

The Afropolitan Identity as a Rhizome

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ABSTRACT

Working within Selasi and Mbembe's tenets of Afropolitanism and Guatarri and Deleuze (1987) concept of a rhizome, this paper interrogates and contextualizes the Afropolitan identity as a rhizome. The aim is to deepen the conversation and debate on Afropolitanism as a new way of mapping the African cultural identity in synch with the world while offering a new descriptive vocabulary. The examples interrogated in this study are drawn from selected African novels which evince the Afropolitan sensibilities. This is portrayed through rhizomatic characterization. This study is also in conversation with Ede's notion of "rhizomatic existence". This paper stresses that the rhizomatic features of the Afropolitan identity portray the Afropolitan as an individual with transnational affiliations whose identity cannot be pinned in an absolute sense to a single cultural geography. Importantly, the prefix "Afro", in Afropolitanism suggests that Afropolitanism privileges Africanness while the cultural fusion which cosmopolitanism engendered in Africa's metropole and beyond is the fulcrum upon which the idea of Afropolitanism is drawn from.

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1. Introduction

The cultural fusion that cosmopolitanism engendered in Africa's metropole (see Appiah 1997, and 2006) is the fulcrum upon which the idea of Afropolitanism draws from. Gevisser and Nuttall in 2004 describe such cultural fusion drawing examples from South Africa as Afropolitan identity (see Balakrishnan, 2017, p.1). In their observation, Gevisser and Nuttall (2004) note that "Johannesburg could be marketed as a fascinating Afropolitan city: as a place where you can eat *fufu* or Swahili curry or *pap en vleis* (p. 518), it is this cultural fusion that Selasi (2005) in London, and Mbembe (2007) in South Africa call Afropolitanism.

Afropolitanism gained currency as an African idiom and a popular vocabulary in mainstream media and discourse after Selasi's 2005 publication "Bye-bye Babar" in *Lip Magazine*; and Mbembe (2007) advanced the concept as a theoretical framework within the academic sphere. Since then, it has become one of the several ways of describing and mapping the "new" cosmopolitan African cultural identity about the world to underscore Africa's various social, political and cultural stances in relation with the nation, concerning the race, and to the issue of difference in general (Mbembe, 2007, pp.28-29).

Several scholars have attempted to add their voice in describing Afropolitanism and the Afropolitan identity. For example, it is described as "a state of cultural hybridity – to be of Africa and of other worlds at the same time" (Gikandi, 2011, p.9); a state of being an African who is rooted "both in Africa and elsewhere" (Guarracino 2014, p.9); a type of "newly diasporized Africans" (Ede, 2016, p. 88); "a way—the many ways—in which Africans, or people of African origin, understand themselves as being part of the world rather than being apart" (Mbembe and Balakrishnan 2016 p. 29); such that it bridges the divides between Africanness and world citizenship (M'Baye, 2019, p. 3). It is described as an African with global citizenship (Abebe, 2015) or an "Afro-cosmopolitan ethos of transcending national differences to forge multiracial communities" (Balakrishnan, 2018, p. 49). And it is noteworthy that an African who demonstrates the features of Afropolitanism is termed an Afropolitan, a blending of two words African and cosmopolitan (Ede, 2018, p.37). In the words of Gikandi (2011):

To be Afropolitan is to be connected to knowable African communities, nations, and traditions; but it is also to live a life divided across cultures, languages, and states. It is to embrace and celebrate a state of cultural hybridity – to be of Africa and of other worlds at the same time. (p. 9)

Though the various conceptualisation of Afropolitanism by the foregoing scholars invoke the idea of a multicultural and hybrid African identity made up of cultural “networks and flows” (Balakrishnan 2017, p.1), this study offers a new descriptive term- the Afropolitan as a rhizome- for the Afropolitan identity in other to demonstrate what Ede (2018) calls “rhizomatic existence” (p.37). This study arrives at this description by drawing an analogy in terms of the correlation between the Afropolitan identity and a rhizome.

2. The Concept of a Rhizome

The word rhizome is a register within the field of discourse known as agricultural or biological studies. It refers to a rootstock and not exactly the main root of a plant. This rootstock has the capacity to propagate its kind and to also sprout when it is engrafted to another environment, or plant. This rootstock is a type of stem which may be located or situated at the soil surface or underground and contains nodes from which the new roots and shoots originate.

A distinctive quality of a rhizome, or such root stock is the ability to reproduce itself or propagate its kind. Unlike real roots, a rhizome has nodes, buds, and tiny leaves which can yield new plant, or another of its kind with features of both the new environment and old environment or the features of the engrafted plant and that of the host plant. In spite of the fact that rhizomes are not true roots, they are imbued with the capacity to thrive. When a rhizome is cut out from the main root, or separated, each piece of a rhizome can produce a new plant (see Wang, T. et al., 2017, p.864). The new offspring or plant from a rhizome is a hybrid. This is because its growth is distinctive yet retains the roots from which the rhizome emanated. Also, if a rhizome is engrafted to another plant, the new offspring will demonstrate the new and old plant's features. These features of a rhizome are evident in Afropolitan identity, in terms of the capacity of Afropolitan to relocate to a new environment and evolve a new identity or off-spring through cultural integration.

The concept of the rhizome has been appropriated as a technical term by Deleuze and Guatarri (1987) in critical discourse to deconstruct western system of thought or knowledge, noting that instead of the idea of a single root, an arborescent and autonomous system, knowledge is rhizomatic, or made up of multiple roots. Deleuze and Guatarri (1987) see a rhizome as a multiple established root and not an absolute unified entity. A rhizome thus speaks of a way of seeing a distinctive entity such that in defining this distinctive entity, we describe it as both one and also multiple where this multiple means the “semiotic chains” (Deleuze & Guatarri, 1987, p.7) or connections (lines) to genealogies, histories, cultures, borders and spaces. The main point we need to draw from Deleuze and Guatarri’s conceptualisation of a rhizome is that a rhizome has some features such as: “connections”, “heterogeneity”, “multiplicity”, and an “asignifying rupture”.

Deleuze and Guatarri’s conceptualisation of the rhizome is crucial in our understanding of the Afropolitan identity as analogous to a rhizome in terms of a “rhizo-subject” (Deleuze & Guatarri 1987, p.97). A rhizo subject means individuals, (within literary fictions we may refer to as characters) whose experience or identity are multiple and transcultural due to cultural fusion. Such individuals are capable of wearing more than one identity due to their more than one origin(s) or cultural encounters and experiences. Such individuals constitute a hybrid, as they are culturally linked and heterogeneous. The heterogeneity of the rhizo-subject thus defines their identity.

Therefore, what this study implies by saying that the Afropolitan has an identity analogous to a rhizome, is that like a rhizome, the Afropolitan is made up of more than one root or cultural affiliation, like a rhizome the Afropolitan is capable of creating new off-springs (identity) in varied cultural environments, with connected experiences and affiliations cutting across more than one geography; like a rhizome, the Afropolitan when cut off from his or her cultural root due to migration, or relocation can thrive in another soil and still have affiliation with his or her origin, in terms of wearing more than one identity with roots both in Africa and in the new environment a rhizome relocates to. The term, rhizo-African, and Afropolitan are used interchangeably and in this study, they serve as descriptive terms with which this study refer to the Afropolitan as a rhizome.

2.1 The Emergence of Rhizo-Africans

This study underpins the emergence of the rhizomatic nature of the Afropolitan identity to the cosmopolitan cultural fusion observable within and outside cities in Africa. Particular for Africans, this cultural fusion instigated new ways of talking about being African, due to the African cultural presence in the world in conversation with other cultures through a cross-cultural interface. Such Africanness is a “polyphonic Africanness”, as it is made up of more than one

cultural voice, root and tolerates cultural dilution and it privileges “cross-cultural and cross-national harmony” (Tiovanen, 2017, p. 1). Appiah, (1997), calls it “liberal cosmopolitanism as it values, “the variety of human forms of social and cultural life (p.621).

Such cultural fusions while it encourages cultural assimilation, also threatens the Afro-emancipatory thoughts and epistemic frame which concepts such as Garveyism, Negritude, Pan-Africanism, and Afrocentrism have attempted to preserve, as it seeks to open up racial boundaries, de-emphasize national leaning for the place of transnational links in order to foster multiracial interactions. Interestingly it has steered up new conceptual movements which at the forefront is the term Afropolitanism (Balakrishnan, 2018) an “Afro-cosmopolitan ethos of transcending national differences to forge multiracial communities” (Balakrishnan, 2018, p. 49).

The foregoing has great implications for Africans today. The outcome is the emergence of an African identity and culture that is flexible and open to multiplicity, emphasizing shared ties, heterogeneity and hybrid connections across various geographies. One of the ways African writers on the African diaspora have been able to capture or represent the rhizomatic nature of the Afropolitan identity is through characterisation. In the next subsection, this study will demonstrate how such identity formation is captured in the selected novels for this study.

2.2 Rhizomatic Characterisation

Rhizomatic characterisation is a way of representation which captures the hybrid cultural connections, multicultural affiliation and transnational lives of Africans in the diaspora. In such representation, Afropolitans are represented (a) as individuals who are removed and engrafted from their soil into another soil, where soil means environment and cultural spaces (b) they become engrafted into the new soil through relocation (c) they are defined by their rootedness or affiliation to their parent root (Africa), and the new space or soil they are engrafted into, not only that, there is the possibility of return to their homeland, (d) these imbue such identity and culture with an experience that is transnational, transcultural, with hybrid connections, (e) such representations captures the “the many ways—in which Africans, or people of African origin, understand themselves as being part of the world rather than being apart” (Mbembe and Balakrishnan (2016) p. 29), (f) Such representation seeks to bridge the divides between Africanness and world citizenship (M'Baye, 2019, p. 3), (g) like a rhizome, such representation captures the Afropolitan identity and culture as thriving even if they may be cut off from their root due to migration, or shattered at a given spot, but they will thrive again, sprout again in a new environment or soil. As Arthur (2010) rightly observes that:

Whether they settle in the United States, Britain, Canada, Australia, or elsewhere, the *mélange* of identities structured by the immigrants are typically defined and rationalized through the lens of African cultural traditions and vestiges. In city after city in the West, African immigrants are playing out the full range of what it means to be black, foreign-born, African, and also American or British. This multiplex and *mélange* of identities emanating from these singular and plural roles are reinforced by the complex media and agencies that these immigrants establish to anchor their cultural traditions and ideals in transnational arenas and spaces. (p. xiii)

2.3 Analogous Relation between the Afropolitan and a Rhizome

a. The Afropolitan as a Rhizome in Adichie's *Americanah* (2013)

Our analysis of the analogous relation between the African identity and a rhizome begins with Adichie's novel *Americanah* (2013). In this novel, the connection between a rhizome and the Afropolitan identity and culture is demonstrated in the representation of the characters: Ifemelu, the female protagonist and other characters such as: Halima, the Malian-American (p.11); Aisha the Senegalese-American (p.18), Wambui the Kenyan-American who doubles as the President of ASA (p. 138), Mwombeki, the Tanzanian-American (p. 139), Dorothy, the Ugandan-American (p.139), and Kofi the “American African” (p.140). These characters demonstrates what Deleuze and Guatarri (1987) call “connections” as a feature of a rhizome. They are culturally connected to two spaces: Africa and America as geographical and culture plateaus. This is reflected in their conversations as they mention their connection with Africa as their home country and also America as their host country.

This transnational connection portrays the characters as rhizomes, whose identities are defined by their African origin and their relationship to more than one cultural space Africa and America. Such cultural connection is similar to a rhizome being engrafted into another soil or root. Importantly, such cultural connections imbued Ifemelu, Obinze, Auntie Uju among others, with expanded cultural worldviews which to a large extent enable them to make informed, existential

compromises while tolerating the cultural constraints and conflicting demands that come with encountering new cultural topographies.

The transnational identity that the connection between Africa and America offers for Ifemelu enables her to straddle two geographies while striking a balance between Nigerian worldviews and American culture. We see this in Ifemelu's choice to wear the Nigerian hairstyle against the opinion of her fellow Africans in America who expected her to apply relaxer on her hair as it is the norm, not only that, this has the capacity of increasing her chances of gaining employment when she goes for an interview .

Ifemelu's wearing of her African hair style in America resonates a rhizome's affiliation with her cultural root, which for Ifemelu, is her African culture. The braided hair constitutes a type of Africa's material culture capital in contact with the American culture space. An incidence that is focal and related to the foregoing is Ifemelu's visit to a hairdresser who specialises in braiding African hair. The hairdresser (Aisha) questions why Ifemelu had not relaxed her hair (to reflect the culture space she finds herself then) to which Ifemelu tells her "I like my hair the way God made it" (Adichie, 2013, p.12).

Aisha expects Ifemelu to integrate with the cultural trends and expectations in America. This integration comes or offers her some benefits such as gaining social acceptance and belong. On the other hand, Ifemelu's reply "I like my hair the way God made it" (Adichie, 2013, p.12), using the existential pronoun "I", speaks of a self-conscious Afropolitan woman, who is willing to gain acculturation or integrated into the American culture, but she is conscious of her African essence as she keeps in touch with her cultural root. Aisha "clearly could not understand why anybody would choose to suffer through combing a natural hair" (Adichie, 2013, p. 12). Aisha's opinion stems from her cultural assimilation of the American culture norms. Ifemelu's capacity to embrace and provide a fusion for two cultures, African culture and American culture speaks of the ability of a rhizome to thrive in another soil or geography. Importantly, Ifemelu's choices and actions suggests that an Afropolitan is self-conscious and capable of finding positive connections within culture contacts where necessary.

Several other actions of the character Ifemelu demonstrate her Afropolitan identity and its analogous relation to a rhizome. This is evident in the various identity Ifemelu wears as a character, which speaks of "multiplicity" Deleuze and Guattari (1987) as a feature of a rhizome. For example, Ifemelu is an Igbo woman, a Nigerian, an African female intellectual, demographically young, internet and tech savvy, cosmopolitan, residing in America, a blogger, a social media influencer, a fellow at Princeton University.

If one observes clearly, one will notice the cultural blending and the cross-cultural interface which the United States of America offers Africans in America such as the multicultural identity of Boubacar the Senegalese professor at Yale, who introduced Ifemelu to the Fellowship program at Princeton, or Wambui the Kenyan-America who doubles as the President of "ASA" and several members of the African diasporic family.

The rhizomatic connections, multiculturalism it offers, the capacity to thrive manifests as collective effervescence, in terms of strength, and solidarity kinship that African diaspora can build for themselves through a digital presence is also noteworthy. Wambui introduced Ifemelu to this African digital community, HappilyKinkyNappy.com, an Afro-digital natural hair community. In this community, Ifemelu finds other African women like her, and they even have a name for her kind of short hair Tweeny Tweeny Afro (Adichie, 2013, p. 212). In order to raise awareness on the issue of African natural hairstyle and the cultural politics it engenders, Ifemelu uses her blog as a platform to talk about African women's natural hair which speaks of a type of Afropolitan feminism as it privileges the narration of the experiences of cosmopolitan African women in the diaspora over that of African men in the diaspora. To an extent, connections and diasporic community the online community provides offers Ifemelu the mental strength for her regaining her African consciousness of self and identity despite the cultural fusion American offers. To a large extent, this informed her thematic focus in her blog *Raceteeen* or *Curious Observation by a Non-American Black on the Subject of Blackness in America* (Adichie, 2013, 298).

Apart from demonstrating the African migrant's potential to establish community and survive in difficult soil, much like a rhizome, the online community testifies to the strength and identity of the Black or African community in the diaspora as a transnational space. This is noteworthy because it is a source of strength. What the preceding has shown is that African diaspora are communal. The characters can identify with Africanness and at the same time as Africans who have seen the world, other worlds, and cultures or experience. This blending, fusion, and kinship amidst the cultural dilution that comes with the cosmopolitan African life in the diaspora constitutes the Afropolitan essence.

b. The Afropolitan as a Rhizome in Gyasi Homegoing (2016)

The second demonstration to show the analogous relation between the Afropolitan identity and a rhizome is drawn from Gyasi's *Homegoing* (2017). In the novel *Homegoing* (2016) this analogy is captured in the character Ness whose cultural origin begins from her mother Esi Asare who is from Ghana and a slave. Ness demonstrates a rhizome's feature in terms of being engrafted into another soil or cultural space through relocation when she is cut off from her African root due to the slave trade and transported to the United States of America, as a slave.

In this new soil and culture space, she gets married and begins the propagation of an off-spring that is at the same time African and American, a hybrid of her African identity and American identity as evident in her children, grand-children and great grand-children Kojo, H., Willie, Carson, and Marcus. Her children and offspring demonstrates a feature of the rhizome known as heterogeneity and multiplicity Deleuze and Guattari (1978), since their root entails several cultural experiences and origin. As an Afropolitan through migration, Ness demonstrates the feature of a rhizome, due to her multiple root where her offsprings are hybrids of the two environments – Africa and America and are products of cultural diffusion.

In *Homegoing*, such cultural diffusions depict the Afropolitans as a new generation of urban, young, cosmopolitan Africans in America, who are heterogeneously connection to an ancestry and genealogy traceable to Ghana of 1775 century A.D, through Cobbe Otcher, the father of Effia (the ancestral mother of Marjorie) of Asenteland and Essi (the ancestral mother of Marcus) of Fanteland respectively. Their genealogy or rhizomatic roots encompasses the past and the present, Africa and America and the historical engagements between Europe, Africa and America via the triangular trade.

The outcome of such cultural fusion is the hybrid identity of Marjorie and Marcus, who are symbolic of a rhizome's "asignifying rupture" (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987), and whose history can be traced from the 1775 till the twentieth century evolving through intermarriage, slave trade, and the Black plantation experience in the Mississippi, coal mines and the American universities. The rhizomatic identity of Marjorie and Marcus imbued them with a broadmindedness Eze (2014) calls "... fluidity in African self-perception and visions of the world" (p. 114), such that in their perception of self, they are not rigidly tied to Africa alone. This is what Ede (2018) describes as an "expansive worldliness" (p.37).

Also, through the marriage between Effia and James, a type of cultural intersection and fusion, the rhizomatic feature of engraftment into another soil is demonstrated. As Afropolitans, they are cultural engraftment from the African culture space into the European culture space. The outcome of such cultural engraftment is the hybrid identity of Quey, the child who emerges from the cultural connections and marriage between Effia and James. Interestingly, like a rhizome, Quey the son of Effia and James symbolically is a hybrid formation, as his identity is a fusion of Africa and Europe. Thus, as an Afropolitan, his cultural root is beyond Africa, transcending the confines of Fanteland and connecting to England. Another type of representation in *Homegoing* demonstrates the analogous relation between a rhizome and the Afropolitan. This is the relocation or migration from Ghana to America through slave trade. Such transnational engraftment is facilitated through the Atlantic triangular slave trade movement, where the ancestors of Marcus, Esi Asare, just like a rhizome are relocated or engrafted into American soil.

The relationship such rhizomatic characterisation foster is a connection between "fields" (Gilles and Guattari 1987, p.12). Fields in the context of our study refers to cultures and spaces whether African, American, British, German; or other worlds beyond Africa. The Afropolitan identity as characterised in *Homegoing* shows that like a rhizome, the Afropolitan identity or culture is not defined in isolation, nor is it culturally autonomous as an "arborescent culture" (Gilles and Guattari. 1987, p.15).

Just as a rhizome is capable of thriving in another soil, the Afropolitan is also capable of thriving in another culture. This is demonstrated in character Marcus' who represents the translation of a family narrative from a slave history to a narrative of empowered agency where some of the opportunities denied Marcus' ancestors (such as Ness) where now available to him, such as education, class, citizenship among others in the United States of America. They are able to sprout in other cultural soil, and thrive amidst the socio-economic and political challenges they encountered. This is what Deleuze and Guattari (1987) implies by "asignifying rupture" which implies that "a rhizome may be broken, shattered at a given spot, but it will start up again on one of its old lines, or on new lines" (p.9).

c. The Afropolitan as a Rhizome in Selasi's *Ghana Must Go* (2013)

In Selasi's *Ghana Must Go* (2013), the analogous relation between the Afropolitan identity and a rhizome plays out in the representation of the urban, intellectual, rich, cosmopolitan, diasporic African American family of Kweku and Fola Sai and their children who demonstrate cultural fusion and integration at its best. Kweku is a Ghanaian resident in

the United States of America. He is a Medical Doctor (Surgeon) who relocates to the United States of America, with his wife Fola and children.

Their family roots cut across Scotland (through Maud), Igbo Nigeria (through the Nwaneri) and Yoruba Nigeria (through the Savage) and Asia (Through the Ling Wei). The rhizomatic connections of the Sai crystalizes as specific physiological features of their children such as Ethiopian eyes, native American cheekbone, the black hair/blue eyes of the Welsh, and Nordic skin, which Selasi (2013) describes as “the product of a process of refinement and reinforcement over century upon century of mass reproduction (p. 166). In addition, the children of the Sai’s are exposed to an education system in Ghana and the ivy-league education in Europe. In all of these, Olu and Kehinde are able to thrive or find an “asignifying rupture” in London, for Sadie it is in Yale, while for Taiwo, it is in New York.

This study notes that like the rhizome, in spite of the Kweku’s family heterogeneous experiences and multiple origin, they are all connected to Ghana (through Kweku), Nigeria (through Folasade) in Africa and Scotland (through their grandparents Maud). These multileveled, transnational and multicultural experiences shaped Olu, Kehinde, Taiwo and Sadie’s identity as African such that it is impossible to define their Africanness without taking into account their heterogeneous links with Nigeria, Ghana, USA, Scotland and Asia.

Selasi’s representation of characters with rhizomatic experience underscores the transnational and cultural mobility of the Sais across Africa-America-Europe and Asia. This is captured in more than one aspects. There is a sense of transnational mobility represented in the various countries they are connected to, making the Sai partly Nigerians, partly Ghanaians, partly Americans partly British and partly Asian. There is career mobility which crystalizes as Kweku’s brilliance as a surgeon in Hopkin Hospital, and the successes of his children in their chosen profession. Cultural mobility and link are also demonstrated in the marriage between Olu, an African and Ling Wei an Asian, (Selasi, 2013, p. 120).

The Kweku’s family represents a new generation of Africans who share connections with other cultures and continents through marriage, education, business, travels, and voluntary relocation. What do we call such Africans? Indeed they are Africans, but not the type of Africans we were familiar with. Their Africanness come with cultural fusion, heterogeneity, hybrid connections, new links and cultural affiliation, yet with affiliations to Africa. These are some of the insights Afropolitanism seeks to underscore while such features reflect the features of a rhizome.

d. The Afropolitan as a Rhizome in Habila’s *Travellers* (2019)

In Habila’s *Travellers* (2019), several characters represent the analogous relation between a rhizome and the Afropolitan identity. For instance, the character Uta is a hybrid who wears more than one cultural identity as an African student at the Free University and a German. Her mother is a Cameroonian and her father a German — both doctors in former East Berlin — (Habila, 2019, p.19-21). Uta’s cultural identity leaning which cuts across two geographies: Africa and Europe speaks of the rhizomes capacity to thrive and build cultural connection when engrafted into another soil or geography.

Another important example of a character who demonstrates the analogous relation between the Afropolitan and a rhizome is James Kariuku. He is an intellectual, and a self-exiled poet whose identity transcends the African geography to include his places of sojourn in America and Europe. James Kariuku demonstrates a rhizomatic connection such that there is no longer just one narrative of belonging for him, but a multiple narrative of belonging, identity and citizenship for him.

The representation of the characters as shown in the novels evince what Mbembe and Balakrishnan (2016) call “multiple origin” (p.30) or hybrid cultural connections similar to the connection the Afropolitan identity or culture shares between the new cultural environment and their homeland. This is what Deleuze and Guatarri (1987) see as: hybrid connections, heterogeneity of identity, multiplicity of origin, and an asignifying rupture. These qualities imbue them with the capacity to thrive in other geographies. This also enabled them as Afropolitans to ‘recognize one’s face in that of a foreigner” (Balakrishnan, 2017, p.2). This ability to “recognize one’s face in that of a foreigner” engendered the empathy with between the nameless character in *Traveller* (2019) and the occupants of the old church house in Kreuzberg and the migrants who lodge in Heim. It depicts such characters or Afropolitan migrants as connected to semiotic chains like a diasporic family. For the Afropolitan migrants in Habila’s *Travellers* (2019), Heim symbolically represents the connection point between of cultures and identity as various people and culture converge in Heim. This makes Heim crucial in the mapping of the rhizo-Africans in *Traveller* (2019).

Importantly, the characters in *Travellers* such as the occupants of the old church in Kreuzberg (Habila, 2019, p.17), captures the foregoing in terms of their shared cultural experiences as travellers, and migrants in motions, as we

can find in the character: Eric, Manu, Portia, and Stan, a Ph.D., student of Humboldt, who grew up in Senegal (Habila, 2019, p. 21) and Gina the African American and wife of the nameless character (they later divorced), whose father was a retired professor and Fulbright Scholar in Nigeria in 1980 (Habila, 2019, p.12) demonstrate an identity and a sense of belonging Eze (2014,) calls “absence of fixity to a location” (p.235).

This absence of fixity is due to the Afropolitan constant motion or mobility. This mobility or movement is crucial in the plot structure of the novel *Travellers* in terms of constant motion of movement symbolized in the train. It allows the African migrant to be engrafted into more than one culture space. This study underscores the symbolic role of the network of train stations represented in *Travellers* (2019); arguing that it is an aesthetic design which speaks of movement and rhizomatic links between characters, identities, cultures and spaces. Significantly, such aesthetics facilitate the creation of nomads, or African diaspora as embodiments of cultural diversities, straddling more than one spaces.

Due to the rhizomatic nature of the Afropolitans in *Travellers* (2019) the Afropolitan migrant see home as the many places they have established roots and they are “so connected physically and historically to other parts of the world” (Balakrishnan, 2017, p.2). Through such characterization, Habila demonstrates that though physical borders are symbolic of boundaries, crafting an Afropolitan narrative complicates such boundaries, to create porous and blurred borders. This underscores what Makokha (2011) calls “the re-examination of how spaces and borders can be engaged anew, within the parameters of literary criticism, to bring out the nexus between history, culture and identity, with the continent as a backdrop” (p. 17). Lastly, it is in *Travellers*(2019) that we see the “way—the many ways—in which Africans, or people of African origin, understand themselves as being part of the world rather than being apart” (Mbembe and Balakrishnan 2016 p.29).

e. The Afropolitan as a Rhizome in Bulawayo *We Need New Names* (2013)

Bulawayo's *We Need New Name* (2013) is another important novel on African diaspora which evinces the analogous relation between the Afropolitan identity and a rhizome. This is demonstrated through characters such as Darling, the protagonist, Aunt Fostalina, in terms of the engraftment into new cultural soil or space (USA) by the process of relocation or migration. Their relocation initiated self-re-invention, which enabled them to thrive like a rhizome in a new engrafted environment.

For Darling, her engraftment or relocation to the USA evolved a capacity to thrive, which manifests as a transformed perception of life and the world. This transformation is influenced by her having experienced two cultural plateaus: Paradise and USA. We see this capacity to thrive in a new cultural topography after her engraftment into USA when a contrast is made between the identity of Darling when she was in Paradise and Darling, when she relocates to the United. This contrast is in terms of her perception of the world while in the two geographies. While she was in Paradise, Darling sees Paradise which allegorically refers to Zimbabwe (formerly Rhodesia), as a “country [or] a place of hunger and things falling apart” (49), and “it is no longer possible to stay” (146). This perception becomes the motivation for her desire for migration or relocation as she states thus, “I am going to America, to live with my aunt Fostalina, it won't be long, you'll see, I say, raising my voice so that they can all hear” (Bulawayo, 2013, p. 14). But it is her relocating to the United States of America becomes the catalyst that instigated an asignifying rupture that also defined her sense of self and transformation into an Afropolitan with hybrid cultural experiences.

Darling's relocation to the United States of America opened her to new cultural connections, and a heterogeneous experience transcending her “innocent” vision of the world she had while in Paradise, to a broader perspective to life's options and a self-awareness of her identity as a rhizomatic being who wears more than one identity. Importantly, Darling also gets to see that after all, USA is not the Eldorado she imagines as America is not free from its own crises just as Paradise. For instance, as Darling observes below:

In the summer nights, there sometimes was the bang-bang of gunshots in the neighbourhood and I had to stay indoors, afraid to go out, and how one time a woman a few houses from ours drowned her children in a bathtub, a four of them, how there were poor people who lived on the streets, holding up signs to beg for money. I left out these things, and a lot more, because they embarrassed me, because they made America not feel like My America, the one I had always dreamed of back home. (Bulawayo, 2013, p. 188)

This study notes that Darling's relocation to America translates her into an Afropolitan and the transformative power of human mobility and relocation to new geographies such that one never remains the same again once one

leaves behind who one is (see Bulawayo, 2013, p. 146). This speaks of the capacity of relocation to a new environment to create a broader perspective to life, a more than one cultural experience and identity for the Afropolitan migrant. Some of the cultural connections opened to Darling in the United States of America as a cultural plateau include: new cuisine, the pop lifestyle, the exposure to virtual realities like “Google” (Bulawayo, 2013, p. 166), “Facebook”, technology like “Blackberry cell phone” (Bulawayo, 2013, p. 177), a culture of using fork and knife (Bulawayo, 2013, p. 178), where it is normal for one to look an adult in the eye, even if it is rude within the African culture context (Bulawayo, 2013, p. 194).

From the foregoing, the identity and perception of the Darling, who left Paradise culturally naïve is different from the Darling who resides in America. Darling’s experiences, both in Paradise and America forced her to reinvent herself, with an adaptive African identity such that she can straddle more than one cultural reality whether America or Paradise, in order to belong in her new culture space. As a rhizomatic character, Darling’s self-reinvention is a matter of necessity as she is forced to come to terms with her more than one cultural affiliation. She becomes the young, worldly wise, African in America with a new identity, a new outlook, a new disposition, a new name in order to evolve a new self that is cognisant of her environment’s social codes.

f. Unigwe’s *On Black Sisters’ Street* (2010)

In Unigwe’s *On Black Sisters’ Street* (2010) the analogous relation between an Afropolitan and a rhizome is demonstrated through the transcultural experiences of the female characters. In this novel, the characters: Joyce, Madam, Efe, Sisi, and Ama had cultural experiences cutting across a wide-ranging space. Their narrative and stories about self are punctuated by the places they have been engrafted into as Afropolitans, the people they have met and the cultural worldviews they embody. Although a Liberian, Joyce (whose real name is Alek) has experiences drawn from Liberia, Belgium, and Nigeria. This is also same with, Madam, Efe and Ama whose origin begins with Nigeria and extends to Belgium.

Efe, Ama, Joyce, Sisi, and Madam’s journey or engraftment and engrafted them from Africa into Belgium. This made their vision of the world more expansive and cosmopolitan. Their perception of life moved from illogical idealism to more balanced realism. For instance, Efe, would not understand in her wildest imagination that the streets of Belgium were not paved with gold until she would arrived Belgium. Before coming to Belgium, Efe had imagined castles and clean streets, but after her arrival, she describes her coming as a botched dream (Unigwe, 2010, p.24). The encounters with Belgium as a cultural space, and the topography of its economy opened up Efe, Sisi, Ama, and Joyce’ understanding of the divergent value system within it. For one thing, they developed coping strategies or “asignifying rupture” which allow them thrive in their new environment while oscillating between their identities as Africans and as Africans in Belgium.

Efe, Sisi, Ama and Joyce’s capacity to thrive in an new environment manifests as tolerating the commodification of their body as products for export into the sex industry in Europe (Belgium) and other transnational spaces and the attendant dehumanisation which accompanies it also point to cultural variance between Africa and Belgium, for while the former would not see commercial sex as a social anomie, the later sees it as a type of labour engagement or employment even if it is sustained by chattel slavery, human trafficking and sex slavery of Africans in Europe. By placing the characters in more than one cultural and economic topography as rhizomatic beings, Unigwe critiques through these characters – Efe, Sis, Ama, and Joyce — the neoliberal culture and capitalist saturated European sex industry.

Unigwe indirectly critiques Belgium as a diasporic economic and culture space where rhizo-Africans like Ama, Efe, Sisi and Joyce are yoked in a bind as Afropolitan females, who do not own their body, at least, till they are able to pay and buy back their lives from Madam and Dele. Belgium fulfils the hopes and desires of Efe, Sisi, Ama, and Madam as Afropolitan females enjoying the glitz and glamour of Europe and occasionally, sending money back home to sustain the family in Nigeria. Their occasional nostalgia or recollection of home, speaks of their more than one cultural root and connect just like the rhizome and it reminds them of Africa, and of their root. Importantly, even as sex workers, these African migrants have plans to return home and also set up businesses. What actually makes such characters distinctive is their positive outlook on life and their capacity to make cultural interface and blend within multicultural spaces and economy.

g. Ndibe's *Foreign Gods Inc.*, (2017)

In Okey Ndibe's *Foreign Gods Inc.*, (2017), the analogous relationship between the Afropolitan and a rhizome is captured in the character Ikechukwu Ozondu's more than one geo-spatial and cultural affiliation which prefixes Africa. Ike is a psychologically troubled young man, a New York based Nigerian American, a taxi-driver for about 13 years. Ike is a typology of a rhizome engrafted into another cultural space (the United States of America) through migration. Like a rhizome, Ike seeks new roots, but he struggles to thrive due to the enormous challenges he faces. In a bid to establish root in America, Ike gets married to Bernita. His marriage to Bernita is also analogous to the rhizome's engraftment to another plant and soil. But in Ike's case, he marries Bernita to be accepted into the American socio-economic system and for him to secure a work permit and later secure an American citizenship.

Being a Nigerian and also resident in the United States of America transformed Ike into a hybrid; an Africa-American who culturally exists there in Africa and here in America. The Nigerian value system occasionally varies with the American value system within him. This is seen when he rides his taxi and he expects his passengers to exchange greetings with him, as it is obtained in Nigeria but he forgets that such is not a cultural obligation in New York City (Ndibe, 2017, p. 49). Another example of the cultural divergence in values due to his hybrid connections is seen in the ethical dilemma within him due to his cultural affinity with African in terms of fulfilling his responsibility to his mother, sisters and family at large (Ndibe, 2017, p33), and his economic struggles in the capitalist oriented system he is exposed to in the United States of America. It is this dilemma, the need to earn money, in order to provide for his parents which is a social expectation in Igbo culture especially as the first son, that made him decide to export and sell Ngene as a piece of Art.

But Ngene is much more than that. Ngene represents the material culture of the Igbo people, their worldview, their ontology and being. Thus, if we are to understand Ike's motivations for selling Ngene, we must give attention to his cultural experiences both in Nigeria and also in the United States of America which informed the multiple identity he wears as a character: an Igbo man, a Nigerian, an American, an Economist, a cab driver, and an Afropolitan. This characteristic is comparable to the concept of connections and multiplicity in a rhizome, where connections refer to Ike's cultural ties to America and multiplicity to his experiences in both Nigeria and America. This mosaic of cultural experiences muddles his veneration for Ngene as a deity and whatever it represents, as well as his eventual desecration of Ngene as a commodity for export as an artwork to the American Art Market.

Ike decision to export Ngene as a last resort is connected to his frustration as a rhizo-African in the United States of America struggling to thrive. But Ike is resolute in his pursuit to thrive and sprout in this seemingly harsh topography. By depicting such the rhizomatic experiences of Ike, Ndibe demonstrates the challenges Afropolitan migrants experience as they wear and straddle more than one identity and geographical space while projecting themselves as Africans. And such exposure may come with some economic or social pressure as evident in the challenges Ike faces.

The analogous relation between the Afropolitan identity and a rhizome demonstrates an important benefit and a huge untapped resources which African countries can catch on from their transnational and multicultural lives and experiences of her people in the diaspora. A careful conservation of the characters, from Ifemelu, to Sai and his children Olu, Sadie, Taiwo Titi, to Auntie Faustalina and Auntie Uju, to Ikechukwu Ozondo, Marjorie and Marcus, and Gina, Mark (Mary Chinomba), the Nameless Character, Manu shows that they are equipped with a particular skill set, and professional excellence which could drive the continent of Africa. The outcome is that what has been seen as a brain drain will become a brain gained in the long run. This can be galvanised for social and economic transformation, and geographical distance will not be a barrier considering the enormous benefit of the internet and faster means of transportation today.

3. Conclusion

We offered a novel descriptive term for the Afropolitan cultural identity in terms of a rhizome in this study. This study also offer the term "rhizo-Africans" as a vocabulary to describe this rhizomatic African identity. This study is in conversation with what Ede (2018) has described as rhizomatic existence of the Afropolitan which depicts the Afropolitan as an individual with transnational affiliations whose identity cannot be pinned in absolute sense to a single cultural geography. Importantly, by being prefixed by "Afro", the term Afropolitanism privileges Africanness amidst the cultural fusion and hybrid identity it encourages.

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