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Unveiling Transnationalism in New Diasporic and Migratory Discourses: A Post Marxist Reading of African Art, Films and Virtual Writings

BY

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ABSTRACT

This paper deployed post-Marxist insights to investigate transnationalism as a trajectory with very rich openings into new perspectives and fields of study. It is premised on the hypothesis that transnationalism does not function in an island of values, but in settings with multiple identities; it suggests that a new impetus can be given to its development by establishing a dialogue between transnationalism and other key identities and processes in the creation of 'homeness'. It aimed to chart out the various ideas that emerged from transnationalism over the past decades in novels, films and digital writings. It found out that, while the research agenda of the early stages was marked by a need to distinguish between transnationalisms from related terms, such as globalization, the field can now regain momentum by exploring synergies with



other concepts in order to refocus transnationalism studies on the unevenness, instability and inequality of diasporic and migratory spaces. Consequently, it staged a number of confrontations between transnationalism and 'borders', 'translocality', 'precarity', 'moralities', 'the statehood', and 'brokerage'. It showed how these ideas raised their own problematics, and issues and how they were deployed. The goal was to facilitate a more productive interpretation of the interface between the local and the global, the national and the diasporic and to shift away from a narrow Eurocentric reading of the term transnationalism that is essentialising. In the past, transnationalism was associated with globalization, migration, cosmopolitanism, multiculturalism, diaspora, post-migration studies, and internationalism. But today, transnationalism is transformative and powerful enough to trigger changes in contemporary societies. This paper demonstrated how transnationalism intersected with new writings in ICTs and with narratives of return migration.

Keywords: *Transnationalism, postcolonial, postMarxism, diaspora, Renaissance*

Introduction

This paper is premised on the hypothesis that African diasporic and migratory discourses on transnationalism are not created in a vacuum, but are re-constructions of the social experience of Manichean locations of culture. Discursivity is a force that has the potential to deconstruct binarising diasporic culture. In the history of African diasporicism and migration, the concept of transnationalism was often veiled as an economically seductive, but minoritarian space and was perceived in hierarchical terms of white/centre and black/periphery. African and black communities occupied a marginal position of the 'subaltern' discourse in this core/margin dispensation where multiple forms of biological, gendered, sexual, ethnic and geographical identifiers were being simultaneously negotiated and normativized in binary relationships such as Black/British, African/American,



Tunisian/Japanese, Algerian/French, or through other 'culturally long tail' and intensive signifiers like Kenyan-born Somalian/Chinese, etc. However, recently, with the advent of globalization, African traditional and modernising societies, which identify not only with religious, linguistic and ethnic allegiances, but also with inclusively imposed nationalisms and black community ideologies, have raised new issues within the transnationalism space interwoven around undecidable discourses of patriotism and loyalty as the complex space has become not only intensively hybridized around the capitalist economy, but also increasingly diversified and productively fluid around new ideologies of identity. As Houston Baker Jr (1994) has confirmed, contrary to the centre/periphery orthodoxy according to which black diasporic communities must occupy marginal positions in the transnational communication metanarrative, it is increasingly very seductive for black and African people to rethink themselves by first feeling that they can and should recreate their own public spaces to articulate their own specifically economic as well as cultural concerns. They are now drawn to the idea of transforming the white bourgeoisie public into an empowering and expressive one of black and African self-fashioning (Baker Jr, 1994). As far as the internet is concerned, the year 1995 was also a watershed moment for transformation of the digital space from a predominantly white, capitalist and masculine elite forum into a black and African diasporic online presence. Consequently, this transnational space has been witnessing and raising new critical questions such as how do indigenous African and black members of the diasporic and migratory communities internalize and also deconstruct the status of European, Japanese, British, French or American personhood? How can this complex process be explained as starting with the psychological realm and entailing a high sense of *double consciousness*? (Gilroy 1993). Paul Gilroy affirms in *The Black Atlantic* that the challenge is quite huge for the African and black community member to negotiate multiple identities simultaneously especially when considering the liminality existing between centre/periphery in the diasporic space of transnational



dichotomy and when considering new ways of articulating (dis)continuity in it.

Etymologically, the term diaspora consists of a prefix *dia* (i.e. 'over', 'through') and the verb *sperein* ('scatter', 'sow'). The conjunction of the terms 'transnationalism' and 'diaspora' typically refers to a displaced population living as a community outside of their homeland, chiefly for reasons of economic survivability and opportunities. But the prefix and verb suggest that there are cultural, ideological and religious connections among dispersed and exiled transnational groups linked to an imagined homeland through multiple networks. Originally, the movements of transnationalism, diaspora and migration were associated with the dispersal of Jewish communities all over the globe. But during the past forty or so years, the deployment of transnationalism in diaspora and migration became common in reference to black and African communities. The terms were now being routinely utilized interchangeably to refer to various African and black communities located outside specific nation state territories they originally identified with for economic reasons, principally (Feldner 2019). Consequently, it is possible to talk of the 'African diaspora' (Ibid). Both concepts have served as research lenses through which to envision the aftermath of international capitalism, diasporicism, migration and the shifting of state borders across national populations. As Faist (2010) has also pointed out, diasporicism and migration are the genesis for the reproduction of transnational social formations in which cross-border networks such as multiculturalism and globalization have operated. The two concepts therefore constitute what Faist calls 'dance partners' (Ibid). Although transnationalism and diasporicism/migration refer to cross-border processes, with diaspora used to denote the general spirit of national or religious groups travelling and living outside an (imagined) homeland, transnationalism is often utilized more narrowly to depict the concrete processes that 'fossilize' the idea of migrants' ties across nation states and capture the notion of active networks, groups and organizations.



Diaspora theorists such as Rogers Brubaker, William Safran, James Clifford and Robin Cohen maintain that it makes sense to consider the ideology of diaspora if the following features apply, namely, collective idealization, memories and myths of a homeland, a history of dispersal from an original homeland and a collective desire and commitment to return to it, all of which can be as a result of a troubled relationship with the host nation. In this way, this framework of features can be utilized to portray a great variety of diasporic transnational formations which indicate that diasporic-transnationalism should not be perceived as a fixed and stable capitalist space, but rather as a process that is constantly adjusting and shifting its superstructural components and is being “[re-]formed by a series of often contradictory convergences of peoples, ideas and even cultural orientations” (Brubaker 2005). Subsequently, the meaning of the terms ‘transnationalism,’ ‘African diaspora’ and ‘migration’ was not fixed and stable because it was contingent upon numerous shifting contexts, such as *which* nation-states the African communities come from and *where* (the US, China, Europe, Brazil, Russia, Australia, Saudi Arabia, Serbia, etc) the diasporic and migrating community is destined to and located. Thus, there is a proliferation of what Brubaker (2005: 1) calls the ‘diaspora. diaspora’ in reference to the ‘dispersion of meanings of the terms in semantic, conceptual and disciplinary spaces’. The semantic expansion and proliferation of the term ‘transnationalism’ in ‘diaspora’ and ‘migration’ is evident where ‘diaspora’ is often conflated not only with the capitalist economy but also with a range of related concepts in African novels, films and new virtual writing sources such as racial and ethnic difference, refugee and minority status, exile and migration (Edwards 2007: 82).

Therefore, this paper urges that the transnational space should not be understood in a narrow *structuralist* sense as a set of international forces driven by capitalist economic power linking people and institutions across nations with concentration in the major metropolises of free market capitalism such as London, New York, Paris, Japan and



recently emerging countries like China, Qatar, South Korea, South Africa, Brazil, Russia and India. The key to this new understanding should be the recognition that national sovereignty in African countries is a regulatory force in international co-existence, and is declining. With the free flow not only of global capital, commodities and money, there is also the complex interaction of people, cultures, information, technologies and bodies, and the resulting emergence of new conditions of financing, production, distribution and reception of works of creative art, a new dynamism that has been evolving with its own narrative and emotive aesthetic captured by novelistic markets, Nollywood and other international film industries and, digital information websites. These counter-hegemonic responses to capital being captured by African diasporic writers, film makers and websites, enable us to understand anew the different historicities through which the contemporary world is being re-imagined across the globalizing system.

This paper argues that structured Eurocentric readings of transnationalism in diasporic and migratory movements are reductive, but also useful and problematical. It is within the interstices of these seemingly mutually exclusive terms (African/Russian, African/Australian, etc) driven by capitalist forces of the diasporic *status quo*, that new and complex meanings are acquired, performed and re-lived in ways that challenge orthodox modes of centre/periphery thinking and rewrite hybridized cultures. This paper charts out a postMarxist, and convoluted reading of transnationalism in diasporic and migratory novels, films and websites over the past decades, in order to demonstrate that this technology of analysis is capable of accounting for re-deployment of linearity in historical space. The postMarxist model of analysis will enable us to argue for a critical reading of transnationalism in diasporic and migratory cultures that might productively interface the national and the transnational, the local and the global as extremely productive allomorphs. The paper will show that the intersectional encounter of cultural identities in transnational capitalist spaces is a moment fraught with ambiguities and the quest for



freedom; it is even a potential act of international political insubordination that continues to resonate with cultural theory in literary scholarship. So, the paper will show how the African diasporic and migratory movement is mutating away from its capitalist assemblages into new configurations, assuming new moorings in the course of history as it comes into contact with the modernizing and postmodern forces reconstructing it. It will also lay the case for a differential lens through which we can scrutinize the deconstruction of minoritarian transnational power relationships in creative art, films and website data in various global contexts.

Methodology

PostMarxism is an appropriate qualitative method and theoretical framework from which to scrutinize the mobility of capitalist transnationalism in migratory cultures. Post-Marxism is a trend in political philosophy, social theory and the humanities that deconstructs Marxism proper and Karl Marx's writings in order to propose an alternative to orthodox Marxism. Post-Marxism is opposed to the economy as the foundation of politics and statehood: it rejects the derivative idea that the economy is an instrument functioning in an autonomous fashion and without ambiguity on behalf of the interests of a given class of people (Laclau and Mouffe 2014). It is aligned to the idea that decolonized people have the propensity to develop a postcolonial identity based on cultural interactions between various (ethnic, cultural, national, gender, class, etc) identities that are assigned different degrees of social power by a colonial society. Beller and Leerssen add that: "Identity ...means being identifiable, and is closely linked to the idea of 'permanence through time': something remaining identical with itself from moment to moment" (Beller and Leerssen, 2001: 1). An individual has his own identity also referred to as "*ipse identity*" (Laitinen 2002: 57-7). This paper opts for the concept of cultural identity (Singh 2005). Drawing from the idea of cultural identity, Stuart Hall theorizes that



instead of thinking of identity as an *already* realized factuality, which the new cultural practices then represent, we should instead re-think identity as a practice of *production* that is never really complete, but is always in process, and is always re-constituted not outside, but within representation (Hall, 1992). Hall maintains that there is always a *supplément* that is left over (Hall 1992: Ibid), a deferral displacement that applies, for example, to West Indians (Byfield 2000: 2).

Rooted Transnationalism

Although Francoise Lionnet and Shu-mei Shei (1994) have pointed out in *Minor Transnationalism* that minority subjects identify themselves in opposition to a dominant discourse than in relation to minority groups, the authors invite us to go beyond the exegesis of centre/margin and investigate relationships among different diasporic margins as well. They urge us to problematize the centre/periphery premise because there was nothing minor about, for example, the 1959 and 1963 pan-African conferences during which African writers met in Rome and Paris to trace out their own path of committed literature or when the Bandung conference brought together leaders from the global South in 1955 to map out a new course of political action. They were physically present in the diasporic *centre*, yet their interventions served to correct obsessions with the centre/periphery *status quo* celebrated in postcolonial studies. The term 'rooted transnationalism' has now emerged to oppose minoritarian transnationalism, and enables us to chart out *networks* that have all along been driving diasporic cultural history and literature. Aminatta Forna's (2013) *The Hired Man* is a text that illustrates some of these rooted transnationalism networks. The author herself, Forna, was born to a Sierra Leonean father and a Scottish mother, reared in Sierra Leone and Britain and spent her teenage years in Iran. Her father, a medical doctor by name Mohamed Forna was appointed finance minister in Stephen Siaka's Sierra Leonian government, and was later hanged because of his disagreements with the policies of the postcolonial administration. After his death, Forna



and her mother, who had remarried a diplomat, re-located to Zambia, Iran and Thailand. Forna grew up in a very rich transnational and cultural background that enabled her writing to defy simplistic African/British literary canonization based on an assumed stability of race, identity, nation and culture. She published *The Hired Man* (2013), and other novels such as *The Memory of Love*, *The Devil that Danced on the Water* and *The Window Seat*.

Literary criticism is confronted with huge challenges when it comes to naming literatures that are produced by writers, who have lived in more than one national geographical location. The imaginations of these writers take readers away from orthodox landscapes that traditionally capture novelistic geographies of centre/periphery with their localizing particularities and categories. Forna is an important part of the new generation of rooted transnationalism writers whose writings point out the inadequacies of categories such as centre/periphery, Us/Them, national/international, etc. *The Hired Man*, for example, is a novel with a non-conventional setting placed not in Sierra Leone nor in Britain, but rather counterintuitively in a small village in Croatia. The narrator is not the female writer but a male observer, Duro Kolak, who reports about the 'assemblages' of a genocide. The only reminiscence of hybridity alluded to in the narration is the detail that the co-existence of two cultures for many decades is the originating cause of the genocide. One day the differences existing between both cultures emerge into a border conflict that eventually leads to ethnic cleansing. The violence portrayed in the narration is experienced as a personal trauma of the author that serves as a *deus ex machina* to raise the following question that goes beyond just diasporic economism into the moral and ethical problematic of cultures migrating and living together with the potential for war: how will those who did nothing to stop genocide live side by side with those who committed ethnic cleansing?



Political Economy and the Identity Politics of Sonority

Beatty's (2008) *Slumberland* is an African American text based on the fertile comparison made by Marlon Riggs, a film documentary producer, who deployed the image of the *gumbo*, that is, of a potage made from okra brought by African slaves and the sausage introduced by German immigrants in Louisiana culture, to articulate thematic recipes like race, class, disability, gender and sexuality. However, in Beatty's *Slumberland*, the economic materiality of *gumbo* is replaced by beats, music and breaks that are utilized as a sampling model to metaphorize the identity formation of blackness outside of the transnational setting of the USA. Thus, whereas in Beatty's *Slumberland*, the only reminder of the literal personification of the racial discourse is DJ Darky, blackness begins with the need for economic emancipation but ends with the need for sounds, a locus of self-realization and humanization. The rest about DJ Darky's identity - namely, what he does for a living, his name, origin, family history, etc, are artistically erased in order to depict complete alienation of the essential blackness and its unstoppable that is spurred in terms of indetermination. DJ Darky embodies the artistic wisdom of Beatty in the maxim: 'what is in a name?'. Darky is deliberately proposed as the name of the protagonist because it has resonances with the old slave appellation: 'nigger' from a tradition of primitive capitalism. Both appellations are stereotypical connotations that were used as a pejorative term for the blackest of the black. But the artistic point here is that, just like 'nigger', Darky also alludes to an iconographic minstrel performance in blackface whose value was fabricated by the gaze of the slave trade gentry and their social mores in the Nineteenth and early Twentieth centuries. Those mores of a specific historical period of late capital are now depicted as *dépassé* and the artistry of Beatty resides in the fact that there is a beginning and an end to every historical fabrication that is essentially and materially fictitious. It is here that the *representation* of diasporic blackness culled from the society of white people is signified as very different from the 'experience' of blackness. The de-historicisation of that representation is evident today with the



absence of depth and feeling in the use of the terms 'nigger' and 'blackness' and in the falseness that they invoked in the past to portray the Us /Them mentality based on capitalism.

Conversely, DJ Darcy brings to light the continuous relevance of the experience of sound irrespective of historical period. Sound can be felt by human bodies as either present or absent even if humans cannot *name* it. In the absence of economic status and its identitarian corollaries of race, class, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, bodies or generations, in Beatty's *Slumberland*, Darcy represents the capacity to equivocate with the indeterminateness of blackness. The author points out here that diasporic blackness is not how it is represented by others for economic reasons, it is not how they are categorized, gazed or imagined; blackness is about the spiritual power of feelings. In the text, DJ Darcy does not leave grudges behind in order to justify why he must come back to the diasporic order of capitalist centres/ peripheries. Rather, he declares that: " the sound of American rhetoric is one of the reasons that I left; it's the last remaining tie that I have left to the country of my birth", thereby situating himself as an American citizen not necessarily disenchanted with the politics or economy of the nation, but with its culture of 'us/ them' that prioritizes history as emptiness (Beatty, 13). As a DJ with a very elevated phonography of memory, Darcy prioritizes the infinite possibilities of sound based on possibilities of new beats and this irritates him into leaving the US for another country where he can locate other possibilities of capturing original sounds thanks to his enormous skills of recognition. This imbues DJ Darcy with the celebration of authenticity as opposed to the glorification of materialistic emptiness and the things that are irrelevant on the historical long run. DJ Darcy therefore allegorizes the construction of blackness outside of the diasporic geography of the US, in a new minstrel environment of digital sampling. Beatty shuns the idea of essentializing blackness; and that is why at the beginning of the novel, DJ Darcy declares that: "blackness is *passé*, and I for one couldn't be happier because now I am free to go to a tanning salon if I want to and I want to" (Beatty, 4). This liberating



statement proclaimed by DJ Darky sets the stage in the narrative for the major preoccupation of the writer, which is the end to racism and the idea of blackness itself based on and motivated by capital. This project of society can only be achieved outside of the geography of centre/periphery of capital and not inside it. Beatty's *Slumberland* is a successful attempt to dismantle investments in capitalist theories about black culture by re-contextualizing the experience of constructs of race as essentially false. Beatty achieves the goal of reclaiming blackness from the diasporicism of cultural capitalism and its cohorts of phenomenology.

From Manichean Binarization to the New Order of the Veil

Similarly, when Walter Mosley (1990) published his Afro-American detective fiction *Devil in a Blue Dress*, his intention was to persuade the reader to see that there are emerging trends that challenge the binary *status quo* on black/white history. Daphne signifies the enigma at the end of the text, because, despite her biracial heritage, her unrestricted libido with Todd Carter, Ruby Hanks, Easy, and others, she turns out to incarnate Wolfgang Iser's insight that fiction "suddenly take[s] on the shape of an 'enduring form of life.'" *Devil in a Blue Dress* is a deeply moral introspection of the African American racial order and its corollaries followed by the realization that the text constructs a new form of meaning out of the old racial prejudices and misogyny in Afro-American diasporic society. Daphne's *double consciousness* is evident in her racial sexual indiscretions, sleeping with both white and black men; but the light that emerges from here to illuminate the idea of a post-diasporic society, is that Daphne refuses her status as a *black* person despite the huge pressure on her to accept her black roots and her fate as a *mulatto* African. *Devil in a Blue Dress* grants Daphne the right to live *on her own terms* as opposed to the terms of a binarised, Manichean, but racialised society. For example, the text rejects, through Daphne, the law that provides that the percentage of genetically racial blood existing in a person's veins defines her as a 'black' person or as a 'white' person and



demands that she should assume that status as *naturally* biological. Daphne rejects the idea to “wanna be white” as Mouse insinuates (209), and insists that she will not allow any portion of her ancestry to dictate her current life. Daphne embodies the new cultures that have constructed the white/black dichotomy in diasporic America but, by that same token, rejects them all as a replaceable dictatorship of racial antipathies and sympathies theorized by Du Bois’ concept of the veil that indefinitely separates blacks and whites in *The Souls of Black Folk* (2015). Daphne’s existential choices refuse to adhere to this old perception of man and project into its replacement by a new order.

The Hybridized Transnational

Against the orthodoxy in understandings of migratory transnationalism, the writings also provide insights into the undecidabilities of *hybridity* of the diasporic experience, where the migrant’s struggle to negotiate new cultural spaces is highlighted. They show that while some migrants successfully adapt and integrate into new Western locales, others exist at the margins unable to fully negotiate cultural difference. The diaspora and migration become a space not only for opportunities and economic mobility, but also for cultural alienation. The undecidabilities of *hybridity* illuminate the heterogeneity of the African and black narrative, expanding the dialogue of writers in the diaspora and migratory environments, from a simple one of loss and melancholia to a more sophisticated one of self-realization and empowerment. For example, although Chester Himes never lived in Harlem, he commented that he experienced “a sort of pure homesickness” while creating the Harlem-set detective novels from his self-imposed exile in Paris (Himes 2011). Through writing, Himes constructed an imaginary home informed both by nostalgia for a community he never knew and a critique of the racism he left behind in the US. Fifty years later, Michelle Cliff wrote about her native Jamaica from the US, articulating a positive Caribbean feminism that at the same time acknowledged Jamaica’s colour homophobia (Cliff 1996). The works of Himes, Cliff, and other Twentieth-century black



international writers, such as Caryl Phillips (Pirker 2017, Ledent 2011, Mascoli 2017, Bentley, 2017), Simon Njami (2013), and Richard Wright (Matthews 2014, Mehrvand 2021), who have lived in and published from countries they do not call home, evidence signs of revolt. Unlike other authors in exile, those of the African diaspora are doubly displaced, first by the discrimination they faced at home and second, by their life experience abroad. In this way, in the absence of a recoverable land of origin, the idea of diaspora comes to represent a 'home' that is not exclusionary and writing in exile is much more than a literary performance; it is a profound political act of African communities struggling to surface up their identity even in multicultural societies occupied by the Chinese, Jews and so on (Pieterse 1992).

The Transnational Priestess

The African American diasporic metanarrative has opened up new critical narratives of the black 'priestess', that is, the folklore cycle of the conjure woman as an archetype in the visual arts and literature. In Martin Kameelah's monograph, *Conjuring Moments in African American Literature: Women, Spirit Work and Other Such Hoodoo*, she engages with how African American writers recycle and reinvent the conjure woman figure in Twentieth century fiction. In order to articulate the deployment of African cosmologies as a trope in African American literature, new vocabularies referred to as conjuring moments are developed to express the critical discourse surrounding the conjuring. In order to critically assess effects of the inscription of African ritual cosmologies on the treatment of the Africana woman in American cinema, Martin Kameelah also published *Envisioning Voodoo: African Diasporic Religion in the Popular Imagination, 1985-2010* to articulate this thematic of the 'periphery' *writing back* against the 'centre' in African American literature. Georgene Bess Montgomery's (2008) *The Spirit and the Word: A Theory of Spirituality in Africana Literary Criticism* portrays a variant format such as issues of the spiritual life in Africana literatures via the critical lens of the *Ifa* supernatural worldview. In order to reaffirm the



inter-relationship between the spiritual and literary theory, Melvin Rahming (1986, 2012, 2006) published *The Evolution of the West Indian's Image in the Afro American Novel*, edited *Critical Essays on Barack Obama: Re-Affirming the Hope, Revitalizing the Dream* and co-edited *Changing Currents: Transnational Caribbean Literary and Cultural Criticism*. The intersection of African American feminism, post-soul literary aesthetics and *hip hop* culture is explored in various journals such as *MELUS*, *The Journal of Popular Culture*, *Feminism*, *Race Transnationalism*, and *Meridians* (Beauty Braggs). African American authors and new critics are now focusing on knowledge production and imagination of American society in James Manigault-Bryant's *On Black Metaphysics* (Manigault-Bryant, James Arthur. "Yoga and the Metaphysics of Racial Capital." *Race and Yoga* 1.1 (2016) and *Signs of Damascus Road: The Call in the African American Ministerial Imagination* (Greene-Hayes 2021). Manigault-Bryant deploys African religious thinking to reimagine contemporaneous examples of lived sociality by using the writings of Hortense Spillers. Charles Long, and Howard Thurman. Another variant of the thematic is the use of historical texts of the Harlem Renaissance to satirize the logistics of racialised society in America as a transnational and diasporic order. Darryl Dickson Carr (2006, 2005) published his *African American Satire: The Sacredly Profane Novel* and *The Columbian Guide to Contemporary African American Fiction* (Radford 2005). Transnationalism has been grounded in multiculturalism and *créolite* in various fields such as religion, history and sexuality (Roberto Strongman, ed. *Journal of Haitian Studies*, *Journal of Caribbean Studies*, *Journal of Caribbean Literatures*, *Journal of Latin American Cultural Studies*, *Wadabagei*, *Kunapipi*, *Callaloo* and in Strongman's *Black Atlantic Transcorporealities*).

The Afropolitan Transnational

Prior to 2000, debates in world literature took place outside of African studies. African literatures were integrated in anthologies of world literature, but were often excluded from the intellectual debates that shaped their production and reception. But from 2000 onward, Euro-



American literary scholarship was concerned with the role of globalization, migration and multiculturalism in the rise of 'world' literatures. Consequently, one of the sub-thematics of this section is to re-contextualize the 'transnational turn' in the humanities within the critical writings of African diasporic mobility and migratory historicity. The next section will trace out how African philosophers such as Achille Mbembe, embraced this turn through the notion of Afropolitanism in cinema. The core argument here is that Euro-American transnational debates were inspired by black priorities that were different from those of African writers and intellectuals. Over the past decade or so, Afropolitanism has been considered as possibly even a new powerful movement. Within academic circles, the concept has raised concerns about direct concentrations around neoliberalism and free market capitalism at the expense of the suffering masses in the periphery and an increasing emphasis has been placed on what an Africa Rising movement might teach, possibilities for salvaging activism ideals at the centre of the term, and suggestions about the way forward (Balakrishnan and Mbembe. 2016: 28-37).

Afropolitanism in transnational migration is a new form of cosmopolitan movement with deeply African roots (Coetzee 2016). Although the movement started with Taiye Selassie's essay 'Bye bye Barbar' and was consolidated by Achilles Mbembe, the years from 2011 to 2013 were characterized by the publication of several works of art considered as Afropolitan such as *Ghana Must Go* by Taiye Selasi (2013) and *Americanah* by Chimamanda Adichie (2013) increasingly committed to film productions. Mobility is a key element in Afropolitanism; in this cosmopolitan tradition, mobility is the ability to move between and to inhabit different cultures and places and is evident in the *Hip Hop* in Africa, the *Y' en a marre* movement, the Black Lives Matter movement and in films like *Trafficked*, for example, by Bill Wallace. In *Trafficked*, three girls from Nigeria, India and America find themselves in a diasporic brothel, and faced with the challenge of accepting food in exchange for surrendering their bodies, they opt to escape from the



brothel to seek their physical freedom. Today, this movement includes digital mobility that encompasses fast dissemination of images and ideas via the cyberspace. In the 2015 'African Literature Association' Conference that took place in Beyreuth, a panel was created dedicated to issues raised by Afropolitanism. The new generation of Afropolitan writers that includes Taiye Selasi, NoViolet Bulawayo, Chimamanda Adichie and Teju Cole, took the world by storm by grabbing prestigious awards and by selling millions of copies of their writings and films. They present a new, increasingly fashionable and marketable vision of Africa's place in the world in ways that are quite different from those of previous migratory generations. Afropolitanism rejects the idea of reinforcing images of Africa in the world media as merely war-torn, poor, diseased, and constantly drifting into chaotic political scenarios. By objecting to the image of Africa as a victim, Afropolitanism concentrates on a wide-ranging influence that Africa has on the world. As a type of world literature, Afropolitan literature scrutinizes the controversy surrounding literature and cinema as predatory in light of the unprecedented circulation of culture possibilized by global technology and argues for expansion of its geographical and temporal boundaries. (Ede 2016, Eze 2014, Eze 2016, Glissant 1992, Makalani 2011, M'Baye 2017, Miller 2009, Musila 2016, Nwankwo 2014, O'Donnell 2016, Pahl 2016, Royston 2017, Selasi 2005, Tomlinson 2007, Tulloch 2016, Veblen [1899] 2009).

The rubric "transnational diasporic cinema" refers to a set of films produced by members of demographic groups as well as their descendants who experienced forced migration from their nations of origin in order to survive in the face of a hierarchical space of ethno-racial, political, and religious discrimination or displacement as a result of war or economic necessity (Ella and Stam 2003). With globalization of capital, culture and media, borders were threatened by the obsolescence of nation state enclosures. In their didactical functions, transnational cinema generates profoundly ambivalent messages about migration from Africa to the global universe, because it warns against the dangers



that this movement represents while, simultaneously, putting on stage the attractions of diasporic cities like London, Paris, New York, Beijing, Tokyo and Bonn. Transnational films offer the viewer the pleasures of virtual travel and consumption, while at the same time putting on display the perspective for lives that can be ruined and the idea of returning to 'home' as being better. Underwriting this ambivalence is the membership of Africa and Africans in the time-space configuration of global cities coined by Nuttall and Mbembe (2008) and the 'worlding' of Africa thanks to the facilitation of technologies, routes, commodities, modern transportation and links.

In various transnational films such as *Mamma Mia Italiana* (2006), *U Gotta Go Home* (2008), *Back to Ghana* (2003), *Coming from America* (2005), *London Got Problem* (2006), *Agyaa Koo in Libya* (2009), *Run, Baby, Run* (2008), *Wild, Wild World* (2002), *Wild World (If Wishes were Horses)* (2002), *Back to Kotoka* (2001), *Idikoko in Holland* (2005), *Mr Ibu in London* (2004), *Koofori in London* (2005), *Amsterdam Diary* (2000), *Double Trouble (Mamma Mia Part II)* (1998), and *Love Brewed in America* (2008), imaginary travel and virtual tourism are enacted by a poor, illiterate African protagonist who leaves home because he is under economic duress and believes that he will find opportunities abroad. These stories are different from those of elite citizens (Ong 1999) and cosmopolitan transnationals (Desai 2004) because these are Africans with little knowledge about the western world, without money and who must make recourse to illegality to get what they want in terms of material needs in various cities of Europe, America, Japan, Canada, Australia, China, India and so on. In order to travel, they may purchase illegal documents from the blackmarket (*Koofori in London*), pay smugglers to transport them to destination countries (*See You Amsterdam*), put away away cargo (*Mr Ibu in London* (2004), and do other menial jobs to survive in their new host territories. While in their destination countries, they have enormous difficulties to deal with the frosting weather, walking through white parks with cold stares and annoying racist expressions, stopping hunger and confronting general hardship (*Mamma Mia Italiana*). These movements



create high suspense about the improbable attainment of their objectives of well-being: for example, Mr Ibu is unable to queue for food in London, his pidgin English is not intelligible to Londoners, he is almost knocked down by a car while trying to cross a street, he is unable to make out if the London's Tower Bridge is a fiction or is real created by *Mami Wata*, he believes he is in a television programme when his figure appears in the monitor of a security camera, and he makes love advances to Mr Michael's wife, who opted to support him as a fellow Nigerian before throwing him out of his London apartment. At the end of the film, he is compelled to return to Lagos as the final solution to the numerous embarrassments he faces in this diasporic and migratory capital of transnationalism. Mr Ibu's final itinerary signifies a symbolic deconstruction of the centre-periphery dialectic in the world cities' hypothesis of transnational diasporicism and migration.

The Ghanaian immigrant living in Amsterdam in *Amsterdam Diary* (2000) flirts with European girls but looks to Africa for a wife, the Mother Africa figure, to construct what s/he sees as a stable 'home' away from home. Besides, s/he is aware that any marriage with a European girl will be interpreted by his mother as "cursed" because "tradition is tradition and you have to abide by it". His quest is to amass as much wealth as possible and support their family back in Africa rather than to invest in the 'centre' as the diasporic and migratory discourse requires. In *Back to Ghana* (2003), just as in most other transnational African films, life becomes so unbearable in the diaspora, in spite of the seductions of the west in terms of sites, food, women, etc. The films narrate the experiences of these immigrants into the west as enchanted excursions into the Baudrillardian *simulacra* of social wellness in diasporic and migratory spaces. More critically, and from the viewpoint of film studies, many of these Afro-politanistic movies about transnationalism in the diaspora rely on a *montage* technique of *pastiche* in which scenes of Africans living in the diaspora, are often shot in conjunction with scenes from Ghana, Nigeria, Cameroon or some other African countries. In *U Gotta Go Home* and *Back to Ghana*, multiple



locations snapped in the US, Italy and Ghana are creatively compiled together and then shot in order to make them look as though they were a New York city setting. Producers of the films such as Bob Smith are often compelled to deploy forgery of scenes because, in the visits to the world cities of the 'centre', they are not granted permission to film facilities there. Consequently, they imagine and re-invent new strategies in the African 'periphery' countries to produce movies. By so doing, their creative products from the *detritus* of the cinema industry succeeds to challenge orthodox thinking from the 'centre' according to which the film industry worth its salt must be related only to Hollywood, not to Nollywood or Bollywood, for example. When Bob Smith travelled to the US for his film project, he was denied access to film facilities in the US that were to feature therein. Before returning to Ghana, he took a shot at the exterior of a morgue with a large sign to identify in Minneapolis. The producer strung together various scenes of offices, rooms and hallways so that his main protagonist, Kwabena, can be viewed as being physically present in New York. In other instances of imagined worldliness, such as the Nigerian movie *Love in Asia* (2007), the local and the global are imagined entirely from a movie facility in Lagos and not in the diasporic west. The transnational subject has to do with the scale, distribution and diversity of cultural exchanges and their effects at a local level as well as an understanding that effects may manifest within and beyond the nation-state.

Digital media have changed the routine practices of Africans in migratory environments (Bernal 2014, Hafkin 2015). This change has emerged because of the new forms of sociality that digital connectivity has afforded, conducive to old African values of sociality. The concept of "wealth in people", is a value system that expands beyond kinship relations, by following a "non-genealogical, accumulative logic" (Guyer 1993:243). Diasporic Africans are now actively working to construct and maintain wide-ranging networks of social ties by placing a high value on personal connections. Grosz-Ngate (2014: 80) confirms that non-kin associations of different types "offer their members sociability, moral



support, and an opportunity to expand personal networks". What is now new in relationship to conventional thinking about friendship in the Global North, is that there is the phenomena of 'Facebook friends', for example, in social media, where outer circles of social relationships are sustained chiefly through *phatic* communication, and can be mobilised under some circumstances. These relationships have models 'on the ground' that have long been a hallmark of African sociality. For example, in the sociality of African diasporas and migration, abducted enslaved Africans severed from their familiar homeland environments and dispatched to slave vessel overcrowded bowels forged out of necessity a virtual community based on intercultural kinship and forged out new languages to express them (Everett 2009: 2). They responded to migratory oppression by creatively inventing new forms of 'virtual communities' and diasporic identities. Recently, Eritreans from various religious and ethnic constituencies dispersed across many countries have created their first Eritrean diaspora website, Dehai.org. (<http://dehai.org/dehai/contact>) in which various entertainment such as football and birthday parties are featured.

Thanks to the synergy of economic, technological and spatial flows in globalization (Castells 1997), new forms of ethnoscap (Appadurai 1998) are being created from the unprecedented movement of Africans across widely dispersed and de-territorialized geographies. Intertwined with these mobilities, are possibilities for Africans to engage with their homes of origin by bringing their imagined communities of "home" to their new localities at the same time as they venture themselves onto realities of the tribal areas they have left behind. New economic, political and social spaces unconfined to the specific sites of sovereign states have emerged, that are breaking down borders and opening up possibilities for transnationals to reconstruct the politics and social life of their nations. The digitization of diasporic communities has created strong connections rather than dissociations between home and host nations. The diaspora of virtuality is now a new media and physical ecology energized by migrations across international



boundaries, with the convergence of social groups outside their homes of origin as communities of action, and the borderlessness of the new ICT architectures (Tettey 2004: 123). A growing number of internet TVs, websites and radio broadcasts, are combined with interactive media outlets to provide news and forums for discussions on various developments in different African countries. These chatrooms serve as sources of knowledge for economic, political, social, and cultural engagements for the African diaspora by helping to link them to issues, events and conditions in their nation states while simultaneously serving as a platform for civil interaction.

Discussions

The first attempts to investigate diaspora and migration prioritized survivability of Africans and their cultural traits in the New World. But, new questions of authenticity and displacement deconstructed that structuralist approach. Although some scholars continue to sustain the argument that there is an extinction going on of African cultural characteristics in the diasporic regions, this paper reminds us to be mindful that diasporic identities are always historically constructed, reconstructed, and regenerated (Patterson and Kelley 2000: 20). Identity has its own dynamics within diaspora, with several typologies of survivability adopted based on the opposition between “crystallised diasporas” and the “fluid diasporas,” namely, not only trade and labour diasporas, but also imperial, political and the cultural diasporas (the example of the West Indies), is a thought-provoking and productive type. In its cultural typology, the diasporic discourse stresses on the idea of hybridity, deployed by post-modernist scholars to indicate the evolution of new sociological dynamics in mixed cultures. Another critically metaphoric designation of roots for diasporic hybridity is the rhizome, a network concept created by Guattari and Deleuze (Grossberg 2014, Pisters and Lord, eds, 2001). The rhizome portrays African root systems of migration as shapes constantly growing. Edouard Glissant refers to the rhizome identity by drawing from the



French Caribbean and hybridity, James Clifford speaks of 'travelling cultures' with respect to the Black diaspora in the 'Black Atlantic' and Cohen makes allusion to 'diasporas located between 'nation-states' and 'travelling cultures' in the economic, physical, spiritual, astral and other perspectives of the nation-state's space/time zone" (Cohen 2008). Paul Gilroy alludes to diasporic translocation via assimilation and return. For Gilroy, diaspora is an antidote to 'camp-thinking' that links oppositional and exclusive modes of thinking about culture and people on the grounds of purity of identities (Carter 2005). Diasporic identities can also be creolized, syncretized, hybridized and chronically impure cultural forms (Gilroy 2000.) The idea of the diaspora is therefore itself antinational, de-stabilizing and subversive (Ibid: 128) and provides a substitute to the metaphysics of race, nation and bounded culture coded into the body. The diaspora is therefore an idea that problematizes the notion of a historical and cultural mechanics of belonging; it is "invariably promiscuous" and is in active conversation with mutable forms, movements and complex, dynamic variations (Ibid: 129-130). Hall adds importantly that the concept of diasporic identity should be conceived as based on hybridity and difference because it rejects antiquated forms of hegemonising and imperialising ethnicity (Hall, 1996: 401). The diaspora is not a purity, but the recognition of diversity, heterogeneity and migrancy away from fixations with home as a stable consciousness.

Cultural identity is not static but very fluid because it evolves, adapts and adopts. Du Bois accounts for the double consciousness spirit by arguing that the black subjectivity feels his two-ness, the American and the Negro (DuBois, 1994: 2). This 'hyphenated' identity comes from Africa, goes to Europe and creates a 'traveling alterity' and the idea of signifying articulates "how black texts 'talk' to other black texts" (Gates, 1988: 26). Glissant opines that identity is open-ended and a double root, from creoleness; it is a rhizome-like identity, moving toward and encountering other roots (Glissant, 2005: 27). In this process of 'travel', the identitarian home is not a cultural center, but is sustained by



appropriating and disciplining movements of people and things (Clifford, 1997: 3). 'Home' is not a *lieu* that an individual leaves behind; rather, it is a geographical reference point that anchors travel, syncretizes overlapping systems, negotiates 'border' experiences and entangles the intersection of ethnic, regional, national, and transnational identities (Clifford, 1997: 7). In *Wide Sargasso Sea*, the protagonist, Antoinette, rejects all the constrained categories in order to inhabit blended spaces, by stealing a set of keys, at the end of the tale. She breaks from the contained spatiality of a bedroom and emerges into a passageway that fulfills her earlier quest to master "shifting shadows" (Rhys, *Wide Sargasso Sea*, 48). But this passageway does not have any direction nor destination. A candle is used to light the way of the protagonist into the dark passage, but the novel ends here without any specific locality as an endpoint (Rhys, *Wide Sargasso Sea*, 156). This perpetual space of liminality signifies a failed rite of passage and mirrors the dissolution of convention. It represents a cognitive process of creating self-knowledge or self-identity, a 'double consciousness' of reflexivity that questions the African self as a supreme being. In this counterintuitive space, hybridity undergoes displacement, as all notions of fusion, mixture, miscegenation or creolization are revisited in a geography of rejection of the purity of antagonistic communities (Sibley, 1995: 410). Kwame Appiah has enlightened us that "whatever Africans share, we do not have a common traditional culture, common language, common religious or conceptual vocabulary" (Appiah, 1993: 26). Brah also articulates the idea of 'homing' the power of return and home, in which a return is possible forever, whenever, if ever" (Echehuo, 1999: 4). In his paper entitled 'There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack', Paul Gilroy prophetically prioritizes the linkage between a deterritorialized, diasporic black consciousness and the local and territorialized identity politics of whiteness. In a Hegelian sense, the African is now breaking through permeable boundaries of *desire* and *loathing* into new spaces of liberation and renaissance.



Conclusion

This paper has shown that transnationalism is embedded in migrants' 'deep stories', and how these stories are altered in migratory settings. A multi-sited, but nonetheless locally grounded, transnational history breaks down in the writings of diasporic Africans with older modes of imperial history treating Africa as little more than a setting for the history of colonizers transforming into new historicities of self-affirmation. Critical approaches to imperial history have pointed to, but not adequately pursued, the treatment of colonizer and colonized as coeval subjects of history and objects of analysis. Historians of Africa and the diaspora, however, have moved beyond imperial history to reconstruct the boundaries between colonizer and colonized by thinking outside of empire and embracing the critical theory of postMarxism, but in a manner consistent with the groundedness of multi-sited historiography. A multi-sited, but nonetheless locally grounded, transnational history breaks with older modes of imperial history that treat Africa as little more than a setting for the history of neocolonizers.

More recently the invention of social networking software has facilitated revolutionary changes of importance to migrants who are dispersed from their original locations, but usually remain connected through transnational social networks. A broad range of not only economic, but also sociocultural, and political cross-border activities and practices, and their various combinations, have contributed to modify diasporic and migrating people's sense of belonging to spaces; affect their idea of citizenship and nationality and transform their aspirations, imagination and decisions in everyday life. These identitarian changes have created new spatial flows that are now reshaping the development of what Appadurai (1998) calls ethnoscapas, across geographically dispersed territories. The focus is on digital migrants as 'connected users', and therefore as participants in social media platforms. Though there is no consensus on what digital diaspora means exactly because it



depends on its many disciplinary takes and media-specific variations, such as 'e-diasporas', 'digital diasporas', 'net-diasporas' and 'web-diasporas', there is consensus on the profound ways in which digital connectivity has transformed privileged terms of spatiality, belonging and self-identification. Digital diasporas provide new possible cartographies to map the self in relation to increasingly complex patterns of globalization and localization, while avoiding closures and the negative effects of identity politics.

The dawn of neoliberal rationality in Africa in the 1980s coincided with a massive exodus of skilled Africans to the global North. The 'accented' film is one of the manifestations of border consciousness in the African diasporic cinema where physical and land collisions are waged in accordance with the universalized theory of Anzaldua (1987). In the films, borders are open with subjectivities and 'open wounds' that cannot be healed through post-nationalism because the unequal power relationships in the 'centre-periphery' diasporic space and the incompatible identities they spawn prevent any form of 'healing'. Homi Bhabha (1994) formulated the idea of producers of critical excesses, sly civility and irony. The characters presented in the novels, films and digital data exhibit registers of behaviour and performativity that portray asymmetrical power situations of centre/periphery cultures. But the characters are also a *supplément*, an 'excess' from the norms of the 'centre' in the sense that they may hold multiple identities or reject all identities as they cross their borders into new imaginary journeys with various motivations, directions and duration. Return journeys away from the diasporic 'centre' into the African 'periphery' are empowering in Halle Gerima's (1993) *Sankofa*, for example, where the protagonist returns to Ghana, Raquel Gerber's (1989) *Ori* where the protagonist returns to Africa and Faridah Ben Lyazid's (1989) *Door to the Sky* where he returns to Morocco. As Houston Baker Jr has confirmed, contrary to the orthodoxy of the centre/periphery according to which black diasporic communities occupy marginal positions in the transnational communication metanarrative, it is increasingly very seductive for black



people to feel that they can create their own public space to articulate their specific concerns. They are now drawn to the idea of transforming the bourgeois public into an empowering and expressive one of self-fashioning.

Transnationalism is often reducible to relationships between source and target destinations, and social contexts, with prioritization of internal censure and shortcomings. This paper has deployed (post)Marxist critique to a selection of novels, films, music and digital blogs, to hypothesize an emerging transnationalism metanarrative that goes beyond classical restrictions of migratory spatial geographies, into fluid and dynamic sets of 'superstructures' constructed by 'imagined communities' with predispositions to new impetus and synergies. These 'superstructural' synergies are intersecting globalization and new subaltern networks, translocalized borders, deterritorialized geographies, new ethnoscares and moralities, and competing state governance policies, and are also brokering with new digital infrastructures and capitalist frameworks. This framework de-motivated not only the intelligentsia but also the Afropolitanistic class to trigger new forms of immigration to the West. But with racialism transforming the class into transnational 'Others' and compelling them to migrate from their hosting countries to converge in other destinations, migratory Africans had no other choice but to rethink their situations, environments and lives. The paper concludes that this analytical toolkit can richly fertilize our comprehension of transnational cosmopolitanism as a dynamic space of unevenness, instability and inequality; but also as a new romanticized citizenship site geared toward realizing new African *Renaissance* geographies with the quest not only for a better economic future in new 'elsewheres' other than 'home' but for an improvement of lives in virtually all areas of human activity.



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