The Afropolitan Flâneur: Literary Representations of the City and Contemporary Urban Identities in Selected African and Transnational Texts

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Abstract

When an individual walks the urban landscape there is a unique symbiosis between self and city. It is through walking the cityscape and observing the crowd and the surrounding environment that the archetypal literary figure of the European flâneur acts as a mirror of a particular time and space. But how might such a flâneur walk and observe the city in contemporary African and transnational literary texts? I argue that there is a literary re-imagining and repurposing of the flâneur figure which has hitherto not been acknowledged and explored: an Afropolitan flâneur. 'Afropolitan' is a term popularised by Taiye Selasi in a 2005 essay to refer to a 'scattered tribe' of 'Africans of the world' (n. pag.). In this dissertation, the entanglement of the Afropolitan subject and the European flâneur brings together past and present, Africa and the West. I first provide a historical and theoretical framework to illustrate how the flâneur figure 'migrated' from Europe to Africa, and how this figure is to be understood as a literary construct, in relation to current considerations of Afropolitanism. I go on to discuss a wide range of texts that engage with Afropolitan flâneurs who traverse cities in Africa (such as Johannesburg, Cape Town and Lagos), or global north cities (New York, Paris and London). While some of the Afropolitan flâneurs depicted in these texts are migrants or homeless individuals who struggle to adapt easily to a new environment, others, despite being more privileged, also sometimes experience uncomfortable assimilation in their new or strange city space. There are also those who seem to feel equally at home wherever they find themselves. As these Afropolitan flâneurs walk their way through the urban landscape in the texts under examination, they reflect different ways of being in the city. By problematising the binaries of local/global, national/transnational, black/white, slum/paradise, this dissertation seeks to address issues of belonging or not belonging and gestures towards new ways of understanding what it means to be an African in the world.

Notes

Style and Orthography

The referencing format used throughout this thesis is based on Rhodes University's Department of Literary Studies in English Style Sheet for Writers of MA and PhD Theses[1] which follows that of the Modern Language Association (MLA). This thesis conforms in particular to the seventh edition of the *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*. While standard UK English spelling has been used throughout, sometimes the orthography that appears in quotations will depart from this, in keeping with the spelling and punctuation used in the original source.

Gender and Race

Since language shapes the world we see, I have used unbiased language as much as possible. Gender-inclusive language is employed in this thesis, but in cases where specific terms have both masculine and feminine forms (such as *flâneur* and *flâneuse*), the gender specific word is used when discussing a particular character. For instance, in Chapter 3 the word *flâneuse* is used since the narrator of *Skyline* is a female flâneur. Similarly, while the term *sapeur* also has a feminine form (*sapeuse*), the feminine form of the term is not used as the sapeur analysed in Chapter 5 is a male character.

Throughout this thesis, I avoid the use of inverted commas or capitalisation of initial letters for the terms "black", "white" or "coloured", as I do not wish to reify apartheid race classification which affected the lives of millions of people in horrifically unjust ways. Over the last few decades, such usage has been a controversial issue among scholars as the terms were historically constructed labels for racial categories.[2] While mixed race South Africans are generally referred to as "coloured", according to contemporary South African usage, the term "black" also includes the coloured community as well as the Indian and Asian population groups.

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[1] The Style Sheet is available online at <https://www.ru.ac.za/english/coursematerials/>.

[2] In *Not White Enough, Not Black Enough,* Mohamed Adhikari notes that during the apartheid period and beyond, certain scholars "refused to capitalize the first letter of the term *Coloured* in order to indicate both opposition to the enforced classification of people into racial and ethnic categories and distaste for ethnocentric values" (xv). More recently, adds Adhikari, such capitalisation was again in use, partly as "a response to the gradual normalization of South African society in the postapartheid period" and partly "in recognition of a growing grass-roots sentiment neatly expressed by journalist Paul Stober: 'As a distinct ethnic group with over three million members, we deserve a capital letter'" (Adhikari xv).

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List of Abbreviations

When referencing any of the twelve primary literary texts, the following abbreviations will be used throughout for the titles below:

BA – Blackass

BB – Bom Boy

BWR – Blue White Red

ED – Every Day is for the Thief

GL – GraceLand

LF – Lost and Found in Johannesburg

OC – Open City

PK – Portrait with Keys

Sky – Skyline

TC – Thirteen Cents

TS – The Street

WH – Welcome to Our Hillbrow

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Introduction: Finding the Way

> Their story begins on ground level, with footsteps. […] Their intertwined paths give their shape to spaces. They weave places together. (de Certeau 97)

Does the act of walking allow for a particular way of interacting with and reading the city? How is the individual subject affected by walking in the city? Such questions point to a concern regarding the symbiotic relationship between human subject and cityspace, which is where this walking journey begins. It is through the simple act of walking that human beings connect directly with the earth, the landscape, the environmental surroundings. While walking, the human mind is stimulated by what is seen along the way. The environment influences identity, which is not static, but rather it is protean and labile. By environment I mean not only buildings, streets and landscapes, but also people – as individuals, and as part of a broader community. The particular environmental space in which the literary figure of the Afropolitan flâneur will be examined in this thesis is an urban space, since it is in major cities that this figure encounters not only other people, but history as well, and "walking [is] a way to read that history" (Solnit 191). Writing about walking, then, as the authors of the selected primary texts do, is similarly a means of reading history. Not only do the busy city streets have borders and boundaries which guide the Afropolitan flâneur and invite transgression, but there are also interruptions and intersections that affect the movement of the Afropolitan flâneur. As an urban walker, literary stroller or street life reporter, the flâneur's observations of the city environment stimulate his or her mind and the results of such observations are often penned in literary texts. In this manner, via the literary text in which he or she appears as a character, the flâneur reflects or mirrors the cityscape, allowing the reader unique insight of that particular landscape.

The experience of walking the city is described by Michel de Certeau in the epigraph above as a weaving together of places, and for him it is by walking that one gains an understanding of the urban environment. Geographer and urban theorist Edward Soja writes about the "unbounding" of the city which breaks down old boundaries, and moves into new spaces, where "territorial identity" is directly related to the "scale and scope of the modern metropolis" (*Postmetropolis* 218). Henri Lefebvre's arguably socialist understanding of "the right to the city" (*Writings* 147) is a call for equal access of all individuals to city space, indicative of the hybrid complexity of the city. Thus, de Certeau's weaving of places and

Soja's "unbounding" of boundaries constitute methods of achieving Lefebvre's "right to the city". This project investigates, through the literary figure of the flâneur, how space impacts upon the individual subject, and how, in turn, the subject impacts upon space, constituting a dialectic in motion.

The flâneur employed as a literary device appears in literature as a character who walks in the city, interprets his or her surroundings and asserts both a sense of ownership of and a belonging to the city. While the flâneur figure is generally considered a detached observer, paradoxically, as will be evidenced through textual analysis, he or she is also intrinsically connected to the urban surroundings.

This thesis is the first full-length academic study (to my knowledge) that analyses the *literary figure of the flâneur in an Afropolitan context*, or more precisely, that considers what exactly constitutes an *Afropolitan flâneur*, and what specific type of flânerie such a figure presents in a variety of African and transnational texts. In this thesis I seek to examine the concept of the original flâneur in order to point out how this figure has been rearticulated in African and transnational literary texts. By pointing out how the traditional definition of the flâneur has been subverted in the literature, and by studying such a figure in an Afropolitan and diasporic literary context, I aim to challenge simplistic or essentializing notions of Africa and African identity. In the literature selected, identity construction is presented as a dialogical process, whereby identity requires confirmation and consolidation by others, and is an ongoing process.

What exactly is an Afropolitan flâneur? This project seeks to provide a nuanced answer to this primary research question, which shows a concern with contemporary urban identities, as expressed in the literature selected. I seek to disentangle both the '*Afropolitan*' and the '*flâneur*' from their generalised associations with privilege, thus removing exclusionary and elitist frills that dress up a commodity. The term "Afropolitan" was popularised in 2005 by Taiye Selasi in an article titled "Bye-Bye Babar", in which she defines Afropolitans as "African emigrants" who can be recognised by their "funny blend of London fashion, New York jargon, African ethics, and academic successes" (n. pag.).[3] Around the same time, Afropolitanism was described by Achille Mbembe as "a way of being in the world" ("Afropolitanism" 28), and a few years later Simon Gikandi asserted that to be Afropolitan is "to embrace and celebrate a state of cultural hybridity – to be of Africa and of

[3] "Bye-Bye Babar" can be regarded as the founding essay on Afropolitanism. Written by Taiye Selasi (formerly Taiye Tuakli-Wosornu) in 2005, it appeared as an article in *Lip Magazine*, online at <http://thelip.robertsharp.co.uk/?p=76>, and this is the version to which I refer. "Bye-Bye Babar" also appeared in *The International Review of African American Art* 22.3 in 2008, as well as in *Callaloo* 36.3 in 2013.

other worlds at the same time" ("Foreword" 9).[4] While the Afropolitan is an actual individual connected to cities of Africa and the diaspora, the flâneur was originally a literary figure connected only to cities of Europe. This thesis examines the intersection of these two figures in the form of the Afropolitan flâneur in selected literary texts. These Afropolitan flâneurs include the author-flâneur, the migrant flâneur, the flâneuse, the celestial flâneur, the street child flâneur, the refugee flâneur, the *sapeur*, the voyeur, the *dériveur*, the imaginary-flâneur, the contra-flâneur, the *oyinbo* flâneur, the cyber-flâneur, and even a stalker-voyeur-flâneur.

Since this research is based on literary representations, it is clear that the study is not sociological or historical, although to study literary representations is to be aware of insights derived from other disciplines. The 'Africa' of the Afropolitan is a defined subjectivity generated through literary representation, and the flâneur is a literary figure who perceives an artistic and imagined Johannesburg, Lagos, or even New York, as the case may be.

To reflect a multiplicity of authorial positions, the selection of texts is broad. Each of the three novels per chapter features a flâneur character who reveals the intricacies of human subjectivity in the urban cityscape. Close readings of the texts are carried out individually, while I also compare and contrast these texts in each chapter. Equal emphasis will be placed on the subject (the Afropolitan flâneur) and the object (the city itself as seen by the observer). Through literary analysis, this thesis will compare and contrast three cities in Africa (Johannesburg, Cape Town and Lagos), as well as three global north cities (New York, Paris and London), as seen through the eyes of the Afropolitan flâneur.

The thesis throughout responds to the overarching question "What is an Afropolitan flâneur?" This enquiry is placed in motion in **Chapter 1** which sets up the theoretical framework for the thesis. The framework is rooted in debates on the figure of the postcolonial flâneur in literature and postcolonial spatiality as theory. Concepts of African identity and definitions of transnationalism and diaspora are provided. As this thesis is situated in the field of transnational literary studies, it has much to do with identity formation, how it is impacted upon by borders and boundaries, and how these are crossed or negotiated through movement. An evaluation of concepts of identity formation by Stuart Hall and Kwame Anthony Appiah, amongst others, is then provided.

Contemporary diaspora studies experts including Paul Gilroy and Avtar Brah are referred to with the aim of providing a theoretical background which serves as a lens through

[4] Achille Mbembe's article first appeared in French in 2005, titled "Afropolitanisme", and was translated by Laurent Chauvet in a 2007 article for the Africa Remix exhibition catalogue. The very fact that Mbembe wrote the article in French, which was then translated into English by a Frenchman who settled in South Africa, enacts the "worlds in movement" idea which Mbembe espouses.

which the selected literary texts will later be analysed. Homi Bhabha's "Third Space", Leon de Kock's "seam" and Sarah Nuttall's "entanglement" are offered as a means of further examining the liminal spaces in which transnational subjects navigate their physical surroundings and encounters with other people.

De Certeau's work on walking the city is then discussed insofar as he sees that it is pedestrians who create the city by walking about. These individuals apply their imagination to what they see, and thus give meaning to these urban spaces. The intertwinings and weavings that de Certeau speaks of here echo strongly with themes of transnationalism and diaspora that run through this project.

Thereafter the chapter traces a historical development of the figure of the flâneur in literature, as interpreted by Honoré de Balzac and Charles Baudelaire in the nineteenth century to Walter Benjamin in the twentieth century, who developed the flâneur as a character who walked the urban landscape. More recent studies on walking and flânerie are discussed with reference to, amongst others, Keith Tester's *The Flâneur* (1994), Rebecca Solnit's *Wanderlust* (2001), and Laren Elkin's *Flâneuse* (2016).

Once this background on the evolution of the literary flâneur has been provided, a working definition of the term 'Afropolitan' is developed through examining key concepts provided by scholars Selasi (2005), Mbembe (2007), Gikandi (2010; 2011), Eze (2016), and others. As an urban identity, the Afropolitan's transnationalism as well as liminality serve as a focus for me as a critic of the literature from Africa and its diaspora. Thus, through readings of the literary flâneur in an Afropolitan context, I investigate what might be learned about the relationship between city and human subject. The Afropolitan flâneur as a character in a literary text provides the reader with a particular perception of the city he or she walks.

To illustrate the interconnectedness of space and identity, an overview of the work of postcolonial spatial theorists such as Henri Lefebvre and Edward Soja is then presented. This is followed by an introduction to Guy Debord's psychogeography as nexus between environment and individual. Theories of the abject and performativity according to Julia Kristeva and Judith Butler are touched upon briefly before the chapter closes. All of the above-mentioned theoretical ideas provide a useful means of further understanding the intricate relationship between the human subject and the city environment as it is further examined in the twelve selected literary texts.

Once the theoretical background has been provided, I then, in the remaining four chapters, examine in what ways the Afropolitan flâneur is deployed in specific literary texts, in order to examine Afropolitan subjectivity. A range of twelve primary texts are consulted,

mostly novels, but also an autobiography and a mixed-genre text. Through literary analysis, with reference to the theory outlined in Chapter 1, I consider ways in which environment shapes the human subject and the human subject shapes the environment, particularly in the urban spaces traversed by the Afropolitan flâneur.

Afropolitan flâneurs as examined in the selected literary texts are analysed via a focus on different points of view, including that of the reader as flâneur, the writer as flâneur, or the protagonist as flâneur. Each text presents a unique Afropolitan flâneur. In this way it will be shown how these flâneurs and the literary texts themselves represent and inscribe Afropolitanism and contemporary African diasporic identity formation in a selection of cosmopolitan cities: Johannesburg, Cape Town, Lagos, Paris, London and New York.

Throughout Chapters 2 to 5, amongst other things, the literary analysis: (1) identifies specific Afropolitan flâneurs in each text examined; (2) considers ways in which the city environment shapes the human subject and the human subject in turn shapes the urban environment; and (3) develops new theoretical ideas on the Afropolitan, and the flâneur, by revisiting and expanding upon existing scholarly and popular interpretations.

To this end, **Chapter 2** is concerned with the spatiality of mapping, and the cityspace of Johannesburg forms the focus for the texts selected. Particularly helpful to my approach in this chapter was the work of Achille Mbembe, Sarah Nuttall and Lindsay Bremner, amongst others. The primary texts I consider here reflect flâneuristic impressions of the transitional city of Johannesburg: *Portrait with Keys* by Ivan Vladislavić, about the city and one man's place in it; *Lost and Found in Johannesburg* by Mark Gevisser, which is an autobiographical account of a white, Jewish, gay man growing up in the city; and the fictional *Welcome to our Hillbrow* by Phaswane Mpe, which tells the story of a migrant's arrival in the city. The writers and their protagonists or narrators in the three texts examined are all Afropolitan flâneurs who are simultaneously insiders and outsiders in the city of Johannesburg.

It is through the act of walking, as seen in this chapter, that boundaries are both defined, explored and transgressed. The Afropolitan flâneur who walks his or her urban surroundings is doing precisely that: defining boundaries, even challenging their existence while exploring physical spaces. All three texts carefully reference maps and mapping the city as a means of finding one's way. Thus the spatial formation, or what Nuttall refers to as the "citiness of cities" ("City Forms" 740), is illustrated here in three very different texts that highlight in their own way the heterogeneous mixture of Johannesburg.

Chapter 3 helps to further my argument in relation to re-defining the Afropolitan flâneur. The texts discussed in this chapter feature a contemporary version of the flâneur in an

Afropolitan setting of Cape Town: *Skyline* by Patricia Schonstein-Pinnock; *Thirteen Cents* by Kabelo Sello Duiker; and *Bom Boy* by Yewande Omotoso. These three novels are compared and contrasted in order to establish a conversation between the three as a means of re-examining urban identities such as the refugee and the migrant, and of considering notions of home and belonging as they relate to such identities. Each of the Afropolitan flâneurs in these novels taps into issues surrounding migrancy, and problematizes, in different ways, the lived experiences of migrants, of 'other' Africans in 'southern' Africa. Not only do these three novels share the same setting of Cape Town, but they all have a child or young adult protagonist who is a flâneur who walks the city streets. These three novels share a concern with intersections and alienation as they examine aspects of hybridity, transculturation, intersectionality and *ubuntu,*[5] which help expand upon the existing definition of Afropolitanism.

In the three novels discussed in **Chapter 4**, the narrator or protagonist is an Afropolitan flâneur who negotiates his way through the city on foot, as a stranger, through a personal mapping of urban Lagos, where the Yoruba word *oyinbo*, or Igbo word *oyibo*, is a term used to refer not only to the language of the coloniser, but also to foreigners, strangers, Europeans or white people. In Chris Abani's *GraceLand*, Teju Cole's *Every Day is for the Thief,* and A. Igoni Barrett's *Blackass,* themes related to the construction of gender and racial identity are examined. Abani, Cole and Barrett use the topography of Lagos in a manner that reflects Afropolitanism, multiculturalism and dynamic urban identities to focus on different aspects of contemporary Nigerian life.

The final chapter, **Chapter 5**, deals with the ambivalent connection to home shared by diasporic subjects and returnees alike. These issues are explored in Alain Mabanckou's novel *Blue White Red*, set mostly in Paris, Biyi Bandele's *The Street*, set in London's Brixton and Teju Cole's *Open City,* set mainly in New York. *The Street* opens and closes with a dream, and both *Open City* and *Blue White Red* are similarly concerned with the dream of a better life elsewhere. In this chapter, it is through the figures of the Afropolitan flâneur, the *sapeur*, and the *dériveur*, that I interrogate matters of identity and belonging as a diasporic African individual in three global cities and I argue for a broader, more inclusive Afropolitanism. Metropoles such as Paris, London and New York are western cities which

[5] *Ubuntu* is a (South) African philosophy which, as an expression of humanity, recognises that an individual is not considered separate from his or her community. The idiom "*umntu ngumntu ngabantu*" (isiXhosa) or "*umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*" (isiZulu) or "*motho ke motho ka batho*" (Sepedi) means "a person is a person through other people". *Ubuntu*, as Desmond Tutu notes, "speaks of the very essence of being human" (31).

are inhabited and experienced differently by the Afropolitan flâneur from individuals born and bred in those cities.

Finally, the **Conclusion** of the thesis offers a brief discussion of what has been achieved and makes suggestions for future research possibilities relating to the role of the literary flâneur and contemporary urban identities in literature.

In summary, the novels analysed are illustrative of different versions of the Afropolitan flâneur in various city spaces. Home, identity, diaspora and displacement, are all themes that concern these 'entangled' characters, who find themselves situated on 'the seam' in spaces that are representative of liminality as well as of home. It is through the figure of the Afropolitan flâneur in these texts that the reader is better able to understand the kaleidoscopic cities and identities that continue to be in flux.

This thesis is a collection of three years of research, notes, readings, thoughts, dreams, and writing – my own wanderings as a flâneuse through a number of literary texts, and through both real and fictional cities. I invite you to enjoy these discoveries with me in the next chapters.

Chapter 1: The First Steps

1.1 Introduction: New African Identities and Diasporic Perspectives

> For itinerancy makes the alien familiar and vice versa, because no two walks are ever quite the same. It is a way to experience ownership without property. Walking is what turns spaces into places. (Appiah "Presidential Address" 19)

The above quotation comes from Kwame Anthony Appiah's Presidential address, "Boundaries of Culture", which he delivered at the Modern Language Association Convention in 2017, and in which he elaborated on how the act of walking forms a central concern of not only nineteenth-century writers but also of modernist and contemporary writers. Walking is a means of literally and figuratively crossing boundaries, not only physical, but also of language and culture, and in Appiah's words, "not as needful drudgery but as a mode of contemplation and observation, a way of being fully in the world, a mode of movement that was also a form of attention" ("Presidential Address" 17). There are clear echoes here with Appiah's cosmopolitan ethic detailed in his iconic book *Cosmopolitanism,* where he answers his own question, "A citizen of the world: how far can we take that idea?" (xv). To bridge the gaps between cultures and bring people together in order to "recognise one's face in that of a foreigner" (Mbembe, "Afropolitanism" 28) is a global challenge.

Ways of walking form the focus of all the literary texts that will be analysed in this thesis. Walking connects people to place at the same time as it tells a story or induces a memory. Michel de Certeau writes that:

> It is true that the operations of walking on can be traced on city maps in such a way as to transcribe their paths (here well-trodden, there very faint) and their trajectories (going this way and not that). But these thick or thin curves only refer, like words, to the absence of what has passed by. (97)

In a similar manner, the novels analysed are, like the maps de Certeau speaks of, records of walking. Each text has a flâneur figure, or characters who are flâneurs, who walk and observe the urban environment. In the case of Mark Gevisser's autobiography, the text is written by someone who is an Afropolitan flâneur himself. The primary literary texts that are discussed in the following chapters are illustrative of the paradox of detached immersion, which relates not only to the flâneur but also reflects the occasional sense of displacement experienced by the multi-directional Afropolitan.

Hybrid identities emerge out of certain spaces, in borders and through movement, as evidenced in the works of postcolonial theorists such as Homi Bhabha and Edward Said, who have proffered that there is no such thing as a 'pure' culture.[6] In the words of Paul Gilroy, "[i]dentity is the compound result of many accretions. Its protean constitution does not defer to the scripts of ethnic, national, 'racial' or cultural absolutism" ("Diaspora Detours" 323). Thus, identity is that which is always becoming something, always being built upon. To clarify further, and as pointed out by Neville Hoad referring to an essay by Edward Said, "identity […] is always unresolved" (*African Intimacies* 116). Identity cannot ever be fixed and is always subject to change. In his seminal essay "Cultural Identity and Diaspora" (1990), Stuart Hall emphasises the fluidity of identity by proposing that we should think of identity as a "'production' which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation" (222). Hall goes on to note that "cultural identity is not a fixed essence at all […] but a *positioning*" (226, emphasis in original). Identity is a complex notion, in a continuous state of flux, influenced by various mixes and crossovers, and subsequently forming and re-forming new identities, as Hall elaborates elsewhere:

> Everywhere, cultural identities are emerging which are not fixed, but poised, *in transition*, between different positions; which draw on different cultural traditions at the same time; and which are the product of those complicated cross-overs and cultural mixes which are increasingly common in a globalized world. ("Question" 310)

One area where identity formation is foregrounded is the interconnectedness of subject and place, which has received much critical attention over the last few decades. The focus of scholarship has been on where individuals come from and how that is related to an understanding of their identity. This is complicated, however, as where an individual comes from may include several places such as birthplace, places from ancestral history and even places visited for extended periods, as well as certain communities that might be considered home.

In an article on locating self, John Dixon and Kevin Durrheim note that questions concerning "'who we are' are often intimately related to questions of 'where we are'" (27),

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[6] In *The Location of Culture*, Bhabha challenges the notion of a pure culture by noting that "[c]ultures are never unitary in themselves, nor simply dualistic in the relation of Self to Other. […] The reason a cultural text or system of meaning cannot be sufficient unto itself is that the act of cultural enunciation – the place of utterance – is crossed by the difference of writing" (36). In *Culture and Imperialism*, Edward Said notes in the Introduction that "all cultures are involved in one another; none is single and pure; all are hybrid, heterogeneous, extraordinarily differentiated, and unmonolithic" (xxix).

suggesting that place affirms identity. Taiye Selasi, who popularised the term "Afropolitan" (as will be seen later in this chapter) said in a 2014 TED conference talk "Don't ask me where I'm from, ask where I'm a local", meaning that "replacing the language of *nationality* with the language of *locality* asks us to shift our focus to where real life occurs" (n. pag.).[7] An individual might feel entirely 'at home' in a so-called 'foreign' land when there is a recognition by other people of cultural habits or mannerisms which reflect that which is familiar to them. Movement, whether simply on foot or by means of international air travel, for leisure or by forced migration, inevitably brings different cultures (such as African and European) in contact with one another, allowing for either conflict or change in terms of identity formation.

As a result of the "worlds-in-movement phenomenon" (Mbembe, "Afropolitanism" 28) which reflects continuous movement, both within as well as beyond the continent, Africa became a melting pot of peoples from elsewhere, including Europe and Asia. Mbembe challenges what he refers to as the "nativistic reflex" (28) by pointing out that to be 'African' is not necessarily to be 'black'.[8] For Mbembe, contemporary Africa constitutes "forms of multiplicity" which include "racial multiplicity" (29). According to Eva Knudsen and Ulla Rahbek, Mbembe's controversial idea "that 'Afro' is not necessarily a racial signifier" implies that "we should unhinge black from our conception of African" (151). While the racial openness espoused by Mbembe is contested and might appear to be a utopian idea, it resonates with the notion of a broad Afropolitanism as represented in the selected literary texts under analysis.

Through the literature examined, this project will critically engage with the evolving identity of the Afropolitan flâneur, and in this chapter, intersections between the figure of the flâneur (Section 1.2) and the Afropolitan (Section 1.3) will be pointed out. Of particular relevance to my argument is the way in which the figure of the Afropolitan resituates debates on the postcolonial flâneur and spatiality in Africa and the African diaspora. Space, place, and mapping that space is a concept in literary and cultural studies referred to by theorists

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[7] Selasi's talk can be viewed on YouTube at this link: <http://www.ted.com/talks/taiye_selasi_don_t_ask_where_i_m_from_ask_where_i_m_a_local/transcript?language=en#t-30999>.

[8] Mbembe devotes a section of his essay on Afropolitanism to a discussion on what he means by the "nativistic reflex" and he offers a critique of how, "in its mild form", nativism glorifies difference, and yet such difference itself, he says, as seen in specific customs and traditions, was often an invention "not by the actual autochthons, but by missionaries and settlers" ("Afropolitanism" 28). Mbembe goes on to make it clear that Afropolitanism should not be equated with "Pan Africanism or *négritude*", but rather with "forms of multiplicity" ("Afropolitanism" 29) that take into account the broad scope of what it means to be of Africa.

including Michel Foucault and Edward Soja, as spatiality. The writerly mapping of social space is a focus of Robert T. Tally Jr.'s 2013 study quite simply titled *Spatiality*. This "literary cartography" (Tally Jr. 2008; 2013) is a mapping that is linked to what Tally Jr. terms "geocriticism" which he explains as "an approach to reading that examines the fundamentally cartographic aspects of fiction" ("Geocriticism" 4).

Situated in the context of transnational literary studies, this project is concerned with *literary representations* of the city and contemporary urban identities. How is identity formation, in the literature, impacted upon by borders and boundaries, and how are these crossed or negotiated through movement? Movement can be both large-scale movements, such as displacement or forced migration of groups of people, as well as much smaller movements such as an individual walking in an urban environment. Various scholars have offered numerous definitions for the terms "transnational" and "diaspora", which will be discussed in detail in this section to illustrate how these concepts will be utilised throughout this thesis.

Increasing global patterns of migration which link individuals and societies to multiple cities are referred to by Steven Vertovec as "super-diversity", which results in a multiplicity of evolving identities.[9] Transnationalism, like diaspora, involves such diversity and change in individuals who are connected to various places through movement such as migration. Broadly speaking, transnationalism refers to "multiple ties and interactions linking people or institutions across the borders of nation-states" (Vertovec "Conceiving" 447). Thus, a Nigerian or Ghanaian who lives and works in New York or London, for instance, would be considered a transnational subject living in the African diaspora, having perhaps resided in multiple locations, and whose life has been influenced by a connection to these places through other people and cultures. "Hey, I'm African just like you" says a taxi driver to the narrator in Teju Cole's *Open City* (40), but this is not met with reciprocal eagerness by Cole's narrator, Julius. Both the taxi-driver and Julius are diasporic subjects connected to their roots in different ways. As pointed out by Simon Gikandi by way of an example he provides in a discussion on globalization and cosmopolitanism, "African street traders in New York or Paris do not necessarily conceive a radical disjuncture between their deep engagement with the modern city and their commitment to their local cultures" ("Between Roots" 31). The "local cultures" to which Gikandi refers are homeland cultures in Africa, as he goes on to talk

[9] For more detail, refer to Steven Vertovec's article, "Super-Diversity and Its Implications". Elsewhere, Eva Knudsen and Ulla Rahbek use the metropolis of London to elaborate on Vertovec's super-diversity by explaining that it "focuses on the interplay of a range of factors that relate to ethnicity and the fact that there are multiple diversities *within* ethnic groups" (271, italics in original).

about the "survival of locality outside national or ethnic boundaries" given that "locality itself has been globalized" ("Between Roots" 32). In other words, diasporic subjects do not necessarily lose their cultural roots and links to their homeland, rather they transport them elsewhere, thus changing their new locality. Examples of how diasporic subjects affect their new environment will be evident in the examination of novels such as Biyi Bandele's *The Street* and Alain Mabanckou's *Blue White Red*.

As illustrated in the primary literature that will be discussed in the next few chapters, transnational subjects experience numerous incongruities in adapting to life outside their particular homeland and develop a heightened tolerance towards binaries such as local and global, familiar and unfamiliar. Many such transnational individuals live in an in-between state as they adapt to new environments, yet often still hanker for their former homes. As local and global blur into 'glocal', boundaries and entangled divides intersect all the more. Exposure to different languages, ways of being and cultures other than those from one's homeland affect an individual's constantly changing hybrid identity and, as pointed out by Gikandi, "cultivating a cosmopolitan identity is also an attempt to deploy the resources of intellectual culture to produce and reproduce a subjectivity that is reliable and recognizable" ("Between Roots" 33) as a means of dealing with diasporic experiences such as the feeling of rootlessness. Teju Cole makes this quite obvious in *Open City*, as will be seen in Chapter 5, by problematizing the lived experiences of his Afrodiasporic narrator who walks the streets of New York.

It is arguably largely due to Stuart Hall's influence that the term "diaspora" has grown in popularity over recent years, and his concern with cultural identity, as noted by Floya Anthias, has enabled the "concept of diaspora [to emerge] as a way of rethinking the issue of black cultural identity and representation" (560). This project aims to "rethink" such identities and reimagine the Afropolitan subject in particular, specifically in a diaspora space, where identity continues to undergo certain shifts and fluctuations. Hall elaborates on diaspora and identity by pointing out that the diaspora experience is defined

> not by essence or purity, but by the recognition of a necessary heterogeneity and diversity; by a conception of 'identity' which lives with and through, not despite, difference; by *hybridity*. Diaspora identities are those which are constantly producing and reproducing themselves anew, through transformation and difference. ("Cultural Identity and Diaspora" 235)

It is this diversity and fluidity of identity which Hall speaks about that is of interest insofar as it relates to the literary texts scrutinised. It is helpful to look at "diaspora identities" always

with new eyes, and in particular when considering the impact of movement across and through national and international borders. Paul Gilroy explains his understanding of the term "diaspora" as follows:

> Diaspora identifies a relational network, characteristically produced by forced dispersal and reluctant scattering. It is not just a word of movement though purposive, desperate movement is integral to it. Under this sign, push factors are a dominant influence. […] Life itself is at stake in the way the word suggests flight or coerced rather than freely chosen experiences of displacement. ("Diaspora" 207)

Thus a sense of coercion underlies this kind of movement and Gilroy debunks the false, glamorous image of diaspora by pointing out that it is not merely a term for a fashionable nomadism, but rather the word has connotations of "flight following the threat of violence" and he goes on to point out that "[s]lavery, pogroms, indenture, genocide and other unnameable terrors have all figured in the constitution of diasporas and the reproduction of diaspora-consciousness" (207). By means of employing a botanical metaphor of sowing seed, Gilroy talks about the heterogeneity and similarity between individuals and communities and the capacity for change "by focusing attention on the sameness within differentiation and the differentiation within sameness" (209). As a result of varied conditions, the sown seeds will grow differently, and so it is with the effects of transnationalism and diaspora on individuals. Rainer Bauböck and Thomas Faist suggest that "the best test for the present academic value of these concepts [transnationalism and diaspora] lies in their capacity to trigger new research perspectives and questions" (7), which is one of the aims of this project. By focusing on a specific urban identity – that of the Afropolitan flâneur – this project imagines and examines new ways of understanding dynamic, transnational, cosmopolitan subjectivities.

Diaspora can be regarded as a way of being, rather than relating to a specific grouping of people. Floya Anthias makes the point clear by referring to postmodern versions of diaspora – such as those propounded by Stuart Hall and Paul Gilroy, amongst others – as denoting "a *condition* rather than being descriptive of a group" (565). She adds that "this condition is put into play through the experience of being *from* one place and *of* another" (565). Contemporary diasporic identities are fluid, and do not exist in a vacuum. In Avtar Brah's discussion on "diaspora space" she says that it is important to note that it is particularly at the intersections of "economic, political, cultural, and psychic processes" that identities are contested (Brah 208). She goes on to point out that "multiple subject positions are juxtaposed, contested, proclaimed or disavowed" in this diaspora space, "where the

accepted and the transgressive imperceptibly mingle" (208). A range of conceptual metaphors which will be used throughout this project and which equate to Brah's understanding of what characterises "diaspora space" include Homi Bhabha's "Third Space", Breyten Breytenbach's "Middle World", Leon de Kock's "seam", and Sarah Nuttall's "entanglement".

Bhabha speaks of hybridity being a "Third Space" which "enables other positions to emerge", and it is this liminal space between cultures which "gives rise to something different, something new and unrecognizable, a new area of negotiation of meaning and representation" ("Third Space" 211). Knudsen and Rahbek argue that Bhabha's Third Space "can be seen as a qualifying precursor of the Afropolitan space" (33). It is in Bhabha's liminal space of in-betweenness where new identities are formed, spaces that are, and are not, home. Similarly, Breyten Breytenbach writes about a condition of living beyond exile, which he terms the "Middle World" and which J. U. Jacobs explains as being a "trope for those who share a diasporic consciousness" (158), who are "culturally hybrid and practitioners of nomadic thinking" (159). Breytenbach's Middle World inhabitants, as Jacobs elaborates, have "a fascination for metamorphosis and their consciousness is characterised by multiplicity, not duality" (159). This will be evidenced in the examination of A. Igoni Barrett's novel, *Blackass*, in Chapter 4, and further discussion will be offered in relevant chapters.

Leon de Kock's "seam" is a sewing metaphor he uses for "the site of a joining together that also bears the mark of the suture" ("South Africa" 276), a site where "difference and sameness" (277) can come together. In a country such as South Africa, which suffers from binary overload that includes polarities such as black/white, rich/poor, educated/uneducated), the seam is a useful image for joining those opposites, as will be seen for instance through examples offered in Chapter 2.

Sarah Nuttall's concept of "entanglement", of particular use for this project, is concerned with constantly shifting interweavings, which she describes in these words:

> Entanglement is a condition of being twisted together or entwined, involved with; it speaks of an intimacy gained, even if it was resisted, or ignored or uninvited. It is a term which may gesture towards a relationship or set of social relationships that is complicated, ensnaring, in a tangle, but which also implies a human foldedness. It works with difference and sameness but also with their limits, their predicaments, their moments of complication. (*Entanglement* 1)

Nuttall proposes "entanglement" as a metaphor for bringing together sites or relationships which were formerly considered separate, such as black and white, as was seen with de

Kock's "seam". Nuttall's concept of entanglement will be deployed in the analysis of primary texts in Chapter 2. All of these terms – diaspora space, Third Space, Middle World, the seam, entanglement – relate to the transnational subject, who is to be found in such spaces.

To be clear, the term diaspora, as it will be used it in this thesis, refers to various peoples originating from Africa, who remain connected to Africa, and who reside either within Africa or in other countries world-wide, and whose identity formation is affected in a number of ways due to a sense of dislocation. Afrodiasporic identity formation that results from multi-dimensional flows will be further examined in the next section with reference to the literary figure of the flâneur.

1.2 Literary Perspectives of Flânerie and the Postcolonial Pedestrian

> Cosmopolitans are the flaneurs of our age, walking the cities of the world, convinced that their identity can only be mirrored through their engagement with others, sure of their mastery of global cultural flows and their secure place within it. (Gikandi, "Between Roots" 32)

While Gikandi here talks about cosmopolitans and actual people, the flâneur that will be considered in this thesis is *a construct, a literary figure* whose understanding of the urban environment comes about by means of walking, step by step, through the city. The texts that will be analysed in this thesis provide examples of the literary flâneur, and therefore highlight the sociological phenomenon of flânerie. While the flâneur can indeed be an actual, living figure, this thesis is interested specifically in how this figure interacts with the environment as seen in the literature. Simon Gikandi sees the flâneur as a global cosmopolitan who interacts with others in the modern metropolis. This is in line with Kwame Anthony Appiah's insistence on sustaining "communities of difference" (*Cosmopolitanism* 105). Nineteenth century urbanisation and industrialisation were key to the emergence of the flâneur, and thus the birth of the archetypal flâneur is closely linked to the birth of the modern city. The flâneur in literature was born at a moment of high imperialism, when Europe had colonised much of the rest of the world. During this time, the wealth and growth of the metropole was predicated on the success of empire, that is, of the subjugation of the colonies. Thus, the middle-class, white, dandy flâneur of nineteenth century Paris is a product of colonialism. In order to understand the growing metropole, the flâneur of that era walked the city and observed the surroundings. The flâneur (then generally male) often went on to record his observations in a literary or artistic form. While these early flâneurs were actual people, the focus in this thesis will fall on fictional characters and / or writers who exhibit qualities of flânerie.

Some scholars write about the need for a different word, such as simply "pedestrian"[10] or the Spanish "*callejeralo*", to define a new flâneur that reflects the mutability of this literary figure (see Suárez 864), while Mary Gluck "distinguish[es] the 'popular' from the 'avant-garde' flâneur" (in Boutin 128). As Aimée Boutin notes, the flâneur has undergone a transformation (129). These ideas point to the existence in literature of a new type of flâneur: a contemporary, global and transnational figure that appears as an updated figure given the changes the urban environment has seen over the last two centuries. In this thesis the word flâneur / flâneuse is used to refer to a contemporary literary figure who is a different figure to the original, itinerant flâneur made popular by Charles Baudelaire and Walter Benjamin. While it may be unnecessary to change the word 'flâneur', it is appropriate to revise and update the word's meaning to reflect how this figure has evolved in the literature.

The experience of walking the city has been described by Michel de Certeau (1984) as a "weaving" together of places, and for him it is by walking that one gains an understanding of the urban environment. Sarah Nuttall elaborates on this further when she explains that "de Certeau's key insight was that people use cities by constructing who they are, producing a narrative of identity" ("City Forms" 741). The human subject, while walking the city, creates a unique narrative, without "know[ing] how their individual paths affect the city as a whole" and thus they "make a sentence or a story of particular places in the city, while the city is not available as an overview – the city is the way that it is walked" (Nuttall, "City Forms" 741).

Nuttall makes clear the symbiotic relationship between the walker who writes the city step by step and goes on to decipher it through each step and the very space itself which is walked. Said differently, with reference to self, space and place, Emma O'Shaughnessy explains that "the term *place* in fact departs from the concept of lived space" since it "refer[s] to how exchanges between subject and space produce and invest empty spaces with meaning, and how these in turn influence a person's sense of self" (33). Similarly, Senem Yildirim highlights the idea that the "relation between the act of walking and the formation of space is co-dependent" (30).

De Certeau "explores walking as a mode of political resistance" (Middleton 579) and also notes how cities are designed in ways that afford control by those in power – citing for instance the former towers of the World Trade Centre. There are those who can view the city from above, in a Foucauldian panopticon sense, or a god's-eye view, and those who only see it from below at street level. In *The Practice of Everyday Life*, de Certeau suggests that it is

[10] Isabel Carrera Suárez adopts Marsha Meskimmon's "concept of the pedestrian" where the pedestrian is one who "differs from the flâneur in locatedness and physicality" (856).

pedestrians who create the city by walking about, applying their imagination to what they see, thus giving meaning to these spaces:

> Their story begins on ground level, with footsteps. They are myriad, but do not compose a series. They cannot be counted because each unit has a qualitative character, a style of tactile apprehension, and kinesthetic appropriation. Their swarming mass is an innumerable collection of singularities. Their *intertwined* paths give their shape to spaces. They *weave* places together. In that respect, pedestrian movements form one of these 'real systems whose existence in fact makes up the city.' They are not localized; it is rather they that spatialize. They are no more inserted within a container than those Chinese characters speakers sketch out on their hands with their fingertips. (97, italics mine)

Viewed this way, those who walk the city give it life, and are part of its very bloodstream. Similar to entanglement, the intertwinings and weavings that de Certeau speaks of here echo strongly with themes of transnationalism and diaspora that run through this project. By viewing the city on foot, one is wholly immersed in the space, somewhat different to how it might be seen through the window of a moving vehicle or from the top of a high-rise building. The Afropolitan flâneur, on the other hand, does not necessarily only walk the city on foot, but also sees it from a distance as a voyager from inside an aeroplane or from a height through the windows of high-rise buildings. Sarah Nuttall, referring to Zygmunt Baumann's take on city walkers, notes that the flâneur comes in many guises: the "tourist", "player", the "vagabond or vagrant" and the "commuter" ("City Forms" 26). At the beginning of the novel *Open City*, Teju Cole's narrator, reminiscing on how he started walking New York City, muses as follows:

> Not long before this aimless wandering began, I had fallen into the habit of watching bird migrations from my apartment, and I wonder now if the two are connected. […] Each time I caught sight of geese swooping in formation across the sky, I wondered how our life below might look from their perspective […]. (*OC* 3–4).

If it is through walking in the city as the flâneur does, that the connection between identity and space is foregrounded, Cole takes this one step further by allowing his narrator-flâneur to imagine a bird's eye view of the city, affording him a bit of distance. Vehicular or aerial flânerie, while an option for some, is different for individuals driving to those who are passengers. For example, in their article "Afropolis: From Johannesburg", Sarah Nuttall and Achille Mbembe write the city of Johannesburg as experienced by them while driving in a car:

> Surface and depth: a city of shallows and depths, surfaces that have forgotten their depths […]. A city of surfaces, capitalist brashness, in which only some want to remember, or in which the past appears fleetingly, glimpsed as parodic reference or embedded in a space or a face, an ash drift, an exfoliation. (286–87)

As one drives, there is a limited way of seeing, as described above, and this reflects the ephemeral quality of the city as it is caught simply in a flash. Driving provides a different perspective to walking, and the difference is that of "surface" and "depth". Driving the city is more like skimming a book, whereas walking is more like careful reading that provides the individual with a deeper understanding of the book.

Clearly, the flâneur continues to be an interesting figure in urban discourse ever since the emergence of the figure in 19th century France. By means of critically engaging with a range of definitions from various sources, over the next few pages, conventional notions of what the flâneur is, will be challenged through the argument that the practice of flânerie is not exclusive, and is a practice that occurs in the current day irrespective of place, race, culture, gender, or mode (on foot or by car). While the act of flânerie can be seen as a sociological phenomenon, and indeed the flâneur can be an actual individual who walks the streets, the focus in this thesis is on *the flâneur as a literary construct*.

There appears to be a resurgence of interest in the figure of the flâneur in literature, as evidenced by the publication of titles such as Edmund White's *The Flâneur: A Stroll Through the Paradoxes of Paris* (2001) and Lauren Elkin's more recently published *Flâneuse* (2016).[11] Testament to the fascination with the topic of flânerie, in 2017 at The Jewish Museum in New York there was an exhibition titled "The Arcades: Contemporary Art and Walter Benjamin" which explores the ongoing relevance of Benjamin's incomplete magnum opus[12] which dealt, amongst other things, in some detail with the original Parisian flâneur. Further evidence of this figure's popularity is "Gallery Flâneur" in Adelaide, Australia, which is "dedicated to Adelaide's urban wanderers and explorers"[13] with contemporary art exhibitions running back-to-back. This revival of the figure of the flâneur is topical, but what exactly is a *flâneur* and what is the meaning of *flânerie*?

It is by means of a *literary* device – the figure of the flâneur – that contemporary urban identities as they appear in selected literary texts in the next four chapters will be

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[11] Edmund White's 2001 book, *The Flâneur: A Stroll Through the Paradoxes of Paris*, is a personal account of his walks in Paris, while Keith Tester's *The Flâneur* (1994) provides a selection of essays by experts in the field.
[12] For more on this, see <http://thejewishmuseum.org/exhibitions/the-arcades-contemporary-art-and-walter-benjamin>.
[13] More on the Gallery Flâneur can be seen at <https://splashadelaide.com.au/project/gallery-flaneur>.

explored. While the specific flâneurs that are identified in the primary texts are mainly characters in novels, sometimes the literary flâneur is not a construct, but the author him/herself. An understanding of the flâneur's literary genesis will help clarify how such a figure remains relevant in literature today, and how flânerie relates to the postcolonial, diasporic (and perhaps even post-diasporic) urban environment.[14] From street wanderer to solitary onlooker, the figure of the flâneur has traditionally been associated with nineteenth century Paris, as interpreted by Walter Benjamin with reference to Charles Baudelaire's poetic descriptions of how a flâneur strolled through the streets and arcades of the city. Historically, it was thanks to Baron Georges Haussmann,[15] commissioned by Napoleon III, that the city of Paris was restructured, thus altering the way the inhabitants of the city negotiated shared public spaces such as the boulevards, cafés and arcades. The flâneur's act of walking and observing urban life came to be known as flânerie. With reference to an 1808 dictionary of "popular usage", Priscilla Parkhurst Ferguson notes that a flâneur was defined by d'Hautel as "a lazybones, a loafer, a man of insufferable idleness, who doesn't know where to carry his trouble and his boredom" (24). Ferguson also notes that the first recorded usage of the word arose from as early as 1585 in France (39). The more cultured and narcissistic "bourgeois flâneur" made his first "public appearance" in 1806 in an anonymous 32-page pamphlet (Ferguson 26). The flâneur was not yet perceived as a real, living individual. According to Elizabeth Wilson, the nineteenth century *Encyclopaedie Larousse* suggests that the term 'flâneur' might have originated from the Irish word for 'libertine' but the editors of *Larousse* also "devoted a long article to the flâneur, whom they defined as a loiterer, a fritterer away of time, associated with the new urban pastimes of shopping and crowd-watching" (75). However, the new *Larousse Encyclopédie en ligne* (launched online in 2008) offers merely the following definition for flâneur: "Qui flâne, aime à flâner; promeneur"[16] meaning one who enjoys the act of flânerie or promenading.[17] This definition is useless, but, as pointed out by Keith Tester, since "the *flâneur* is fundamentally a figure who can only be known through the activities of *flânerie*, a certain mystery is intrinsic to his identity" (7). This mystery itself is an indication perhaps that an activity such as flânerie

[14] In her article "The Stranger Flaneuse and the Aesthetics of Pedestrianism", Isabel Carrera Suárez employs the term "post-diasporic" to denote a "context of diverging diasporic groups, whose second-generation experiences go beyond reference to a homeland and are more locally grounded" (854–855).
[15] According to Katheryn Kramer and John Rennie Short, "Hausmannization destroyed true flânerie" as a range of new "commercial devices […] restricted creative wandering through the streets" (328).
[16] From <http://www.larousse.fr/encyclopedie/rechercher?q=flaneur#g4YrcVbH1VGfpwpX.99>.
[17] For a detailed discussion on Elizabeth Wilson's useful etymology of the word "flâneur", see Kinga Araya's article "Walking the Wall: Global Flâneuse with Local Dilemmas".

requires some re-defining in a twenty-first century context. Literary representations of the flâneur, as seen in the next four chapters, indicate that contemporary flânerie is evident in one way or another through characters encountered in the streets of major metropoles world-wide. Moreover, a particular type of flâneur – an Afropolitan flâneur – will be defined in this chapter, in keeping with the concepts of globalism,[18] mobility and transnationalism as they appear in the literary texts.

In sum, then, the flâneur as s/he is interpreted in this thesis is an individual in a literary text who walks, generally removed from the multitude, gazing over what is to be seen, perhaps even asserting a sense of ownership and belonging, despite an air of detachment. This literary figure of the flâneur can be a character in a novel, such Azure in K. Sello Duiker's *Thirteen Cents* (discussed in Chapter 3) or Chris Abani's Elvis, who is the protagonist in *GraceLand* (discussed in Chapter 4). Less commonly, the flâneur can be the author, such as Mark Gevisser, whose memoir, *Lost and Found in Johannesburg*, is discussed in Chapter 2. Through the ordinary act of walking, the flâneur observes and records those observations in some way, by saving them to memory, writing them down, drawing or even photographing particular people or scenes in the street. An example of a photo-flâneur appears in Chapter 4 in the form of author and photographer Teju Cole, whose novel *Every Day is for the Thief* contains a number of his photographs of Lagos. It is the act of recording or documenting what is seen in relation to him/herself that proves that observation is critical, and in that sense the flâneur's seemingly aimless and directionless walking enables voyeurism – a paradoxically alienated participation in city life. Flânerie is an activity that yields tangible results in literature and art. An analysis of the literature forms the main focus in Chapters 2 to 5, through which the figure of the Afropolitan flâneur is explored in detail.

In order to better understand the literary figure of the flâneur, some historical detail is necessary. Three authors whose writings on flânerie served as precursors to the modern day flâneur include Honoré de Balzac, Charles Baudelaire and Walter Benjamin, to whom the focus now shifts.

1.2.1 The three 'B's of flânerie: Balzac, Baudelaire and Benjamin

In the early 1800s the flâneur was regarded as a lowlife type, with a popular definition being as indicated earlier, a "loafer, a man of insufferable idleness" (Ferguson 24). This early

[18] Globalism is not the same thing as globalisation. Globalism describes "a world which is characterized by networks of connections that span multi-continental differences", whereas globalisation is a process, which "focuses on the forces, the dynamism, the speed" of the changes of globalism (Nye n. pag.).

flâneur, who enjoyed comfort and routine, differed from later versions, who exhibited a flair for spontaneity (Wilson; Ferguson). Honoré de Balzac offered a description of flânerie in his *Physiologie du Mariage* which appeared originally in 1829 as follows:

> *Flâner est une science, c'est la gastronomie de l'oeil. Se promener, c'est végéter. Flâner, c'est vivre.* (34)
>
> [To walk as a flâneur is a science, it is the gastronomy of the eye. To stroll is to vegetate. To *flâner* is to live. (translation mine)]

The difference to which Balzac alludes here is that mere strolling does not involve careful observation, whereas flâneuring involves the active gaze while walking, thus it is an enlivening experience. It is thanks to Balzac's influence that the artist-flâneur gained prominence (Ferguson 29). During his period, Balzac's flâneur embodied modernity, specifically in the vibrant and dynamic city of Paris. Balzac's flâneur was "anonymous, devoid of personality, unremarkable in the crowd […] very much like an author in search of characters and intrigue" (Ferguson 28). This flâneur maintained a social distance, as evidenced by the illustrations in *Physiologie du Mariage* which show the flâneur dressed very differently to others in the crowd with whom "he certainly cannot be involved" (Ferguson 31). The Balzacian flâneur, Ferguson adds, is imaginative and knowledgeable, "a living guidebook" (31) who is, however, at risk of being overwhelmed by the city (33). This flâneur nonetheless continued to stroll spontaneously and without direction through the city streets, distantly observing people and places, recording with a realist's eye. Today, two centuries later, this flâneur continues to appear in literature, and Afropolitan examples of this are provided in the works of Teju Cole and Ivan Vladislavić, amongst others, as will be discussed in more detail in later chapters. These contemporary flâneurs also inherited some of their literary citiness from the writings of Charles Baudelaire in the nineteenth century.

Charles Baudelaire, French poet and essayist credited with coining the term "*modernité*", brought the streets of the city of Paris to life through his writing, responding in particular to the modern developments taking place in the surrounding spaces. In the words of Heather Acott, "[a]s *a literary construct*, the flâneur owes its origins to the Parisian prowler of Baudelaire […] an anonymous consumer of spectacle who looks without touching but who retains some sympathy for the outcasts of the city; part detective, part sociologist, part journalist, part rogue male free from domestic constraints" ("Nat Nakasa" n. pag., emphasis mine). Examples of the early literary flâneur appear in Baudelaire's 1857 collection of poetry titled *Les Fleurs du Mal,* in particular the "Parisian Scenes" section. Later, in Baudelaire's

seminal essay "The Painter of Modern Life"[19] which has been much cited as one of the earliest texts and main works relating to the flâneur (Tester 1–2; Wolff 40; Minnaard 82), he provides the most well-known description of the flâneur whose "passion and […] profession are to become one flesh with the crowd" (9). Of particular interest at the time was the manner in which the flâneur interpreted the commodified spaces of the imperial centre. In "The Painter of Modern Life", Baudelaire describes the "dandy"[20] as one who has "no other status but that of cultivating the idea of beauty in their own persons, of satisfying their passions, of feeling and thinking" (8), while the flâneur that Baudelaire describes is the realist painter, Constantin Guys, and his essay is a reflection on how flânerie itself could be said to define modernity. In the words of Baudelaire:

> For the perfect *flâneur*, for the passionate spectator, it is an immense joy to set up house in the heart of the multitude, amid the ebb and flow of movement, in the midst of the fugitive and the infinite. To be away from home and yet to feel oneself everywhere at home; to see the world, to be at the centre of the world, and yet to remain hidden from the world – such are a few of the slightest pleasures of those independent, passionate, impartial natures which the tongue can but clumsily define. The spectator is a *prince* who everywhere rejoices in his incognito. ("Painter" 9)

Indeed, such princely anonymity belongs to the poet flâneur who has the power to take charge of his own movements in spaces of his choosing. Catherine Nesci argues that a "male projection of the feminized, sexualized city is clearly at work here" ("Memory" 78) since women of that era could not walk the streets equally freely. Although detached or separate from the crowd, as a solitary figure that does not join in a group, the flâneur is nonetheless a part of the environment, both in and of the crowd, which might seem contradictory. He is the "lover of life [that] makes the whole world his family" (Baudelaire "Painter" 9). The detachment allows the flâneur the space to observe objectively, while he remains connected to the crowd. When Baudelaire first mentions this particular flâneur figure in his essay, he withholds his name and refers to the painter as "M. G.", for "Monsieur Guys", who had requested that his name be suppressed. Baudelaire writes of M. G., who also represents other such artist figures:

> Observer, philosopher, *flâneur* – call him what you will; but whatever words you use in trying to define this kind of artist, you will certainly be led to

[19] Although Baudelaire's essay, "The Painter of Modern Life" was written between November 1859 and February 1860, it was only published in instalments in 1863 in the French daily newspaper *Le Figaro.*
[20] An updated, African version of the dandy can be seen in the figure of the *sapeur*, who features in the discussion of Alain Mabanckou's *Blue White Red* in Chapter 5.

> bestow upon him some adjective which you could not apply to the painter of eternal, or at least more lasting things, of heroic or religious subjects. Sometimes he is a poet; more often he comes closer to the novelist or the moralist; he is the painter of the passing moment and of all the suggestions of eternity that it contains. (Baudelaire "Painter" 5)

It is evident then that Baudelaire romanticised this individual, as indicated in his words which glorify the "painter" as being able to capture fugitive moments of eternity. This same flâneur Baudelaire likened to "a mirror as vast as the crowd itself" or even "a kaleidoscope gifted with consciousness" ("Painter" 9), The connection between painting, literature and flânerie is fairly clear in Baudelaire's descriptions of Guys, and similarly, while literature remains the primary focus of this project, it will at times be crucial to consider visual texts that are included in some of the primary texts, thus entailing an ekphrastic approach.[21] Ekphrasis, simply put, is the literary or narrative description of an artistic creation.

When describing the flâneur as a "man of the world", Baudelaire makes mention of Edgar Allan Poe's 1840 short story "The Man of the Crowd", set in the streets of London, where the crowd is symbolic of the constantly evolving city.[22] Poe "served as inspiration for Baudelaire's notion of both the crowd and the poet-artist who observes it" (Mazlish 50). It is worth noting that Poe's detective Dupin (who made his first appearance in an 1841 short story "The Murders in the Rue Morgue") can also be considered a flâneur to some extent because Dupin is a fictional character in a literary text who has "an appetite for urban observation" (Brand 95).[23] As mentioned by Rob Shields, the flâneur "is like a detective seeking clues who reads people's characters not only from the physiognomy of their faces but via a social physiognomy of the streets" (63).

For Baudelaire, literature is akin to painting, for both are worthy forms of art. This resonates once more with Baudelaire writing of the flâneur, where he noted that "[t]he crowd is his element, as the air is that of the birds and water of fishes" ("Painter" 9). The flâneur may be a fictional character, an artist, or the author of a book. Though solitary and detached, the flâneur is, paradoxically, quite at home when immersed in a crowd in the city. The flâneur, whether fictional or real, is able to map the urban surroundings from the inside and

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[21] For instance, Mark Gevisser includes maps at the beginning of his memoir. Besides cartography being a visual aid, so too is photography and cinema. Susan Sontag (in *On Photography*) writes about how the camera has become the tool of the flâneur, and this is exemplified for instance in *Every Day is for the Thief,* where Teju Cole includes some of his own photographs.

[22] Baudelaire translated Poe's stories from English into French in *Nouvelles Histoires Extraordinaires,* published in 1857 (see Murail, "Beyond" 269).

[23] For a discussion on Poe's detective flâneur, see James V. Werner, "The Detective Gaze: Edgar A. Poe, the Flaneur, and the Physiognomy of Crime" in *American Transcendental Quarterly* as well as Chapter 5 of Dana Brand's book *The Spectator and the City in Nineteenth-Century American Literature.*

stay finely connected to the city which generates stories of interest for the flâneur to share. In this manner the flâneur is both immersed and detached from the city since "he is always passing on and through, never remaining still in space or time" (Murail, "Beyond" 23). In *Le Spleen de Paris,* Baudelaire writes that his poetry finds its roots in the "*croisement*" or criss-cross of the countless "*rapports*" or interrelations that make up the city (Murail, "Beyond" 221). Estelle Murail draws on Baudelaire's idea of criss-crossing to explain that the flâneur's apparent disconnection is due to a "specific gaze, his permanent state of in-betweenness or 'out-of-jointness' [which] stems from his crossing nature" (Murail, "Beyond" 23).

Almost a century after Baudelaire wrote about the flâneur and provided examples of the literary figure in his poetry, Walter Benjamin's essays on Baudelaire depict the modernist, nineteenth century Parisian flâneur, who, while walking, becomes a "chronicler of his and his own epoch's misery and a witness to his times, as a rigorous observer, an amateur geographer and historian" (Ivanchikova 20). The negativity of the "epoch's misery" reflected here relates in part to the social conditions of the time as well as to Baudelaire's own gloominess and suffering. The flâneur's act of walking is described by Benjamin as "botanizing on the asphalt" (*Charles Baudelaire* 36), an oft-quoted phrase used by scholars when describing this activity (Clark 2000; Solnit 2001; Acott 2009; Psarras, 2014) evoking the meticulous observation of a city in harmony with nature and the environment. Ironically, the very nature of cities is a turn away from nature to create a false natural ambiance. The city landscape possesses its own inherent natural beauty as a number of the flâneurs in the next few chapters will testify. This metaphor of flâneur as botanist is useful since the work of a botanist is precise and time-consuming, involving particular attention to detail in nature, as do the observations of the flâneur in his/her environment. This also echoes the work of a detective, who spends much time exploring the scene of a crime and collecting clues. It is work that can take not just hours, but perhaps days or weeks. Observing, reading, writing and carefully recording are thus some methods employed by the flâneur to interpret the city.

The flâneur, as a careful observer, records observations meticulously, in encyclopaedic fashion as would a botanist, and is never in a great hurry. Indeed, Benjamin elaborates on this relaxed tempo thus: "The flâneurs liked to have the turtles set the pace for them. If they had had their way, progress would have been obliged to accommodate itself to this pace" (*Charles Baudelaire* 54). The nature-related metaphors continue in Benjamin's writing elsewhere:

> Not to find one's way in a city may well be uninteresting and banal. It requires ignorance – nothing more. But to lose oneself in a city – as one loses oneself in a forest – that calls for quite a different schooling. Then, signboards and street names, passers-by, roofs, kiosks, and bars must speak to the wanderer, like a twig snapping under his feet in the forest, like the startling call of a bittern in the distance, like the sudden stillness of a clearing with a lily standing erect at its center. (Benjamin, *Selected* 598)

There are some strong Romantic notions here, where a city and a forest are paralleled. The sounds of the contemporary city are largely those of traffic and the comings and goings at busy intersections. Both the flâneur and the naturalist observe their surroundings while moving, on foot, through their environment, effectively "botanizing" or exploring the life of a particular environment. As Walter Benjamin noted, it is the streets "that are the dwelling place of the eternally restless being who is eternally on the move, the being that experiences, learns, knows, and imagines as much between the houses as the individual between his four walls" (*Selected* 265). Since the flâneur traditionally explored public rather than private spaces, s/he is the ideal embodiment through which to interpret how social identities are formed or transformed.

In the twentieth century, it was through Walter Benjamin's brilliant and expansive *The Arcades Project*[24] that Baudelaire's flâneur was resuscitated as Benjamin explored the effect of urban life on the human subject, detailing the relationship between the writer and the urban environment. Benjamin's incomplete project was essentially the history of the city of Paris put together as a mosaic of fact, fiction, snapshots, drawings, letters and more. For Benjamin, the literary figure of the flâneur was an interpreter of modern life, a bohemian boulevardier who was deeply affected by the urban environment.

As noted earlier, not only are characters in novels flâneurs, but the author of a text can also be a flâneur. David Frisby elaborates on the literary production of the flâneur, thus referring to the author-flâneur:

> The flâneur and the activity of flânerie is also associated with Benjamin's work not merely with observation and reading but also with production – the production of distinctive kinds of texts. The flâneur may therefore not merely be an observer or even a decipherer; the flâneur can also be a producer, a producer of literary texts (including painting), a producer of narratives and reports, a producer of journalistic texts, a producer of sociological texts. ("The Flâneur" 83)

[24] At the time of Benjamin's death in 1940, *The Arcades Project* was still unfinished. As noted by Aimée Boutin, the "posthumous publication of *The Arcades Project* [by Benjamin] in German in 1982 and in English in 1999 gave new impetus to the study of flânerie" (128).

Here Frisby notes the importance of production with regard to the flâneur, emphasizing that flânerie is more than simply strolling aimlessly: it also has long-term textual results. As an observer who walks the streets, voyeuristically noting the movements of other individuals in the crowd, the flâneur closely examines the nature of the urban environment, the identity of the city and its inhabitants who create that identity. In many ways, as suggested earlier, the flâneur is a kind of private detective, looking and listening in order to put everything together to make some kind of sense of what has gone before. Indeed, as described by Benjamin, the flâneur is "the essential figure of the modern urban spectator, an amateur detective and investigator of the city" (*Charles Baudelaire* 129). Not only is the flâneur a fictional character in literature, but the flâneur can also be a detective, spectator, writer, painter, photographer or journalist, who captures the city's moments in time through the senses such as touch, sight and sound, as "seen and unseen, the flâneur observes and is observed" (Malone 84). Invoking Walter Benjamin, Susan Buck-Morss suggests that the flâneur's purpose is not only to loiter aimlessly but to commodify the city, to write about it, and sell the product (111).[25]

Some critics and scholars have pointed out that "the flâneur is invariably seen as a bygone figure […] living and dying on the streets of Paris alone" (Tester 13) as a result of Benjamin and Baudelaire's portrayals of the literary flâneur in Paris. Other scholars identify flânerie in the works of American writers: Dana Brand, for instance, writes about the flâneur figure in the works of Edgar Allen Poe and Walt Whitman.[26] Aimée Boutin argues that "[t]he clear impact of the Benjaminian approach […] can be felt in the reduced sensuality of flânerie in the critical field today" and yet she adds that Benjamin nonetheless reflected a "sensuality of the everyday" in his 1929 essay "The Return of the Flâneur" (128). These apparent contradictions add to the eclecticism of the concept of the flâneur.

Historically, the flâneur figure has appeared in literature as male, white, privileged, and as someone sufficiently comfortable financially to be able to afford free time to walk idly in the streets. This is not necessarily the case with the contemporary literary flâneur, however. Despite these specificities, the flâneur figure has always been dynamic, evolving differently depending on his particular geographical, historical and cultural surroundings. For instance, derivative of the Parisian flâneur at the turn of the twentieth century in New York,

[25] This sense of commodification finds echoes in some interpretations of Afropolitanism, as will be evidenced in the next section.
[26] Brand further points out that while Poe, an American author, depicted flânerie in "Man of the Crowd", the story itself was set in London (in Malone 84–85).

foreigners became the new flâneurs in American literature, as immigration brought diverse people to the city (Festa 28). For these migrants in literature, walking was not a luxurious choice but rather it was flight, by necessity. Cross-continentally, in places such as Johannesburg and Cape Town in the twenty-first century, an influx of inter-African migrants brought new life to those cities, and this can be seen, for instance through the flâneuse character in Patricia Schonstein-Pinnock's *Skyline*. The narrator-flâneur in *Skyline* is not strictly speaking a flâneur, but rather a *flâneuse*, the female form of the literary urban stroller.

1.2.2 (En)gendering flânerie

Throughout this thesis, I refer to the flâneur in a non-gendered fashion, incorporating in its meaning the rarer, feminine form of the word, flâneuse. Historically, as has been evidenced already, the flâneur has invariably been described as a male figure in literature, since women in eighteenth and nineteenth century Europe generally lacked the same access to the streets as afforded to men, and were considered by some men as merely objects of the male gaze. As pointed out by Janet Wolff, flânerie had been solely a male preserve because nineteenth-century women walking aimlessly "risked being seen as prostitutes touting for business" (in Acott, "Tactics" 8). Susan Buck-Morss agrees with Elizabeth Wilson who argues that "prostitution was indeed the female version of flânerie" (in Malone 81). In fact, Baudelaire himself did not conceive of a female flâneur, since for him, while a woman was "far more than just the female of Man", she was "a kind of idol, stupid perhaps, but dazzling and bewitching, who holds wills and destinies suspended on her glance" ("Painter" 30). Thus, for Baudelaire, a woman was merely an object of the male gaze and "unable to enjoy the same freedoms as men" (Dreyer and McDowall 39). Referring to Baudelaire and Benjamin's interpretations of the modern world, Polish-born Kinga Araya,[27] conceptual artist and scholar, notes that "modernity in the last exhaustive years of the *fin de siècle* was obsessed with the female body" (64). An example of this was that the only female character considered as an alter ego of the flâneur in the nineteenth century was "a prostitute, in French called *peripateticienne*, the one who walks the city" (Araya 64). The term "flâneuse," as explained by Lauren Elkin, rarely appears in most French dictionaries, and the *Dictionnaire Vivant de la Langue Française* defines "*flâneuse*" as a kind of lounge chair, suggesting that "the only kind of curious idling a woman does is lying down" (Elkin 7). It is telling that the term

[27] In the introduction to her "Walking the Wall" article, Kinga Araya explains that she defected from Poland by "simply *walking* away from a student trip in Florence, Italy" (55, emphasis mine).

‘streetwalker’ refers to a woman who walks the streets, since this has obvious “connotations of prostitution” (Suárez 854). Even now, two centuries later, as pointed out by Araya, a woman walking can still be subjected to “derogatory and sexist remarks” (69) in certain parts of the globe. This invisibility of the flâneuse is reflected in the literature. Novels or other literary texts that feature characters who are flâneurs and female remain uncommon. Out of the twelve primary texts selected for this study, only one of them – *Skyline* – features a character who is a flâneuse. The lack of visibility of women walking the urban landscape as flâneuses is reflected through the same invisibility in literature.

Flânerie practised by women and recognised by both men and women today, however, remains largely problematic, for a number of reasons, as women cannot walk aimlessly alone in public spaces with ease. Elfriede Dreyer and Estelle McDowall note that “due to women’s position in society, they cannot enjoy the same freedoms as men” (39) and they elaborate on the necessity of being assertive when walking the street. Similarly, Meaghan Malone points out that “with its prototype a European male, the flâneur translates un-easily across gender or geographic boundaries” (87). While reviewing contemporary writings on walking practices, Deirdre Heddon and Cathy Turner point out that the “invisibility of women in what appears as a canon of walking is conspicuous; where they are included, it is often as an ‘exception’ to an unstated norm, represented by a single chapter in a book or even a footnote” (225). They go on to cite Merlin Coverley’s *Psychogeography* (which will be reviewed later in this chapter) as a case in point, since the only perambulating woman mentioned in his book happens to be André Breton’s character, a prostitute named Nadja. As noted by Boutin, “[t]he discourse on the flâneur inevitably assumes his male gender” and yet “women did walk in the city and wrote of their trespasses as flâneuses” and in being denied the “right to […] see, feel, and move about the city […] they were either hypervisible […] or invisible” (128–129). Certainly, women in European cities like Paris in the nineteenth century were not as privileged as men were to amble leisurely as spectators in the crowd. Rebecca Solnit draws attention to the fact that “[w]omen have routinely been punished and intimidated for attempting that most simple of freedoms, taking a walk, because their walking and indeed their very beings have been construed as inevitably, continually sexual in those societies concerned with controlling women’s sexuality” (233).

In her essay on the stranger flâneuse and postcolonial pedestrianism, Isabel Carrera Suárez argues convincingly that “contemporary urban, post-diasporic texts create embodied, located pedestrians, rather than detached flâneurs” (853). Suárez supports her argument by providing examples in a selection of novels written by women and set in cities as vastly

different as Singapore and London. The flâneuse, although little known, was characterised by Nella Larsen's black flâneuse in her 1928 novel *Quicksand,* which foregrounds her Harlem and New York experience. It should also be noted that from the late 1800s it was fashionable for high society women to stroll the streets of New York, however working class women walking in the same streets were seen differently, even mistaken for prostitutes (Festa 97). In fictional London, Virginia Woolf's Mrs Dalloway is the perfect example of a flâneuse in 1925, and Woolf's 1930 essay "Street Haunting" offers yet another example of the early flâneuse in an ever-changing modern city "open[ing] the way to a female flânerie as a form of mobile creativity that blends street-rambling and street-writing" (Nesci, "Memory" 81).

Literary texts such as Woolf's and Larsen's might have appeared daring for their time. "The desiring gaze of the flâneur," says Allyson Kreuiter, "which feminist scholars have considered both controlling and voyeuristic in nature, seems to deny the flâneuse the right to an existence" (5). It was almost impossible for a woman to move freely through the streets "without being sexualised" (Kreuiter 5). This remains the case even today, in some parts of the world, where for many reasons women are not free to walk the streets in the same way that men do. Women are more at risk, more vulnerable to the power and control men seem to possess, thus making the streets unsafe to walk alone. Suárez identifies some of these difficulties as cultural and linguistic, pointing out how the English language has few synonyms for the city walker compared to synonyms available in Spanish, for example, which uses words such as *paseante, caminante*,[28] and several others (854). Additional feminist critiques of the flâneur can be seen in the work of Janet Wolff (1985), Deborah Epstein Nord (1991), Priscilla Parkhurst Ferguson (1994), Elizabeth Wilson (2001), and Helen Scalway (2006), amongst others.

The female flâneuse has lately earned herself more serious attention, as evidenced in Catherine Nesci's book *Le Flâneur et les Flâneuses* (2007) and in cultural critic Lauren Elkin's recently published *Flâneuse* (2016). Elkin depicts the flâneuse as someone who creates the city at the same time as observing it, and proves that this individual need not necessarily be male. Her book, "part cultural meander, part memoir" according to the dust-jacket, gives voice to the previously silenced flâneuse:

[28] The Spanish words "*passeante*" and "*caminante*" translate to mean an individual who walks, yet there is much lost in translation, as these terms relate to different ways of walking and journeying. In an article on the "stranger flâneuse", Isabel Carrera Suárez draws on feminist philosopher Elizabeth Grosz and visual critic Marsha Meskimmon to contend that "contemporary postcolonial, post-diasporic texts create embodied (and at times exposed) *pedestrians* rather than detached modernist *flâneurs*, or even the resistant *walkers* imagined by de Certeau" (856). While this "pedestrian" may certainly be found in some novels by women chroniclers of urbanity, it does not account entirely for the specific brand of transnational flânerie.

> To suggest that there couldn't be a female version of the *flâneur* is to limit the ways women have interacted with the city. We can talk about social mores and restrictions but we cannot rule out the fact that women were there; we must try to understand what walking in the city meant to them. (11)

Women walking the city might observe their surroundings in a different way to men, given the previously mentioned constraints. Elkin herself is a writer who is a flâneuse, as her book is a collection of essays that is part memoir and includes her own actual walks in cities. Other such author-flâneurs include Mark Gevisser, whose memoir is analysed in Chapter 2, and Ivan Vladislavić, whose *Portrait with Keys* is also examined in that chapter. There are many versions of a flâneur as they appear in literature, and these include the migrant and sometimes the refugee, as will be detailed in due course.

1.2.3 The entanglement of Europe and Africa

Simon Gikandi asks the following thought-provoking question:

> Do African refugees become cosmopolitan when they cross boundaries even when it is apparent that many of them are incapable of, or simply disinterested in, the intellectual and aesthetic stance that cosmopolitanism presupposes? ("Between Roots" 31)

What might be the link between European and Afropolitan flânerie? The French literary flâneur, birthed in the modern Western city of nineteenth century Paris, was a figure who, in many ways, came of age on the streets, where he could observe his new and fascinating surroundings following the Enlightenment and as a result of Hausmann's renovation of Paris. As already explained in the preceding sections, this original, quintessential flâneur was white, privileged and male, with the means and the free time to wander aimlessly and carefree across the boulevards and through the newly developing arcades of Paris. How do the ideas of Baudelaire and Benjamin bear any relevance for African and diasporic thinkers? As will be discussed later in this section, recent work by postcolonial scholars has helped to reorient the flâneur in a more transnational and Afropolitan fashion. To reiterate, the flâneur, by definition, wanders yet keeps a distance and remains anonymous and is thus out of place and wanders because he has no place. There is another literary flâneur, of the postcolonial era, who likewise walks the streets, observing his or her surroundings, yet this flâneur is not necessarily white, nor always male, nor necessarily privileged. How did this particular flâneur, an Afropolitan flâneur, 'migrate' from Europe to Africa? Is it conceivable that African cities had their own flâneurs? The flâneur, like the novel, is a European construct, so

why even apply such a term to the African context? How is flânerie relevant more than a century after French writers included flâneurs in their novels and poetry? In order to answer such questions, it is worth considering the entanglement of Africa and Europe through the lens of Avtar Brah's concept of "diaspora space", mentioned earlier in the first section of this chapter. Brah notes that the concept of diaspora space "includes the entanglement, the intertwining of the genealogies of dispersion with those of 'staying put'" (209). This "entanglement" is one of border crossings that are "territorial, political, economic, cultural and psychological" (Brah 209). Regarding the entanglement of Europe and Africa then, it is clear that nothing is fixed, but rather, it is ever-changing. Brah elaborates further that

> [t]he concept of diaspora space decentres the subject position of 'native', 'immigrant', 'migrant', the in/outsider, in such a way that the diasporian is as much a native as the native now becomes a diasporian through this *entanglement*. (242, emphasis mine)

Defining migration ought to be easy. In simple terms, migration involves the crossing of a border or boundary by an individual or group of individuals. Viewed from the point of view of transnational literary theory, however, migration is complex. In her discussion of the term 'diaspora', Avtar Brah notes its overlap "with meanings of words such as migrant, immigrant, expatriate, refugee, guest worker and exile" (16). Brah also notes that while diaspora cannot "replace" these categories, it does "displace" them (16). Displacement, despair, confusion, dislocation, and a need for belonging affect the migrant. While diaspora is concerned with the lived realities of migrancy that involve the desire for a home, the assimilation and integration of the migrant in the host community is an area of concern for anthropologists and sociologists alike. This concern is reflected in the literature examined in this thesis, as the Afropolitan subject is a diasporic individual deeply affected by migrancy.

The term 'migrant' will be used in a broad sense in this thesis to denote an individual who travels and crosses borders for any number of reasons. A 'migrant' can refer to an individual with no permanent abode, such as nomads and drifters, as well as migrant labourers, whose mobility is usually short-term or seasonal. Sometimes the migrant will settle elsewhere or return to their place of origin. Included under the umbrella term 'migrant' are 'immigrant' and 'emigrant'. An 'immigrant' refers to an individual who has undertaken a more permanent change of residency, where immigration "specifies movement 'into' another space" (Gallagher 123). An 'emigrant', on the other hand, is an individual who exits his or her country of origin to settle elsewhere. There are a number of other variations of 'migrant' such as asylum seeker, exile, refugee, expatriate, nomad, vagrant and numerous others which

fall beyond the scope of this study. Experiences which result in despair, confusion, dislocation, and a need for belonging affect all migrants in varying degrees.

Notions of migration and migrancy, according to Mary Gallagher, are privileged "over those of emigration or immigration" in contemporary cultural criticism (122). Gallagher adds that whereas "migrancy is hailed as a euphoric story of enrichment", emigration, immigration and exile are notions that are "seen as implying privation or loss" (122). However, the notion of migrancy is more complex than Gallagher suggests it is. Instead of being "a euphoric story of enrichment", migrancy comprises a range of distinctive and interlinked stories. Accordingly, in the chapters that follow, notably Chapters 3, 4 and 5, stories as they are told by narrators such as the migrant flâneur, the refugee flâneur and the sapeur-flâneur will be explored.[29] It will be seen that the stories told by these Afropolitan migrant flâneurs reflect the fluidity and entanglement of the concepts of home of origin and diasporic home.

The postcolonial flâneur was influenced by, and appropriates, forms from the colonial encounter. In many ways Africa followed Europe in terms of modern urbanity, but imposing the culture of the coloniser on Africa was violent and unjust and continues to have repercussions decades later. The effects of the problematic nature of colonialism are evident, for instance, in the way that even today walking the streets is different for individuals of colour in places such as South Africa or the USA. Examples of this will be provided in the discussion of texts in Chapter 2 through the works of Ivan Vladislavić, Mark Gevisser and Phaswane Mpe.

If it was the topography of the new arcades and city pavements that gave rise to the Parisian flâneur, what might the topography of a changing, urban African city generate? "African urban societies" says Mamadou Diouf, "have evolved considerably through time and space" (346), and he provides examples with reference to 1980s youth culture in Dakar. Similarly, it is the youth in places such as the Democratic Republic of Congo and Nigeria who actively seek change. Fictionalised accounts of such examples of youth seeking change, as presented in Chris Abani's *GraceLand* and Alain Mabanckou's *Blue White Red,* will be analysed in Chapters 4 and 5 respectively. Over time, African cities, such as the burgeoning new city of Johannesburg, have developed their own unique identities. The urban development of Johannesburg was, however, largely one of racial segregation even since

[29] Although migrants and refugees are not generally identities that are associated with flânerie, these, and a range of other identities, are included as categories of Afropolitan flâneur that serve my own specific analysis.

colonial times.[30] The unjust apartheid regime which forcefully segregated races in South Africa continues to have long-lasting negative effects, particularly on previously disadvantaged individuals of colour who were not afforded the same opportunities as their white counterparts. The postcolonial cities that form the Afropolitan flâneur's world of observation in this project are dynamic, fluid, often fragmented and contradictory spaces.

As a symbol of urbanity, the flâneur mirrors the nature of these city spaces, and a contemporary example is the figure of the "*sapeur*" who is described by Sarah Nuttall as a "figure of spatial transition, operating in the interstices of large cultures, participating in a cult of appearance, especially expensive clothing" (*Entanglement* 38). The *sapeur* in literature, who will be examined in more depth in Chapter 5, is but one of many different versions of the Afropolitan flâneur examined in this thesis. As listed in the Introduction, these include the author-flâneur, the migrant flâneur, the flâneuse, the celestial flâneur, the street child flâneur, the refugee flâneur, the *sapeur*, the voyeur, the *dériveur*, the imaginary-flâneur, the contra-flâneur, the *oyinbo* flâneur, the cyber-flâneur and even a stalker-voyeur-flâneur. Other flâneur-type figures besides these which do not appear in the literature analysed here are the Hustler and the Ghanaian *kòbòlò* or street lounger.[31] In the literature, the cities traversed by the myriad of pedestrian figures come with histories that continue to influence the character of the place and its inhabitants. For instance, South Africa's apartheid policy in force prior to democracy largely impacted on the way individuals of colour moved about in the city, and repercussions continue to be felt today, as will be noted in more detail in Chapters 2 and 3.

As mentioned earlier, the flâneur is not always a literary construct, but can be the author him/herself. Journalists are such flâneurs, who often cross boundaries in their search for facts. A South African journalist better known as a short story writer, Herman Charles Bosman (1905–1951), is one such example, as is journalist Nat Nakasa (1937–1965) who shared the "urban concerns" (Acott 20) of his contemporaries. Heather Acott argues that Nakasa was one of South Africa's first literary flâneurs who "walk[ed] the city as an urban spectator" ("Tactics" v). Yet, as Acott points out, Nakasa is not Baudelaire or Benjamin's

[30] In 1923 the Natives (Urban Areas) Act was passed which laid down the principles of racial residential segregation. See more at <http://www.sahistory.org.za/topic/colonial-history-and-development-johannesburg>.

[31] The figure of the *kòbòlò* is an individual of minimal economic means (in contrast to the wealthy European dandy) who has the free time to loiter, whereas the flâneur has leisure time to observe. Nonetheless all these street wanderers – the flâneur, *sapeur*, *kòbòlò*, hustler, as well as the refugee and migrant – play a role as observers. They make use of urban detail and a form of flânerie is thus evident in what they say, record, write or paint. For more on the *kòbòlò*, see Ato Quayson's "Kòbòlò Poetics: Urban Transcripts and Their Reading Publics in Africa".

European flâneur. As a black man in South Africa, Nakasa was marginalised due to the apartheid policy of the time and certainly was not afforded the same privilege or access to the city as fellow white citizens.[32] Both these South African writers (Bosman white and privileged, Nakasa black and marginalised) were well-read and well-travelled, and their interest in urban literature and concepts such as literary flânerie grew out of a keen connection with their environment and a flâneur's scopic gaze.

Two more flâneurs as authors are South African poet Arthur Nortje[33] (1942–1970) and Zimbabwean writer Dambudzo Marechera (1952–1987) who both lived in London as exiles. Marechera embodied a strange mix of community and individuality when, despite personal difficulties and becoming homeless, he moved to London where he lived in a squat and completed writing his first book *The House of Hunger* (1978). Back in Harare in the 1980s, Marechera lived a homeless existence, yet the streets became his home where he remained an outsider. Marechera is an early example of what can be referred to as an Afropolitan flâneur. While these early flâneurs were actual people, the focus in this thesis falls mainly on fictional characters who exhibit qualities of flânerie. The connection between the literary flâneur and the real-life flâneur is in the awareness of the urban environment which is gained through the intimate act of walking.

A recent example of a South African literary flâneur can be found in Phaswane Mpe's *Welcome to our Hillbrow*, which will be discussed in Chapter 2. The protagonist flâneur is a migrant, an outsider who walks the urban environment of Hillbrow, getting to know the place. Reading the first few pages of Mpe's novel is like opening a map of Hillbrow, Johannesburg, and studying the street names. Mpe's flâneur walks the Hillbrow streets observing carefully his surroundings, yet he can also be considered an early version of the Afropolitan subject who has shaped and given voice to a particular view of the surroundings, of the urban environment and happenings of the time, grounded in the spatiality of the apartheid city. There is clearly a reciprocal connection between environment and the human subject: the flâneur assembles meaning from urban space, and in so doing gives meaning to that space.

In African countries such as Angola and Mozambique, the destructive force of Portuguese colonisation left its mark in a number of ways, resulting in civil wars and the

[32] Denied a South African passport, Nat Nakasa took an exit permit which prevented his return, and he died tragically in New York in 1965 (Acott, "Tactics" 1).
[33] Arthur Nortje's poetry appears in a collection titled *Anatomy of Dark*, edited by Dirk Klopper.

forced dispersal of ordinary people. Angolan and Mozambican journals and newspapers[34] at the turn of the twentieth century are evidence of the imposition of the Portuguese language and culture.[35] Mozambican poet and journalist Rui Knopfli (1932–1997) is an early African flâneur, who in many ways experienced the alienation of the flâneur through the pull of Europe and the tug of Africa that he encountered in his daily life.[36] Yet there were other ways that ideas and beliefs were transported from Europe to Africa and vice versa. Stefan Helgesson illustrates this further when he writes about Roberto Schwarz's ship that carried ideas to other lands and Paul Gilroy's metaphor of the ship that represents the "Black Atlantic's transethnic, transnational mode of community" (*Transnationalism* 18). Helgesson compares the ship to "the brown envelope as a synecdoche of postwar print culture in southern Africa […] circulating not only within countries and colonies but likewise to and from Angola, Portugal, France, South Africa, Great Britain, Mozambique, Brazil, and the United States" (*Transnationalism* 18) as it was the contents of the envelope (books, letters, periodicals) which, like the ship, connected people and ideas across great distances. Helgesson's formulation does not privilege Europe as there was not uni-directional influence.

The legacy of this colonial connection was noted some years earlier by Leon de Kock in *Civilising Barbarians* where he discusses the establishment of a cultural orthodoxy through missionaries and printing presses. It was European colonial culture which attempted to shape African intellectuals and, as noted by de Kock, his intention in *Civilising Barbarians* was to "describe the making, in the nineteenth century, of a discursive orthodoxy in English as a basis upon which colonial identity was negotiated and reformulated in ongoing cultural exchanges between Africans and Europeans" (19). Arguably, in some cases this exchange was not reciprocal as colonialism was a dominating force which suppressed individual rights in varying degrees. Nonetheless, cultural influence was often mutual, and agency of the colonised subject did exist.

As a result of the colonial encounter, mimicry and mimesis became necessary strategies of subversion and survival. As Bhabha noted so clearly, it was "from such a

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[34] From Mozambique: *O Brado Africano* (1918–74), *A Voz de Moçambique* (1960–74); from Angola: *Mensagem* (1951–52). See further discussion in Chapter 1 of Helgesson's *Transnationalism in Southern African Literature*.

[35] Helgesson makes the point thus: "The Brazilian and Portuguese literary fields, for example, are sharply distinct from each other although facilitated by an interconnected discourse network of lusophone print. Arguably, by virtue of belonging to the network but not to the two dominant fields, it is in colonial Angola and Mozambique that one is best placed to partake of both Brazilian and Portuguese literature. This applies also to the literary-discursive triangle of Britain, the United States and anglophone South Africa, with South Africa being both marginalized and privileged by not being confined to one field" ("Transnationalism" 12).

[36] Rui Knopfli's poem "*Naturalidade*", which illustrates this connection between European thinking and African living, is discussed in further detail in Chapter 2.

colonial encounter between the white presence and its black semblance, [that] there emerges the question of the ambivalence of mimicry as a problematic of colonial subjection" (*Location of Culture* 129). Elsewhere, in his essay "Of Mimicry and Man", Bhabha argues that mimicry can even be subversive, when it falls in the "area between mimicry and mockery, where the reforming, civilizing mission is threatened by the displacing gaze of its disciplinary double" (127). Clearly, such subversion is not always intentional. Amardeep Singh elaborates that "[u]nder colonialism and in the context of immigration, mimicry is seen as an opportunistic pattern of behaviour", adding that "one copies the person in power, because one hopes to have access to the same power oneself" (n. pag.). Examples of such colonial mimicry will be provided in Chapters 4 and 5 when examining *GraceLand* and *Blue White Red.* As pointed out more recently by Achille Mbembe (when referring to the beginnings of colonial Johannesburg), it was "hard [for Johannesburg] to resist the temptation of mimicry […] imagining itself as an English town and becoming a pale reflection of forms born elsewhere" ("Aesthetics" 38–39). Sometimes the coloniser imposed his culture and sometimes the colonised subject imitated the coloniser. In the case of South Africa, colonialism was followed by a further form of oppression, namely apartheid, which, as mentioned earlier, also influenced the development of urban areas and access to those spaces.[37] Further discussion of mimesis and the development of the city of Johannesburg will be offered in Chapter 2.

The creation of the metropolis as a capital, evident in the imagination of a city such as Cape Town, can be seen as a result of the entanglement between slavery and colonialism. Drawing from a two-volume history of Cape Town which he co-authored, Vivian Bickford-Smith notes in an article on the identity of this city that "Cape Town was established by the Dutch East India Company in the mid-seventeenth century as a way station between Europe and its possessions in the East" (137). As the settlement developed, Bickford-Smith explains, it came to be an "expansive colony complete with slaves, exiled opponents of Dutch colonialism in the East, and subjugated Khoisan" (137). From its early history then, Cape Town was an entanglement of Europe and Africa, the free and the bonded, white and coloured.[38] Such entanglements can bring people together, but can also alienate and divide.

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[37] Apartheid had huge implications on the black subject because of the imposed restrictions of movement, denying black people the freedom to move with ease in public spaces. In South Africa, migrant labourers had little choice but to travel from rural areas to larger cities like Johannesburg and restrictions on movement were highly problematic.

[38] See Vivian Bickford-Smith's article for a more detailed historiographical conceptualisation relating to Cape Town and that city's Malay population.

The Afropolitan flâneur sometimes experiences such alienation, and the notion of 'stranger' is seen very clearly in Teju Cole's novel *Every Day is for the Thief*, for instance, analysed in Chapter 4, where his Nigerian narrator is positioned as an *oyinbo* (white man), thus set apart from everyone else in theé urban environment which he used to know so well before his departure and subsequent return. A similar sense of alienation is evident in A. Igoni Barrett's Kafkaesque novel *Blackass*, also discussed in Chapter 4, where the Lagosian protagonist wakes up one morning to discover he has turned into a white man. In Patricia Schonstein-Pinnock's *Skyline*, which is analysed in Chapter 3, the young narrator is a flâneuse who is detached in a different way, given that her observations centre around the immigrants and refugees she encounters in the block of flats in central Cape Town where she lives. Similarly, Mark Gevisser, the author-flâneur of *Lost and Found in Johannesburg*, is a detached observer for various reasons as will be seen in the next chapter which also looks at Ivan Vladislavić's *Portrait with Keys*. What all these novels have in common is an Afropolitan flâneur, whether s/he is the author, the protagonist or the narrator. In many of these texts, matters to do with race loom large, and the manner this is dealt with by the authors will be discussed in more depth in the separate chapters.

The term "postcolonial flâneur" has been called into use by several scholars over the past two decades (Shields 1994; Williams 1997; Gikandi 2010; Minnaard 2013; Bartosch 2016; and Hartwiger 2016) and can be seen as a link between the nineteenth century European and twenty-first century Afropolitan flâneur. The term postcolonial refers to a critique of colonialism, and so by extension, the postcolonial flâneur offers a critique of colonialism. Such critiques, in the form of an ongoing decolonisation process, will be evident in the discussion of some of the literary texts over the next few chapters. Alexander Hartwiger points out that the gaze of the postcolonial flâneur is different to that of the Parisian flâneur in that it takes cognisance of "the complex flows of capital and people" (5), which are aspects currently visible in Afropolitanism, for instance. The Afropolitan flâneur, as successor to the postcolonial flâneur, followed in the footsteps of the the Parisian flâneur. Just as the rise of urbanisation in nineteenth century Paris saw the flâneur emerge, so too has this literary figure reappeared in African cities in the twenty-first century due to modernisation and rapidly increasing urban growth.[39] While walking as a practice existed in

[39] While the practice of walking is as old as humankind, flânerie (as it came to be known) developed with the growth of the European city in the nineteenth century. African cities developed differently to those in Europe, and are fraught with a history of colonisation, slavery and violence. While people in African cities also walked and observed their surroundings, the west was perhaps too busy colonising to pay attention. Urban growth in Africa over the last two decades has been exceptionally rapid, and the flâneur in these cities has different issues

precolonial African society, particularly with nomadic people and strandlopers, cities were not the spaces that were walked during that era. Flânerie as a practice therefore only developed in Africa after the construction of new cities in the colonies. Partly through mimicry, and partly through cultural imposition, Africans imitated the French cultural practice and adapted and modified flânerie. This mimicry is particularly evident in the dress style of the Congolese *sapeur*, who Nuttall describes as "the figure of spatial transition" (*Entanglement* 38). In this sense, flânerie can be considered a European import which arrived with the advent of new cities that were built in the colonies.

Hartwiger goes on to point out that the postcolonial flâneur "is simultaneously a chronicler of history, a keen observer of the present, and an augur of the future" (Hartwiger 7). Simon Gikandi points out that "to invoke postcoloniality is to claim to be a citizen of many cultures and nations […] to claim rootlessness in order to position oneself in multiple cultural spaces" ("Between Roots" 33). It is precisely this multiplicity and entanglement that will be identified in the Afropolitan subject in the next section of this chapter. To extend this idea further, Liesbeth Minnaard writes of postcolonial flânerie, or "flanerie in the age of globalization" (80) as:

> a third phase of literary flanerie (whereby flanerie refers to a particularly productive combination of simultaneous moving and seeing, reading and interpreting) […] [and] refers to a particular way of processing the, at times, overwhelming experiences of the increasingly globalized metropolis. (79)

Globalized cities offer increasingly varied stimuli, and adapting to such conditions requires a different pace to that set by Benjamin's famous turtle mentioned earlier. The Afropolitan, as will be seen in the next section, is deeply situated within this "globalized metropolis", privileged with a particular way of being in the world. Elizabeth Wilson refers to some of the ambiguities surrounding the flâneur, pointing out that where some writers have celebrated this figure, others have seen the flâneur as mere "commodification of urban existence" (90). Interestingly, there is a similar argument related to Afropolitanism, as will be seen in the next section.

Returning once more to Baudelaire, it is clear that his interpretation of "modernity" still bears relevance today, almost two centuries later, when he describes modernity as "the ephemeral, the fugitive, the contingent, the half of art whose other half is the eternal and the immutable" ("Painter" 13). The flâneur has persisted, in literature and in real life, as a figure

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to contend with from the European flâneur. For a detailed look at the history and development of African cities, see Bill Freund's *The African City: A History.*

of crossings and intersections, partly due to inevitable change but also displacement through movement. As will be evidenced over the next few pages, the Afropolitan, like the flâneur, is both a real person, as well as a literary construct. In the literature this flâneur will be seen to exhibit qualities that can be considered both "ephemeral" as well as "eternal" as she or he explores and moves through the cosmopolitan urban environment. While the focus of this thesis falls on literary interpretations of the Afropolitan flâneur, a background understanding of the concept of Afropolitanism is also necessary.

1.3 Multi-faceted Afropolitanism

> Cosmopolitan in scope, anti-essentialist, open to cultural and intellectual hybridization, but endowed with a particular consciousness for Africa''s historical wounds, Afropolitanism is praised as an attitude which can contribute to complete the as yet unfinished decolonization process of Africa. (Gehrmann, "Cosmopolitanism" 64)

As observed by Susanne Gehrmann in the extract above, decolonization is ongoing, and much has to be done to set right some of the violent wrongs carried out through formerly imposing the culture of the coloniser on African subjects. The postcolonial flâneur is critical of colonialism, as the literary analysis in the next few chapters will illustrate. The wounds that cut deepest are largely to do with matters of racism, such as slavery, apartheid and xenophobia, as well as resultant imposed restrictions on movement. While such matters do not form the focus of this project, issues of race as they pertain to the flâneur cannot be ignored. "Race" writes Rubén Rumbaut, "is a social status, not a zoological one; a product of history, not of nature; a contextual variable, not a given" (15). Of the twelve primary texts examined in Chapters 2 to 5, most of the Afropolitan flâneurs are black. Their blackness calls attention to their *Afropolitan* flânerie, where flânerie was an occupation previously enjoyed by white men of comfortable economic means. For instance, Azure, the almost teenage protagonist flâneur in *Thirteen Cents*, has limited freedom to walk the streets as as a homeless black streetchild. The same applies to the young Nigerian Elvis, who dances to earn a living. For Ashleigh Harris, this type of homeless figure is, like the narrator she discusses in Brian Chikwava's *Harare North,* "not the exile" but rather "the dispossessed" (252). Such dispossession and homelessness are "rooted in economic conditions" (Harris 252), and paradoxically, for figures such as Duiker's Azure in *Thirteen Cents* or Chris Abani's Elvis in *GraceLand,* their way of being "at home in the world" is through homelessness.

By joining the literary constructs of the Afropolitan and the flâneur, this thesis proposes a novel way of looking at urban literature from Africa and its diaspora. Several questions arise throughout this study. Why has Africa been largely ignored in cosmopolitan theory? Why are so many contemporary African novels concerned with flânerie, or more specifically drifting, or hustling? How might innovative narrative forms of texts (such as Phaswane Mpe's *Welcome to Our Hillbrow* or Ivan Vladislavić's *Portrait with Keys*) reflect Afropolitan flânerie? One way of answering such questions is to give consideration to the form of the selected texts, and this can be done through carrying out a close-reading of the texts. Another way might be to read the texts in relation to socio-political and economic contexts. Since this thesis is based on *literary* representations of the Afropolitan flâneur, the former method will prove most useful in order to understand the contribution of literature towards new insights on cosmopolitanisms.

As necessary background theory for the literary analysis that follows in Chapters 2 to 5, this section provides a critical overview of scholarly interpretations of Afropolitan identity. While the Afropolitan that is discussed here refers to a sociological phenomenon, a real and lived identity, the Afropolitan flâneurs discussed in subsequent chapters take the form of fictional or fictionalised characters as represented in selected texts. Analysis of these texts involves consideration of how they engage with, among other things, contemporary debates on what it means to be Afropolitan.

Just as there is a revival of interest in the figure of the flâneur, so too has there been ongoing interest in matters cosmopolitan. As pointed out by Emily S. Davis, cosmopolitanism "offers one of the oldest available discourses for addressing questions of solidarity, shared responsibility, and mutual entanglement, and it has seen a scholarly resurgence in the last two decades" (99–100). This idea has echoes with Sarah Nuttall's concept of 'entanglement' which will be considered in more detail in Chapter 2 specifically with reference to living in Johannesburg, and Chapter 3 in the discussion of novels set in Cape Town. By taking Nuttall's idea of entanglement into account, it can thus be seen that by looking at the world in merely regional or cultural terms is too constricting. Nuttall's concept of entanglement echoes Gilroy's "sameness within differentiation" mentioned at the beginning of this chapter. This paradoxical enmeshment and difference related to the cosmopolitan identity is largely connected to movement from one place to another. Mobility is a characteristic of shifting urban identities, and certainly of the Afropolitan. Eva Knudsen and Ulla Rahbek provide the following definition of mobility:

> Mobility is thus movement, as it were, on both a large and a small scale. It is manifested as walking and wandering, moving and travelling, leaving and returning, migrating and escaping, and through the status of exile and refugee. (66)

Not everyone is equally mobile however: for some, a trip by air might be purely for vacation and relaxation, while for the returning exile, the flight destination holds different promise. Olivia Laing's recently published *The Lonely City: Adventures in the Art of Being Alone* (2017) focuses on the cosmopolitan, who, like the flâneur is "defined by mobility" (Livingstone and Gyarkye n. pag.) and is comfortable being alone. Mobility and solitude are aspects of flânerie that will be evident in the texts under study in the next few chapters. Of interest here is not only mobility on foot in a single city, but also global mobility as seen in the cosmopolitan identities studied in this project. Borders and boundaries have different currency in our globalised world today in the twenty-first century, compared to nineteenth century Europe where the flâneur was born, and as noted by Gikandi, "one of the most perplexing and intriguing phenomenological aspects of global movements is the survival of locality outside national or ethnic boundaries" ("Between Roots" 32). Highlighting some of the issues related to boundaries, Stephen Clingman notes that the boundary "is a profoundly ambiguous place: it is a place of fear, risk and danger; but it is also the place of encounter, navigation and creation" (52). Like de Kock's seam, the boundary is where sameness and difference meet. Boundaries in the contemporary world represent a greater complexity than they did a few centuries back, being far more nuanced with meaning, not only separating but also connecting people of various places and cultures.

From neologism to everyday parlance, the still-evolving term 'Afropolitan' was articulated and popularised[40] in 2005 by Taiye Selasi[41] in her 2005 article "Bye-Bye Babar". Over the past decade a growing interest has developed in the idea of the Afropolitan, whose identity has been debated and contested, and aspects of the discussion have entered the milieu of academia. In her article Selasi describes Afropolitans as:

> the newest generation of African emigrants, coming soon or collected already at a law firm/chem lab/jazz lounge near you. You'll know us by our funny blend of London fashion, New York jargon, African ethics, and

[40] While Selasi is purported to have 'coined' the term "Afropolitan" (Harris 240; Otas 38; Ucham & Kangira 42), it would be more correct to say that she 'popularised' the concept as a lifestyle choice, since the term was already in use before her famous article appeared. Carli Coetzee writes that "Selasi does not lay claim to having invented or 'coined' the term" (102), and in a conversation with Taiye Selasi, Aaron Bady says that "Teju Cole raked [him] over the coals, a little bit, for saying [Selasi] 'coined' it" ("From that Stranded Place" 157).

[41] Taiye Selasi was also known as Taiye Tuakli-Wosornu, taking the names from her father, Ladé Wosornu, and her Ghanaian mother, Juliette Tuakli.

> academic successes. Some of us are ethnic mixes, e.g. Ghanaian and Canadian, Nigerian and Swiss; others merely cultural mutts: American accent, European affect, African ethos. Most of us are multilingual: in addition to English and a Romantic or two, we understand some indigenous tongue and speak a few urban vernaculars. There is at least one place on The African Continent to which we tie our sense of self: be it a nation-state (Ethiopia), a city (Ibadan), or an auntie's kitchen. Then there's the G8 city or two (or three) that we know like the backs of our hands, and the various institutions that know us for our famed focus. We are Afropolitans: not citizens, but Africans of the world. ("Bye-Bye" n. pag.).

Clearly there is an echo with Kwame Anthony Appiah's "citizens of the world" put forward in *Cosmopolitanism.* Selasi's famous rendering of the Afropolitan quoted at length above will be unpacked with reference to various scholars over the next few pages. Her definition refers to a specific generation of young people only and poses some problems, not least of which is the idea of elitism and commodification, suggesting that many might be precluded from being considered as Afropolitan, given that they lack education, professional success and the financial means to travel. Afropolitanism, in this sense, "emphasizes the fundamental disconnection between the postcolonial African elite and the majority of citizens, whose lack of economic capital denies them access to Afropolitan ways of being in the world" (Fasselt "Nigeria" 126). Furthermore, this definition does not take into consideration people who might have been displaced through no choice of their own, but due to political turmoil in their country of origin. Such individuals might themselves have many of the qualities listed in Selasi's definition, yet could be precluded from being called Afropolitans due to other factors such as age or education. An important aspect of Selasi's idea on Afropolitanism can be seen when she states the following:

> What distinguishes this lot and its like (in the West and at home) is a willingness to complicate Africa – namely, to engage with, critique, and celebrate the parts of Africa that mean most to them. Perhaps what most typifies the Afropolitan consciousness is the refusal to oversimplify; the effort to understand what is ailing in Africa alongside the desire to honor what is wonderful, unique. Rather than essentialising the geographical entity, we seek to comprehend the cultural complexity; to honor the intellectual and spiritual legacy; and to sustain our parents' cultures. ("Bye-Bye" n. pag.)

What stands out here is the critical engagement with the concepts of Africa and African identity. Indeed, the word 'Africa' itself is complicated, as Okwui Enwezor and Chika Okeke-Agulu illustrate:

> the term 'African' employed here is capacious. It accommodates slippages, incompleteness, eccentricities, idiosyncrasies, and ambivalences. It is not to

> be understood in ethnocentric, national, regional or even continental terms alone, but as a network of positions, affiliations, strategies, and philosophies that represent the multiplicity of cultural traditions and archives available to and exploited consistently by the artists to shape their artistic positions in a way that reflects the diffuse repertoire of artistic forms and concepts which we designate as contemporary African art. (11)

While Enwezor and Okeke-Agulu refer specifically to African art here, they pick up on the vastness of meaning relating to Africa and what is considered African, and the debate regarding interpretations is ongoing when discussing so-called 'African' literature. Similarly then, interpretations on Afropolitanism are also wide-ranging and complex.

African cosmopolitanism is not new. Noting the seeming contradiction in words, Neville Hoad writes that

> *African* is a word that designates a geographic, if not racial, specificity. In contrast, *cosmopolitanism* aspires to a worldliness unbound by either geography or race and suggests that multiple specificities exist. (*African Intimacies* 113, emphasis mine)

Hoad provides a footnote to this in which he remarks how the notion of cosmopolitanism was then experiencing a revival in criticism (*African Intimacies* 161), and indeed, this continues to be the case over a decade after his words were penned. While the extract above comes from a chapter on Phaswane Mpe's *Welcome to Our Hillbrow* in Hoad's 2007 book *African Intimacies: Race, Homosexuality and Globalization*, it appeared earlier in 2005 in an edited volume, which had been mentioned as "forthcoming" in 2004 in an article by Sarah Nuttall.[42] In her 2004 article, when Nuttall discusses Phaswane Mpe's novel, she similarly refers to an African cosmopolitanism when she notes "the highly tensile beginnings of an 'Afropolitanism'" ("City Forms" 744). While Nuttall's Afropolitan reference is to intra-African migrants in Hillbrow, and multicultural diversity, the double meaning of the word "tensile" suggests not only an underlying tension, but also a growing, stretching or expansion of sorts which could pertain to the capacious nature of Afropolitanism.

Sarah Balakrishnan points out that "scholarship [on Afropolitanism] inside South African circles saw the term circulating earlier" (n. pag.) than 2005, and she cites journalist and author Mark Gevisser's use of the word 'Afropolitan'.[43] Around the same time, in 2004,

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[42] Hoad's chapter "An Elegy for African Cosmopolitanism: Phaswane Mpe's *Welcome to Our Hillbrow"* appeared in his book *African Intimacies* in 2007. Portions of that chapter previously appeared in 2005 under the title "Welcome to Our Hillbrow: An Elegy for African Cosmopolitanism" in *Urbanization and African Cultures.*

[43] Gevisser noted in a 2004 conversation on a walk with Sarah Nuttall that "Johannesburg could be marketed as a very exciting Afropolitan city: as a place where you can eat *fufu* or Swahili curry or *pap en vleis*. It's all there

Achille Mbembe and Sarah Nuttall published an article titled "Writing the World from an African Metropolis", about being African in the world, which is the essence of Afropolitanism. The idea of an 'African Cosmopolitanism' or 'Afropolitanism' was evidently receiving increasing attention in South African scholarly circles before 2005 when Taiye Selasi's famous article brought the concept to the world at large. It is somewhat ironic then that the concept was re-created beyond African borders to describe something uniquely African. Nearly a decade later, Emily S. Davis, writing on cosmopolitanism in Mpe's *Welcome to our Hillbrow* posed the question: "To what extent can the term [cosmopolitanism] escape its Eurocentric origins?" An important question indeed, and one which can be applied equally to the term 'flâneur'. Afropolitanism provides a way of thinking which shifts the focus from Europe to Africa.

The Afropolitan has been critically examined by scholars including Achille Mbembe and Simon Gikandi, amongst others. Achille Mbembe's article "Afropolitanisme", which first appeared in French in 2005, was translated in 2007 for the *Africa Remix* exhibition catalogue, and in it he described Afropolitanism as "a way of being in the world, refusing on principle any form of victim identity" where Afropolitans are migrants who "can express themselves in more than one language" (28–29), an aspect that features largely in the general understanding of Afropolitanism. Mbembe writes that "it is not simply that a part of African history lies somewhere else, outside Africa. It is also that a history of the rest of the world [...] is present on the continent" (28). According to Gehrmann, "Mbembe elevates Afropolitanism to a philosophical concept apt to lead the way towards an integral transformation of identity politics" ("Cosmopolitanism" 64) which he distinguishes from "Pan-Africanism or *négritude*" (McPherson 259). Mbembe describes Afropolitanism as an

> Awareness of the interweaving of the here and there, the presence of the elsewhere in the here and vice versa, the relativization of primary roots and memberships and the way of embracing, with full knowledge of the facts, strangeness, foreignness and remoteness, the ability to recognise one's face in that of a foreigner and make the most of the traces of remoteness in closeness, to domesticate the unfamiliar, to work with what seem to be opposites. ("Afropolitanism" 28).

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at the moment, but it's inaccessible to foreigners" ("From the Ruins" 518). A decade later, in a talk at CUNY, with Kwame Anthony Appiah, Gevisser was referred to as a "queer Afropolitan" and he embraced the label comfortably ("Queer Afropolitans: Mark Gevisser and Kwame Anthony Appiah in Conversation" was the title of a CLAGS (The Centre for LGBTQ Studies) event that took place at The Graduate Center, CUNY, New York City, May 6, 2014. The full event can be viewed on YouTube at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ggSfFsDvUHA>).

Mbembe's ideas on Afropolitanism offer an understanding of the concept as a positive, Afrocentric cosmopolitanism which integrates a global and confident way of being African in the world. The above words find echoes in the intricacies and ramifications of of the trajectory of the flâneur who originated in Europe and 'migrated' to Africa. Mbembe's inclusive notion of an entanglement which he refers to as "the interweaving of worlds" ("Afropolitanism" 28) and "racial multiplicity" (29) is highlighted by Susanne Gehrmann in the following:

> For Mbembe […] Afropolitanism does not only transcend the question of diasporan vs. African-based urban cultures as he explicitly includes both, but it also transcends the question of race. White South Africans, Asian diasporic Africans and so forth could be part of Afropolitanism, as long as they identify with, and do not essentialize Africa. ("Cosmopolitanism" 65)

This idea of identifying with Africa is clear in Selasi's 2005 definition of Afropolitanism. As evidenced in the 2016 special "Afropolitanism: Reboot" issue of the *Journal of African Cultural Studies*, the label continues to be re-defined, not least because one of its central problems is who qualifies and who is excluded from being defined as Afropolitan. Mbembe's idea of inclusivity is thus an important one, making room for white South Africans to also be considered Afropolitan, as will be seen in Chapter 2, with Mark Gevisser himself being just one such example.

Approaching Afropolitanism from a more cultural perspective, Simon Gikandi in 2011 asserted that

> [t]o be Afropolitan is to be connected to knowable African communities, nations, and traditions. […] It is to embrace and celebrate a state of cultural hybridity – to be of Africa and of other worlds at the same time. ("Foreword" 9).

Skinner argues for an "Afropositivist perspective" (14) of a "multivalent Afropolitanism" constitutive of "intersecting itineraries" (16). Further exploring the debate on Afropolitanism is Eva Rask Knudsen and Ulla Rahbek's 2016 collection titled *In Search of the Afropolitan*: the sub-title *Encounters, Conversations, and Contemporary Diasporic African Literature* broadens the debate. A special 2017 edition of *The European Journal of English Studies* which focuses on "Debating the Afropolitan" serves as further testament to how relevant this topic continues to be today. Claiming the Afropolitan to be "a hotly debated and malleable term", the editors sought to interrogate this new identity category "that captures the complexities of transnational lives and its ambivalent relationship with African roots" (Durán-Almarza, Kabir and González 108).

The various understandings of what makes an Afropolitan, as well as different interpretations of Afropolitanism, point to ongoing difficulties inherent in the existing definitions. Crucial in this project are representations of the Afropolitan found in the literature. It will be useful here to provide as diverse a range of understanding of this cultural phenomenon as is possible in the space available by drawing on yet further interpretations to provide necessary background for the literary analyses that follow in the next few chapters. Philosopher and literary scholar Chielozona Eze describes the Afropolitan as

> that human being on the African continent or of African descent who has realized that her identity can no longer be explained in purist, essentialist and oppositional terms or by reference only to Africa. Afropolitans claim that they are no longer just X as opposed to Y; rather they are A and B and X. Their realities are already intermixed with the realities of even their erstwhile oppressors. It is not possible to go back to their native place, since they are all mutts, biologically or culturally. ("Rethinking African" 240)

Eze's assertions echo the multiplicities to which Enwezor and Okeke-Agulu referred earlier in relation to the network of positions associated with the term 'African'. The entanglements to which Eze refers in the quotation above are multi-faceted results of the colonial encounter. To further expand upon this, Eze also claims that "[t]he term Afropolitanism is troubling […] [when it is] understood as a market ploy, or associated with well to do Africans who can afford to travel the world" ("We, Afropolitans" 114). Eze's critique of an elitist view of Afropolitanism is valuable as all too often Afropolitanism is dismissed as exclusive, and therefore limited in scope. The reference to a small, elite group of people is only too apparent when one does a Google search of the term 'Afropolitan' and a long list of sites indicates the connection to a classy lifestyle, suggesting that Afropolitans live in a very comfortable economic bracket. The Johannesburg-based magazine *The Afropolitan*, for instance, prides itself on being the "signature of African sophistication",[44] and the contents of the magazine offer often expensive suggestions as to how that sophistication can be bought as a commodity of sorts.

Commodification is a tag all too often connected with the idea of Afropolitanism, and Binyavanga Wainaina, who prefers to call himself a Pan-Africanist, not an Afropolitan, sees Afropolitanism as "a phenomenon increasingly 'product-driven'" (Bosch Santana 121). For similar reasons "Yewande Omotoso, Emma Dabiri, and Marta Tveit, have also declared that they are not Afropolitans" (Bosch Santana 121). Chimamanda Adichie, author of *Americanah*

[44] From *Media Update* article online at <https://www.mediaupdate.co.za/media/111503/the-afropolitan-welcomes-lerato-tshabalala-as-new-editor>.

dismisses being associated with the label by saying: "I'm not an Afropolitan. I'm African, happily so. I'm comfortable in the world, and it's not that unusual. Many Africans are happily African and don't think they need a new term" (qtd. in Dabiri, "Why" 106). Critical of the commodified version of Afropolitanism, Dabiri argues elsewhere that a "reductive analysis fails to engage with the spaces in between, the fact that you can be critical of the direction a movement is taking while also acknowledging that it is possible to imagine alternative possibilities for it" ("Pitfalls" 205). This thesis aims not only to imagine such possibilities, but also to draw attention to such alternatives that appear in the literary texts that are analysed. While Adichie chooses to use the term 'African' over 'Afropolitan', the former does not adequately cover the hybridity of this Nigerian-born author who lives in the USA and Nigeria and who has become a global literary phenomenon. In some instances, the term Afropolitan would better serve to describe the multiplicity of subject positions (which also applies to the term 'African') occupied by individuals such as Adichie, who nevertheless wishes to foreground her 'Africanness'.

On the other hand, Teju Cole, author of *Open City* and *Every Day is for the Thief* (which will be discussed in later chapters), ironically summarises his feelings regarding labels by negotiating a middle ground when he says "I'm an Afropolitan, a pan-African, an Afro-pessimist, depending on who hates me on any given day. I embrace all those terms. However, labels: they always apply, except when they don't" (Bady "Interview" n. pag.).

According to Eze "the Afropolitan believes that being African is not reductive to colour, heritage or autochthony; rather being African is expansive. Whoever has lived on the continent long enough to identify with it is African" ("We, Afropolitans" 117). But who decides how long is "long enough"? One does not only claim an identity, as there are diverse ways in which people construct an *African* identity. As mentioned in Section 1.1 of this chapter, identity is always in flux, and according to Stuart Hall, we should think of identity as a "'production' which is never complete ("Cultural" 222). The creation, expression and presentation of identity is a dialogical process, and that identity has to be ratified by others, particularly in the South African context for instance, where white claims to African identity are scorned because of historical enmity.

Referring to Selasi's treatment of Afropolitan identity in her "Bye-Bye Babar" article, Ashleigh Harris says that "despite her clear rejection of autochthonous Africanness, Selasi's Afropolitanism is, on closer inspection, little more than African expatriate and diaspora culture in a world quite radically dissociated from African everyday life" (240). Harris points to Selasi's neglect of Africans in Africa, given that the focus in Selasi's defining article is on

"emigrants" from Africa (241).[45] Indeed, this is where it is useful to add the ideas of both Mbembe (who views Africa from a local perspective), and Gikandi (who celebrates cultural hybridity) to broaden Selasi's definition. Harris asserts the need for a term such as "Afropolitanism" to reflect the experiences of Africans in the world and their particular "experiences of worldliness" (242). Afropolitan experiences are unique to individuals of or from Africa, as opposed to the experiences of economically privileged individuals from the global North for example.

The notion of an Afropolitanism that only celebrates Africans in a Western world seems to ignore millions of Africans in Africa.[46] It is not just the Afropolitan of privilege that is of interest here, but also the homeless Afropolitan, the refugee Afropolitan, the lost Afropolitan, and a number of others. By means of looking at Afropolitan figures that appear in selected literary texts that feature flâneur characters, this thesis aims to broaden the definition of 'Afropolitan'.

Since the flâneur in literature reflects that which s/he observes in the urban environment, the reader is afforded an opportunity to observe that city environment and history through the Afropolitan flâneur's eyes. While the European flâneur mirrored modernity of two centuries ago, the contemporary literary Afropolitan flâneur's perceptions offer a different, updated viewpoint (of cosmopolitan spaces both in and '*out*' of Africa) which reflects the fluidity of the city, one which is constantly changing, depending on who inhabits its spaces.

1.4 Novel Chorographies of the City

> [It] is to the city that the emigrants, the minorities, the diasporic come to change the history of the nation. […] it is the city which provides the space in which emergent identifications and new social movements of the people are played out. (Bhabha, *Location* 170).

Urban spaces continue to draw people from different backgrounds together, and it is in such spaces, as Bhabha points out, that cultures from elsewhere can congregate. The word "chorography" is a combination of the Greek *khōros*, meaning place, and *graphein*, meaning "to write". Writing about place is not new. In literature, cities have been written about in both

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[45] That Selasi chooses the word "emigrant" in favour of "immigrant" lays the focus on the country of origin as opposed to the country of destination.

[46] In "Afropolitanism: Africa without Africans (II)" S. Okwunodu Ogbechie argues that "Africans have almost absolute immobility in a contemporary global world that works very hard to keep Africans in their place on the African continent" (n. pag.). For more about the bias against African mobility internationally, particularly insofar as it concerns artists, see Ogbechie's article online at <http://aachronym.blogspot.co.uk>.

fiction and non-fiction, ranging from texts such as Italo Calvino's fictional *Invisible Cities* to Mark Gevisser's lived reality in *Lost and Found in Johannesburg*. African diasporic and transnational novelists in recent years have used the literary form to shape new cartographies of the urban environment, new cityscapes that enable the reader to cross borders and boundaries without leaving home. Some of these writers are flâneurs themselves or they have employed as a device the literary figure of the flâneur, as a narrator or protagonist. These texts traverse different genres, including autobiography and life writing. The selected texts in this study represent six major cities: Johannesburg, Cape Town, Lagos, New York, Paris, and London, which will be discussed in detail from the point of view of the Afropolitan flâneur characters.

An examination of the Afropolitan flâneur and urban identities in the selected texts can be enhanced through consideration of Bhabha's basic theories about hybridity and cultural identity. For Bhabha, hybridity has to do with how individuals form a sense of self or identity based on how they perceive their surroundings and how they react to cultural influences. "Hybridity," writes Emma O'Shaughnessy, is "both a state of reinvention and dislocation, a splitting as well as a potentially dynamic reformulation of the self within the postcolonial sphere" (28). Floya Anthias alludes to this city identity in her discussion of the problem of intersectionality, noting that the "image of the diasporic individual in Bhabha (1990) is of the cosmopolitan rootless but routed intellectual" (570). This is a reiteration of the multi-directionality experienced by the Afropolitan subject whose cosmopolitan aspirations emanate from different roots. Anthias's notion of intersectionality is also very much in line with Gilroy's discussion on "roots" and "routes" in *The Black Atlantic* where he problematises the tension between nationalist purity and the hybridity that results from international flows and exchanges. Gilroy's botanical metaphor also has echoes with Benjamin's reference to the flâneur as a "botan[ist] of the asphalt" who strolls across the city pavements observing the surroundings with a keen eye. Yet Gilroy and Benjamin's formulations differ crucially in that they are epochs apart: for Gilroy the local and transnational are linked, whereas much of Benjamin's thought was European-based. Nonetheless, for both it is in the city that the flows or routes are evident in cameo version, perhaps partly because, as Solnit emphasises:

> Cities have always offered anonymity, variety, and conjunction, qualities best basked in by walking: one does not have to go into the bakery or the fortune-teller's, only to know that one might. A city always contains more

> than any inhabitant can know, and a great city always makes the unknown and the possible spurs to the imagination. (171)

Solnit's description of the city seen here illustrates the variety a cosmopolitan city can offer, which, in terms of identity formation has certain echoes with Bhabha's notion of hybridity. By walking the city, and simultaneously observing and immersing themselves in the city, the flâneur acts as a mirror which reflects back to the reader, thus making the unfamiliar more familiar territory to the reader.

Referring primarily to the post-apartheid South African city, and with reference to the work of Ash Amin and Nigel Thrift on urban theory, Sarah Nuttall writes of

> the intricacy of the city as a spatial formation, its density as a concentration of people, things, institutions and architectural forms; the heterogeneity of lives juxtaposed in close proximity, the citiness of cities, the ways in which they gather, mix, remix, separate, conceal and display and the ways in which urban life becomes the irreducible product of mixture, each urban moment sparking performative improvisations which are unforeseen and unforeseeable.[47] ("City Forms" 740)

It is this city-ness Nuttall describes above that is unique to every urban space, depending on how the city is given shape through its inhabitants. While this is not specifically what is represented in the literature, the Afropolitan flâneur is able to closely observe this "citiness of cities" simply by walking its streets and observing the people and architecture. This project considers literature through the eyes of the Afropolitan flâneur character or protagonist who observes all the contradictions of the city streets. Besides referring to African and South African criticism on the city and urban studies, this project draws from postcolonial spatial theory and also makes use of psychogeography as a lens through which to interpret some of the texts under scrutiny. These will be examined in further detail in the next two sub-sections of this chapter.

1.4.1 Postcolonial spatial theory

> Not so many years ago, the word 'space' had a strictly geometrical meaning: the idea it evoked was simply that of an empty area. In scholarly use it was generally accompanied by some epithet as 'Euclidean', 'isotropic', to 'infinite', and the general feeling was that the concept of space was ultimately a mathematical one. To speak of 'social space', therefore, would have seemed strange. (Lefebvre, *Production* 1)

[47] In Nuttall's article, she footnotes this sentence to express her debt "to the important work of Ash Amin and Nigel Thrift, in their book *Cities – Reimagining the Urban* (Cambridge, Polity Press, 2002)."

The interconnectedness of space and identity has received much critical attention over the last few decades. Social critic Henri Lefebvre, quoted above, argued that particular spaces were created by specific societies, and his ideas continue to influence contemporary urban spatial theory. In Lefebvre's seminal text, *The Production of Space*, he offers a spatial triad of perception, the everyday and the institution. This triad is a representational space of interrelationships: imagination and ideas, daily routine of urban reality, and maps or plans that represent the physical space. Geographer and urban theorist Edward Soja went on to update Lefebvre's ideas and developed what he called the "Thirdspace", not to be confused with Homi Bhabha's "Third Space" of difference and hybridity that was discussed at the beginning of this chapter. As is evident today, the relationship between people and place – or space – is largely affected by social instances of migration, war, religion and culture, to name but a few.

Both Soja and Lefebvre were proponents of a spatial turn in literature. Lefebvre's arguably socialist understanding of "the right to the city" (1996) was, in the words of Mark Purcell, "a struggle to 'de-alienate' urban space, to reintegrate it into the web of social connections" (149). Just how important this is, becomes more evident when considering the displacement that is felt by migrants, for instance, in a new urban environment. The Afropolitan flâneur, as this thesis will illustrate, is no longer only the detached observer as in Baudelaire and Benjamin's nineteenth century Paris, but is rather presented as a much more mobile and involved flâneur, with a complex relationship to home, homeland or origin. Importantly, as noted by Berthold Schoene, "[c]rucial distinctions need to be upheld between the mobility of tourists, economic migrants and refugees. The mobility of the latter two is enacted under duress" (in Knudsen and Rahbek 66). This particular twenty-first century flâneur is also sometimes in flight, *en fuite*, even perhaps a *fugueur*[48] or runaway, in exile or who experiences a difficult, even fraught, connection to place. The Afropolitan flâneur thus negotiates spaces and traverses boundaries that otherwise might not be easily visible. In Chapter 3 this is discussed in more depth when analysing Patricia Schonstein's protagonist-flâneuse in *Skyline*. Soja, whose "'real-and-imagined' places" (*Thirdspace* 11) map a particular theory of spatiality, pointed out that "[b]eginning in the early 1980s […] there has developed a body of literature that revolves specifically around the effects of globalisation on cityspace […] and on the spatial specificity of urbanism as a way of life" (*Postmetropolis*

[48] Pieter Vermeulen, writing about Teju Cole's *Open City,* describes the "cosmopolitan flâneur" figure, Julius, as a "*fugueur*", a "more sinister, and mostly forgotten, nineteenth-century figure of restless mobility" (42).

218). He wrote about the “unbounding” of the city which breaks down old boundaries, and moves into new spaces, with “territorial identity” being directly related to the “scale and scope of the modern metropolis” (*Postmetropolis* 218). These ideas are very much evident in the Afropolitan space which is characterised by mobility and fluidity. As noted by Hazel Easthope, “mobility and place are fundamental aspects of the human condition” (78), but it can be added that while this applies to all individuals, it is especially relevant to transnational and Afropolitan subjects. Negotiating place through the flâneur’s act of walking in the city – Benjamin’s “botanizing on the asphalt” (*Charles Baudelaire* 36) – thus becomes a way of understanding space and identity formation within urban space through meticulous examination similar to that of a botanist carefully studying found plant specimens. Through walking the streets of the cosmopolitan city, the flâneur is able to absorb the vitality of the surroundings and share those findings with others by means of recording various observations through writing, painting or photography. It is the spaces that tell the stories. What is of interest to me in this project are the literary representations of the city as mediated by the figure of the Afropolitan flâneur in the selected African and transnational texts that are listed in Section 1.5 of this chapter.

1.4.2 Psychogeography

> *Psychogeography.* A term that has become strangely familiar – strange because, despite the frequency of its usage, no one seems quite able to pin down exactly what it means or where it comes from. (Coverley 9)

In his study on “developing a method of literary psychogeography”, Kent Chapin Ross notes, as vaguely as Coverley does in the extract above, that “the full development and definition of the term [psychogeography] as a precise instrument for literary understanding has not yet been fully and systematically developed” (1). The theory of psychogeography goes some way to explain the city–self engagement, as did the discussion of space Lefebvre provided in the previous section. While psychogeography is not the main focus of this project, there are aspects of this theory that will serve a close-reading of some of the primary texts in forthcoming chapters. Kent Chapin Ross pointed out that a “comprehensive and organized method of psychogeography can be shown to generate valuable insights into literary theory, narrative theory, understanding the theory of literary genres, and in performing analysis while close-reading specific texts” (1). In this project on the Afropolitan flâneur, the practice of psychogeography will be resuscitated and imbued with a contemporary, transnational twist,

like the sophisticated cocktail, the *Boulevardier*,[49] with literary roots. Indeed, such an analogy makes sense given that early psychogeographers tended to imbibe excessively, since for them urban exploration was "best conducted under the influence of alcohol" (Smith 168). Psychogeography will be employed as an additional if sometimes blurry lens through which to view the texts in a way that makes understanding it both accessible and enjoyable.

Coverley's words quoted in the epigraph to this section leave an understanding of psychogeography open to interpretation, as the fluidity of the term itself allows for novel ways of viewing and understanding urban identities in a city environment. The basic etymology of the word is worth elucidating as it echoes the focus of this project: "psycho" meaning "mind, mental; spirit, unconscious" and "geography" relating to the "science of description of the earth's surface in its present condition".[50] The psyche relates not only to the mind and unconscious, but also to emotion and memory. Place retains memory and brings up memories from the subconscious mind. Solnit says that

> if memory is imagined as a real space […] then the act of remembering is imagined as a real act, that is, as a physical act: as walking. […] To walk the same route again can mean to think the same thoughts again, as though thoughts and ideas were indeed fixed objects in a landscape one need only know how to travel through. In this way, walking *is* reading, even when both the walking and reading are imaginary, and the landscape of the memory becomes a text as stable as that to be found in the garden, the labyrinth, or the stations. (77).

Walking, reading, and memory are interconnected, and thus the flâneur is able to be immersed in the city at the same time as walk or read that city and store it to memory. In simple terms, the literary flâneur provides (for the reader) a psychogeographical viewpoint, as an observer of his/her fictional environment. Said somewhat differently by De Certeau, "[o]bjects and words also have hollow places in which a past sleeps, as in the everyday acts of walking, eating, going to bed, in which ancient revolutions slumber" (108). The everydayness of walking provides respite for the mind. Walking the city reflects an individual's identity which is reflected in that cityspace itself.

A Google search for the term "psychogeography" will yield a number of recently created websites, suggesting that contemporary interest in this concept is very much alive. A

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[49] The Boulevardier is a Negroni-style cocktail which calls for whisky instead of gin, and is named after a Parisian magazine similar to the *New Yorker,* called *The Paris Boulevardier,* published by Erskine Gwynne. (see the interview with Gary "Gaz" Regan, *The Negroni: Drinking to La Dolce Vita, with Recipes & Lore* <http://www.townandcountrymag.com/leisure/drinks/a3205/things-you-didnt-know-about-the-negroni/>).
[50] See <http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?term=psycho->.

2015 collection of essays edited by Tina Richardson and titled *Walking Inside Out: Contemporary British Psychogeography* is testament to this resurgence of interest in psychogeography. As the back cover of the book proclaims, Richardson's collection:

> represents the first attempt to merge the work of literary and artist practitioners with academics to critically explore the state of psychogeography today. This collection illustrates contemporary psychogeographical perspectives, shows how a critical form of walking can highlight easily overlooked urban phenomena and examines the impact that everyday life in the city has on the individual. (back cover)

It is precisely this impact felt by the individual that is of interest, as it is that which is experienced by the Afropolitan flâneur in urban surroundings. Given both Ross and Coverley's definitions earlier, the term "psychogeography" remains decidedly open to interpretation. For purposes of this project, the term will be used to encompass not only the mind, but the body as well. The body–mind connection is crucial when considering the figure of the Afropolitan flâneur as it is through the physical act of walking that the mind is able to engage with the surroundings.

According to Coverley, besides Charles Baudelaire and Walter Benjamin, the literary figures who have influenced the current understanding of psychogeography include Daniel Defoe, William Blake, Thomas de Quincey, Robert Louis Stevenson and Edgar Allan Poe, to name but a few. The main psychogeographical locations written about are London and Paris. For Blake, the "Godfather of Psychogeography" (Sinclair in Coverley 32), his connection to the city of London was so acute that self and city became one. The major cities in this project, such as Johannesburg, Cape Town, Lagos, Paris, London and New York, exhibit a unique sense of *genius loci*. In other words, a concept which originates in Europe in the past is transplanted and transformed into contemporary African cities through complex processes of mimicry and appropriation. Some might see this as a Eurocentric thing to do, but my argument is that Afropolitanism itself is a re-reading and re-writing of cosmopolitanism in an African context. Wandering and drifting is not only related to the physical act of walking, but is also the mind, the imagination, which shapes a different understanding of the environment. It is the imagination and creativity that drive these writers and characters in their seemingly aimless wandering, thus rendering their wandering far from aimless. The act of observation is key to the flâneur, who gazes at urban scenes with great patience in order to carefully interpret the city.

One of the most useful definitions of psychogeography is, arguably, one that comes from Guy Debord, French Marxist theorist, and member at the time of the Letterist International.[51] According to Jan D. Matthews, "the Letterists drank a lot, did drugs, and generally tried to avoid work" (n. pag.). Some might argue this was a reason for their ideas sounding somewhat vague, however it is worth noting that Debord was a founding member of the avant-garde movement Situationist International[52] of the 1950s which espoused a "radical, subversive political philosophy, meant to upset the balance of power" (Ross 2). It is Debord who is credited with coining the term "psychogeography" in 1955 and he provided the following definition:

> The word *psychogeography,* suggested by an illiterate Kabyle as a general term for the phenomena a few of us were investigating around the summer of 1953, is not too inappropriate. […] Psychogeography sets for itself the study of the precise laws and specific effects of the geographical environment, whether consciously organized or not, on the emotions and behavior of individuals. (Debord, *Introduction* 23)

This was perhaps the beginnings of looking at the connection between the individual and the geography of the environment – psyche and space – in a manner that considered both behaviour as well as emotions, in an attempt at understanding the occasionally nebulous connection between the two. This sounds akin to a definition of Romanticism, which was gaining currency at the time that the flâneur figure was first being written about. One of the subversive tenets of situationist psychogeography was known as the *dérive* or "drift", and bohemian drifting was a popular 1960s counter-cultural mode of locomotion partly credited to Debord and the Situationists. The practice of drifting involved walking through the city on one's own, "with the chance of finding unknown places" (Baker in Ross 2). As Greil Marcus put it, the point of the *dérive* was:

> to encounter the unknown as a facet of the known, astonishment on the terrain of boredom, innocence in the face of experience. So you can walk up the street without thinking, letting your mind drift, letting your legs, with their internal memory, carry you up and down and around turns, attending to a map of your own thoughts, the physical town replaced by an imaginary city. (in Solnit 212–213)

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[51] Letterist International, created by Guy Debord, was a Paris-based collective of "radical artists and theorists" which was active between 1952 and 1957. See more via this link: <https://www.revolvy.com/main/index.php?s=Lettrist%20International&item_type=topic>.

[52] Situationist International (1957–1972) was a Paris-based international movement of artists, writers and poets who espoused a radical political theory. For more information, refer to Jan D. Matthews, "An Introduction to the Situationists" online at < https://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/jan-d-matthews-an-introduction-to-the-situationists > and also <http://www.tate.org.uk/learn/online-resources/glossary/p/psychogeography>.

The above method of walking is a kind of automatic walking, like the automatic writing of the Surrealists. Clearly the imagination is given a huge boost when walking, and so it is no wonder that inspiration could strike in the form of art – paintings, poetry, photography, literature – the tangible results of flânerie. A decade or two after Debord, de Certeau was to call walkers "practitioners of the city" (93) since cities, in his understanding, were there to be walked. Psychogeography interrogates space and history, and through the act of walking an individual's memory is activated by the stimulation of the senses.

It is this nexus between environment and individual, inside and outside, as seen in both Debord and de Certeau's work, that lies at the root of psychogeography and is evident in all the texts that will be analysed here. There is a risk of psychogeography sounding like a very bourgeois tool by which to study literature by Afropolitans or literature about Afropolitans, yet the same risk exists with regard to the concept of Afropolitanism itself, as has already been alluded to in Section 1.4. However, this need not be the case when one considers that psychogeography is a very simple act in itself, as in walking from one place to another.

English novelist, journalist, and controversial social commentator Will Self wrote a regular psychogeography column for the *Independent* newspaper, which was subsequently collected into a book titled *Psychogeography* (2007).[53] Some of Self's unique psychogeographic projects included documenting a trip between London and New York as a means of integrating his own 'home base' with his mother's home town of New York City.[54] As pointed out by Ross, "Self demonstrates the psychogeographical viewpoint that draws in a multi-sensory packet of sensations, thoughts, memories, and impressions that create his narrator as a character" (57) and this provides the reader with something they can understand. Similar psychogeographical wanderings and character impressions will be seen through some of the characters in novels such as Biyi Bandele's *The Street*, for instance, which is discussed in Chapter 5.

Postcolonial spatial theory and psychogeography are useful lenses through which to filter my concern with the relationship between urban landscape, environment and identity. This will be teased out in the discussions in the other chapters which examine identity

[53] The full title of Will Self's book is *Psychogeography: Disentangling the Modern Conundrum of Psyche and Place.* Merlin Coverley's book titled *Psychogeography* appeared in print three years later in 2010.
[54] To illustrate a "seamless transition" between the different places, Self walked on foot from South London to Heathrow Airport, then flew to JFK Airport, before walking on to Manhattan (from <http://www.psychogeography.co.uk/psychogeography-by-will-self/>). While some might find Self eccentric, in his writing, lectures and videos, his eloquence is captivating, and his psychogeographical writing demonstrates how the individual psyche is influenced by the environment.

formation of transnational subjects as seen through the eyes of the Afropolitan flâneur (at times the author, at other times the narrator or even a character in a literary text) who is influenced by a particular *genius loci*, the spirit of a place.

1.4.3 Performativity and abjection

The spirit of a place is reflected both physically in space as well as on the human body. The body can perform and the body can be abject, and thus it is necessary to include a brief mention of certain theories of Julia Kristeva and Judith Butler relating to abjection and performativity. Even though the work of Kristeva and Butler does not pertain directly to postcolonial spatiality, aspects of their thought inform some of the discussion in later chapters. The concept of abjection was first theorized in a political way by Georges Bataille in his 1934 essay “Abjection and Miserable Forms”. It was later popularized in a psychoanalytic way by Julia Kristeva in her work *Powers of Horror*. According to Kristeva, the abject is “loathsome” (2), it “makes me balk” and “separates me” (3) from something. Kristeva classifies as abject bodily wastes (such as faeces), the signs of sexual difference (menstrual blood for instance), loathsome foods, and the corpse (3–4). That which causes abjection, according to Kristeva is “what disturbs identity, system, order” (4). The abject, says Kristeva, “does not respect borders, positions, rules” (4). Neither does the refugee respect borders, and choice of movement is not an option. Given the increasingly disturbing refugee crisis worldwide today, where human lives are reduced to abject bodies while fleeing, it is possible to see how refugees and illegal immigrants might be transformed from objects to abjects. For Judith Butler, whose theories can sound complex and largely abstract, the abject “relates to all kinds of bodies whose lives are not considered to be ‘lives’ and whose materiality is understood not to matter” (in Meijer and Prins 281). For Butler, bodies do matter, both politically and strategically. A relevant Butlerian theory that will be employed briefly in later chapters, has to do with performativity. As seen in her essay, “Performative Acts and Gender Constitution” as well as in her book *Gender Trouble*, performativity is not a choice but it has to do with repetition of norms. Butler suggests that “the body becomes its gender through a series of acts which are renewed, revised, and consolidated through time” (“Performative” 523). This performativity of gender will be used in relation to a specific performativity of race as seen in Chris Abani’s *GraceLand* as well as Alain Mabanckou’s *Blue White Red,* for example. These theories illustrate how the body finds its place in space, but further ideas regarding urban space and performativity will also be explored.

1.5 Conclusion: Texts and the City

> And in the midst of all this, made drowsy by my wanderings, I drift out into the street, like a leaf. The gentlest of winds has swept me up from the ground and I wander, like the very close of twilight, through whatever the landscape presents to me. (Pessoa 39)

The above extract comes from Fernando Pessoa's *The Book of Disquiet,* and illustrates the intimate connection between individual and surroundings. The writer feels as though he is part of a living landscape as he moves through it aimlessly. Through this drifting movement of the flâneur, the interconnectedness between space and identity can be seen. In the novels examined, all the flâneurs are presented with different things in the landscape they walk, and they all respond differently. By means of looking at characters such as the Afropolitan flâneur, the literary scholar can ponder on what Africa represents. The Afropolitan flâneur exemplifies what it means to be African, or of Africa, or, as Mbembe famously proclaims, to have an "[a]wareness of the interweaving of the here and there" ("Afropolitanism" 28).

A selection of literary works containing Afropolitan flânerie and written by a variety of writers will be examined in detail in the next four chapters. These works are: *Portrait with Keys* by Ivan Vladislavić; *Lost and Found in Johannesburg* by Mark Gevisser; *Welcome to Our Hillbrow* by Phaswane Mpe; *Skyline* by Patricia Schonstein Pinnock; *Thirteen Cents* by K. Sello Duiker; *Bom Boy* by Yewande Omotoso; *GraceLand* by Chris Abani, *Blackass* by A. Igoni Barrett, *Blue White Red* by Alain Mabanckou, *The Street* by Biyi Bandele, *Every Day is for the Thief* by Teju Cole, and *Open City* also by Teju Cole. The Afropolitan flâneur encountered in the literary texts in this study is a hybrid being, who embodies a dynamic African identity. Most of these flâneurs are male and black, some are homeless and live on the streets, some are financially privileged. One of these, in *Skyline,* is a young woman. Thus it will be seen that, in this literature, race, gender and class all impact on ways the flâneur is able to wander the urban environment. The individual flâneurs examined might be protagonists in a novel (such as Elvis in *GraceLand*) or they might be the authors themselves (as in the case of Gevisser and Vladislavić). The self-city relationships traced through the eyes of the flâneur help the reader (who also becomes a flâneur by 'walking' through the text) gain an understanding of how the city environment shapes the human subject and how that human subject in turn shapes the environment, living and adapting in ways that reflect this.

In the African, diasporic and transnational texts selected here, the flâneur's description of the city environment helps the reader to understand how identities are conceived. By relying on aspects of postcolonial spatial theory and adopting, where possible, a psychogeographical approach, which shows the impact upon the human psyche by the environment, this project will illustrate how the Afropolitan flâneur helps to position him or herself as well as others in relation to their surroundings.

Chapter 2: Mapping the Territory of Johannesburg

2.1 Introduction: Defining the Boundaries of an Edgy City

O meu Paris é Johannesburg	(My Paris is Johannesburg,
Um Paris certamente menos luz,	a Paris certainly less bright,
mais barato e provinciano.	cheaper and more provincial.
Mas Johannesburg lembra-me o Paris	But Johannesburg reminds me
Que não conheço ...	of the Paris I've never known …)

(Knopfli in Helgesson, "Johannesburg" 264)[55]

The lines above come from a poem titled "*À Paris*" ("To Paris") written by Mozambican journalist, photographer and poet, Rui Knopfli, who was born in 1932.[56] Knopfli suggests in this poem that Johannesburg exerts a similar fascination for him as does Paris, particularly since he hails from Mozambique. It is by means of invoking Paris that Knopfli helps the reader make sense of Johannesburg (Helgesson "Johannesburg" 265). Knopfli's poem is furthermore an attempt to situate Johannesburg on the same world stage as Paris, the European epitome of a thriving metropolitan centre. Knopfli's largely urban-centred poetry draws attention to an in-between cosmopolitanism that suggests a sense of dislocation. Johannesburg is not, nor could ever be, Paris, but it is the imaginary Paris the poet chooses and wherein he feels more comfortable.

Educated in what was then Lourenço Marques (now Maputo, post-independence) and Johannesburg, Knopfli also lived in London and Lisbon, where he died in 1997. Knopfli thus epitomises an early Afropolitan flâneur, albeit he was a white lusophone with direct ties to Europe. Although he was a transnational whose roots were never forgotten despite the routes travelled, Knopfli was closely connected to the city of Johannesburg and this is reflected in his writing.

The transitional city of Johannesburg serves as the locus for all three texts examined in this chapter. Each text reflects Afropolitan flâneuristic impressions of the city: *Portrait with Keys* by Ivan Vladislavić is about the city and one man's place in it; *Lost and Found in Johannesburg* by Mark Gevisser is an autobiographical account of a white, gay Jew growing

[55] The translator of Knopfli's work quoted in Helgesson's article is Suzette Macedo.
[56] For further detailed discussion of Rui Knopfli's metropolitan poetry, see Stefan Helgesson's article "Sing for our Metropolis: Self, Place and Media in the Poetry of Rui Knopfli and Wopko Jensma". More detail can be gleaned from Helgesson's book *Transnationalism in Southern African Literature*, as well as his chapter titled "Johannesburg, Metropolis of Mozambique in Nuttall and Mbembe's *Johannesburg: The Elusive Metropolis*.

up in the city; and the fictional *Welcome to our Hillbrow* by Phaswane Mpe tells the story of a migrant's arrival in the city. The peripatetic structure of all three texts discussed in this chapter clearly reflects the itinerancy of the flâneur. The selection of Vladislavić's *Portrait with Keys* for analysis, rather than any of his other Johannesburg texts, such as *The Restless Supermarket,* for instance, deserves elucidation. While it must be noted that although Vladislavić's *The Restless Supermarket* certainly shares with Mpe's *Welcome to our Hillbrow* a specific place (Hillbrow) and context (post-apartheid South Africa), and both books were published in the same year, *Portrait with Keys*, on the other hand, offers a distinctly different *form* to these texts. "Neither a novel in any conventional sense nor a collection of short stories" reads the inside sleeve of *Portrait with Keys*, this text offers an entanglement of memories and histories that formally represent the many layers of Johannesburg itself. Close-reading of the numerous 'portraits' is thus used as a method that considers the form of *Portrait with Keys* in detail, in order to echo the movement of the flâneur. Furthermore, while Mark Gevisser's memoir, *Lost and Found in Johannesburg*, might seem out of place amongst texts that are novels, its inclusion here offers a non-fictional reading of the city seen through the eyes of an actual flâneur who questions the physical boundaries of that city.

The writers and their protagonists or narrators in the three texts examined in this chapter, are Afropolitan flâneurs who are simultaneously insiders and outsiders in the city of Johannesburg. Illustrative of Mbembe's "worlds in movement" is Vladislavić's narrator, Vlad, who is a white man who acknowledges the changes he encounters in his neighbourhood after the demise of apartheid. Gevisser, also white, in his autobiography recalls his incomprehension of apartheid as a child growing up in South Africa. How are Vlad and Gevisser Afropolitan flâneurs? Mbembe notes that the common conception for many is that "to be 'African' is to be 'black' and therefore 'not white'" ("Afropolitanism" 26) and yet Africa has a "history of colliding cultures" where there has been "mixing, blending and superimposing" (27). Colonialism was a reality that has left its mark, and decolonisation is an ongoing process in Africa. Gevisser and Vlad, as flâneurs, walk the Afropolitan city of Johannesburg with an awareness of the injustices of the colonial past, which they often critique.

The following lines from Knopfli's poem "*Naturalidade*" ("Origin") published in 1959 illustrate a tenuous connection between colonial thought and lived reality:

Europeu, me dizem. *Eivam-me de literature e doutrina europeais* *e europeu me chamam.*	(European, they tell me. They infect me with European literature and doctrine and they call me European.
Não sei o que escrevo tem a raiz de algum pensamento europeu *É provável ... Não. É certo,* *mas africano sou.* (Knopfli in Helgesson, "Sing" 76–77)	I don't know if what I write has its roots in any European thinking. Perhaps … No. For sure, but African is what I am.)

The poet interprets European doctrine as an infection to which he is exposed, with no agency of his own to deal with it, yet the intrinsic pull he feels is towards Africa. Knopfli inscribes himself in a European literary tradition at the same time as he feels alienated from it (Helgesson, "Sing" 78). These lines of Knopfli's poetry cited above highlight the multidimensionality of the transnational subject, such as the Afropolitan, who has origins in one place yet has connections to several places. Journalist Nat Nakasa is similarly uncertain about his ties to home, when he writes in a 1964 article "It's Difficult to Decide my Identity" that "I'm not even sure that I could claim to be African. For if I were, then I should surely share my identity with West Africans and other Africans in Kenya or Tanganyika" (159). Such "dual dislocation" and displacement constantly plague the migrant subject, and will be evident later in this chapter in the discussion of Phaswane Mpe's *Welcome to Our Hillbrow*. Questions pertaining to belonging and identity form part of how individual subjects see the world around them.

In contrast to Knopfli's poems above, "City Johannesburg" is a poem written in the early 1970s by South African poet and political activist Mongane Wally Serote, who lived for several years in exile in London and Botswana before returning to South Africa in 1990. An extract reads as follows:

> Jo'burg City
> I travel on your black and white and robotted roads
> Through your thick iron breath that you inhale
> At six in the morning and exhale from five noon.
> Jo'burg City
> That is the time when I come to you,
> When your neon flowers flaunt from your electrical wind,
> That is the time when I leave you,
> When your neon flowers flaunt their way through the falling darkness
> On your cement trees.
>
> (Serote 4)

Writing about the everyday event of travelling experienced during the apartheid years, Serote accentuates that apartheid was an inhospitable, mechanical evil, evidenced in the phrases Johannesburg's "robotted roads", "iron breath", "neon flowers", "electrical wind" and "cement trees". Although he suppresses anger, Serote is angered and shares none of the staged romance evident in Knopfli's "To Paris", and yet both writers share a deep connection with the paradoxical metropolis.

Yet another early interpretation of Johannesburg can be seen in "Johannesburg, Johannesburg" where the writer, journalist, and flâneur Nat Nakasa relates his experiences of the first years he spent in Johannesburg by choosing to be a "wanderer" (3–4). The distance Nakasa creates between himself and others is in keeping with the detached attitude of the Parisian flâneur. Ironically, however, Nakasa still claims that he is "part of Johannesburg" (3). In this way Nakasa is like Baudelaire's "man *of* the crowd as opposed to the man *in* the crowd" (Tester 3), as he participates in the daily rhythms of the city. Nakasa is one of Taiye Selasi's "Africans of the world" ("Bye-Bye" n. pag.).

Johannesburg: one city, many interpretations. Egoli.[57] City of Gold.[58] Joburg (together) or Jo'burg (spaced apart). Affectionately Jozi. "One of the pre-eminent cities of Africa, the paradigmatic Afropolis" (Mukherjee 473). This "improbable city" (Niederhuber and Sachs 10). An "edgy city" (Kruger 2001; 2013) of contrasts and contradictions that has many names. "Literary representations of Johannesburg", notes Richard Samin, "depict the place as an arena of contending forces, marred by long years of economic greed, racial segregation and political conflicts" (97). How does this modern, capitalist, material world and cosmopolitan melting pot in the twenty-first century intersect with considerations of the archetypal nineteenth century European city alluded to in Knopfli's poem? To answer this question, discussion in this chapter will draw particularly from Sarah Nuttall and Achille Mbembe's pioneering study, *Johannesburg: The Elusive Metropolis* (2008), and South African scholar Lindsay Bremner's *Writing the City into Being* (2010), as well as work by postcolonial scholars such as Gerald Gaylard and Stefan Helgesson, amongst others. I will also refer to *The Emergence of the South African Metropolis* (2016), a timely book by Vivian Bickford-Smith that focuses on the South African cities of Johannesburg, Cape Town and Durban and "examines the metropolitan perceptions and experiences of both Black and White South Africans" (back cover).

[57] *Egoli* is an isiZulu word meaning "place of gold" and is often used to refer to the city of Johannesburg.
[58] A gold rush brought people flocking to Johannesburg in 1886 as a result of "gold-bearing ore [which] was discovered in March 1886 on a farm called Langlaagte by an Australian prospector, named George Harrison." (Manià 39).

While there are still traces of its apartheid past, evidenced in some of the architecture and colonial street names, Johannesburg is a changing city for everyone who comes from everywhere else. In the introduction to *Johannesburg: The Elusive Metropolis,* Sarah Nuttall and Achille Mbembe point out that:

> The way in which Johannesburg relates to, and helps us to, understand other African cities requires further studies. The degree to which it invokes a Southern Hemispheric modernity more widely is still to be properly probed in comparative work. (26)

The idea that Nuttall and Mbembe allude to here is that there are ways of understanding African cities through their interconnectedness, yet comparative studies in this regard are still in their infancy. According to Mbembe and Nuttall, contemporary Johannesburg "is the premier metropolis in Africa in terms of technology, wealth and racial complexity, as well as cultural practices and formal institutions" ("Writing the World" 365) and is thus a leading city in Africa. Knopfli's poem cited at the beginning of this section, which compares Johannesburg with Paris, ends with a melancholy solitude, similar to that evinced in the detachedness of the flâneur, as expressed in the following lines:

Aqui ninguêm sabe quem sou,	(Here no one knows who I am,
Aqui a minha importância é zero.	here my importance is nil.
Em Paris também.	As it is in Paris.)

(Knopfli in Helgesson, "Johannesburg" 266)

The anonymity to which Knopfli refers is reflected in that of the alienated contemporary flâneur wandering the streets of Johannesburg. As Helgesson points out, this Paris is "not Paris at all […] [but] a generic shorthand for the metropolis as a mode of being, or, better, a space of simultaneity that enables the precariously pleasurable subject position of a Baudelairean *flâneur*" ("Sing" 86). Contrary to what Helgesson claims, there is perhaps a hint of longing for the actual Paris as well, reading between the lines of Knopfli's poem. This quasi-romantic Knopflian representation of space is one that is identifiable in much urban writing that relates to memory and nostalgia, as will also be seen in the Johannesburg-centred works by South African writers discussed in this chapter.

Mbembe writes that "Johannesburg became a central site not only for the birth of the modern in Africa, but for the entanglement of the modern and the African – the African modern" ("Aesthetics" 39). The 'African modern' shares many similarities with the Afropolitan flâneur. Nuttall expands upon the idea of entanglement elsewhere with reference to Ivan Vladislavić's *Portrait with Keys*, and discusses how the narrator "uncovers a series of

urban paradoxes and parables, surfaces which reveal a set of underneaths, not least the memories of his own earlier life in the city" ("Invisible City" 330). Johannesburg, an unnatural city of mine-dumps, a tribute to human greed, is a place of many layers, inside and outside, above and below, surface and beneath the surface. However, post-apartheid Johannesburg, says Lindsay Bremner, "no longer operates in section, it no longer has a below and an above, an inside and an outside" (6). Bremner's non-sectional structuring of Johannesburg contradicts Nuttall's idea of layers and yet, as Bremner elaborates, the former secrets of apartheid are now visible "on […] [Johannesburg's] skin, a thick surface of tangled trajectories, muddled hierarchies and latent opportunities" (6), and it is this scarred skin that is like a map for the flâneur who reads the city by walking through it. Bremner's image of scarred skin is valuable as it suggests more than the binaries of in or out, surface or beneath, but rather a number of layers, of pathways. Here it would seem that Bremner's "tangled trajectories" are the equivalent of Nuttall's "entanglement". The Afropolitan flâneur, with a history of tangled trajectories as well as entanglements, in carefully observing the urban environment is well equipped to look beneath the surfaces of the city that are walked, as will be discussed in more detail when examining textual extracts.

Identity is greatly affected by place, and boundaries keep people in their place. For instance, in Phaswane Mpe's *Welcome to our Hillbrow*, published in 2001, he writes in a stream-of-consciousness passage that:

> [T]he new president Rolihlahla Mandela welcomes guests and visitors unlike his predecessors who erected deadly electric wire fences around the *boundaries* of South Africa trying to keep out the barbarians from Mozambique Zaïre Nigeria Congo Ivory Coast Zimbabwe Angola Zambia from all over Africa fleeing their war-torn countries. (26, italics mine).

A few years later, in *The Exploded View*, Ivan Vladislavić writes:

> The *boundaries* of Johannesburg are drifting away, sliding over pristine ridges and valleys, lodging in tenuous places, slipping again. At its edges, where the city fades momentarily into the veld, unimaginable new atmospheres evolve. (6, italics mine)

The fascination with boundaries continues into his next book where Vladislavić writes in *Portrait with Keys*:

> Johannesburg is a frontier city, a place of contested *boundaries*. Territory must be secured and defended or it will be lost. (*PK* 185, italics mine)

A similar concern with boundaries is evident when, writing a decade after Mpe, Mark Gevisser attests in *Lost and Found in Johannesburg* that:

> This strand of self-consciousness about borders and *boundaries* – a negotiation of frontiers and a fear of what lies beyond – is particularly (even if not uniquely) South African. (*LF* 36, italics mine)

Indeed, a problematisation of boundaries is highly visible in South Africa, but it is debatable that this is, as Gevisser claims, a uniquely South African concern. For instance, the Mexico/USA border, the Berlin Wall, and the Great Wall of China are all evidence of societies that desire separation at great human expense. By means of examining three literary texts which feature Johannesburg as an example of a transitional city, this chapter is concerned with how boundaries are drawn and negotiated. Both Nuttall's entanglement and de Kock's notion of the seam, introduced in Chapter 1, will also be applied to a discussion of diaspora in South African literature. It is through the act of walking that boundaries are both defined and explored, and the flâneur who walks his or her urban surroundings is doing precisely that: defining boundaries, even challenging them while exploring physical spaces.

Since these Afropolitan flâneurs considered in this chapter are located in Johannesburg after the apartheid era, due consideration will be given to how they continue to come into conflict with boundaries or negotiate and traverse them. In Mpe's novel, the Afropolitan flâneur has a God's-eye view and is thus also a kind of celestial flâneur. Of interest too, is how the authors discussed in this chapter deal not only with physical borders and boundaries, but also with issues of race and the interregnum[59] or liminality within that space. The literary genre of the three texts also reflects a concern with boundaries in that one text is fiction (Mpe's *Welcome to our Hillbrow*), one is autobiographical (Gevisser's *Lost and Found in Johannesburg*) and the third is a mix of genres (Vladislavić's *Portrait with Keys*), thus blurring the line between fact and fiction.

There is an art to getting lost or being found, and the flâneur is adept at embracing a sense of discovery at every turn of the road, especially in "a constantly expanding megalopolis" (Murray 9) like Johannesburg. Sarah Nuttall points out that "[m]ost work on the

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[59] In a monograph, *Willem Boshoff*, IvanVladislavić writes that "[w]e are in a second interregnum, a parenthetical era, in which a provisional country asserts itself, but drags its history behind in brackets, like a skin it has not properly sloughed" (8). Nadine Gordimer first used the term "interregnum" in her 1982 lecture "Living in the Interregnum" wherein she described the liminal space in which South Africa would find itself for many years: 1990–1994 was the first interregnum, with the setting up of a phasing out of apartheid rule with Nelson Mandela's release from prison.

South African city has focused on themes of African urbanisation" ("City Forms" 740), and that city spaces are about "movement, change, crossings" (747). Clearly, to experience change requires some form of acceptance or adaptation, and Kirby Manià expands on this by claiming that Johannesburg "is pervasively viewed and depicted as a highly superficial, materialistic city lacking a locally articulated, vernacular architectural language" (12). If this is the case, then a progressive way of interpreting the city is required.

Nuttall and Mbembe seek to read the city by means of "writing, talking, seeing, walking, telling, hearing, drawing, making" (*Johannesburg* 9). Indeed, some of these everyday practices are mentioned several times by Michel de Certeau in *The Practice of Everyday Life* as "maintain[ing] formal continuities and the permanence of a memory without language, from the depths of the oceans to the streets of our great cities" (40), and are the self-same methods of capturing the everyday of the South African city that are employed by all three authors discussed in depth in this chapter.

"All roads lead to Johannesburg", wrote Alan Paton in his well-known *Cry, the Beloved Country,* and irrespective of if "you are white or if you are black they lead to Johannesburg" (48). This indicates that Johannesburg is a multicultural, multi-ethnic city that beckons to all irrespective of race. In her introduction to *Entanglement*, Nuttall alludes to the complex duality of Johannesburg as "an intricate entanglement of éclat and sombreness, light and darkness, comprehension and bewilderment, polis and necropolis, desegregation and resegregation" (13). This binary overload is evident in a melting pot city such as Johannesburg. But is Nuttall's concept of entanglement sufficient to account for the shifting ground of a city such as Johannesburg? While Achille Mbembe calls Johannesburg "the centre of Afropolitanism par excellence" ("Afropolitanism" 29), he also refers to Johannesburg as "the apartheid city" where "racial segments interacted with one another in a number of different ways" ("Aesthetics"49), further illustrating the entanglement of a city that is historically and racially complex and multi-layered. In South Africa, the use and ownership of space has been a race matter, resulting in boundaries being legally enforced during the apartheid era. Not that much has changed since, however, and "Johannesburg," points out Ed Charlton, "still is a space patterned by elision, oblivion, and disorientation" (15). This legacy is in large part the result of segregationist legislation, including the Urban Areas Act (1923), Prohibition of Mixed Marriages Act (1949), and the Group Areas Act (1950), amongst others, which spanned several decades of South African history. During the apartheid era in South Africa, the State controlled mobility. Movement of black South

Africans was severely restricted and a 'pass' had to be carried and produced upon demand by the police.

In *Portrait with Keys,* published almost a decade after the official end of apartheid, Vladislavić allows his characters to define different racial attitudes in a 'changing' post-apartheid South Africa. The narrator, Vlad, is more open to change than is his brother named Branko, a name which in Slavic means "defender", and in Portuguese it translates as "white". Given that Vladislavić is particular with words and language, it seems this choice of name is not accidental. In *Portrait with Keys,* while walking with his brother Vlad, Branko refers to the people they pass on the road, saying:

> What's wrong with these people? [...] Why don't they stay inside like normal people? Why are they always lazing about in the yard? Have they got nothing better to do with their time than sit around in the sun? (*PK* 21)

Here Branko's attitude is clear, showing that he has little time for people who are not like him, in particular people of colour as he is just not happy with blacks moving into the formerly 'white' suburbs. Vlad seems non-committal, and avoids expressing his thoughts. "Rather than meeting face to face, the two suburbs [black and white] turn their backs on one another" (*PK* 20) says Vlad, highlighting racial difficulties which do not disappear overnight. "Even before 1994, the date of South Africa's formal transition to democracy, apartheid Johannesburg was unravelling", notes Bremner, and "[o]fficial narratives, creative everyday practices and new urban imaginaries were disrupting and interrupting the given landscape of the apartheid city" (261–262). This disruption was part of an ongoing process, but even two decades later, the traumatic effects of apartheid are felt and still linger. Nuttall wonders whether one can "write oneself in to Johannesburg, a city one feels to be receding from one's grasp, unless one inhabits at least the beginnings of a cross-racial world" (*Entanglement* 93). Nuttall expresses the belief that it must be possible to inhabit such a cross-racial world, and yet the reality dictates otherwise. Many black people still walk long distances to work while many whites drive along highways from the suburbs, and there is little chance of mingling across race. Vlad, an Afropolitan flâneur, only ever encounters black people when he is out walking on the street. Nuttall seems to imply that Vlad ought to have more black friends, but she also directs this expectation towards older white South Africans (like Branko) who refuse to establish friendships across the racial divide.

Writing about Johannesburg as a transitioning city, Achille Mbembe notes that:

> the fabric of the racial city is in the process of being destroyed. [...] Blacks and whites have become wanderers among its ruins. But the play of intervals

> enables everyone to construct his or her own story of Johannesburg and form memories of place. […] The rupture between the racist past and the metropolitan present, between here and there and between memories of things and events, renders possible the production on new figural forms and calls into play a chain of substitutions. Johannesburg becomes a city of deconstructed images. ("Aesthetics" 63)

Mbembe thus sees the rupture as a potential site for creating a space for the new, which is similar to de Kock's analogy of the "seam". Mbembe's "racial city" is multi-layered, re-painted like a pentimento and re-written like a palimpsest. However, for some people, Johannesburg is still very much a divided, racialized city which remains un-deconstructed. Remnants of old apartheid are evident, for example, in the many (predominantly white) households that continue to employ (black) gardeners and domestic workers. Thus, the socio-economic structures remain the same.

In an effort to move forward with changes, Nuttall proposes that "we need theories and ways of reading culture which take into account the extent of the transformations that have taken place" ("City Forms" 731). Since the official end of apartheid and the birth of a 'new' nation, South Africa is still, twenty years later, trying to do just that. The past continues to appear in the present, albeit in some other form, and yet, the future must offer hope of further change. While there are many ways to do this, literature provides a useful record of history, even when disguised as fiction, and more specifically, new literatures of the city offer a way of reading the changes that have taken place. Regarding post-apartheid fiction, Nuttall highlights its usefulness in "understanding city-culture" through seeing:

> the intricacy of the city as a spatial formation, its density as a concentration of people, things, institutions and architectural forms; the heterogeneity of lives juxtaposed in close proximity, the citiness of cities, the ways in which they gather, mix, remix, separate, conceal and display and the ways in which urban life becomes the irreducible product of mixture, each urban moment sparking performative improvisations which are unforeseen and unforeseeable. ("City Forms" 740)

In this extract, Nuttall illustrates clearly how all the ingredients of a city are carefully mixed together to form something unique out of a particular urban space. Key to this is an impromptu performativity which comes with the territory; a performativity which, though scripted, cannot be rehearsed. Ultimately, this performativity is what gives rise to the fluidity of the city, and yet it is the flux and flow of ongoing changes which creates the city.

In *Portrait with Keys,* Vladislavić plots his text as a series of word portraits with the main headings being "Point A" and "Point B", and his index is titled "Itineraries", suggesting

"some other thematic pathways through the book" (*PK* 205). Both *Portrait with Keys* and *Lost and Found in Johannesburg* almost obsessively return to the past, adding to the tension of negotiating a way through the ever-changing city in the present. Gevisser's itinerary begins with his explanation of a map-making game he played as a child, plotting routes through Johannesburg with the aid of his parents' street guide, *Holmden's Register of Johannesburg* (*LF* 7–8), and the first chapter of his book is accompanied by illustrations from the Holmden's map. The first chapter of Mpe's novella is titled "Hillbrow: The Map" and starts with a set of clear street directions from central Hillbrow to the University of the Witwatersrand on the edge of Braamfontein (*WH* 6–13). All three texts carefully reference maps and mapping the city as a means of finding one's way. Thus the "spatial formation" of which Nuttall speaks is here illustrated in three very different texts that highlight in their own way the heterogeneity of Johannesburg.

2.2 Ivan Vladislavić's Ambulatory Itineraries in *Portrait with Keys*

> I'm walking around with my eyes wide open, taking everything in like a vacuum cleaner, coughing bits of it out on paper. (*PK* 26)

The above words, those of Vlad, the narrator of *Portrait with Keys,* epitomise the flâneur through whose gaze the city surrounds are interpreted. Vlad is an Afropolitan flâneur, a fictional character who wanders in a suburb of a South African city. As an Afropolitan flâneur he carefully observes the urban spaces and the inhabitants of those spaces in order to understand cultural identity and to find both his own place in the city and a sense of belonging. Written by South African born Ivan Vladislavić, of Croatian origin, *Portrait with Keys* is but one of his many works that depict the city of Johannesburg. As indicated inside the front cover dust-jacket, *Portrait with Keys* is "neither a novel in any conventional sense, nor a collection of short stories" (dust-jacket). This text explores quotidian Johannesburg through the eyes of an Afropolitan narrator-flâneur, where the reader, like the writer of the text, is also a flâneur, or urban stroller. In their preface to an interview with Vladislavić, Mike Marais and Carita Backström note that "Vladislavić almost invariably responds to our questions not only as the writer but also as a reader of his novel" (119), highlighting an authorial duality. Given Vladislavić's obsession with language,[60] his work in general offers us, in his words, "a sense of the mechanics of it all, a particular sensitivity to what the

[60] "I've always been drawn to the intricate details of language" says Vladislavić in an interview with Christopher Warnes (278).

connections are between words" (interview by Christopher Warnes 278). Furthermore, *Portrait with Keys* illustrates how Vladislavić experiments with literary genre by combining several writing styles unconventionally. Vladislavić's multiple roles of writer, reader and editor are all aspects of his particular style of being an Afropolitan flâneur. In this text, the flâneur is not only the narrator, but also the author and the reader.

Through his writing, Vladislavić highlights marginality by himself not being margin-confined, since by walking as an Afropolitan flâneur he goes beyond the boundaries, and as an author he writes outside the margins. Gerald Gaylard notes that an aspect which makes Vladislavić's writing stand out is a specific concern with the marginal spaces in South Africa. The "apartheid era" in South Africa, says Gaylard, is defined as "one which attempted to socially engineer the dominance of the centre – in this case colonial whiteness and Eurocentrism – via fixed delineations of margins: spatial, geographical, racial, sexual, psychological, spiritual" ("Introduction" 2). Such concerns are clearly evident and interrogated in the work of Vladislavić.

The activities of walking and writing are closely associated with memory, as was noted in Chapter 1 in the section on psychogeography. De Certeau has also noted the role memory plays in the mind of the walker. Memory ties us to place, says de Certeau, and "[h]aunted places are the only ones people can live in" (108). For instance, while walking, the mind is stilled enough to think and remember. Memory and re-membering, reminiscing and nostalgia[61] are tackled in several ways in *Portrait with Keys.* Memory and nostalgia connect to contemporary flânerie because of the hankering for a place or time that is evident not only in Vladislavić's text here, but also in Gevisser and Mpe's work, as will be illustrated later. In an interview by journalist Fred de Vries, Vladislavić commented that his work was deeply concerned with nostalgia. "I've looked up the meaning of 'nostalgia'," said Vladislavić, "[i]t comes from the Greek word *nostos*, meaning to 'return home'. I think that my book is about that question: how do you feel at home?" (208). The sense of returning home is pervasive in *Portrait with Keys*, as is memory. In order to return home, one must not get lost, but as a preventative measure, having a map helps:

> When I was a child, my father, a city man through and through, a lover of walking and driving, finely attuned to change in the world around him and

[61] For in-depth reading on nostalgia, refer to Svetlana Boym's "Nostalgia and its Discontents" and Jacob Dlamini's *Native Nostalgia* (2009). Psychogeography also goes some way to provide a theoretical underpinning in this regard, in that the geography of the environment affects the psyche, and memories are triggered through encounters via sights, smells, sounds and other senses that are attached to being in that environment.

> therefore able to give directions with creativity and precision, taught me that it never harmed anyone to have a map in hand. (*PK* 13)

Vlad's father in this description sounds himself like an Afropolitan flâneur. The dynamic Afropolitan city offers the walker new surprises with every step. As Lindsay Bremner notes in her introduction to *Writing the City into Being*, Johannesburg "never reveals itself all at once. […] It spawns multiple centres, sends one in divergent directions, weaves multiple paths and reveals itself in its impurities. It insists that to know anything about it requires coming back, again and again" (1). The fragmented narrative of *Portrait with Keys* allows one to do exactly that, to re-turn and re-form in palimpsestic fashion, a different narrative of Johannesburg each time.

It is by means of walking that the flâneur is able to grasp and fully interpret the surroundings. As de Certeau reminds us: "They walk – an elementary form of this experience of the city; they are walkers, *Wandersmänner*, whose bodies follow the thicks and thins of an urban 'text' they write without being able to read" (93). In *Portrait with Keys*, not only does the narrator-flâneur Vlad walk through the city, so does the author-flâneur Vladislavić follow the same route as him. Indeed, we reader-flâneurs walk the selfsame Johannesburg territory, we follow the same route to learn the story of the city, and create what Kirby Manià terms "a narrative of urban identity" (133). We all walk this territory "marking out its borders and limits, traversing and transgressing it, having it transgressed, to the extent that borders and definitions become porous and problematic" (Gaylard, "Introduction" 5). This is a flâneur whose character stems from the original Parisian flâneur, yet this "African flâneur is no leisurely dilettante taking his turtle for a stroll on a leash" (Gaylard, "Introduction" 11). Elaborating further, Gaylard remarks that this "restless […] stranger" is:

> An invisible everyman who may be like the reader or may be an anachronistic hangover, idiosyncratic misfit, stranger or migrant, sometimes unpleasant, who connects the formal and informal, urban and rural, city and underbelly, groomed and chaotic, wealthy and impoverished. ("Introduction" 11)

In a more recent article, Gaylard writes about the "Johannesburg walker" who is "anxiously alert" ("African Flâneur" 57). The act of walking here is described by Gaylard as a "repartee between feet and earth, the parley between eyes and surrounds" and is a "somatic interaction that can reveal the unfamiliar" (63). Gaylard likens this to having an "internal GPS" (63) which is helpful in allowing the narrator's "peripheral vision" (65) to observe far more than myopic vision would ever allow. It is perhaps this highly tuned sense of his place in space that enables the narrator in *Portrait with Keys* to discover an entirely different world existing

beneath the manhole covers where "[t]here was a maze of mysterious spaces underfoot, known only to those who could see it" (*PK* 50). Vlad as an Afropolitan flâneur has an extra-sensory ability to notice such underfoot spaces as these where the poor and unfortunate homeless street people of Johannesburg store their meagre possessions.

Only through movement can one return home, and the only way to get somewhere is to go from Point A to Point B. To labour this point, Vladislavić structures his book in two sections. On the "Contents" page, these points are simply separated by an ellipsis, a series of three dots, suggesting that there are multiple ways to get from A to B, and the reader is at liberty to navigate her or his route through *Portrait with Keys* from "Point A" to "Point B". These two sections comprise the 138 numbered narrative fragments of different length, relating to some aspect of the city as seen through the eyes of the narrator-flâneur Vlad. The text is, in the words of Sally-Ann Murray, "a creative miscellany of the urban, a multipli*city*" (73). The index of *Portrait with Keys* provides a range of 29 suggested itineraries (long – moderate – short) indicating the original orders in which they appeared in different contexts elsewhere when previously published. This indexed structure allows for agency on the part of the reader-flâneur who is able to make her/his own way through the textual fragments, aided by the itineraries. Furthermore, if considered psychogeographically, this enables chance to play a role, opening up the "possibility of improvisation" where, as James Graham suggests "[r]eaders might choose to stop and dwell a while, skip a street or ignore a scene, retrace their steps or change direction" (Graham 337). In other words, the reader is able to behave like a flâneur. Each person will navigate a city differently, read a book differently, and leave behind a different footprint, as unique as a fingerprint, in the city.

The postmodern[62] structure of *Portrait with Keys* allows for agency on the part of the reader-flâneur who is able to make his/her own way through the non-linear text, thus negotiating their own route through the kaleidoscopically fragmented city of Johannesburg. The "Walking" itinerary cites twenty-two "portraits", or "keys", evidence that the activity of walking remains one of the text's main themes. Indeed, *Portrait with Keys* is a sophisticated psychogeographic scrapbook of an ever-changing city of bits and pieces. The bricolage form replicates the fragmentation of the city of Johannesburg, with its walls, security fences, locks and keys. At the end of the book, an index labelled "Itineraries" traces "previously published

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[62] In her article "Rethinking the Flâneur", Aimée Boutin notes that "the postmodern flâneur has become a tool for conceptualizing urban mobility and encounters, and a symbol of self-conscious awareness of urban experience" (130). Vladislavić's postmodern structure combined with his postmodern narrator-flâneur Vlad in *Potrait with Keys* thus provides an intensely detailed immersion into the urban environment described in the text.

cycles and suggests some other thematic pathways through the book" (*PK* 205). In this way, the book becomes a unique map of the city, a fingerprint, and is, as its title implies, an actual portrait of Vlad's "Joburg and what-what", which is the sub-title of the text.

The reader of Vladislavić's text becomes de Certeau's walker in the city. The city described by Vlad is one of mazes, of walls, of boundaries, of things not immediately seen with the eye. This recalls what Michel de Certeau says of the walker who:

> make[s] use of spaces that cannot be seen […]. The paths that correspond in this intertwining, unrecognized poems in which each body is an element signed by many others, elude legibility. (93)

While there is a de Certeauian romanticism evident in Vlad, as well as an intense attention to detail paid by him in his perambulatory observations, Sarah Nuttall suggests that this narrator in *Portrait with Keys* does not "walk to the tune of the flâneur" ("Invisible City" 331) as there is an element of danger. Indeed, any type of flânerie practised in Johannesburg can be perilous, as will also be seen in *Lost and Found in Johannesburg* and *Welcome to Our Hillbrow.* Nuttall adds that "[t]he narrator's sense of alienation and belonging is complex" since if "he is 'out of place', he is also engaged in the act of 'writing himself in' to a city which does its best to resist him" ("Invisible City" 332). The Afropolitan flâneur is at once alienated and yet simultaneously belongs to the city. This flâneur can indeed "slip into the margins" and become "increasingly marginal to the city's demographics and concerns" (Nuttall, "Invisible City" 333).

Michel de Certeau maintained that by walking the city, an individual was in fact *writing* the city by producing a unique narrative as a result of the symbiotic relationship between individual subject and the city:

> The long poem of walking manipulates spatial organizations, no matter how panoptic they may be: it is neither foreign to them (it can take place only within them) nor in conformity with them (it does not receive its identity from them). It creates shadows and ambiguities within them. (de Certeau 101)

While space, as seen in the above extract, can be manipulated and reorganised, it also presents ambiguities. Such ambiguities are part of the city of Johannesburg, and Vladislavić makes use of this in his work. Intertextual references are plentiful in Vladislavić's oeuvre in general, and in *Portrait with Keys* he invokes de Certeau when he refers to the same "long poem of walking" in the extract below:

> The way and the walker […] are in conversation. The 'long poem of walking' is a dialogue. Ask a question of any intersection […] and it will answer, not always straightforwardly, allowing a quirk of the topography, the lie of the land, a glimpse of a prospect to nudge you one way or the other. This conversation is one of the things that makes city walking interesting, and one of the masters of the art was Dickens. (*PK* 53)

Vladislavić illustrates here the symbiotic relationship between the urban environment and the one who walks that space. By referring to the 'long poem of walking', the narrator-flâneur Vlad reminds his reader that in order to read the city, ordinary practices such as walking and observing will produce a conversation and tell a story. Here then, also a necessary reference to Dickens, master of everyday life in London,[63] whose Scrooge already received an oblique mention at the beginning of *Portrait with Keys*.

A further intertextual reference comes from one of Vladislavić's writerly influences, Herman Charles Bosman, who, like writer Lionel Abrahams, makes several guest appearances in *Portrait with Keys*. Vladislavić writes:

> Wherever I go in Joburg, I bump into Herman Charles Bosman. I see him at the City Hall, talking from the steps or heckling from the edge of a crowd; gazing into a shop window in Eloff Street, barefooted and in his shirtsleeves, suffering from the recognizing blues. (*PK* 187)

Bosman, South African writer famed for his short stories, also wrote many essays on Johannesburg. In the extract above, Vladislavić quotes directly from the opening lines of Bosman's story "The Recognising Blues", which starts off with the sentence: "I was ambling down Eloff Street, barefooted and in my shirt-sleeves, and with the recognising blues" (19). In Bosman's story, the recognising blues occur when, after too much smoking of marijuana, a person imagines that they recognise someone. In Vladislavić's *Portrait with Keys,* his narrator Vlad also appears to have the recognising blues. If this is indeed the case, in a city such as Johannesburg, just how does Vlad get from Point A to Point B?

2.2.1 From Point A

From "Point A", Vladislavić sets the scene at the beginning of the book with a short passage about alarming a house when exiting, clearly indicative of a security-consciousness that living in Johannesburg dictates. The flâneur is free to roam the streets, yet the shutting up of

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[63] Dickens's London was a "city that offered the walker 'miles upon miles of streets' in which to be lonely and 'warm company' at every turn once his loneliness had been satisfied" writes Vladislavić (*PK* 54). London was a "city that collaborated enthusiastically in its own invention" whereas Vlad's Johannesburg is "a city that resists the imagination" (*PK* 54). Post-apartheid Johannesburg does not lend itself to easy walking in the streets, and houses are carefully curtained, locked and alarmed, "explosive" (*PK* 11) and "ticking like bombs" (*PK* 54).

the house suggests a potential vulnerability. Not even the flâneur is immune from the dangers of criminals that lurk hidden in the shadows of the very same streets the flâneur traverses regularly. In the portrait below, Vlad the narrator relates the exchange of directions between people in the city:

> The busy city person must rely on words and gestures to guide the stranger through a clutter of irrelevant detail, with dead ends and false turns on every side, some of which might prove disastrous to the unwary. Giving directions is a singular skill, and doing so well a reliable measure of character. [...] It is also true that the complexities of cities, the flows of traffic across ever-changing grids, coupled with the peculiarities of physical addresses, occupations, interests and needs, produces for each one of us a particular pattern of familiar or habitual movement over the skin of the earth, which, if we could see it from a vantage point in the sky, would appear as unique as a fingerprint. (*PK* 12)

In the lines quoted above, Vladislavić summarises all the intricacies of the urban environment with its flows of traffic and people criss-crossing paths on a daily basis, by evoking a sense of courteous hospitality. The psychogeography of Perec and Debord can be read into the above, since the way the city is read and interpreted is directly in response to the geographical environment. Vladislavić speaks of the stranger to help put in perspective for the local inhabitant the difficulties encountered in understanding new surroundings. The passage also recalls Bremner's analogy of wrinkled skin, as Vladislavić here likens the pattern of the city flows to skin covering the earth. Furthermore, the unique "fingerprint" mentioned in this extract can be equated with the individual footprint of the flâneur.

In a portrait that enacts psychogeography and invites postcolonial critique, Vlad says:

> I live on an island, an accidental island, made by geography and the town planners who laid out these city streets. Roberts and Kitchener, avenues in uniforms of English soldiers, march away to the east, side by side. A spine of rock, an outcrop of the goldbearing reef on which the city depends, blocks every thoroughfare between the avenues, except for Blenheim and Juno. (*PK* 18)

The history pertaining to Johannesburg's colonial origins, exacerbated by a goldrush that brought European settlers, is evident in the physical environment and the actual street names in Vlad's description above. While Vlad does not critique colonialism directly, he is aware of the history that lives in the streets, and as an Afropolitan flâneur he acknowledges, arguably, in a postcolonial fashion, "that Africa's societies had always been diverse, mobile and

composite – that cosmopolitanism was indigenous" (Balakrishnan n. pag.).[64] Some of the colonial street names, such as "Roberts" and "Kitchener" that Vlad mentions, honoured Anglo-Boer war heroes,[65] and have been changed over recent years to reflect a more inclusive history of Johannesburg. For instance, "Kitchener Avenue", which celebrated a brutal mass murderer, is now known as "Albertina Sisulu Road", in honour of an anti-apartheid activist, fondly referred to as the "Mother of the Nation" (Downing and Hastings-Tolsma 214).[66] "Roberts", the other street name which Vlad refers to in the extract, refers to the general credited for winning the same war. Irrespective of the meaning behind the names, they do nonetheless serve, on a fundamental level, the geographical function of mapping.

The naming of streets has been addressed by de Certeau who asks in *The Practice of Everyday Life,* "[w]hat is it then that [the names of streets] spell out?" (104). To answer his own question, de Certeau states that

> Disposed in constellations that hierarchize and semantically order the surface of the city, operating chronological arrangements and historical justifications, these words […] these names make themselves available to the diverse meanings given them by passers-by; they detach themselves from the places they were supposed to define and serve as imaginary meeting-points on itineraries which, as metaphors, they determine for reasons that are foreign to their original value but may be recognized or not by passers-by. (de Certeau 104)

As de Certeau attests here, the names given to streets serve to impose a specific order and historicity, and yet those walking the streets interpret the meanings differently. In this way, the names serve as metaphors, reminding the reader of the power of language. Word-weaving is Vladislavić's distinctive way of being a writer-reader-flâneur, and his further use of metaphor in the following extract deserves attention because of the manner in which it situates Johannesburg when Vlad the narrator-flâneur proclaims:

> When I am driven to walk, which is often, only the long way round, following this shore – Blenheim, Roberts, Juno, Kitchener – will bring me back to the beginning. Johannesburg surges and recedes like a tide. I come

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[64] In her article on the Afropolitan idea, Sarah Balakrishnan refers to a vein of scholarship prevalent in the 1970s and 1980s that showed cosmopolitanism to be indigenous to Africa. She mentions specifically Igor Kopytoff's 1987 *The African Frontier,* where he argues "that African polities had always been pluralist" (n. pag.). To elaborate, Balakrishnan points out the multicultural origins of the Swahili language.
[65] The South African War (1899–1902), a conflict between Boer and Briton which included black South Africans, was formerly known as the Anglo-Boer War.
[66] "Mother of the Nation" is a title conferred on a number of other people including Winnie Mandela, Fatima Jinnah, Queen Victoria, and Brazilian President Dilma Rousseff. Albertina Sisulu, who championed human rights, represents a stark contrast to Kitchener who introduced a 'scorched earth' and concentration camp policy during the South African War.

> home with my shoes full of sand, empty my pockets at the kitchen table and pick through the findings. The roar in the air is the absence of water. (*PK* 18)

In this passage, the use of a water metaphor is ironic as Johannesburg is a land-locked city. As a writer-flâneur, Vladislavić is clearly more interested in the life of the street than in the old colonial street names. The "accidental island" (*PK* 18) described by the narrator Vlad is a space that can be navigated on foot by the narrator-flâneur, whose gaze falls on small treasures gathered en route, much like a *strandloper* or beachcomber.[67] While walking is essential for both *strandloper* and flâneur, the former depends on it for survival, whereas the latter walks mainly for leisure purposes.

As he walks, the flâneur Vlad picks up prompts from both past and present, and thus the city "is no more than a mnemonic" (*PK* 31). "Where do we go?" he asks himself, "[w]hat do we see?" (*PK* 31). Here Vladislavić is clearly drawing on Benjamin, who suggests in "The Return of the Flâneur" that the city is indeed a "mnemonic for the lonely walker: it conjures up more than his childhood and youth, more than its own history" (262). This observation illlustrates how the city environment impacts upon the human subject via prompts to the memory. Georges Perec, when interviewed on the "work of memory" spoke about "attempts to recover elements that form part of the texture of everyday life" (*Species* 127), and this is precisely what Vladislavić is doing in *Portrait with Keys,* since memory and nostalgia are major concerns in this text.[68]

Further along on this route walked by both Afropolitan flâneurs, Vladislavić the writer and Vlad the narrator, one of the shortest portraits in the book is only four lines long, and floats like an island between the other portraits:

> My people are islanders. I am happy enough on the edge of the city, combing its long shores while the weather drives currents through the veld. My English blood makes me go clockwise, the rest urges me the other way around. (*PK* 46)

The recurring oceanic reference and connection to islander ancestry is in juxtaposition with the land-locked city. Vlad's roots are strong and yet he experiences a push-pull relationship to his own people. Just as the tide surges and recedes, so too do his roots: his ancestral ties

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[67] A *strandloper* is South African term which relates to some of the earliest Khoisan inhabitants who foraged from the sea, scavenging along the shores of the southern African coastal region. Further detail on *strandlopers* can be gleaned from Michael Lewis Wilson's MA thesis "Strandlopers and Shell Middens".

[68]Aspects pertaining to memory and nostalgia are layered both overtly as well as subliminally throughout the text, reverberating with the de Certeaudian words used as the epigraph to *Portrait with Keys*: "Haunted places are the only ones people can live in" (9). As Gaylard puts it, "the present is always haunted by the past" ("Migrant" 293). Vlad is constantly reminded of that past as he walks once familiar streets that are changing.

send him in one direction, while part of him goes the other way, echoing the dilemma of identity experienced by the migrant and person of mixed heritage. It is this "interweaving of worlds" (Mbembe, "Afropolitanism" 28) that defines the Afropolitan, in Mbembe's understanding, and serves to illustrate that the African and the Afropolitan do not necessarily have to be black. Mbembe argues for a "broad-mindedness" that acknowledges "racial multiplicity" and that can also conceive of "Africans liv[ing] outside Africa" ("Afropolitanism" 29). These ideas then make room for Vlad to be identified as an Afropolitan, with roots in Africa.

Related to roots, ties and belonging, are Homi Bhabha's "Third Space", de Kock's "seam" and Nuttall's "entanglement" which are also connected to boundaries and margins. Apartheid made clear the boundaries in South Africa, with policies that dictated who could live where and enforced racist separation, and while change can be slow, such apartheid structures must be dissolved. Bhabha's Third Space, as a "domain of hybridity and transculturation", is a space for new identity formation in which "contradictions and ambiguities are negotiated" (Knudsen and Rahbek 33). An example of how Vladislavić comments on change and hybridity is seen in the manner his text diarises ways that the neighbourhood changes, with new people moving in (who were previously prevented from doing so because of apartheid legislation), and "Africa […] coming to the suburbs in the nicest possible way" (*PK* 25) when a Ndebele mural is painted on a garden wall. By inserting this portrait, Vladislavić makes a clear cross-cultural reference, to acknowledge some of the ways that change and decolonisation enter the city. The new inhabitants are impacting on the physical suburb. The "neighbourhood's first street corner hawker" (*PK* 19), a cobbler who sets up shop in a space of his own choosing, is subtly transgressing boundaries and shifting the former way of seeing those spaces, as he does not live in that area, but migrates daily in and out of the peripheries. Having such neighbours, for racist white bourgeois Johannesburgers such as Vlad's brother appears to be, is a signifier of decline. While Vlad might appear ambivalent about these changes in the neighbourhood, he does not ignore them. As a flâneur, he notices things in his surroundings, he observes how the cityscape changes through the impact of the individuals that live in it. Vlad's flânerie is akin to drifting, in the manner of the *dériveur*, or drifter, who takes an unplanned walk.

An example of the *dérive* can be seen when Vlad defamiliarises the mundane, for example:

> Now you must go into the veld – don't forget your walking shoes – slowly, there's no rush. […] What are you looking for? – a greasy bottle with a Smirnoff label. half a brick with a scab of cement and an iron rod twisting out of it. a flattened tin. the foundations of a ruined substation. three porcelain insulators thrown down from the pylons by the Escom electricians, as beautifully wrought as vases. a burnt-out bulb. a signature. smudged lines. pencil stubs. (*PK* 182)

In this passage the relaxed walking pace of the *dérive* is emphasised, and the walker is absorbed in carefully noticing everything that appears in his path. Vladislavić's description reads like a collection of items in a garbage dump or scrap metal yard. By ignoring conventional writing styles such as capitalisation and sentence structure, Vladislavić draws attention to the basics, to the ordinary. These encounters are so precisely described, the minutiae of the everyday, which chimes with Georges Perec's attention to quotidian details in his psychogeographic *Species of Spaces*, where he writes:

> Note down what you can see. Anything worthy of note going on. Do you know how to see what's worthy of note? Is there anything that strikes you?
>
> Nothing strikes you. You don't know how to see.
>
> You must set about it more slowly, almost stupidly. Force yourself to write down what is of no interest, what is most obvious, most common, most colourless. (50)

Here Perec[69] emphasises the need to look carefully, and to write at a slow pace, whereas Vlad focuses on the slowness of walking. Common to both is the importance of seeing, whether writing or walking. *Portrait with Keys* reflects the effects on the body of walking the city (Gaylard, "Migrant" 295) and provides a mapping of the urban space of Johannesburg. In this way, the book becomes a map of the city, a fingerprint (or even a footprint) and is, as its title implies, an actual portrait of Vlad's "Joburg and what-what". The everyday activities of observing, walking, and writing are the life breath of the flâneur. Vladislavić's flâneuristic journey through the city continues, as does that of the Afropolitan flâneur narrator Vlad, as does the journey of the reader of the text. As an Afropolitan flâneur, Vlad observes very carefully the changing urban space around him, a space that echoes the changing history of the country, with a view to better understanding the various cultural identities that come together in the cosmopolitan space of Johannesburg. The discussion that follows considers portraits that are located in the "Point B" section of *Portrait with Keys.*

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[69] Vladislavić himself drew inspiration from Perec and refers to this in *The Loss Library* (Twidle, "Don't Say 'etc.'" 3).

2.2.2 To Point B

Portrait 89 describes the day the weather turned:

> In September 1981 it snowed in Johannesburg for the first time in decades. […] The snow changed the city miraculously. We were all in it together. […] In the streets, white businessmen and black newspaper vendors were throwing snowballs at one another. White kept falling, this cold and foreign substance. People threw colour at one another. 'You want to be white?' the newspaper vendors said, 'well here it comes. How do you like it?' And the businessmen said, 'You think *you're* white, chucking snowballs at us? Try this for size.' And this 'being white', this 'white' itself, was nothing more than a froth that melted between your fingers or burst apart on a turned shoulder, was something improbable and silly that you could play games with, that did no real harm, that would not last. (*PK* 128–130)

South Africa in 1981 was a country deeply entrenched in apartheid ideology and dogma. For many South Africans, seeing snow was a novelty, particularly in Johannesburg. The narrator suggests how the snow became a bridge across the apartheid colour bar, enabling people to engage comfortably with one another. The Johannesburg snowfall "obliterated difference" (Manià 248) and brought all races joyously together. Vladislavić expresses an Afropolitan vision in acknowledging that this happening brought people of different races together and in highlighting the ludicrous idea of whiteness. While 1981 was a time of deep entrenchment of apartheid in South Africa, such a status quo, like the snow, could not remain indefinitely, as is suggested by the impermanence of the snow that melts into nothing. Vladislavić confesses that he had "always had an interest in how Johannesburg changes" and, referring to the years following Nelson Mandela's release, how he "became interested in how the city reflects South African society's evolution" (Poplak n. pag.). But of course, euphoria does not last, and so the narrator returns to reality in Portrait 99:

> Despite the alarm, Glynis is jittery. She wants to put her house on the market, but Sean talks her out of it. 'Everyone keeps saying Troyeville's going downhill,' he says. 'What are they talking about? It's always been at the bottom of the fucking hill. Just think about it for a minute. It was fucked when I was a kid, in an Afrikaans sort of way. It was fucked when I was a teenager, in a more Portuguese sort of way. And now here I am, fully grown, surrounded by Angolans and Nigerians – and guess what, it's still fucked. It's just a different shade of fucked.' (*PK* 146–147)

While the tone here is lighthearted as Sean critiques the changing neighbourhood, the sentiment that underlies his words points to a dangerous racist ideology that has not

disappeared. Indeed, as is evident in this passage, the more things change, the more they stay the same. While a number of suburbs in and around central Johannesburg are Afropolitan given the mix of inhabitants, nonetheless there exists a general economic malaise which understandably gives rise to crime and unease. An example of this appears in this wry account:

> Johannesburg has an abundance of wildlife, and the poachers have taken full advantage of the open season. They've bagged a steenbok at Wits University; a horse from outside the library in Sandton (first docking the beast, to see if anyone would mind, and then hacking off its head like Mafiosi); a pair of eagles nesting near the Stock Exchange; and another steenbok in the Botanical Gardens at Emmarentia. […] urban poachers are not just hungry for horseflesh, any old iron will do. (*PK* 136)

While the metaphor of the wildlife poacher is used to show the criminal element of metal thieving, Vladislavić uses the imagery of the bronze sculptures of eagles and buck to provide a lively animalistic contrast against the city background, giving new meaning to an urban jungle. Gaylard suggests that the urban poacher might also be a flâneur, one of "a whole underclass of loiterers" ("African Flâneur" 66), thus adding a new dimension to flânerie – that of action. The urban poacher might well lurk without moving in the shadows and loiter slowly on the streets, yet still spring into action to commit a crime. It is in the careful gaze of the poacher that the strength lies, and such powers of observation equate the poacher with the flâneur. The criminal, or petty thief, of necessity needs to be quick (or be caught) and time is a luxury the "urban poacher" cannot afford. The "urban poacher" here recalls Rob Shields's "urban native" flâneur whom he declared "the distant cousin of the environmentally attuned 'sauvage' who tracks prey through careful observation of the woods and an empathetic understanding of the quarry" (61). Flânerie requires that the "botanizing on the asphalt" (Benjamin, *Charles Baudelaire* 36) be carried out with due precision, by walking and observing closely the city surrounds.

A reference was made earlier to Vlad's knowledge of life below the street's surface, where people even lived beneath the manholes (*PK* 49–50). Not only is Vlad aware of what lies below the surface, but he also sees the city from above. Vlad describes Johannesburg as seen through the window of an aeroplane at night:

> This failure to see Johannesburg whole, for the last time, will cast a pall over the future. Tears start to my eyes. And then just as suddenly the plane levels out and *the city* rises in the window, as I knew it would, *a web of light* on the veld, impossibly vast and *un*naturally beautiful. (*PK* 109, italics mine)

This passage recalls de Certeau's distinction between the "voyeur-god" (93) and "pedestrians" when describing the city below from the 110th floor of the World Trade Center (91–101). Similarly, Vladislavić's narrator seeing Johannesburg from an aeroplane window (109) has a very different perspective of what was earlier seen at street level throughout the rest of the text. The Afropolitan flâneur's perspective from the window of an aeroplane is a recurring image in other texts that will be discussed later in this thesis, such as in Alain Mabanckou's *Blue White Red* and Teju Cole's *Open City.*

Having walked through Vladislavić's *Portrait with Keys* as a reader-flâneur, it is evident that his narrator-flâneur in Afropolitan Johannesburg differs from the comfortable Parisian man of leisure in several ways. Vlad, as an Afropolitan flâneur in Johannesburg, does not walk with a sense of entitlement: rather, he walks with caution, wary of what he might encounter around the next bend in the road because of the pervading threat of crime in Johannesburg streets. Ralph Goodman expresses it thus:

> Paris was passively laid out for the inspection of the flâneur, Johannesburg writhes and threatens under the gaze of this twentieth-century stroller whose nervous awareness of detail challenges the naturalization of city space and unmasks the power issues that underlie the construction of such spaces. (228)

Time and space separate different interpretations of the flâneur, and with the passing of time it is all the more necessary to update previous versions of the flâneur in order that this figure of urbanity reflects more precisely his or her city surrounds. Vladislavić "transculturates the flâneur for the African city" (Gaylard, "African Flâneur" 68). This flâneur, Vlad, is an African of the world, or an Afropolitan who connects to the urban space through walking to make it more like home for himself. Vlad's flânerie has highlighted a racial complexity and issues of belonging, which reminds the reader that life in South Africa during a time of transition was complex. Vlad, as an Afropolitan flâneur, walks with one foot moving towards the future, while the other still lingers and hesitates in the past. He is a walker who sets his own pace and seeks his own place in the city.

2.3 Mark Gevisser's Liminal Spaces in *Lost and Found*

> My world, atomised by apartheid, was defined by what it had been walled against, dammed against. I was safe in direct relation to the insecurity of those outside – who were in turn corralled by Bantustan or township borders, borders specifically defined to dispossess them. (Gevisser, *LF* 36)

The above extract, from Mark Gevisser's autobiography, *Lost and Found in Johannesburg*, refers to the same boundaries and borders that continue to plague Johannesburg many years after the demise of apartheid. A similar concern is problematised in the South African short film *Berea*[70] about a Jewish pensioner, Aaron Zukerman, who lives alone in his inner-city apartment where he receives weekly visits from a prostitute. When a replacement arrives one day, he becomes angry and the viewer is witness to how Zukerman's world gets smaller and smaller as he is left with only memories in a city that overwhelms and continues to change. This recalls the repeated themes of memory and loss, themes evident in Vladislavić's *Portrait with Keys* as well as themes which recur in autobiographical texts. Biography too, of necessity, explores the past in order to help us understand the present. Journalist and life writer Mark Gevisser, speaking at a Life Narratives Colloquium[71] pointed out that if he was going to "make any sense of what was happening in this country, [he] had to work with life stories". The present can only be understood within the context of the past.

Mark Gevisser's original claim to fame was his 2007 biography of the then South African President titled *Thabo Mbeki: The Dream Deferred* which "reads like a political thriller, ranging all over the world to trace the cultural formation of South Africa's toppled philosopher-king" (Twidle, "New Maps" 48). Referring to this biography in an interview conducted by Sarah Nuttall, Gevisser explained that his work "is explicitly about 'using the past to find the present'" ("Writing Biography" 109), as noted earlier. Clearly, for Gevisser, there can be no sense of the present without excavating what has gone before. Twidle cites Gevisser's Mbeki biography as an example of how such "portraits of others have always held slivers of self" ("New Maps" 48). It follows then that a few years later Gevisser would go on to write his own autobiography in the form of a "memoir of place and sexuality, home and identity" as proclaimed on the inside dust-jacket of *Lost and Found in Johannesburg*.[72]

The Afropolitan flâneur, as a citizen of the world, of Africa, is closely connected to his or her urban environment, largely through walking, seeing and writing. For the young Gevisser, an Afropolitan flâneur in the making, trying to find his place in the world, he "learned it was wrong for us to call ourselves 'Europeans' and black people 'Non-Europeans', as stipulated by the race classification laws" (*LF* 79). Furthermore, he is struck

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[70] The film *Berea* (2013) forms part of the *African Metropolis* series of movies.

[71] The *Life Narratives: Self-Representation in an Age of Human Rights* colloquium was held at the Johannesburg Holocaust & Genocide Centre on 14th June 2017 where Mark Gevisser delivered the keynote address.

[72] *Dispatcher: Lost and Found in Johannesburg* (Granta, UK, February 2014) is the title of the UK version of the South African publication, *Lost and Found in Johannesburg*, which appeared the following month (Jonathan Ball, SA, March 2014).

by the revelation that "if I was 'South African', I must be 'African' too" (*LF* 79). It was thus from a very young age that Gevisser started to question the divisions that kept white people separate from blacks, and he became more attuned to borders and boundaries that enforced this separation. The flâneur's sense of boundaries is reflected in the ways s/he interprets walked spaces, and how the city is mapped out and read. While Vladislavić's *Portrait with Keys* "connotes a frame […] multiply repeated in the gridded segmentations that constitute the layout of the narrative and recall the grid of the city map" (Boehmer and Davies 400), Gevisser's *Lost and Found in Johannesburg* refers to the same grid of the city map read through *Holmden's Register of Johannesburg*, a street guide which Gevisser made use of as a child to play a game he called "Dispatcher". This particular game involved Gevisser finding routes for an imaginary "dispatcher" or courier to get through or around different Johannesburg suburbs. By means of playing the "Dispatcher" game, the young Gevisser became an Afropolitan flâneur while stationed in the back seat of his father's car and perusing a street guide to decipher various routes to get from one place to another. "Inevitably," writes Gevisser, "Dispatcher took me places I was not meant to go" (*LF* 9). Decades later, the Global Positioning System (GPS)[73] technology carries out the same cartographic interpretation to assist individuals to arrive at their destination.

In the ways described above, both *Portrait with Keys* and *Lost and Found in Johannesburg* are texts of Afropolitan flânerie that deal with finding one's way around the city of Johannesburg, not necessarily always on foot. These two texts, as well as Mpe's *Welcome to our Hillbrow,* also share a preoccupation with borders, boundaries, marginalisation and segregation. Gevisser's autobiographical narrative of Afropolitan flânerie has much in common with Vladislavić's *Portrait with Keys* in that it is a bricolage of archival, factual, personal, as well as anecdotal pieces about living in a changing metropolis. If, as J.M. Coetzee famously proclaimed, "all autobiography is autre-biography"[74] (in Acott, "Tactics" 81), thus implying an othering of the self, Gevisser proves this to be the case through his own otherness. While he grew up Jewish, white and gay in a border- and boundary-obsessed South Africa, Gevisser was intensely aware of divisions and how identity was affected as a result. In South Africa, after the so-called end of apartheid, since there are fewer boundaries, or different divisions, there are subsequently new identities, such as the

[73] This recalls Gerald Gaylard's reference to an "internal GPS" ("African Flâneur" 63) discussed with regard to Vladislavić's *Portrait with Keys* in the previous section.
[74] Acott quotes from an interview with David Attwell where Coetzee explores "autre-biography" as a semi-autobiographical fiction to describe the part-autobiography / part-fiction he wrote in works such as *Boyhood* (1997) and *Youth* (2002). See also Margaret Lenta's article "Autrebiography: JM Coetzee's Boyhood and Youth".

contested Afropolitan, which continue to be shaped. Furthermore, in the current climate of renewed calls for decolonisation, different Afropolitan voices are emerging which express an acknowledgement of hybridity and ongoing change as an essential part of the make-up of Africans of the world.

In *Lost and Found* there are three flâneurs: Gevisser himself, the dispatcher in a game, and the reader, whose ways of being Afropolitan are shaped by how they perceive themselves in their urban surroundings, and how those surroundings reflect their part therein. Towards the end of the opening chapter, "Closed City", Gevisser writes:

> In his unforgettable novel about New York, the Nigerian-American author Teju Cole records his protagonist's wanderings around the city in the way Baudelaire was a *flâneur* in Paris or James Joyce set Leopold Bloom around Dublin in *Ulysses*. Cole's novel is called *Open City*, and it leads me to think about Johannesburg as anything but that: it draws its energy precisely from its atomisation and its edge, its stacking of boundaries against each other. It is no place to wander. (*LF* 20)

Here Gevisser compares and contrasts the Afropolitan flâneur in Johannesburg, who is defined by boundaries, with Cole's flâneur in New York, Baudelaire in Paris, and Bloom as a flâneur in Dublin. Ironically, New York is not truly the open city it is proclaimed to be for Cole's narrator, as will be seen in Chapter 5. What sets this flâneur in Johannesburg apart, even though an Afropolitan, is the edginess of the city and the multiple boundaries.

Having set the tone by pointing out that his text will similarly be about walking the city, Gevisser goes on to explain the difference between the Baudelairean flâneur and wanderers in his own city while at the same time he echoes Nuttall and Mbembe's study of Johannesburg as an *Elusive Metropolis*:

> On one level, Johannesburg's elusiveness is a condition specific to the city itself; its apartheid history, its risky streets. The people who walk Johannesburg daily are not *flâneurs* at all, but migrants, or workers, to whom the city still denies the right to public transport. Each time they walk it is not only a weight on their feet but a slight on their dignity: the stories their feet tell, unlike those of the idealised *flâneurs* imagined by Baudelaire or Walter Benjamin, are often ones of pain and dislocation. The rest of us drive. (*LF* 20)

Gevisser does not see these Johannesburg walkers as flâneurs, but rather as migrant workers, and this distinction requires elaboration, as he alludes here to the apartheid history of the city. During that time such migrants, who were black, travelled from rural areas to the city, and were denied the same access to public transport afforded to white travellers. Therefore, unjustly, these migrant workers were forced to walk long distances to reach their workplaces.

Despite Gevisser's claim that these migrants are not flâneurs, their feet do tell stories, as he himself suggests. Indeed, the stories of these migrant workers are not the same as those of the leisured and economically comfortable city dwellers. However, these migrants still walk and observe the city, albeit a city that is both alien and alienating. Such migrants, like refugees, are particular Afropolitan flâneurs whose itinerancy is forced upon them. Their walk is not relaxed, and their gaze is highly alert and cautious. The young Gevisser is one of "the rest of us", who enjoys the privilege of car travel. It is precisely a result of separatism that he invented his own way of being a newly fashioned Afropolitan flâneur by means of playing the childhood game he called "Dispatcher".

The "dawning of [Gevisser's] political consciousness" (*LF* 13) began early on in the 1970s segregated Johannesburg when "using the street guide's index [he] discovered […] that Mr Mphahlele lived only two pages away from [them], on page 77, far closer than Granny Gertie's hotel or even [his] school in Victory Park" (*LF* 12). Thus, already as a young boy, Gevisser is surprised to discover that nearby townships such as Alexandra were either difficult to find or the routes were hard to follow. In his "Dispatcher" game, the writer recalls the young Gevisser's frustration:

> […] trying to get my courier to his destination in Alexandra: there was no possible way of steering him from page 77 across into page 75. Sandton simply ended at its eastern boundary, the Sandspruit stream, with no indication of how one might cross it, or even that page 75 was just on the other side. The key plan might have connected the two pages, but on the evidence of the maps themselves there was simply no way through. (*LF* 12)

While the suburban boundaries in the Holmden's street guide referred to here are merely separated by pages, in reality the separation by legislation is much more evident in the patchwork city of Johannesburg. In the days of Gevisser's youth it would have been almost impossible for a white man to walk the streets where a black man lived and vice versa. There were enforced boundaries that mapped and shaped the identities of South Africans who lived in spaces represented on different pages of the street guide. During Gevisser's childhood, while he could walk with ease, black people could be arrested for walking in the wrong place at the wrong time or simply for not have a pass book on their person. The frustration of the young Gevisser is obvious as a result of apartheid ideology of 1970s Johannesburg as a "structural system of racial discrimination etched into the city's urban planning" (Boehmer and Davies 400). This also illustrates how identity is connected to space, given that Gevisser's political identity was shaped cartographically. This spatial connection is

problematised throughout Gevisser's autobiography and it is evident that ever since childhood he had questioned the boundaries that were imposed on others.

Boundaries during apartheid, separated by suburban demarcations on a map, were deemed necessary for the apartheid state to maintain control. Boundaries today, such as razor-wire fences and high walls, continue to make it easier to keep individuals out, particularly those who are unwanted or criminal-minded. As seen in Vladislavić's *Portrait with Keys*, which begins with the alarming[75] of a suburban house, the city of Johannesburg is one where inhabitants are constantly on high alert. Extra vigilance is necessary for the Afropolitan flâneur on the streets of Johannesburg. Mpe's text also provides encounters with crime, as the next section of this chapter will show.

Boundaries in the shape of walls and security fences in the "Closed City" (*LF* 7–21) of Johannesburg are designed to keep people inside safe from others who are kept outside and prevented from intruding, and Gevisser writes: "There is always a suburban wall, there is always a palisade fence, an infrared beam, a burglar bar, a thick red line, between the city I think I know and the city that is" (*LF* 21). However, boundaries are not insurmountable, and Gevisser continues his account:

> And then, at 9.30 p.m. on 11 January 2012, there was suddenly not enough of a boundary, as three men with guns slid effortlessly through a locked door on the fifth floor of a block of flats and ruptured that perimeter of denial that all Joburgers have to erect if they are to sleep comfortably at night. (20)

Crime has no respect for boundaries and Gevisser and his friends are shockingly disturbed one evening at a dinner party when armed men break in and invade their private space. The "Prologue" to the book sums the incident up in these lines:

> Something seemingly irrevocable changed, that night, in my relationship to Johannesburg, my home town, the place I have lived for four decades, the place of this book. (*LF* 3)

At the time of the home invasion, when Gevisser and his two friends were held hostage for several hours, the book was already in complete draft manuscript form, and he had a hard copy with hand-written notes with him. Although he had been living in France at the time, Gevisser was visiting South Africa "for a couple of months to finish working on this book" (1). How different might Gevisser's memoir have been had the violent break-in not occurred? He had already sent his agent an electronic copy, yet decides subsequently to revise and

[75] The use of the word 'alarm' in this context means 'to switch on a burglar alarm', an exercise which over recent years has become commonplace in South Africa.

rewrite, even though he had been reluctant to include accounts of violence and crime in his story. Leon de Kock observes that "[i]n conceptual terms, it is accurate to say that [Gevisser's] marked-up manuscript is placed under a form of erasure" (*Losing the Plot* 147). The changes to the manuscript are a necessary addition given that the unfortunate incident accurately depicts how borders and boundaries are transgressed and how this affects individuals on both sides of the fence, on different pages of the Holmden's street guide.

In the section aptly titled "Bird's-eye View", Gevisser notes how different boundaries are in the current technological era, as he watches his nephews "zoom around the globe on their computers" (*LF* 92). These are cyber-flâneurs who are able to travel the entire globe without leaving their computer screens, and Gevisser says he is "moved by the boundlessness of their enterprise" (*LF* 92). Afropolitan flânerie can take on an entirely different meaning since, as Gevisser writes, "[p]olitical borders simply do not show up on the satellite photographs of Google Earth; you can go anywhere you like, so long as you have a destination" *(LF* 92). Boundaries become irrelevant and this type of cyber-flânerie is incredibly precise. Gevisser's request to Google Maps finds for him the self-same route that had been taken by his grandfather over a century ago from Lithuania to South Africa:

> On the map itself, the computer has drawn a chunky blue line from point A, up near the Baltic Sea, to point B, down on the southeast tip of Africa. […] The accompanying fourteen pages of directions, broken down into 293 instructions, tell me to 'Head north on A. Smetanos Gatve,' which was, in fact, the road on which Grandpa Morris was born […]. I bypass Warsaw, Berlin and Nuremberg on autobahns […] before I am put on the ferry to Algiers. […] I am on the Trans-Sahara Highway […] and so on through Chad, the Sudans, Uganda, Tanzania, Zambia, Zimbabwe and across the Limpopo River onto the familiar South African N1, which sweeps me down through Johannesburg. (*LF* 93).

Google Maps, the virtual mother of cyber-flânerie, could easily be a global flâneur, traversing with absolute ease down Africa, perhaps to enjoy the view as the route does not go "directly down Africa's west coast" (*LF* 93).[76] Should Gevisser choose to do the same journey on foot,[77] Google Maps routes him "through Britain, taking ferries" before he can find his way "to board the ship to Cape Town" (*LF* 94). Though Google Maps is not affected by borders, it does, nonetheless, take cognisance of other factors and issues travel advisories such as: "Use

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[76] Gevisser wonders about Google's route and asks himself whether the dispatcher is "worried that the Congo remains a 'heart of darkness', or that landmines might still be strewn across Angola's roads after three decades of violent civil war?" (*LF* 93–94).

[77] Cognisant of the fact that Google had "received criticism that its directions were 'car-centric'", Gevisser notes Google's "pedestrian routing option" (*LF* 94) which he selected to find the route his grandfather had travelled from Lithuania.

caution – This route may be missing sidewalks or pedestrian paths" (*LF* 94), thus acknowledging space for those travelling on foot.

Gevisser's text is also a portrayal of loss and lostness, as was previously encountered in Vladislavić's *Portrait with Keys*. Not only has there been the loss of a manuscript, self, dignity, and privacy that has been stolen by thieves, but also a sense of loss of that which is familiar, what is known and which creates a feeling of being lost. Gevisser's lostness echoes that of others across the racial divide, of black South Africans with whom Gevisser was prohibited from fraternising. In apartheid South Africa of Gevisser's youth, the colour of one's skin dictated where one could play, work or walk.

An example of walking the city as a black person during the apartheid regime is offered in the following description:

> By Nakasa's time, the apartheid city was a place of manifest oppression. Even if they had lived there for two or three generations, black people were 'temporary sojourners' who had to leave by curfew […]. And yet, like all cities, this city could also be, paradoxically, a place of liberation. You could lose yourself in the crowd, away from the prying eyes and constraints of your community (*LF* 141).

Nat Nakasa, the *Drum* journalist referred to in Chapter 1 as an early Afropolitan flâneur, witnessed daily the horrors of apartheid, and the contradictions of working and walking in the city as a black person. Nonetheless, people found ways to survive such difficulties, and Gevisser relates the story of a black man who, while not permitted to try on "white clothes" at a clothing store, could still purchase something as "proof of your urbanity in your hand and you felt a man of the world" (*LF* 141). A well-tailored outfit purchased in the city went a long way to prove an Afropolitan worldliness, and more of this will be discussed in Chapter 5 when the Congolese *sapeur* is examined in Alain Mabanckou's novel, *Blue White Red.*

The format of Gevisser's book deserves some attention, particularly given how it obviously changed with the addition of a lengthy account of the violent experience, as well as how it relates to journeys and the idea of home. Much like the traditional three-act storytelling structure of a movie (setup, confrontation, resolution), the script or narrative is divided into "Part One – Outward Bound"; "Part Two – Attack"; and "Part Three – Homeward Bound".[78] Therefore, the format that Gevisser's book takes is also thus a journey:

[78] The "Outward Bound" section begins with a chapter titled "Closed City" and the "Homeward Bound" section that closes the book has two chapters: "Hope in Alexandra" and "*Open City*" which refers directly back to the title of Teju Cole's famous novel set in New York (and which is discussed in Chapter 5 of this thesis).

it is a peripatetic study encompassing an outward journey, or departure, discoveries en route, and then a homeward journey or return.

Interspersed throughout the book are a number of illustrations and maps which provide evidence of Gevisser's "cartophilia", a passion he shares with the artist William Kentridge (*LF* 28), who himself had learned early "to question structural impositions".[79] Besides cartography being a visual aid, so too is photography and cinema. Numerous black and white family photographs are included in *Lost and Found in Johannesburg,* as well as a number of newspaper photographs taken by other people.

Photography, like writing and painting, is an art form appreciated and enacted in flânerie. Susan Sontag writes about the camera as a tool of the flâneur, noting that

> [t]he photographer is an armed version of the solitary walker reconnoitring, stalking, cruising the urban inferno, the voyeuristic stroller who discovers the city as a landscape of voluptuous extremes. Adept of the joys of watching, connoisseur of empathy, the flâneur finds the world 'picturesque'. (55)

For Gevisser, photographs serve as an aid to his method of storytelling, and he explains in an interview with Sarah Nuttall that he uses photographs "as talismans to conjure up the past" (Nuttall, "Writing Biography" 112). Many of his chapters, Gevisser explains in the same interview, "begin with a close reading of a photograph", which helps him "in an almost cinematic way, to set the scene" (112). It is this archaeology of the text which helps Gevisser set the scene, aiding the reader by providing knowledge from the past. To illustrate this, Gevisser explained at a book launch how he had found photos taken by his uncle on a Durban beach in the 1950s. One of these photos was of his aunt seemingly speaking to someone who did not appear in the frame of the picture. A clue to the identity of the person was revealed in another photo which showed an Indian man who was only permitted on the "whites-only" beach to light the cigarettes of sunbathers (Mbao n. pag.). For Gevisser, of interest is that which appears outside the margins, on the edges and between page numbers.[80]

In Vladislavić's *Portrait with Keys*, a remembering of home was evident, particularly when feelings of nostalgia were sometimes brought on by scenes gazed upon in the urban environment. Similarly, in *Lost and Found in Johannesburg*, Gevisser does indeed find his way home. In the final chapter, "Open City", Gevisser changes from writing in the first

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[79] From an article by an unknown author titled "William Kentridge Depicts Oppression and Freedom Through his Celebrated Art in 21 Icons", at <https://artafricamagazine.org/william-kentridge-depicts-oppression-and-freedom-through-his-celebrated-art-in-21-icons/>.

[80] This level of critique would also make it viable to call Gevisser not only an Afropolitan flâneur, but also a postcolonial flâneur.

person and now writes in the second person, explaining that "it's okay, you're an adult now. You know the way" (*LF* 327). To write or speak in the first person is usually an indication of a well-formed self, but this shift to second person usage suggests that Gevisser is not negating that self, but rather affirming that a growth has taken place, as evidenced in the words earlier quoted. Another effect of this is to distance oneself. The final chapter is thus both a reminiscence as well as a farewell, for "You are leaving Johannesburg for a place where you do not need to dash across the dark and deserted garage, heart thumping" (*LF* 328). Gevisser continues traversing across memories as he tells the reader that

> Your route home is through Hillbrow, along Abel Street, near to where your mother's car was found, past the Hillbrow Police Station where you identified Sibanda, and westwards into Empire Road. [...] Look up, at the Lloyd. Yes, it is dilapidated, why wouldn't it be? Whole families now live in the single rooms once occupied by Jewish dowagers called Muriel and Gittel. (*LF* 330–331)

Gevisser's route "home" is a very disparate one to that which will be discussed in the next section, where Mpe's characters take a differently detailed route through Hillbrow. This passage locates Gevisser as a flâneur in the present even while he remembers events from his past, thus recalling Jacob Dlamini's claim that nostalgia "is essentially about the present. It is about present anxieties refracted through the prism of the past" (16). It is by going back to his childhood and revisiting his past that Gevisser is able once more to be at home in the present. These are the very same Hillbrow streets we encounter in Phaswane Mpe's novella that will be discussed in the next section. Despite the changes, despite the losses, despite the crime, Johannesburg remains home to many. The Afropolitan flâneur encountered on these streets has a silent strength that comes of necessity from living on the edge. There is hope as the journey continues and Gevisser writes on the last page:

> think about what makes you feel at home, at home among strangers [...] it is the Dispatcher's route that threads it all together, sending you out and bringing you home, sending you out and bringing you home, sending you out and bringing you home, stitching you together tighter and tighter until the stitches lose their individual definition and become a *seam*, a road, a river, the Sandspruit itself, holding page 75 and 77 together across its banks rather than keeping them apart. (*LF* 332, italics mine)

Whereas de Kock's theory of the seam emphasised the simultaneous joining and pulling apart, Gevisser employs the idea of a seam to highlight a coming together. In his essay "South Africa in the Global Imaginary: An Introduction" de Kock uses the metaphor of the seam as

> not only the site of difference (as one might say of the more traditional "frontier" metaphor), but it necessarily foregrounds the representational suture, the attempt to close the gap and to bring the incommensurate into alignment by the substitution, in the place of difference, of a myth, a motif, a figure, or a trope. (276)

It is, for Gevisser, as a result of "creating one life of the past and present, the rough and the smooth, black and white" that he is at last able to end his memoir with two simple words: "Welcome home" (332).

Many of those who walk in Johannesburg are migrants who come from elsewhere in the country seeking work. Others who live in Johannesburg drive. These are generalisations related to the apartheid era South Africa. Many do still walk, but walking in Johannesburg is not relaxed, but rather rushed and edgy. Remnants of inequality and injustice remain to haunt the city streets, and more borders and boundaries have developed to protect people in their homes from intruders. Thus, the Afropolitan flâneur is not a bored traveller, but rather, this flâneur has an alertness in their step, an awareness that they might be pursued at any time as potential criminals lurk in dark corners. This raw, edgy city, where the heart beats faster because one is scared, is the Johannesburg of Vladislavić's and Gevisser's flâneurs, who sometimes lose their way, but when they are found, they are home again, as suggested in these words:

> Think about that, as you idle here for a few moments, on the corner of Claim and Paul Nel: think about what makes you feel at home, at home among strangers. (*LF* 332)

As will be evidenced in the next section, the same thoughts apply to Phaswane Mpe's Afropolitan flâneur.

2.4 Phaswane Mpe's Elegy for Afropolitanism in *Welcome to Our Hillbrow*

> There is a train that comes from Namibia and Malawi
> there is a train that comes from Zambia and Zimbabwe,
> There is a train that comes from Angola and Mozambique,
> From Lesotho, from Botswana, from Swaziland,
> From all the hinterland of Southern and Central Africa.
> This train carries young and old, African men
> Who are conscripted to come and work on contract
> In the golden mineral mines of Johannesburg
> And its surrounding metropolis, sixteen hours or more a day
> For almost no pay.
> (Hugh Masekela, "Stimela")

When world-renowned flugelhornist, composer and singer Hugh Masekela performs his "Stimela" (Coal Train), the audience is transported elsewhere, back to a younger Johannesburg in an apartheid South Africa when migrant labourers would leave their loved ones to travel by steam train to work on the mines. "Stimela" is a powerful Afro-jazz style protest song about African migration, and when Masekela intones in a gravel-throated voice that the miners "Think about the loved ones they may never see again / Because they might have already been forcibly removed / From where they last left them" his audience cannot fail to be deeply moved. As Masekela's voice is "a-chugging, and a pumping, and a smoking, and a pushing, a pumping, a crying and a steaming and a chugging" and he builds up to the climactic "whooo whooooo" whistle, the audience collectively feels the desperate plight of the migrant, and empathises.[81]

Migrant labourers in South Africa, as in many other countries, are not well paid, and many such individuals live in shacks or hostels between commutes back 'home'.[82] The migrant figure, as noted by Sarah Nuttall, "is central to South African history" ("City Forms" 748) and thus the shaping of diasporic personhoods is often a trademark of South African literature. However, the migrant in South Africa has historically struggled to find work, and when work is available, it is a struggle to remain employed. Masekela's "Coal Train" renders clear the difficult and extreme work conditions of the migrant labourer in South Africa.

The migrant, as an Afropolitan figure, habitually encounters borders and boundaries. Salah Hassan expresses concern that "by using the term Afropolitan we restrict ourselves to the middle class and the off-spring of well-to-do diasporic Africans" (in Knudsen and Rahbek 33). This need not be the case, however, and the focus here is on the Afropolitan figure as an itinerant African of the world, as someone who is aware of flows even when they might encounter frictions on the way. Throughout this thesis it is argued that individuals such as migrants and refugees also qualify as Afropolitan flâneurs, even without the ease of travel that money can buy, but by virtue of their being subjectivities resident in or of Africa. Migrants in particular are not strangers to borders and boundaries, and Phaswane Mpe's novel *Welcome to Our Hillbrow* is an account of various migrant flâneurs: those who travel from rural areas to the city, intra-African migrants, and global travellers.

[81] See <https://www.antiwarsongs.org/canzone.php?lang=en&id=24443> for the lyrics and to watch the video of Masekela perform "Stimela".
[82] The Mozambican term for 'migrant labourer' is '*magaíça*' or '*magaiza*', which is "synonymous with the mineworkers who went to Johannesburg" (Helgesson, "Johannesburg" 260).

The city of Johannesburg is largely defined by African migrancy, with an economy built on migrant labour. This is evident not only through the cosmopolitan mix of inhabitants but also in its entire nature of movement, and Phaswane Mpe's novel is an exploration of this at street level. Published seven years into South Africa's new democracy, *Welcome to Our Hillbrow* is an exploration of change, both positive as well as negative, in a post-apartheid South Africa. One of the themes the novel deals with is "a strange illness" which the migrants say "could only have been AIDS" (*WH* 3). This illness also travels, as Mpe illustrates in the novel, and it has no respect for boundaries. While mobility might not be as restricted as it was during the apartheid era, there are still regulations governing cross-border movement. As with Mark Gevisser's life writing in *Lost and Found in Johannesburg*, Mpe's novel can be considered to be largely autobiographical, since Mpe identifies closely with the individuals about whom he writes and the place that is so close to him. As Sarah Nuttall claims, "Hillbrow, for Mpe, is figured as the partial and now patchy inventory of the old apartheid city and as the revised inventory of a largely black, highly tensile, intra-African multiculture" ("City Forms" 744), suggesting the beginnings of a specific Afropolitanism. Hillbrow, and neighbouring Yeoville, Berea, and surrounds, are the Afropolitan neighbourhoods of contemporary Johannesburg, and are host to a curious amalgam of cultures and languages.

Welcome to Our Hillbrow was an Afropolitan text even before the term gained popular currency. Published in 2001, Mpe's novel brings the sacred and celestial onto the city streets as the narrative is relayed to the main protagonist – Refentše, who is already dead – by an ancestor, the narrator, who speaks from "Heaven" (*WH* 29). It is the innovative structure of the novel which brings Neville Hoad to refer to it as an "elegy for African cosmopolitanism" ("*Welcome*" 267), as it is the mapping of a loss of multiple Afropolitan relationships formed across borders. Mpe's narrator's perspective is one from a distance – from heaven, where earthly matters are seen differently. Mpe's narrator is a celestial flâneur, having a God's-eye view of things from heaven, and through this gaze, observing and walking alongside the characters. The narrative begins thus:

> If you were still alive, Refentše, child of Tiragalong, you would be glad that Bafana Bafana lost to France in the 1998 Soccer World Cup fiasco. Of course you supported the squad. But at least now, you would experience no hardships walking to your flat through the streets of Hillbrow – that locality of just over one square kilometre, according to official records; and according to its inhabitants, at least twice as big and teeming with countless people. (*WH* 1)

The author provides a transnational, multicultural setting for his novel as he situates South Africa within a global context. Significantly, Bafana Bafana referred to here was the first mixed race team representing all South Africans, who played their first match in 1992, two years before the country's first democratic elections. In this way Mpe inserts slices of reality into his fiction, a reflection of the W. E. B. du Bois epigraph, "Reader, be assured this narrative is no fiction" (*WH* n. pag.). "Our Hillbrow" is a geographical space within Johannesburg, a "locality of just over one square kilometre" (*WH* 1), a space built of other places:

> Your first entry into Hillbrow, Refentše, was the culmination of many converging routes. You do not remember where the first route began. But you know all too well that the stories of migrants had a lot to do with its formation. (*WH* 2)

This convergence recalls both Baudelaire's *croisement* or criss-crossing metaphor, as well as Nuttall's idea of entanglement. The connection between human subject and city environment is illustrated clearly through the movement of migrants. The celestial flâneur narrator then continues with a description of Hillbrow as a "menacing monster" that has "swallowed a number of the children of Tiragalong, who thought that the City of Gold was full of career opportunities for them" (*WH* 3). The dream is so often more appealing than reality, but once people arrive in the city, it becomes difficult to return, for various reasons.

Mpe, like Vladislavić and Gevisser, explores the effects of place on human behaviour, and he starts off the first chapter, "Hillbrow: The Map", with a set of directions:

> If you are coming from the city centre, the best way to get to Cousin's place is by driving or walking through Twist Street, a one-way street that takes you to the north of the city. […] You will then cross Van der Merwe and Goldreich Streets. Your next port of call is Caroline Street. Just cross to the other side of Caroline. (*WH* 6)

This route reads like a set of Google Maps instructions, reminiscent of Gevisser's lively description in *Lost and Found in Johannesburg* provided in the previous section. The above street directions enable this Hillbrowan migrant, as an Afropolitan flâneur, to easily find the way. For another two pages, the narrator (as a celestial flâneur) continues providing street directions, and mentions landmarks such as "OK Bazaars", "Clicks" and a "terribly noisy shebeen, *Jabula Ebusuku*" (*WH* 7–8). In the carefree spirit of psychogeography, Mpe's Afropolitan flâneur (who is "you" in the text) discovers some of the surprises of the city in the small area of Hillbrow, where the streets spill over with a funky mix of dirty garbage,

stealthy crime and even sometimes an unexpected worldliness. But what exactly is Mpe mapping? Hillbrow is the ideal setting for a novel that deals with AIDS-related concerns, as well as migration and xenophobia, all of which are issues that are affected by movement in one way or another. Streets, borders and boundaries are similarly mapped, indicating where one is able to go and what routes can be taken.

As was seen in Gevisser's and Vladislavić's texts, mapping is an essential aspect of way-finding. The streets criss-cross at intersections which sometimes also function as borders. These boundaries have the potential to limit the freedom of the flâneur, yet the walkers in Hillbrow are Afropolitans who move at times with ease and other times out of necessity. Mpe's focus on the figure of the migrant who walks the Hillbrow streets and gets to know his or her way around indicates a particular Afropolitan flânerie that began to be more visible in South African cities after the end of apartheid.

Together with Cousin, Refentše's "soles hit the pavements of the Hillbrow streets" (*WH* 10), and they walk as the migrant flâneurs that they are, through neighbouring Braamfontein where "dirty children" are busy "taking turns at glue" (*WH* 13). The street map that Mpe provides for the reader is relayed by means of Refentše's measured steps as he tries to define, demarcate and find his own place in the city, where the streets are named and detailed as he crosses "Wolmarans and three rather obscure streets, Kapteijn, Ockerse and Pieterse" before he walks "past Esselen, Kotze and Pretoria Streets" (*WH* 6). Mpe's mapping and listing of street names, as was seen earlier with that of Vladislavić, recalls de Certeau who regards street names as "metaphors" (104). According to de Certeau, the names given to streets serve to impose a specific order and historicity, and yet those walking the streets interpret the meanings differently. The street names Mpe lists hark back to a colonial past which, as de Certeau claims, lose their meaning in a different context, or they become re-defined. The walker is able to re-define these colonial names to suit their own specific needs. This is clearly a postcolonial strategy, and the flâneur critiques this naming precisely by repeating the names and drawing attention to them. Nonetheless, while street names might have lost their original symbolic meaning, they continue to serve as a means of graphically providing directions.

It must also be borne in mind that the walking here is mapped, plotted and described from a different perspective, as Refentše is already in heaven with the ancestors. Thus, there is a double re-inscription that occurs here, as not only were the named streets different when Refentše was at ground level walking those streets, but they are again changed from his heavenly god's-eye view perspective. Rebekah Cumpsty argues how in doing this, Mpe

sacralises the streets, and once in heaven, Refentše is "granted an omniscient perspective" where he is "able to map not only the streets of Hillbrow, but the networks of his fellow migrants" (*WH* 12). Not only has Refentše managed to "propel [his] body across the boundary between rural and urban" (Samuelson 248), but also across heaven and earth. In this manner then, there are no longer any boundaries, and space becomes a liminal, creative world of the imagination.

The reader learns that Refentše, to whom the narrator speaks as the novel opens, has come to Johannesburg to study at a local university, and is not from Hillbrow, but from Tiragalong, a rural village near Polokwane in South Africa's Limpopo province. He is thus a migrant, as well as, we soon discover, a flâneur who walks through Hillbrow's streets. "[T]here are very few Hillbrowans" continues the heavenly narrator as a celestial flâneur, "who were not originally wanderers from Tiragalong and other rural villages" who have arrived in Hillbrow seeking work and education (*WH* 18). Hillbrow welcomes such individuals and becomes home to these migrants. The single square kilometre of Hillbrow that falls under Mpe's sharp focus has become home to the dispossessed, and the narrator says that "the *Makwerekwere* you accuse of this and that are no different to us – sojourners, here in search of green pastures" (*WH* 18). "*Makwerekwere*" is a derogatory slang term for foreigners or black migrants to South Africa from other African countries, it is a "word derived from kwere kwere, a sound that their unintelligible foreign languages were supposed to make" (*WH* 20). These Afropolitan migrants bring their own culture and language into a new space, thus impacting on the city and its inhabitants. Later in the novel we learn that "at our Heathrow" the word for *makwerekwere* is "a much more widely used term: *Africans*" (*WH* 102). These are people who share a common history of origin, of Africa, but Mpe highlights a disturbing intra-African othering. Xenophobia is in direct contradiction to the idea of hospitality towards another. Xenophobic tendencies are a contrast with the titular "welcome" of Mpe's novel.

Throughout *Welcome to Our Hillbrow*, the glaring contrast between the Afropolitan city and the rural village is obvious, and walking in these spaces has different connotations. As much as boundaries were apparent in both *Portrait with Keys* and *Lost and Found in Johannesburg,* they are less obvious in Mpe's novel. The title is the first clue to the attempt at erasing boundaries as the "welcome" offered is inclusive, since Mpe's refrain "our" suggests that Hillbrow is for everyone, rural dwellers and foreign visitors alike.

Besides the physical and spiritual boundaries evident here, are also geopolitical and temporal borders, as pointed out by Meg Samuelson ("City Beyond" 247). Further borders

Samuelson identifies in Mpe's text include the following binaries: "rich and poor", "'modernity' and 'tradition'", "city and countryside", "seen and unseen", and "fact and fiction" ("City Beyond" 248). In Mpe's novel, it is the migrants who cross the borders that not only bring about change but also change the structure of these borders, or at least shift the boundaries or blur the lines.

When Refentše starts dating a Johannesburg woman, Lerato, his mother disapproves, as Lerato is not from their village. Furthermore, the reader has already learned that "AIDS's travel route into Johannesburg was through *Makwerekwere*; and Hillbrow was the sanctuary in which *Makwerekwere* basked" (*WH* 4), suggesting that this disease crosses all boundaries. Ironically, however, there are no real borders as the narrator reminds Refentše that "[h]ome always travels with you, with your consciousness as its vehicle" (*WH* 55). The celestial narrator continues and refers to the diseased woman in Refentše's story whose "second resolution was to pour all her grief and alienation into the world of storytelling" (*WH* 55). Storytelling is one of the tools of the flâneur, as the narrator so clearly knows, and this gift is imparted to others like Refentše. As the novel progresses, the reader learns that Lerato has had an affair with a mutual friend of his, which finally results in Refentše taking his own life.

Where Refentše hoped for Hillbrow to have definitive boundaries, evident in Mpe's mapping of Hillbrow in the first chapter, he discovers it to be more open, as the boundaries were blurred by Hillbrow's diverse character, its intersectionality more noticeable after the formal end of apartheid. Such intersectionality brings to mind Nuttall's concept of entanglement, which is visible not only in the physical, concrete surrounds of Hillbrow, but also in the complex relationships the characters have with one another, relationships that are "complicated, ensnaring, in a tangle" (*Entanglement* 1).

Both Refentše and his friend Refilwe, the other main protagonist in the novel, nonetheless still carry their original homes within them, as well as all the other places they visit, making them Afropolitan flâneurs who "belong to no single geography, but feel at home in many" (Selasi "Bye-Bye" n. pag.). Towards the end of the novel, Refilwe does what Afropolitans do: she leaves the country of her birth to study in England at Oxford, where

> Refilwe was to observe, in Oxford, that people there talked about Africans and South Africans. These Oxfordians who talked so distinctly about Africa and South Africa were themselves a hybrid of native Oxfordians and those who had acquired the citizenship by other means. All those we called by the term Oxfordian, without distinguishing whether they were, indeed, born Oxfordians, or English, or something else. (*WH* 102)

Here it is clear that Mpe wants his reader to think about the ironies of hybridity and nationality by alluding to the danger of the single story. Difficulties result from making generalisations, and just as Oxfordians forget they too are mongrelised, so too really is everyone else. Ronit Frenkel notes that Mpe's text "writes the space of the city as a type of situated transnationalism where the local and the global exist as coeval discourses of signification" (26). This coevality is evident in the way Mpe brings together Oxfordians and Africans in the above extract, and elsewhere there is the criss-crossing of the rural and urban, Nigerian and South African. This observation is equally true of Afropolitanism, where the global and the local flow into one. Minna Salami speaks about "glocalism" since the "issues we face as Africans are closely connected to the problems of the local and the global being merged" (in Knudsen and Rahbek 159).

Refentše, who also becomes an all-knowing celestial flâneur in Mpe's novel, views things from his great, heavenly distance, but he feels helpless:

> Refentše, looking down from Heaven, helpless to intervene, could not help wishing as he watched that he was God, or the gods, and owned this world of ours. […] He only knew, as he watched [Refilwe] from his high vantage point, that God and the gods of our happiness were more likely to be found in Hillbrow and Oxford and Tiragalong – everywhere and anywhere except in the Heaven that we read about in the Big Book. (*WH* 111)

The transnational flows that have brought migrants from both Oxford and Tiragalong, bring people together so that Mpe at this stage is able to change his "Welcome to our Hillbrow" refrain to one that is more universal. Therefore he writes: "Hillbrow in Hillbrow. Hillbrow in Cape Town. Cape Town in Hillbrow. Oxford in both. Both in Oxford. Welcome to our All" (*WH* 104). Here then is a resounding echo with Mbembe's Afropolitanism, which speaks to the "interweaving of the here and there, the presence of the elsewhere in the here and vice versa" ("Afropolitanism" 28). "Welcome to the World of our Humanity" (*WH* 113) once again echoes the coevality of glocalism, and the very last line of the book concludes with "Welcome to our Heaven …" (*WH* 124), ending with an ellipsis suggesting infinity. These various welcomes also serve to map the movement of the human subject in space, from Hillbrow, Oxford and Tiragalong, through "Humanity" (*WH* 113) and up to "Heaven" (*WH* 124).

Welcome to our Hillbrow is thus an alternative mapping of Hillbrow, viewed from above by a celestial flâneur, in a de Certeauian God's-eye view sense. As noted by Rebekah Cumpsty, Mpe here characterises Johannesburg as a "globalized city with porous boundaries"

(9), which is not the same Johannesburg conceived by Gevisser and Vladislavić, who speak of very obvious boundaries. This Hillbrow is a place where all individuals are flâneurs in one way or another, "just Passers-by on this Earth" (*WH* 121) and where, at the end of *Welcome to Our Hillbrow*, the narrator declares that

> Heaven is the world of our continuing existence, located in the memory and consciousness of those who live with us and after us. It is the archive that those we left behind keep visiting and revisiting; digging this out, suppressing or burying that. (*WH* 124)

There is an echo here with the ending of Gevisser's *Lost and Found in Johannesburg* where his memory of the spaces previously walked is what helps him walk through a changed city. Mpe's Hillbrow, walked by locals and migrants alike, reflects those who have been there. History continues to be made as more human traffic flows into the city, is changed by it, changes it, and flows out again. As Frenkel suggests, "the behaviour we designate as 'other' ultimately belongs to the self", and this is ultimately what "Mpe's cosmopolitan humanism" is about (33). Such an idea connects with the philosophy of *ubuntu*, which maintains that we cannot exist without others. *Welcome to Our Hillbrow* is a journey undertaken by a number of Afropolitan flâneurs who are, in fact, all connected by the same transnational flows and who end up, in Mpe's novel, in the same heaven. Hillbrow is a melting pot of Afropolitans from all over, and those who come to live, to work, to settle, come to belong: they come to belong as they do not belong elsewhere. Their presence will leave a mark, engraved in someone's memory and in the urban cityscape.

2.5 Conclusion: Encounters across Difference

All of these novels share a preoccupation with borders, boundaries, marginalisation and segregation. It is through the act of walking carried out by the different Afropolitan flâneurs that boundaries are both defined and explored, and the flâneur who walks his or her urban surroundings in these texts is doing precisely that: defining boundaries, even challenging them while exploring physical spaces. While apartheid made clear the boundaries in South Africa, not all of these boundaries have entirely disappeared. The Afropolitan flâneur in Johannesburg responds to the edginess of the city and its boundaries by developing a resilience and a cautious attitude, aware that anything may lurk behind the next corner and up the next street.

Three related types of Afropolitan flâneur have been analysed in this chapter: authors, readers, and narrators or protagonists in the texts. In Vladislavić's *Portrait with Keys,* while the narrator-flâneur Vlad walks through the city, noting the changes in his neighbourhood, so too does the author-flâneur Vladislavić do the same. Indeed, the reader-flâneur walks the selfsame Johannesburg territory. *Lost and Found in Johannesburg* similarly has three flâneurs who walk the Johannesburg streets: Gevisser himself, since it is autobiographical; the dispatcher in Gevisser's childhood game; and once again, the reader. *Welcome to Our Hillbrow* is narrated by a voice from heaven, a celestial flâneur who has the distance required to see things in perspective.

All of these flâneurs walk the city psychogeographically. They respond to their environment by means of pondering what they see, by remembering, and by critiquing aspects of their social surroundings. Their ways of being Afropolitan are shaped by how they perceive themselves in their changing urban surroundings, and how they interpret various encounters. In a city that is changing after the demise of apartheid, narrator-flâneur Vlad notices how new people of colour are moving into the formerly white suburbs; author-flâneur Gevisser remembers with distaste the physical boundaries that apartheid enforced between people; and Mpe's celestial flâneur is acutely aware of the xenophobia that appears when cultures meet in the same space. While these are all Afropolitans, they are also postcolonial flâneurs given that they critique aspects of colonialism which still remain visible in the city.

In *Portrait with Keys*, the perambulations of the narrator, Vlad, occur mainly in suburbs surrounding Johannesburg, outskirt suburbs such as Kensington and Troyeville. Despite the changes he notices post-apartheid, Kensington for instance remained a largely white enclave, and blacks moving in were greeted with superstition or patronization. These are very different to the inner-city spaces walked by Refentše in Mpe's *Welcome to our Hillbrow*, spaces which are more like Aubrey Tearle's Hillbrow in Vladislavić's *The Restless Supermarket.* It must also be borne in mind that race continues to play a role, even as there is ongoing change: Vladislavić and Gevisser are associated with white privilege, whereas Mpe hails from a life of being 'othered' as a black person even post-apartheid. Despite these racial differences, the reader of these texts is invited to explore the city of Johannesburg through the eyes of the different Afropolitan flâneurs, thus being offered a glimpse of the city as the writer, black or white, views it. The matter of race will continue to surface throughout this thesis as it is a lived reality that cannot be ignored, and is a matter that deserves ongoing recognition. How different authors deal with cultural and racial differences will be discussed and sometimes questioned in the analyses of the texts.

The routes walked by Vladislavić, Gevisser and Mpe and their literary constructs of Afropolitan flâneurs cover the same spaces, yet are interpreted differently by each of them as they walk those streets. These are spaces which will continue to be traversed by younger generations, new travellers, other migrants, as a result of intra-African migrancy and transnational flows. Those very same streets walked continue to carry with them a history, as more footsteps are added to those urban histories. The routes of the different flâneurs are similar and yet divergent as they are walked by different individuals who will continue to associate different connotations with the street names they traverse, street names which connote past histories. The Afropolitan flâneurs depicted in this chapter are those who experience ongoing change and whose movement is cautious and edgy because of the uncertainty encountered in the changing environment. This flâneur's gaze as seen in these texts is one which hopes to find a way of interpreting changing urban identities.

If to be Afropolitan "is a contingent and dialogically constituted way of being African in the world", as Knudsen and Rahbek note, then it is through "encounters and conversations across difference" that an understanding of what it means "to be African or of African descent in the contemporary moment" (Knudsen and Rahbek 42) can be gained. The Afropolitan flâneurs examined in this chapter help illustrate different ways of being 'African'.

Further comparison with other literary depictions of contemporary Afropolitan flâneurs will illustrate both differences and similarities in the flâneurs' perceptions of selected cities of this study: Cape Town, Lagos, Paris, London and New York. Staying in South Africa for the moment, Chapter 3 will examine urban identities in Cape Town as seen through the eyes of Afropolitan flâneurs who are youngsters verging on adulthood.

Chapter 3: Thinking Africa from the Cape

3.1 Introduction: "An Entanglement of Multiple Worlds"

> "What are we?" Everyone has much to say about what we're *not*. Everyone. Everyone feels *entitled* to say what we're not. People I don't even know tell me who I'm not. Ghanaian readers and Nigerian readers, wherever I go […] "Afropolitan" came from that stranded place. Not from a utopian vision at all. […] There is an African diaspora, not the original one; there is a new one, a smaller one. (Bady and Selasi, 159–160, italics in original)

Where is Africa and who is African? Who is Afropolitan? Which Africa, whose Africa? What diaspora? These are urgent questions that are posed throughout this thesis. A lecture series hosted at Stellenbosch University in 2011 engaged with the idea of thinking Africa from the Cape, and "sought to open up the conceptual vantage point offered by the Cape as the convergence point of three worlds: the African, the Atlantic and the Indian Ocean" (Samuelson and Musila 424). In his lecture at the *Locations and Locutions* series Harry Garuba noted three significant moments as "interlocking phases, with legacies and characteristics that linger on and permeate the present" (n.pag.).[83] He identified these phases as colonialism and empire, apartheid, and post-apartheid. Garuba's suggestion was for "dialogic engagement", instead of a mono-centric, "colonising view of the world" (n. pag.). Dialogic engagement suggests that engagement is part of a dialogue that guides and affects the interaction between individuals or groups. One way of engaging dialogically, then, is to consider various perceptions and constructs of the migrant in Africa.

In the previous chapter, the figure of the migrant who travels to and through the city of Johannesburg was highlighted in Phaswane Mpe's *Welcome to Our Hillbrow*. The geographical urban space that this chapter turns attention to is Cape Town, South Africa. In their report on the *Locations and Locutions* lecture series, Meg Samuelson and Grace Musila note that while "recognised as an entanglement of multiple worlds", the Cape's relationship to the rest of the African continent, emphasises "the need to think from this location without fetishizing it as a site of difference or exception" (424–45). The city of Cape Town, in this context, on the southernmost tip of the continent, is, arguably, as much a part of Africa as elsewhere on the continent. Three contemporary South African literary texts set in Cape Town will be examined in detail with a view to expanding the definition of the literary

[83] This quotation comes from an extract of Harry Garuba's paper, "Thinking Africa from the Cape" which was delivered at the Locations and Locutions lecture Series hosted at Stellenbosch University on June 7, 2011, and appears as a blog post in the *Mail & Guardian*.

flâneur when positioned in an Afropolitan city. "Afropolitanism", as noted by Eva Knudsen and Ulla Rahbek, "is not only and always about the privileged elite" (287). With these words in mind, this chapter aims to refine the definition of Afropolitanism as well as nuance the definition of the flâneur.

Walter Benjamin's flâneur, outlined in Chapter 1, was seen to be a "critical figure who wanders amidst yet also 'against' the crowds and urban flows of modern life" (Murail, "Du Croisement" 29). The texts that will be discussed here feature a contemporary version of that flâneur in an Afropolitan setting: *Skyline* by Patricia Schonstein-Pinnock (henceforth referred to as Schonstein), *Thirteen Cents* by Kabelo Sello Duiker, and *Bom Boy* by Yewande Omotoso.[84] These three novels will be compared and contrasted in order to establish a conversation between the three as a means of re-examining urban identities such as the flâneur, the Afropolitan, the refugee and the migrant, and to consider notions of home and belonging as it relates to such identities. Each of these novels taps into issues surrounding migrancy, and problematizes, in different ways, the lived experiences of migrants, of 'other' Africans in 'southern' Africa. The common denominator of these three novels is that they all have a child or young adult protagonist who is a flâneur in his/her own right and who walks the streets of the Afropolitan city of Cape Town.

The voice of the child narrator-flâneur provides a believable account of how s/he sees the city surroundings and how s/he situates her/himself in such a cityscape. Tying all three texts together are crossings and connections made through the footsteps of the flâneur walking the city streets. The new forms of Afropolitan flâneur include those with refugee status, who are displaced and traumatised. They walk in different ways and have different relationships with the city. *Skyline* provides a reading of social interactions between migrant inhabitants of a block of flats in Cape Town's Long Street, as seen through the eyes of the young narrator-flâneuse. Dedicated to "thousands of children [who] were forced to take part in Mozambique's sixteen-year civil war" (n. pag.), Schonstein's novel forces the reader to consider, amongst other things, social issues, war, exile, migration, loss and notions of home. Ultimately, through the young narrator's observations, *Skyline* suggests that while a utopian vision of Afropolitanism might be impossible to achieve, it nevertheless has value insofar as it suggests there is hope for change and improvement. *Thirteen Cents*, on the other hand,

[84] *Skyline* was originally published under the name of Patricia Schonstein-Pinnock, by David Philip Publishers in 2000. Subsequent works by the same author were published under the name Patricia Schonstein. In this thesis, when abbreviating her name, I use simply "Schonstein". In *Diaspora and Identity in South African Fiction*, J.U. Jacobs removes the hyphen and refers to the author as "Patricia Schonstein Pinnock".

from that same "stranded place" to which Selasi refers in the epigraph to this chapter, can be considered dystopic in many ways, conveying the tragic life of a street child. *Bom Boy* provides perhaps a more compromised or balanced vision, considering the great difficulty that comes with becoming un-stranded in a place like Cape Town.

Cape Town is seen by Rebecca Fasselt as "an inherently ambiguous place of intersection and cross-cultural contact, as well as of alienation" ("Nigeria" 119). This intersection is an echo of Baudelaire's term *croisement* which he writes about in his preface to *Le Spleen de Paris*, proclaiming that his poetry is rooted in "the criss-cross of the innumerable interrelations"[85] that make up the city (in Murail "Du Croisement" 29). A criss-cross can be seen as a point of intersection, similar to the seam de Kock offers to explain a joining together which simultaneously "bears the mark of the suture" ("South Africa" 276). By considering Bhabha's Third Space, Cape Town can also be seen as a city of crossings and intersections that both entice and exclude. There is an ongoing sense of lostness depicted in the three texts, which will be addressed in this chapter.

A brief return to the discussion on Afropolitanism is necessary at this point, to help articulate how the three novels take into consideration the intersectionality of gender, race, age and class when representing the identity formation of the Afropolitan flâneur or flâneuse. As was noted in Chapter 1, Afropolitanism is a highly contested concept, due in some degree to its leaning towards elitism and commodification. While delivering the keynote lecture at a conference on "Africa, Literature and the Cultural Renaissance" in 2016, Ama Ata Aidoo frivolously dismissed Afropolitanism as pretentious and "evidence of self-hatred". Aidoo's controversial statement suggests that perhaps Afropolitanism, to her mind, is used as a "'fancy moniker' that tries to 'mask the terror associated with Africa'" (Phiri n. pag.). However, Afropolitanism is more about "empowerment and a celebration of identity" (Toivanen 192). Aidoo's objections to Afropolitanism are similarly felt by writers such as Binyavanga Wainaina and Chimamanda Adichie who prefer to disassociate themselves from Afropolitanism. When Taiye Selasi originally wrote about Afropolitanism in 2005, it was to unravel the unease that she felt came with being African, or Afrodiasporic, and to find an alternative and more positive way of accepting this fluid identity.

It is worth revisiting Achille Mbembe's ideas touched upon in Chapter 1, adding specifically his understanding of what underlies the term Afropolitanism. Mbembe sees this

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[85] In *Le Spleen de Paris,* Baudelaire writes this as "[le] croisement de leurs innombrables rapports" (in Murail "Du Croisement" 29).

as an “[a]wareness of the interweaving of the here and there, the presence of the elsewhere in the here and vice versa” (“Afropolitanism” 28). It is thus the idea of embracing all facets of what make up a transnational, hybrid, intersectional identity that allows for a less commodified and more inclusive Afropolitanism. In viewing the Afropolitan in Mbembe’s terms quoted above, therefore, it is possible to understand how migrants and refugees are interwoven Afropolitan identities, as discussed in Chapter 1, since they carry both remoteness and closeness of Africa and the rest of the world in their subjectivity. Just as the flâneur is affected by the city and affects the city in exchange, so too does the Afropolitan connect Africa with the rest of the world and Africans within the continent in a reciprocal manner.

Mobility is a common characteristic of Afropolitanism, as well as of the flâneur, but it is also a feature of globalism and capitalism, allowing for movement, such as travel, by choice, not by force. Globalisation is the process which reflects the dynamic changes of globalism. In other words, globalisation “focuses on the forces, the dynamism, the speed of these changes” (Nye n. pag.). It is important to note that globalism “does not imply universality” and “globalisation implies neither equity – nor homogenization” (Nye n. pag.). This means that difference and individuality are maintained and respected. Increasing global patterns of migration which link individuals and societies to multiple cities are referred to by Steven Vertovec as “super-diversity”, discussed in Chapter 1, which results in a multiplicity of evolving identities. As will be evident in this chapter, migrants to the city come from different ethnic, racial and economic backgrounds, and they all have different stories of arrival as well as hopes and aspirations relating to their new ‘home’. Nuttall and Mbembe refer to the anomaly of mobility when they note that “the migrant worker more than the flâneur is the paradoxical cultural figure of African modernity – the one who is both beneath the city and outside of its orders of visibility” (*Johannesburg* 23). During apartheid times, migrant workers were only afforded temporary residence in the city, so they were merely visitors and never truly at home in the city, as was seen earlier in Chapter 2. One of the claims made in this chapter is that African migrants are Afropolitan flâneurs, since they walk as flâneurs and are intimately connected to Africa. In the discussion of the three novels that follows, migrant identities will be strongly foregrounded in order to extend the definition of the Afropolitan flâneur to include these subjects.

3.2 Flâneusing the Cityscape in Patricia Schonstein-Pinnock's *Skyline*

In an article where he refers to Minna Salami's stance on African feminism, Ryan Skinner writes that "African women are defining and re-defining what it means to be a citizen of the African world today" (13). Skinner sees this as a specific "feminist Afropolitan itinerary" (13) of awareness of the complexity of an African diaspora. Such complexities are tackled in Patricia Schonstein-Pinnock's novel *Skyline*, which forms the subject of analysis here. Not only is the unnamed narrator in *Skyline* a female, adolescent, literary flâneuse, but so too is Schonstein the author a flâneuse, as she captures the urban metropolis through writing the city of Cape Town, as seen through her narrator, from the streets, as well as from the edges and from the fictional high-rise building "Skyline", situated in Long Street. Historically, the city streets were not known as a place for respectable women, and in Chapter 1 some of the difficulties surrounding the concept of a flâneuse were discussed. Isabel Carrera Suárez was earlier quoted as arguing that "contemporary urban, post-diasporic texts create embodied, located pedestrians, rather than detached flâneurs" (853). In this chapter, the question that is asked is whether *Skyline*'s unnamed female narrator is a flâneuse or simply a pedestrian?

Dedicated to child victims of the sixteen-year-long Mozambican civil war, *Skyline* is set in the 'mother city' of Cape Town, where a fictional apartment building called "Skyline" houses an African diasporic community. Different migrant experiences intersect here, and the building "Skyline" is, in the most fundamental sense, a diasporic space, just as Schonstein's text of the same name becomes a diasporic space. At the end of each chapter of *Skyline,* the reader is introduced to one of a series of paintings that depicts scenes and characters of a certain area of this particular city. Both the narrative and the descriptions of the paintings offer the reader a panoramic view of the city and its inhabitants. The narrative format recalls Georges Perec's famous novel *Life: A User's Manual*, where the narrative paints a picture as it moves around the rooms and lives of people living in a Parisian apartment block. In *Skyline*, the use of literary descriptions of works of art, or ekphrasis, serves to add another dimension to the narrative, which culminates in the final pages of the text. Ekphrasis can be understood quite simply as "the verbal representation of visual representation" (Hefferman in Brînzeu 247), and Schonstein provides such verbal descriptions of visual artworks throughout the novel at the end of each chapter.

The artist in Schonstein's novel, Bernard, is also a flâneur – a postcolonial, Afropolitan flâneur – partly styled on the original flâneur described by Baudelaire[86] in his famous 1860s essay "The Painter of Modern Life", which was referred to earlier in Chapter 1. Bernard's paintings are incorporated into Schonstein's narrative structure as a means of highlighting the different subjects encountered by Bernard and The Girl in the migrants of "Skyline". J.U. Jacobs, invoking W.J.T. Mitchell, explains ekphrasis as a meeting of the verbal with the visual, "between the seeable and the sayable, display and discourse, showing and telling" (140). Both Mitchell and Jacobs maintain ekphrasis to be a dialectic relationship of "image-text" (Jacobs 141). Jacobs points out that in *Skyline* it is through the merging of image and text that Schonstein illustrates an African diasporic experience. As a palimpsest, then, the multiple viewpoints of image and text, which equate with the many layers of Afropolitanism, parallel the multiplicities of the migrants of the intra-African diaspora of Cape Town in the novel.

3.2.1 Migrant narratives

> You see the stars lying on the sky? These the same stars I see in Mozambique. (*Sky* 175)

The characters in Schonstein's novel are brought together in one particular geographical space and yet they hail from various countries across the African continent. How does the urban space of Cape Town help to shape, or perhaps re-shape, the Afropolitan identities of some of these individuals? In his discussion on cosmopolitanism, globalisation and transnationalism, Simon Gikandi argues that "global cultural flows are still dominated by those coerced migrants rather than the free-willing cosmopolitan subjects" ("Between Roots" 28). In Schonstein's *Skyline,* the narrator tells us that:

> There is dust in these people: red dust and brown dust and dust from shrivelled riverbeds. They carry dust from the scorched fields of war. Some are powdered with coal dust and asbestos dust or dust from the old copper mines. There are those covered with the ash of bones left to the wind after mass killings. Others are dulled by the dusts of the Slim people who have wasted away. All come here looking for a new life. (*Sky* 9)

[86] It is noteworthy that the watercolour painter Constantin Guys, around whom Baudelaire styled his essay, was also a former soldier, as well as a war correspondent during the Crimean War, and similarly, Bernard, in Schonstein's *Skyline,* was also himself deeply affected by war. See the Introduction by Clifford Hall in *Constantin Guys: Flushing, 1805: Paris 1892.*

This potent image of dust recurs several times in each sentence, alluding clearly to mortality. Furthermore, the image is striking as it conveys the sense of connection between the refugee and the environment, given how they still carry dust on their person. The idea recalls a Sotho proverb that declares "the lizard that lives on the rocks still carries the dust of long ago" (Watson 18). The migrant characters who have travelled great distances are the "scattered tribe" that Selasi refers to as "Africans of the world" ("Bye-Bye" n. pag.). These migrants described by the narrator all carry "the presence of the elsewhere in the here" that Achille Mbembe speaks about which was referred to earlier ("Afropolitanism" 28). This brings to mind Mbembe's interpretation of Afropolitanism as that which "domesticat[es] the unfamiliar" ("Afropolitanism" 28). The narrator continues her description thus:

> Under their western clothes, some are tattooed and cut with ritual scars. Some have ear lobes stretched and heavy with rings. Their hair is plaited or braided like rivulets running over granite koppies. (*Sky* 9)

Images of these cultural interweavings abound in *Skyline*, and differences between individuals, while still perhaps evident, are not regarded by the characters as alienating, but are embraced instead.

By means of critical analysis of the characters and of the narrative, this section of the chapter will now go on to examine the shaping and interpretations of Afropolitan identities as seen through the eyes of the narrator, a young girl, who is not what one would immediately consider to be a flâneuse.

The unnamed first-person narrator, whom I will refer to here as "The Girl" (following Grace Kim's lead)[87] is a teenager whose mother is largely absent. As a result of the breakdown of the family, The Girl is forced to raise herself and her younger, autistic sibling, Mossie, in a high-rise building that is home to a number of socially marginalised characters. She narrates that:

> Most of the people who live here are illegal immigrants and refugees from the rest of Africa. […] Not many have the right to be here and most of them carry forged papers or pay bribes to stay in the country. They arrive from all over Africa by taxi, by bus, by train. Some hitch rides on overland transporters. Many just walk. (*Sky* 8)

This narrative is conveyed matter-of-factly in the voice of a young girl, a flâneuse, the pervasive observer of urban life, through whose gaze in this instance the Afropolitan city of Cape Town is rendered visible to the reader. These displaced persons – refugees and

[87] See Ha-Eun Grace Kim, "Marginality in Post-TRC Texts: Storytelling and Representational Acts".

immigrants with falsified documentation – are numerous in cities such as Cape Town, and it is they who contribute to the city's Afropolitanism. Their mobility has been necessitated through war and they have had to act to survive. The Girl relates what she sees around her as events occur, and presents these changing narratives in what is often a stream of consciousness rendering:

> This is Skyline at the top of Long Street. We live on the fifth floor and can see the sea from our veranda. Sun comes through our windows all morning. It plays on the walls, paints with long tendrils of light against shadow. (*Sky* 7)

Light and shadow are foregrounded by the author throughout the novel, not least perhaps because of how vital these aspects are in chiaroscuro painting.[88] Painting and colour are recurring themes throughout the text that weave the novel together, tying in with the use of ekphrasis. Once rendered to canvas, and translated into a literary description, the artwork enacts the difference between seeing and being. Put differently, a painting, like literature, is a representation of space and time. Henri Lefebvre in *The Production of Space* writes about "a *representation of this space,* one which is bound to graphic elements" (Lefebvre 361, italics in original). Ekphrasis provides the reader of a literary text with a supplementary way of understanding what the artist perceives and renders to canvas. Richard Brock, writing on ekphrasis, speaks of an artist's painting as a "pregnant moment" which has been "spatially constituted" (134). The same can be said of literature, where "space and place are understood through imaginary or figurative means" (Darici and Tally Jr. 29). The Girl is deeply connected to the city, not just through sights and images, but she is also immersed in its very rhythm and flux, aware of its urban heartbeat:

> We buy Cokes at 7Eleven and sit outside drinking, watching the flow of cars move through Long Street and split up at the intersection. I'm used to the traffic and the way it washes through my mind, swirling with changing rhythms. It is a moving, liquid, smooth and soothing music; a song of haunting sounds and hootings woven from the speed and rushings of the city. The traffic is a song which plays my feelings as though they were a string instrument or distant drum. It erases all silences within me. (*Sky* 6)

This passage indicates The Girl's ability to be part of the city and feel at peace, listening to the sounds of traffic, which she compares to music. The rhythm, flow and sound of traffic are a metaphor for music and The Girl herself is compared to a musical instrument, as the music

[88] The treatment of light and shade and the absence of colour are aspects of chiaroscuro (literally meaning light and dark). Leonardo da Vinci is one of the artists famed for developing this technique. For more about the suppression of colour by chiaroscuro, see John Shearman's article "Leonardo's Colour and Chiaroscuro".

of traffic plays through her, soothing her. This highlights the close relationship between human subject and city, which is the way of the flâneur. The soundscape described by The Girl is part of the city and is not perceived as harsh and alienating: rather she absorbs the sound meditatively, as it all adds to the dynamic and hybrid experience of Cape Town.

A further indication of the hybrid Afropolitan nature of Cape Town is that petrol attendants at a nearby petrol station refer to "Skyline" as "Africa Junction" (*Sky* 10), suggesting the conglomeration of many parts in one space. Ironically this is so named in a derogatory fashion, and in the first of many italicized paragraphs that focalise a voice other than that of The Girl, the petrol attendants exclaim and complain:

> You see! The whole of Africa is running into the country and to here at the top of Long Street. Do they think Cape Town is the big hotel with the free jobs? Or what they thinking? And do they think they can just come here from where they come from over Africa and take the people's jobs? […] Now they selling passports and they buying your wives. […] You see, they no good for us, these peoples. They must go back to their own country. They must go back to Congo or whatever. (*Sky* 10)

In this extract, the author uses demotic speech for these characters, but does not do so for The Girl, which highlights difference. The xenophobia that was evident in Mpe's *Welcome to Our Hillbrow* (see previous chapter) is once again echoed here by some of the local inhabitants of Cape Town, with the word "Congo" thrown in sarcastically as representative of the whole of Africa. It must be noted that while reference is made to race and the attitudes towards migrants from elsewhere, Schonstein never describes The Girl in racial terms – she could be coloured or white – and it is important to note that her race at this point is irrelevant as she symbolises a hybrid Afropolitan being. Being 'African', for Achille Mbembe, is not related to race at all, but rather it encompasses globalism and hybridity ("Afropolitanism" 28). In contradistinction, referring to the migrants that populate Skyline, the 7Eleven manager says:

> They know Mr Mandela's justice has gone to shit. They just got to come down from Africa and take over our country. Fuck up their own place, then come here to steal from us. I'm telling you, the old days was better. (*Sky* 50)

The manager goes on to blame the "illegals" that "South Africa belongs to Africa, not us" (*Sky* 50), echoing the plight of the refugee who is accused by some of causing the decline of a country that has "just gone to shit" (*Sky* 50). Schonstein inserts this voice into the text as a means of problematising xenophobic elements that are ever-present wherever legal and illegal migrants are to be found.

Migrants and refugees in the novel have walked hundreds of miles to find refuge, and in fleeing their homelands their gaze has taken in stories of their flight. The refugee becomes a flâneur not so much while fleeing, but rather while discovering, sometimes cautiously, the streets of a new city. The Girl relays the beginning of one of these migrant narratives:

> I look at the woman's shoes which she has placed neatly beside her sleeping mat. They have no colour left in them and are completely bashed up. They have taken on the weary shape of her leather feet. Her feet are hard and cracked. Her legs are dry and scratched with the markings of thorns and the merciless bushes which grow in dry places. Her children have no shoes. They have feet which look like worn-out little boots and their toes have no softness. (*Sky* 14).

The Girl's narrative here focuses on walking – shoes, legs, feet, and she conveys with empathy the lived experiences of some of the marginalised migrants with whom she shares the walls of Skyline. This particular form of mobility – walking – is often the only means some migrants have of getting from one place to another, sometimes crossing borders illegally on foot. Similar to the female flâneur, migrants thus can also be conceived as invisible flâneurs, and their walking is neither with ease nor carefree. Refugees, for instance, might be on foot but they are also *en fuite,* in flight or on the run, escaping their country of origin. Reference was made to the notion of *ubuntu* earlier in the Introduction as representing an African humanism that brings people together. In her examination of *Skyline*, Rebecca Fasselt focuses on the notion of *ubuntu* "as a counter-discourse to xenophobia" with the "coming-together and entanglement of seemingly incommensurate spaces and identities" ("Ke Nako" 1), seen as a whole rather than as separate or different. It is nonetheless through difference that these individuals are able to come together. The refugees are more than just other people in the building: they look after the two sisters, often providing food for them. On one occasion (in Chapter 29), Alice intervenes and pretends to be family when a social worker arrives to inspect The Girl and Mossie's living arrangements. Raphael and Bluebell help prepare a dinner, and Bernard serves at the table. All of these characters play a role to make Mossie's home environment appear normal for the benefit of the authorities.[89] These ideas of social connection bring to mind Sarah Nuttall's concept of "entanglement": the coming together of "identities, spaces, histories" (*Entanglement* 20). The inhabitants of Skyline are all Afropolitans who hail from different parts of Africa and come together in one space. Bernard and The Girl, as well as other characters encountered in the novel, support

[89] The reader has learned that The Girl and Mossie's father has abandoned them, and their mother spends her time drinking and popping pills. The social worker has been informed that "Mossie keeps coming to school with bird lice, without her school bag, has mood swings and is very tired" (*Sky* 126).

each other. Fasselt claims that Schonstein's novel "moves beyond *ubuntu*'s framing of African immigrants as pitiable 'others'" through the suggestion of an "entanglement of hosting and guesting" (Fasselt, "Ke Nako" 183). The individuals living in Skyline share more than just the space of the building, they are closely enmeshed in one another's lives, helping out when possible, and being able to depend upon each other when need dictates, sharing stories and skills. The residents of Skyline are Africans of the world who have come together via very different routes. Their individual experiences have cast them as displaced or marginalised figures, exiles and refugees, who share a common humanity.

The Girl's sister, Mossie, provides a practical example of this sharing through transculturation. Since she is autistic and her language skills are minimal, she communicates differently to other individuals, yet this does not impede her socialization with others. Shortly after Cameron arrives from Zimbabwe, with his pouches of beads, he tells Mossie "about the slaves these beads were to have bought and makes a picture for her of ancient Portuguese trading vessels crossing between India, the land of agate beads, and Africa, the land of slaves" (*Sky* 118). Mossie also begins to learn the language of beads from the wireworkers and street vendors:

> The dagga traders have explained the language of Xhosa beads to Mossie. Beads are not just coloured bits of glass. Beads, when woven together in different colour combinations, speak a language of their own. But this language is slowing [sic] dying because it is so old-fashioned and what beads once said, need no longer be spoken. (*Sky* 147)

This is a clear reference to changing times, and an indication of cultures changing and adapting over time. This passage carries the potent image of beads, which are a symbolic language throughout Africa. Mossie, being autistic, does not communicate easily with others, but she is obsessed with collecting beads. The exchange between the traders and an autistic girl is significant in terms of Afropolitanism, as together they discuss the cultural heritage of the amaXhosa people and share knowledge. Through the use of colour and pattern, the traditional beadwork[90] of the amaXhosa communicates the social status of an individual, and is used in rituals, and for communication between the sexes, amongst other things. Wealth, status and sometimes profession are also communicated via bead language (Costello 13). It is suggested in the above passage that the language of beads is dying, and yet, paradoxically,

[90] For an in-depth exploration on the significance of the beadwork of the amaXhosa, see Dawn Costello's *Not Only for its Beauty: Beadwork and its Cultural Significance among the Xhosa Speaking Peoples* and Ettagale Blauer's "Messengers of Culture: The Glory of African Beadwork".

Mossie appears to understand, suggesting an entanglement that is far deeper than skin, and is rather more to do with a sense of ubuntu and Afropolitanism.

Individual, disparate lives come together as one new community in *Skyline*, where The Girl who has a penchant for writing, wants to bring both friends and strangers together. Through her eyes a positive Afropolitan vision is provided, in a city where both locals and foreigners can live together comfortably. However, The Girl's idea of bringing people together by transforming their sad stories into something good is perhaps too ambitious, as she herself attests:

> So I gather up the words which I find spewed across the tar of Long Street and at the foot of Skyline and I try to turn them into poetry. I try to re-embroider these splintered words into the finery they once were – old litanies from Ethiopia; chantings from Sudan; fables from Eritrea. But I cannot turn the city's laments into anything of beauty. (*Sky* 55)

Schonstein is being self-reflexive here, and The Girl represents the power of literature. The beads of the amaXhosa mentioned earlier can also be added to this list of words, chantings and fables. This recalls Walter Benjamin's description of the flâneur's act of walking as "botanizing on the asphalt" (*Charles Baudelaire* 36), involving meticulous examination of what is found in the environment. In the extract above, The Girl finds not plant specimens, but words on the tarmac, which she refers to as 'poetry', 'litanies', 'chantings' and 'laments', richly lyrical in their descriptive mode. The act of writing is a consequence of flânerie as it occurs in reflection after the activity of walking. Though the unified society she desires to create might be no more than a chimera, through her writing, The Girl still wants to give voice to the silenced people of Africa, the marginalised travellers who have come from afar, but she encounters others who do not feel as she does and who are not nearly as welcoming to foreigners as is she. It is perhaps no accident that Schonstein's child narrator remains nameless, suggesting, as Grace Kim points out, "an effacement of self, and a renunciation of her 'privileged position' to represent others' stories" (79). The Girl's youthful naïveté is juxtaposed with the hostility of others towards refugees seeking shelter. Nonetheless, The Girl continues to seek a new order, a new society:

> One day I will leave Skyline and live with Mossie in a nice house up on the side of the mountain. Then I'll find words in places other than wind and war and traffic. I will find beauty and words of a new order. (*Sky* 56)

This new order which The Girl hopes to espouse is for her writing to aestheticize her surroundings into a form of art, since words and beauty are linked to a notion of literary

aesthetics. According to Jana Pretorius, this new order is also “linked to the narrative’s vision of an unconditionally hospitable social space, where ordinarily disparate lives can come together without prejudice or fear” (65). Clearly then, there is a desire for The Girl to create, through watching and writing, a new Afropolitan society. New beginnings and belonging are key for The Girl as she relays her vision, walking the city landscape of Cape Town and watching everyday life unfold around her. If it is the crowd that is the domain of the ubiquitous flâneur, then in *Skyline* that crowd is the group of migrants and refugees who inhabit the building, and the flâneur, as The Girl, is the Afropolitan flâneuse through whose perceptive eye the city is read, interpreted, translated and recorded in her written narrative. The Afropolitan flâneuse is a hybrid being, at home in the world wherever she is, who embodies a dynamic African identity and who “make[s] the most of the traces of remoteness in closeness” (Mbembe, “Afropolitanism” 28).

3.2.2 Sheltering the marginalised

> But refugees frighten me because they are signs of a dislocated locality, a mote in the eye of cosmopolitanism, of that postcolonial identity which derives its legitimacy from the mastery of the culture of modern Europe. (Gikandi, “Between Roots” 23)

In the above extract, Simon Gikandi speaks of refugees he encounters on an international flight to London and New York as “outcasts” who “are encountering the modern metropolis for the first time” (“Between Roots” 22). That refugees are disconcerting or an irritation to cosmopolitanism points to something under the surface which has the potential to initiate change. Cities are constantly in flux, and urban identities are required to adapt with the changes, yet some dislocation is necessarily experienced in the process, particularly when there is arrival or dispersal of individuals. Since the characters are what hold the narrative together, and since this thesis deals with Afropolitan identity formation, this section examines some of the different characters in *Skyline* as individuals as well as in the manner that they work together as a whole in the sense of *ubuntu* that was mentioned earlier. The reader comes to learn that the narratives of the diasporic characters are conveyed through The Girl’s rendition, and these characters are representative of the intersectionality lived out in Afropolitan communities, such as among the residents of the Skyline building. In his introduction to *Diaspora and Identity in South African Fiction*, J. U. Jacobs writes:

> Diasporic identities are not settled, but transitive, in the sense that they are continually being formed through navigation across physical and cultural

> boundaries between home countries and host countries, across difference. The diasporic subject does not overlook or transcend differences within the self or between the self and other selves, but constantly engages and implicates the self with the other – socially, culturally and linguistically – in a migratory trajectory that begins with displacement. (5)

In the above extract, Jacobs highlights the fluid identity of the diasporic subject, and pays attention to various influences, such as cultural and linguistic. It is important to note that the displacement which Jacobs speaks about affects diasporic individuals to a lesser or greater degree, as will be seen in the various characters in *Skyline*. As the flâneur illustrates and as Jacobs suggests in the lines above, environmental factors and geography play a role in the formation of identity. Some individuals respond to this by adapting to their new environment, while others respond by refusing to immerse themselves in their new surroundings. The engagement between self and other is a dialogic relationship that is clearly conveyed through the various diasporic characters cast in the novel. The owner of Skyline, Mrs Rowinsky, is a Jewish fugitive from the Second World War, and her experiences have shaped her and enabled her to care for others by offering hospitality towards them. Mrs Rowinsky elaborates thus:

> [W]hat this stimulated in me was the whole question of shelter: the sheltering of the fugitive, the sheltering of the refugee from whatever circumstance but particularly from war and destabilization. […] The fugitive from war is a broken person, and you imagine that person arrives with nothing except what he can carry on his back or what he wears. But there is also what is inside him. […] Something else I have given a lot of thought to is the whole question of returning. How do displaced persons return home? (*Sky* 102–3)

Mrs Rowinsky's concerns seen here come from a place of empathy and humanism, but this line of thought and questioning read like they come from a diaspora studies scholar more than a war fugitive, which makes her seem a somewhat contrived mouthpiece for the author. Empathy is not everyone's strong point, but perhaps part of what Schonstein is trying to achieve in her novel is to raise awareness in others to the plight of refugees, particularly those who are forced to flee because of war. The refugee and the exile are unable to put down roots, but they learn to adapt. They can never belong entirely to one place and are always on the move, and ready to move in a hurry if necessary. One such refugee sheltered in Mrs Rowinsky's building is Bernard, an artist who seeks asylum in South Africa. Having left war-torn Mozambique like countless others as a result of the war, Bernard is a refugee flâneur and he explains his arrival in the country:

> You always wanting to know how I am come to Skyline. I walking here from there. I walking from Mozambique. Even through that Kruger animal park and I coming with some others through the fence. (*Sky* 142)

Here is evidence of literal border-crossing. Bernard thus is himself a refugee flâneur whose walking has been far from casual strolling: his walking has been necessary flight with urgent purpose. The concept of flânerie can thus be extended to include these types of walkers, such as Bernard, the refugee woman with the ruined shoes, The Girl, and even Mossie, who all continue to walk the Cape Town city streets. The Girl narrates that Bernard "is here illegally" and his fake passport says "he was born in Cofimvaba, though he was really born near Vila de Manica in Mozambique and his name was once Bernardino" (*Sky* 29). Despite the fact that the war is over, Bernard's tragic situation has rendered him homeless and it is uncertain whether or not his wife and children are even alive.

> Bernard lives on the fourth floor. He lives alone and has no friends except us. He sells flags at the Buitengracht intersection and dresses really well in designer suits and wide-brimmed hats. He comes from Mozambique and speaks Portuguese and rolling, round English. (*Sky* 29)

This passage is highly indicative of Bernard's specific brand of Afopolitanism: he dresses like a Congolese *sapeur*, and is multilingual. Despite his marginality and the loss of his family and home, Bernard refuses to be a victim, and he tries to make the best of his current situation. That he sells flags adds a further multinational aspect to his identity, and since he stations himself at an intersection, the suggestion is one of crossings and entanglement. At this point in the novel, the reader is not privy to the fact that the artworks described throughout the novel are painted by Bernard. Suffering from post-traumatic stress, Bernard works hard to accept what has happened by means of painting. His paintings reflect his memories of Mozambique as well as his new life as a refugee living in Cape Town. While the reader only realises it retrospectively, towards the end of the novel, it is Bernard's artistic renderings of people and places that are described ekphrastically at the end of each chapter. In her dissertation, Jana Pretorius suggests that "this invocation of visual art can be read as a means of creating hospitable spaces" (66). Bernard is thus able to narrate his "experiences of nationality, geography, foreignness, difference", and define what it means to be "at home" (Dodd and Kurgan in Pretorius 66). Bernard is an Afropolitan flâneur who also paints the city and people he sees. The difference with his brand of flânerie, however, is that he observes other diasporic beings that he encounters on the streets, and they form the subject matter of

his paintings. He paints an intra-African Cape Town of diasporic identities. In this manner, he captures an Afropolitan city that is home to a number of migrants and travellers.

For the diasporic characters in *Skyline*, "home" has a variety of meanings. Princess, who is from Rwanda, lives in the flat above The Girl and Mossie, and she braids and cuts hair to earn a living, and also rents out sleeping space to new arrivals in the country. Princess is described ekphrastically in Bernard's third painting "It is the Woman of Rwanda" (*Sky* 12). Thus, despite being a migrant herself, Princess acts as host, sharing out her own space with other displaced people such as herself, people who "arrive in Cape Town with nowhere to go" (*Sky* 11). These people "arrive without money but with stories written on the parchment of their hearts" (*Sky* 11) which they do not easily talk about as most are memories of war and flight. Stories are a recurring motif, which, like The Girl's words earlier, create an additional Afropolitan narrative. The diaspora space of the building, Skyline, is rich with story because of the inhabitants who are diasporic individuals. The novel *Skyline* is itself a diasporic space as it 'houses' the stories of these individuals from all over Africa.

There are other individuals living in Skyline who are similarly marginalised: the "Spice Girls", Alice and Bluebell, who "are not actually girls but men who cross-dress in silks and satins" (*Sky* 62); a blind, mixed-race couple, Gracie and Cliff, who could only marry in 1990 "thanks to Mr Mandela" (*Sky* 24); Kwaku who "walked from Ghana to Zimbabwe" (*Sky* 118); and Cameron and Liberty Chizano, who "have driven from Zimbabwe to nobody in particular" (*Sky* 115). Skyline in Cape Town is seen as a safe haven for such lost individuals from elsewhere in Africa, while the streets might not always be that welcoming:

> The wire-workers will introduce [Cameron and Liberty] to the merchant who controls the pavement space and who will charge them protection because they are kwere kwere, foreigners who are not really welcome here. Sometimes traders from Africa get beaten up because people think they're stealing jobs. (*Sky* 118)

While these migrants are formally unemployed, and very likely could not find other work if they tried, out of necessity they create their own employment, by selling goods such as curios they have brought from other parts of Africa. Naturally this creates envy amongst the locals who are resentful of foreigners earning money when they cannot. St George's Mall, where Cameron and Liberty go to trade their carvings, is an Afropolitan space that affords foreign traders a chance of earning some income. In the novel this is another Afropolitan space where numerous individuals and communities of Africa converge.

Just as Bernard was homeless, forced to leave his Mozambican home, so too are The Girl and Mossie in a different way homeless, in that they come from a broken home, after their father abandoned them and their mother. Their broken home has rendered them refugees in a different sense, yet also seeking shelter. It is The Girl (and not her mother) who cares for her sister Mossie, and it is the other tenants of Skyline who care for The Girl and Mossie, with Bernard acting as a substitute father. Significantly, the final painting described at the end of the novel is titled "It is the Portrait of the Artist with his Good Friends" and depicts Bernard with The Girl and Mossie. The frame "is made of small stars cut from old tin" (*Sky* 186), which suggests unity and light emanating from the past. There is a sense then that The Girl's utopian vision is not in vain, and that national borders and cultural boundaries are not necessarily restrictive. Society can adapt and change, and in the Afropolitan urban cityscape of Cape Town, Schonstein and The Girl convey the idea that there is still hope of a better, community.

3.2.3 Picturing new communities through ekphrasis

From the very first chapter, the narrative paints a picture:

> I watch the city lights move across the ceiling, splintering up the darkness. It's not ever really dark in our room. Even with the lights off, the cars and neons and street lights leave a glow all the time. The city pours in, swirls around, stains everything with paint thrown against a wall, running down, mixing. (*Sky* 2)

Reminiscent of a trademark Pollockian[91] technique, this 'mixing' denotes the hybridity and cosmopolitan nature of the city. The Girl becomes at one with the city, as she is so in tune with her surroundings that the city light spilling into her room becomes a painting of mixed colours. The city and human subject are thus intimately connected, forming a specific co-dependent relationship. The sounds of the traffic too, are interpreted in a synaesthetic[92] and anthropomorphic sense, "screaming, […] splashing everything with tears. The traffic is the wail of a Madonna stripped and bleeding" (*Sky* 2). The city of Cape Town never sleeps, especially the rebellious Long Street, its major artery. The above description sets the tone for what will be a series of pictorial descriptions, the ekphrastic sections of the novel.

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[91] Jackson Pollock is known particularly for his famous drip paintings of the 1940s and 1950s. See more on the artist in Elizabeth Frank's 1983 publication *Jackson Pollock.*

[92] Synaesthesia is a unity of the senses, a blending of colours and tastes which may be interpreted as sounds or words. There are different types of synaesthesia: for a valuable exploration of this phenomenon, see Ophelia Deroy's *Sensory Blending: On Synaesthesia and Related Phenomena.*

The first painting in the series that is narrated to the reader situates the novel and characters in a particular place and time. Titled *It is the Cape Town City*, it depicts the "dynamism of a rushing city" (*Sky* 3) and the narrator's description also conveys the strong sense of colour and joy the painter has captured in an Afropolitan city, where "[c]olours carry an orchestration of African city-sound" (*Sky* 4). Numerous ekphrastic descriptions in *Skyline* seem to emphasise the bright colours of Africa. Vivian Bickford-Smith's article on the customs and dress of the inhabitants of the city offers an historical explanation of Cape Town's identity stemming from the colourful "Malay" inhabitants by focusing on "perceptions of cultural and behavioral distinction" ("Providing Local Color" 134). The mix of colours brings to life the multicultural space of the city and the hybridity of the Afropolitan inhabitants.

The colours and sounds of the city with which Schonstein engages ekphrastically to convey the texture of the African diaspora serve to "link contemporary histories of African dispersal back to an ancestral past and also to bring Western cultural traditions in relation to new African practices" (Jacobs 147–48). It is in this manner, continues Jacobs, that "the ongoing reimagination and cultural transformation of the splintered African diasporic self" (148) is presented. Schonstein cleverly combines actual ekphrasis of real paintings with Bernard's fictive paintings, as each of his paintings is contrasted with that of a well-known artist, and in this way the author hybridises the fictional collection which is Afropolitan with European roots. Schonstein thus brings together Afropolitan and European fiction and art in her novel. Similarly, as this thesis shows, the postcolonial flâneur serves as a bridge which connects the Afropolitan flâneur to the original European flâneur. Bernard's paintings are of individuals with whom he engages in the novel, individuals who are themselves marginalised diasporic subjects in an Afropolitan city.

Towards the end of the novel, when the reader is informed that the refugee flâneur, Bernard, was the creator of the artworks, they are posthumously exhibited by Mrs Rowinsky within the "Bernard Sebastião Collection" (*Sky* 186). On one level, the actual paintings by Bernard illustrate aspects of life as he interprets it. On another level, the anonymous narrator who describes these paintings also interprets the paintings in a specific way. The descriptions of the paintings conveyed to the reader in this manner have evolved over several stages, and as Pretorius points out, the reader is thus "invited to participate in bringing this vision of Ubuntu to fruition" (80). Bernard's collection of artworks parallels *Skyline* as a palimpsest.

The multiple layers of this palimpsest include the author-flâneuse, The Girl flâneuse, Bernard as refugee flâneur and painter, as well as other flâneur characters in the novel.

Further layers of *Skyline*'s palimpsest include real painters and paintings which exist and existed in the world, fictional painters and paintings, and characters who are subjects of the paintings and of the text and inhabitants of the fictionalised city. Then there is the city: the real city, the city in the text, the city in the painting, the city in the painting in the text. Such a list could go on *ad infinitum*. The reader, the viewer of the paintings, the painter, the writer and the child narrator are all part of one story, each one an Afropolitan flâneur or flâneuse in his or her own way in a city that continues to reflect ongoing changes and flows.

These many layers of the palimpsest run parallel with the various overlays and seams that are evident in the figure of the Afropolitan who "lives a life divided across cultures, languages and states" (Gikandi, "Foreword" 9). *Skyline* demonstrates the multiplicity and humanity of a lived Afropolitan. This is evident when The Girl declares that:

> when the caress of Long Street traffic becomes that of the mothers of the dispossessed, affirming the dreams and hopes of those who have walked down Africa, I might hear Bernard's song at the intersection. (*Sky* 183)

The traffic, which brings people to and from different places, becomes a caress and the intersection brings music to The Girl's ears. The idea of *croisement* or criss-crossing is thus emphasised, with the traffic intersection being the heart that pumps lifeblood that never ceases as it brings people to and from elsewhere. This perspective is "an ideal framework through which to raise polemic and unsettling themes" (Simoes da Silva 90) such as those encountered in a post-apartheid South Africa still coming to terms with its new identity. In this manner Schonstein is able to make a powerful comment on power structures, belonging and not belonging. Through the fresh eyes of a child, things are seen differently to how they are seen by a disillusioned adult, and via this youthfulness Schonstein portrays the transformation in South Africa in a positive light, to promote a sense of belonging, infused with an optimism and hope for the future. This is in contrast to the quasi-apocalyptic message conveyed in Duiker's narrative by his child narrator.

At the end of the novel, The Girl comes to accept her gift of writing and her passion for telling stories and acknowledges that she is a writer, exclaiming:

> Bernard! Look at me! I am a writer now. I can spin my words, my many gathered words, into fine coir and threads of raw cotton, as you always said I should, so as to weave from them all manner of finery. […] I can weave from my words histories and songs of love, rhyming sculptures and pictures of every sort! They fly in the wind for you! Do you see them? Not concrete, not traffic fumes! They are no longer vagrant and wandering words. They

> are tales, Bernard, tellings which the wind will always carry for you! (*Sky* 184)

The Girl as narrator-flâneuse has recognized the experiences of migrants as a subject for literature. Through her own writing, The Girl is now able to transform experiences that were originally vagrant and rootless, to fill the spaces in which she finds a sense of belonging. Thus, the idea the reader is left with at the end of the novel is that there are more "stories of the marginalized, waiting to emerge from the shadows" (Kim 82), opening "a hospitable space, in which ordinarily disparate lives can converge to create new, shared, intimate public narratives" (Pretorius 80). Through her sensitive gaze and acute observations, The Girl gathers impressions and moulds them into word sculptures, making her a flâneuse who creates a living cityscape. Similarly, Bernard has woven his impressions into art, illustrating the city and its people as he envisaged it. The Girl has seen aspects of the cityscape in a different light, tinged with hope, and she has captured these into stories that will, as she says, continue to be carried by the wind. Once again, the sense of *ubuntu* is conveyed, with the hope that instead of dispersals and xenophobic splits, new social groupings will emerge, bringing seemingly different individuals together in one hybrid Afropolitan community. This provides a contrast to the next novel that will be examined: *Thirteen Cents.*

3.3 Living on the Edge as a Street Child in K. Sello Duiker's *Thirteen Cents*

In earlier chapters the concepts of boundaries and borders were discussed; concepts essential to any discussion on Afropolitan and transnational fiction. Meg Samuelson teases out two different types of borders when considering South African cities in particular: "geo-political" and "temporal" borders (247); the former being concerned with connections (or dis-connect) between South Africa and Africa at large, and the latter focusing on the blurred line between the "apartheid past and post-apartheid present" (247). Once again, the liminal space and the seam or site of suture indicate that borders are places of contiguity as well as points of separation. Thus, as Samuelson highlights in her article, a range of borders is interrogated in Duiker's novel, transgressed primarily through the child protagonist Azure's very act of walking the streets (255), suggesting that these borders are permeable. Azure transgresses boundaries at the same time as he blurs those boundaries, since because of his mixed race he is also a boundary, and this sometimes confuses other people he encounters.

In *Thirteen Cents* the matter of race is tackled in a seemingly light-hearted fashion in this passage:

> I like watching people swim. […] Out at sea there'll be one or two white faces, mostly surfers. They don't fear the sea. As always they go at it like they own the sea. And then still out at sea but closer to the beach you'll find the coloureds, laughing and frolicking in the water. […] And then at the water's edge you find black people. We always seem to be scared of water. Usually women will be wading in the water wearing their swimming caps to protect the chemicals in their hair from reacting with sea water. (*TC* 180)

Embedded in this light-heartedness is an astute observation about racial difference in relation to a shared experience within a natural element. The contrast between the white and black experience is a stark reflection of reality. *Thirteen Cents*, published in 2000, with the storyline spanning about two years (1998–2000), relates the life and times of almost-thirteen-year-old orphaned street child Azure who learns about the harsh reality of life in post-apartheid Cape Town.[93] By means of exposing the gritty reality of life on the streets for orphaned children, Duiker examines how the so-called "Rainbow Nation" has failed its citizens, in particular the youth. Duiker provides the reader with an account of Azure's street life walking experiences, and in so doing he deconstructs the utopian myth of the rainbow nation.

The Afropolitan flâneur is a successor of the postcolonial flâneur who, similarly, is an updated rendering of Baudelaire and Benjamin's archetypal flâneur. The flâneur in African and African diasporic cities is an individual who is not defined by a particular race or social class, but who is any observer of the crowd that has a perceptive eye and a flair for recording what is seen in the street. While the nineteenth century flâneur strolled the city in a leisurely fashion, this newer flâneur wanders the street out of necessity. This flâneur is furthermore not bound by borders or restrained by manners, and also remains anonymous in the city crowd as s/he walks the urban landscape, carefully observing everyday life and other people. Azure is economically disadvantaged, a school drop-out who depends on hustling to earn some money in a society that is largely money-driven.

Those who live and walk the streets as homeless individuals are intensely aware of the power of time over their lives. There are rhythms that cannot be broken, a regularity that even for the street children cannot be ignored. Azure has to rise early, before other inhabitants of the city awaken, since he does not wish to draw attention to himself. While Andrea Spain refers to "the destitute, the sick, the jobless, the homeless, the queer" as "by-products of modernity" (416), these are the subjects that make up the real urban cosmopolite. These

[93] See Leon de Kock's *Losing the Plot* where he problematises the concepts of 'post-apartheid' and 'transition', suggesting that South Africa is not 'post' anything. See also Sam Naidu's review of de Kock's book in *English in Africa*.

liminal figures are the heartbeat of a city that rarely sleeps. At the beginning of *Thirteen Cents,* as the sun lightens the sky, Azure gets up:

> "Bafana, son, get up, we need to get breakfast." I poke him. "Bafana … Bafana." I go on like this for about five minutes before he gets up. […] "The sun is already out, hurry up. I'm also hungry." (*TC* 9, 1st ellipsis in orig.)

Interestingly, although a child himself, Azure calls Bafana "son", symbolic of his protectiveness over the younger boy. The two commence their day by washing in the sea not far from the corner of the beach where they sleep. Despite their marginality, these orphaned streetchildren must observe everyday routines in order to survive.[94]

3.3.1 Multiple realities and messy intersections

> My name is Azure. *Ah-zoo-ray.* That's how you say it. My mother gave me that name. It's the only thing I have left from her. […] I live alone. The streets of Sea Point are my home. (*TC* 5)

Azure is a street-wise youngster, because he is orphaned and is forced to live a harsh life that is dangerous for all who inhabit that low-life pavement world. The entire novel is a mapping of Azure's peripatetic existence on the streets of Cape Town. His movement in these streets and his acute awareness of his surroundings qualify him as a particular type of Afropolitan flâneur. Although he is traumatised, prematurely adult but boyish, Azure uses flânerie to deal with grief as a form of healing, empowerment, and ultimately, of transcendence. "I walk a lot," Azure says, "My feet are tough and rough underneath" (6) echoing the corporeal violence he experiences on a daily basis. The Cape Town street child, says Miki Flockemann, "is a migrant in his own home city" (281). Cape Town is not Azure's original 'home city', however, as he hiked to Cape Town from elsewhere after his parents died (*TC* 109). Nonetheless, having migrated, on foot, he now makes Cape Town his home city:

> I sleep in Sea Point near the swimming pool because it's the safest place to be at night. In town there are too many pimps and gangsters. I don't want to make my money like them. So during the day I help park cars in Cape Town. (*TC* 7)

Ironically, however, Azure's body becomes a form of "currency for his survival" (Nabutanyi 6). Safety for those living on the street is represented in terms of time: daylight hours are

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[94] Gerrard and Farrugia draw on Guy Debord and Erving Goffman to illustrate how "everyday encounters with homelessness" perpetuate "dysfunctionality" (2221).

generally considered safer than at night, and Azure has chosen to keep his distance from other unsavoury characters who take advantage of the dark to commit illegal activities. Azure's earnings on the streets result chiefly from the "tricks" (*TC* 12; 15; 35) he performs by means of homosexual prostitution. Such prostitution forces him "to smile" (*TC* 13). Much later in the novel, with another client, Azure tells a "lie and put[s] on a smile" when he says to the wealthy, well-mannered man "Just relax, okay. I also want to have some fun" (*TC* 101). This appears to be a strange mix of performing sexuality, being an adult, and yet still remaining a young boy who wants to please and to play.

With regard to performativity, Judith Butler's work, referred to briefly in Chapter 1, springs to mind immediately. In a re-examination of the term 'performativity' in a lecture given in 2009, Butler "completes [the term] with the idea of precarity, by making a reference to those who are exposed to injury, violence and displacement" ("Performativity" i). While performativity has to do with agency, precarity focuses on "conditions that threaten life in ways that appear to be outside of one's control" ("Performativity" i). In *Thirteen Cents*, Azure is placed in a position of precarity and therefore his performed sexuality is a sign of his agency which is necessary for his survival.

The reader learns a lot about the protagonist from the opening pages of the novel. Azure's self-sufficiency and huge jump to adulthood are clear when he claims that "I'm almost a man. I can take care of myself" (*TC* 5–6). Although orphaned, Azure does not lack family, as friends and other street people look after him one way or another (Joyce does his 'banking' for him and feeds him, Liesel gives him marijuana, Allen gets him new clothes). Liesel is the only "grown-up" Azure trusts "because she asks [him] for money and always pays [him] back a week later" and furthermore he notes that Liesel "doesn't tell lies … like the other people who stay under the bridge." (*TC* 8). This manner of looking after one another, or what AbdouMaliq Simone refers to as the notion of "people as infrastructure",[95] is a type of *ubuntu*, similar to the social networking already evidenced in *Skyline* earlier in this chapter. Simone's notion of infrastructure extends to activities of people in the city and "emphasizes economic collaboration among residents seemingly marginalized from and made miserable by urban life" (68). The notion of "people as infrastructure" reflects the necessary processes and interactions between individuals, which is part of the "precarious process of remaking the inner city" (Simone 71). Living day-by-day on the streets as Azure

[95] Simone's essay, "People as Infrastructure: Intersecting Fragments in Johannesburg" first appeared in *Public Culture* 16.3 (2004): 407–429, and was reproduced in Nuttall and Mbembe's edited collection *Johannesburg: The Elusive Metropolis.*

does cannot be accomplished without this kind of infrastructure, which depends on support from others even if in only a small way.

Youngsters such as Azure are forced to eke out their survival under difficult circumstances. Like many of the other children the reader encounters in the novel, Azure lives on the edge, "pushed to the fringes of society" (Abramson 35), forcing him to appreciate and economise his use of city space. Because Azure is not privileged, and because he utilises space in a unique manner, he can be described as a distinct type of Afropolitan flâneur. Nonetheless, he has adapted to these spaces in a manner which is comfortable for him. While he is forced to sleep in the streets, he chooses the safety of shelter near the swimming pool. He knows where he is and how best to use the space to his advantage. He is a young flâneur who adapts to his urban environment at the same time as he uses that environment to suit his needs as far as possible. An example of this is how Azure and others like him live off other people's discarded food and old clothes.

Azure is acutely aware of his body and goes to great lengths to keep clean by washing in the ocean every day.[96] He ensures his clothes too are clean and says "I wash my pants but I wear them wet till they dry in the sun from all the walking I do" (*TC* 18). The reader learns that Azure does a lot of walking all day long, and the entire novel is a mapping of these walks. He ensures that he looks presentable while walking, and in this sense, despite his marginalisation, despite his class and race, Azure is similar to the gentleman flâneur and dandy of the nineteenth century, updated into a twenty-first century version. Writing about a group of young homeless men in Hillbrow, Alex Wafer notes that they "are well aware of the social stigma that their bodies bear: as young, unemployed, mostly male and very often foreign […] frequently harassed by the police, forced to make life-worlds at the interstices of an already diverse neighbourhood" (404). This acute awareness, in Azure's case, is what helps him aspire towards at least appearing decent to others, by resisting his position as a displaced, homeless child. Further indicative of flânerie is how Azure generally spends his day: drifting aimlessly, loitering, wandering the streets:

> I drift around town going to the station, the library, even taking a nap in the Gardens. I think of nothing but just enjoy my high. […] I lie on the grass. […] I walk back to Sea Point, the air thick with the smell of sea water. (*TC* 26)

[96] Since he is visible to others and because his earning ability depends on it, Azure is impeccable with regard to cleanliness. "Homeless bodies, poor bodies, visible to passersby, visible to the streets," notes Wright, "are open to the public's gaze, to the gaze of authority" (Wright in Gerrard and Ferrugia 2220).

Azure's occupation of public space is a loitering which affords him the luxury of relaxation. He is able to be comfortable in the cityspace to the degree of napping and enjoying life. Azure is able to claim his right to the city as an Afropolitan flâneur through total immersion in the environment here without feeling like a homeless visitor. Azure's loitering, as with that of Bernard in *Skyline,* whose loitering is more active when he sells flags at intersections, is "about the endurance of the body in the present, the ability to remain present for an unknown duration in the hope of an uncertain and precarious future" (Wafer 408). As is evident throughout *Thirteen Cents*, the future is always deferred. Loitering, according to Wafer, "is the most likely urban role many young men and women in cities across Africa will inhabit for significant periods of their adult life" (408). But even while idle, while waiting, and loitering, there can still be a desire for something more, as can be seen when Azure says:

> All I want is a decent pair of shoes, to make up with Gerald and a Malawi stop[97] to make me think I'm flying. Is that so much to ask for? (*TC* 27)

Walking, feet and shoes are recurrent symbols throughout *Thirteen Cents.* Since it is through walking that this flâneur can stake a claim on an Afropolitan city such as Cape Town, it is essential that Azure has the requisite good feet and strong shoes. Through Azure's eyes the underbelly of the city is seen in its harshness, forcing him prematurely into adulthood:

> A boy? I'm not a boy. I've seen a woman being raped by policemen at night near the station. I've seen a white man let a boy Bafana's age get into his car. I've seen a couple drive over a street child and they still kept going. I've seen a woman give birth in Sea Point at the beach and throw it in the sea. A boy? (*TC* 170)

As a result of trauma, his childhood has been curtailed and Azure is forced to behave like an adult. These scenes are the reality of life which is not usually seen by the average city-dweller, yet they are scenes Azure is forced to witness from his vantage point in the streets. The type of flânerie he performs here is of survival as a result of trauma. Azure's life has also been one of harrowing misfortune and he remains traumatized by the loss of his parents, which Duiker hints at throughout the novel. This trauma is a feature of this particular type of street child flâneur, as is the trauma of the refugee Bernard in the previous section. While early on in the text Azure says that his "friend Bafana can't believe that [he] saw [his] dead parents and didn't freak out" (*TC* 6), and he simply cried and then it was over, the last two

[97] "Malawi stop" is a reference to cannabis from Malawi, reputed to be very strong. "Malawi Gold" is a top quality strain of marijuana. See <https://edition.cnn.com/2017/10/09/africa/african-countries-legalize-marijuana/index.html>.

sentences of the novel suggest potentially ongoing trauma: "My mother is dead. My father is dead" (*TC* 194). Several scholars have written about the effects of trauma and how it plays out in *Thirteen Cents*: Edgar Nabutanyi argues how "compelling and intimate insights into the lives of children caught up in such traumatic contexts" (1) are provided to arouse readers' empathy and draw attention to the reality of troubled childhoods, while Mamadou Ngom notes that "behind every street child there is a traumatic ordeal to tell" (46). Others have written about trauma in the novel as a "compelling critique of the post-apartheid city" (Kenqu 4) and that "taking care of himself takes priority over mourning and seeking help" (Raditlhalo 273). Indeed, for a character such as Azure, there is no time to mourn and any bourgeois form of therapy would be a luxury. Shortly before he leaves the streets and walks up the mountain, Azure proclaims:

> What's there to think about? My mother died. My father died. I hiked to Cape Town with Mandla, Vincent. And now I'm here. There's nothing much to say. There's nothing much to think about. I can't write. I can't phone my relatives. They don't care about me anyway. (*TC* 109)

These thoughts indicate Azure's solitariness and despair. While he says there is nothing to think about, ironically, the entire novel is precisely about him thinking and articulating his feelings. Alone and traumatised, Azure finds himself in a liminal space where he is misunderstood.

Azure is further marginalized by his "blue eyes and a dark skin" (*TC* 5) which confuses people as while he himself transgresses boundaries, he is also the boundary, the seam, and the in-between. He inhabits **and** embodies the crossing. When seeing his own face in the mirror, Azure claims that he cannot look at himself too long as his "blue eyes remind [him] of the confusing messages they send out to people. [He] wear[s] [his] blue eyes with fear because fear is deeper than shame" (*TC* 25–26). Azure's blue eyes render him in a liminal space, somewhere between black and white, which causes disdain and even hatred from blacks, while whites marginalise him because of his skin colour. Lizzy Attree notes that "[p]art of the Afropolitan nature of the African city in literature is the composite nature of its inhabitants" (32). Azure's genetic mixed-race make-up therefore adds to the Afropolitan nature of Cape Town to which Attree refers. His Afropolitan existence is in Homi Bhabha's 'Third Space', as Azure is a product of an "alternative form of identity and meaning that effectively blur[s] boundaries" (Knudsen and Rahbek 33). Azure is one type of Afropolitan flâneur who makes a home for himself as a streetchild in the streets of an African city.

3.3.2 Hustling and trickery

Azure encounters a number of individuals on an almost daily basis, and most of these youngsters are unemployed[98] and therefore have time to roam through the city committing various acts of crime. Some of these unsavoury hustlers include Gerald, a violent, racist gangster who renames Azure "Blue"; Allen, a pimp who also deals in stolen goods; Sealy, a gangster who lives under the bridge in a shack, and who occasionally smokes joints with Azure; Bafana, a nine-year old "lytie" who chooses to roam the streets. There are others who are kind and supportive towards Azure, including his best friend Vincent (also known as Mandla) and Joyce, an old woman who often feeds Azure and pretends to be saving his money for him in the bank. This looking after one another is a similar type of *ubuntu* that was seen in *Skyline*, discussed earlier, a particular African humanism that allows for people to live in community.

Azure's existence on the streets is precarious as he has to remain vigilant to escape potential danger. "My feet are sore, they have walked too much" says Azure, "My eyes hurt. They have seen too much" (*TC* 80). The new forms of Afropolitan flâneur identified in recent transnational literature, as mentioned at the outset of this chapter, include the displaced and the traumatised. Azure walks yet his feet feel pain, and his gaze takes in things that cause his eyes pain. His is an uncomfortable flânerie: it is one of discomfort occasioned by trauma that he continues to experience. Azure goes on to explain that he has lost things along the way, and then elaborates that "[t]he way in Cape Town, it's a long road, winding" (*TC* 80). Playing with the words 'sea' and 'see', Azure says that because he is always lost he "hide[s] out in Sea Point" as that is "where [his] eyes are" (*TC* 80–81). This sense of lostness is inescapable, because at this point he cannot turn back and he is alone. Azure bemoans his fate saying "I walk around the station and feel lost. With Vincent I'm never lost. I always know where I'm going because I'm walking with him" (*TC* 119). This is perhaps the paradox of the Afropolitan flâneur who is both a solitary being but requires the company of others and depends on the crowds in the city: "In everyone I pass I can see a little of myself" says Azure, "I carry a little of everyone I know in me" (*TC* 123). Later he proclaims: "I just want to be left alone. I just want to be able to walk the streets the way I like" (*TC* 171). The significance of this restless walking is a combination of the need to escape as well as an inability to be

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[98] The youth unemployment rate in South Africa was over 52% in 2017, according to Statistics South Africa, with youngsters between the ages of 15 and 29 making up almost half of the total unemployed. See <https://tradingeconomics.com/south-africa/youth-unemployment-rate as well as https://mg.co.za/article/2017-09-04-the-lesser-known-and-scarier-facts-about-unemployment-in-south-africa>.

pinned down. Azure experiences an inability to feel completely at 'home', yet in walking he finds a form of safety and freedom. In a scene with Sealy, the two are eating fish and chips in a parked car, and the following exchange takes place:

> "I'm just going for a walk," I tell [Sealy].
> "Don't be stupid, only white people say that. Now where are you going?"
> "To the park."
> "To do what?"
> "I just want to lie in the sun. What's your problem?"
> "Then I'm coming with you," he says.
> We go to the Gardens. I walk in front. I walk past the fountain where there are always lots of people. I can't help looking around and watching people. (*TC* 174–75)

In the above exchange, Sealy makes it clear that walking for leisure is only for the privileged, and thus he does not understand Azure's desire to go for a walk. Despite himself, Azure is still drawn to observing others, both up close but also from a distance, and, like the original flâneur, he wants to be alone. His perspective is at once detached and yet, paradoxically, one of immersion. In the same way that Azure carries "everyone" (*TC* 123) in himself despite his lostness, so too does he "possess all the places he encounters" (Kim 87) despite his homelessness. It is as though he is better able to gain a perspective from a certain remove, from where it is easier to see things as they really are. Azure seems to earn and own a privileged view of the city in a de Certeauian sense, when he reflects how:

> From where I'm standing [rooftop of block of flats] I can see the city. I can see the library, the train station, even the Cape Sun with its golden light. (*TC* 62)

Michel de Certeau's work on the city and his spatial practice have bearing here, since Azure can be considered no more than one of the "ordinary practitioners of the city [who] live[s] 'down below' the thresholds at which visibility begins" and whose body "follow[s] the thicks and thins of an urban 'text' [he] write[s] without being able to read it" (de Certeau 93). Thus, as suggested earlier, Azure's perspective changes when he is elevated. Azure's paradoxical immersion in the city on the one hand, through walking, and his sense of lostness on the other, situate him in that illegible text to which de Certeau refers. However, this does not mean that Azure is powerless, and in fact, when he later escapes the city and starts to walk up the mountain, climbing higher and higher, he declares: "When I look back I can see the now-quiet city. It lies weak beneath me" (*TC* 127).

In his chapter on "Walking in the City", de Certeau describes what it is like to see Manhattan from the 110th floor of the World Trade Center (91) and he writes:

> When one goes up there he leaves behind the mass that carries off and mixes up in itself any identity of authors or spectators. […] His elevation transforms him into a voyeur. It puts him at a distance. It transforms the bewitching world by which one was 'possessed' into a text that lies before one's eyes. (92)

Similarly, from his mountain-top remove, Azure is transformed into a voyeur, and his scopic power enables him to see through several layers, throwing a new light onto the city below:

> From the highest point on the mountain I look around and go towards the hills. White people are everywhere. They think they own this mountain, I say to myself as I look at them eating Simba chips and drinking Coke. (*TC* 149)

Duiker regularly passes comment on race and class, and makes astute observations that reflect entitlement, since, as he says, whites seem to own not only the mountain but also, as mentioned earlier, "they own the sea" (*TC* 180). How else then could a black street child with blue eyes interpret life? This 'othered' perspective is one which paradoxically empowers Azure despite his abject position in society. From being a traumatised street child Azure becomes an empowered subject: an Afropolitan flâneur who has grown from his earlier experiences, survived, and can return to society as an individual, who although still marginalised, can see things from a different perspective

In the foreword to *Negotiating Afropolitanism,* Simon Gikandi argues for a new "way of being African in the world" (9). He stresses the need to consider African identities as "both rooted in specific local geographies but also transcendental of them" (Gikandi 9). This paradoxical sense of belonging and unbelonging is also evident in *Skyline*, where Bernard, despite being a traumatised migrant transcends his situation and turns to painting. Azure, similarly traumatized, seizes opportunities for growth and empowerment, even from his marginalised societal position and even though his material reality has not changed. For Azure, who has felt alienated, fearful and prone to commit criminal acts, the desire to walk stems from a need to connect. His flânerie takes him to places he would not otherwise go, such as the mountain, and later to a cave, where he experiences a kind of transcendence.

For certain types of Afropolitan flâneurs, such as Azure (and Bernard in *Skyline*), their flânerie and the notion of transcendence are linked. Through the act of walking, such flâneurs become empowered and find a new perspective from which to view their situation. Tied up with Azure's flâneuristic observation skills are notions of place and space, belonging

and unbelonging, defamiliarization and homelessness. Michel de Certeau elaborates on the difference between *place* as being physically fixed and *space* as that which relates to movement in a place, rendering that physical place alive. “In short,” explains de Certeau, “space is practiced place” (117). Thus space is a place that is lived in. Azure walks seemingly between spaces, not ever being static in one place, and as a result does not belong anywhere in particular. Azure is marginalised because he does not fit in socially anywhere, and his liminality is evident in this snippet of conversation:

> “Engelsman, nè?”
> “Sotho,” I say.
> “Joburg,” David says.
> “Ja.”
> “I thought so. You don’t find many Sotho mense in Cape Town. All the darkies speak Xhosa here.” (*TC* 32)

Besides being socially and culturally side-lined, Azure is also linguistically othered, as he speaks seSotho rather than isiXhosa, which is what most black people in Cape Town speak. Another example of not belonging is seen when Azure has climbed the mountain and is enjoying being alone outside the cave he discovered, when a hiker called Oscar joins him and they chat casually. When Oscar says “You never told me where you come from”, Azure replies quite simply “I live under a bridge” (*TC* 137). Later, while smoking a joint together in the cave, Oscar asks Azure about his lifestyle:

> “So what’s it like living under a bridge?” he says.
> “You see the stars at night. If you stand close to the fence.”
> “So what, you live with homeless people?”
> “We have a home. It’s just not your normal kind of home with a kitchen and all that stuff but it’s still a home.” (*TC* 140)

A bridge is a symbol of crossings and connections, and a fence implies boundaries and borders. Such a boundary is also a seam or a place of connection. That Azure lives under a bridge suggests that he still has some way to go before he is able to cross the boundaries with ease. Yet, as already mentioned, Azure also blurs the boundaries and he is the seam. This is a reference to the necessary breaking down of boundaries in a country that has undergone a transition. While the notion of home might be a contested one, Azure lives communally and thus his homelessness becomes a metaphor for displaced people in general, in Cape Town, and in the country as a whole. However, Azure dismisses Oscar’s definition of him being homeless in the same manner that Bhabha claims that “to be unhomed is not to be homeless”

(*Location* 9). Despite the fact that he is orphaned and displaced in the city, Azure is still able to articulate a notion of "home".

Azure's liminality is further emphasised by his ongoing search for home. In one of his dream encounters, in the cave on the mountain, the Khoi woman Saartjie says to him "That is a very hard thing, not to know where you come from" but Azure replies quite simply that "It has always been like that" (*TC* 144). He adds that he has "been lost [in the city] for a long time" and he is "trying to find [his] way home" (*TC* 145). Azure ponders the idea of home in spatial as well as temporal terms, considering where he came from, where he is now, and where he would finally like to be. The conversation with Saartjie is pertinent because she conjures up memories of a Khoi past. The association with the ancestors in many traditional African beliefs is important both emotionally and spiritually in the sense of creating and sustaining an individual's identity.

Through Saartjie's help, and the shamanistic trance that he entered into in the cave, Azure appears to have gained the power to overthrow his enemies, both real and imagined. He might still be alone, but Azure has grown enormously from the experiences he has had:

> My feet smell like a sewer and remind me of all the unfriendly places I've walked in. I crawl out of the cave. I haven't slept much. […] I look around me. There's no one around. I like these quiet moments by myself where there are no grown-ups. (*TC* 190)

Azure's preference for solitude echoes the flâneur's need for being solitary. But this flâneur does not wear designer shoes and his feet smell, reminding him where he has been. This recalls the reading of Afropolitan space put forward by Minna Salami in conversation with Knudsen and Rahbek as an inherently "non-class aligned space in terms of questions that it interrogates and in terms of what it desires for Africa" (158). For Salami, class is not what defines the Afropolitan, even though, as she also points out, such a person would not tend to engage in Afropolitan dialogue (in Knudsen and Rahbek 158). Afropolitanism then opens up a number of different ways of being an African in the world, and Azure, it is argued, is an Afropolitan flâneur who can afford neither the latest fashions nor expensive shoes.

Towards the end of Duiker's novel Azure descends the mountain to witness the destruction of Cape Town by a huge tidal wave and "fireballs fall from the sky" (*TC* 194). This dystopic ending can be read in different ways, but my preferred interpretation is that through walking the cityspace as a flâneur as well as by viewing it from the mountain above, Azure has, as the observer of urban life, rewritten the Afropolitan city as well as his own identity and has learned to seize his own power for the greater good. There is a sense at the

end of the novel of new beginnings as Azure has come to terms with things, and he admits finally, "I have seen the centre of darkness" (*TC* 194). This seemingly apocalyptic ending is in fact a new beginning for Azure who now has the "opportunity to construct his own identity" (Aljohani 81). Similar to the growth witnessed in The Girl at the end of *Skyline*, when she becomes a writer, Azure too has grown. He has transcended his abject situation. Both of these characters, as Afropolitan flâneurs, are able to claim the cityspace as their own, albeit in very different ways, and even though the city itself is a changed space.

Inasmuch as there are different ways of being African, so too are there different ways of being an Afropolitan flâneur. The kind of Afropolitan flâneur inscribed through Duiker's character, Azure, is certainly not the privileged Afropolitan originally identified by Selasi. Azure is a streetwise yet socially marginalised character who comes to know the cityscape intimately even as he is mistreated by others. The knocks he takes in life are real, yet he surfaces victorious and stronger, thus gaining the confidence to walk as an Afropolitan flâneur and be part of the world. The kind of Afropolitan flâneur inscribed through Azure is one who feels at home in his solitude, but who has also come to feel at home in the world.

3.4 Yewande Omotoso's *Bom Boy*: Chronicles of a Troubled Childhood

Yewande Omotoso, whose debut novel *Bom Boy* is examined in this section, fits the profile of Afropolitan in the popular sense of the term, as her life story attests. According to the dustjacket of her 2011 book, Barbados-born Omotoso grew up in Nigeria with her Nigerian father, West Indian mother, and brothers before the family moved to South Africa, where she has lived ever since.[99] Omotoso, like Binyavanga Wainaina,[100] believes that Afropolitanism only gains credence when set against a Western backdrop. When interviewed by Rebecca Fasselt, Omotoso dismisses the Afropolitan label in reference to herself, claiming that:

> I'm not Afropolitan. […] I don't identify with the West. I feel I can be African and have the views and experiences that I've had, but it doesn't take me away from being on the continent. Being an Afropolitan to me sounds as if you are supposed to be a mediator between the West and Africa because you have travelled and lived overseas. […] I'm of the continent. My mother was from the Caribbean, so I'm multicultural anyway, not only Nigerian. But I feel this doesn't mean I'm Afropolitan. I've travelled to places and I've

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[99] Yewande Omotoso lives and works in Johannesburg as an architect, is passionate about literature, and travels extensively, which strongly suggests she lives a privileged Afropolitan lifestyle.

[100] As discussed in Chapter 1 of this thesis, Binyavanga Wainaina critiqued Afropolitanism and claimed rather to be a Pan-Africanist than an Afropolitan (see more in Stephanie Bosch Santana's article "Exorcizing the Future: Afropolitanism's Spectral Origins").

> learned things, but I'm still African. It doesn't mean I'm less African, and that's why the term is problematic. […] The term Afropolitan only seems useful for the West as it gives the West an opportunity to understand and even "consume" Africa. ("I'm not Afropolitan" 235)

This rejection of the term is based on a particular understanding of Afropolitanism which is arguably too narrow. Omotoso appears to repudiate all western influence whether imposed or not, and on these grounds she disregards Afropolitanism as it seems to her to combine 'western' and African traits.[101] It is necessary at this point to return briefly to Taiye Selasi's original 2005 essay on Afropolitanism. One of the main ideas Selasi put forward was that Afropolitan referred specifically to a "diaspora generation" (Balakrishnan n. pag.) whose parents had left the African continent for European or American cities during the 1960s and 1970s. This generation came of age outside their parents' countries of origin. Omotoso appears to be talking herself in circles in her dismissal of the Afropolitan, as her narrow understanding suggests that Afropolitanism is merely a Western construct. By repudiating 'western' influence, irrespective of how that influence came about, Omotoso denies her hybridity.[102] The approach to Afropolitanism taken in this dissertation is inclusive and comes from a humanist angle, it is not classist, sexist or racist. For these reasons, characters such as migrants, refugees, gays, straights, whites, blacks, the poor, marginalised, and street children, can all be Afropolitan as they fully inhabit their space in or of Africa.

Bom Boy takes the form of two narrative threads: the first conveys the story of Oscar, (in the past), a Nigerian immigrant in South Africa, and the second thread relates the life of Oscar's young son Leke (in the present), a transracial adoptee[103] who lives alone in Cape Town. It is the latter that is of interest for purposes of this project. Leke is connected to the past through letters from his father which he puts off reading until close to the novel's end. He is also connected, unknowingly, to his birth mother, as he carries around a photograph of a woman he does not know, with the letter "E" on it. Only once he reads his father's letters does he discover that "E" stands for Elaine, which is his mother's name.

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[101] While Omotoso's views might appear naïve, perhaps what she is expressing is something similar to Chimamanda Adichie who "speaks about becoming less interested in the way the West sees Africa, and increasingly concerned by how Africa sees itself" (Dabiri, "Why" 107).

[102] Western influence, even as a result of the violent colonial encounter, still constitutes in part the modern African, the Afropolitan, the transnational subject. Cultural hybridity, for instance, is largely the result of the colonial encounter. See further discussion on Amardeep Singh's blog at <https://www.lehigh.edu/~amsp/2009/05/mimicry-and-hybridity-in-plain-english.html>.

[103] The word "transracial" is used here to refer to Leke's adoption status. Leke was born to a black Nigerian father, Oscar, and a coloured South African mother, Elaine. Leke's adoptive parents, Jane and Marcus, are white South Africans.

Leke can be considered to be an Afropolitan flâneur in that he reads the urban environment from his own hybrid perspective as transracial adoptee as well as an intra-African immigrant. Throughout the novel father and son never come in contact with one another: Oscar is in prison and Leke has lived with his adoptive parents before moving into a place where he lives alone. Leke, the reader discovers, for many years never cared to learn much about his birth parents. Oscar's story is communicated chiefly through a series of letters written in the early 1990s from prison to his (then) unknown son, as well as some letters to Leke's birth mother, Elaine. Each chapter is headed simply with a date, for example "Wednesday 19th February 1992", and there are temporal jumps throughout the novel, to-ing and fro-ing between the years spanning 1991 (the year before Leke is born), to 2013, by which time Leke is almost 21 years old.

From the opening lines, the reader is introduced to the young protagonist Leke as someone who is still trying to come to terms with his identity. This identity confusion is conveyed firstly through Omotoso's choice of Cape Town as the setting. Fasselt points out that the novel "envisions Cape Town as an inherently ambiguous place of intersection and cross-cultural contact, as well as of alienation" (Fasselt, "Nigeria" 119). A sense of discomfort is expressed as an "invisible rash" that manifested when Leke "was picked for the school play" and was there "when girls glanced away as he walked down the corridors" (*BB* 1). The simile here is an odd one as it compares an invisible rash that sets Leke apart from other people to a tree that grows. Here Leke is merely a boy who is about to have his ninth birthday party, but he feels shy and lonely. This is the first hint of what will later become Leke's obsession with health matters and bodily image. In the above extract there is the suggestion that it is a psychosomatic illness that disrupts Leke's ability to socialise with other people, perhaps as a result of some form of internal conflict, and he is immediately othered. That Leke was chosen for the school play suggests his being forced to play a role, which he is unwilling to do as he is later removed from the cast. It is of interest that the rash is invisible, since this suggests that only Leke himself is aware of it, as nobody else can see it. Although at the outset the reader does not know that Leke is a transnational, transracial adoptee, it becomes clearer over the subsequent pages that Leke's racial identity is possibly confusing, not only for others, but also for himself. The idea of invisibility recalls a time in South African history when people of colour were not often seen in the same spaces as white people

since legislation prevented the sharing of public space across the so-called colour bar.[104] An indication of the effects of invisibility occurs early on in the novel when the narrator recounts that "[b]ack at school Leke struggled through, listening harder and raising his voice to be heard" (*BB* 8) but at night, in his dream-world which was "a terrain he was adept at navigating", Leke was at peace as he could let go of the "confusions of the day" (*BB* 8). Leke is neither black nor is he white, so his perceived invisibility is a result of his transracial status.

A further confusion surrounding Leke's identity can be seen in the meaning of his name. *Leke* is a truncated version of Ifaleke: "The full name is Ifaleke. Ifa – the creator – is the victor" (*BB* 56), whereas *Leke* signifies the white bird in a children's song: "*Lekeleke gha mi leke* […] White swan, help me" (*BB* 55). The white bird was believed to bring luck, which explains the victory as a result. It would seem then that Leke's name was both a kind of victorious thanks as well as an ongoing plea for good luck and fortune. As the novel progresses and Leke finally accepts, from Marcus, an envelope containing his estranged father Oscar's letters, he reads the face of the envelope: "For Leke", and written beneath, "Lay-kay" (*BB* 168). He is convinced that the contents of the envelope were meant to serve as an "instruction manual for his adoptive parents" (*BB* 167). Throughout the novel Leke has pondered the meaning of his name which "had become a rhetorical question over time […] [and a] Google search brought up a motley selection of answers" traversing a number of places including Antwerp, Albania and Bali (*BB* 168). This recalls the ten-year-old Leke, Afropolitan-in-the-making, who "owned a library of atlases and a collection of globes" (*BB* 8).

According to Mbembe, as noted in Chapter 1, Afropolitanism is "the ability to recognise one's face in that of a foreigner and make the most of the traces of remoteness in closeness" ("Afropolitanism" 28). In one sense this is what Leke does with his adoptive family, as the only connection he has with his blood father is the unread letters. Oscar's letters to Leke, which he only reads when he himself is a young adult, serve as a means of providing Leke with cultural roots he did not know as a young child growing up in Cape Town.

The origin of Leke's Afropolitanism is conveyed in a letter from Oscar dated Saturday 25th July 1992, where his father recalls his own childhood:

[104] At the same time, however, black people in South Africa were also rendered hyper-visible by certain laws – they stood out if they were in the 'wrong' place at the 'wrong' time, such as after curfew. Similarly, in the USA today young black men are hyper-visible to the police.

> 'Am I Nigerian?' I asked my dad.
> He nodded.
> 'And I'm South African too?'
> My mother nodded.
> 'How come we don't go there? And how come your skin is like that but Daddy and me are like this?'
> 'Daddy and I.'
> 'If you're really my mother how come you're *oyinbo*?' (*BB* 59, italics mine)

While the narrative explores Oscar's intimate though distant connection to Nigeria, he experiences dislocation largely as a result of his transnational status. On one of the occasions that Oscar's father retells the story of Moremi, he tells Leke that he himself has two mothers – his real, *oyinbo* mother, and the mythological Moremi (*BB* 17).[105] Oscar's own sense of alienation manifests in his son Leke, who also has two mothers and who is furthermore traumatised by the loss of his adoptive mother, Jane, when he was a young child.

As mentioned in Chapter 2, Achille Mbembe refers to South African cities as "Afropolitan" spaces, naming Johannesburg in particular as the "centre of Afropolitanism par excellence" ("Afropolitanism" 29). For Mbembe, Afropolitanism is "an already old and experienced African way of interacting with the world" (Knudsen and Rahbek 28). While Cape Town is a relatively new Afropolitan metropolis, by situating *Bom Boy* in just such a space, Omotoso foregrounds the fluidity of urban identities that are constantly being shaped. According to to Fasselt, by setting the novel in Cape Town, Omotoso "considers the city's particularly problematic relation to the African continent" ("Nigeria" 120). The relationship between Cape Town and Nigeria is considered by Fasselt to be a "vexed" one ("Nigeria" 120), and indeed relations between the two countries are, in reality unstable.[106] *Bom Boy* challenges popular and academic understandings of Afropolitanism in the sense that alienation, instead of hybridity and cosmopolitanism, is highlighted.

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[105] While Oscar's story does not form the focus of discussion in this section, since Leke is the Afropolitan flâneur who is examined in this text, the mention of Moremi is nonetheless important. Omotoso juxtaposes the statue of Moremi in Nigeria with that of Cecil John Rhodes in Cape Town. The latter is a colonial relic of "imperialistic megalomania" (Fasselt, "Nigeria" 129), while the former represents humility and strength. This juxtaposition confirms for Fasselt the "copresence of Afropolitanism and alienation" ("Nigeria" 119) in the novel.

[106] Rebecca Fasselt's article, "Nigeria in the Cape: Afropolitanism and Alienation in Yewande Omotoso's *Bom Boy*" provides a very detailed account of the relationship between Nigeria and South Africa. For further reading, see also Chimamanda Adichie's "Why Do South Africans Hate Nigerians?" and Anote Ajeluorou's "There Is Need for Better Understanding between Nigeria, South Africa".

3.4.1 Voyeuristic flânerie

> No matter what trail the flâneur may follow, every one of them will lead him to a crime. (Benjamin, *Charles Baudelaire* 41)

The above quotation highlights the ambiguity of the flâneur, since on the one hand, as already seen, the flâneur is a type of detective. On the other hand, while wandering the city streets, the flâneur can sometimes become the criminal. Leke fits the profile of the flâneur in that he is physically situated in his urban surroundings, and yet he operates at a remove, on the edges of society where he can observe the crowd and is not specifically tied to any particular place. This type of flâneur carries out his or her observations in an Afropolitan sense in that place is all important and home can be anywhere, perhaps even a multiplicity of homes. Towards the beginning of the novel the reader learns that Leke's home is Widow Marais's "garage room" which is his own small space in the city of Cape Town:

> The entire garden on Leke's side had been plucked out and as he walked, his half-worn brogues left muddied shoe prints on the rose-coloured brick paving. A two-metre high wall with flecks of grey paint peeling off protected the space from the Cape Town winds, the silence created a chilling stillness. Beyond a squat wooden gate, swollen with the winter rains, the end of the cul de sac was exposed. Leke entered his studio. (*BB* 28)

The image of Leke's home is not a welcoming one and is foreboding and indicative of the barriers Leke puts up around himself, keeping a distance from others. As was evidenced with The Girl and Azure, walking and shoes are trademarks of the Afropolitan flâneur, and Leke's muddy brogues are old and well-worn, indicating that he does a lot of walking. While the garden wall offers Leke protection from the elements, it also indicates a boundary that keeps others out, so there are no prying eyes from passers-by.

Although he does own a car, Leke chooses to walk the city habitually and alone, suggesting a form of deliberate immersion in the cityspace. Leke's unusual manner of flânerie is to watch "the pavement as he walked, [while] his long legs swung a slow easy gait" (*BB* 20). Leke is strangely observant, and when "he was around others whistling, he studied them, hoping to catch on to their secret" (*BB* 20). He chooses what he wants to see. Unfortunately for him, Leke's silence and lack of interaction with his peers at the technikon where he is studying, are "mistaken for arrogance" (*BB* 20). Leke's economy of friends further reflects this sense of solitude. His "dearest friend" is in fact a personified object – "Red […] an old rusting Volvo 200 series station wagon" (*BB* 28) which he actually parks *inside* his flat.

Despite his choice to live a hermit-like existence, he feels alienated as he had been ostracized at school and later in his work environment. Leke paradoxically still craves and actively seeks out human company. His need for company is satisfied partly through close encounters with people from the medical profession. Leke initiates a series of visits to doctors, dentists, physiotherapists and various health practitioners:

> That feeling had been with him over the last few weeks. A tightness. For relief he'd gone to see one doctor and then another and before he'd realised it he was spending most of his lunches sitting across from one practitioner or another. (*BB* 141)

Leke's particular way of walking the city is by means of connecting to various medical practitioners across the city. These corporeal encounters can be read as bringing Leke closer to the adoptive mother who died, as well as to his birth mother whom he never meets (all he has of her is a stolen photograph with the letter 'E' slightly visible on the back (*BB* 10). After the reader learns that Leke was with his adoptive mother Jane when she died, the narrator conveys a possible reason for Leke distancing himself from others:

> After the funeral Marcus had left to go off to another conference. He hadn't said goodbye. Ten-year-old Leke had grown up overnight, he resolved to retreat into his own world. He knew he couldn't stay there forever but he'd stay for as long as possible and return as often as he could. (*BB* 194)

Much of Leke's adolescence is then spent retreating from others, and yet, ironically he still needs some form of staying in touch. When Leke visits a homeopath for an eye problem and headaches, this is evident when she asks him "What are you most afraid of? Another way of looking at that is what do you avoid?" to which Leke answers simply: "People" (*BB* 191). This recalls Azure's views of fear seen earlier in the previous section. Besides visits to medical professionals, another means of finding human company for Leke, albeit from a distance, is through walking in the mall. The narrator describes Leke's first visit to a recently opened shopping mall:

> He walked the route to the back of the mall and slipped in through a delivery door. During the day this access was busy, but after 6pm it got quiet. He entered under the bright lights of the mall, squinting but enjoying the glint on the tiled walls. […] The Plaza Mall smelled of paint and brass polish. From the high ceilings warm coloured lights hung low, and along the floors elaborate stone clay pots held palm fronds and cacti. […] The mall was hypnotic, like an enchanted forest, but instead of trees and bushes there were elevators and escalators. (*BB* 77)

Leke shows a contradictory relationship to space, where at times he is distant, yet at other times, as seen above, he is definitely immersed in his spatial surroundings. This description of light in the mall recalls Walter Benjamin's *The Arcades Project* where multiple descriptions of architectural forms, such as mirrors[107] and lighting, feature. Guy Debord's *Society of the Spectacle*[108] also comes to mind because architecturally, the Plaza Mall panders to an image-oriented, capitalist society. At the mall, Leke follows unsuspecting women with his "aimless wandering" (*BB* 78) and a series of kleptomaniacal incidents are narrated. In some ways, then, Leke is more like a common loiterer, than a flâneur "wait[ing] at the entrance of the mall" (*BB* 109) before following random shoppers to lift something off their person or from their bags. This odd behaviour becomes habitual: Leke "started walking. His feet knew where to carry him, hungry for whatever the mall would offer" (*BB* 120). What the mall offers him is a variety of kleptomaniacal possibilities, ironically with the chance of light conversation with the women whom he stalks. In a rather strange way, this is a real attempt at connection on Leke's part, since taking a random object from a stranger is a desperate act to force a connection between people. *Bom Boy* in this way describes the anomie of this type of loitering Afropolitan flâneur, whose social instability results perhaps from his family background of alienation.

Leke takes to wandering at night, waking up at odd hours to go out, and eventually begins stalking Tsotso, whom he first met at work. This flâneur's odd voyeuristic perambulations are in part the result of Leke's tormented and unsettled self, where he strives to own an identity that is whole. Although his social behaviour is abnormal, the reader understands from whence it comes, being privy to Leke's adoptive status and loss of (both) his mothers and the fact that he is of mixed race.

When Leke does choose to walk the streets in his neighbourhood, the narrator describes the area thus:

> His favourite street was where Elias's corner shop stood; a narrow road still cobbled […]. It seemed more suited to the trendy surrounding suburbs that had been redeveloped but somehow it landed up amidst the old and creaking neighbourhood that was excluded from the gentrification project. […] The street seemed confused to Leke, and sad. (*BB* 153)

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[107] See for instance: "Paris is a city of mirrors. The asphalt of its roadways smooth as glass, and at the entrance to all bistros glass partitions." (Benjamin, *The Arcades Project* 877).

[108] *The Society of the Spectacle,* which critiques consumer culture, is a philosophical work published in 1967 on the modern human condition. A feature-length, black and white film by the same name came out in 1973.

This extract provides an example of how the Afropolitan flâneur connects intimately to the city surroundings. Here Leke projects his own feelings of confusion and sadness onto the street. The narrator uses Leke as a focalizer and conveys to the reader a sense of two different worlds in the same street: one where the comfortable middle-class "drink coffee" and browse "the quaint second-hand bookstore", while parallel to this "beggars and skollies [are] stretched out on the narrow pavement, nursing hangovers" (*BB* 153). This description recalls Afropolitan images of trendy areas of Johannesburg where people of all races and social backgrounds occupy the same space. Once again, this does not echo entirely the popular understanding of Afropolitanism à la Taiye Selasi, but rather the re-visioning of Afropolitanism according to scholars such as Mbembe and Gikandi, as conveyed earlier in Chapter 2.

After yet another visit to a doctor, not due to any physical illness, but rather due to a desperate need for human contact, Leke "walked towards home too dazed to register the old man pissing onto a wall, and a beggar with a baby on her back. […] His footsteps were so leaden he appeared to be performing a march, solemn and deliberate" (*BB* 127). Once again, this reference to performativity recalls a similar performance by Azure, which was related to a form of precarity. The precarity to which Judith Butler refers in connection with performativity "seems to focus on conditions that threaten life in ways that appear to be outside of one's control" ("Performativity" i). While Leke's life is not directly under threat, that which drives him to seek medical attention, his psychological well-being, is beyond his control. Traumatised due to the death of his adoptive mother, whom he cared for greatly, Leke, like Azure, uses flânerie to deal with grief. For him, walking is a form of healing which empowers him and enables him to transcend his current situation.

This particular Afropolitan flânerie carried out by characters such as Leke in *Bom Boy* and Azure in *Thirteen Cents* is far removed from the usual easy strolling of the archetypal nineteenth century literary flâneur. The narrator in *Bom Boy* is quick to point out street scenes (such as the old man and the beggar) that Leke has failed to absorb, but Leke is clearly preoccupied with other things such as his own grief. Once back in his own small studio space, "Leke noticed loneliness" (*BB* 127), which seems to be a peculiarity specific to his own brand of Afropolitan flânerie where he finds himself socially outcast, and recalls the first page of the novel where, on his ninth birthday, Leke felt alone.

Despite his aloneness, Leke is indeed aware of his surroundings, as he carefully stalks young women in the local shopping mall:

> Approaching the mall, he noticed that, across the road, another building had been completed seemingly overnight. A pile of rubble was being loaded into a large truck. Leke took in the new addition to the suite of buildings, it was a parking lot meant to service the mall and the nearby high-rise residential blocks. (*BB* 134)

This observation returns Leke to practising a type of flânerie, commenting on change and development of the time that reflects economic growth, and the description that follows once more echoes passages from Benjamin's *Arcades* project:

> Plaza Mall had also opened its final wing. "Diamond Walk" the sign boards had announced, silver sequins spelling out the name. […] High above fitted glass panels let the moonlight in but it was no competition for the glare of Diamond Walk. All the surfaces reflected Leke back to himself, sometimes clearly sometimes distorted. (*BB* 134)

The above extract confirms the human subject's immersion in the environment while at the same time it suggests a mirrored reflection of the environment.[109] In this way, through reading his external environment, Leke is able to read, or see himself. However, the perspective is not constant, nor is it always a true reflection, and Leke is still in the process of becoming someone, of finding himself. Identity, as noted by Stuart Hall, is always in a state of flux, "not fixed, but poised, *in transition*, between different positions" ("Question" 310, italics in original). The glittery Plaza Mall could well be a nineteenth century Parisian arcade:

> That is what one becomes in Paris, where you can hardly take a step without catching sight of your dearly beloved self. Mirror after mirror! (Lahrs in Benjamin, *Arcades* 539)

This reminder of the human subject being mirrored or reflected in space is useful insofar as it relates to Leke, who is fully immersed in the space of the mall as he stalks women. It is shortly after seeing himself reflected in the mirrors of the mall that Leke is stopped by a guard who explains that cameras which hang from the ceiling had previously caught Leke loitering, and the mall management had received complaints about Leke's behaviour. Leading Leke to the exit, the guard "pointed to the cameras at the entrance, a silent gesture to say 'we're watching'" (*BB* 135). While it is Leke who has been loitering and stalking, ironically he is the one who is also being watched.

[109] In *The Painter of Modern Life,* Baudelaire likens the dandy to "a mirror as vast as the crowd itself; or a kaleidoscope gifted with consciousness, responding to each one of its movements and reproducing the multiplicity of life and the flickering grace of all the elements of life" (9).

3.4.2 Blending two nations

As many South Africans are aware, Nigerians in South Africa are often stereotypically cast as fraudsters, drug dealers, scammers, hustlers and rip-off artists par excellence. Many Nigerians are also medical doctors, though this is not generally mentioned. Nigerians continue to be at the receiving end of xenophobic prejudice, with unemployed, uneducated and poor people accusing them of stealing work that could be given to South Africans. For these and other reasons, there continues to be a chasm between these two nations. Rebecca Fasselt points out that while "trade between Nigeria and South Africa is booming" there "still seems to be a lack of dialogue and collaboration between writers from the two countries" ("Nigeria" 120). Omotoso's novel then is all the more important as it sensitively uncovers the complexities of both intersections of cultures as well as the sense of divide and mistrust. In her novel way, Omotoso brings the two cultures and nations together through the concept of transracial adoption. A further way that the Nigerian–South African connection is dealt with both delicately and cleverly in *Bom Boy* is through numerous points of similarity alluded to between traditional beliefs of the Yoruba and Xhosa cultures[110] and, most significantly, through the figure of the Afropolitan flâneur, Leke.

Towards the very end of the novel, in the last dated chapter entry, "Wednesday 19th February 2013", Tsotso goes with Leke to visit a sangoma to finally lift the curse that has plagued Leke and his forefathers for centuries. The reader is made aware that the sangoma is able to decipher Leke's ancestral lineage and learns that the babalawo's curse can be released by means of a truce. Leke's ancestors, explains the sangoma, wish for his child-to-be to practise healing. Fasselt discusses this scene in some detail, concluding that this joining of Yoruba and Xhosa beliefs is necessary to highlight "the novel's conceptualization of identity, place, and Afropolitanism" and more specifically, "an Africa-centered Afropolitanism" (Fasselt, "Nigeria" 138). It is interesting to note that the Afropolitanism advocated by Omotoso, as Fasselt goes on to point out, is the connection between two places in Africa – Nigeria and South Africa – which links up very clearly with Mbembe's interpretation of Afropolitanism "from the viewpoint of Africa" ("Afropolitanism" 27).

Leke has a deep and close connection with his immediate urban Afropolitan environment while as a flâneur he walks the Cape Town streets by visiting medical practitioners and stalking young women in shopping malls. *Bom Boy* in this sense describes

[110] Although these are not discussed here, there are multiple references in Omotoso's text, such as Leke's mixed parentage with Nigerian and South African heritage, for instance.

the anomie of this type of Afropolitan flâneur whose sense of alienation has driven him to seek contact with other individuals in unusual ways. Alienated and fearful, Leke uses flânerie to connect with others, and sometimes oversteps the limits by committing small crimes. Afropolitan flânerie can indeed take many unexpected forms, Leke's being but one of a great variety.

3.5 Conclusion: A Longing to Belong

All three novels analysed here explore different aspects of urban identity encountered in the Afropolitan city of Cape Town seen through the gaze of the flâneur in different guises. This chapter has extended the term "Afropolitan flâneur" to include new and exciting forms of flânerie as evident in the literature. In *Skyline,* one of the Afropolitan flâneurs is female, adolescent and literary, and the other, Bernard, is a migrant. In *Thirteen Cents,* the traumatised streetchild Azure, who is prematurely adult but boyish, uses flânerie to deal with grief. Azure's walking becomes a necessary form of healing which empowers him, and ultimately, he transcends his abject situation. In *Bom Boy,* the protagonist Leke, fearful and alienated, commits small criminal acts and uses walking as a means to connect with people. These different characters, with their specific styles of walking, and different reasons for walking, prove just how capacious the term "Afropolitan flâneur" can be.

All three novels examine aspects of hybridity, transculturation, intersectionality and *ubuntu*, which further expands upon the existing definition of Afropolitanism. While Chapter 2 was more focused on borders and boundaries, this chapter has been concerned with intersections, and the rationale for including these three texts specifically is that they offer a youth-oriented rendering of the figure of the Afropolitan flâneur or flâneuse, and expand upon Benjamin's consolidation of the flâneur as an "emblem of modern urban alienation" (Murail, "Du Croisement 29). This alienation is experienced differently by each of the protagonist flâneurs, and childhood for the protagonists in these novels has been traumatic and intensely troubled. *Skyline* showed childhoods ruptured by war and domestic abuse, in *Thirteen Cents* there was sexual violation on the predatory streets, and in *Bom Boy*, adoption and loss of family was the trauma Leke had to live through. Azure takes a very long time to accept his parents' death; when Leke's adoptive mother dies, Lightness finds him "coiled around the stiff body" (*BB* 194); and in *Skyline*, The Girl makes the best of what she can, coming from a broken family background. The manner in which protagonists in all three novels negotiate encounters with others and with urban space reflects the image of a

crossroad or intersection, which requires some form of action. While Azure and Leke both choose solitude in preference to companionship, The Girl and Bernard are both very social Afropolitans, immersed in the lives of other migrants and diasporic beings.

Both *Bom Boy* and *Thirteen Cents* return to traditional African myth and belief: in *Bom Boy* there are countless references to Yoruba legend and towards the end of the novel Leke and Tsotso seek help from a sangoma, and in *Thirteen Cents* Azure goes into a shamanistic trance, communing with Khoi ancestors. In *Skyline*, Bernard's artworks provide a similar connection with the other-worldly, and Mossie's intuitive connection to beads and beadwork brings her closer to a culture different to her own. The flâneurs discussed in this chapter are individuals who wander through the Afropolitan city of Cape Town by going beneath the surface of external beauty that everyone else sees. In walking their own chosen paths they create their own freedom within the constraints that the city imposes upon them. The Girl, Bernard, Azure and Leke write their own maps and each map of the same city is a very different one. The different world views and cultural beliefs portrayed in these three novels go towards illustrating an alternative form of Afropolitanism which is neither exclusive nor commodified, but rather more hybrid and open to flux and flow in whatever form that may take. The Afropolitan flâneurs in these three texts show that, irrespective of trauma, fear, or alienation, there are different ways of belonging, of being located in the world where individuals can root themselves and locate their identities.

Chapter 4: Pigments of the Imagination in Lagos

4.1 Introduction: "No End of Fascinations"[111]

Him talk *oyinbo* pass English man!
Him talk *oyinbo* pass America man
Him talk *oyinbo* pass French man
Me I say him talk *oyinbo* pass Germany man

The better *oyinbo* you talk
The more bread you go get

("Mr. Grammarticalogylisationalism Is the Boss", song lyrics by Fela Anikulapo Kuti,[112] italics mine)

Nigeria is a country that is exceptionally diverse linguistically, with around 400 indigenous languages (Aito 18), yet the school-going generation is educated in English. The lyrics quoted above are from a 1975 song written by musical innovator and human rights activist Fela Anikulapo Kuti, and serve as a critique of the Nigerian colonial system of education. The word *oyinbo* in the above context signifies the colonial language of western education. Kuti's lyrics proclaim that those who speak better English are also better paid. Kuti is no stranger to controversy, and his "mixing of pidgin, Yoruba and a nonsense idiolect" serves as a "popular discourse of defiance to elite manners" (Bryce 178), pointing further to the power of language. Chantal Zabus refers to the peculiar linguistics of West Africa as a "palimpsest", because the "dominant, foreign European language [was] imposed over the indigenous African languages" during the "process of Euro-Christian colonization" (1). While Zabus adds that "[t]he book's metaphor is that of the palimpsest" because beneath the layers of the European language are "remnants of the African language" (3), Jane Bryce notes the inadequacy of such a metaphor because contemporary writers are more often "exploiting their multilingualism or inventing new hybrid languages in response to a globalised marketplace" (180). Indeed, as argued throughout this thesis, representations of the city and contemporary urban identities must similarly be read in the context of globalism, transnationalism and diaspora.

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[111] Teju Cole's narrator in *Every Day is for the Thief* proclaims: "[t]his place exerts an elemental pull on me. There is no end of fascinations" (62).
[112] More commonly known as Fela Kuti, the Nigerian Afrobeat musician is also referred to as Fela Anikulapo Kuti, or sometimes Fela Anikulapo-Kuti.

This chapter will consider the Afropolitan flâneur figure as presented in three contemporary texts set in Lagos, Nigeria, where the Yoruba word *oyinbo*, or Igbo word *oyibo*, is a term used to refer not only to the language of the coloniser, but also to foreigners, strangers, Europeans or white people. In the novels examined here, the term *oyinbo* is ironic as the individual flâneurs to which it refers are themselves Nigerian. Rob Shields notes a similar inversion with reference to the figure of the stranger who is "a foreigner who becomes like a native, whereas the flâneur is the inverse, a native who becomes like a foreigner" (68). In all three novels discussed in this chapter, the narrator or protagonist is an Afropolitan flâneur who negotiates his way through the city on foot, as a stranger, through his personal mapping of urban Lagos.

Chris Abani's *GraceLand* spans a period of several years in the life of its young protagonist, Elvis Oke, and shifts between his early life in rural Afikpo, and his teenage years in bustling Lagos, where he becomes a stranger to himself. Much of the narrative plays out in Lagos, before Elvis departs for the United States at the end of the novel. In *Every Day is for the Thief,* Teju Cole's unnamed narrator-flâneur straddles two worlds as a reverse migrant, who is mistaken for an *oyinbo* in the land of his birth. In A. Igoni Barrett's *Blackass,* the black-turned-white-except-for-his-ass protagonist, Furo, is also seen as *oyibo*, despite speaking like a local. Similarly, the character Igoni, who undergoes a gender transformation towards the end of the novel, is also *oyibo.* Issues of identity formation, race and gender are thus brought to the fore through the encounters and observations on the streets by the *oyinbo* flâneurs seen in these three texts. Each of the protagonists deals with some kind of identity crisis stemming from an existential question, and themes related to identity, gender and race formation are examined in the texts through the manner in which the protagonist flâneurs relate, as *oyinbo*, to their urban surroundings. Abani, Cole, and Barrett use the topography of Lagos in a way that reflects Afropolitanism, multiculturalism and dynamic urban identities to focus on different aspects of contemporary Nigerian life. It is through the act of walking, in the "half slum, half paradise" (*GL* 7) of Lagos that the protagonists of these novels lead us, the readers, to recognise so much strangeness in the familiar and so much of what is familiar in the strangeness.

In this chapter, the novels examined interrogate rather than celebrate Afropolitanism. The flâneurs in each of the novels can be regarded as strangers who question their sense of belonging by trying to adapt or by walking their own path alone. They experience internal conflict when faced with a push and pull reflex that is connected to their immediate environment. Informed by the concepts of Julia Kristeva's abjection and Judith Butler's

performativity, as well as literature on return migration and Shields's consideration of the flâneur in relation to 'strangers' and 'natives', the Afropolitan Lagosian flâneur will be shown to be paradoxically both an African and *oyinbo*. In other words, the Lagosian flâneur in the texts analysed is both of Africa and of Europe or America, both black and white, both local and foreign. This recalls Achille Mbembe's argument that to be Afropolitan is to possess "the ability to recognise one's face in that of a foreigner and make the most of the traces of remoteness in closeness, to domesticate the unfamiliar, to work with what seem to be opposites" ("Afropolitanism" 28).[113]

The Nigerian urban sprawl of Lagos, one of the fastest growing megacities on earth, is predicted to be the third largest city in the world by the year 2020. The growth rate of Lagos is so rapid that, during the 1980s, as pointed out by Ashley Dawson, "Lagos grew twice as fast as the Nigerian population as a whole" (17). The city of Lagos is a combination of architectural and structural elements of a modern metropolis such as skyscrapers and paved streets, and more informal, unplanned presences such as hawkers and pop-up slums. It is a city of huge contrasts, a chaotic mish-mash of "snarled traffic", activity and industry, or "friction zones" that obscure the complex orderliness of "intensely emancipatory zones" (Okeke-Agulu and van der Haak 439). Lagos is conceived as an economic hub: it is a place of potential wealth that lures individuals from their lives of rural poverty to an urban dream of comfortable living. It is this dream of something better that accounts, to a large degree, for the migrancy flows from rural villages to such urban areas. Teju Cole's unnamed narrator declares that Lagos "exerts an elemental pull" on him, and there "is no end of fascinations" (*ED* 62), and the reader too feels this pull when following in his footsteps. Lagos is an urban paradox, a city that easily draws a person in and yet just as easily pushes one away, as experienced by Cole's narrator, for instance.

Lagos, Wide & Close is the title of a documentary directed by filmmaker Bregtje van der Haak, based on research by the Harvard Project on the City coordinated by Dutch architect Rem Koolhaas. Sub-titled "An Interactive Journey into an Exploding City", the documentary treads new ground "because filming has long been prohibited in Nigeria" and very few images of Lagos exist (Koolhaas and van der Haak, DVD booklet 1). Particularly striking about the documentary is that by virtue of its interactivity, the viewer is able to

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[113] This chimes with Georg Simmel's essay, "The Stranger" where he notes: "Finally, the proportion of nearness and remoteness which gives the stranger the character of objectivity, also finds practical expression in the more abstract nature of the relation to him. […] The stranger is close to us, insofar as we feel between him and ourselves common features of a national, social, occupational, or generally human, nature. He is far from us, insofar as these common features extend beyond him or us, and connect us only because they connect a great many people." (405–406).

choose between close-up encounters with Lagos inhabitants (through the perspective of bus driver Olawole Busayo) or view the same scenes from a more comfortable distance. Van der Haak says she "felt the linear storytelling mode was very constraining and could not do justice to [her] experience of Lagos" (Korody n. pag.). Koolhaas explains in an audio interview on the DVD that during their first visits to Lagos they took many pictures, but on returning home discovered "there was nothing" and it "took time to discover that [they] couldn't capture Lagos by looking at the middle ground" (Koolhaas and van der Haak, DVD booklet 20). This particular study of Lagos was "an attempt to understand the hidden logic that makes a 'dysfunctional' city function" (DVD booklet 1), and by bringing together the two perspectives of both distance and close-up, the entanglement of a hugely complex city is foregrounded. These contradictory perspectives add to the strangeness of Lagos, thus offering a parallel to this chapter's choice of Lagosian flâneur as stranger, in order to better understand the relationship between human subject and the puzzling, sometimes alienating urban environment that is Lagos.

The topography of Lagos offers an excellent example of crossings, of bridges over water, of roads intersecting, of human and urban mingling. Such crossings appear formidable, particularly in aerial view,[114] where the city appears as a living being with a pulse. It is clear how the movement of human subjects actually creates and changes the city. For instance, where traffic jams occur on roads or highways, an opportunity arises for those on foot to hawk goods to those waiting in vehicles. Such regular occurrences have led to the establishment of informal markets, and rather than being a "backward situation", this kind of uniquely Lagosian situation serves as "an announcement of the future" (Koolhaas in Packer n. pag.).[115] Further opportunities arise at the markets where youths sell water to traders and charge a fee for washing feet (Packer n. pag.). Innovation is a necessary survival strategy for those who experience the chaos and crowdedness of Lagos.

"By the early years of the twenty-first century", Chris Dunton notes, Lagos had "become established as one of the world's preeminent fictionalized cities, as with London and Paris more than a hundred years before" (68). The literary representations of Lagos in this chapter will be examined from multiple perspectives: the physical distance of the scholar,

[114] Rem Koolhaas and Bregtje van der Haak's Lagos documentary *Lagos, Wide & Close* provides such a view.
[115] See Packer's article "The Megacity: Decoding the Chaos of Lagos" at <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2006/11/13/the-megacity>. A very clear example of such movement of individuals creating informal city structures can be seen in Koolhaas and van der Haak's documentary *Lagos, Wide & Close,* where an aerial shot shows an overcrowded market, bustling with people and with no space to move, when a train drives through and the crowd splits uniformly into two halves. As soon as the train pulls off again, the straight line of its tracks is immediately filled once more with bustling human activity.

myself, who has never set foot in Nigeria, close-up through the authorial lenses of Chris Abani, Teju Cole and A. Igoni Barrett, and closer still through the eyes of the Lagosian *oyinbo* literary flâneurs who walk the city reflecting its strangeness.

4.2 The 'half slum, half paradise' of Chris Abani's *GraceLand*

> Elvis read the city, seeing signs not normally visible. (*GL* 306)

As the epigraph above suggests, Elvis interprets the city in a way that is not similarly seen by other inhabitants. He is an Afropolitan flâneur whose all-encompassing gaze falls on the numerous contradictions not overtly obvious in his urban surroundings. *GraceLand* opens with the figure of Elvis Oke waking up on the morning of his sixteenth birthday and looking out of a window into the streets of Maroko, a shanty town in Lagos. Sheets of rain have been pelting down on the rooftops, lessening the heat, but as the rain abates into drizzle and disappears, the stench of "garbage from refuse dumps, unflushed toilets and stale bodies [is] still overwhelming" (*GL* 4). Abani's excremental imagery here immediately catapults the reader into the stinking heart of Lagos. To Elvis's mind, the suspended swamp city of Maroko is in a "perpetual sense of becoming" (Ouma, "Navigating" 147). In other words, the "half slum, half paradise" remains in limbo, always already incomplete. Similarly, Elvis too is in a "perpetual sense of becoming" because he reflects, and reflects on, the urban space around him, which is always changing.

In contrast to the scatological image just described, something more pleasant is heard on the radio. Elvis listens to Bob Marley's "Natural Mystic" playing and he starts to sing along until the sound of highlife music coming from an untuned radio next door grabs him and he changes his tune to "Ije Enu" (*GL* 4). Elvis is sensitive to the sounds in which he finds himself immersed, and this recalls a similar receptiveness experienced by the female narrator in Patricia Schonstein's *Skyline*, discussed in the previous chapter, who interpreted the sounds of city traffic as soothing music. The Afropolitan flâneur does not only walk on foot, but utilises various forms of transport, bringing him or her into spaces where crossings and intersections occur constantly. Furthermore, the Afropolitan flâneur does not only look and observe the city as s/he walks, but s/he hears and smells too, and in this way experiences the city space more fully with all the senses.[116]

[116] The city itself provides a multisensory experience. Based on sensory input, artist Kate McLean, creator of "smellwalks", maps cities by smell and conveys them physically on maps via dots and lines. McLean notes that tracking odours over time can provide insight into "social and cultural change", and that new odours, "whether

Auditory and olfactory descriptions are pervasive throughout *GraceLand* and it is evident that through his finely tuned senses, Elvis is able to interpret his surroundings, more so than the other characters that pepper *GraceLand*. He has moved from his childhood village, Afikpo, to Lagos, and lives with his father at the "edge of the swamp city of Maroko" where their street runs into "a plank walkway that meander[s] through the rest of the suspended city" (*GL* 6). While walking through puddles to the bus stop, Elvis sees the reflection of his own face which "seemed to belong to a stranger", and, feeling removed from his surroundings, he wonders dejectedly, "[w]hat do I have to do with all this?" (*GL* 6). Elvis is a solitary onlooker, he is both an immersed participant in city life as well as an alienated being, and his face "seem[s] to belong to a stranger, floating there like a ghostly head in a comic book" (*GL* 6). Elvis, both remote and close, is also a stranger who can be seen as an *oyinbo* flâneur in a suspended, swamp city. Elvis's gaze takes in the duality of the whole:

> he let his mind drift as he stared at the city, half slum, half paradise. How could a place be so ugly and violent yet beautiful at the same time? he wondered. (*GL* 7)

In the above quotation Elvis ponders over the Lagosian paradox, wondering how such opposites can exist in tandem. This brings to mind again Sarah Nuttall's "intricate entanglement" (*Entanglement* 13), which she uses to refer to the complex duality of Johannesburg. The same "eclat and sombreness, light and darkness, comprehension and bewilderment, polis and necropolis, desegregation and resegregation" (*Entanglement* 13) can be said to hold true for Lagos. As noted by Dustin Crowley, Abani's characters struggle "to ground themselves in fluid, disruptive, and often unjust cityscapes" yet at the same time Abani portrays the urban landscape as a place of "vitality and value" (129).

Contradictions abound in Lagos, where binaries of slum/paradise and ugly/beautiful are amalgamated in one picture frame. The image of unsanitary conditions pervades the novel, conditions common to contemporary slums worldwide, typifying how slum dwellers are "treated as excrement" (Dawson 20). According to Mike Davis, "[i]nstead of cities of light soaring toward heaven, much of the twenty-first-century urban world squats in squalor, surrounded by pollution, excrement, and decay" (in Herbert 209), which is certainly true of the Lagos described by Abani. Elvis is forced to find his own way of navigating the city, by creating his unique map in order to read the streets that somehow harness order in the chaos.

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the result of waves of immigration introducing new scents or the evolution of social norms" sometimes elicit complaint from those unfamiliar with such smells (Traverso n. pag.). Olfactory flânerie can indeed provide a useful mapping of urban space. See more on McLean's website <https://sensorymaps.com/research/>.

Christopher Ouma highlights Elvis's reading of the urban landscape as a "process of map-making" that is not only through his gaze, but also "through a construction of aural and olfactory cartographies" ("Navigating" 141). Abani provides rich descriptions in *GraceLand* that bring the sounds and smells of the Lagosian landscape to life.

In "The Metropolis and Mental Life", Georg Simmel writes that "[t]he interpersonal relationships of people in big cities are characterized by a markedly greater emphasis on the use of the eyes than on that of the ears" (in Frisby, *Fragments* 78). Simmel attributes this auditory laziness to the increased use of public transport, as before then strangers were not forced into situations of having to stare at one another. The flâneur, however, is more often a pedestrian than a passenger. Elvis is one such flâneur who employs all the senses to bring alive his particular flâneuristic reading of the "swamp city of Maroko" (*GL* 6). Poet Odia Ofeimun describes Lagos as follows:

> this city by the lagoon fascinates […] because it offers the closest Nigerian parallel to a melting pot. [Lagos is] our prime city of crossed boundaries. It is the most open ground for the meeting of nationalities and the criss-cross of individual talent in this country. (138)

The above words resonate with Mbembe's idea of Afropolitanism as an "awareness of the interweaving of the here and there" ("Afropolitanism" 28). Since he is new to Lagos, Elvis is still learning to read the overwhelming Afropolitan city of Lagos, where he "wander[s] aimlessly through the jostling crowd of people" (*GL* 14) as a flâneur:

> Negotiating the ghetto plank walkways with care, he made his way home. One wrong step could cause him to lose his footing and fall headlong into the green swampy water that the ghetto was mostly built on. Raised on stilts like some giant millipede, the walkways' many legs were sunk below the surface. (*GL* 14)

Abani thus provides an image of something that is alive: the ghetto is a living creature. The novel is in this manner also framed in terms of the Afropolitan protagonist–flâneur's multi-sensory perception of the city – the smells of the ghetto, the sounds he hears and what he sees are finely-tuned, going beyond average observation. This specific literary construct offers a unique rendition of the Afropolitan flâneur as Elvis makes use of multisensory powers of observation to get to know the Lagosian cityscape.

Nothing is static in Abani's Nigeria, evidenced clearly in the transcultural movement of ideas and people demonstrated throughout the novel. The very notion that Elvis Oke chooses to emulate his namesake, the great American musical hero Elvis Presley, is immediate evidence of this fluidity. Ironically, Nigerian Elvis's first encounter with the idea

of dancing like his famous American namesake occurs in the market-place of his home village Afikpo, where he is enthralled by the dance moves of two Ajasco dancers moving to Presley's "Hound Dog". Elvis watches, mesmerised, as: "Two boys in high wigs, dark sunglasses and white long-sleeve shirts, gloves, trousers and white canvas shoes danced to the music, bodies fluid" (*GL* 65). It is there and then that Elvis realises that his life ambition is to be a dancer. Mimicking American dress style and popular culture, the Ajasco dancers demonstrate a fusion of cultures that Elvis finds enticing, and he yearns to become such an Elvis impersonator.

Abani has created, in Elvis, an Afropolitan flâneur figure whose flânerie is not only multisensory, but also takes the form of dance. Dance can be seen as constituting flânerie in that it too is a form of movement to a particular rhythm, and the dancer, like Benjamin's flâneur, derives pleasure from immersion in the crowd. Flânerie is not associated solely with walking and literature. The practice extends to other art forms, such as painting and film. When he writes about the flâneur on film, Rob Stone[117] notes that "[f]lânerie has informed many films about those who transcend the potential banality of their existence via the affinities they find in ephemeral associations" ("Between" n. pag.). The same can be said of flânerie in literature, and such transcendence is evident in characters such as Azure and Leke discussed in the previous chapter. For Elvis in *GraceLand*, while his transcendence does not come directly through dance, it is, however, initiated by it, as it is largely through dancing that his character moves and develops. This art form is Elvis's preferred way of moving, of becoming, and evolving. Dance, like walking, allows for practitioners of this art form a unique way of feeling, responding to, and representing, the environment. Dance can be a form of communication as much as it can be a means of observation of others and of bringing people together. For Elvis, to dance is to transcend his abject living conditions, and dancing is his unique mode of walking the city.

As Christopher Ouma notes, for Elvis, dancing is "a symbolic gesture of freedom, invoking the liberating memories of his late mother, while unshackling him from the claustrophobic hold of a highly masculine cityscape" ("Popular Cultural" 105). Unfortunately for Elvis, this draws attention to the fact that he is different and not the kind of 'man' his father hoped he would be. It is through dance that Elvis will be able to grow and let go of the past that might otherwise hold him back. Dancing is one such mechanism that will allow Elvis the opportunity to grow and to go places.

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[117] Rob Stone's "Between Sunrise and Sunless" is a short film which came out of his book *The Cinema of Richard Linklater: Walk, Don't Run* which explores, inter alia, themes associated with the figure of the flâneur.

A decade after leaving rural Afikpo and living in Lagos, not only does Elvis mimic a superstar, but he imitates whiteness too. Mimicry, as noted in Chapter 1 with reference to Homi Bhabha, is often seen as a power tactic. By means of imitating a popular, powerful figure like Elvis Presley, the young Elvis hopes to harness some of the same power, fame, and riches himself. However, while he changes from his street clothes into white shirt and trousers, and dons a wig, Elvis is disappointed when he looks into a mirror because “this was not how white people looked” (*GL* 11). His identity-in-the-making is ridden not only with ordinary teenage uncertainty, but as he has suppressed his own identity, Elvis also experiences feelings of confusion and self-doubt. Elvis would like to wear makeup but knows that to be dangerous “as he could be mistaken for one of the cross-dressing prostitutes that hung around the beach” (*GL* 11). Mimicry, as Amardeep Singh maintains, “is often seen as something shameful” (n. pag.): people of colour who engage in mimicry are often mocked by others, and naturally Elvis does not want to be mistaken for a prostitute nor does he wish to be teased for dressing up as he does. If he is to perform as Elvis Presley, in costume and with white facepaint, the young Elvis desires to do it as best as he can.

To be white, to be *oyinbo*, is desirable for Elvis, as he imagines it offers a pleasant, easy and privileged way of living which he has not thus far experienced. This reference to race is thematic throughout the novel. Later, when Elvis does actually apply whiteface make-up, it starts to fade as he sweats and he wonders, “what if he had been born white, or even just American?” (*GL* 78). He imagines that if “Redemption knew about this, he would say Elvis was suffering from colonial mentality” (*GL* 78). This awareness suggests that there is something of the postcolonial flâneur in Elvis. Elvis’s performance is largely motivated by a desire for a better life economically, not culturally. Performance, in a Butlerian sense, means taking on a particular role and acting out in a specific way. Performativity is an act of becoming, and for Elvis, his repeated dance performance in whiteface is a means to becoming somebody else. As Butler says, with reference to gender (but the same can apply to race in this instance), it is “an identity instituted through a stylized repetition” (“Performative Acts” 519). Elvis’s performativity of race through whiteface is necessary for the identity he wishes to present to the world, and similarly, for the Afropolitan flâneur in general who ‘performs’ a certain role. The role performed by the Afropolitan flâneur in literature is that of a citizen of the world who walks the urban environment and observes carefully what is encountered. The flâneur figure acts as a mirror that reflects the environment. The performativity and fluidity of identity characterised in Elvis is largely a response to what he encounters in the cityspace

of Lagos, and therefore he adapts or shifts shape as the city itself changes, or as circumstances force him to change.

The allure of a better life in America is ever-present throughout the novel, especially as the protagonist finds it "hard eking out a living as an Elvis impersonator, haunting markets and train stations, as invisible to commuters or shoppers as a real ghost" (*GL* 13–14). For him the urban space is a phantasmagorical city, and his ghostly white face haunts that space, thus leaving Elvis in a disorientated dreamworld. Ironically, Elvis is rendered invisible when in fact, he really wants to be seen, and America holds promise of that. America also calls out to one of the other central characters, Redemption, who carries around a "crisp green passport" and a "Visa to States" ever ready with the idea of leaving Lagos and going to live in America to "act inside film and make millions" (*GL* 54). Elvis's aunt Felicia also tries to coerce Elvis into moving to Las Vegas where she has settled.

Despite his attachment to Lagos, it is Redemption who tells Elvis that "States is de place where dreams come true, not like dis Lagos dat betray your dreams […]. It is full of blacks like us" (*GL* 26). Nonetheless the attraction for elsewhere is counterbalanced with the contentedness of staying put, such as seen with Madam Caro, who lives across the street from Elvis and is "one of those women that traditional society couldn't peg into a role […] [and is] at home in the urban anonymity of Lagos" (*GL* 25). Thus, in *GraceLand*, Abani provides a mix of characters who are either content to stay in Nigeria, like Madame Caro, or who long to leave, like Elvis.

4.2.1 An Afropolitan oyinbo flâneur "In a perpetual sense of becoming"

Just as Christopher Ouma notes that "the ragged built environment" seems to Elvis to be "in a perpetual sense of becoming" ("Navigating" 147), so too is Elvis himself always already in such an incomplete state of fluidity. Elvis's process of way-finding as a recent arrival in Lagos is that of an *oyinbo* flâneur as he observes his surroundings:

> The plank walkways, which crisscrossed three-quarters of the slum, rang out like xylophones as a variety of shoes hurrying over them struck diverse notes. In the mud underneath this suspended city, dogs, pigs, goats and fowl rooted for food. Somewhere in the vicinity, the congregation of a Spiritual Church belted out a heady, fecund music that was a rhythmic, percussive background to their religious ecstasy. (*GL* 24)

The musical imagery that opened the novel is once again very strong in this passage, adding a lively beat to the visual scene presented. Strongly evident in this extract is the recurrence of

words denoting hybridity: “crisscrossed”, “variety”, “diverse”, and even the animals listed are a motley crew. This recalls Estelle Murail’s discussion of the way the flâneur persisted over time. As mentioned in Chapter 1, Murail makes use of the French word “*croisement*”[118] or crossing, which appears in the preface to Baudelaire’s *Le Spleen de Paris,* where he declares that his poetry finds its roots in the “criss-cross of innumerable interrelations” (Murail, “Beyond” 221). In Murail’s interpretation, the flâneur is a ‘crosser’ who walks through city space. The idea of displacement and flux is intrinsic to the *croisement* that is evident in the Afropolitan flâneur and his/her urban environment. In Abani’s text quoted above, the image of a suspended city – a city in suspense – incomplete, serves to further emphasise the fluidity of an overpopulated slum that is constantly outgrowing its own borders. It also invokes, according to Ouma, “a metaphysical phenomenon of material isolation, desolation and alienation” (“Navigating” 145). Thus, the paradox of the Afropolitan flâneur is highlighted in Abani’s text, showing both the interrelation Murail mentions, as well as the alienation referred to by Ouma, thus exemplifying Mbembe’s idea of “traces of remoteness and closeness” (“Afropolitanism” 28). Elvis, as spectator, is at once immersed and alienated from his urban surroundings, and as noted by Sarah Harrison, he is even later in the novel shown to be a “paralyzed observer of social injustice” (95). In a sense, this Afropolitan flâneur is, at times, a helpless stranger, depending on what the city environment presents.

Abani notes that one half of Maroko “was built of a confused mix of clapboard, wood, cement and zinc sheets” while the other half was built on “solid ground reclaimed from the sea” (*GL* 48). This description brings to mind the *croisement*, or crossing, mentioned earlier. Such hybrid mixes in the actual physical form of the city, which allow for, in this instance, the criss-cross of different materials, are evident not only in the architecture of Lagos but also in the roughly hewn *danfos, molues*, and *okadas* that transport Lagosians on the roads.[119] A portion of this floating city is physically suspended by means of “stilts and wooden walkways” (*GL* 48) that provide merely a temporary foothold with no deep connection to the city. Even where a section of Maroko is built on solid ground, its form is still constantly shape-shifting. An example of this can be seen in the following passage:

> Heading home from work, Elvis crossed the lagoon and went for a walk under the sweeping flyovers. A shantytown had grown underneath them peopled by petty traders, roadside mechanics, barbers, street urchins,

[118] For a reading of Edgar Allan Poe’s “Man of the Crowd” through the word “crossing”, see Estelle Murail, “‘He Crossed and Re-Crossed the Way Repeatedly’: Illegible Crossings in Poe’s ‘The Man of the Crowd’”.
[119] The innovative public transport that is prolific in Lagos will be discussed in more detail in the next section of this chapter, when looking at Teju Cole’s *Every Day is for the Thief.*

> madmen and other mendicants. He paused to watch, noting that despite the streetlights coming on around the National Stadium across the way, and the head- and taillights of the traffic that marked night's approach, the energy of the bridge city was unflagging. (*GL* 29)

Crucial here is Elvis's stance as a flâneur: his walk is unhurried, allowing him time to stretch his eyes and observe the incessant energy of a city that never sleeps. Abani's lyrical description renders what would normally be a polluted eyesore, an almost beautiful scene: this ghetto-land sparkles in the light as Elvis walks, seemingly calmly and unhurried, near the lagoon. His gaze takes in the incongruity of a "young girl leaning against a lamppost", alongside a "tire vulcanizer" who waits for a customer as he reads "a book on quantum physics through cracked glasses" (*GL* 30). Despite everything, the flâneur, albeit an observer from the outside, is here at peace with his environment.

This peace, however, is short-lived. In a scene where Elvis feels conflicting emotions after a confrontation with his stepmother, Comfort, he leaves their shack:

> He had no idea where he was going, but after a while he realized that unconsciously he'd taken a bus to one of Lagos's oldest ghettos, Aje. It was nothing like Maroko. It had no streets running through it, just a mess of narrow alleys that wound around squat, ugly bungalows and shacks. It occupied an area the size of several city blocks, and the main road ran to a halt at either side, ending in concrete walls decorated with graffiti. This was where Redemption lived. (*GL* 51)

Aje is described here as a messy, ugly contrast to Maroko. Elvis's act of walking is directionless, unconscious, and he takes a bus without giving it a thought. In this instance, Elvis is a *dériveur,* or drifter, practising a psychogeographical wandering similar to that of the 1960s Situationists discussed in Chapter 1, thereby transforming the unknown to something known. Where human and environment, street and traffic, walker and vehicle collide, chaos is the result. Yet even without collision, but merely through immersion, there can be chaos. Marshall Berman refers to Charles Baudelaire's poem "Loss of a Halo" where the pedestrian in traffic is described as "crossing the boulevard, in a great hurry, in the midst of a moving chaos, with death galloping at [him] from every side" (159). Elvis similarly manages to inhabit the chaos as an Afropolitan *oyinbo* flâneur who crosses streets, space and race, and eventually crosses over to another country.

Another symbol of crossing occurs in the form of the ubiquitous Lagos transport and traffic, which provides ease of movement for the masses, including the Afropolitan flâneur. Traffic and its dangers are a very real problem in Lagos even today, when a high rate of pedestrian deaths exists because people continue to avoid using the overhead pedestrian

bridges.[120] In *GraceLand,* examples of deathly encounters occur regularly as described by Abani in this passage:

> The motorways were the only means of getting across the series of towns that made up Lagos. Intent on reaching their own destinations, pedestrians dodged between the speeding vehicles as they crossed the wide motorways. It was dangerous, and every day at least ten people were killed trying to cross the road. If they didn't die when the first car hit them, subsequent cars finished the job. The curious thing, though, was that there were hundreds of overhead pedestrian bridges, but people ignored them. (*GL* 56)

Here human beings become roadkill as the motorways become home to regular necropolitan street-feasts. Human life has little value when up against the speeding metal machines on the motorways. Puzzled by the occurrence of road deaths, Elvis asks a fellow passenger in the bus why the bridges are not used for crossing, and the passenger replies matter-of-factly that "life in Lagos is a gamble, crossing or no crossing" (*GL* 57). This becomes true for Elvis, as life is a gamble for him either way, whether he stays in Lagos, or whether he leaves to go to America.

As a flâneur, Elvis crosses the city mostly on foot, but sometimes also by using different modes of public transport such as the bus. The epitome of both chaos and hybridity in Lagos is the *molue* bus, described in *GraceLand* as follows:

> The cab of the bus was imported from Britain, one of the Bedford series. The chassis of the body came from surplus Japanese army trucks trashed after the Second World War. The body of the coach was built from scraps of broken cars and discarded roofing sheets – anything that could be beaten into shape or otherwise fashioned. The finished product, with two black stripes running down a canary body, looked like a roughly hammered yellow sardine tin. (*GL* 8–9)

The *molue*[121] is a bricolage comprising parts obtained from all over the world, assembled with scrap iron and broken pieces. While Abani's description above highlights its hybrid construction, yet the bright yellow "canary" fits well into its Lagosian concrete jungle. The *molue* buses are described as being generally filled beyond capacity, with people hanging out

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[120] There are a number of reasons why many Lagosians choose not to use the pedestrian bridges. Various news reports claim that many of the bridges are not in a good state of repair which renders them unsafe and can possibly cause injury to pedestrians. In their case study, engineers V.O. Oladokun and O.O. Okasiji cite poor location of pedestrian bridges as one reason for the underutilization of these structures. There is also overcrowding on the bridges, making the fear of potential collapse very real. Furthermore, according to ongoing popular media reports, beggars are plentiful and night-time muggings are a regular occurrence.

[121] Fela Kuti used the *molue* as a 'case study' when he sang about the Lagos transport sector and its chaos: "Every day my people dey inside bus suffering and smiling, 49 sitting 99 standing". See article by Emeka Nwosu at <https://etimesafrica.wordpress.com/2016/08/09/how-lagos-passengers-dump-danfo-and-molue-buses/>.

of the doors as the bus dodges unevenly through the streets, where the "spirits of the road" play with lives while trapped "in an urban chaos that was frightening and confusing" (*GL* 9). The *molue* serves as a symbol of globalism, encouraging interactions between vastly different people, yet it also highlights Lagosian overcrowding. It is important to note that globalism "does not imply universality" and "globalisation implies neither equity – nor homogenization" (Nye n. pag.).[122] This means that difference and individuality are respected. In the case of the *molue*, while it is an obvious symbol of hybridity, it is nonetheless unique to Nigeria.

The streets of Lagos may be familiar territory for the Afropolitan flâneur, but it is the crowd itself that is his or her second home, and throughout *GraceLand*, Elvis finds himself immersed in the crowds. For example, when Elvis ends up in a foreign neighbourhood, he meets up with Redemption, who takes him to a nightclub in the hope of finding some dance work. Instead of getting drunk as he had on a previous occasion, Elvis resorts to "people watching" (*GL* 90), with the observant gaze of a flâneur. On another occasion, dancing in the same club with someone else, Elvis is accused of assaulting an army officer, but is rescued by Redemption who takes him out through the back door and they find themselves "in the narrow dirty alley at the back of the club" where Elvis notices other alleys running off it "like tendrils of a spider's web […] connecting each other in a network that probably traversed the entire city" (*GL* 120). This mapping of the city by means of observing its secret backstreets provides Elvis with yet another means of reading his surroundings, and these backstreets also serve as a mirror to the dark and hidden side of Elvis. Further down the alley when Elvis and Redemption are met by soldiers, Redemption once again drags Elvis off to avoid further trouble. Elvis notices yet another, different back alley world:

> Their route showed the city to be as untidy as the remnants on a half-eaten plate of food. Elvis mused at how personal it seemed, specifically adapting itself to meet each circumstance. On his way to the club, the streets he had traveled singed straight and proud, like a rope burn or a cane's welt. Now every alley with its crumbling walls, wrought-iron gates, puddles of putrefying water and piss and garlands of dead rats was just as unique. Yet, though each square inch was distinctive, the city remained as general as an insult shouted on a crowded street. (*GL* 121)

[122] It is worth reiterating the difference between globalism and globalisation at this stage. Joseph Nye explains that globalism is "characterized by networks of connections that span multi-continental differences" (n. pag.) Globalisation is the process which reflects the dynamic changes of globalism. In other words, globalisation "focuses on the forces, the dynamism, the speed of these changes" (Nye n. pag.).

The particular poeticism of Abani's prose is interesting as at the same time as it aestheticizes the cityspace, paradoxically it also serves to foreground an abject version of the city, untidy yet uniform and regular as some spider webs. This shows contrasting views of the same "straight and proud" streets, and yet Abani uses harsh and unexpected similes to express the cruelty associated with the regularity of the streets. The city is a space of contrasts: both "unique" as well as "general". One view (the streets in front of buildings) is seen by many, but another view (the alleys behind the buildings) remains hidden from the public eye. Elvis gains access to both views, and it is in such hybrid spaces where crowds congregate that he is able to observe carefully, with the gaze of the flâneur, the ambiguity of the city.

The marketplace is another space where people congregate, more specifically to meet and exchange ideas. The constantly moving and changing, hybrid urban space of Lagos offers a variety of markets where people converge to buy new or used goods, fresh produce, cultural artefacts, and more. It is at one of these markets that Elvis makes acute observations on the psyche of Lagosian society when he is witness to an atrocious event. At the beginning of Book II, Elvis realises that the shady business dealings, such as cocaine wrapping, that he and Redemption have been doing were in fact jobs for the Colonel, and he is shocked and far from happy, although caught in a web of corruption he will eventually attempt to escape. Nonetheless when Elvis waits with Redemption for their lift to pick them up to embark upon another illegal buying and selling job, there is a commotion in the market near them. The crowd chases an alleged thief, and Elvis watches a horrific scene unfold as the man is first stoned and then set alight with a petrol-soaked rubber tyre or "necklace of fire" (*GL* 227), burning to death. Elvis feels he should help, but Redemption cautions him against it, and then their ride arrives. Alighting from the truck, Elvis is shaking:

> This scene had affected him more than anything else he had seen, though he wasn't sure why. Maybe it was the cumulative effect of all the horror he had witnessed; there was only so much a soul could take. As they drove off, Elvis watched the spreading fire through the tinted glass. It was horrifying, yet strangely beautiful. (*GL* 228)

This juxtaposition of beauty and horror is often repeated throughout the novel, and becomes a form of abjection, where the ugliness of the slums is translated into beauty. Elvis's reaction appears to be insensitive or even inhumane, but as suggested by Harrison, it is rather "a paradoxical assertion of his humanity in spite of the horror to which he has been exposed" (105). Clearly Elvis has been deeply affected by witnessing such a horrific event, and his body responds in shock. Not only he, but others who saw the event, are stunned into silence,

and yet, surprisingly while the *buka* drives off and Elvis watches through the windows, he finds the horrific scene of flames "strangely beautiful" (*GL* 228). While Elvis's reaction might appear to be a paradoxical one, the grotesque horror of what he has witnessed has elicited such a confusing response because the event itself was so abject and traumatic. According to Julia Kristeva in the *Powers of Horror*, the abject refers to precisely such a human reaction to a "threatened breakdown in meaning caused by the loss of the distinction between subject and object or between self and other" (Felluga n. pag.). For Kristeva, bodily wastes, such as excrement, illustrate a crossing of boundaries:

> It is thus not lack of cleanliness or health that causes abjection but what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite. (4)

In the above description, the notion of borders being crossed relates directly to the many types of crossing or *croisement* that occur in Abani's novel. For this particular *oyinbo* flâneur, then, it would seem that the abject cityscape is what creates Elvis's sense of ambivalence when he reads his personal map of the city. Further abjection is encountered towards the end of the novel, when Elvis is arrested, tortured, and thrown out of a moving van, and finds himself "on a back street that was deserted except for the corpses of hundreds of dead rats that littered the roadside" (*GL* 297). The imagery of dead rats which appeared earlier in the novel glorified as "garlands" (*GL* 121) recurs here to emphasise the filth and decay[123] of the inner city. Furthermore, this ties up with the human roadkill encountered earlier in the novel. In this sense Abani equates human life with that of a different type of sentient being. Once again, Elvis does not know where he is or even where he is going, and so:

> He just walked. It wasn't clear to him if he was really free or whether it was just an illusion. All day long he just walked, on and on, like a man possessed. The sun dipping on the horizon cast long shadows behind him. Cars whizzing past him blared their horns angrily as he wandered into the road. (*GL* 297)

This long, ongoing walking recalls Azure in K. Sello Duiker's *Thirteen Cents,* discussed in Chapter 3, when Azure also just walked incessantly, and became possessed, entering a trance-like state when he found himself in the mountain cave. Elvis's act of walking also renders him possessed, as he wanders at an oddly distant remove from his surroundings, so much so that passing vehicles hoot at him in the road. Walking for Elvis, as for Azure, is a form of

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[123] This sense of decay recalls Baudelaire's *Les Fleurs du Mal* where putrefaction, says Isabella Huberman, is "a cherished theme of Baudelaire's" and she provides the example of "Une Charogne" where the poet describes a body he discovers while walking one morning (n. pag.).

therapy. Both are marginal beings, they are traumatised flâneurs, and walking is a means of healing for them, as it allows time and space to lighten the mind.

Later in the novel, when Elvis returns to Lagos after his imprisonment and torture, he finds only debris in the place his home used to be. He does not yet know that his father, Sunday, had sprung "with a roar at the 'dozer'" (*GL* 287) that was set to tear the shacks down, and almost instantly died in this brave act. Elvis is confused and stunned at the sight of a post-mortem Maroko:

> All around, scavengers, human and otherwise, feasted on the exposed innards of Maroko. They rummaged in the rubble as bulldozers sifted through the chaos like slow-feeding buffalo. Here some articles of clothing still untorn; there a pot; over there a child's toy with the squeaker still working. There was a lot of snorting coming from a clump of shrubs as a pack of hungry dogs fed. The hand of a corpse rose up from between the snarling dogs in a final wave. (*GL* 303–304)

This extremely abject scene is too shocking for Elvis to to comprehend, and Abani's imagery creates a sense of horror as a result of the disregard for human life. The scene described in the *GraceLand* quotation above also brings to mind Vladislavic's dystopic image of a city where "urban poachers are not just hungry for horseflesh" (*PK* 136). When in *GraceLand* Elvis tries to shake himself back to reality and recall how he came to be there, he "vaguely remember[s] the dreams and walking" (*GL* 304), and the chaos overwhelms him:

> Elvis started walking again, unable to accept his situation. One minute he had a life – not much of one, but he had one. And the next, everything fell apart. He walked for hours. He had no plans, no ideas about what to do or where he was going, he just walked. He wasn't going anywhere in particular, but at least he was not standing still. (*GL* 306)

Elvis as a traumatised flâneur is walking to survive. He has become more of a stranger, an *oyinbo*, even to himself, as no longer is his walk simply carefree and relaxed, but rather, his walking becomes a desperate act, even though he has no plans. Drifting once again, as a *dérive*, Elvis is described by Abani as walking without plan or purpose. The sense here, however, is one of total loss: Elvis has come face to face with dystopia, and all he can do is to walk mechanically, without thinking:

> He kept walking until he found himself underneath one of the many dusty flyovers that littered the city. Another ghetto had been growing here for a long time, but now it just exploded as the influx from Maroko brought more life flooding into it. (*GL* 306)

Elvis remains disconnected and lost, in an unreal, zombie state, and lacks a place to simply be at home, while experiencing the "material violence of homelessness, poverty, and dispossession" (Herbert 211). When he wakes up in Bridge City, Elvis is "feeling more than slightly confused" (*GL* 307) until his friend Okon appears and helps him. Soon enough Elvis feels as though he has always lived in Bridge City because time has "lost all meaning in the face of that deprivation" (*GL* 309). This calls to mind Azure in *Thirteen Cents* who also, for a period, lived underneath a bridge. In Bridge City "it was easy to be very much alone in the crowds that milled everywhere" (*GL* 309), and this aloneness is not far removed from that of the flâneur who is both one with the crowd as well as apart from it. Elvis, a stranger in the crowd, is the *oyinbo* flâneur, an "urban native" (Shields 61) who is desperately lost. This is not a life for Elvis, especially as in a short time "he had lost everyone in Lagos who meant anything to him" (*GL* 310). It is in this state of forlornness that he meets up again with Redemption who eventually offers him his passport as a gift (*GL* 317).

4.2.2 Intertextual criss-crossing of cities

While space constraints do not allow for in-depth discussion, it is necessary to touch on the numerous intertextual references, both literary and filmic, that punctuate the novel, allowing Abani to make serious comment about literature and culture. Elvis, being an avid reader, makes use of the United States Information Service (USIS) Library on Victoria Island because at the local library he had to "pace his borrowing so as not to finish [the books] all too quickly" (*GL* 55). Furthermore, the narrator informs the reader that "the local library had an anthropology section that only had books with the word 'Bantu' in their titles – like *Bantu Philosophy* and *Bantu Worldviews*" (*GL* 55). Writing on postcolonial intertextuality, Zoë Wicomb comments that "What the writer does then is to introduce dialogue between texts, whether they be written or spoken, and so brings into being the interconnectedness of the human world in a divided society" (146). The numerous intertexts in *GraceLand* relate mainly to themes of culture, memory and place, which shape the literary terrain that Elvis traverses, and infiltrate his life on a regular basis, helping him to form his own creative voice. For instance, when Elvis sneakily goes to watch movies using the money his grandmother, Oye, gives him to post her pen pal letters, he himself writes replies to her by constructing stories of her pen pals' lives based on the movies he has watched in Afikpo. This deception keeps Elvis's grandmother interested and his humorous stories entertain the reader. Elvis continues to improvise when reading his own invented letters to Oye, pretending that they

have been written by her pen pals, where he has adapted scenes from "*Casablanca, Breakfast at Tiffany's* and *Gone with the Wind*" (*GL* 100). However, his guilty conscience bothers him and he is convinced that Oye secretly knows his ruse but has said nothing, and so Elvis eventually "turn[s] to his own imagination" (*GL* 100) and begins to create even more elaborate stories. When he challenges his grandmother, guessing that she does not believe the stories, she asks "Why? Are you changing what is written there?" (*GL* 100). Creative acts, such as writing, painting, and photography are often related to the flâneur, as was seen for example with The Girl in *Skyline* who weaves from her words the histories that "are no longer vagrant and wandering words" (*Sky* 184). That Elvis is able perform various identities and writes stories that his grandmother believes were written by other people, allows him to give those stories a new home.

Re-homing stories can also be seen in Abani's many intertextual literary references which throughout *GraceLand* are either American, such as James Baldwin's *Another Country* (*GL* 112), Russian, such as Dostoyevsky's *Crime and Punishment* (*GL* 112), or British, including Enid Blyton (*GL* 100) and Charles Dickens (*GL* 111), amongst others. Notably, for Elvis, Dickens's opening line in *A Tale of Two Cities*, "It was the best of times, it was the worst of times" provides what he believes to be "the perfect description of life in Lagos" (*GL* 111), recalling lines in the opening chapter:

> How did they come to this? he wondered. Just two years ago they lived in a small town and his father had a good job and was on the cusp of winning an election. Now they lived in a slum in Lagos. (*GL* 6)

Throughout *GraceLand* these contradictions, as already seen, continue to surface. Elvis could well be in a Dickensian novel, coming from a comfortable life in Afikpo, to the worst of times he experiences in a Lagosian slum. It is not only international writers who receive a mention, but a handful of West African writers are also thrown into Abani's mix: Chinua Achebe, Mongo Beti, Elechi Amadi, Camara Laye and Mariama Ba (*GL* 111), to mention a few. This eclectic blend of authors is testimony to a well-read individual with a broad range of tastes, such as Elvis, and Abani himself, which brings to mind an aspect of Taiye Selasi's definition of "Afropolitan" in her famous essay:

> Rather than essentialising the geographical entity, we seek to comprehend the cultural complexity; to honor the intellectual and spiritual legacy; and to sustain our parents' cultures. ("Bye-Bye Babar" n. pag.)

The value of reading is sustained throughout the novel, and at the very end, while Elvis waits to board a flight, he reads James Baldwin's *Going to Meet the Man* where he "see[s] a lot of parallels between himself and the description of a dying black man slowly being engulfed by flames" (*GL* 319). Baldwin's description is an echo of the earlier scene when Elvis witnessed a man being set alight (*GL* 227). While he is immersed in reading Baldwin at the airport, Elvis's reverie is interrupted when a soldier approaches him to ask what he is doing there, and then tells him to move. "To where?" Elvis responds, before being "poked in the chest with the ugly snout of [a] rifle's barrel" (*GL* 320). The feeling of estrangement sensed by Elvis at the beginning of the novel when he asks "What do I have to do with all this?" (*GL* 6) has come full circle.

Towards the end of the novel, in a ghetto scene where Elvis notices a young pregnant girl and beggars, Abani writes that "Elvis read the city, seeing signs not normally visible" (*GL* 306*).* This is the essence of the flâneur: to walk, to read, to write the city. While he is observant and immersed also, Elvis's *oyinbo*-like alienation from his surroundings has afforded him an increasingly distant view of Lagos, and a desperate need to move on. This is exemplified in the novel by the fact that *GraceLand*'s cosmopolitan narrative, "sceptical of a diasporic insistence on origins" (Schwetman 184) jumps non-chronologically between rural Afikpo in the past and Lagos in the more recent present, and then hints towards an uncertain future in the United States.

4.2.3 Elvis done leave de country[124]

"We're lost, aren't we?" Elvis asked, stating the obvious. (*GL* 243)

GraceLand closes with Elvis about to leave Nigeria and board a plane for America. In an interview, Abani says the following:

> We are more transnational than we believe. We are more peripatetic than we believe; we are more nomadic in that sense. We are more mongrelized than we would ever like to accept we are. What really happens is that living on top of each other forces the acceptance, or at least a workable way of living with that mongrelisation. (in Aycock 5)

[124] The words, "Elvis done leave de country", are uttered by Redemption when he offers Elvis his passport (GL 318). Redemption's words recall the famous phrase "Elvis has left the building", announced at the end of Elvis Presley's concerts. This way fans would know the show was over and there would be no further encores. The phrase is still used to indicate that "someone has made an exit or that something is complete." <https://www.phrases.org.uk/meanings/elvis-has-left-the-building.html>.

The above could well read as a description of the Afropolitan flâneur. Individuals who are brought together in close proximity in a city environment such as Lagos, make the crossing of cultures more immediate.

In an interview, Chris Abani stated that "[t]here is a branch of pseudo-science that I've been particularly fond of called psychogeography that argues that humans and cities shape each other in complex symbiotic relationships" (in Goyal 238). For him, as Abani explains, a knowledge of psychogeography enables a way of "visualizing and understanding place and space" and how to interact in that space even "when constrained by the geography of cities" (in Goyal 238). Psychogeography espouses the act, or perhaps more precisely, the *art*, of getting lost in the city, through the *dérive*, or drift[125] which allows for an intimate connection with the urban environment.

Abani's protagonist persistently seeks a means of understanding his environment by observing his surroundings in both a deeply thoughtful and questioning manner and at times in a detached fashion, and through different modes such as writing and dancing. Throughout *GraceLand*, Elvis is in motion: dancing, walking somewhere, going by bus, getting a lift in a truck, or rushing off in a stolen vehicle, but he does not always know where he is or where he is going. In a scene where Elvis and Redemption escape yet again after discovering they had been trading in human "spare parts" (*GL* 242), Elvis asks Redemption whether they are lost as he realises that they "had no idea where they were" (*GL* 244). Later still, when travelling with musicians the Joking Jaguars to Ijebu, Elvis once again finds himself in unfamiliar territory:

> He didn't know what [the place] was called. Hell, maybe. Wherever they were, he did not speak the language. That was the problem with a country that was an amalgamation of over two hundred and fifty ethnic groups, he thought – too many bloody languages. (*GL* 274)

This linguistic-ethnic-cultural combination is overwhelming, and he resorts to using sign language with a hawker to buy bananas and peanuts. Elvis wonders how the Joking Jaguars found these towns as there "were no road maps or signs" (*GL* 275). Elvis himself is learning ways to read the geography and people of the city. Referring to Henri Lefebvre's *Writings of Cities*, Christopher Ouma comments on the blurring of binaries between city and country, and notes that "the production of space has extended beyond the built environment to the cyber-

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[125] In *GraceLand,* there are several instances where Elvis feels disorientated and lost (see pages 243, 244, and 297). This brings to mind Guy Debord's psychogeographic ideas of simply 'letting go' when walking.

environment and therefore to thought processes which construct ‘representative spaces’, reflected in imagination and the landscapes of desires that we see in *GraceLand*” (“Navigating” 152). Indeed, the neighbourhood boundaries are blurred in *GraceLand*, as one slum merges onto the next, but also the imaginative environment becomes confused with the real, concrete environment. This typifies the close connection between human subject and built environment as seen in the movement of Elvis as an Afropolitan flâneur. For Lefebvre, the urban environment continues to be created and re-created by an individual’s movement through space. Being lost in space is similar to being lost in translation, in that the guidelines are not easily available. Just as linguistic diversity in Nigeria means people are required to find creative ways to communicate with one another, so too is it necessary for individuals like Elvis to find their own way in, around and through the city of chaos that is Lagos.

Elvis in *GraceLand* is an Afropolitan flâneur whose multisensory awareness enables him to observe the city in ways that might otherwise go unnoticed. Olfactory and auditory images amplify this particular flâneur’s experience of the city. He is an Afropolitan flâneur whose auditory and olfactory senses are acute and whose mode of walking is through whiteface performance and dance. As was seen with Leke in *Bom Boy,* and Azure in *Thirteen Cents,* some flâneurs sometimes resort to crime as a means to an end. Elvis is no different, and his ultimate performance is a criminal act, whereby he uses his friend’s passport to leave the country.

The conclusion of Abani’s novel, according to Sarah Harrison, is far from “uplifting” (110) because Elvis departs Lagos as somebody else, as his friend “Redemption”, since he carries his passport. While Harrison’s interpretation is a valid one, it can, however, also be argued that the novel ends with a sense of hope. Elvis has changed to such a degree that his very identity becomes a new one, and he is, effectively, redeemed. Elvis repeatedly performs identity, first by emulating his namesake Elvis Presley, and later when he seeks redemption in the guise of someone else named Redemption. He has a chance to begin afresh in new surroundings.

While John Schwetman feels that the novel “celebrates Elvis’s destination, not his origin” (200), such an interpretation seems to ignore Elvis’s constant returns to his past (such as reading his mother’s journal which he keeps on his person) which connects with his origins. Despite the fact that Elvis senses a historical pull to his birthplace, and has been unable to fully immerse himself in the city of Lagos, he has nonetheless remained an observer, an Afropolitan flâneur, with finely tuned awareness and the additional virtue of having a moral conscience. Elvis remains attached to both the western world and to Africa.

Similar aspects of Afropolitanism are also evident in Teju Cole's *Every Day is for the Thief*, which will be examined in the next section of this chapter.

4.3 Teju Cole's *Every Day is for the Thief* as Examination of Reverse Migration

> This should be a time of joy. You know? Going home should be a thing of joy. (*ED* 11)
>
> London, New York, and Berlin had made me long for Lagos. (*ED* 67)

Where Chris Abani's *GraceLand* ends with its protagonist, Elvis, at the airport about to leave Nigeria for America, Teju Cole's *Every Day is for the Thief* begins with its nameless protagonist at the consulate in New York, planning his return to Nigeria after many years of absence. As the two brief extracts above indicate, the migrant's return to the homeland is fraught with mixed emotions of joy and longing. Issues surrounding migration (in the case of Abani's Elvis) and reverse migration (as seen with Cole's unnamed narrator) are explored in these narratives. The experiences of these two protagonists illustrate their specific, and different, brands of Afropolitan flânerie. Global mobility has resulted in Afropolitans becoming flâneurs, partly through mimicry and adaptation, but also as a response to surviving in an urban environment.

The term Afropolitan is fluid and still means different things to different people. In an interview with Taiye Selasi, Cole had this to say about labels, such as "Afropolitan":

> I'm comfortable being described as Afropolitan, or African, or American, or pan-African. Or Yoruba, or Brooklynite, or black, or Nigerian. Whatever. As long as the labels are numerous. I'm "local" in many places. But I don't think this is a greater or lesser life than the one lived by people who are more grounded in one terrain. (n. pag.)

Through these words, Cole embraces multi-locationality and hybridity. Cole's publishing history, for example, is clear evidence of multi-locationality as *Blind Spot* was first published a year earlier in Italian as *Punta d'Ombra*. Similarly, Cole's first book, *Every Day is for the Thief*, was originally published in Nigeria in 2007. In the United States, a revised version was only published in 2014, a few years after Cole's better-known *Open City.* Various critics and reviewers have read *Every Day is for the Thief* as an Afropolitan novel, albeit less so than novels by Chimamanda Adichie or Taiye Selasi. By calling attention to how other critics have interpreted *Every Day is for the Thief*, McPherson notes that "the narrator could be read as an Afropolitan who cannot cope with the inherent tensions of this identity script and hence

exposes it as highly ambiguous" (267). This is one way of reading it, since the unnamed narrator constantly questions whether or not he will return to stay permanently in Nigeria.[126] However, McPherson's observation is somewhat tautological. The Afropolitan contends with the tensions of hybridity and occupies an ambiguous position. Therefore, it can be concluded that Cole would indeed create such a narrator and narrative given that inherent tensions and ambiguity are constitutive elements of Afropolitanism. Themes that run throughout Cole's rapidly increasing oeuvre include transnationalism, travel and multiculturalism.

From the very first page of *Every Day is for the Thief,* the narrator informs the reader that most of the people at the consulate that morning are Nigerians, but "there are also unexpected faces: a tall Italian-looking man, a girl of East Asian origin, other Africans" and on the television there is a "broadcast of a football match between Enyimba and a Tunisian club" (*ED* 9). While he waits and observes, the narrator is reminded of the corruption and bribery that is stereotypically associated with Nigerians. During an exchange between the narrator and another man in the waiting room, the narrator tells him that he will insist on obtaining a receipt. "Hey, hey, young guy, why trouble yourself?" the man asks him, adding that "They'll take your money anyway, and they'll punish you by delaying your passport" (*ED* 12). The narrator is forced, against his will, into being complicit with a system he despises, taking a receipt "mutely" before passing a torn sign upon leaving that reads: "Help us fight corruption. If any employee of the Consulate asks you for a bribe or tip, please let us know" (*ED* 12). The irony here is that the note carries no contact details, so the only way to heed its warning is to report corruption to one of the corrupt. The theme of systemic corruption runs through the novel as it is clearly an issue that everyone encounters in one way or another in Nigeria. It is partly the psychological effects of such corruption that provide the impetus for Cole's narrative. This particular scene suggests that the narrator does not wish to be part of the same corrupt system in a country which he had left some years prior.

An old man in the consulate waiting room says that "[g]oing home should be a thing of joy" (*ED* 11), and even the narrator, after landing, acknowledges that:

> I, too, experience the ecstasy of arrival, the irrational sense that all will now be well. Fifteen years is a long time to be away from home. It feels longer still because I left under a cloud. (*ED* 14)

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[126] Most critical work on Cole that examines his deployment of the figure of the flâneur usually deals with his second, more celebrated novel, *Open City*, and little attention is paid to *Every Day is for the Thief.* While Knudsen and Rahbek write about both novels, they refer to the unnamed narrator in both texts as "the Julius figure" (87). Katherine Hallemeier points out commonalities between the two narrators (24), and while some readers of both texts might conflate both narrators, I have chosen not to link the two texts, but to rather interpret them as very different, standalone texts.

One wonders how long such ecstasy will last. How the narrator will make sense of his former home forms the subject of most of the novel, and it is an ambiguous position in which he finds himself. While he might be "using [his] return to Africa as a painful cure for the psychic wound [he] suffered while living abroad" (Ojaruega 29), his gaze on Lagos after this time apart will indeed be different from before. As night descends suddenly, he notices that "other things, less visible, have changed. I have taken into myself some of the assumptions of life in a Western democracy – certain ideas about legality, for instance, certain expectations of due process – and in that sense I have returned a stranger" (*ED* 21). In other words, having been exposed to a different way of living, he now sees what was previously familiar, in a new light. And yet, he admits to feeling an "elemental pull" even though "there is much sorrow" (*ED* 62–63). The narrator feels conflicted emotions, as evidenced in the following passage:

> I am going to move back to Lagos. I must. […] I have headphones on, and I am listening to "Giant Steps," that twisting, modal argument of saxophone, drums, bass, and piano that is like a repeated unmaking and remaking of the audible world. It is at high volume, but the generators say, No, you will not enjoy this. I have no right to Coltrane here, not with everything else going on. This is Lagos. I disagree, turn the volume up, listen to both the music and the noise. Neither gives way. No sense emerges of the combat between art and messy reality. (*ED* 63)

This passage highlights contradictions and is reminiscent of some of Elvis's descriptions of Lagos in the previous section where despite chaos there is also music. The internal emotional conflict evinced in the above passage is a recurring element not only in *Every Day is for the Thief*, but also in *GraceLand*, as will be seen in *Blackass*. While the narrator attempts to listen to Coltrane, he is prevented from enjoying the music due to the interference of the buzz of the generators, despite him wearing headphones. When he turns up the volume and listens to the music, he still hears noise, and is unable to make sense of it, in the same way that he is not able to make sense of the contradictions of Lagos itself. The choice of musician is interesting here, as saxophonist John Coltrane was a free jazz artist, whose style attempted to break down or disrupt convention, seeking freedom from old jazz styles and a cross-pollination of the new. "Giant Steps", Coltrane's adventurous 1960 release, is described by the narrator as an "argument" and a "remaking of the audible world", suggesting fluidity and change. McPherson points out the reference here to an "overwhelming sense of deprivation and scarcity [where the narrator's] emotional struggle can be read as one with the complicity of privilege" (267). Indeed, this is the case as evidenced when later visiting the MUSON School, the narrator is impressed, expressing his delight that this represents "a great leap

forward" (*ED* 77) compared to when he was at school. He himself "did not discover [his] passion for music until [he] went to America" (*ED* 77). Once again, a conflict, a push and pull of the senses creates uncertainty in the narrator's mind.

When a childhood friend, Rotimi, visits, the narrator reminisces and they both talk about change. Rotimi confirms what the narrator already knows, saying "life is hard in Nigeria" and everyone is "looking to get out. America, London, Trinidad. Wherever" (*ED* 81). The reader learns a few chapters later that the narrator himself "left under a cloud" and his "departure was sudden and, to [his] family, a complete surprise" (*ED* 102). He recounts how he maintained a distance from family in order to "make the break complete", and even when he discovered via his Uncle Tunde that his mother had similarly left Nigeria and moved to California, he felt no desire whatsoever to contact her. The narrator says that

> In this journey of return, the greatest surprise is how inessential [my mother's] memory is to me, how inessential I have made it, even in revisiting sites that we knew together, or in seeing many people who knew us both. People know better than to ask about her. This is what it is to be a stranger: when you leave, there is no void. Mother was a stranger here. She left no void after eighteen years, as if she had never been here. (*ED* 103)

Ironically, the narrator feels no connection towards his mother because she was a stranger, and yet he himself has also become a stranger, who left no void when he left. He is *oyinbo* in the land where he previously felt at home. Despite the narrator's stubborn refusal to reconnect with his mother or to visit the site of his father's grave, he nonetheless agrees to meet his old girlfriend, Amina, now married and a mother. He finds the encounter awkward, with the pauses in conversation lasting far too long: "The tension is that of a waiting room, and I wonder why I have come, why I have chosen, yet again, to recover the impossible" (*ED* 108). All the while he knows that he cannot return to the past, and yet the narrator is consumed by an ongoing need to revisit that past. This is an interesting contrast with Elvis and his relationship with his mother, whose journal he keeps on his person, which was "all that he had inherited from her, all that he had to piece her life together" (*GL* 11). For Elvis, unlike for Cole's narrator, the past lives on in him, particularly as he re-visits that past through the city he used to know.

The narrator's flânerie is like a tourist's travelogue, that features "highly localised vignettes that literally map the city of Lagos" (McPherson 265) as each chapter is dedicated to some place that is visited by him: an airport, a market, museum, a bookshop, or even traffic jams at chaotic intersections. Armed with his digital camera hidden away, the narrator

is a photo-flâneur, forever seeking opportunity to capture real moments on camera so the images taken can later serve as *aide-mémoires.* When he visits the National Museum, however, the narrator is forbidden by a "listless woman" to take photographs, a woman whose "disconnection from the environment is absolute" (*ED* 65–66). Her disconnection emphasises the narrator's own attempts at reconnection, as he explores his old neighbourhood and reflects upon changes that have taken place during his fifteen-year absence. For instance, in an early chapter, the narrator observes that:

> One sign of the newly vital Nigerian economy, and one of the most apparent, is the proliferation of Internet cafes. There had been none when I left home. Now there are several in every neighbourhood, and there must be hundreds in Lagos alone. The Internet café is symbolic of a connection to goings-on in the larger world, an end to Nigeria's isolation. (*ED* 24)

This is an apt illustration of how essential it is to be "connected" to the rest of the world via the internet, particularly with regard to a global economy, where growth indicates progress and keeping up with leading countries. Despite ongoing opportunities for fraud via computer scams, the main advantage of a growing internet connection is that it allows for global connectivity without the inconvenience or expense of international travel.

In a later chapter of the novel, when the narrator finds himself waiting with his aunt in a school field for a goods container to be delivered, the reader learns that the term for "secondhand imported consumer goods that flood the Nigerian market" is a Yoruba word, "*tokunbo*", meaning "from over the seas", and has come to describe a variety of foreign goods: "*Tokunbo* cars, *tokunbo* clothes, *tokunbo* electronics" (*ED* 89). We are told that since Nigeria's manufacturing industry is not particularly well developed, the market for used goods from other countries is big. It is interesting to note that such a word as "*tokunbo*" is losing its meaning of worldliness to have "a mildly pejorative air about it" (*ED* 89). The meaning of the word is changing as *tokunbo* is increasingly associated with the lower middle-class group of people and therefore not something to aspire towards. Nonetheless, a global theme is sustained throughout the novel, and aspects pertaining thereto are mulled over by the narrator, as he compares and contrasts America with Nigeria.

It is in aimless wandering, similar to that of Elvis (*GL* 14), that Cole's narrator-flâneur "find[s] [him]self truly in the city" (*ED* 111). As the Afropolitan photo-flâneur "roam[s] around the city" he feels sobered by a sense of "[s]truggle and absence", since in Nigeria, he says, "we experience all the good things that texture a life, but always with a sense of foreboding, a sense of the fragility of things" (*ED* 125). Perhaps it is that discomforting

fragility that highlights for the narrator an emptiness, a loss, that is irretrievable when he revisits his country of origin. Once back in New York, the narrator revisits a memory of his Lagosian journey. He recalls a hot afternoon in Iganmu, where "the city becomes as trackless as a desert" and alone, he "wander[s] with no particular aim" (*ED* 136). Such aimless wandering brings to mind the *dérive*, or drift, as practised in psychogeography by the Situationists. Cole's description of the city without easy-to-read streets can be compared to similes Abani uses for the haphazard streets of Aje (*GL* 51) and the spider web type alleyways that Elvis walks (*GL* 120). Part of the immersive experience of the *dérive* is not knowing where one is going: it is spontaneous and unplanned. Cole's narrator declares that:

> Losing my geographical bearings in this way always brings ambiguous emotions. Not knowing where I am exposes me to various dangers, and there is always a possibility that I will be accosted by a hostile party. On the other hand, letting go of my moorings makes me connect to the city as pure place, through which I move without prejudging what I will see when I come around a corner. (*ED* 136)

This 'letting go' allows for the unknown to become known, as he immerses himself in his surroundings without preconceived ideas, much like a stranger in a foreign land. In this extract, the narrator's ambiguity of feeling is a further echo of the paradoxes encountered earlier in Abani's text, for instance when Elvis views the city as "half slum, half paradise" (*GL* 7). Around the corner, the narrator finds himself in a labyrinth, where one of the streets leads him to a coffin-building business. So intrigued is he by the scene that the narrator is tempted to photograph it, but is afraid that in doing so he "will bind to film what is intended only for the memory, what is meant only for a sidelong glance followed by forgetting" (*ED* 138). This "dockyard of Charon's [...] has an enlivening purity" explains the narrator, and continues by saying that there is

> A wholeness, rather, a comforting sense that there is an order to things, a solid assurance of deep-structured order, so strongly felt that when I come to the end of the street and see, off to my right, the path out of the labyrinth and into the city's normal bustle, I do not really want to move on. But I know, at the same time, that it is not possible for me to stay. (*ED* 138)

Interestingly, it is through disorder and chaos that a sense of order results. Once again, this paradox of chaos and order recalls Elvis's interpretation of the city in Abani's *GraceLand.* As with Abani's text, movement too, is necessary and essential for the Afropolitan flâneur, and the entire narrative of *Every Day is for the Thief* becomes a to-and-fro-ing of staying or

going, as the narrator returns, revisits, and re-visions his life. In this sense then, Cole's narrator remains in limbo, momentarily suspended.

4.3.1 Getting around in a "City of Scheherazades"[127]

Just as Cole's narrator suspends his decision of whether to return permanently to Lagos or not, so too does the city he visits reflect this limbo. The structure of the novel provides a further echo of this suspension, given that Cole frames his novel between scenes of aircraft take-off and landing. Both the second chapter and the second-last chapter of *Every Day is for the Thief* describe scenes from the window of an aeroplane, affording both the narrator and the reader a bird's eye view from above. This recalls de Certeau's description of looking down on the city below from the 110th floor of the World Trade Center in New York, where his "elevation transfigures him into a voyeur" and "puts him at a distance […] transform[ing] the bewitching world […] into a text that lies before one's eyes" (92). A similar translation of the city into text is evident in architect Rem Koolhaas's 2004 documentary *Lagos Wide and Close,* directed by Dutch filmmaker Bregtje van der Haak, already mentioned at the outset of this chapter. The "wide" view of Koolhaas and Van der Haak's film comprises aerial footage shot from a helicopter. This distanced view emphasises the detachment of the filmmakers from the city below. Similarly, in *Every Day is for the Thief,* as the aircraft from New York nears Lagos, the narrator offers the reader this view:

> It is early evening when the aircraft approaches the low settlements outside the city. It drops gently and by degrees toward the earth, as if progressing down an unseen flight of stairs. The airport looks sullen from the tarmac. It is named for a dead general, and is all that is worst about the architecture of the seventies. (*ED* 14)

The narrator's perspective is like that from inside a *danfo*, at a certain remove. From the aircraft window, however, Cole's narrator is no longer immersed in the crowd as he was in the *danfo*, and it is from this distance, from high above, that he is able to get a clearer picture of things without being emotionally attached. However, the airport itself is anthropomorphised in Cole's description, and this therefore partly contradicts the distancing effect. Already, before the narrator has even landed, he anticipates the paradox of what it is to be a stranger, *oyinbo*, in his former home city. That Cole chooses not to name the airport that honours a "dead general" reinforces the belief that the man was not respected by everyone.

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[127] Words borrowed from *Every Day is for the Thief* (29).

The "dead general" who violently ran the country for several decades was responsible for a series of military regimes which brutally crushed opponents.[128] Toward the end of the novel, as he departs Lagos for New York, the narrator leans against the small window and observes the following:

> The plane sheds ballast and rises above the city, rises above the countless small dots of light that are scattered like stars across the landscape, rises slowly into the cloudless harmattan night, easing the compression, rises deep into the ether, until there is nothing visible in the darkness below except for the earth's dark curve. (*ED* 135)

Significantly, in the narrator's view the city is slowly erased altogether, indicating that it no longer bears any ties for him. Once again there is a distance between him and the urban environment of Lagos. The city seen from above is something very different to the city viewed by walking it at street level.

As he drives "home" from the airport, the narrator notes that "the late afternoon rush makes the traffic snarl" (*ED* 19), reinforcing a sense of chaotic aggression in the noisy traffic. This contrasts sharply with the "soothing music" of the Cape Town traffic described by *Skyline*'s narrator referred to earlier in Chapter 3. Lagos *is* traffic: there is no avoiding it in this sprawling city, where the sound of traffic is not akin to music. Public transportation in the form of the *molue* bus encountered earlier in Abani's *GraceLand*, also comes in a smaller version: the yellow public minibus or *danfo*, "carrier of the masses" (*ED* 35). The *okada*, a small motorbike, is a simple means of getting around the city by weaving through other traffic. Cole's narrator is warned by his family who say he must not ride the "death trap" *danfo*, but he feels that "being there on the danfo, being there on the streets, is the whole point of the exercise" (*ED* 34). After a short walk, the narrator reaches the Ojodu-Berger Bus Terminus, thinking:

> The degree to which my family members wish me to be separate from the life of the city is matched only by my desire to know that life. The danfo, carrier of the masses, is the perfect symbol of our contest. The energies of Lagos life – creative, malevolent, ambiguous – converge at the bus stops. There is no better place to make an inquiry into what it was I longed for all those times I longed for home. (*ED* 35)

Cole's narrator is highly invested in getting to know the city, and in order to get around other than on foot, he chooses to travel by *danfo*, the little brother of the *molue* which Abani used

[128] It is somewhat ironic that the airport in Ikeja that was named after Murtala Mohammed after his death by assassination is the same airport he had hijacked more than a decade earlier.

as a symbol of globalism. Emeka Nwosu aptly calls the *danfo* the "enfant terrible of Lagos roads" (n. pag.).[129] The *danfo* offers this Afropolitan flâneur a relatively safe immersion in the crowd and an opportunity to navigate the streets without feeling threatened. The image of the *danfo* recalls scenes from Rem Koolhaas's interactive documentary, in particular where he interviews *danfo* driver Olawole Busayo, who is totally immersed in the city, revealing the "contested terrain" (Godlewski 15) of this type of transport. Cole's narrator becomes fascinated by a female passenger alighting the *danfo* at Ojodu-Berger, because she holds a large book by Michael Ondaatje and he thinks that "an adult reading a challenging work of literary fiction on Lagos public transportation [is] a sight rare as hen's teeth" (*ED* 40). While the narrator finds this as unusual as he would have found it were the female passenger to start singing "a tune from Des Knaben Wunderhorn" (*ED* 41), the point that Cole makes is that literature, like art, music, and culture, travels. Reading is also thematised in *GraceLand* and Abani lists a number of well-known texts throughout his novel. In *Every Day is for the Thief,* the fact that Ondaatje is being read on a mere *danfo* that is used by ordinary Lagosians appears completely incongruous, and the narrator wonders how the woman is able to concentrate on such a writer's lyricism when in the midst of noise and chaos. Cole's narrator considers approaching her to talk, but then thinks to himself that "Lagosians are distrustful of strangers" (ED 41), confirming his own sense of being *oyinbo*. Cole's narrator does not approach the female passenger, but simply continues to "watch the back of her head for the duration of the journey" (*ED* 41), which brings to mind a photograph of Cole's which appears in *Blind Spot* and was on exhibition in New York in 2017. The photograph, taken from behind, is of a long-haired blonde woman, crossing an intersection. Cole describes this particular photograph thus:

> I follow her for one city block. Thirty seconds after the first photograph, I take a second. Against my will and oblivious to hers. Then I lose her to the crowd — the mutual danger is defused. On Instagram, the ones who see what you saw are called your followers. The word has a disquieting air. (*Blind Spot* 294)

These women remain a mystery: the woman reading on a Lagosian *danfo*, the woman Baudelaire passes in a Parisian street, and the woman photographed by Cole in New York. While these women might be temporally centuries apart, yet they remain objects of the

[129] For a lighthearted read, see the comparison between *danfos* and *molues* in an article by Emeka Nwosu at <https://etimesafrica.wordpress.com/2016/08/09/how-lagos-passengers-dump-danfo-and-molue-buses/>.

flâneur's gaze, viewed with compulsion instead of detachment. A further connection here is that this compulsion recalls the stalking carried out by Leke in *Bom Boy* which was discussed in Chapter 3. Similarly, Leke too is a stranger in a different country, whereas the Afropolitan flâneurs encountered in this chapter are strangers in their own country. When Cole's narrator returns to Nigeria after many years of absence, he re-familiarises himself with places he once knew well, but sees these with the eyes of a returnee who is almost as disconnected from the country as a stranger or tourist, an *oyinbo*.

Nonetheless, Cole's narrator tells the reader at the beginning of Chapter Twelve that "One goes to the market to participate in the world", and he describes the Tejuosho bus stop as "a tangle of traffic" and "one of the densest spots of human activity in the city" (*ED* 53). Despite his preference to not be part of the crowd, it is at this market that the narrator is annoyed when taken to be a foreigner, as vendors call out to him "*Oyinbo*", "White man" (*ED* 54) when he moves through the shops and merchandise of the marketplace. This flâneur is mistaken for white, whereas Abani's Elvis performs whiteness. Cole's narrator, as returnee, is a stranger, which also means that his observations are different to what they would have been before he went overseas. The bustling chaos of people going about their business is tangible:

> The concrete underfoot is curiously soft, tempered with use. Then I emerge to sunlight and the sudden hysteria of car horns and engines. Six roads meet here and there are no traffic lights. Congestion is the rule, to which there is rarely any exception. Here, I'm told is where the boy was killed. (*ED* 54)

History still lives on these streets, and the narrator is drawn to the memory of a similar act of mob justice meted out on a petty thief that took place when he himself was only a little boy. Cole's narrator-flâneur describes the "perpetual movement" from the high bridge at Ojota, "where the length of Ikorodu Road stretches into the city as far as the eye can see [and] one has a panoramic view of the thickly populated area below: cars, molues, danfos, people" (*ED* 123). This overgrown urban space is eternally busy while people are transported from one place to another, moving non-stop. Beyond Ojota is Chinatown:

> Chinatown in Lagos? But there it is, another signal that we are in a normal place, or a place that aspires to normalcy, like New York, London, Vancouver, San Francisco, with their Chinatowns. This one fits the bill, right down to the giant Chinese characters on the frontage. The Chinese have arrived, and they are visible all over Lagos, as merchants, as contractors, as laborers. This is home to them now. (*ED* 124)

The narrator's perspective is distinctly western, serving all the more to qualify him as an *oyinbo* flâneur. His western understanding can be contrasted with Elvis's very localised perspective of Lagos in *GraceLand* and his wonderment for that which is American. Normality is measured in bizarre fashion as the narrator's comparison of Lagos is with global megacities. While the ongoing influx of Chinese appears to be a world-wide phenomenon, such movement is largely driven by trade and economic need. The narrator points out that people "from all corners of the world have come to take advantage of the newly open economy. Indians, Lebanese, Germans, Americans, Brits" (*ED* 124). Nigeria entices people with the lure of good money to be made, and this is a place where the Afropolitan thrives.

Wherever there is money to be made, so too is there a chance of loss of riches. As already mentioned earlier, the narrator is well aware of bribery being akin to a national sport as it is a game almost everyone plays. With the proliferation of internet cafes, so too has there been a growth in internet misuse fraud, "popularly known as '419' after the section of the Nigerian criminal code it contravenes, [and which] is endemic in Nigeria" (*ED* 24). On the morning after arriving in Lagos the narrator pays a visit to Tomsed Cyber Café, which is close to capacity and filled with young customers between the ages of twenty and forty. After paying a fee and sitting at a computer, the narrator secretly observes the man seated next to him who is composing a message:

> The words I see him type, 'transfer,' 'dear friend,' 'deposited into your account forthwith,' present incontrovertible evidence: he is composing a 419 letter. I have stumbled onto the origin of the world-famous digital flotsam. I feel as though I have discovered the source of the Nile or the Niger. (*ED* 28)

Noticing that other men in the Café are composing similar letters, the narrator questions his cousin about the practice and learns that the universities are the "nerve centres" of this scam, which is also called "nineteen", and the scammers are known as "the yahoo boys" or "yahoo yahoo" (*ED* 29). Commenting on this endemic, corrupt practice, the narrator notes that gullible foreigners feed the needs of the scammers, whose letters supposedly come from

> the heirs of fictional magnates, from the widows of oil barons, from the legal representatives of incarcerated generals, and they are such enterprising samples of narrative fiction that I realize Lagos is a city of Scheherazades. (*ED* 29)

These fanciful tales are familiar stories that anyone who is connected to the internet has come across at one time or another, and the gullible remain just so, further enabling the practice to continue. Another such modern-day Scheherazade who comes to mind is Chris Abani's

protagonist, Elvis, in *GraceLand*, who creates highly entertaining fictions that he reads to his grandmother, pretending them to be letters from her pen pals (*GL* 100). Both *GraceLand* and *Every Day is for the Thief* are making a postmodern comment on writing fiction, since in a sense these texts become a map to be read, just as the city is is a text read by the flâneur.

Cole's titular thief appears halfway through his novel, in the marketplace. The narrator witnesses the atrocious act just as he had seen decades earlier:

> The boy is eleven, but he has eaten poorly all his life and looks much younger. He is crying. He is trying to explain something. Someone told me to do it, he says, that man over there. He points. It's futile. A wiry man steps forward and slaps him hard. It's not a bag, it turns out; it's a baby he's accused of stealing. Everyone knows that you can use a stolen baby to make money, to literally manufacture cash, in alliance with unseen occult powers. (*ED* 55)

Things move quickly, and suddenly a tyre encircles the boy's body, which is then "doused with petrol" (*ED* 55). There are echoes here with a similar necklace-of-fire scene in Abani's *GraceLand*. The uncomfortable description of beauty combined with horror in both novels is striking, making the experience all the more abject. Witnessing the tire being flung around the boy and petrol then being poured over him, the narrator observes that "[t]he splashing liquid is lighter than water, it is fragrant, it drips off him, beads in his woolly hair. He glistens" (*ED* 56). It is as if he is describing a Renaissance painting because of the beauty of the picture and attention to detail, rather than the horrific necklacing of a child, which suggests an almost grotesque apotheosis. These scenes are also about vigilante justice, which is a more sinister kind of chaos and which is dependent on a crowd for it to be effective.

4.3.2 Untangling the chaos and beauty of Lagos

Every Day is for the Thief offers numerous examples of ekphrasis,[130] which is a useful method of capturing a lively picture of the city in words, as was seen similarly in Chapter 3 with reference to examples in Patricia Schonstein's *Skyline*. The inclusion of photographs in Cole's novel adds a further dimension to the literary text, imbuing it with extra multi-sensory detail that adds various textures and levels of meaning. The photographs also problematize genre and leave the reader wondering if this is indeed fiction. It might well be more accurate

[130] In a keynote lecture on ekphrasis and visuality in Cole's fiction, Birgit Neumann argued that "the evocation of visual practices in Anglophone fiction constitutes an act of intermedial and transcultural translation" (n. pag.). A video of this lecture is available at <https://www.uni-giessen.de/faculties/gcsc/gcsc/video-blog/entries/2016/pushing-narrative-to-its-limits-ekphrasis-and-visuality-in-teju-coles-fiction>.

to say, as Monika Gehlawat does, that "*Thief* reads alternately as personal memoir, fictional narrative, travelogue, cultural commentary and art criticism" (2). While the Afropolitan photo-flâneur narrator tells the reader that he carries a digital camera on his person, he also says he only manages "to take a few photographs" (62). The novel bears a selection of Cole's own photographs of Lagos and the people who populate the dense yet fluid city, yet most of these are clearly shot from the relative safety of a vehicle. A photograph serves to emphasise the detached relationship between photographer and photographed, and this is amplified through the distancing afforded from the confines of a vehicle. Cole as author and photographer can himself also be seen as an Afropolitan *oyinbo* flâneur. The black and white photographs that adorn the pages of Cole's novel are sprinkled through the text in random fashion, slotted in without explanation or caption. Since no words appear alongside the photographs, the interpretation is left open to the reader.

The photographs in Cole's novel are symbols of both memory and forgetting, much like the journal belonging to Elvis's mother that Elvis carries around with him in *GraceLand*. Gehlawat argues that the meditative aspect of the photographs invites the reader to "linger and think", and such contemplation "resists, or subverts, the frenzied pace of the city that is [Cole's] subject" (2). While the photographs are not captioned or explained directly, the reader can only surmise how they connect to the text which they supplement. According to Annika McPherson, Cole's photographic works in *Every Day is for the Thief* are seen mostly "as illustrative and thus as enhancing the nonfiction, journalistic feel of the novel rather than as heightening the question and problem of perception" (266). Of particular interest is the subjective position of the photographer, through whose eyes the photograph is originally composed or framed. However, there is not total immersion with whatever is being photographed, as the photographer remains distant from the object or the scene.

Some of the photographs appearing in *Every Day is for the Thief* have clearly been taken from the relative safety of inside a car, through the window. As was seen earlier when he visited the National Museum, the photo-flâneur narrator had been forbidden from using his camera (*ED* 66), and so he remains cautious about using it in public. Later, in the closing chapter, the narrator says:

> I want to take the little camera out of my pocket and capture the scene. But I am afraid. Afraid that the carpenters, rapt in their meditative task, will look up at me; afraid that I will bind to film what is intended only for the memory, what is meant only for a sidelong glance followed by forgetting. (*ED* 138)

The camera here is thus intended for use as an *aide-mémoire*. This, similarly, is the dilemma of the flâneur who, even without a camera, captures the scene in the minds so that it may be remembered. When a scene is captured on film, however, multiple viewers who access the photographs are afforded the opportunity to imagine what lies beyond the picture, interpreting the scene as their own. The photograph captures a moment in time, and so too do stories. The power of the story is conveyed in this passage:

> The air in the strange, familiar environment of this city is dense with story, and it draws me into thinking of life as stories. The narratives fly at me from all directions. Everyone who walks into the house, every stranger I engage in conversation, has a fascinating story to deliver. The details I find so alluring in Gabriel García Márquez are here, awaiting their recording angel. All I have to do is prod gently, and people open up. And that literary texture, of lives full of unpredictable narrative, is what appeals. (*ED* 59)

The above extract has echoes with *GraceLand* as well as with *Skyline* since narrativization is one way the flâneur or flâneuse is able to capture a particular scene or event. The city becomes text. Just as the photograph helps with remembering, history too, provides the "unpredictable narrative" quoted earlier (*ED* 59), and there is no escaping what has taken place in the past, irrespective of what past or whose past it may have been.

Throughout *Every Day is for the Thief*, the narrator has had to confront his past in an attempt to reconcile memory, to heal, to move on, but it has not been a simple task. It is through walking the streets as a flâneur and revisiting past haunts that this Afropolitan narrator has interrogated the strength of the bonds that still tie him to his place of origin. Through a re-examination of his city, he makes the decision to leave once again instead of to remain rooted to a city that no longer seems to reflect his inner identity.

Through telling stories and taking photographs of the cityspace he has walked, the Afropolitan flâneur narrator shares his experiences with the reader. At the end of the novel, after boarding the aircraft bound for New York, the narrator ruminates:

> The word "home" sits in my mouth like foreign food. So simple a word, and so hard to pin to its meaning. We have not left yet, and already there is something drawing me back to this city, this country. *(ED* 135)

Notions of home and being a stranger are common themes in both *Every Day is for the Thief* as well as in *GraceLand,* where identity formation is foregrounded. Similar questions pertaining to the identity of the Afropolitan are portrayed in A. Igoni Barrett's novel, *Blackass,* which will be examined via the protagonist's flânerie in the next section of this chapter.

The narrator of *Every Day is for the Thief*, like Elvis in *GraceLand*, is a multisensory Afropolitan flâneur, and descriptions of the city are brought alive through olfactory and auditory images. Memories are what connect him to his original home, and this Afropolitan, as a photo-flâneur narrator, revisits the past through images as he seeks an answer to whether or not to return to Lagos to setttle. In this sense he is the opposite of Elvis, whose desire was always to leave Lagos. Both flâneurs do not entirely fit into their environment and are considered *oyinbo* for different reasons: Elvis looks white because of the make-up he wears as an Elvis impersonator, whereas Cole's narrator is mistaken for being *oyinbo* as he has forgotten his former ways of being a Lagosian. Another literary character who passes for *oyinbo* will be discussed in the next section of this chapter in the examination of A. Igoni Barrett's novel, *Blackass*.

4.4 A. Igoni Barrett's *Blackass* as Satirical Exploration of Identity Formation

Returning briefly to the Afropolitan debate, it is worth considering the question of how 'African' literature is read and what is generally understood to be Afropolitan writing. In an interview with writer Jennifer Makumbi, Aaron Bady asks whether Makumbi feels any particular affinity for categories such as 'African' writer, Ugandan writer, or Ganda writer, to which she replies that "categories are dangerous in as far as they limit the reach of an author in terms of readerships" (Bady, "Post-coloniality" n. pag.). This is an echo of Teju Cole's take on the subject of categorisation, mentioned in the previous section, where Cole finds it not to be a problem "as long as the labels are numerous" (Cole, "Cole Talks to Selasi", n. pag.). In Bady's review of A. Igoni Barrett's novel, *Blackass*, he suggests it is like a "photo-negative" of Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah,* adding that "if *Americanah* is an 'Afropolitan' narrative, then the one thing *Blackass* isn't, is Afropolitan" (Bady, "Barrett's *Blackass*" n. pag.). Contrary to Bady's suggestion, *Blackass* will be read here as an Afropolitan narrative, and reasons for this will be explored in the ensuing discussion of the text.

Published in 2015, Barrett's *Blackass* is a Kafkaesque satire, taking bustling Lagos as its setting. The young Nigerian protagonist, Furo Wariboko, wakes up one morning surprised to see himself transformed overnight into the skin of a white man: he has red hair, green eyes, and the only part of blackness remaining are his buttocks, or in vulgar slang, his 'ass'. The

novel is about race, identity and belonging. The first few pages of Barrett's novel are almost word for word Kafka, whose *Metamorphosis* begins like this:

> One morning, when Gregor Samsa woke from troubled dreams, he found himself transformed in his bed into a horrible vermin. He lay on his armour-like back, and if he lifted his head a little he could see his brown belly, slightly domed and divided by arches into stiff sections. (1)

When Gregor turns to the window, he notices that it is raining, and he wonders why his alarm clock has not rung. His mother knocks on the door. In Barrett's *Blackass*, the first chapter begins as follows:

> Furo Wariboko awoke this morning to find that dreams can lose their way and turn up on the wrong side of sleep. He was lying nude in bed, and when he raised his head a fraction he could see his alabaster belly, and his pale legs beyond, covered with fuzz that glinted bronze in the cold daylight pouring in through the open window. (*BA* 3)

Still lying in bed, Furo is "startled […] by his phone alarm", before he hears his mother knocking on the bedroom door (*BA* 4–5). Furo is confused and disorientated. Returning briefly to Chris Abani's *GraceLand*, there are similar Kafkaesque echoes in the opening pages which are worth noting here: Elvis stands by an open window. It is morning. There is a knock on the bedroom door (*GL* 3–4). In all three narratives, identity is at stake: Gregor becomes "vermin"; Furo becomes "white" and Elvis mimics whiteness. This metamorphosis, these changes, recall Breytenbach's "Middle World" inhabitants who, as J.U. Jacobs elaborates, have "a fascination for metamorphosis and their consciousness is characterised by multiplicity, not duality" (159). Such metamorphic multiplicity suggests a hybridity that is evident also in the Afropolitan flâneur, who has a fluid identity.

In an interview, Barrett explains that when he realized his idea for a story had similarities with Kafka's *The Metamorphosis*, he re-read the story and decided that his Furo Wariboko would do the opposite of what Kafka's Gregor Samsa does. Thus, unlike Gregor Samsa, who hides in his room in the hope that his family will eventually accept his bizarre transformation, Barrett's protagonist chooses rather to run away from his family, and sneakily leaves the house, never to return home. Barrett's novel satirically explores issues of racial and sexual identity in order to highlight the bias and prejudice that surrounds these issues. For instance, after Furo's new lover, Syreeta, discovers that his buttocks are black, the narrator notes that:

> No one asks to be born, to be black or white or any colour in between, and yet the identity a person is born into becomes the hardest to explain to the world. […] He knew that so long as the vestiges of his old self remained with him, his new self would never be safe from ridicule and incomprehension. (*BA* 111)

The only visible trace of his former self is hidden from public view beneath his clothing. Outwardly, therefore, nobody but Furo and his lover knows this secret. That he is transformed into a white man, that is the real difficulty, since in areas of Lagos "such as Agege, Egbeda, Ikorodu" he stands out very obviously because "an oyibo strolling down their street is an incidence of some thrill" (*BA* 10). Furo is paradoxically both a stranger and not a stranger at the same time. However, despite his changed skin colour, his accent and his name remain "markers of his true identity [which] continue to plague him" (Rono 19). When Furo asks the time of day from a passerby, the woman comments on his Nigerian accent, and he replies simply "I'm Nigerian" (*BA* 12). He soon discovers that his new identity commands interest and respect, which helps to secure him a job and the interest of both men and women alike. Afropolitan urban identities are forever moving and changing, yet Furo is thus far only partly changed. It becomes necessary for him to attempt other methods of updating his newly acquired identity.

All three novels examined in this chapter pass comment on cosmopolitanism as well as on social and cultural globalism (as seen in the movements of ideas and information). The various protagonists at some stage or another have to deal with passport control bureaucracy. This is significant because it points to an Afropolitan concern with "existence and the nature of being and becoming" (Knudsen and Rahbek 35). It is impossible to move about legally anywhere in the world without correct papers of entry and exit. In *GraceLand*, Elvis inherits Redemption's passport; in *Every Day is for the Thief,* the novel begins with the narrator attempting to have his passport reissued; and in *Blackass,* for various reasons, it becomes necessary for Furo Wariboko to obtain a new passport. Inevitably some form of bribery or corruption is also involved in order to speed up the process. In *Blackass,* Furo is "to wait by a flagpole at the passport office entrance" although he feels "it seemed imprudent, provoking […] to walk into the lair of immigration officials and stand under the Nigerian flag" (*BA* 97). Nonetheless things move along better than expected:

> The bribe-sharing, the queue-jumping, the fact non-checking, and the customer-handling were as efficient as any system whose design was alimentary: in through the mouth and straight out the anus. He was no more than a bite of food for a subverted system, which chewed him up for money

> and, to avoid the cramp of constipation, shat him out fast. It was bad business for Passport Man to fart where he ate, and so, for his own sake, he put real effort into guiding Furo around the hiccups in the bureaucracy. (*BA* 103)

Barrett's choice of vulgar language is a response to the revulsion he feels for a system that is extremely dishonest. This scatalogical portrayal of a corrupt system echoes that of Abani's in *GraceLand*, where the excremental picture he paints of Maroko also suggests a skewed bureaucracy, and leaving the country becomes the only way out for some. Similarly, in *Every Day is for the Thief,* the narrator displayed an aversion to corruption. Another reference to corruption appears in *Blackass* when Furo's parents return from a visit to the police, and Furo's sister wonders (via Twitter) how the police could ask for a bribe before doing anything (*BA* 80). Corruption seems to be part of the territory, but it is something that all the Afropolitan flâneurs in this chapter appear to encounter at one stage or another.

Listening to the company driver, Headstrong, Furo learns of his desire to "travel overseas, anywhere was good so long as it wasn't Africa, though South Africa wasn't bad, there were white people there" (*BA* 187). When Headstrong asks Furo why he has not left Nigeria, his simple answer is "Because I like it here" (*BA* 187). Furo has never been tempted to leave, to migrate, to study at a university overseas. And yet, in a different sense, Furo has left – his home, his family, his former life. When he later has to travel for work, he realises that the only official identity document he has is still in the name of Furo Wariboko, but that "was the last thing he wanted, this pulling back to a place he had left behind" (*BA* 214). This paradox is one that plagues transnationals and returnees alike. Furo's world might be small, but the issues he faces are global.

4.4.1 Not indifferent to difference

> He was white, full oyibo, no doubt about it. (*BA* 4)

Just as Teju Cole's narrator was a stranger, *oyinbo*, returning to his homeland after many years, so too is Barrett's protagonist, "full oyibo". It is this *oyinbo*-ness which adds to their respective experiences as they navigate their urban surrounds, as neither is in familiar territory since things have changed – in Cole's narrator's case, the country has changed, as has he, since living elsewhere, while in Barrett's protagonist's case, Furo himself has changed. Both individuals are "acutely aware at all times of [their] non-belonging" (Bady and Selasi, "Stranded" 158). On the morning that he awakes transformed into a white man, Furo

has to get to a job interview, and sets off, on foot. Instead of flâneuristically observing his urban surroundings, Furo himself becomes the object of other people's gaze while

> stares followed him everywhere. Pedestrians stopped and stared, or stared as they walked. Motorists slowed their cars and stared, and on occasion honked their horns to draw his face so they could stare into it. (*BA* 8)

As he continues walking, he passes people and places he knows, but walks unrecognised. "In some parts of the city," writes Barrett, "it is not unusual to see a white person walking the streets on a sunny day" (*BA* 9). Furo thus morphs into a "contra-flâneur", a "self-conscious urban viewer" (Hildebrand 1) and attempts to conceal his own identity:

> Lone white face in a sea of black, Furo learned fast. To walk with his shoulders up and his steps steady. To keep his gaze lowered and his face blank. To ignore the fixed stares, the pointed whispers, the blatant curiosity. And he learnt how it felt to be seen as a freak: exposed to wonder, invisible to comprehension. (*BA* 11)

This short passage could be read as a commentary on what it feels like to walk in somebody else's skin, to walk in a crowd where everyone else appears different, and to have the gaze fall upon the individual who is actually not the same as everyone else. Writing about walking while black in America, George Yancy notes that the white gaze is "hegemonic, historically grounded in material relations of white power" (n. pag.).[131] However, Furo is a white man, *oyinbo*, in Nigeria, so the reversal should hold true but it does not. As Yancy continues, "it was deemed disrespectful to violate the white gaze by looking directly into the eyes of someone white" (n. pag.) and this is precisely why Furo keeps his eyes lowered. Further encounters on the street elicit various reactions, and when he asks a passer-by the time, she "squawk[s] with laughter" when he answers that he is Nigerian after she has commented on his Nigerian accent (*BA* 12).

While he is answering many questions at the human resources department of the company where he is to be interviewed, Obata, looking at Furo's CV, glares at him and exclaims "you – a white Nigerian? That is just not possible!" (*BA* 21). Furo then begins "to see that he had no past as he was and no future as he had been" (*BA* 21–2), which is similar to the condition of a transnational migrant who has to try to forget the past and attempt to plan a new future, while at the same time preserving aspects of such past in the diaspora space. Nonetheless, through a series of events, Furo accepts a job offer and makes a decision to

[131] See more in George Yancy's article "Walking While Black in the 'White Gaze'" at <https://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2013/09/01/walking-while-black-in-the-white-gaze/>.

leave his family, because he is unable to explain his changed circumstances, in particular, his skin colour. On foot, once again, Furo is met with stares, and "all followed him with their eyes as he strode by" but still he "kept on moving", onwards, "throwing step after step along the sun-cracked sidewalk" (*BA* 47) towards the largest shopping mall in Lagos, far away from his family, where he need not fear being found by them. It is in this strange space where Furo manages to hide by fitting in with others:

> in the crowded passage ahead of him were several oyibo people, some Indian- and Lebanese-looking, some Chinese […] all of them as indifferent to their difference as he wasn't to his. (*BA* 50)

All of those who are not Nigerian are seen as *oyibo*, and yet the range of people Barrett mentions here shows racial groupings that are often othered through conservative western eyes. Furo remains unprepared for how others might see him, and in the mall where he now finds himself, he encounters white people who are more like his new self. While they are comfortable in their skins, he is still learning to adapt and understand his new identity. The ongoing Afropolitan identity similarly is in a state of becoming. However, unlike other Afropolitans, Furo does not travel internationally, and he has chosen to stay in Nigeria. While he never completed his degree, he did attend university for a period, but at the age of 33 he still lives with his parents. Furo has been forced by circumstance to create a new identity for himself, and he has to try to live with that change. Having found a job, a girlfriend, a whole new life, Furo also has to settle on a new name:

> He had been trying out names as he chose his clothes for work, but none yet sounded right, none felt like his to keep. At first he considered taking Kalabari names, and then Itsekiri, Efik, Yoruba, but he soon gave up on Nigeria. In his new life he was American and his new name would confirm that. A new name from the new world for the new him – that sounded right. (*BA* 157–58)

Furo's renaming is an urgent attempt to claim a specific identity for himself, one which will match his new life. Barrett makes it clear that this is not a lighthearted matter: much consideration goes into Furo's re-identification. Since Furo imagines being American, this is a constructed identity, it is a performance he must carry out with careful attention to detail, even though his Nigerian roots remain. The final section of the novel, titled "Frank Whyte", which is Furo's new identity, is preceded with a quote from Frantz Fanon's *Black Skin, White*

Masks: “For the black man there is only one destiny. And it is white” (*BA* 171).[132] Barrett’s novel is is an Afropolitan narrative because of the manner in which it brings such matters into sharp focus. When interviewed by Jamilah King, Barrett explained that *Blackass* “is about identity” and he continued by saying that “there are many ways of being Nigerian”, and there are equally “many ways of being human in the world” (Barrett n. pag.). This echoes Taiye Selasi’s famous words “We are Afropolitans: not citizens, but Africans of the world” (“Bye-Bye” n. pag.). While Furo is a satirical Afropolitan, is he also a flâneur?

Furo can be seen as an atypical flâneur in that his observations are directed inwardly rather than outwardly. He is introspective and the gaze falls more often *on him*, rather than his gaze being directed over the urban surroundings. In this sense, then, Furo can be interpreted as being a contra-flâneur. Seen by others as *oyinbo* due to his white skin, Furo is nonetheless Afropolitan, at the same time as he is a metamorphic contra-flâneur.

4.4.2 Texting the city

The existence of social media as a means of communication has led to its integration in mainstream publications, as will be evidenced in this section. The character Igoni in Barrett’s *Blackass* will be interpreted as a cyber-flâneur for reasons that will become clear in the discussion that follows.

The economy of words and immediacy of sharing and reading media such as Twitter allow for countless possibilities a novel is not normally able to offer. Teju Cole constructed an entire narrative titled “Small Fates”[133] out of a series of tweets, which comprised incidents or news briefs known in French as *fait divers*. Twitter is a platform that allows for small pieces of information to be shared via the internet with great speed, and while most tweets are not written as stories, it is indeed possible to amass a number of tweets into a narrative. However, as pointed out by Al Shariqi and Abbasi, “Twitter fiction is considered an incomplete piece of art by traditional standards because it cannot incorporate all five basic traditional elements of a story: the setting, characters, plot, conflict, and resolution” (16). Contrary to what this statement claims, it is indeed possible to convey an entire story, concise

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[132] In an interview, Barrett says “So I felt that resonated with the Fanon quote – the world we engage with today is based on a Western model. In the end, the destiny of the black man so far has been to become white, and that will only balance out when it’s become the destiny of the white man to become black. The only way the white man will want to become black is when blacks finally begin to own their own cultures. So that’s why the quote resonated with me; I felt it was painful but honest.” (in Serrell interview).

[133] For more information on Teju Cole’s “Small Fates” see <http://www.tejucole.com/other-words/small-fates/>. Cole praises the length limitation of Twitter in his article and offers further examples of small fates and explains how each fate “is complete in itself” and needs “neither elaboration nor sequel” (n. pag.).

and compressed, and include these elements in merely a few words. This can be clearly seen in one of the *fait divers* provided by Cole: "In Ikotun, Mrs Ojo, who was terrified of armed robbers, died in her barricaded home, of smoke inhalation" (n. pag.). All the necessary story elements mentioned by Al Shariqi and Abbasi are included in this one line, thus qualifying it as a complete art piece.

Online media such as blogs are platforms where, as noted by Annika McPherson, "the ongoing contentious debate surrounding the Afropolitan continues to be led" (259) and she lists several examples. Through the internet, many more people are afforded access to reading some form of textual narrative. The Afropolitan flâneur walks around with a mobile phone that has a good camera and easy internet access. As noted by Jason Kalin,[134] "the two most popular questions of mobile phone users are: where are you, and can you hear me now?", revealing the importance attached to "location awareness" (62). Indeed, it is what keeps many people connected to life around them, and one feels lost without a mobile phone.

In an interview conducted by the filmmaker and director of *Lagos/Koolhaas*, Bregtje van der Haak, Achille Mbembe says that the "Internet intensifies that capacity to dream and that narrative of liberation, which was invested earlier on in other kinds of utopias – revolutionary and progressive" (in van der Haak, "The Internet" n. pag.).

It is this capacity to dream, to imagine something different, in a space of anonymity, that frees up Igoni to be the person he (and eventually, 'she') wishes to be, and when, in the narrative, through a series of tweets, Tekena asks Igoni what she should call him, he jokingly replies, "Call me Morpheus" (*BA* 94). The reference here is not only to Kafka's *The Metamorphosis*, but also to Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, where Morpheus, the god of dreams, could mimic humans and take any form he wanted, which is precisely what Igoni eventually does, by changing gender to become a woman. This becomes a performed identity that he has chosen.

By making use of social media as narrative technique, Barrett is able to experiment with form, adding a further dimension to his novel. It is as a result of new technologies, such as the internet, that "the distance between the human and the object" is erased (Mbembe in van der Haak, "The Internet" n. pag.). Mbembe elaborates by explaining a specific African turn:

> in African cosmologies, African systems of thought before the colonial era, and even now, a human person could *metamorphose* into something else.

[134] For a more in-depth look at how mobile technologies and applications are changing the ways users organize and experience city space, see Kalin's paper "Toward a Rhetoric of Hybrid-Space Walking".

> […] So, if one wants to think in those rather essentialist terms, Africa is a fertile ground for the new digital technologies, because the philosophy of those technologies is more or less exactly the same as ancient African philosophies. This archive of permanent transformation, mutation, conversion and circulation is an essential dimension of what we can call African culture. (in van der Haak, "The Internet" n. pag., italics mine).

Mbembe's observations here offer a useful parallel between African philosophies and digital technologies. Mbembe speaks of African myths of origin, explaining how "migration occupies a central role" (in van der Haak, "The Internet" n. pag.). Change is constant. Importantly, the point Mbembe goes on to make is that the internet is not exclusive. The "flexibility and this capacity for constant innovation, extension of the possible" that is evident in Africa, says Mbembe, "is also the spirit of the Internet" (in van der Haak, "The Internet" n. pag.). The internet is alive, it is accessible.[135]

The section of the novel titled "@_Igoni", narrated through a first-person point of view, is recounted through a series of tweets, sandwiched between introductory and concluding paragraphs, thus giving credence to the popularity of social networking in a specific setting. Having his interest piqued after first meeting Furo Wariboko in the flesh, Igoni "did what everyone else does these days: [he] Googled him" (*BA* 77). The internet is "radically accessible, interactive, egalitarian and non-hierarchic" and because of its availability to the masses, "it has the potential to generate manifold personal connections that transcend normal boundaries within our society" (Harvey in Francis, n. pag.).[136] It is for these reasons that social media have proliferated, and there are multifarious possibilities in cyberspace. In the novel, Igoni's search leads him to Facebook and Twitter:

> And so I, @_igoni, spent bundles of time on Twitter. Hours spent lurking on the timelines of virtual strangers. Hours spent snooping through megabytes of diarrhoeic data. But my investment paid off, I got what I wanted, I found @pweetychic_tk, whom I realised was Furo's sister as I read [a] tweet of hers. (*BA* 78)

Barrett seems to suggest that the virtual internet world is as nauseating and as scatological as his characters sometimes see the real world. Igoni is a cyber-flâneur, moving in a virtual

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[135] Miriam Pahl mentions that in his 2015 keynote lecture at the 2015 African Literature Association conference in Bayreuth, Germany, Cole "introduces Twitter as an African city in order to demonstrate the internet's importance in revolutionary movements on the African continent like, for example, the Arab spring. He emphasizes the connection, but also the distinction between people marching in the streets and people talking about it on social media" (Pahl 80).

[136] Larry Harvey is the founder of Burning Man, an annual event that takes place in the Nevada desert. For more information, see the Burning Man website at <https://burningman.org/>. Similar art and culture events take place elsewhere, such as the Burning Man regional event in Tankwa, Karoo, South Africa (see <https://www.afrikaburn.com/>).

world where stalking and ‘following’ is permissible to a large extent, even although different rules apply. His becomes a virtual “Thirdspace”, in Edward Soja’s flexible spatial terms, in addition to Homi Bhabha’s Third Space of difference and hybridity. The cyber-flâneur is connected to others via accessing a telecommunication network with fingertips on a keyboard, just as the literary flâneur is immersed in the crowd via walking on foot in the streets. The cyber-flâneur can create her or his own identity at will, and can change persona at any moment without the knowledge of anyone else. Social media platforms are word-image oriented, allowing for multiple ways of seeing and interpreting the world around oneself.

Lurking in the anonymity of cyberspace, @_igoni is able to “follow” Furo’s sister Tekena, known on Twitter as @pweetychic_tk. In this virtual world, @_igoni reads Tekena’s tweets “for hidden meanings in her abbreviations and punctuation choices” (*BA* 78). Thinking about his own transformation, @_igoni writes that “[l]ong before Furo’s story became my own, I was already trying to say what I see now, that we are all constructed narratives” (*BA* 83). The various social media platforms on the internet develop new languages, and new identities can be created through a few taps and clicks on a digital keyboard.

While attempting to “get some insight into a part of Furo’s story”, Igoni himself has questions related to his own identity, more specifically his own unfolding sexual identity. By the end of the novel Furo begins to understand that identity is more than skin deep. Later, when Furo meets up again with Igoni, who has since undergone a gender transformation, Furo notices that “this woman, this Igoni, wasn’t that man. Not any more” (*BA* 226). Furo feels relieved because “[s]omewhere, in some way, it was always happening to someone” (*BA* 226). Barrett’s satirical novel delves deeper and more seriously into issues surrounding African identity, and in this sense, it is a text that can certainly be added to the Afropolitan canon. “Any which way you slice it,” writes TMS Ruge in his blog, “the African story is an Afropolitan story” (n. pag.). Afropolitanism, as a way of being African in the world, is a particular acknowledgement of globalisation. Just as Chimamanda Adichie claimed in her TEDTalk,[137] Ruge also notes that Afropolitans “aren’t defined by a single narrative” (n. pag.). There are many stories that connect Africans of the world, and as evidenced in Barrett’s novel, both Furo and Igoni find their own ways of negotiating their individual Afropolitan paths in the world.

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[137] Adichie’s talk “The Danger of a Single Story” can be viewed online at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D9Ihs241zeg>.

In *Blackass* while the flâneur characters are not immediately obvious flâneurs, they are specific Afropolitan figures who are all considered *oyinbo*, or strangers, for different reasons. Furo is *oyinbo* firstly because of his pale skin, and secondly because he adopts an American identity. He is a contra-flâneur who is characterised by metamorphosis, a consequence not of migration, but of a form of internal exile. Instead of observing his surroundings and being immersed in the crowd, he stands out in the crowd and is observed by others. Equally metamorphic is Igoni, who undergoes a sex change, and whose Afropolitan flânerie takes the form of cyber-flânerie, since his 'walking' is stalking on the internet.

While Furo and Igoni are unusual Afropolitan flâneur figures, their inclusion here serves to reinforce the fluidity of the literary flâneur and the capaciousness inherent in the figure of Afropolitan.

4.5 Conclusion: Black and White in Colour

In each of the novels discussed in this chapter, the narrator or protagonist is an Afropolitan flâneur who is an *oyinbo* or stranger who finds his way through a personal mapping of urban Lagos. Abani's Elvis as *oyinbo* flâneur dances in a crowd, but he is never really part of the crowd, as his dance is a solo performance. He performs whiteness by emulating his American namesake, Elvis Presley. Cole's narrator-flâneur straddles two worlds as a reverse migrant who is mistaken as an *oyinbo* when he visits a local market, and this confuses him as he was never considered a stranger when he used to live there. Barrett's Furo is also seen as *oyinbo* despite speaking the language like a local. In the three novels examined in this chapter, issues of identity formation, race and gender have been brought to the fore through an examination of encounters and observations on the streets, in the "half-slum, half paradise" (*GL* 7) of Lagos where there is so much strangeness in the familiar.

These three novels engender what Achille Mbembe refers to as an "[a]wareness of the interweaving of the here and there" ("Afropolitanism" 28). The contradictions of Lagos are performed through the identities of the protagonists who combine oppositional racial or gender positions. Achille Mbembe's interpretation of Afropolitanism "from the viewpoint of Africa" provides a deep-rooted understanding of globalism as including intra-African mobility ("Afropolitanism" 27). This is confirmed by the "pre-colonial history of African societies [which] was a history of people in perpetual movement throughout the continent" ("Afropolitanism" 27). Mobility is an essential component of both flânerie as well as Afropolitanism. The act of walking is necessary for each of these flâneurs as it situates them

in a space that is fluid and where encounters are given a chance to take place. It is in those points of crossing and intersection, where meetings with others occur, that these Lagosian Afropolitan flâneurs sense themselves as outsiders, as *oyinbo*.

All three novels considered are palimpsests which contain layers of hybridity, transnationalism and Afropolitanism. Barrett re-writes Kafka's *The Metamorphosis* by setting it in a different time and place; Cole's narrator is a returnee whose gaze re-visits past haunts; and Abani's narrative form is one of bricolage and pastiche, suggesting that his protagonist will re-build his life anew elsewhere even if on the ever-shifting foundations of his own history and ancestry.

The focus on Lagos has allowed for an interrogation of the Lagosian flâneur himself, as the *oyinbo* flâneurs are Afropolitans who in one way or another perform whiteness and become strangers in their own country. The suggestion here is that the Afropolitan flâneur – in this context at least – is always-already an insider and an outsider. Belonging and non-belonging in this busy and crowded city are determined for these flâneurs by means of how they observe and integrate into their urban surroundings.

The Afropolitan as *oyinbo* in the three texts examined here embodies alienation of self, others and the environment, and in this manner intersects with the figure of the flâneur. Rob Shields writes:

> The failure of flânerie is that it does not solve the alienation of the flâneur himself. It involves staging an alienated relationship with the environment and cruelly perpetuates alienation from the Other. […] The flâneur is both present and not present; he seeks in proximate auras, traces of the far-away. (77)

Although Shields claims this to be a failure of flânerie, the ambiguous relationship embodied in this alienation mirrors the contradictions of the Lagosian cityscape itself. There are echoes of Mbembe's "traces of remoteness in closeness" ("Afropolitanism" 28) in Shields's words above. While Shields speaks of alienation as a "failure", it is more of a reality with regard to the Lagosian Afropolitan flâneur, who is seen as a stranger, an *oyinbo*, as the three texts in this chapter have shown. Alienation and disconnection are common experiences of the Afropolitan *oyinbo* flâneur.

Elvis's identity has been a spectral presence from the start, when he noticed his own face in a puddle "floating there like a ghostly head" (*GL* 6), evidence of his alienated and disembodied connection to his surroundings. Contrary to what Shields says in the extract above, the flâneur's alienation does not require to be solved nor does it need salvation. These

oyinbo flâneurs have all grown to some degree. All three protagonists examined in this chapter demonstrate Sarah Nuttall's idea that "entanglement is frequently revealed to be a process of becoming someone you were not in the beginning" (*Entanglement* 58).

It is through the act of walking – be it in Lagos or cyberspace – that the protagonist flâneurs of these novels lead us, the readers, to recognise so much strangeness in the familiar and so much of what is familiar in the strangeness.

Chapter 5: New African Diasporas in Paris, London and New York

5.1 Introduction: Roots and Routes

> I came from a country where race was not an issue; I did not think of myself as black and I only became black when I came to America. (Adichie, *Americanah* 290)

> Because we were not in our country, we could not use our own languages, and so when we spoke our voices came out bruised. […] In America we did not always have the words. (Bulawayo 240)

In novels such as Chimamanda Adichie's *Americanah* quoted above, as well as NoViolet Bulawayo's *We Need New Names* and Chris Abani's *GraceLand*, to name a few, the protagonists leave their African countries for a new life in America. Immigration becomes a long-term re-settling in what for these protagonists will always be a strange place. In the quotations above, while Bulawayo highlights the linguistic handicaps the immigrant experiences, Adichie focuses on race and identity, which her protagonist Ifemelu elaborates on extensively in her blog.[138] Kenyan born postcolonial scholar Simon Gikandi, who lives in America, says in conversation with the authors of *In Search of the Afropolitan*, that "Europeans do not become white until they arrive in the US" (in Knudsen and Rahbek 61). This equates with what Adichie's black protagonist says in the quote above. Gikandi adds that some of his white South African friends were surprised when "their attempts to claim that they are African" were rapidly thwarted as soon as they were "adopted into American racial structures" (in Knudsen and Rahbek 61). Race matters differently to individuals in different places, and of different backgrounds.

While race is pertinent and determines how the black person walks, as was seen in the previous chapter, it is but one aspect that impacts on the Afropolitan flâneur. Interlinked with race are anxieties attached to inhabiting unfamiliar spaces. Such new spaces can confuse the migrant. Migration is complex from the point of view of transnational literary theory. To reiterate what was stated in Chapter 1, the term 'migrant' is to be understood in its broadest sense to denote an individual who travels and crosses borders for any number of reasons.[139] Included under the umbrella term 'migrant' are 'immigrant' and 'emigrant'. This chapter

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[138] Ifemelu's blog in Adichie's novel *Americanah* carries the title "Raceteenth or Various Observations About American Blacks (Those Formerly Known as Negroes) by a Non-American Black" (4).

[139] See a lengthier definition of 'migrant' as it is used in this thesis in Section 1.2 of Chapter 1 in the discussion of African and transnational flâneurs.

problematises African migrant experiences of the act of walking in Paris, London and New York. Each of the flâneur characters discussed in this chapter will be seen as a distinct literary imagining of the Afropolitan flâneur, while the shift in perspective to the metropoles of the coloniser serves to extend the term 'Afropolitan flâneur' even further.

It is fitting then to turn the discussion to the city that birthed the flâneur – Paris – by examining in some detail Alain Mabanckou's novel *Blue White Red,* which is set in the beautiful "City of Lights" or "la Ville Lumière". Attention will be paid to a movement known as *La Sape*, which originated in colonial Congo in the 1930s and which is "defined by contradictions [and] legends of political resistance" (Steinkopf-Frank 1), where sartorial elegance is used to create a unique personal identity. The *sapeur*, Parisian or *mikiliste*[140] is a performer, and as a dandy-flâneur he translates his urban experience into the art of dressing elegantly, which he self-consciously shows off to fellow urbanites. This "black diasporic dandyism" plays out in the streets as a means of "transcend[ing] [a] rather chaotic urban situation" (Mbikayi 10). Where the flâneur is mobile on foot, the *sapeur*'s sense of fashion invokes a performed mobility of class. The stylised movements of the *sapeur*, when he or she walks, are a unique performance designed specifically to draw attention to the *sapeur*'s impeccable dress style. Paris, as capital of the fashion world, is the mecca of the *mikiliste*, a symbol of vestimentary freedom and artistic expression.

Following the analysis of Mabanckou's novel, the focus will shift to a reading of Biyi Bandele's *The Street*, set in London's Brixton, where the reader is introduced to a mix of characters whose unplanned flânerie takes the form of the *dérive*, or drift, and who fill the lively urban atmosphere with both joy and pathos. The chapter will close with an analysis of Teju Cole's *Open City,* set mainly in New York.

As explored in these three texts, the following questions will be posed: Do these Afropolitan flâneurs integrate into their foreign surroundings or do they remain outsiders? How exactly do the characters 'of Africa' in *Blue White Red, The Street* and *Open City* navigate their way, given their backgrounds, and come to understand Paris, London or New York respectively? Another way of phrasing this is what set of survival skills do these individual characters require so that they can integrate comfortably as immigrants? What about those who, like the author Taiye Selasi, have a connection to Africa that comes not by birth or living there, but through one or both parents? It is through considering such questions

[140] A *sapeur* is a member of *La Sape* movement, who dresses elegantly. Jaime Hanneken uses the terms "*sapeurs, Parisiens* or *mikilistes*" interchangeably, and as evidenced in *Blue White Red*, both "Parisian" and "*sapeur*" are used throughout the text. An in-depth definition of the *sapeur* will be arrived at during the course of this chapter.

that this chapter aims to expand upon the definition of the Afropolitan and infuse the figure of the flâneur with multiple mobilities and gazes.

The literary flâneurs examined in this chapter are, like most (but certainly not all) Afropolitans, black. Yet they find themselves in countries that are predominantly populated by whites. In the previous chapter, each of the black flâneurs that was examined performed whiteness in different ways, in a country predominantly black. While the flâneur is traditionally conceived as a white person, and the Afropolitan as black, this does not mean that race alone is what dictates their identity. Writing about black metropolitan life in London, Mpalive-Hangson Msiska coins the word "Blaneur" or "Afraneur" (9) for the black flâneur, while Vivian Bickford-Smith writes about "Black Baudelaires" (*Emergence* 197), thereby attempting to decolonise the flâneur. However, Bickford-Smith's label could be seen as neo-colonial since black people are not simply mimics of white people. White cannot always be the default position from which everything else is measured. Flânerie existed in Africa in some form long before the act of walking and observing the city environment was given a name.

A paradoxical immersion in the city as well as a certain detachment or alienation is evident in flânerie. This paradox can be seen with the Afropolitan migrant too. As a result of migrant flows, the contemporary city today is a more multicultural, fluid space than it was a century ago. Achille Mbembe's notion of Afropolitanism, as discussed in Chapter 1, is seen as an "interweaving of worlds" ("Afropolitanism" 28) in an Africa where subjects of "racial multiplicity" (29) all have a place together. Thus Mbembe conceives of 'African' as being racially diverse and inclusive, and removed from racial colour classification. If we adopt Mbembe's stance, as I do, then Taiye Selasi's Afropolitan "Africans of the world" ("Bye-Bye" n. pag.) must include "the experience of white Africans, Arab Africans, Indian Africans" (Knudsen and Rahbek 61) as well as Chinese Africans, coloured Africans, and all other possible shades and ethnic mixes of 'African'. However, and understandably, Mbembe's utopian vision is challenged by Simon Gikandi who extends the idea outside of Africa with regard to "the issues Africans face as migrants" (in Knudsen and Rahbek 61). Gikandi's concern will receive due attention in this chapter when the migrant Afropolitan subject is considered in Paris, London and New York. Race is not a criterion for inclusion in the category of Afropolitan flâneur, since one does not have to be white to be a flâneur and one does not have to be black to be an Afropolitan. However, race does have a huge impact on the Afropolitan flâneur, and in many ways defines the identity of different types of Afropolitan flâneurs. In this chapter, therefore, texts which draw attention to the

contradictions and paradoxes that are intrinsic to both the Afropolitan and to flânerie have been selected for analysis.

Walking the city should be a simple activity possible for all able-bodied individuals world-wide. This is not the case. Some cities are just not walkable and some people are not able to walk as freely through the urban environment as are others. “On the streets,” writes Aminatta Forna, in an online article, “race and gender intersect, the dominance of men over women, of white over black, of white men over white women, of black men over black women, of Hispanic men over Hispanic women and so forth” (n. pag.). There are many reasons for this inequality, not least to do with who owns the power of the gaze. For instance, walking as a black person, even today, does not come without its own complex set of problems. As recently as early 2018 in Philadelphia, the police were summoned after a store manager reported two black men who were meeting in a coffee shop.[141] The men were cursorily handcuffed and arrested for ostensibly loitering and not ordering anything to eat or drink. This is but one of many such incidents which continue to occur, and racial profiling remains a cause for concern because it makes the simple act of walking restrictive and inaccessible for some. In “Walking while Black”, an online version of his essay “Black and Blue”, Garnette Cadogan writes:

> Walking while black restricts the experience of walking, renders inaccessible the classic Romantic experience of walking alone. It forces me to be in constant relationship with others, unable to join the New York flâneurs I had read about and hoped to join. […] Walking as a black man has made me feel simultaneously more removed from the city, in my awareness that I am perceived as suspect […]. It has made me walk more purposefully in the city, becoming part of its flow, rather than observing, standing apart. (n. pag.)

While he was born and raised in Jamaica, Cadogan now lives in New York. As indicated in the extract above, while walking puts people in relationship with others, some people of colour, such as himself, are othered in the activity of walking. Black skin seen on the streets of New York is interpreted by some as non-belonging. This brings to mind a chapter titled “The Fact of Blackness” in Frantz Fanon’s *Black Skin, White Masks,* where Fanon recalls when in France he was pointed out as a “dirty nigger” (33; 109).

In a recent 2018 interview, Cadogan explains that walking is much more than getting from point A to point B: he sees walking “as discovery, as escape, encounter, arrival, rest,

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[141] The incident occurred at a Starbucks coffee chain store in Philadelphia early in 2018 and led to protests nationwide and boycotts of Starbucks as far as neighbouring Canada. A video of the arrest can be viewed at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NWOz3OZ6J9M>.

walking as a way of becoming more aware of the self, walking as a way to become aware of other selves" (King-Abadi n. pag.). In order to discover or interpret the city, a certain amount of freedom of movement is necessary, but for Cadogan, his walking as a black man limits that freedom. Walking for some requires adopting a vigilance in an environment that ought to be accessible to all. Tragically, some women become sexual targets while walking, while some black people are treated as a threat. "My only sin is my skin," sang jazz musician Fats Waller, "What did I do, to be so black and blue?" In the case of Cadogan, when he moved from Jamaica, a majority-black country, to New Orleans, he began to notice how people appeared apprehensive of him in the street (n. pag.). Despite being "local in its manifestations", as noted by Achille Mbembe, "racism has always been a global phenomenon and part of its persistence is a result of its globalisation" ("Blind to Colour" n. pag.). How might such racism and racial power impact upon the existence of the flâneur, and more specifically, the Afropolitan flâneur? Furthermore, how does the Afropolitan flâneur in the diaspora integrate in the host city and how is that cityspace seen by this flâneur? These are some of the questions that this chapter poses.

In maintaining a global focus, this chapter places cities of the North side by side with some cities of the Global South through readings of the selected texts to illustrate just how capacious the term "Afropolitanism" can be and how fluid the figure of the flâneur has become. The selected texts for this chapter go beyond geographical boundaries while they focus on the flâneur figure's understanding of spaces in three global cities: Paris, London and New York.[142] Writing about "literary travellers" in the new African Diaspora, Sandra Jackson-Opuku writes that they "do not only cross borders, they lift up the edges and braid the strands of diverse cultures; traversing, transferring, and transforming as they travel" (478). The actual characters in the texts analysed here are the ones who do the physical walking, and in terms of the structure of this thesis, the route is circular as there is a return to the flâneur's place of origin, the Paris of Baudelaire and Benjamin.[143]

[142] I use the term "global city" in the sense proposed by Saskia Sassen (2002; 2004; 2016) who employs the concept to highlight multicultural, cross-border networks that are not boundary-constrained and that connect finance, technology and communication, among other things.

[143] To reiterate the discussion in Chapter 1: the flâneur was born at a moment of high imperialism, when Europe had colonised much of the rest of the world. The growth (and wealth) of the metropole depended on the subjugation of the colonies. While the middle-class, white, dandy flâneur of nineteenth century Paris was thus itself a product of colonialism, this flânerie was appropriated in the colonies. In other words, the colonial cultural product of flânerie migrated from metropole to colony and then back again to metropole. But the process of these migrations is complex: mimicy, appropriation, subversion etc. There is therefore a complicated and ironic historical relationship between the original flâneur and the twenty-first century Afropolitan flâneur.

Each of the novels analysed in this chapter problematises the flâneur's gaze, where the gaze falls upon the streets of the triumvirate of global cities: Paris, London and New York. Writing about what it means to be a "citizen of the world" today, Kwame Anthony Appiah expresses the idea that it includes "the freedom to create oneself […] to invent what we have come to call our identities" ("Cosmopolitan Patriots" 625). It is necessary here to return very briefly to the discussion initiated in Chapter 1, relating to Afropolitanism. In Taiye Selasi's original 2005 essay, "Bye-Bye Babar", she wrote of Afropolitans that "[y]ou'll know us by our funny blend of *London* fashion, *New York* jargon, *African* ethics […] We are Afropolitans: not citizens, but Africans of the world" (n. pag., italics mine). Selasi's London and New York are multicultural cities to which the African diasporic characters in this chapter's novels migrate. It is in the African diaspora where Selasi's Africans are in a position to interrogate notions of belonging, of the roots they have left behind and the new routes they now travel. Afropolitans can feel at home while away from home. All three cities of the North that will feature in the selected texts for analysis in this chapter are vibrant hubs of travel, trade and technology, promising the potential realisation of great dreams: new spaces for Afropolitans. The twenty-first century's "streets of the multicultural metropolis" are what Liesbeth Minnaard refers to as "urban spaces of the age of globalization" (83). What has contributed enormously to the growth of these global megacities, as Jennifer Wawrzinek points out, is the arrival of wave after wave of immigrants as a result of displacement, wars or the search for something better (179). Indeed, culturally diverse New York is a prime example of a city that was "built on immigration" (Wawrzinek 179) and continues to invite a flow of migrants. Wawrzinek sees New York as a "city of convergence" and she elaborates that it is "a place where these diverse lives interconnect and intersect", a space "of openness towards diversity and difference" (180). The same can be said of Paris and of London. This is not the same sense Cadogan has of New York. However, Wawrzinek's view of openness is somewhat idealistic, as diversity and difference, even today, is not celebrated equally by all inhabitants of the city. Cities such as New York, London and Paris are still dominated by whiteness. Garnette Cadogan expresses a deep sense of regret that things have not changed much in the few years since he wrote "Walking while Black" in 2015, since he and people like him remain vulnerable while walking in public spaces because they still carry "the shade of trespass" (in King-Abadi n. pag.). In the literature, the way these cities are sometimes represented suggests that there is the potential for self-re-invention and the promise of freedom and peaceful coexistence with others irrespective of race.

Whereas New York is now the epitome of modernity, Paris was earlier afforded such status at the turn of the nineteenth century when it represented the "capital of European modernity" (Festa 16). Running concurrently with the rise of modernity in Europe was the start of classical colonialism in Africa, largely predicated on the oppression of millions of black people in the colonies of the French empire. Hussein A. Bulhan notes that the "systemic violence" of colonisation was "organized, continuous, methodic and willful" (242). Referring to Pascale Casanova's *The World Republic of Letters,* Jaime Hanneken points out that "during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries Paris became the *privileged* site for cultural exchange and development, the meeting place where authors from all over the world converged to create a universal standard of literature" (370, italics mine). Indeed, as evidenced in Chapter 1 of this thesis, Paris was where a genre or type of urban literature was birthed, a literature which focused on the flâneur and his (occasionally her) creative observation and interaction with the city.

5.2 Topography of Africa in Paris: Reading Alain Mabanckou's *Blue White Red*

> Kitchen duty allowed me to discover a place that would later become a decisive landmark in my existence: Château Rouge […]. I went there to buy exotic ingredients from our country, from the African continent. It was a place that reminded me of the markets back home. Manioc leaves, tubers, and smoked fish made me feel at home. I forgot that I was in France. I walked from one end of the market to the other, in the hope of bumping into a face I knew. (*BWR* 93)

The description above is of a typical market scene in the African neighbourhood called Château Rouge, fondly named "Little Africa", in the 18th *arrondissement* at the foot of Montmartre.[144] Via his imagination, when walking through this market, the narrator can forget he is in Paris and return to his 'roots' in Africa, to what is familiar and feels like home. In her essay on migration and settlement, Helen Hayes wonders about what exactly is meant by "home" for the migrant when she asks "is home a place of origin or a feeling of belonging?" (2). Replication of the homeland is a very specific phenomenon in the diasporic home, for instance Chinatown in various metropoles, Little Liberia in New York or even the New England region of northeastern United States of America. The tendency in such places

[144] The city of Paris is divided into twenty smaller areas or *arrondissements* which are numbered from 1 (The Louvre) at the centre, and spiral in a clockwise direction to the 20th arrondissement, Ménilmontant, which boasts the most famous cemetery in Paris. A periphery encircles the twenty *arrondissements*, after which the suburbs, or *banlieus*, are spread out.

is to recreate the homeland rather than to assimilate. As a specific migratory strategy, such homeland replication as well as migrant ideas of home are complex and paradoxical, and require careful attention. It is in Château Rouge that the narrator of Alain Mabankcou's novel *Blue White Red* feels most at home, where "small groups of Africans spoke in patois […] and burst out laughing" (*BWR* 93). When the narrator notes that passersby "had to *slalom* between several bowls of red yams from Côte d'Ivoire and crates of plantains from Bobo-Dioulasso" (*BWR* 94, italics mine), the image created is one of "interweaving of the here and there" (Mbembe, "Afropolitanism" 28) which brings together Europe and Africa. Mabanckou's choice of word for zig-zagging between containers of market goods aptly conveys the sense of the displaced foreigner, since 'slalom'[145] is an out-of-place word in this context, being a term specific to snowy terrain, which is not generally associated with Africa. How does the transnational subject, who is a foreigner or migrant in Mabanckou's novel, adapt and straddle two different worlds? Of interest in this examination of *Blue White Red* are the constantly vacillating contradictions of transnational displacement. When the protagonist encounters "a variety of people with multiple faces", migrants just like him, they become people who "juggled shadows and light" (*BWR* 95), and things are not always as they seem. The migrant characters in Mabanckou's novel are forced to figure out their own ways of adapting to their new environment, the place that for some will become 'home', with all the complex connotations the word carries in a country that is not their own.

One of the difficulties experienced by the immigrant in the host country is how to reconcile the differences between 'routes' taken to arrive 'here' (in the host country) 'now' (in the present), and roots that are tied to 'there' (the country of origin) and 'then' (in the past). In his article "Fear of a Black France", Grégory Pierrot, a Frenchman of African descent, verbalises the difficulty of such ambiguity thus:

> By law and values, if you're born on French soil you are a French citizen, no matter where your parents came from, why, how, or when. The right of soil has been attacked in recent decades, but still, it remains. But in France, we do not hyphenate: origins are known and often discussed but they're expected to bow down to Frenchness. (n. pag.)

The notion of non-hyphenation expressed here is disturbing, as it suggests that white bourgeois French nationals are averse to the idea of transnational identity. Formerly exiled South African Breyten Breytenbach, who now also holds French citizenship, writes in his

[145] This term is used not only in the translated English version of the novel, but it appears in the original French version, where Mabanckou writes: "Les passants devaient *slalomer* entre plusieurs cuvettes d'ignames rouges de la Côte d'Ivoire et des caisses de bananes plantains de Bobo-Dioulasso" (*Bleu Blanc Rouge* 140, italics mine).

book *Notes from the Middle World* about a condition of living beyond exile. Breytenbach calls this space the "Middle World", he says, "because of its position somewhere equidistant from East and West, North and South, belonging and not belonging" (136). For Breytenbach, this is "[n]ot of the Center though, since it is by definition and vocation peripheral, other" (136), therefore it is a space inhabited by those who live on the edges, at the margins, between the cracks. It is being in this Middle World which is so often the lived, in-between world of the migrant, the exile and the traveller, which becomes an existentially fraught state, since it is in the very process of moving, through the act of walking, of physically crossing the border that the migrant or exile is defined. To what extent does the Afropolitan flâneur inhabit this liminal space? Mabanckou's novel *Blue White Red* offers an interpretation of what it is like for Afropolitan migrants to live in such an in-between world as they perceive France to be.

Alain Mabanckou himself is a Franco-Congolese (hyphen intended) Afropolitan writer and academic: more specifically, he is a French citizen born in the Republic of the Congo and currently a local in Los Angeles where he is based in the Faculty of French and Francophone Studies at UCLA. Transnational, Afropolitan, Mabanckou is a prolific writer whose first novel, *Bleu Blanc Rouge,* originally published in French in 1998, only appeared in English translation as *Blue White Red* in 2013.

In his introduction to the English version of Mabanckou's novel, Dominic Thomas remarks on the difficulties facing young people from the African continent in the postcolonial period, since they find themselves "alienated, disenfranchised, and with limited professional opportunities" (*BWR* xii) and forced to seek opportunities outside of the continent. As is known to be the case world-wide, migrants globally experience legal limitations and the harsh realities of potential deportation. Mabanckou's novel interrogates these and related issues that impact upon the migrant, particularly economic migrants who leave the Congo for France in the hope of finding a better life for themselves and their families.

The focus here falls on issues pertaining to the two main protagonists of the novel: Massala-Massala, through whose perspective the story is told, and Moki, around whom it would seem the world revolves. In their own different ways, both of these characters are specific types of Afropolitan flâneurs: Moki as a *sapeur* is what I call in this chapter a sapeur-flâneur, while Massala-Massala is an imaginary-flâneur. Much of Massala-Massala's walking is internal, in his imagination, as he is forced into hiding and is therefore unable to walk in the public arena. Later in the novel, when Massala-Massala is in prison and not of sound mind, his observations are those of a flâneur reading urbanity in silent meditation. On the

other hand, Moki's performance of flânerie reverses the gaze of the original flâneur who looked outwards, which becomes focused on him, and his walk itself is a stylized movement, carried out purely for the purpose of impressing others.

5.2.1 A forced and lonely march

Mobility in Mabanckou's novel is not only visible through the act of walking carried out by the flâneur, but also in the movement and flow of transnational migration. Walking imagery is abundant, serving to emphasize the movement associated with migrancy as both escape and encounter. *Blue White Red* is a work of social satire that tells the story of a young Congolese man, Massala-Massala, who is in awe of Moki, his peer who has made his way to Paris and who returns periodically to prove his overseas success to family and friends. Massala-Massala is seduced by Moki's apparent wealth and comfort, and chooses eventually to also travel to Paris to live the dream. As Moki guides him, the novel highlights the truth of the dream and finally Massala-Massala is stripped of everything he had, including his dignity, when he is eventually repatriated.

The narrative is structured in two parts: "Opening" leads into the first main section, Part One, titled "The Country", and this is followed by Part Two, titled "Paris", which is followed at the very end with a brief "Closing" section. The effect of this is very clearly to provide a boundary between country and city settings, and also a theatrical setting with a curtain rising and falling upon the main subject matter, that is, the push-pull between two places felt by the desperate migrant. In this manner, Paris and the Congo are set in sharp contrast against one another. As Dominic Thomas conveys, the text is thus "about the manner in which France […] continues to represent a mythic space for the African subject in the era of postcoloniality" (965). It is the very dream ideal of a better life in Paris which is sharply juxtaposed against the harsh reality of the migrant once in that coveted dreamworld. Thus, Mabanckou offers a "demythification of the pilgrimage to Paris" (Hanneken 376), stripping the illusion bare.

Massala-Massala is the narrator of the novel, a unique imaginary-flâneur whose gaze provides for the reader a record of his observations, specifically when recounting stories about Moki's visits to "The Country", and how he later dupes him when in "Paris". As an imaginary-flâneur, Massala-Massala undertakes "mental voyages" (Boutin 130) long before he attempts any physical journey. The imaginary-flâneur, as seen in this thesis, is an Afropolitan flâneur whose 'walking' occurs mainly in the imagination. In this way, much like

the virtual flâneur or cyber-flâneur (such as Igoni in *Blackass*), the imaginary-flâneur can continue to walk without physically being in motion. The imaginary-flâneur can travel anywhere in his or her mind. Mabanckou's novel opens with the protagonist narrator in a prison cell:

> I've completely lost my bearings here. My universe is limited to this isolation I've grown accustomed to. […] I follow deserted paths. I pass through ghost towns. I hear my *footsteps* on dead leaves. (*BWR* 3, italics mine)

In the above lines the use of language which describes walking (although the subject is in fact immobile) is striking. Through his imagination he experiences auditory hallucinations. The walking Massala-Massala speaks of here only takes place in his imagination, where there are no real paths or people. The sense of despair is immediate, and the loneliness of one who wanders alone is emphasized. Everything seems lifeless and ghostly, conveying a feeling of total desolation and loss, which is the plight of the migrant in a foreign land. Massala-Massala goes on to narrate that:

> The horizon unfolds, while the land, scattered with rough spots, leaves us no choice but a painful march and burning feet. (*BWR* 4)

Once again, the narrator emphasises walking, yet it is neither leisurely nor voluntary. Suddenly the plight of the migrant becomes universal, as the narrator highlights by speaking of 'us' not 'I', referring to all migrants who walk the same painful path. The narrative continues in this vein a page later where we read that it had been "a terrible forced march" to get there and that "it wasn't [his] feet that carried [him] to get all the way" (*BWR* 5), suggesting that there are others involved in this regimented walking, others who force him to walk against his will. "I've stepped back a bit now that I'm heading, for better or worse, back to square one," he says, before adding, "[a]nd this path is not one of the easiest. To retrace one's footsteps is to confront the specter of one's past. I am not so intrepid" (*BWR* 4).[146] This is an Afropolitan migrant flâneur who knows that returning to the past and to his former home will only delay his ability to settle in the present with his feet on solid, new ground. His footsteps should only be forward-moving, and his gaze open to discovery. He recalls how the reflection of his face in a basin surprises him and he is shocked by a photograph of how he looked when he first arrived in Paris (*BWR* 5). An inability to relate to one's own image is a sign of profound dislocation and alienation from self, and it is suggested from the start of the

[146] This image brings to mind Elvis's spectrality and reflection in a mirror in *GraceLand*. The protagonists in both novels are, in many ways, haunted by their pasts.

novel that the protagonist suffers from some form of trauma. These first few pages of the novel are memories reeling through the protagonist's mind that go back to his capture and eventual imprisonment.

Massala-Massala's walk in his imagination is a reliving of what happened. He recalls that he "put up no resistence" when captured by two men, largely because of fear, as he asks himself "[h]ow could I pump my legs to run for my life when they were paralyzed and wouldn't hold me up anymore?" (7). The narrator explains to the reader that the "signs along the highway meant nothing" to him, suggesting there is no legible map and confirming his sense of confusion, exacerbated later when he finds he is not "dressed for the weather" as there is white snow on the ground (*BWR* 9). In alien surroundings, unsure what is going on, not even knowing what has gone before, the protagonist wonders, horrified, "What had we come here to do? Did I deserve this isolation" (*BWR* 10). At this point it is clear to the reader that the protagonist is in prison, yet he goes on to explain that he never entertained the idea of escape as he did not consider himself a prisoner (*BWR* 12). When the protagonist declares that "It's impossible for me to separate dream from reality" (*BWR* 13), he recognizes two familiar faces, but it is unclear whether these are merely hypnotically induced visions or not. Thus begins Mabanckou's novel, setting the scene for what is to follow over the next hundred pages of *Blue White Red* by stepping back in time to inform the reader of the circumstances that landed the protagonist-narrator, Massala-Massala, in such a predicament.

For youngsters like Massala-Massala, although the allure of France is always there, the only way to get there seems to be as an imaginary-flâneur, with eyes closed, in the land of dreams:

> I was one of those who thought that France was for the others. France was for those who we used to call *the go-getters.* It was that faraway country, inaccessible despite its fireworks that shimmered even in the least of my dreams and that left me, when I awoke, with a taste of honey in my mouth. (*BWR* 20)

Massala-Massala counts as obstacles to travelling to France his parents' poverty and his poor self-image, added to this his uncertainty about whether in fact he would be able to "fly with [his] own wings" (*BWR* 21).

The pull of France is strong for Massala-Massala who eagerly listens to Moki's stories every time he returns from Paris to visit family and friends. "I lived like his shadow," he says, "I was always behind him" (*BWR* 22). He notices that "[t]he white man's country had changed [Moki's] life. Something had shifted: there was an undeniable metamorphosis"

(*BWR* 22). This has echoes with Furo and Igoni in *Blackass,* as well as with Elvis in *GraceLand*, as metamorphosis is a recurring theme related to the fluid identity of the Afropolitan flâneur. Moki's physical build is different, he is no longer thin as he used to be, hence he is regarded with envy as he gives the illusion of doing well for himself. The weight he has gained suggests that he has been eating well and must be financially comfortable enough to afford good food. As Hanneken points out, the *sapeur* is an illusionist (385) who creates an image he believes others want to see. With every visit back home, Moki is a spectacle for all to admire:

> The first thing we noticed was the colour of his skin. Nothing at all like ours, poorly cared for, devoured by the scorching sun, oily and as black as manganese. His was extraordinarily white. (*BWR* 38)

While Moki argues that the cold winter is the cause of his new-found whiteness, Massala-Massala discovers much later that Moki in fact purposely attempts to get his body to respond to its environment by using hydroquinone products to lighten his skin colour. This indicates the difficulty he experiences in adapting to a foreign environment, yet he is unwilling to admit as much to others. Furthermore, there is a strong performative element of identity here, and making a visual spectacle of himself is what the Moki as *sapeur* does constantly. There are echoes here again with the performance of whiteness in both *GraceLand* and *Blackass* seen in Chapter 4. Didier Gondola remarks that practices such as face-bleaching ought not to be mistaken for attempting to become white (31), but should be seen in the context of the frustrations of African youth in search of a new identity. This new identity is created and performed.

This new identity, as explored in Mabanckou's novel, is that of the *sapeur*, *mikiliste*, or "Parisian"[147] as he is named in *Blue White Red*, an individual who is acutely aware of appearance and how he carries himself. In this sense the *sapeur* is the opposite of the flâneur, in that the gaze is *upon* him instead of *from* him. Instead, it is other people who gaze upon him, and the *sapeur* invites this kind of attention, in fact he thrives on it, as will be detailed in the next section.

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[147] In French the word is spelled "*Parisien*", but in English it is "Parisian", and these spellings are used in the respective French or English versions of Mabanckou's novel. Jaime Hanneken in her article maintains the French spelling, "*Parisien*".

5.2.2 *La SAPE and the importance of being elegant*

> To be a sapeur you must own a pair of Westons. […] If I hadn't bought this pair, I'd have bought a plot of land. (*The Congo Dandies*)[148]

The *sapeur*, as mentioned in Chapter 1, is described by Sarah Nuttall as a "figure of spatial transition, operating in the interstices of large cultures, participating in a cult of appearance, especially expensive clothing" (*Entanglement* 38). While the gaze of the flâneur is directed outwards, in the case of the *sapeur*,[149] the gaze of others is drawn towards the *sapeur*. "It is the pleasure of causing surprise in others, and the proud satisfaction of never showing any oneself" writes Baudelaire (10) in "The Painter of Modern Life", where he describes the "dandy" as one who has "no other status but that of cultivating the idea of beauty in their own persons, of satisfying their passions, of feeling and thinking" (8). The dandy as a product of European bourgeois culture can afford to live this life of indulgence. The *sapeur*, on the other hand, merely mimics the privilege and the ease of life of the white European dandy. In *Black Skin, White Masks,* Frantz Fanon critiqued mimicry for good reason, as the adoption of Western ideals ("white masks") means a loss of autonomy. While the *sapeur* might mimic the European dandy, he is unable to mimic the same economic status. On the outside, the dandy and the *sapeur* might well dress the same, but they walk different paths.

The *sapeur*, as will be seen, has a high regard for beauty and fashion, and, like the flâneur, he also enjoys walking the streets. "A sapeur's walk" writes Michela Wrong, "is an art form in itself, a mixture of swagger and stroll as individual as a graffiti artist's" (22). Indeed, the *sapeur* calls attention to the self, to the body, for the *sapeur* is an exhibitionist: their dress a thing of beauty and the walk a practised peacocking. In this manner, the *sapeur* might be considered a contra-flâneur, with their identity being focused on outward appearance. Much like Furo in *Blackass,* Moki in *Blue White Red* is a "self-conscious urban viewer" (Hildebrand 1), but unlike Furo, he makes no attempt to conceal his identity. This *sapeur*, Moki, who is a rather peculiar Afropolitan contra-flâneur, exaggerates an identity and performs.[150] However, since the *sapeur* nonetheless shares other qualities with the flâneur, and since the Congolese *sapeur* is a migrant who travels, it can be argued that the *sapeur* can

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[148] *The Congo Dandies* can be viewed on YouTube at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W27PnUuXR_A>.

[149] Throughout this chapter, I refer to the *sapeur* in the masculine gender. This does not mean that the female *sapeur* is non-existent, but rather that the *sapeurs* in the text under discussion all happen to be men. The female *sapeur*, although in the minority, is known as a *sapeuse* and she is certainly alive and well-dressed.

[150] For a more detailed discussion on the historical adoption of particular names, such as 'Moki', see the section entitled "An African by Any Other Name" in Wandia Mwende Njoya's PhD thesis. Moki's name too conveys the suggestion of his split personality, since his first name, Charles, was the result of his father's blind admiration for Charles De Gaulle (or "Digol" as he calls him).

also be considered to be a flâneur, specifically an Afropolitan flâneur. There are other reasons that will support this argument, such as the manner in which the sapeur-flâneur walks. Since this idea is rather complex, it will be teased out in more detail in the paragraphs that follow.

The acronym SAPE stands for *Société des Ambianceurs et des Personnes Élégantes*, matching the French slang '*sape*' and later translated into English as the "Society of Artists and Persons of Elegance" (Mbikayi 16). The French word "*sape*" comes from the verb "*se saper*", which simply translated means "to dress",[151] but in an ostentatiously fashionable manner. To "*sape*" therefore is to dress flamboyantly, elegantly, extravagantly. Since there is no equivalent English word which conveys precisely the same sense, the French word will be maintained in this context throughout this chapter. While he might live in poverty, the *sapeur* manages to spend a fortune on clothing, hence the *sapeur* is a contradiction in any country of social and economic instability.

As a movement, *La Sape* has its beginnings in 1970s Congo-Brazzaville where it is both a complex phenomenon and a paradoxical lifestyle sought by many young Congolese who have great aspirations for their future. As affirmed by Dominic Thomas,[152] La Sape is a "socio-cultural phenomenon to which a transnational matrix can be applied" (949) where the migrant impulse is to travel from the Congo to France with the intention of purchasing fashionable designer clothes. *La Sape* was made internationally famous in the 1980s by Congo-Kinshasa musician Papa Wemba, who earned the title *Le Roi de la SAPE* or King of SAPE. *Sapeurs* live their clothing as though it were a religion, seeking out designer labels on a regular basis, and obliterating the desire or need for any other material comfort.[153] Put succinctly by Maurice Mbikayi, *La Sape* is "the performance of black identity, which began as a white fantasy of black reality, [and] was later adapted into a new cultural domain by blacks themselves" (19). This performance to which Mbikayi refers dates back to eighteenth century slaves whose masters had them elegantly dressed so that they did not look out of place in the opulent surroundings of the master's estate (12). The black slave was thus

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[151] Sections quoted from Mabanckou's *Blue White Red* come from the officially published version translated by Alison Dundy. However, unless noted otherwise, other translations from French to English in this section are my own.

[152] For a detailed discussion on the politics of dress with specific reference to *La Sape*, see Dominic Thomas's article "Fashion Matters: *La Sape* and Vestimentary Codes in Transnational Contexts and Urban Diasporas".

[153] Testament to the popularity and currency of *La Sape* movement is a forthcoming photography and film-based project on global black dandyism, scheduled for opening in December 2018 titled "Dandy Lion: (RE)Articulating Black Masculinity" and curated by Shantrelle P. Lewis. Significantly "Dandy Lion" is a travelling exhibition and has moved to various venues since 2016. The advertorial publication for the exhibition explains that the project highlights "young men in city-landscapes who defy stereotypical and monolithic understandings of black masculinity by remixing Victorian-era fashion with traditional African sartorial sensibilities" (n. pag.).

impeccably dressed as a white dandy, which is how the master wished him to appear. This renders the performance of black identity to which Mbikayi refers ironic, as it is in fact a performance of white identity, which is the white fantasy he speaks of.

Blackness is rendered more conspicuous because of the incongruity of a black person in a white person's clothes. During the colonial era, the white need to domesticate and civilise the black 'savage' was pernicious, and so white anxieties about black barbarism could be allayed by the semblance of respectability afforded by clothes. Why does the *sapeur* appropriate this practice and what is achieved, in a postcolonial sense, by this complex performance of racial and class identity? The *sapeur*'s performance of identity in *Blue White Red* provides some answers to this question.

It is thus through performance or disguise, then, that the *sapeur* subverts or challenges normal vestimentary codes by combining multiple identities into a single identity through exaggeration and performance. Performance in society, by manner of external appearances such as clothing, sends out a signal to others to clarify specific social standing. To further explore this, it is useful to consider the work of Judith Butler on performance. Butler conveys the idea that performativity has to do with repetition, and while she refers to oppressive and painful norms in her work as these relate specifically to gender, this can also be seen in relation to *La Sape*'s black identity. In the same manner that Butler draws attention to the performance of gender, it is possible to draw attention to the performance of race. So, when Butler writes that "gender proves to be performative – that is, constituting the identity it is purported to be" ("Gender Trouble" 24) she means that gender roles, such as what is expected behaviour for males or females, are scripted. Based on that script, an individual then performs accordingly. Although Butler's gender theory is very complex, by substituting "race" for "gender" in Butler's formulation above, it becomes possible to view racial identity as performed. In the literary text analysed, how the *sapeur* acts and reacts to his situation impacts on how he or she presents to the world.

The *sapeur*'s performance begins with language, by naming the performativity that is carried out. In *Blue White Red*, Moki and other *mikilistes* like him are referred to as "Parisians", another name for *sapeurs*. He explains to eager followers how his interest in the movement developed and how he was involved initially with a group called the "Aristocrats":

> What we were most preoccupied with was how people dressed, la *sape*, and to leave for Paris one day. School became a handicap. […] An Aristocrat did not wear jeans. Those things were made for mechanics and plumbers, not for people like us with a fashion aesthetic. (*BWR* 50)

The *sapeur* thus sees himself as a white European, as superior to others (more civilised, more refined) but also as part of a group of elegant people. The flâneur, on the other hand, is never part of a group, always preferring to remain isolated and apart from the crowd. The *sapeur* thrives on the attention he receives from the crowd. The "Aristocrats", explains Moki, adopted different names in search of a unifying identity:

> From *fighters* we went to being called *playboys.* But that all sounded too English or American. Today we are *sapeurs*, and so much the better. […] Clothing is our passport. Our religion. (*BWR* 51)

It is a sartorial religion, where *La Sape* is a gaudy mishmash of colonial and postcolonial, a remix for Guy Debord's *Society of the Spectacle*.[154] Debord argues that society, or social life, is a "degradation of *being* into *having*" bringing about "a general shift from *having* to *appearing*" (Th. 17). Individual reality, says Debord "is allowed to appear only if it is *not actually real*" (*Society*, Th. 17).[155] Debord's thesis relates directly to the performativity of the *sapeur*, since the persona created is a visual display that masks reality. In the case of the *sapeur*, the reality is that impoverished, disenfranchised Africans, in Africa or in the metropole, still remain as colonised as ever. *La Sape is* the spectacle, and, at the same time, it is an illusion.

When Moki entertains his friends and family back in the Congo, the scene is one theatrically crafted, worth quoting at length for full effect. As Dupond and Dupont assist Moki with one of his rendezvous,

> One of them opened the car door. The other held an umbrella over the Parisian's head. Not a ray of sun on his fragile skin. As soon as he was out of the car and aware that all eyes were upon him, he put on what could have been a walk down a fashion runway, to the great delight of the fanatics sitting in the *buvette.* He unbuttoned his jacket, handed it to one of his brothers behind him. Under the see-through shirt, his skin looked brighter, almost pale, without any irritation or the other severe allergies borne by local imitators. This *metamorphosis* stupefied the crowd. (*BWR* 45, second italics mine)

This passage describes Moki's arrival as though he were a movie star about to walk the red carpet with paparazzi cameras flashing. The repetition of the metamorphosis theme (as a natural consequence of migration) highlights Moki's transformation, which is ironic as it is

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[154] Debord's *Society of the Spectacle* was mentioned briefly in the discussion of *Bom Boy* in Section 3.4 of Chapter 3.
[155] When citing Debord, I write "Th." as an abbreviation for "Thesis". Debord's *Society of the Specacle* takes the form of eight chapters, with 221 short 'theses' appearing in numbered format.

performed. Mabanckou's description above is laden with satire.[156] Every move Moki makes is carefully rehearsed, and the desired effect on the crowds is one of dazzled wonder and admiration. It is quite clear that Moki's performance is as a direct consequence of the emasculation of colonialism. This brings to mind the words of Frantz Fanon:

> The white world, the only honorable one, barred me from all participation. A man was expected to behave like a man. I was expected to behave like a black man. (114).

Moki as black, poor and male, hyperbolically performs the role of a rich European who is comfortable in his masculinity.

Despite the glitz and glamour and the famed reputation he gains, Moki, like Massala-Massala, suffers an identity crisis in the novel: Moki himself "had two faces. He wore several masks" (*BWR* 89). This brings to mind the colonised subject who wears the white mask of civilisation in Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks* to cover up perceived inferior blackness. Unlike Massala-Massala, however, Moki possesses the confidence to go through with the masquerade. These aspects of the mask and masquerade, as well as issues surrounding identitarian borders, are central to the argument that the *sapeur* is a particular type of Afropolitan flâneur. While Moki the *sapeur* adopts foreign culture and realities into his new lifestyle and mimics the European dandy, his reasons for such mimicry are complicated.

"Mimicry," says Homi Bhabha, "emerges as the representation of a difference that is itself a process of disavowal" ("Of Mimicry" 126). Mimicry is at once "a complex strategy of reform, regulation and discipline" as well as "the sign of the inappropriate" (Bhabha, "Of Mimicry" 126).[157] While Bhabha argues that the coloniser wishes for the colonised to be more disciplined and to adapt to the coloniser's ways, at the same time the colonised subject becomes a threat to the status quo having learned the lesson well. In Mabanckou's novel, Moki as a Congolese dandy who has taken a European model for his dress style can become a threat to the colonial order. However, the real danger associated with *sapeurs* like Moki is

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[156] While the satire is subtle, this brings to mind Fanon's mockery of the pretentiousness of Martinican officials "in their white linen suits" who "looked like prunes in a bowl of milk" (*Black Skins, White Masks* 164). Added to Mabanckou's satire is wry humour, and the author's choice of name for his protagonist begs the question: does the name 'Moki' perhaps echo the word 'mock'? There can be different ways to answer such a question. Nonetheless, as pointed out by Wandia Njoya, the name "Moki" means "'the world' in Lingala" (146), which chimes with Mbembe's Afropolitan 'worlds-in-movement' phenomenon ("Afropolitanism" 26).

[157] In her exploration of colonial violence as seen through the medium of selected Congolese literature, Susanne Gehrmann draws on Homi Bhabha to discuss the "problem of colonial mimicry as a space of ambiguity" ("Remembering" 14). Gehrmann's article focuses on how specific writing techniques are used by selected authors of fiction "to provide counter-narratives to colonial texts of conquest and domination" (14).

that they become the coloniser and get others (like Massala-Massala) to follow in their footsteps.

While Moki feels alienated and suffers deeply after having migrated, it is not apparent to his family and friends back home since he fabricates most of his stories and puts on a dazzling performance. It is his performance that convinces his family and friends back home that he is a success. However, as noted by Njoya, "the portrait of Moki as arrogant and pretentious minimizes his internal conflict" (125), and it helps him to keep up the pretence necessary for survival. However, while Njoya also suggests that the reader laughs at Moki's exhibitionism, this is not necessarily the case, and his outward persona is rather more tragic, considering that it is deliberately effected as a cover for his true identity. Moki as a contra-flâneur "didn't move around on foot" simply because he "would not debase himself by getting caught in the sand and the muddy streets like a vulgar native" (BWR 40). The *sapeur* disavows being a disempowered, colonialized subject. Moki owns two taxis in his home neighbourhood in the Congo and similarly, when in Paris, he makes use of taxis. Before he even sets foot in Paris however, Moki is a Parisian or *sapeur*:

> I knew Paris before I even got on the plane for the first time in Luanda. All the Aristocrats knew Paris. As soon as I got off the airplane, I confidently took a taxi and told the driver which way to go. He was dumbfounded. To him, I was not a foreigner. I was home. (*BWR* 56)

There is irony in the above extract as the Paris Moki knows is a construct which harks back to colonial times. Notwithstanding, Moki affirms his assumed knowledge with confidence. This sense of belonging conveyed as a familiarity with the diasporic home is also part of Moki's performance. While Moki slips so easily into his new role, and Massala-Massala aspires to be like him, he is unsure whether he will ever reach the same level of comfort and ease in new surroundings as Moki. The Paris taxi and the route itself are, according to Hanneken, "spatial coordinates" which verify Moki's "conquest of the city through the expert interpretation of Parisian-ness" (386). This is where flânerie is obvious, despite the fact that it is by taxi instead of on foot. Mode of locomotion aside, Moki immerses himself in the urban environment, and is acutely aware of what he sees, even though he secretly knows that this Paris he is navigating is a myth. Another example of this confident map-making can be seen when Moki hands out the Métro maps as thank-you gifts when paying for services such as haircuts back home. The gifts are received with jubilation, but as Moki declares:

> Of course, they didn't understand these tangled itineraries, these numbered lines that were so intertwined that one would have said it was a hydrographic

> map of China. They surprised the Parisian himself. In fact, certain natives described the Métro lines with unequaled talent, station by station, to the point that you would have thought they had stayed in Paris. (*BWR* 39)

In Paris, Moki becomes adept at deciphering the Métro maps, which show many intersecting routes, something with which he feels comfortable. In the above extract, Mabanckou emphasises the intricacy of the Parisian Métro, one of the world's densest urban rail transit systems. Moki transports his newfound knowledge back home, by bringing with him maps, in this sense highlighting his own Afropolitanism and showing off his command of the system. While most of his Congolese neighbours do not understand the maps, for others they seem easily readable, suggesting that they too would one day travel to Paris. Mabanckou takes this further in satirical fashion when explaining that some of Moki's neighbours even took the Métro station names as pseudonyms, inserting "Monsieur" beforehand, as in "*Monsieur Saint-Placide, Monsieur Strasbourg-Saint-Denis*" (*BWR* 39). This recalls de Certeau's discussion on street names in *The Practice of Everyday Life* where he notes that the "names detach themselves from the places they were supposed to define and serve as imaginary meeting points" (104). Despite living an entire continent away, Moki's neighbours and friends take these unfamiliar names and make them their own as they continue to also dream of Paris.

As with the flâneur, the migrant and the traveller, so too for the *sapeur* is movement essential, since it is the very mobile act of walking that defines these figures. Similarly, the Afropolitan is a traveller, equally familiar with airports as with the streets. Moki explains to his followers:

> You know, a Parisian has to move. He can't stay idle. He has to know Paris, the Métro, the suburban rail, the buses, the streets, the avenues, the squares, the monuments: he can't have difficulty with any of that. (BWR 54–55)

This perpetual movement and intimate knowledge of the urban environment is natural for the flâneur. Moki as the *sapeur* can be seen as a dressed-up version of the flâneur, since movement is essential to his very sartorial being. The walk of the *sapeur* is a calculated performance, almost a type of dance, designed to attract attention by the extravagant clothing that is worn for show. The focus of attention is the elevated social position of the *sapeur*, as opposed to the inferior, vulgar native. The *sapeur* is adept at travel, as is the Afropolitan today, who is comfortable in airport lounges or waiting on platforms at railway stations. The *sapeur*'s movement differs from the flâneur in that while the flâneur walks and observes the surroundings, the *sapeur* walks and performs with the intention of being seen. *Sapeurs* gather

regularly to parade their designer outfits where they perform what is known as "the dance of designer labels" (MacGaffey and Bazenguissa-Ganga in Thomas 961).

Sapeurs like Moki who migrate regularly between the Congo and Paris have done much travelling, not only on foot. In the case of Moki, he left home "by way of Angola" (*BWR* 55), ran out of funds while in Angola, and had to turn to illegal earnings to survive there until he was able to "bribe the guys at the airport [who] lived off this trade" (*BWR* 56). One of the paradoxes of immigration laws is that they "create an economy that thrives on helping people contravene those laws" (Njoya 139). The tangled web of immigration bureaucracy makes it simpler to migrate illegally, through obtaining 'legal' documents by means of bribery and corruption. In Mabanckou's novel, this is precisely how Préfet earns his living in France: through the provision of falsified documents to other individuals who are desperate enough to pay huge sums of money for the legal right to be there. Ironically, in order to possess the correct documents to lawfully live in the country, it often becomes necessary to engage in illegal activities. In order to become a "Parisian", *mikiliste*, or *sapeur*, these young Congolese have to travel in a number of different ways: walking on foot, crossing borders *en fuite*, being driven by a chauffeur, flying in style. This mixture illustrates some of the ways characters like Moki as sapeur-flâneur are mobile. The novel does not make it clear what is Moki's reality, and the tragedy of his life can only be interpreted behind the scenes. While Moki makes *La Sape* seem pleasurable, and others dream to follow his example, what happens to Massala-Massala turns out rather differently, as will be seen in the following section.

5.2.3 Paris, the impossible dream

> Who of my generation had not visited France *by mouth*, as we say back home. Just one word, *Paris,* was enough for us to meet as if by magic spell in front of the Eiffel Tower, at the Arc de Triomphe, and on the Champs Elysées. […] We were allowed to dream. It didn't cost anything. No exit visa was necessary, no passport, no airline ticket. (*BWR* 20)

In *Blue White Red,* Massala-Massala, like other youngsters in the neighbourhood, devours Moki's stories each time he returns, and himself comes to know Paris in his dreams even before ever having set foot on foreign soil. Gondola points out how it is the dream that is the first step the young Congolese man takes before he becomes a traveller, and the *mikiliste,* he says "is an individual who first experiences Europe, *his* Europe, in Africa" (28, italics in original). This construct therefore has its roots in the colonial encounter. It is through the

flight of the imagination that Massala-Massala is first transported to Paris. It is the dream that becomes the reality for the sapeur-flâneur, because real life is too harsh, and the dream itself is not necessarily attainable nor true.[158] It is the blurred line between dream and reality that Massala-Massala eventually comes to understand in *Blue White Red,* but this realisation only comes to him when he finally gets to Paris himself.

While in Paris, Massala-Massala is forced into hiding as he is *sans-papiers* (literally without papers), an illegal foreign resident, and he is thus obliged to take on a false French identity when he acquires forged documentation. When Massala-Massala as "*débarqué*" (*BWR* 106) (literally "disembarked"), finds that he is not legally allowed to stay in France any longer, he is caught in a purgatorial space as he does not wish to return to the Congo. He is but one of so many other illegal aliens "who had residency permits [and] found themselves *sans-papiers* – undocumented – sandwiched between complex and draconian laws" (*BWR* 107).

Furthermore, Massala-Massala is forced to change his name as he acquires a new identity in order to legalise his existence, and he becomes

> Marcel Bonaventure … I say this name because over time I became accustomed to it, even though it isn't my name. In reality, I don't know who I am anymore. Here, one has an infinite ability to split oneself in two, to no longer be what one was in order to be what the others would like you to have been and even sometimes what they would like you to be. (*BWR* 84–85, ellipsis in original)

Evidently Massala-Massala has little say in the matter, he has had to take refuge in a new identity, a double identity. His new name links him to a new community that is strange to him. Several other Afropolitan flâneurs discussed in earlier chapters also undergo name changes: in *GraceLand* Elvis assumes Redemption's identity, in *Blackass* Furo becomes Frank Whyte and Igoni passes as Morpheus, in *Skyline* Bernard was previously Bernardino, and in *Thirteen Cents* Azure is named "Blue" by Gerald.[159] While different cultures have various beliefs and customs attached to naming people, identity is encoded in a name. A name generally, in its basic form, represents who a person is and where they are from. Massala-Massala's identity remains in flux, as his name changes also testify, and he says

[158] As expressed by Amadou Hampaté Bâ in Elvis Makouezi's *Dictionnaire de la SAPE*, "*Si vous ne connaissez pas le mensonge comment allez-vous le différencier de la vérité*?" (18) (If you do not know what a lie is, how will you distinguish it from the truth?). Thus one needs to comprehend the lie in order to know the truth.

[159] Wandia Njoya devotes an entire section of her thesis to the importance of naming in African societies by focusing on identity, history and agency in relation to names. In Mabanckou's novel, she explains, "names are intricately linked to the trajectory of the characters' relationship to both Congolese and French societies" (143). Indeed, naming situates an individual in a particular time and place.

"I'm no longer just one person. I am several at the same time. […] It has to do with having a split personality" (*BWR* 85). He now lives schizophrenically, transnationally, in a liminal space over which he has no control. His fractured and fragmented self struggles to gain a sense of balance in his new life where the "shock of reality gnawed away" at him (*BWR* 86). He is obliged to become someone he is not in order to integrate himself into a space that can never be his own.

While in hiding in Paris, Massala-Massala sinks into deep depression and suffers from idleness. He complains that "[t]his was not a world of indolence. Idleness was the first sin. It blocked all perspective. It distanced you from all your compatriots" (*BWR* 92). Distanced, perhaps, but not in the same manner as the flâneur: Massala-Massala is isolated and idle in a foreign land, and the only flânerie he can perform is in his imagination.

An Afropolitan he certainly may be, and one with multiple identities and connections to multiple places, not all of them real. Nonetheless, Massala-Massala is prevented from walking while he lives hidden in a room in the city, and later isolated in a prison cell. He is rootless, with no connection to anyone anywhere even upon his prodigal return to the Congo. Massala-Massala remains a lost, imaginary-flâneur, who is condemned to walk in the land of dreams eternally, forced to "accustom [him]self to the darkness" (*BWR* 11). His walking is not physically connected to the earth, but it occurs in his imagination, rendering him no more than an imaginary-flâneur who is unsure about his own identity.

Massala-Massala acknowledges an existential crisis when he says "I was a man without identity, me who, at one time, had taken on several" (*BWR* 136). His multiple personas have caused him to become a "man who has lost his way" (*BWR* 136), suggesting a schizophrenic tendency. In Mabanckou's novel, when Massala-Massala discovers Paris to be different to what he had been led to believe, he is filled with nostalgia for home, and decides to write a letter to his family. Just as a name pertains to identity, so too does writing form part of the construction of identities, some of which are inauthentic. As already noted, writing, storytelling and narrating are a theme in transnational literature. When Massala-Massala allows Moki to read the dozens of draft letters he has composed, Moki chastises him, saying that if he tells the truth "they won't believe you" because "they love the dream" (*BWR* 87–88). When Massala-Massala then reads over the generic letter which is supposed to be sent home, he laughs as he realises "we were all schooled in the art of making carbon copies. The letter was clear and summed up our desire to perpetuate the dream" (*BWR* 88). Ironically, the *sapeurs* who claim originality in their elaborate sense of dress are mere clones of the coloniser, and also of one another. By copying out the generic letter, however, Massala-

Massala and others simply "reaffirm the narrative of opulence his Congolese community associates with life in Paris" (Knox 59) and they merely keep the lie alive. Towards the close of the novel, Massala-Massala narrates:

> I couldn't keep myself from taking one last look in the broken mirror hanging on the wall. The mirror reflected a dismembered and fragmented image. One big eye. Two mouths. Superimposed teeth. Four arched eyebrows. Three nasal cavities. What difference did it make? I didn't know who I was anymore. Nor where to find the true reflection of things. (*BWR* 114)

The above reads like an ekphrastic description of a surrealist painting where nothing is as it seems and nothing makes any sense. The mirror image is a distortion, one that reflects a fractured identity as Massala-Massala has lost all sense of who he is. The mirror image recurs shortly before the 'Closing' section of the novel, where again Massala-Massala confronts his own identity:

> I faced a mirror. The man I found there intimidated me. I couldn't pull myself away. His big eyes stared at me without blinking. His stricken face pitied me. His drawn features emphasized that these events had exhausted him. I held out my hand to touch him. I noticed that I held out a hand to myself. (*BWR* 134)

This scene emphasises Massala-Massala's split identity. What is truly tragic about this extract is that Massala-Massala confronts himself but it is his reflection that feels pity for him. The mirror reflects and holds the truth that the dream keeps hidden. Massala-Massala's flânerie is only ever imagined, as he is a dreamer who lives more in his head than on his feet. Even in prison, his memory and imagination offer scenes of walking, while he remains physically still in a tiny cell. Just as he dreamt about going to Paris, so he continues to dream afterwards. While he fails at integration and assimilation in Paris, Massala-Massala is Afropolitan in that he is made up of many things, both African and European.

The final page of the novel carries an image that could be read as the epitome of Afropolitanism: a young Congolese man on an international flight from Paris dozes on the shoulder of his "Zairian neighbour" (*BWR* 147). This scene only scratches the surface, as in reality the young man is Massala-Massala. These young men are being deported back to their country of origin, having been unable to successfully integrate elsewhere. They are "failed transnational subjects" (Arnett and Wright 261–262). Despite what appears to be an irresolvable situation, Massala-Massala cannot give up hope as he still has to face his family at home despite his failure abroad.

In *Blue White Red*, as will be seen also in *The Street* in the next section, the ideal of the dream is what keeps the migrant going, forever hoping that he will attain that which he desires. Moki as *sapeur* is a particular Afropolitan contra-flâneur who ensures that all eyes are focused on him wherever he goes. He is not so much Selasi's 'African of the world' as he is *The* African world for his followers. Massala-Massala turns out to be a complete failure, to himself, to his friends and family, and the dream is not attained. In this sense the tragedy has unfolded, with the novel finally closing as the "plane struggles in the clouds like a heavy bird chased out of the sky by an imminent storm" (*BWR* 147), and the knowledge that down below many individuals await the realisation of the same dreams as did the imaginary-flâneur, Massala-Massala. Unlike Moki's repeated returns when he is laden with gifts for his family and friends, Massala-Massala returns feeling shame for not having succeeded. The elevated perspective afforded Massala-Massala from the aircraft window convinces him that he will keep the dream alive. He decides that it is "a matter of honor" (*BWR* 147) to return to France. This aspiring *sapeur*, an imaginary Afropolitan flâneur who has failed to integrate into a foreign country, will risk alienation all over again.

5.3 Mapping Lagos and London in Biyi Bandele's *The Street*

> One of the basic situationist practices is the dérive [literally "drifting"], a technique of rapid passage through varied ambiances. Dérives involve playful-constructive behavior and awareness of psychogeographical effects, and are thus quite different from the classic notions of journey or stroll. (Debord, *Society* Th. 50)

The above extract comes from Guy Debord's "Theory of the Dérive" which details a method of urban exploration where the flâneur sets out to drift aimlessly to observe the environment. The purpose of the *dérive*, an act of drifting carried out in an imaginative and fun manner, is observation of and reorientation in urban space. What makes the *dérive* different to flânerie is that it need not necessarily be a solo activity, and in fact many *dérives* are collaborative efforts. Contemporary practitioners of the *dérive* include Will Self (mentioned in Chapter 1) and Iain Sinclair, among others. Sinclair's method is to jot down observations in a notebook while walking (Day n. pag.), and his book of prose poem essays, *The Last London*,[160] is the

[160] See more in Jon Day's review in *The Guardian* at <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2017/sep/27/last-london-iain-sinclair-review>.

result of such psychogeographical journeying. “In a dérive,” writes Debord, “one or more persons […] let themselves be drawn by the attractions of the terrain and the encounters they find there” (*Society,* Th. 52). While there is no English word for someone who practises the *dérive* other than “drifter”, the French word “*dériveur*” will be used here to denote such an individual. Literally translated, a “*dériveur*” is a type of sailing dinghy that is moved by the wind. The image of such a boat brings to mind refugees attempting to escape their homeland via dangerous seas. While the word “*dériveur*” has an uncomfortable edge to it, the *dérive* is carefree, yet it is precisely this paradox that relates directly to the contrasting experiences of the migrant. It is this type of drifting, carried out collaboratively, that forms the focus of the discussion in the following analysis of *The Street.* As will be argued here, the *dérive* becomes a flâneuristic style of motion whereby the *dériveur* is better able to make sense of the diasporic home.

Written by Nigerian-born Biyi Bandele, *The Street* problematises the notion of immigrants belonging in a multicultural space in a number of ways. The drifting that is evident in Bandele’s novel is an activity that highlights interpersonal relationships between the various characters, as their encounters and observations take place in public street space. Most of the characters in the novel experience or have experienced varying degrees of struggle while trying to adapt to their diasporic home. Bandele’s *The Street,* much like Phaswane Mpe’s *Welcome to Our Hillbrow* examined in Chapter 2, “occupies parallel universes – the worlds of the living and of the dead, the lands of reality and of dreams” (Brenda Cooper 20). Such binaries, also evident in Massala-Massala’s experience in Paris, are extreme opposites, suggesting that whatever lies in-between risks getting lost when falling through the cracks. Nigeria is juxtaposed with England, and lofty hopes and desires are compared with cheap street talk in the novel.

As was seen in *Blue White Red* in the previous section, colonialist discourse is the basis for hopes and dreams, evident in the character of Moki as *sapeur*. The coloniser and his culture are set up as superior in every way in the binary between coloniser and colonised. As subject matter and theme in transnational literature, such hopes, dreams and expectations of the migrant are contrasted with the reality, again as was seen in *Blue White Red*. In Bandele’s novel, the street itself serves as the diasporic home for the variety of characters, who sometimes display what appears to be immigrant schizophrenic behaviour.[161] This state of

[161] While recent studies suggest links between immigrant status and schizophrenia (see Brian Cooper 361), Fanon drew attention to such mental disorders decades ago. Although Fanon uses the term ‘schizophrenic’ in an allegorical manner when he writes in *Black Skin, White Masks* that “the fact that I feel a foreigner in the worlds

split identity was strongly evident in the character of Massala-Massala, whose personality suffered when the reality of his diasporic location shattered the original dreams he had of Paris before he left the Congo.

In Chapter 1, Homi Bhabha's 'Third Space' and Sarah Nuttall's 'entanglement' were offered as a means of further examining the liminal spaces in which transnational subjects navigate their physical surroundings and encounters with other people. How might these find expression in *The Street*? Linguistic entanglement is evident throughout the novel and Bandele examines issues of belonging by challenging tradition in a number of ways, not least through his use of inventive language. Bandele also challenges tradition through the novel's tendency towards the surreal, thereby problematising what it means to be African or British or both. This surrealism was also evident in *Blue White Red* in the ekphrastic scene with Massala-Massala's distorted reflection (*BWR* 5). As elaborated by Jen Bouchard, Bandele uses surrealist techniques to express "the absurdity and arbitrariness of certain social and political structures associated with the experiences of hybridity and unbelonging" (99). One of the ways Bandele uses surrealism[162] is through his characters and narrativization, in order to highlight the absurdity of the liminal position of the immigrant. In a humorous (if sometimes overly adjectival) manner, Bandele caricatures several individuals who live diasporically in the Afro-Caribbean melting pot of London's Brixton, an interwoven, integrated area that changes every day. While the seemingly excessive use of adjectives has been noted by some readers on social media (myself included) as somewhat distracting, Brenda Cooper asserts that "Bandele produces carefully constructed narrative Molotov cocktails in which he takes the English language and subjects it to his will in a cultural political battle that began with colonialism and which has not ended" (19). This is a useful way to consider Bandele's style as it elucidates how the author wrestles with coming to terms with the cultural mix that impacts on his own identity. Just as migrants experience several lives, places and histories, so too can adjectives multiply or complicate the meaning of certain words. Bandele is doing what Ken Sarowiwa and Fela Kuti did with language by using Nigerian Pidgin English to make it accessible but also to make a point about hybridity and

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of the schizophrenic or the sexual cripple in no way diminishes their reality" (12), in *The Wretched of the Earth,* he writes extensively about the psychiatric and psychological effects of colonialism. In Fanon's chapter on "Colonial War and Mental Disorders" in *The Wretched of the Earth* he draws attention to the colonised subject who suffers a range of mental disorders. While in Fanon 'schizophrenic' can relate to the colonised subject, the term is used in this chapter and elsewhere in this thesis specifically to denote an experience of the immigrant in a foreign land.

[162] For a detailed discussion on the use of Surrealism in a postcolonial context, and as it relates to Bandele's novel, see Jen Bouchard's article, "Representations of Diasporic Unbelonging: Surrealism in the Work of Biyi Bandele-Thomas and Yinka Shonibare".

appropriation. This use of language relates to the multiplicity of identity and is a means of binding diasporic individuals together.

It is on the vibrant streets of Brixton that these characters meet regularly, and where the action of the novel is carried out. The multicultural, diasporic Brixton community shares a space that has become their own, a constructed space to which they bring their histories, their memories, their loves and their fears. In this way they also share a common identity and recognise aspects of themselves in one another. The street which they share "functions not only as the site where subject positions are perennially formed and performed, negotiated and (re)constituted, but also as a metaphor for the dynamic and medial nature of diasporic identity" (Okoye 79). This is a liminal space where different groups of individuals can meet in a shared space of convergence and intersection. Symbolically, the street is representative of movement and community. Bandele's characters in this novel are not merely passing through, they live in, on, and off the street, often being more comfortable in the street than in their own places of residence. Some – like Mr Bill, for instance – live under the bridge. Dada and Nehushta both spend much of their time in the street fascinated by the "band of nameless vagrants that drifted like flotsam on the sporadically turbulent streets of Brixton" (*TS* 183). At the start of the novel, Brixton High Street is described as:

> busy and frenetic, packed with the ever-present floating cast of the walking wounded and the clinically Undead; stricken men whose conscience hovered above them like flies over a banquet of dung; damaged souls haunted by memories of past transgressions and paralysed with guilt for sins not yet committed. (*TS* 11)

This abject description is of damaged individuals who are the underworld characters in the novel, some shipped in from Nigeria, and the reader is immediately inserted into a crepuscular space and left feeling as confused as surely most immigrants do when in their new surroundings. In this way, Bandele compels his reader to journey the same streets as the characters in the novel. Other narrative strategies that add to this dizzying and distancing effect include the use and abuse by some characters of alcohol and drugs. For instance, Dada drinks and smokes marijuana, Nehushta also has a passion for smoking joints and she subsidises her income by dealing drugs, and Abiodun drinks excessively. Reading the novel one cannot help but feel in an altered state. It is necessary every now and then to check back for facts to provide a clearer reading, or a more careful chronology. Bandele aims to unsettle the reader while making him or her comfortable. Although the reader laughs through the first few pages, this laughter changes to surprise and an increasing sense of disorientation while

reading. This disorientation serves as an echo of the dislocation experienced by the migrant in diaspora.

Bandele thus manages to "disturb, disarticulate, and rewrite the dominant narrative of a stable and policed culture to whose margins [the colonized subjects] are violently consigned" (Okoye 83). For many of the diasporically unhomed characters in the novel, the street itself becomes a kind of home. Avtar Brah notes that

> 'home' is a mythic place of desire in the diasporic imagination. In this sense it is a place of no return, even if it is possible to visit the geographical territory that is seen as the place of 'origin'. On the other hand, home is also the lived experience of a locality. (192)

The notion of home then, for Brah, is complex, and is experienced both in the imagination as well as physically inhabited. For Helen Hayes the idea of home is "an inner sense of personal authenticity and purpose" (in Knudsen and Rahbek 93). Home is "essentially a spatial concept," says Elisenda Masgrau-Peya, and "whether a site in the diasporic imagination or a reality of the here and now, home is rooted in a place" (62). However, to be "unhomed", says Homi Bhabha, "is not to be homeless" (*Location of Culture* 9), but rather, being unhomed, for Bhabha, is a psychological state experienced by the migrant.[163] Bhabha speaks of "unhomeliness" as being a "displacement" where "the borders between home and world become confused" and where "the private and public become part of each other" (*Location of Culture* 9). It is therefore, for Bhabha, not a matter of being without a home, but rather of having to find a new way of being in the world. Chukwuma Okoye claims that by reading Bandele's characters in *The Street* "as 'being' on the street rather than 'at' home" suggests that as individuals and as part of a group, these displaced figures "are unsecured, unbounded, unclaimed by any stable or culturally determined space" (89). The state of mind of these characters is one of feeling unhomed, even split or divided between places. Ashleigh Harris writes about homelessness in an Afropolitan context as "the attenuation of global space for the African body" (242). The homeless figure, for Harris, is one who is "dispossessed" (252) as a result of their economic situation. Paradoxically, for these figures, their way of being "at home in the world" is through homelessness. While space cannot be possessed in the true sense, it can be inhabited and used. In this manner, many of these individuals are, like the

[163] The term 'unhomely' comes from Sigmund Freud's 1919 essay, "The Uncanny". Freud writes of what is in German *unheimlich,* literally the 'unhomely' to describe the odd sense of the unfamiliar or frightening experienced within the familiar, *heimlich* or home-like.

migrant flâneur, constantly moving: between spaces, between home(s), between memory and diaspora, somehow surviving in the interstices even while they feel unhomed.

These in-between spaces are reflected in the urban environment of Brixton, where the characters find themselves with time to drift on the streets and in and out of each other's lives. Bandele leads his reader through the narrative as though we too walk the streets of Brixton. The traffic lights at an intersection open and close the novel, serving to frame the narrative, but also perhaps suggestive of the idea that borders or boundaries are not rigid. "Dada had a strange dream," we read at the beginning of Bandele's narrative, "Just after midday, the traffic lights at the intersection between the High Street and Stockwell Road developed conjunctivitis" (*TS* 5). While this is a strikingly surreal image, it is relevant that the reference is to a disease of the eye, and thus of the gaze. The ability to see, or the gaze, is essential for the flâneur. In the best of all possible worlds, eyes see. They also suggest the possibility of vision in the larger sense. In other words, they suggest the capacity to transcend the constraints of a life. Eyes indicate the potential to absorb and comprehend what one sees as one stands on one's own two feet and extends one's gaze from one's feet to one's new domain's horizons. However, in the real world, at the intersection of High and Stockwell Streets, the impaired functioning of the traffic lights signifies the difficulty, arguably the impossibility, of seeing the constraints with clarity and envisaging ways of transcending them. The reader certainly senses the difficulties attached to not seeing and crossing.[164] The novel ends with these words:

> The traffic lights at the crossroads between the High Street and Stockwell Road blew a fuse. […] He [Dada]'d had a strange and incomprehensive dream during the night. (*TS* 283)

The lights at the intersection, which ordinarily allow the free flow of traffic, malfunction again, thereby indicating that the problem of seeing and crossing remains unsolved.

The discussion that follows serves to further my argument that Afropolitan urban identity formation is closely related to the environment. When examining the flâneur figure in this novel, not just one but several immigrant characters will be considered: Ossie Jones, The Heckler, Dada and Haifa Kampana. The lives of these characters are entangled in a way that "works with difference and sameness but also with their limits" (Nuttall, *Entanglement* 1).

[164] The symbol of the intersection or crossroads is a recurring one and this brings to mind Stuart Hall's concept of identity as being influenced by various mixes. For Hall, identity is "the product of those complicated cross-overs and cultural mixes which are increasingly common in a globalized world" ("The Question" 310).

Whether or not these entangled characters can be interpreted as Afropolitan flâneurs will be made clearer through the close textual reading that follows.

Just as different feet tramp the pavements of Brixton's High Street and rush up and down escalators to the Underground, so too do other bit-part characters weave in and out of the narrative, all adding to the ever-changing cultural melée that is representative of Afropolitanism. Brenda Cooper draws attention to Bandele's specific and unique use of language as a deliberate stylistic device in *The Street*, and she points out that although he writes in English and does not include any Yoruba words in his narrative, Bandele does often make up his own "strange and foreign language" (29). At times Bandele plays with real words which are rather obscure, such as "absquatulated" (*TC* 195) or "exercitation" (*TC* 202), and other times he is more inventive by using words such as: "Trustafarians", "Afro-Saxon" (*TC* 17), "Nowheresville" (*TC* 34), "Black Blandiloquence" (*TC* 203) and other such linguistic delights. The effect on the reader is one of mystified confusion, as disorientating as it can be when one learns a new language without access to a dictionary or a translator, since Bandele provides little or no explanation for many of these invented words. For instance:

> 'I'm just strolling,' the boy said earnestly.
> 'To Nowhere-in-particular?'
> 'Yes,' the boy said.
> 'Nowheresville. That's a strange place to be going at this hour of the night.'
> 'I'm just taking a stroll,' the boy said mildly. (*TC* 34)

This boy, headed nowhere, strolls like a flâneur, or more specifically, in the manner of the *dérive*, with no particular destination in mind. This flâneur seeks "equality of access [and] freedom of movement" (Self in March-Russell 80). In *The Street,* through the *dérive*, or drift, the migrant flâneur, the Afropolitan flâneur and the *dériveur* can explore their host city even if comfortable integration is not possible.

5.3.1 The cast of the 'walking wounded'[165]

> In the New Brixton, the old mean streets had become the playgrounds and night-haunts of Trustafarians and Afro-Saxon literary, media and artistic types. (*TS* 17–18)
>
> Their accent was African-American by way of Derby. (*TS* 265)

[165] From *The Street* (11). A lengthier quotation including this phrase follows later in this chapter.

In *The Street* three main narrative strands connect the characters: Ossie Jones and his daughter, Nehushta; Dada and his cousin, The Heckler; and Haifa Kampana. Their lives all intertwine, if somewhat chaotically. Several other characters dip in and out of the chaos, one of these being the bookseller, Midé,[166] who treats passers-by to his stand-up comedy. While these characters mostly inhabit the street, they do not all walk it, nor are they all flâneurs. Many of them are, however, Afropolitans, or in Bandele's words, "Afro-Saxon".[167] The novel begins with Ossie Jones, Nehushta's father, who the reader learns only halfway through the novel, was in a coma for fifteen years:

> Ossie Jones drifted from a deep, drunken sleep into a dream in which he was completely sober and in his car driving down a strange, liminal highway that stretched from a nebulous tunnel at the soles of his feet, past the toll-gates of his soul, where he was stopped, even his passport checked, and into the boundless openness of the universe. (*TS* 28)

This passage recalls the opening of *Blue White Red* discussed in the previous section where Massala-Massala is a dislocated migrant. Similarly, as in *Blue White Red,* dreaming is a recurring theme in *The Street*, and relates to the hopes and desires of the migrant subject. Ossie Jones is an "immigration lawyer" (*TS* 25) in London, who had hoped to do his doctorate at Oxford before starting up his own law firm in Nigeria (*TS* 29), although the civil war in his home country coupled with his father's death prevented him from following through with the plan. A long section of the novel is devoted to Ossie's dream sequence, which the reader later discovers is in fact a fifteen-year-long coma (*TS* 64). In this dream state, Ossie is mistakenly taken to be a murderer and is imprisoned for a lengthy period of time. As evidenced in Mabanckou's novel, *Blue White Red*, as well as in a number of real-life instances, immigrants suffer this kind of persecution on a regular basis. The horror for Ossie is that it is a dream from which there is often no escape, and there is no waking up afterwards. As Jen Bouchard puts it, Ossie's coma represents events that could happen to an African immigrant who could as easily be falsely accused of a crime and subsequently imprisoned, purely as a result of discrimination (109). Ossie's specific Afropolitan flânerie

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[166] Even bit-part characters like Midé are created by Bandele to surprise the reader with detail: "They arrived at Midé's flat. It was in a basement right next door to his bookshop. […] Hanging on the kitchen wall a photograph of the writer Sam Selvon […] reading from his fifties masterpiece *The Lonely Londoners*" (*TS* 273). This intertextual reference provides a nod of recognition to the formation of black metropolitan subjectivity by focusing on African and Caribbean immigrants to London.

[167] According to an article by Bassey Ufot and Idara E. Thomas, the term 'Afro Saxon' was first coined by Kenyan scholar Ali Mazrui in 1975 by analogy with the term 'Anglo Saxon', in reference to the increasing popularity of the English language as a first language for some African people (463). Nigeria is a good example of the linguistic phenomenon in which the English language is increasingly becoming the functionally 'first language' of a great many black and African people.

happens in the dreamworld of his coma, where he remembers "the Nigeria of his youth, a place which was now so far away from him and yet so near" (*TS* 117). Ossie's flânerie is in his imagination, in his dreams. In this sense, as an imaginary-flâneur, Ossie is similar to Massala-Massala in *Blue White Red.* In his waking life, however, Ossie remains ambivalent about Nigeria as 'home', and feels "he might decide to move back home, either to Nigeria or to some neighbouring country" (*TS* 118). Ossie could be referred to as what Greg Madison calls an 'existential migrant', as his reasons for migrating were not primarily economically motivated. For existential migrants, "'[b]elonging' is viewed with intense ambivalence" (Madison 246) as such migrants never really feel at home anywhere.

Ossie's daughter, Nehushta, on the other hand, truly inhabits her space, and lives the bohemian existence of an artist flâneuse in Brixton, where she observes people and "capture[s] the recurring faces on the streets around her" (*TS* 184). Nehushta's flat is filled with art equipment, paintings and sketches, most of which "were portraits of people, many of whom Dada knew […] as the Brixton Undead" (*TS* 173). This reinforces the notion of the "walking wounded and clinically Undead" (*TS* 11) mentioned at the beginning of the novel. Nehushta is wooed by a character known as Dada.

A writer-flâneur, Dada is a journalist who falls madly in love with Nehushta until he discovers that she is bisexual and then he spends much of his time lazing about, drinking and smoking marijuana. Bandele's choice of the name "Dada" for one of his characters is clearly a reference to Dadaism, the European movement that preceded surrealism, although in the novel this connection is denied by Dada himself. In this manner the author alludes to the important role Africa plays culturally, artistically and historically in a global sense. In Dadaism, African masks as well as African words[168] were taken out of their original context and inserted into a European space,[169] changing them into something different in order to provoke or subvert. Bandele cleverly highlights this in his novel by noting the name 'Dada' to be an African one. Dada himself, not without difficulty, is an "African of the world" (Selasi, "Bye-Bye" n. pag.), an Afropolitan who is cognisant of the different spaces of diasporic home and his roots. An observer of people, Dada notices others milling about in and out of the underground. He drifts in the manner of a *dériveur*, aimless yet observant. While Dada never does write his book of poetry, he nonetheless writes a book about "the

[168] Spunk Seipel provides an example of the onomatopoetic poems by Richard Huelsenbeck and Tristan Tzara which "also have a link to the African continent." The word "Umba", for instance, might have sounded like nothing more than a nonsense word used between verses, but in reality Umba is the name of a river in northeastern Tanzania.

[169] As recently as 2016, an art exhibition in Berlin titled *Dada Africa* drew attention to Dada artists' "fascination with non-European art" (Seipel n. pag.).

weird and wonderful, sometimes saddening, constantly exhilarating characters that people the streets of Brixton and give it that strange, phantasmagoric quality which is called surreal" (*TS* 286). These characters in Dada's book are the very same characters we encounter in *The Street*.

Representative of another type of African living in the diaspora, Bandele casts the Nigerian Abiodun or 'Biodun as "The Heckler". He is Dada's cousin, and appears to be a permanent resident in the street. After losing his lover, André, to HIV-Aids and learning of his own status, Abiodun quits his job and takes to heckling where he "wittily taunts the sandwich-board preachers outside the tube station" (*TS* back cover). The Heckler, Bandele writes, "locked horns with these mavens, gurus, roshis, lamas, shamans, revolutionaries, avatars, seers, illuminati, diviners, prognostics, prophets and those who considered themselves the street clerisy (*TS* 13)". For the Heckler, words and language are all that is left of his life, but even these he tears apart by harassing and taunting others on the street. Born in Brixton, the Heckler's "desire to see out his days on the streets of his birth had nothing to do with tribal loyalty" (*TS* 13), but was rather more a matter of economic necessity. It is relevant to pose the question: can the Heckler be considered an Afropolitan flâneur? Arguably, he can, since, although born in Brixton, his roots are still African.[170] The Heckler lives on the steets where, even as a drunk, he observes all who come and go, and he knows the street environment intimately. He will continue to somehow eke out a meagre existence on the streets of Brixton, and will never return to Nigeria.

While the Heckler disrupts the lives of others, another disturbed character that Bandele adds to the mix is Haifa Kampana, a stalker-voyeur-flâneur. Unable to deal with his emotions, when he falls passionately in love with someone, rather than meet up with and speak to the person of his desire, Haifa chooses to stalk her obsessively. For instance, when following Susan, he stalks her not only on foot, but also by car, by bike, by train. "In this way Haifa got to know everything that it was possible to know about Susan without going up to her and asking" (*TS* 245). Naturally, such compulsive behaviour can only lead to disaster, and when Susan gets a new boyfriend, Haifa plots to get rid of him by framing him.

Haifa, as a stalker, is similar to Leke in *Bom Boy* (discussed in Chapter 3) who also carries out a voyeuristic type of flânerie, and so once he succeeds in his mean-spirited plot and Susan is left once again unattached, "Haifa indulge[s] his *schadenfreude* by treating himself to a pair of heavy-duty binoculars. And a new pair of shoes" (*TS* 248). Deriving

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[170] This connection to African roots is similar to that of Emma Dabiri who remains connected to her Nigerian identity even though she "has spent her entire adult life as an immigrant" (Dabiri, "Pitfalls" 202).

pleasure from another's misfortune prompts Haifa to reward himself, and it is thus entirely fitting that his two choices of gift are perfect to equip him as an Afropolitan flâneur in order to better observe and to walk the street environment. This is his way of adapting to his diasporic home.

Besides good shoes and eyes, an essential aspect of flânerie is the ability to record what has been observed. The displacement experienced by the migrant is integral to the existence of the *dériveur* who practices the art of wandering aimlessly, and then sharing in some artistic form what has been discovered. Nehushta does this by painting, Dada does it through writing, and the protagonist-narrator of the novel, Mr Bill, does it with words. Mr Bill, a character who actually lives on the street, is the "word seller of Brixton" (*TS* 285), the flâneur par excellence of *The Street.* Described as a "peripatetic idiot savant" (*TS* 181), Mr Bill occupies a regular place outside the tube station:

> In the summer he sold words for a living. He would take his usual spot outside the station, beside the newsagent's stall, and standing there he would whisper words into the ears of passers-by in exchange for a modest honorarium, the average being ten pence per word (though some had been known to buy whole sentences). One man bought a paragraph. It was a birthday gift for his wife. Others simply came back for more words. (*TS* 181)

Bandele thus gives words currency, making them real and tangible, even when they might be unintelligible. He elaborates on how Mr Bill, who lives under Waterloo Bridge, cares for words, by mending "with a needle and thread" (*TS* 182) those words that are damaged. He even rescues "stray, homeless or discarded words" from rubbish bins (*TS* 182). Mr Bill thus helps to bring lost words (like lost worlds and lost people) into the here and now, onto the streets of Brixton. Just like the flâneur is adept at using language to write about what is experienced on the streets, it is by bringing all these words together that Bandele suggests that there is no hierarchy on the street, here in Brixton where Africa and Europe collide and migrants reorganise themselves as a means of survival. However, these multicultural streets of Brixton that bring people together also paradoxically maintain divisions, as is seen with the problematic divide between Afro-Caribbeans and African migrants. Mr Bill's way of surviving is as a wordsmith. He is the *dériveur* who, having walked and observed, attempts to tie all the threads of intersecting stories together, using language to do so. His threaded words become the narrative Bandele writes and the novel that we read.

5.3.2 Brixtonioso banter

> 'Where,' he asked after a long and pensive silence, 'is Africa?' (*TS* 37)

The above words are uttered by Apha, when Ossie tells him a story about a missionary who goes to Africa. In *The Street*, Bandele illustrates that Africa also can exist in England. As Chinua Achebe writes in the introductory message in the Penguin African Writers edition of the novel, "Africa is very complex. The world is just starting to get to know Africa" (n. pag.). It is time "for Africans to tell their own stories" writes Achebe (n. pag.), and *The Street* is many of those stories. Brixton is also Lagos or Accra, if one takes Mbembe's Afropolitan's "interweaving of the here and there" ("Afropolitanism" 28) into consideration. The concrete reality of Brixton High Street serves as a place where multiple cultures mix, and Bandele's now-humorous, now-serious, sometimes confusing yet always delightful narrative style highlights this nomadic mix. Bandele uses the street as a symbol of the crossings and re-crossings of the liminal migrant figure in diaspora. The characters encountered here are immigrant flâneurs, *dériveurs*, Afropolitans whose roots will remain forever somewhere in Africa, yet whose new and always changing lives are in London, in Brixton, in the street. For now.

On the very last page of the novel, Bandele offers the following:

> As Dada stepped out the front door and on to the street, and headed for the Brixtonioso, an alien thought began to take shape in his mind. It assumed the form of an invisible weight pulling him down and crushing him at the same time. He decided, on a whim, to flee from his mind. He soared into the night, like a scream rising, and up to the stars. (*TS* 292)

The interwovenness of the word "Brixtonioso" is once again typical of Bandele's hybridization of language, and ability to bring that which is alien to be integrated into reality. The stars represent external circumstances which reflect or suggest the possibility of liberation, and their presence in the sky helps shift the gaze from the street, from within, to without, driven by the impulse to escape. For Dada there is the hope that he is able to flee his situation, by directing his gaze upward and beyond the ground upon which he walks, but this is at the cost of losing his mind. Or is it? There is a shift in narrative point of view, and Dada has agency to escape his mind which promises the liberty that he, as an immigrant, so desperately desires. However, this is immediately followed by another shift in the narrative point of view, that re-directs his own gaze back down upon himself:

> Then he changed his mind – into a pair of eyes. They stared dimly at him, as he walked along the street. (*TS* 292)

Here the gaze has shifted again, or rather, is shifted, from without to within and without again. There is still the detachment, but in order to liberate himself Dada must see himself from a distance. His elevation provides a perspective from an increased height, which is also an aspect of the Afropolitan flâneur that has been seen in several novels discussed earlier.[171] He must practise the *dérive*, he must lose himself mindlessly while walking. This idea of detachment and looking down upon himself is slightly reminiscent of Massala-Massala's split identity, and suggests that Dada can never really escape the ground upon which he walks, even if it is when he sees it from above. The *dériveur* continues to walk as the journey is never over, it is merely interrupted. There will be another *dérive* for another day, a chance to drift aimlessly and try to feel at home, as best as an Afropolitan can, in this diaspora. While the day-to-day existence of the migrant characters in *The Street* might seem surreal (exaggeratedly so at times), it has become for these individuals a method of coping with the unreal situation of survival in a liminal space.

In sum, a variety of Afropolitan flâneur characters have been identified in *The Street*, with each one representing a different type of Afropolitan flânerie. Ossie's specific Afropolitan flânerie, as an existential migrant, happens in the dreamworld of his comatose state, and he is therefore an imaginary-flâneur, much like Massala-Massala in *Blue White Red*. Dada is a *dériveur*, The Heckler is a disruptive flâneur, Haifa is a voyeur, and Mr Bill, the narrator, is an artist flâneur who sells words. That there are varied perspectives provided by Bandele in *The Street*, even though they are all narrated by one (Mr Bill), and that the characters speak a multitude of Englishes shows that it is just such individuals who are the threads in the fabric that make up this particular London cityspace. The Brixton that these flâneurs walk thus becomes Afropolitan as they walk that space.

All of the Afropolitan flâneur characters in this chapter live diasporically and do not integrate comfortably into their host country. They are 'unhomed' Afropolitan flâneurs, who exist in a psychological state of in-betweenness while they constantly struggle to integrate.[172]

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[171] A similar, distanced perspective where the flâneur is able to see things from a height was evident with Azure from his mountaintop viewpoint in *Thirteen Cents*, the narrator from heaven in *Welcome to Our Hillbrow*, Massala-Massala from the aircraft window in *Blue White Red*, The Girl from the roof of the Skyline building, and Julius in *Open City*, as will be seen in the next section of this chapter.

[172] Research has shown that "discrimination and social exclusion may lie at the heart of the immigrant psychosis problem" (McIntyre and Bentall n. pag.) The findings of research conducted by Richard Bentall indicate that those who remain connected to their "original culture and practices" have a lower chance of becoming paranoid (n. pag.).

Testament to their uncomfortable integration are symptoms which include substance abuse (both Nehushta and Dada are inclined towards marijuana smoking while The Heckler is a drunk), inappropriate social behaviour (Haifa is a stalker and voyeur), and altered mind states (Ossie is even comatose). The Afropolitan flâneurs examined in *The Street* suffer similar psychological effects from being homeless as those experienced by Fanon's colonised subject as a result of racism and alienation.

5.4 Walking the In-Between World of New York in Teju Cole's *Open City*

> How hard it was to get to America – harder than crawling through the anus of a needle. For the visas and passports, we begged, despaired, lied, grovelled, promised, charmed, bribed – anything to get us out of the country. (Bulawayo 240)

The image of passing through the anus of a needle strikes the reader instantly as a reworking of the Biblical metaphor, the eye of the needle, through which it is impossible for a camel to pass. The translation of the eye into the anus welcomes commentary. Darling, the main protagonist in NoViolet Bulawayo's *We Need New Names*, uses the metaphor as a way of indicating her own experience, as well as that of family members, upon arrival in the United States. The image instantly suggests the extreme difficulties and constraints that accompany migrating from her birth-country, Zimbabwe. In literal terms, the eye of the needle can be understood as a gap or hollow through which a thread is passed. Considered as such, the reader might imagine Darling and her relatives as crawling, in abject fashion, on their hands and knees, through the confined space that brings them from their familiar world into one that is disturbingly unfamiliar. The image speaks of a people bereft of the capacity for agency in their new world. However, the fact that the gap or hollow of the needle is attached to the idea of the eye invites closer inspection. Eyes see. In contradistinction, as soon as the reader of *We Need New Names* is presented with the anus in the place of the eye, a different mode of interpretation emerges, that is, one of abjection.

The abjectification of migrants is nothing new and is seen more and more with the ongoing refugee crisis for instance, where migrants are transformed from objects to abjects. As pointed out in Chapter 1, what causes abjection, according to Kristeva, is "what disturbs identity, system, order" (4). The abject, says Kristeva, "does not respect borders, positions, rules" as it is the "in-between, the ambiguous" (4). In literature, such notions of the abject are

taken up readily in other ways as well. For example, consider how Elvis in *GraceLand* viewed the Lagos landscape as scatological.

By contrast, Teju Cole's novel *Open City* advances a less scatological view of immigration than NoViolet Bulawayo's, and yet the novel equally problematizes the plight of the migrant. Cole spent all of his childhood in Nigeria, and subsequently as an adult has lived in New York, thus he belongs to both places, and is a hyphenated being. "If someone wants to call me a Nigerian-American, that's fine" says Cole in an interview conducted by Geetanjali Jhala, and adds that "It's also fine if they want to call me an American-Nigerian, or a Nigerian or an American" (n. pag.). Cole is not overly sensitive to labels, and he explains in a different interview, conducted by Taiye Selasi, that he's comfortable "being described as Afropolitan, or African, or American, or pan-African. Or Yoruba, or Brooklynite, or black, or Nigerian" (n. pag.). Cole provides a realistic account of an individual who straddles two different worlds, and he illustrates the difficulties that sometimes arise with such a duality. The protagonist of this novel, an African in New York, or an Afropolitan flâneur, undergoes a metamorphosis, a natural consequence of migration, to such a degree that he risks losing touch with his roots, by becoming estranged from himself. Cole's Julius adapts to his adopted home to such a degree that he sometimes blatantly snubs his fellow Africans. An example of this occurs when Julius bumps into a Caribbean man who introduces himself as Kenneth and recognises him from a week earlier at the Folk Art Museum. Julius is irritated by Kenneth's familiar "hey, I'm African just like you" attitude which was similar to that of the chatty cabdriver he had earlier encountered. Julius chooses to distance himself from other Africans such as these, perhaps because they remind him of a painful past that he would rather forget. Julius does not care much about recognising his "face in that of a foreigner" (Mbembe, "Afropolitanism" 28) and he purposely passes up several opportunities of acknowledging a common bond with fellow Africans. This suggests that Julius does indeed wish to forget aspects of his past.

Through his Afropolitan flâneur, Julius, Teju Cole problematizes the plight of the African migrant in diaspora, rendering *Open City* a narrative of universal trauma. The migrants with whom Julius interacts all have stories to tell, which add to the palimpsest form of the novel and intensify the commonality of marginalised experience, as well as highlight the stark differences. That Julius is a psychiatrist himself who deals daily with the trauma of others suggests too that the migrant stories he relays throughout the novel also require a form of psychosocial support. This is done in part through the telling of the stories, by giving the silenced a voice. For wounds to heal, it sometimes requires re-living the experiences that

initiated those wounds, and the first step is by speaking those stories, which is what Julius does. The narratives we read are those wanderings in Afropolitan Julius's imagination, thoughts and memories of traumatic events that have been sparked by what he has encountered through walking, one foot in front of the other, through the streets of Manhattan.

Cole's narrator, Julius, of mixed German and Nigerian parentage, is a psychiatric resident doctor at a hospital, who habitually takes leisurely walks across Manhattan, and through his observations and encounters, he relates a detailed diasporic history of New York via cameos of urban life. "The practice of psychiatry," says Julius, "is partly about seeing the world as a collection of tribes" where differences "are small" (*OC* 204). Some pages later, Julius muses: "Each person must, on some level, take himself as the calibration point for normalcy, must assume that the room of his own mind is not, cannot be, entirely opaque to him" (*OC* 243). Julius is not only a flâneur walking the street, but one wandering the depths of the human mind as well. "Who has not," Julius asks, "brought something performative into his everyday life?" (*OC* 243). Is Julius's idea of performativity then akin to disguising the truth? In his mind Julius wonders about good and evil, and as he ponders over the ethics of his own life, he claims to be "satisfied that I have hewed close to the good" (*OC* 243). This reader cannot help but doubt the veracity of such a statement.

Julius's desire to detach from his roots and to be free is evident in the images of flight which recur throughout the novel, both with the flight of birds as well as flight in airplanes. While the symbolism of the birds suggests flight across great distances, and migration but also freedom, similarly the voices of announcers over the radio waves suggest travel that knows no boundaries, and Julius admits to liking "the sounds of those voices speaking calmly from thousands of miles away" (*OC* 4) because he feels connected to the disembodied voices simply by listening. Before he takes to walking, Julius had enjoyed listening to the radio. In this sense he is able to remain isolated and yet still feel a part of the world. In other words, he can be a cosmopolitan without even leaving the confines of his apartment.

It is by means of walking, however, and by observing and thinking about what he sees, that Julius captures the city of New York in a unique manner, by interspersing it with memories from his Nigerian childhood as well as with factual histories from long ago. In this way, Julius, although uprooted (but not rootless), maps his space in the city as a means to better find his own place in it, to discover his identity and to relate intimately to his surroundings. "Places are fragmentary and inward-turning histories," notes de Certeau, "pasts that others are not allowed to read" (108), and Julius keeps those histories to himself, mulling

them through his mind as he walks. For de Certeau, the body is located in space and reacts to that environment, and "[t]he memorable is that which can be dreamed about a place" (109).

As Julius wanders the streets, so too do his thoughts wander and while walking the city, he makes connections between now and then, between Africa and America, slavery and freedom, identifying him thus as an Afropolitan, an "African of the world" (Selasi, "Bye-Bye" n. pag.), a cosmopolitan with African roots. While much of the narrative takes place in the city of New York, there is a substantial section devoted to Julius's visit to Brussels, where he goes in search of his maternal grandmother, not knowing whether she is still alive. Julius is thus the embodiment of a triple identity consisting of European ancestry, Nigerian roots and American daily life. This multiple mapping extends also to Julius's professional life, since as a psychiatrist he maps or navigates the workings of the human brain. Ironically, while he is capable of mapping his patients' minds, he is unable to chart any path towards close human connection with others.

An example of the disconnect between Julius and other people occurs when he is in Brussels and he stops at a restaurant and club where he "spent the entire evening alone […] watching the young Congolese" (*OC* 138–39). It is only when he leaves that he is surprised to learn that the happy, dancing crowd was not Congolese at all, but rather Rwandan. Julius tells the reader that it is at this point that his interpretation of the evening changes, as he imagines what it was like for the Rwandans to have lived through the "genocide" (*OC* 139).

As insider and outsider, Julius embodies the paradoxical perspective of the Afropolitan flâneur which is brought to the fore in the novel, yet the paradoxical, alienated cosmopolitanism evident in Julius is anything but celebratory. Not only is the metropolis at times overwhelming, but the experiences of migrants in such metropoli as New York or Brussels even more so. However, it must be borne in mind that, like cosmopolitanism, Afropolitanism necessarily implies a sense of community as it cannot exist in isolation. Julius might be alone, but his survival requires interaction with community, even if it is from a distance. Besides being identified as a flâneur, Julius has also been referred to as a "fugueur" (Vermeulen, "Flights" 42), a "deracinated stroller" (Festa 81), and a "deracinated New Yorker" (Miller in Powell 74) The term 'deracinated' used by Festa and Miller suggests a forced or violent uprooting, which is not the reading taken in this thesis. While he might have felt uprooted, Julius does not lack roots, and his many returns in his imagination to Africa suggest that this connection remains strong.

The dislocation, loss and sometimes desperate retrieval of memories are explored in *Open City* not only through the narrator-flâneur, but also through some of the characters

encountered in the novel. One of these, for instance, is the completely cosmopolitan Farouq, who is multilingual, much travelled and very well educated. Farouq is one of only a few people with whom Julius takes time to engage when he meets him at an internet café in Brussels, but even when he does engage, it is in a reserved fashion. Farouq can furthermore be considered Afropolitan given that he is studying to be a translator and also believes that "people can live together" (*OC* 113), thus espousing ideas of intersection and humanism. Farouq is constantly involved with people, and engaged in various projects. Given that he easily communicates in different languages with customers in the internet café where he works, he is the opposite to Julius who remains detached and at times even refuses to be recognised as a "brother" and fellow "African" (*OC* 40).

Open City has received far more popular as well as critical attention than Cole's earlier novel that was discussed in Chapter 4, *Every Day is for the Thief,* and yet both texts address similar concerns, albeit they are set in different places. Instead of regurgitating the many critical essays written on *Open City*, a summary of these readings will suffice here. Both Katherine Hallemeier (2013) and Pieter Vermeulen (2015) examine *Open City* as a cosmopolitan text. Vermeulen argues further that in *Open City* the figure of the flâneur degenerates into a fugueur who can be seen as a "mad traveller" (42) or a "dark counterpart to the *flâneur*" (54, italics in original) whose urban perambulations verge more on vagabondism than on flânerie. While Susanne Gehrmann disagrees with Vermeulen's reading of the flâneur as fugueur ("Cosmopolitanism" 71), Vermeulen's interpretation does nonetheless allow for the updated, twenty-first century version of the flâneur to be further explored, along lines as argued in this thesis. The Afropolitan flâneur is a flâneur whose gaze, as pointed out in Chapter 1, takes in the "complex flows" (Hartwiger 5) of people. Afropolitanism itself is an entanglement of these flows, in particular with regard to the movements of migrants. In a similar vein, Alexander Hartwiger suggests that Cole's version of a postcolonial flâneur reflects "an era of globalization" (2) and this reading also focuses on aspects of movement and migration in this rapidly developing era.

Julius is acutely aware of the plight of disadvantaged groups, including migrants and refugees, and Cole provides examples in the novel that include the African slave memorial burial ground, "now under office buildings, shops, streets, diners, pharmacies" (*OC* 220), and the "detention facility in Queens in which undocumented immigrants were held" (*OC* 62), which is also referred to as a "purgatorial waiting room" (*OC* 63) emphasising the plight of the (im)migrant trapped between worlds. This concern too is in line with issues pertaining to the Afropolitan, such as the paradox of the dream versus reality, the abjectification of the

migrant, and the liminality experienced in the diasporic home. *Open City* interrogates colonialism and oppression through the critical gaze of Julius as he backtracks through history and memory. Beatrice Festa examines Cole's narrative by considering the "perpetual sense of trauma" (89) that is experienced when walking in New York post 9/11, for instance, and how this impacts upon the narrator Julius's "deracination and disorientation" (82). As a flâneur figure, Julius is a keen observer of the urban surroundings, and is sensitive to the layers of history that have shaped the cityscape. Ironically, it is through his isolation that Julius is able to join what is a national mourning as a result of historical events that have occurred.

All of these readings serve to show Julius as an example of the quintessential Afropolitan flâneur. The Afropolitan flâneur highlights the ambivalence associated with notions of being connected to geographical roots of origin as well as the routes travelled by the migrant. As Selasi puts it, what typifies the Afropolitan consciousness is an "effort to understand what is ailing in Africa alongside the desire to honor what is wonderful" ("Bye-Bye" n. pag.). Once again, this highlights the paradox of not only the Afropolitan, but also the Afropolitan flâneur.

5.4.1 The paradox of the forgetful flâneur

> Things don't go away just because you choose to forget them. (*OC* 245)

There is a scene about halfway through *Open City* when Julius walks to Wall Street to meet his accountant, but he remembers that he left his cheque book behind. Since he happens to have his bank card on him, Julius goes in search of an ATM machine, but upon arrival he finds, to his dismay, that he "had simply forgotten the number" (*OC* 161). Subsequently he makes several failed attempts to type in the correct pin number before giving up. Julius confesses:

> Such sudden mental weakness […] was from a simplified version of the self, an area of simplicity where things had once been more robust. This was true of a broken leg, too: one was suddenly lessened, walking with an incomplete understanding of what walking was about. (*OC* 161)

Julius is dismayed at his forgetfulness, no less because he had used the card code "for more than six years" (*OC* 161). Feeling unnerved, Julius continues walking and tries, unsuccessfully again, to draw money from a different machine. His forgetfulness here is a

sign to him that something is amiss, and when he eventually meets with his accountant as arranged, he says nothing of what had happened. While he has an opportunity to share the story, given that the accountant was expecting payment, Julius does not do so.

Contrary to the titular openness of the city, Julius himself remains closed off from all that is around him, even when immersing himself in the ‘open city’. A black man walking in a white dominated city, even New York today, still can be viewed with suspicion or perhaps even fear, as illustrated with reference to Cadogan at the outset of this chapter. Disoriented and disconnected in the strange city, Julius remains an outsider in New York even when he tries to form friendships.

Throughout his many daily perambulations, Julius responds to the environment by reliving different memories. As he walks, so his memory is enlivened. The entire novel is a collection of these encounters of memory and history, and this becomes a quest for Julius: to uncover that which is remembered. It is as though there is something he is searching for, but has no idea what it is, and this is similar to Leke in *Bom Boy.* In Leke’s case, he refuses to search for his past, or rather, he hesitates to access memories when prompted.[173] In Julius’s case, these are often distressing memories from a past he would rather forget. Thus, given all the focus on history, memory, and things past, it comes as a surprise when Julius’s memory fails him towards the end of the novel during an encounter with Moji.

It is the final encounter with Moji which, as pointed out by Knudsen and Rahbek, ties Julius’s past to his present, uniting “there and here, Nigeria and New York” (65). The much-discussed scene where Moji years later speaks to Julius about his rape of her provides a disturbing rupture when it arrives in the penultimate chapter. The utterance provided as an epigraph at the beginning of this section, “Things don’t go away just because you choose to forget them” (*OC* 245), emanates from Moji’s lips, towards the end of the novel, when, speaking to Julius, she relives the suffering she underwent as a result of the sexual abuse of which he stands accused by her.

Julius’s inability to remember (or perhaps his unwillingness to do so) complicates his connection to his Nigerian roots. This forgetful Afropolitan flâneur appears to have a very selective memory. In Julius’s case, “the ‘Afro’ gets in the way” of his cosmopolitanism (Knudsen and Rahbek 75). As a psychiatrist, Julius deals with other people’s problems, yet ironically, when it comes to his own, he fails miserably at confronting his own problems

[173] Examples of this include the letters from Leke’s father Oscar, which he refuses to read until years later, and the photograph he carries around with him not knowing why. He did not know who was in the photograph, and the only clue to the person’s identity was the letter “E” on the photo. It is only when he reads his father’s letters that Leke discovers the photograph is that of his birth mother, Elaine.

directly. Julius's "mobility of body *and* of mind" (Knudsen and Rahbek 66) are aspects which require exploration. Not only does Julius get lost on foot, but he also gets lost in his mind. His wanderings are both physical and mental.

Given that the flâneur, unlike the *dériveur*, is generally a solo artist, one should not expect Julius to entertain ordinary relationships. For instance, he has a brief frisson with a stranger which culminates in sex and is soon over. The reader also learns that Julius's long-distance relationship with his girlfriend Nadège remains a challenge and the only 'friend' he spends time with is the octogenarian Professor Saito. Another reference to Julius's dis-connection occurs when he bumps into his next-door neighbour and is surprised to hear that the man's wife had passed away some months before. "A woman had died in the room next to mine," Julius says, "she had died on the other side of the wall I was leaning against, and I had known nothing of it" (*OC* 21). This ought to warn the reader very early on in the novel to pay attention to Julius's relationships with others for potential clues as to his social alienation and extreme distancing from others. On a church excursion with his girlfriend, Julius is reminded of somebody he had once known:

> That other girl had been hidden in my memory for more than twenty-five years; to suddenly remember her, and instantly tie her to Nadège, was a shock. I must have been circling subconsciously around the idea for several days, but seeing the link solved the problem. I never spoke to Nadège about the other girl, whose name I had forgotten, whose face had blurred in memory, of whom I now retained only the image of a limp. It wasn't a deception: all lovers live on partial knowledge. (*OC* 60)

Clearly Julius, a doctor of the mind, is aware how active the subconscious can be. He constantly seems to need to access hidden memories, almost as if to affirm his present existence. As much as Julius seems to be detached from the crowd, so too is he often detached from his memories.

Paradoxically however, despite his detachment, Julius wishes "to find the line that connected [him] to [his] own part in these stories (*OC* 59). Julius, as a stranger in a strange land, exhibits his own strangeness which is echoed by the multitude of strangers with whom he strikes up conversation, such as Terry at the post office and Farouq in Brussels. Testament to Julius's connection with strangers is a scene in the novel where he mails a copy of Kwame Anthony Appiah's *Cosmopolitanism* to Farouq. Julius's Afropolitanism is a diluted form of Appiah's cosmopolitanism which "affirms rootedness in the familiar landscape of home with an appreciation of the world as a whole, including its many forms of strangeness and diversity" (Falk n. pag.). While Julius searches for his roots via his maternal German

grandmother (whom he believes to be in Brussels), he remains forever an outsider in any landscape. His voluntary displacement is equivalent to Madison's existential migration that was mentioned earlier.[174]

It is during one of his sojourns in Brussels that Julius is disturbed by a dream in which he is in Lagos and has a sister. Julius reminds the reader that, in truth, he is an only child, and when he awakens from the dream and realises that he is in Brussels, he remembers that "I was someone, not a body without a being. I had slowly returned to myself from a distance" (*OC* 131). Not only is Julius distanced from other people, but, as his subconscious suggests via this dream, he is also sometimes distanced from himself.

Such dreams and wanderings of the mind are closely connected with Julius's physical wanderings in city environments. When he has some time on his hands before he dines with Dr Maillotte in Brussels, Julius stumbles upon a church which he then enters. Recorded piped music plays while a woman busies herself with a vacuum cleaner between the aisles. As he watches her, Julius thinks "that she, too, might be here in Belgium as an act of forgetting" (*OC* 140). It is possible that Julius is projecting, yet he thinks to himself that "perhaps her escape was not from anything she had done, but from what she had seen" (*OC* 140). Trauma can give rise to both forgetfulness as well as remembering, and in Julius's case his personal memories become entangled with traumas that have been experienced by other people.

At a very late point in the novel, in the scene when Moji recounts the rape to Julius, a shift happens which forces this reader to re-think everything that preceded the telling of this incident. Did Julius do it? Did he remember forcing himself on Moji eighteen years earlier when they were merely teenagers? Why did he react to Moji's telling in such a detached, even clinical, fashion? Pieter Vermeulen feels that Julius's "dissociative condition, and a failure of memory" (54) are connected to his own confusion and identity crisis. Can the reader forgive Julius this distance given that he is a doctor of the mind and therefore trained not to be involved too closely emotionally with his patients? Rebecca Clark suggests that Julius's "non-account of Moji's rape" (183) is too easily filed away in forgotten memories.

The doubt that this revisited rape scene casts in the mind of the reader means that one is forced to backtrack to search for other clues regarding Julius's insensitivity and apparent forgetfulness. Furthermore, this makes a second reading of the text essential and, understandably, it cannot be read in the same manner as a result of the new knowledge imparted by Moji near the novel's end. This new information, appearing so close to the

[174] See Section 5.3 for brief discussion around the idea that existential migrants never feel at home anywhere.

novel's end, leaves the reader to re-think Julius's movements. In one respect Julius is an atypical Afropolitan flâneur as this behaviour seeds the thought that he is either simply forgetful or he might turn out to be untrustworthy, or worse yet, a liar. Was his empathy towards the 9/11 victims genuine or was it merely a hoax on the narrator's part to win the reader's attention? Perhaps, being alienated himself, this disturbed flâneur means to purposely alienate his reader? The version of the New York city that the reader gets from *Open City* is Julius's constructed version, interpreted through his particular ambulatory practice, his own reading of the streets. Was the secret intention of the narrator to deceive his readers? Such questions cannot be answered with any great certainty, even after a second or third reading of the novel, as the trust has been broken.

By revisiting the text, and particularly the scene regarding Moji's rape, it is of course highly possible that Julius did not even remember the encounter, which for him might have been one of many such drunken sexual encounters that he forgot soon afterwards. Moji, on the other hand, was clearly traumatised by the event, and has carried that trauma well into adulthood. Julius says nothing about what Moji has just told him. He gives no indication of how he feels. When Julius simply walks away from Moji after her re-telling of the incident, he is thinking about a double story told by Camus in his journals (*OC* 246). Even days later, it is Camus's story of Nietzsche that he thinks about. The story narrates Nietzsche at fifteen being burned by a hot coal and that "he carried the resulting scar with him for the rest of his life" (*OC* 246). Other kinds of scars remain with Moji, and with Julius, and with many migrants who have been caught in a condition of in-betweenness.

The stories Julius relates remind us that horrors of the past live on in the present, which remain traumatising. The rape of Moji provides the perfect example of how such trauma is carried internally. As a psychiatrist, Julius listens to stories from his patients on a daily basis, so it is peculiar that he is unable to hear Moji and that he appears to feel blameless. While the cold manner in which Julius responds might appear puzzling, it serves to highlight the fact that while he might be provoked by the memory, he would prefer to let it go. This is especially ironic given the way Julius processes other types of trauma throughout the novel.

Through his encounters with Moji, notes Krishnan, "Julius re-enlivens the traces of his forgotten African self" (690), yet there are many other encounters which similarly awaken that self. It is what Ojaide refers to as "psychic disconnection from the continent" (in Krishnan 690) that Cole highlights in his novel as that which plagues diasporic subjects. Since the wounds are too deep for the narrator flâneur to even access the memory of what he

did, it is debatable that he will ever be able to heal. Perhaps Julius is doomed to wander eternally in the purgatorial streets of his own making, where no amount of repressing memories will entirely obliterate the past. His past haunts him and his alienation remains:

> The name Julius linked me to another place and was, with my passport and my skin color, one of the intensifiers of my sense of being different, of being set apart, in Nigeria. I had a Yoruba middle name, Olatubosun, which I never used. […] Being Julius in everyday life thus confirmed me in my not being fully Nigerian. (*OC* 78)

Much like Furo in *Blackass*, whose accent betrays his newfound whiteness, it is his first name and lighter skin that sets Julius apart from other Nigerians, rendering him also a stranger in his homeland. "If Julius is read as an Afropolitan figure," say Knudsen and Rahbek, "then this anxiety about place, skin colour, and difference might be constitutive of one way of being Afropolitan" (68). Such a reading confirms the capaciousness of the term 'Afropolitan'. However, Julius's roots remain even in his preferred rootlessness and, as noted by Krishnan, his name "ties him to space while removing his belonging from that same space" (692). Paradoxically alienated and belonging, Julius is unable to escape his own tortured history. He is what Sollors refers to as a "rootless cosmopolitan" (243), not able to own his own name, and denying its connection to his German birth mother, Julianne.

This inability of total escape might help to explain why there appears to be something of the *dériveur* in Julius which is evident when he narrates that:

> Every decision – where to turn left, how long to remain lost in thought in front of an abandoned building, whether to watch the sun set over New Jersey, or to lope in the shadows on the East Side looking across to Queens – was inconsequential, and was for that reason a reminder of freedom. I covered the city blocks as though measuring them with my stride, and the subway stations served as recurring motives in my aimless progress. (*OC* 7)

This free way of walking is typical of the *dériveur*, who walks without plan or purpose, simply to enjoy the experience, as Julius does in the passage quoted above. Despite the fact that he is rootless in Nigeria and rootless in America and Europe, Julius's body connects intimately with the built environment as he measures his step against the blocks he walks. It is in this reciprocal manner that human subject and built object interact and impact upon each other.

The contradictions of flânerie, as evinced by Baudelaire's flâneur who is apart from the crowd but whose "passion and his profession are to become one flesh with the crowd" ("Painter" 7) are echoed by Julius who notes that, while walking, he is "with thousands of

others in their solitude" and when rubbing shoulders with strangers in the subway, "the solitude intensified" (*OC* 7). This is a further echo of what Elwyn White noted some seven decades previously, when he said that "New York blends the gift of privacy with the excitement of participation" (13). The crowd is essential for the existence of the flâneur, as it is through the crowd that the flâneur is able to perceive the city environment and changes that occur. Solitude in the midst of the city crowd is "among the starkest of luxuries" writes Rebecca Solnit in *Wanderlust*, since in the city "one is alone because the world is made up of strangers, and to be a stranger surrounded by strangers allows for silent introspection" (186). Julius enjoys such moments where he finds himself "alone in this way in the heart of the city" (*OC* 52). While his "sense of being entirely alone in the city intensifie[s]", Julius revels in it by going for walks in the crowd where he is able to "wander aimlessly" (*OC* 108). Paradoxically, while Julius is in fact isolated from the rest of the crowd, and feels alienated, he is at the same time part of those very masses who traverse the streets of New York every day, and in some subconscious way he experiences an affinity for fellow city folk, to the extent that he shares their past trauma as mentioned earlier. In this sense, paradoxically again, Julius does appreciate a sense of community: a shared cosmopolitanism that adds layers not only to his own being, but that is in sync with the palimpsest that is the city's history. Julius's mobility as an Afropolitan flâneur has allowed him to respond to the city environment in a way that never completely invites him to become an insider altogether, as he remains a stranger. Ironically, when he feels a connection to others, such as he does for the two young black men who pass him on the street, he is later attacked by those same individuals (*OC* 212). His Afropolitanism is thus complex and complicated, and his entanglement is in the multiple connections to America, Europe and Nigeria.

5.4.2 Black in a sea of white[175]

> New York City worked itself into my life at walking pace. (*OC* 3)

"I took a detour and walked for a while in Harlem" says the narrator Julius, before going on to describe the sidewalk scene of the Harlem streets, where one table "displayed enlarged photographs of early-twentieth-century lynchings of African-Americans" (*OC* 18). This unsettles what was an initially inviting ambience of "vials of perfume and essential oils, [and] djembe drums", and the paragraph ends with the harsh line: "In the Harlem night, there were

[175] This is a play on "[l]one white face in a sea of black" which A. Igoni Barrett says of his protagonist Furo in *Blackass* (11).

no whites" (*OC* 18), buying in to a stereotypical description of the predominantly black neighbourhood.[176] However, Harlem is not where Julius feels at home.

Julius, the Afropolitan flâneur, has managed to metamorphose to such a degree that he has become a regular New Yorker, joining elderly white people at a concert. However, in contrast to the Harlem experience, Julius does not blend in here:

> Almost everyone, as almost always at such concerts, was white. It is something that I can′t help noticing, I notice it each time, and try to see past it. […] Most of the people around me yesterday were middle-aged or old. I am used to it, but it never ceases to surprise me how easy it is to leave the hybridity of the city, and enter into all-white spaces, the homogeneity of which, as far as I can tell, causes no discomfort to the whites in them. […] But Mahler′s music is not white, or black, not old or young, and whether it is even specifically human, rather than in accordance with more universal vibrations, is open to question. (*OC* 251–52)

In the above excerpt, while he seems to feel mostly at home, it is clear that Julius feels disconcerted, even trapped, by the racial boundaries that dictate the concert hall space, which is in stark contrast to the racial mix encountered in the streets. His view regarding Mahler's music is very subjective, almost idealistic, escapist and esoteric. Julius is the only black in a sea of white faces at Carnegie Hall, a signifier of music aficionados and middle-aged New Yorkers, even though its mission is "to present extraordinary music and musicians, and to bring the transformative power of music to the widest possible audience".[177] While he is tugged constantly by his African roots, Julius's appreciation of European classical music casts him as a cultural aficionado, and by appreciating Mahler's music he claims to transcend issues of race and simply enjoys the music for what it is. Such transcendence is not permanent, it is just momentary.

After the concert, Julius accidentally departs via the emergency exit leading onto the fire escape and is locked out (*OC* 255). When the door shuts and locks itself, it further emphasises the boundary, suggesting one can exit but not return the same way. This imagery connects intrinsically to the plight of the migrant and reflects Julius's own uncertain situation. Having left Nigeria, he has been changed by the experiences of the host country to such a degree that any return to his homeland will again highlight his difference. What distinguishes Julius as an Afropolitan is that he is dislocated in Nigeria and then again in America. As an

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[176] The black population in Harlem has declined over recent years, due to more immigrants arriving. It was almost 100% black in the mid-1950s. See more at <https://www.nytimes.com/2010/01/06/nyregion/06harlem.html> and <https://statisticalatlas.com/neighborhood/New-York/New-York/Harlem/Race-and-Ethnicity>.

[177] From the Carnegie Hall website <https://www.carnegiehall.org/>.

existential migrant, his belonging anywhere "is viewed with intense ambivalence" (Madison 246). However, Julius is dislocated for other reasons besides migration, his mixed race being one of these. Another possible cause for his sense of dislocation is his loss of memory, which is perhaps a symptom of his guilt resulting from the rape of Moji. Because he feels dislocated, he looks for alternative ways of inhabiting New York, and walking as a flâneur provides Julius with just such a way of being more fully involved with his surroundings.

When Julius exits Carnegie Hall and searches for another way out of the building, he finds a second door, but pauses momentarily to observe the stars in the night sky, "[w]onderful stars, a distant cloud of fireflies" (*OC* 256). This recalls the ending of Bandele's novel when Dada's gaze, initially directed at the stars, returns to him (*TS* 292). The Afropolitan flâneur, whether it is Julius in New York or Dada in London, still sees the same stars in the sky. The distanced perspective afforded these Afropolitan flâneurs, mentioned several times previously, allows for a more wholistic view of their environment.

As the novel started with birds, so does it end, but this time the birds are "fatally disoriented" (*OC* 258) by the torch light from the Statue of Liberty. Freedom itself can be distracting, even blinding. The notion of freedom in this context is problematic, however, as the American Dream was predicated on slavery and oppression, and not everyone was afforded the same freedoms. Ironically the Statue of Liberty stands for freedom for some and not freedom for all. For someone like W. E. B. du Bois,[178] for instance, the sense of freedom suggested by the Statue of Liberty was not a freedom he, as a black man, experienced. Another irony here is that the lighthouse, which should provide safety, holds a light which is a trap and is deadly. Liberty comes at a price as there is ongoing suffering. The ending of *Open City* is all the more haunting because of the matter-of-fact statistical delivery by the narrator concerning the numbers of dead birds. The novel is Julius's bird's-eye view of the text of the city, the text he has painfully created and re-created. This is the text Cole leaves for his reader to piece together, pull apart, and read all over again. What stands out about Julius as a particular type of flâneur is how he is immersed and yet detached from the city he walks in. He is an existential migrant and a forgetful Afropolitan flâneur whose personal memories are entangled with traumas that have happened to other people. His Afropolitan 'closeness and remoteness' are linked to these traumas, which make him feel both alienated and connected at the same time. A hybrid "Nigerian, European and American", Julius is "a

[178] In his *Autobiography of W. E. B. Du Bois: A Soliloquy on Viewing My Life From the Last Decade of Its First Century*, Du Bois writes that he could not imagine the same sense of hope that other immigrants had felt when seeing the Statue of Liberty <https://www.nps.gov/stli/learn/historyculture/abolition.htm>.

walker and a wonderer, cosmopolitan and awkwardly Afropolitan, a flâneur and fugueur" (Knudsen and Rahbek 79). As a forgetful Afropolitan flâneur, Julius has another way to get from point A to point B: he can get lost and simply choose to forget.

5.5 Conclusion: Exploring Beyond Borders

> It was the ancient Greeks who decided that Africa, Asia and Europe were separate things, despite the fact that, at the time, you could walk from the southern tip of Africa to the northern edge of Europe to the eastern shore of Asia without ever getting your feet wet. "Continent" means continuous. It's all one chunk of land. That's how we populated the planet. We walked out of the southern bit and wandered into the northern and eastern bits. (Tom Eaton, n. pag.)

Walking is one way to get somewhere. Dreaming and flying are other ways. Where *The Street* opens and closes with a dream, and has an entire section titled "The Dream", both *Open City* and *Blue White Red* are similarly concerned with the dream of a better life elsewhere. In *Open City*, for Saidu from Liberia, "America had sat solidly in his dreams, had been the absolute focus of his dreams" (*OC* 65). Farouq, on the other hand, explains that when he was young "Europe was a dream [but] the dream was an apparition" (*OC* 122). In *Blue White Red,* it is very clear that for the young *sapeur* "There's no border between dreams and reality here anymore" (*BWR* 147). This chapter has looked at how the flâneur and the dream are connected, as dream and the imagination are necessary for survival. The migrant characters examined all suffer different forms of trauma as a result of displacement. While they attempt to practise the "interweaving of worlds" that Mbembe speaks of ("Afropolitanism" 28) they also claim the "rootlessness" that Gikandi speaks of in "Roots and Routes" (33). This awkward liminality forces these Afropolitan flâneurs to react to their situation sometimes schizophrenically, as does Massala-Massala, or surrealistically, as does Dada, or even forgetfully, as does Julius.[179]

All three texts examined in this chapter deal with aspects of Afropolitan identity specifically outside of Africa. In *Blue White Red*, Mabanckou tackles the facts of migration and the desperate dream of a better life elsewhere by telling the story of Moki, a successful sapeur-flâneur, and Massala-Massala, an imaginary-flâneur. A critique of commodification of Afropolitanism can also be read through the excesses of the vestimentary code of *La Sape*. In *The Street,* the *dérive* is practised by inhabitants who live on the street. Ossie, like Massala-

[179] Julius's forgetfulness is chiefly his reaction to the rape and not to his liminality. As an existential migrant he feels constantly unsettled, so his forgetfulness amplifies his experience of dislocation.

Massala in the previous chapter, is an imaginary Afropolitan flâneur, where much of his flânerie takes place in a dream (sometimes even comatose) state. The other characters discussed in this novel are unhomed Afropolitan flâneurs who exist in a psychological state of liminality, some of them even suffering a form of psychosis, as they struggle to integrate. *Open City* closes the chapter with its example of a contemporary, forgetful Afropolitan flâneur who still suffers the trauma of being unable to reconcile his past in Nigeria with his present as an immigrant in New York.

Living in a diaspora is an experience filled with contradiction and uncertainty, and yet when a person settles in a new place permanently they need to find a way to feel at home. This is far from easy, as each of the novels discussed has shown. "Assimilation," as Ashleigh Harris claims, "or successful immigration – is primarily dependent on economic factors" ("Afropolitan" 246). While this might be the case for Moki, who proves that he has made it as a *sapeur* in Paris when he returns home to the Congo laden with gifts, it is not so for Massala-Massala. Massala-Massala's narrative is not one of success, and some critics such as Emma Dabiri might argue therefore that he would not qualify as an Afropolitan. However, given the expansion of the term Afropolitan as argued in this thesis, Massala-Massala is as much an Afropolitan as is Julius. Ironically, successful immigration also does not echo Julius's situation, even though in his case he is economically successful. One way of learning the cityscape is by walking that space as a flâneur, and by being immersed in the urban environment deeply enough to respond to its unique rhythms.

Where the flâneurs in Chapters 2 and 3 are intra-African migrants, the Afropolitan flâneurs that form the focus of this chapter are immigrants living in America and France and England. "Experiences of displacement, diaspora and migration," writes Helen Hayes, "evoke fundamental questions of home and identity" (3). Hayes points out that the migrant's experience of "alienation and estrangement" can be ascribed to everyone as it is an existential angst "which lies at the core of all human experience" (3). Via the themes of movement and migration, the Afropolitan flâneurs examined in this chapter illustrate that while they "belong to no single geography" as Selasi argues, they "feel at home in many" ("Bye-Bye" n. pag.) or they feel at home in none. The sense of "home" is further clarified in that these Afropolitan flâneurs adopt different techniques in their refusal to be marginalised. The Afropolitanism I have highlighted in these texts might not always be celebratory, but it reflects the reality of being Africans of the world today.

Conclusion: Walking On …

> We get to know our cities on foot, and when we leave, the topography shifts. We're no longer as surefooted. But maybe that's a good thing. It's just a question of looking, and of not hoping to see something else when we do. (Elkin 282)

> He made me think of home – perhaps home is not a place but simply an irrevocable condition. (Baldwin 121)

One way of understanding the environment is to observe it through one's own eyes. One way of navigating a city is to walk it, street by street, and to be immersed, step by step, as a flâneur. The relationship between walking and the city as understood in the texts analysed in this thesis has been based on a reading of the figure of the Afropolitan flâneur. This thesis has identified and defined such a figure and gone on to demonstrate, through literary analysis, how the Afropolitan flâneur, through walking the city, interprets his or her environment.

This specific, contemporary literary figure – the Afropolitan flâneur – has emerged from the mists of history of nineteenth century Paris and transformed into a figure appropriately reflecting an identification as an "African of the world" (Selasi, "Bye-Bye" n. pag.). The Afropolitan flâneur as I have defined him or her in this thesis is a literary figure who walks the city streets as a keen observer and recorder of his or her surroundings, and who is also African or who identifies with Africa in some way. This imaginary individual highlights issues pertaining to diasporic identity, such as liminality, displacement, borders, intersections, boundaries, crossings and entanglement. Sometimes the Afropolitan flâneur is connected not only to Africa, but to the world at large, able to feel comfortable or at home in any city, and is therefore a true citizen of the world. This figure mirrors the cityscape and reflects other inhabitants of the city, through recording observations by means of committing to memory (as does Massala-Massala in *Blue White Red*), or by writing (The Girl in *Skyline*, Vlad in *Portrait with Keys*), through photography (Mark Gevisser and Teju Cole), by painting (Bernard in *Skyline*), dance (Elvis in *GraceLand*), performance (Moki as *sapeur* in *Blue White Red*) or other creative art forms. At other times the Afropolitan flâneur fails to connect with Africa or the diasporic home. The literature clearly shows that the Afropolitan flâneur is sometimes traumatised and does not connect, as seen for example in the characters of Massala-Massala and Julius.

Being an Afropolitan flâneur is an attempt to find a home, but it is not always an actualisation of home. The Afropolitan flâneurs identified in the texts analysed have been

seen as ambiguous figures who mirror cities that are laden with paradox. In this thesis I have argued that the twelve selected African and transnational literary texts present different types of Afropolitan flâneurs, through whom we can better understand the Afropolitan's place in contemporary cityspace. While the flâneur can be the author, the protagonist or narrator, as well as the reader, I identified a range of Afropolitan flâneurs encountered in the primary texts studied. These Afropolitan flâneurs include the author-flâneur, the migrant flâneur, the flâneuse, the celestial flâneur, the street child flâneur, the refugee flâneur, the *sapeur*, the voyeur, the *dériveur*, the imaginary-flâneur, the contra-flâneur, the *oyinbo* flâneur, the cyber-flâneur and even a stalker-voyeur-flâneur. This list is by no means comprehensive, as it represents merely the flâneurs encountered in the texts examined.

The preceding five chapters have supported my argument for reading the city and contemporary urban identities via the figure of the Afropolitan flâneur in selected African and transnational texts. These chapters have problematised the tendency towards binary overload of local/global, national/transnational, black/white, slum/paradise in favour of intersectionality and hybridity at the *croisement* of these binaries. The city is the meeting place of these binaries where, for instance, slum and paradise meet in Abani's *GraceLand*, black and white integrate in Omotoso's *Bom Boy*, borders are crossed in Schonstein's *Skyline*, and national becomes transnational in *Open City.*

If the urban environment reflects the individuals it contains, then what has been learned about identity and diaspora from the wanderings of the Afropolitan flâneurs encountered in this thesis? These literary texts all have in common themes that focus on how to find one's place "in a world of strangers" (to borrow an apt phrase from Kwame Anthony Appiah's subtitle to *Cosmopolitanism*), and how to feel truly at home even if homeless. Some of the highlights that have emerged from this research indicate that there is a relationship between migrancy, diaspora and walking which serves to connect Afropolitans from different places. The literature has shown that not all Afropolitan flâneurs necessarily feel at home, while being an Afropolitan flâneur is an attempt to find a home. Being an Afropolitan flâneur changes how the city is viewed, and being an Afropolitan flâneur changes the city and changes the Afropolitan flâneur.

The discussion in the literary analyses has shown that the Afropolitan flâneur may be displaced, dispossessed and traumatised, but is nonetheless a figure who attempts to survive in the city, on the streets, a figure that attempts to adapt to a changing environment, and a figure that is intrinsically fluid. Throughout Chapters 2 to 5, the literary analysis identified specific Afropolitan flâneurs in each text examined, considered ways in which the city

environment shapes the human subject and the human subject in turn shapes the urban environment, and developed new theoretical ideas about the Afropolitan by revisiting and expanding upon existing scholarly and popular interpretations.

Due to the protean and labile identities of rapidly expanding cities, as well as the inhabitants thereof, this thesis has extended contemporary debates about constructions of ‘African identity’. I have questioned contemporary beliefs concerning identity formation, space and place, thus interrogating the positioning of an Afropolitan flâneur in urban literature.

In relation to this specific project there are some gaps that will require further attention. Future research might wish to consider examining the Afropolitan flâneur in situations where the replication of homeland in the diasporic home is problematized, such as instances of recreating the homeland instead of integrating and assimilating. This was touched on briefly in Chapter 5, but as a specific migratory strategy it requires careful examination and further research. An example of such a text is Zakes Mda’s *Ways of Dying*, where the flâneur figure, Toloki, is a “Professional Mourner” who adapts the city to meet his own needs (Ngara 19).

If I were only embarking upon this research now in 2018/2019 there are some things I might do differently. Perhaps I would want to provide greater coverage of scholarly theory pertaining to Afropolitanism, given that, as pointed out by Knudsen and Rahbek in 2016, “[t]he field of Afropolitanism is still an emerging one” (14). Since Afropolitanism itself only started gaining popularity in 2005, it is still a fairly new, growing and multivalent “ism.” It is apparent that the Afropolitan subject itself is similarly multifaceted. This fluidity will continue as cities continue to grow at a rapid rate and people become more and more transnational, eventually outgrowing borders.

The flâneur examined in this thesis cannot exist without a city, which has for centuries been a meeting place of people, bringing together cultures and experiences. Cities as we know them are shared spaces where buildings, streets, sidewalks, subways, market places, shopping centres, parks, playgrounds and places of worship sit side by side. The city streets and the pavements or sidewalks connect all these places together and are the flâneur’s *raison d’être*: they are spaces where people meet for various reasons, or to get from one place to another, and thus the relationship between the built urban environment and walking continues to be explored by a wide range of academics from disciplines such as urban theory, sociology, psychology, political studies, literary studies and architecture. But what about

future cities, future apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic states of being? What might happen when there are no more borders?

Shortly before I settled down to write these final words, I came across a freshly published online article about a cyborg flâneur, and I wondered briefly about the ironies of non-humans being blessed with the mobility that walking provides. It is not so much the mobility that is the issue, as cyborgs have been mobile for a while, but the Artificial Intelligence that can gaze on the city and interpret it (as a human flâneur does) – that is of interest. My mind then drifted to thoughts of other non-human flâneurs such as Haitian zombies and even the zombies of the popular television series *The Walking Dead*.[180]

Such musings could be entertained and future research on walking the city as an Afropolitan flâneur could look ahead towards post-city environments such as those ravaged by war and natural, nuclear, or indeterminate disaster. Mozambican Mia Couto's *Sleepwalking Land* springs to mind here, as an example of the unreality of post-war atrocities. The post-apocalyptic novel *Trencherman* by South African Eben Venter is another text that features a different type of *"Horrelpoot*" flâneur who walks with a particular type of limp and serves as an ominous vision of the future existence of the South African Afrikaner.[181]

Going beyond Africa, beyond the Afropolitan, even beyond the world as we know it, in a post-apocalyptic environment, another flâneuristic text springs to mind: Cormac McCarthy's *The Road*, which features flâneur figures of an entirely different kind: a father and son who have no other mode of mobility but to walk. Their walking is fraught throughout the novel by danger and they have no way of measuring time and space as no borders or boundaries remain. Some might argue that such characters are not true flâneurs, since they do not walk in a city. But that is another story for another day, another dimension, another path to be walked.

[180] In an article on "zombified mobilities", Anna-Leena Toivanen notes the similarities shared between the "clandestine migrant" and the zombie who both "represent a contagious alterity that should be excluded from the community" ("Zombified" 1). The Haitian zombie, Toivanen is quick to elaborate, is "a victim, not a perpetrator" ("Zombified" 2) and is, as noted by Kaiama Glover, "an apathetic nonperson, condemned to wander aimlessly" (in Toivanen, "Zombified" 2). The themes of border crossing and notions of the abject as presented in the zombie figure as flâneur are worth exploring further.

[181] 'Horrelpoot' is the Afrikaans title of Eben Venter's book that was published in 2006, a word that when said out loud is evocative of Kurtz's "horror" in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. The English version of the novel appeared in print in 2008. The title is a reference to the club-footed and gangrened protagonist.

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Note: The following abbreviations are used in the in-text citations for the primary texts:

BA – Blackass

BB – Bom Boy

BWR – Blue White Red

ED – Every Day is for the Thief

GL – GraceLand

LF – Lost and Found in Johannesburg

OC – Open City

PK – Portrait with Keys

Sky – Skyline

TC – Thirteen Cents

TS – The Street

WH – Welcome to Our Hillbrow

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