kinshasa.

The first of these features is the protean ways that African metropolises have expanded seemingly beyond state control. Although it is not true that colonial cities constituted entirely planned spaces (even those developed during rule), the African city today is everywhere absconding its imperial strictures for an architecture from below (Malaquais 2011). The resourcefulness of informal communities to syphon electricity, develop their own drinking wells, or mount a police force has essentially overlaid state-controlled territory with a system refracting resources to those excluded from formal politics. In Lagos, to quote Chris Abani, "There are more canals . . . than in Venice. Except here they are often unintentional" (Abani 2010: 8). Afropolitanism refers to the "geomorphic" transformation of the city from within, and beyond, the palimpsest of colonialism.

In varying respects, the "unplannedness" of the African city has been said to correspond to the universalism which gives Afropolitanism its name. One register is the opacity of segregation in the perpetuation of human suffering. In this paradigm, the fault of apartheid lay not only with its political architects but its physical architects too. The construction of highways bypassing Black neighbourhoods or the segregation of townships from city centres occluded the violence of racial suffering, which only recent urban migrations are now repealing. Second, the interracial proximity fostered in new city contexts are said to precipitate in a politics of intimacy, cohering in the everyday ways that people's lives entangle: a rhythm of the streets, the bar, the corner church. This intimacy, although very gradual, adopts the form of a phenomenal unveiling: a slippage of the iron mask behind which reveals a common humanity.

But there is also something superficial about this elision between cosmopolitanism and globalization. For one, it is based in large part on an exceptional contradiction: that, while the global movement of people and finance does not necessarily precipitate in cosmopolitanism, it nonetheless does so in Africa where no city is exactly capitalist, and no economy is fully formalized. The fact that kinship networks still scaffold the urban economy, granting food and shelter on credit and supporting those in need, is the reason that African cities are said to be capable of absorbing new global itinerants. As Filip De Boeck has remarked: "The urbanscape is not so much shaped by the dynamics of modernity but rather . . . all kinds of notions and moralities" (De Boeck and Simone 2002: 36). It is precisely the endurance of the tribe in the city, as an ever-expanding category, that makes the Afropolis the nexus of cosmopolitanism, *par excellence*.

This state of exception, nevertheless, does little to explain the status of the migrant in the development of a cosmopolitan ethic more broadly, nor indeed, any distinctly African approach to this question of global importance. For if the answer is simply the absorption of the stranger into the tribe, then the stranger still remains one of the most fragile demographies in African society. As Sarah Nuttall writes of Hillbrow, Johannesburg:

> Race and racism in Hillbrow are still beset with contradictions and anomalies. . . . More than 23,000 Congolese and 3,000 Nigerians living in Hillbrow faced xenophobia and 'political racism' in a context in which the anti-apartheid struggle did not breed a pan-Africanist consciousness, or an instant ethos of international solidarity or respect for diversity, *but which is nevertheless leading to the unofficial forging of the highly tensile beginnings of an 'Afropolitanism.'*
> *(emphasis mine, 2004: 74)*

In Nuttall's view, the violence of intimate encounter is the transition cost of cosmopolitanism – what Ashraf Jamal has alternately phrased as "violence and transformation-as-entanglement" (Jamal 2010: 98).

But the politics of the migrant, viewed from the inverse perspective, is also a *politics of diaspora.* Although new intimacies always exist in cities, often the migrant's greatest resource is the diaspora networks from whence he or she comes. Such is a politics of extended kinship, or, in other words, *solidarity.* Its capaciousness is its endurance irrespective of the intimate bonds that might distinguish one neighbourhood from another. Black nationalism predicated its politics on this solidarity, believing that the expansiveness of diaspora was the kin model that could, on a large scale, be transformative. As Nahum Chandler has argued (2013), Du Bois believed that the African-American, in having been made the ultimate offspring of capital modernity – sold from one nation to be alienated in another – made them also the extremis of kinship. To offer them enduring solidarity was to recognize one's own role in the vicissitudes of history that had cleaved the Black apart from Africa: a fission of violence that was the brutal making of the Black diaspora. In this way, solidarity was always a reckoning, always a reparation.

Beyond the diffracted experiences of love, hate, friendship, violence, beauty, and betrayal which characterize the variegated lives of the African city, Afropolitanism is foremost a way of naming the present with respect to the future: a kind of incantation. In fact, insofar as Afropolitanism claims to be a perspective regarding the full diversity of Africa's history, beyond its nativist tropes and tired Marxist mantras, it is also a deliverance from this past. It is no coincidence that the places considered to be the most Afropolitan were those also most penetrated by imperialism. White settlers, Asian indentured labourers, African migrant workers, and Caribbean soldiers co-constitute the multiracial basis for an Afropolitan modernity. The romance of Afropolitanism is its redemption of that wounded place where the colonial project began.

Conclusion

This essay argued that Afropolitanism marks a profound break from the Black nationalist tradition. By deliberately refiguring African identity – and ergo, Africa – outside of racial autochthony, Afropolitanism challenges the principles of racial solidarity and African reclamation that sedimented centuries of Afro-liberation thought. The refusal to treat Blackness and Africanity as commensurate reopens questions of who constitutes the African, who is the diaspora, and what this ancestral tie means as a historical, ethical, or political relationship. The development of Afropolitanism in the mid-2000s largely occurred due to the need to manufacture a political ethos suited to the multiracial postcolony and 21st-century migrations. However, this chapter argued that Afropolitanism cannot act as an ethic for migration until it deals with the inverse question: that is, *the question of diaspora.*

Notes

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2 These currents include diaspora campaigns as well as African-based movements, such as 1960s anticolonial "Re-Africanization" or South African Black Consciousness.

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