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"Nigeria" in the Cape: Afropolitanism and Alienation in Yewande Omotoso's *Bom Boy*

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ABSTRACT

This article studies Yewande Omotoso's debut novel, *Bom Boy*, as an example of the newly emerging body of migrant fiction in South Africa and focuses on its representation of migratory linkages between Cape Town, South Africa, and Nigeria. While Nigerian writers virulently raised their pen against apartheid, current South African writing appears to distance itself from its erstwhile supporters. This most visibly surfaces in the appearance of "the Nigerian" as a new stock character in some recent South African novels. I argue that Omotoso's novel registers the continuous history of South Africa's othering of the African continent while at the same time highlighting moments of relation between South Africa and Nigeria and their respective peoples. The novel envisions Cape Town as an inherently ambiguous place of intersection and cross-cultural contact, as well as of alienation. Drawing on Achille Mbembe's notion of Afropolitanism, I suggest that while invoking the term, the novel also calls for its revaluation. This, the text seems to propose, crucially needs to take into account the specific and troubling history of the Cape as a location from which to think anew transnational connections with Nigeria. The copresence of Afropolitanism and alienation particularly comes to the fore in the author's juxtaposition of the figure of Rhodes with the legendary heroine Moremi of Yoruba myth, as well as in her exploration of the theme of transnational and transracial adoption.

INTRODUCTION

While trade between Nigeria and South Africa is booming, Nigeria's finance minister, Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, stressed during a state visit of President Goodluck Jonathan to South Africa in May 2013 that "political and diplomatic relations have lagged behind commercial ones" (Kotch 1). In the political realm, the rivalry between the two countries came to the fore, for instance, in the 2012 "Nigerian-South African headlock [sic] over the leadership of the AU" (Ballim) and conflict arises again and again over arbitrarily applied immigration rules and regulations.[1] The "rocky patches and frequent rivalries" in the bilateral ties of the continental powerhouses have, moreover, been played out in the sphere of popular culture ("South Africa"). Neil Blomkamp's 2009 science fiction blockbuster *District 9*, with its derogatory and undifferentiated portrayal of Nigerians as criminal cannibals led by a warlord named Obesandjo, caused a furor in Nigeria (Quayson). The country's information minister, Dora Akunyili, even appealed to Nigerian movie theatres to stop showing the film (Bloom).

In the area of literature, connections between the two countries appear to be equally fraught. Although South African literary festivals such as The Time of the Writer (Durban) and Open Book (Cape Town) have in past years frequently invited Nigerian authors, there still seems to be a lack of dialogue and collaboration between writers from the two countries. Nigerian writers bemoaned this reality at Open Book in 2012, emphasizing that they had all grown up reading South African fiction, but that relations between authors from the two countries "had seemingly withered over the past two decades" (Koinange). Chairing the panel was first-time novelist Yewande Omotoso, of Nigerian and Barbadian parentage, who grew up in Nigeria and migrated with her parents and two older brothers to South Africa in 1992. Her personal background, thus, positions her as an exemplary voice crucial to any analysis of contemporary literary relations between South Africa and Nigeria. Focusing on migration between the two countries, her debut novel, *Bom Boy*, contributes toward rekindling connections between South Africa and Nigeria and, thus, toward writing into being a more Afropolitan South Africa. Yet it does not shy away either from highlighting the alienation her Nigerian protagonists feel in South Africa.[2]

South African metropolises, Johannesburg in particular, have increasingly been described as Afropolitan spaces over the last few years. Achille Mbembe, for instance, calls Johannesburg the "centre of Afropolitanism par excellence" ("Afropolitanism" 29). Omotoso, by contrast, seems to challenge the existence of Afropolitan urban spaces in South Africa. *Bom Boy* teaches us to be wary of uncritical identifications of Afropolitan identities, spaces, and practices in that country. Rather, it poses the decisive question of how being located in South Africa may inflect and shape Afropolitan identities. Given the vexed relationship between South Africa and Africa, its long-standing orientation toward non-African (Western) elsewheres and its disconnection from the continent (Mbembe et al.), it seems yet another term may be required to express affiliation to both the world and Africa from the location of South Africa. Furthermore, by setting her novel in Cape Town, the author further considers the city's particularly problematic relation to the African continent.

This article seeks to provide a detailed reading of *Bom Boy* against the background of recent controversies around the notion of Afropolitanism. Its specific focus is on the author's invocation of the term in the context of South African-Nigerian relations. The novel's critical stance toward a celebratory interpretation of the concept in terms of cultural hybridity and mobility, I suggest, helps us reassess its meaning and theoretical feasibility. For Omotoso, the experience of cultural alienation by her protagonists of mixed Nigerian and South African heritage upsets conventional interpretations of Afropolitanism. Rather, the novel appears to invoke a more critical Afropolitanism, emphasizing power imbalances and struggles for societal acceptance and, thus, portraying Nigerian-South African relations in terms of both connectivity and contestation, proximity and distance. In what follows, I will first provide a brief overview of South African-Nigerian relations in literary culture and explore the figure of "the Nigerian" in contemporary South African fiction before discussing the notion of Afropolitanism in greater detail. The final part presents a detailed reading of the novel.

OUTLINING (DIS)CONNECTIONS BETWEEN AFRICA'S LITERARY GIANTS

The political optimism and brief moment of "Africa on the rise" in the early 1960s brought about by decolonization also fostered a lively interaction between writers from across the continent and invigorated the idea of a Pan-African literature (Gunner). These years also witnessed a culture of active exchange between Nigerian and South African writers. One may think of the many Nigerian authors raising their pen against the apartheid regime, or of the first Mbari Artists and Writers Club founded in Ibadan in 1961, which became a central venue that brought together writers from Nigeria and yet-to-be liberated South Africa (Currey). While the club has been described as "arguably the single most influential space for literary and artistic production in Nigeria during the 1960s" (Okeke-Agulu 520), it has equally been praised for its "cosmopolitan character" and "Pan-African vitality" (Ulansky 252).[3] The strong South African focus of the club was mostly due to the presence of Es'kia Mphahlele, who alongside his fellow South African Begum Hendrickse, was among its founders.[4] Moreover, the club organized the seminal African Writers Conference held at Makerere University, Kampala, in June 1962, with the majority of its delegates coming from South Africa and Nigeria. It, therefore, constituted a central organ that furthered literary dialogue between the two countries.

As Mbari's embrace of the Pan-African idea shows, emerging African and, above all, Nigerian writers in this early period of cultural nationalism did not position the South African experience as remote from their writerly concerns. Rather, as Pius Adesanmi writes, "South Africa's unenviable history of racial oppression and the long-drawn resistance struggle it engendered left a profound mark on the African literary imaginary" (242). Chinua Achebe cogently emphasized this sense of interconnectedness and continental solidarity with South Africa, noting that "[i]n Nigeria we do not have Apartheid but the fact that the South African people are locked in this struggle diminishes us and diminishes our own potential for solving our problems in Nigeria. For ultimately it is a struggle about the great wealth of South Africa and its economy and the way this wealth is *not used* for

the benefit of Africa and its people" (qtd. in Searle 160–61). This commitment of Nigerian writers to the liberation of South Africa found poignant expression, for instance, in the numerous poems they dedicated to Nelson Mandela.[5] The South African cause, one may argue, was, thus, a key component of the Pan-Africanist agenda adopted by Nigerian writers at the time.

Even though the disillusionment that followed the earlier moment of independence euphoria, in Soyinka's eyes, called on African writers to redirect their focus from the South toward their own countries, his own oeuvre, as David Attwell aptly shows, continued to engage with the South African situation. Yet the gradual setting-in of post-independence disenchantment, according to Soyinka, resulted in a reversal of the future prospects of African writers from across the continent and those of their colleagues in the South. The "non South African writer," Soyinka notes, may "before very long . . . begin to envy the South African the bleak immensity of his problems. For the South African has still the right to hope, and this prospect of a future yet uncompromised by failure on his own part, in his own right, is something which has lately ceased to exist for other African writers" (Soyinka, "The Writer" 11). This chasm, it seems, persists until the present day. For although numerous scholars predicted in the 1990s that South African literature would follow a similar trajectory to writing from elsewhere on the continent (See Lindfors, *Comparative Approaches*), and many contemporary texts indeed evince disillusionment with the promises of liberation, the reinscription of African otherness in some recent South African fiction also appears to stem from the continuous hope that South Africa will not fully follow the path of nations elsewhere on the continent in the aftermath of independence.[6]

Due to the shift in migration dynamics since South Africa's transition to democracy, Nigerian immigrants are a frequently featured group in this emerging body of literature. In contrast to other Sub-Saharan African countries such as Mozambique, Malawi, Botswana, Lesotho, and Swaziland, which largely provided the work force for South Africa's mining industry during apartheid, Nigeria's function as a source of immigrants to South Africa is relatively recent (Peberdy 145). Prior to the military takeover by General Sani Abacha in 1993, Nigerians in South Africa were mainly academics (Morris). But with the opportunities and promises of a democratic South Africa and the fear of political persecution at home, skilled Nigerians increasingly chose the southern African country as an alternative to Europe, the US, or the Gulf States (Adepoju 59). Besides this group, unskilled immigrants trying to eke out a living as street vendors and traders have settled in the country over the last decade (Ibid. 70). Segatti et al. estimate that the total number of Nigerians in South Africa in 2012 was between 12,000 and 17,000 (3). Unlike immigrants and refugees from countries such as Mozambique, Zimbabwe, and Somalia, who mainly stay in the country's townships and informal settlements and have been among the primary victims of xenophobic violence, most Nigerians residing in the country have tended to settle in inner-city areas (Morris).[7]

Yet, although not the main targets of the frequent acts of anti-immigrant violence, Nigerians, as Chimamanda Adichie notes in her article "Why Do South Africans Hate Nigerians?," are often deemed "worse" than Zimbabweans, Malawians, and Mozambicans. Although Nigerians experience less literal, physical violence, discursive violence directed against them appears all the more intense, drawing on a global archive of denigrating representations of their people. This has become

palpable in the xenophobic discourse of the South African public sphere, with its system of stereotypical images that attaches certain condescending views to specific African nationalities (Garuba, Foreword). While African immigrants in general are frequently regarded as unwelcome "guests" in the country, Nigerians are scripted in this mode of discursive oppression as drug dealers, conmen, and criminals (Nyamnjoh 67). Warnings against, and reports of, the dubious ploys of Nigerian con artists crop up repeatedly in South African media, as a result of which the stereotype of the Nigerian conman and criminal has, over the last decade or so, become entrenched in the public sphere (see Segatti et al. 5).

In contemporary South African fiction in particular, the emergence of the Nigerian fraudster and drug dealer as a typified national character may be read as an indicator of national-territorial demarcation, impeding the revitalization of the earlier moment of cultural and creative connection between the two powerhouses of African fiction. Indeed, the legendary figure of the Nigerian swindler permeates novels and short stories by South African writers from various backgrounds, dating back to the very first years of the democratic dispensation. The entry of this national stereotype, thus, coincides with the nation-building project of the 1990s and partakes in the construction of current South African identities. Among the works featuring Nigerian characters are Zakes Mda's novel *She Plays with the Darkness* (1995), Gomolemo Mokae's short story "Milk and Honey Galore, Honey" (1999), K. Sello Duiker's *The Quiet Violence of Dreams* (2001), Phaswane Mpe's *Welcome to Our Hillbrow* (2001), Patricia Schonstein Pinnock's *Skyline* (2000) and *Banquet at Brabazan* (2010), Kgebetli Moele's *Room 207* (2006), Heinrich Troost's *Plot Loss* (2007), Niq Mhlongo's *After Tears* (2007), and Andrew Brown's *Refuge* (2009).[8] This list is by no means comprehensive; it seeks merely to cover some of the major South African texts including Nigerian immigrant characters whose analysis will help delineate the dynamics of representation of this immigrant group in recent fiction.

While most Nigerians populating these novels only appear as minor characters, the narrative strategies with which they are represented can be seen to fall into two different patterns. One of these tends to reinscribe popular portrayals of Nigerians as unwelcome, harmful, and deceptive by presenting their engagement in drug dealing and other dubious activities as their main character traits. Schonstein Pinnock's *Skyline*, for instance, displays a noticeably asymmetrical structure among its immigrant characters. Whereas the novel astutely delineates the Mozambican refugee and artist Bernard and various other African immigrants and refugees living in a dilapidated apartment block in central Cape Town, the Nigerians inhabiting the top floor of the high-rise building feature as an anonymous collective of document forgers and drug dealers. The more highly differentiated portrayal of other refugee and immigrant characters stands, therefore, in sharp contrast to the one-dimensional image of Nigerians in the novel. Of course the question arises whether such criticism of Schonstein Pinnock's narrative is appropriate and does not itself fall victim to a similar reductionism by reading single characters as representatives of a whole nation. Similarly, one may follow Alex Woloch by arguing that the "narrative price" of the main protagonists' "achieved interiority is the distortion of many other human figures" (34). Yet the Long Street drug dealers are so overtly conceptualized as national characters that such a reading appears justified.

The second narrative pattern is more evidently dedicated to the attempt to subvert the common representation of Nigerians, setting out to challenge their portrayal as unwanted criminals. This seems the case in Zakes Mda's first novel, *She Plays with the Darkness* (1995). Set in Lesotho during the transition years, Mda's novel features two minor Nigerian characters who make a fortune with insurance scams around the world and set up a mutual deal with Radisene, the main protagonist of the novel, and himself a cunning swindler. However, rather than depositing his share of the booty in his bank account, the Nigerians rob him of his entire savings. Learning about the incident, Radisene's girlfriend accuses him of getting involved with Nigerians, reminding him that "You know very well that they are all crooks!" (Mda 191). Radisene's response to this stereotype seems rather contrived: "He felt bitter to let Tampololo paint the whole nation with the same brush. In their happier moments they had often discussed prejudice and the dangers of generalizing about a people" (Ibid. 191).

Needless to say, Mda appears eager to unwrite prejudicial generalizations here. Radisene's moralizing contestation of his girlfriend's view of Nigerians does not emerge as a very convincing reaction after he has been tricked in this manner. In the circumstances, his girlfriend's unqualified condemnation comes across as a far more natural response. Beneath the free indirect speech of the passage, one hears all too clearly the author's voice exhorting his readers and by the same token succumbing to the temptation of moral didacticism. Mda is unable to escape the "moral earnestness, political correctness and ethical high-mindedness" that to a large degree dominated apartheid literature (Frenkel and MacKenzie 4).

Later works (sometimes) abandon this desire for moral righteousness. In Mhlongo's *After Tears*, for example, the actions of most protagonists are motivated by self-interest and we can observe, as Thabo Tsehloane remarks, a form of "ethical abdication in Mhlongo's characterization" (84). We do not find a single central character who does not resort to swindling for personal advancement. Throughout the entire cast of protagonists, fraud, in Mhlongo's satirical account of present-day South Africa, serves as a uniting rather than dividing characteristic. Yet, whereas most of his characters are portrayed as complex figures possessing a range of character traits generally allied to deception, the Nigerian Yomi is relegated to the background of the action and principally characterized by his instinct for racketeering. He is, thus, cast in the role not of an individual but of a type that tells the same unidimensional story of Nigerians. In this way, the overwhelmingly derogatory public image of Nigerians persists, compromising the novel's endeavor to undermine their negative representation by satire.

Considering the integration of these characters in a number of South African works of fiction, we may argue that the Nigerian swindler and criminal has emerged as a new stock character of the contemporary South African novel. These figures mostly inhabit a sphere at the margins of the narrative and show neither individual features nor character development; indeed, an inner life is completely precluded. This is not to say, however, that the inclusion of Nigerian migrants as main characters would necessarily entail their more variegated portrayal as—to use E. M. Forster's rather outdated terms—"round" rather than "flat" characters.[9] As Jens Eder et al. maintain,

> Two common assumptions about character types are false anyway: the assumption that they always possess only few traits and the assumption that they never change in the course of the story. A typified character can possess a quite complex system of traits and be represented in much detail. . . . It is not the simplicity of a character, but the degree to which it agrees with established schemata which turns it into a type. Typified characters can also change, though they tend to change in a typical way. (39)

Stock characters, according to M. H. Abrams (297), are frequently associated with a particular genre and many of these novels, set in South Africa's major metropolises, Johannesburg and Cape Town, may be classified as "city novels," or what Sarah Nuttall in her discussion of novels set in Johannesburg calls "texts which take the city as one of their constitutive subjects rather than as a backdrop to their narratives" (33). One may, therefore, read the incorporation of Nigerian characters into these novels as a means of fulfilling the purposes of the city novel genre with its emphasis on an increasingly Afropolitan texture in the South African urban setting. Yet, notwithstanding this acknowledgement of South African urban spaces as African or Afropolitan, the reductive stereotypical framing of Nigerians reintroduces the clichéd character types of some apartheid writing.[10] The dialogue between Nigeria and South Africa of the 1960s has, thus, largely been absent from recent writing as well as literary criticism, echoing their often conflicted political and economic relations and positioning as continental rivals.

This criticism by no means denies the existence of some Nigerian nationals involved in scams and drug dealing in South Africa.[11] Yet the urgent question arising from this analysis is, once again, why do these groups feature so prominently in contemporary South African fiction? Why—with few exceptions—are South African authors not writing about the more ordinary lives and livelihoods of Nigerian immigrants and refugees? Why do these novels not give narrative space to Nigerian students, doctors, academics, professionals, business people, or street traders in the country? It seems that authors have to a large extent bought into the "single story" of Nigeria as a country of scammers, crisis, and dysfunctionality (Adichie, "The Danger").[12] The recent emergence of the Nigerian national character type, thus, mirrors the simultaneous "re-racialization and balkanization of society" (Bystrom and Nuttall 308) in contemporary South Africa and stands in sharp contrast to Afropolitanism's "uncompromising critique of primary affiliations" (Mbembe, "Thinking").[13]

Let us, at this point, take a brief detour into recent debates triggered by the notion of Afropolitanism. Drawing and expanding on the definitions of Afropolitanism by Taiye Tuakli-Wosornu and Achille Mbembe, Simon Gikandi delineates the term as follows:

> Initially conceived as a neologism to describe the social imaginary of a generation of Africans born outside the continent but connected to it through familial and cultural genealogies, the term Afropolitanism can now be read as the description of a new phenomenology of Africanness—a way of being African in the world. Afropolitanism may sound awkward as a term, but there is no doubting that it has been prompted by the desire to think of African identities as both rooted in specific local geographies but also transcendental of them. 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. (9)

Yet Afropolitanism has recently become a contested term, particularly in light of its uncritical, celebratory usage as a marketing strategy of the increasingly corporatized university in South Africa.[14] This commodification of an African-centered knowledge is echoed in the use of the notion in popular culture. Commenting on Binyavanga Wainaina's address "I Am a Pan-Africanist, Not an Afropolitan" delivered at the 2012 UK African Studies Association conference, Stephanie Bosch Santana observes that "for Wainaina, Afropolitanism has become the marker of crude cultural commodification—a phenomenon increasingly 'product driven,' design focused, and 'potentially funded by the West.' Through an Afropolitan lens, 'travel is easy' and 'people are fluid.'" The term has, thus, frequently been criticized for reasserting Western hegemony, allowing only those Africans of a privileged background with the financial means to travel to the West to call themselves Afropolitans (Seepe and Combrinck). The celebration of the cultural hybridity and mobility of the Afropolitan elite, while intended to destabilize essentialist and stable notions of culture and belonging, thus, at the same time, reintroduces radical divisions. In this sense, Afropolitanism emphasizes the fundamental disconnection between the postcolonial African elite and the majority of citizens, whose lack of economic capital denies them access to Afropolitan ways of being in the world.

It is precisely for the frequent alignment of Afropolitanism with the privileged experience of regular travel to or living in the West and the understanding of an Afropolitan citizen as a "mediator between the West and Africa" that Omotoso dismisses the term (Fasselt, "'I'm not Afropolitan"). Despite her extensive travelling across the world, the author refuses to be called an Afropolitan, arguing that her experience of migration and living outside her home country fundamentally differs from that of writers such as Chimamanda Adichie, Taiye Selasi, and Noo Saro-Wiwa. For her, the term does not add any value to the lives of Africans like herself who are of the continent and, although not necessarily living in their country of birth, have no intention of leaving the continent.

Mbembe's definition of an Afropolitan citizen as "someone who, keeping a centre of gravity in Africa (and not necessarily where one was born), retains the possibility of circulating through the world, in the context of his profession" similarly appears to include only the upwardly mobile who can afford travel to the West ("Why Am I Here?" 144). In his earlier article "Afropolitanism," however, he tries to reroute the geographical focus of the term by emphasizing the centrality of "itinerancy, mobility and displacement" in the history of the African continent (27). The dispersion of people living on the continent and the immersion of people from elsewhere does not necessarily have to be to or from the Western world. Destinations and sources of migratory movements, according to Mbembe, are multidirectional, including South-East, East-South, and South-South routes. He notes, "it is not simply that a part of African history lies somewhere else, outside Africa. It is also that a history of the rest of the world . . . is present on the continent. Our way of belonging to the world . . . has always been marked by, if not cultural mixing, then at least the interweaving of worlds" (Ibid. 28). Pan-Africanism, by contrast, a

notion that Omotoso and Wainaina prefer, in Mbembe's eyes, does not escape the danger of nativist tendencies. Yet Mbembe's definition of Afropolitanism as "the relativisation of primary roots and membership, and the way of embracing, with full knowledge of the facts, strangeness, foreignness and remoteness" (Ibid. 28) comes close to the universalist outlook and commitments that have been central to the critique of normative cosmopolitanism (Kurasawa 182–83).

The question that imposes itself here is thus: if Afropolitanism is as much a practice on the African continent as in the diaspora, is this universalist assumption of Afropolitan ways of being and inhabiting the world still useful? While grounded in an African context, the universalizing impulse elides the certainly entangled, yet nonetheless dissimilar, migration experiences of Omotoso and Adichie. It appears, then, that theoretical accounts of Afropolitanism—like those of cosmopolitanism—need to take into consideration how being located in a particular geographical space may shape Afropolitan identities. We may, therefore, begin to speak of Afropolitanisms or rooted Afropolitanism.[15] This would presuppose a critical assessment of current interpretations of Afropolitanism along the lines of critical cosmopolitanism.[16] Although Omotoso seems altogether skeptical of the term, her novel, as I will argue in the pages to follow, invokes the notion of a more critical Afropolitanism alongside that of (cultural) alienation. In contrast to the other South African novels mentioned above, *Bom Boy*, I suggest, draws South Africa and Nigeria together in new and unprecedented ways.

REWRITING AFROPOLITANISM IN *BOM BOY*

Bom Boy, the author attests in an interview, is written with the express intent to "challenge South Africans about their stereotypes about Nigerians" (qtd. in Ajeluorou). Yet in contrast to Mda, Omotoso does not succumb to moral didacticism. Exploring the ways in which first- and second-generation Nigerian immigrants navigate the social realities in the city of Cape Town, the novel both conjures up the spirit of Afropolitanism and challenges conceptualizations of Afropolitan subjects that uncritically celebrate their mobility and cultural hybridity. The novel's critique of an unreflective Afropolitanism, I propose, becomes manifest on the level of the spatial and the individual in the text's two main narrative strands, which center on two different generations of Nigerian immigrants in South Africa. The first narrates the story of Nigerian immigrant Oscar, who although of mixed Nigerian and South African parentage, has grown up in Nigeria and comes to South Africa to study for his doctorate at the University of Cape Town. We learn of his experiences through a series of letters that he writes from prison to his son Leke in 1992. Encapsulating Oscar's feeling of disconnection and alienation as a Nigerian in the Cape is his impression of Rhodes Memorial, the most striking monument of Cape Town's colonial heritage. The author skillfully contrasts the memorial with a statue of the legendary Moremi of Yoruba myth at the campus of his university in Nigeria. This juxtaposition most poignantly expresses the novel's reservations about an Afropolitan spirit in the Cape.

While, in the first narrative thread, aligning her engagement with Afropolitanism in the Cape mainly to the urban geography and its extant colonial landmarks, Omotoso binds the question of Afropolitan identities in the second strand to the individual psyche of Oscar's nine-year-old son Leke and his

experience as a transnational and transracial adoptee. It is here that Omotoso employs the pattern of the coming-of-age novel, narrating Leke's trajectory out of social isolation toward a more complete sense of self and reengagement with his social surroundings. Yet rather than following the teleological format of the traditional bildungsroman directed toward harmony, finality, and closure, *Bom Boy* ends with a narrative assertion of the uncertainty and unpredictability of life. One may argue that in the course of the novel Leke acquires a more Afropolitan identity through his growing preoccupation with his Nigerian heritage and his increasing openness toward others in his immediate South African surroundings. Yet rather than delineating Leke's growth as a path toward "wholeness," I would argue that the novel upsets celebratory interpretations of Afropolitanism, writing into being what—in alignment with cosmopolitan studies (Delanty)—one might term a critical Afropolitanism.

AFROPOLITANISM IN THE CAPE? RHODES VERSUS MOREMI

Setting her narrative about Nigerian immigrants to South Africa in Cape Town, Omotoso engages with the city's particularly problematic relationship with the African continent, which has for a long time been marked by a discourse of disconnection and exceptionalism. This image dates back to the city's 17th-century reputation as a "tavern of the seas," when, as Mbembe et al. note, "the project of digging a canal across the flats and rendering the peninsula an island was seriously considered." As the authors explain, "[t]he goal of this mad-cap scheme was to insulate the Cape from a dark interior with which it has subsequently had such a troubled relationship." In recent scholarship, above all in the burgeoning field of Indian Ocean Studies, the image of Cape Town as the "tavern of the seas" has been revitalized and reconfigured as a place of multiple crossings between people traversing the Atlantic and Indian Ocean worlds (Ward). Yet South-South connections and crossings between Cape Town and spaces elsewhere on the African continent still remain an under-researched area. Post-apartheid migration from other African countries to the city, thus, forcefully calls for a reexamination of its troubled association with the continent.

Omotoso's protagonist, Oscar, although of Nigerian and South African parentage, identifies more strongly with his Nigerian heritage throughout the narrative. This is not only the result of his Nigerian upbringing (he only spends a relatively short time in Cape Town with his mother after his father's death), but is directly connected to his intimate relationship with his Nigerian father. At the heart of the bond between father and son lies the practice of storytelling through which Oscar is introduced to Yoruba myths, legends, and history. It is his deep engagement with these stories that connects Oscar to Nigeria and appears to raise his awareness of the multiplicity of stories and histories attached to a specific locality. When he returns to Cape Town to do a PhD in molecular and cell biology at the University of Cape Town in the early 1990s, he feels himself confronted by the ongoing presence of an imperial outlook on the African continent and the suppression of African history. Omotoso pertinently interlinks Oscar's experience of African otherness with his frequent visits to Rhodes Memorial:

> Oscar walked up the steps; grudgingly taking in the palm-to-cheek bust of Cecil John Rhodes arranged on the top platform amidst imposing Doric columns. He turned to enjoy the view: the stoned terrace at the bottom of the monument; the curved stone wall; the forests with an army of towering skinny trees leaning away from the southeaster; and the familiar shapes and lines of the surrounding neighbourhoods. . . . The giant shrine to Rhodes contrasted with the simple life-size statue of the revered Moremi behind Oduduwa Hall back on Ile-Ife campus. Oscar remembered visiting the small courtyard as a little boy: a series of chalky statues memorialising Yoruba history. His favourite was Moremi: head bent, hands clasped together and resting on her raised thigh; the intricate detail of her braided hair in suku style. (14)

The narrative overtly places the statues of Rhodes and Moremi in opposition to each other with Rhodes's "giant shrine" reflecting imperialistic megalomania, while Moremi's "simple life-size statue" conveys ordinariness and humility.

Oscar's view of and from the monument strongly resonates with Harry Garuba's analysis of the memorial in his talk "How Not to Think Africa from the Cape" presented in the University of Stellenbosch's lecture series "Whose Africa? Which Africa?" in June 2011. Rhodes Memorial, he argues, serves as a foremost example of how not to think about Africa:

> Yes, the view of Cape Town from here is as stunning as it is panoramic. . . . What arrests you here though is not really this view but the vision it encapsulates: the vision of an era when the world was out there for the taking, when Africa was envisioned as a vast landscape, lying supine at your feet, waiting for the lights of civilisation and commerce to shine over it. . . . This is one way of thinking Africa from the Cape: the modernist, imperialist version that Cecil John Rhodes embodied and envisioned. It is a vision that represses other peoples, other histories, other knowledges; rather than a dialogic engagement, it privileges a mono-centric, colonising view of the world.

Oscar's experience in Cape Town reflects precisely the subjugation of African histories that the monument encapsulates for Garuba. Omotoso evidently intends to emphasize that this imperialist vision cannot be relegated to the past, but continues to find expression in the contemporary moment. The old colonial and apartheid binaries seem, for Oscar, to have shifted to the opposition between citizen and non-citizen. This becomes apparent in his engagement with his South African colleagues, many of whom have neither heard of Moremi nor know where Nigeria is located: "The ignorance of his lab mates mixed with the opulence of Rhodes Memorial had brewed distaste in Oscar. Here in this country, he'd realised, they memorialised wealthy men—thieves; back home in Nigeria simple people who sacrificed for the group" (15). Conceiving "here" and "back home" in binary terms, Oscar positions Cape Town as a place dominated by a fundamentally different culture of memorialization. Whereas Nigeria, in Oscar's eyes, has embraced its precolonial heritage, Cape Town in the early 1990s does not appear to participate in the rescripting of precolonial pasts and traditions, which, according to Daniel Alan Herwitz, is characteristic of postcolonial recreations of national identity (9).[17]

However, rather than reinforcing a Manichean relationship between Nigeria and South Africa, Omotoso eschews and ridicules the simple binary implied by a conventional conception of rivalry. For Oscar partly appropriates history for

his own purpose: in the traditional account, Moremi is a queen, the eldest wife of the Ife king Oranmiyan, not a "simple person," as he would have it. Moremi's Yoruba people have for years been under constant attack from the Igbos and she volunteers to be taken as a slave with the aim of discovering the Igbo strategy. She enters a pact with the river goddess Esinmirin and promises her a sacrificial offering of her choice should she succeed with her plan. With her beauty and gaiety she becomes the Igbo king's wife and delivers the military tactics of the Igbo to the Yoruba, as a result of which the latter manage to defeat their attackers (Olajubu 29). The goddess then calls on Moremi to sacrifice her only son, whereupon the Ife nation, according to Samuel Johnson, "bewailed her loss and promised to be her sons and daughters, for the loss she had sustained for the salvation of her country" (148).

The two most prominent dramatic adaptations of the Moremi legend by Nigerian playwrights Duro Ladipo and Femi Osofisan both employ the story as a means to break through the boundaries drawn between different groups in Nigerian society. First performed in 1966, the year of the military coup and counter-coup in Nigeria, Ladipo's "Moremi" emphasizes inter-ethnic reconciliation between the Yoruba and Igbo, as Moremi averts the killing of the Igbo king and invites the Igbo to live in Ile-Ife. The focus in Osofisan's *Morountodun*, consistent with the playwright's Marxist outlook, is on the dismantling of class boundaries. In one of the central scenes in the play, the main female character, Titubi, dubbed "Moremi of the sixties," becomes aware of her own privileged background and takes up a more critical stance toward Moremi's heroism: "I knew I had to kill the ghost of Moremi in my belly. I am not Moremi! Moremi served the State, *was* the State, was the spirit of the ruling class. But it is not true that the State is always right" (Osofisan 70). The two dramatic interpretations, both conveying a clear political message, reenvision Moremi as a symbolic figure of national integration (see Hutchison).

Taking the myth of Moremi to South Africa, Omotoso diverts from the reconciliatory, boundary-crossing function of the heroine that we find in Ladipo's and Osofisan's plays. In *Bom Boy*, the legend primarily serves to highlight, as well as ridicule, the rivalry between South Africa and Nigeria. Oscar's idealization of Moremi and his celebration of her as an ordinary person provide him with an avenue through which to relate to his Nigerian cultural heritage. Yet it is through the author's thematization of the antagonistic relationship between the two countries that she at the same time invites us to consider their relations in terms of both dissociation and connection. During the evenings Oscar and his colleagues spend at the Varsity Rugby Club, this sense of rivalry is most prominently played out with reference to Rhodes and Moremi:

> He needed every detail he could find to play the game of one-upmanship. The more beer consumed the more animated and irrational the conversation.
> "If Moremi got into a fight with Rhodes, she'd finish him off. Easy."
> "Rubbish! There would be no fight. She'd be part of a mass of people building whatever Rhodes had the *foresight* to envisage."
> "Ha! Foresight my ass! How much foresight does it take to steal land? Crooks!"
> Sometimes the evenings maintained a strained joviality, but often they ended in blatant tension. If his colleagues had listened Oscar would have told them,

> the way his father had told him, the story of Moremi who, leaving her only son and husband, offered herself as prisoner when Ile-Ife was being invaded by neighbouring Ugbo warriors. (15–16)

The absolute qualifier "every," expressing hyperbole, is indicative of the irrationality driving Oscar and his colleagues in these heated evening debates. The shift from internal to external focalization in the first two sentences of the quoted text further corroborates the tongue-in-cheek style of the passage. Significantly, it contains two quite different hypothetical situations: the simply impossible conditional of Moremi getting into a fight with Rhodes and a counterfactual scenario that imagines a space of storytelling and listening. The first scenario, calling on the indigenous and colonial heritage to undermine and supersede each other, projects Oscar and his South African colleagues as inhabiting two separate visions of the continent. The second hypothetical sentence—no longer part of the narrator's rendition of the characters' direct speech but focalized through Oscar—envisions a more desirable alternative world: "If his colleagues had listened, Oscar would have told them . . . the story of Moremi." This situation, by contrast, evokes dialogic interaction and attentive listening to stories. Imagining moments of relation and a space for potential dialogue in this way, one may contend that Oscar conjures up a manner of engagement that resembles Nuttall's and Mbembe's understanding of Afropolitanism as "a conversation between the past and the future, between Africa and the world" (25). As we will see later, human dialogue—rather than a prescribed form of inter- and intra-continental solidarity—is foundational to the novel's invocation of Afropolitanism. Yet by relegating this form of interaction to a counterfactual mode, the author emphasizes her skepticism toward a celebratory interpretation of Afropolitanism, highlighting the sharp, deplorable discrepancy between the "actual" textual and the counterfactual imagined world.

Ridiculing the game of one-upmanship of both parties in the cited passage, Omotoso conceives rivalry as a concept marked both by convergence and divergence, as a term that connects as it divides and vice versa. This sense of simultaneous connection and division is already apparent in the etymology of the term. The Latin "rīvālis," deriving from "rīvus stream," originally denoted a "person living on the opposite bank of a stream from another, [a] person who is in pursuit of the same object as another" ("Rival"). Suggesting a mode of sharing despite fierce competition for the same resources, the notion of rivalry echoes the various metaphors South African literary critics have employed over recent years to capture a move away from an overriding preoccupation with difference.[18] Rivalry, as envisaged by Omotoso, expresses the simultaneous estrangement and intimacy that seem central to Oscar's interaction with his colleagues. Omotoso, thus, registers, but also moves beyond, the binary of local South African and foreign Nigerian, attentive to asymmetries of power, while at the same time envisioning—even in a counterfactual mode—possible points of exchange and dialogue that transcend strictly national filiations.

The novel, therefore, problematizes easy celebration of Cape Town as a transnational, Afropolitan place. It appears to suggest that any Afropolitan perspective needs to answer to the violent colonial past and the ongoing legacy of imperial, othering images of the African continent in South Africa. Instead of giving rise

to a mere celebratory tenor, this understanding of Afropolitanism is tied up with the text's emphasis on the alienation and dislocation experienced by Oscar. The novel is, thus, not only critical of popular definitions of Afropolitanism linked to the free mobility and cultural hybridity of the postcolonial African elite, but also seems to advocate a critical Afropolitanism that questions a single, universal interpretation of the term.

The section that follows moves to the second narrative strand, which likewise displays a duality of intimacy and estrangement in the relations between South Africans and Oscar's son Leke, who, like his father, is of mixed South African and Nigerian parentage. Here, Omotoso envisions the city, in contrast to the imperial, masculine gaze from Rhodes Memorial, as a syncretic space where traditional conceptions of family along the lines of blood and race are remade. At the same time, she asserts the limitations of an uncritical Afropolitan perspective by drawing attention to the regimes of subjugation that Leke witnesses.

REIMAGINING FAMILY THROUGH TRANSNATIONAL AND TRANSRACIAL ADOPTION

The main narrative strand of the novel centers on Oscar's son Leke and foregrounds his dislocation and alienation as a second-generation migrant as well as a transnational and transracial adoptee. The very first sentence of the novel already marks Leke as a social outsider: "A thing had begun to grow like a tree in Leke Denton's throat. It was the same thing that grew when he was picked for the school play and it was there when he was later cut from the cast. It was there when girls glanced away as he walked down the corridors. An invisible rash" (1). As we later learn, the growth in Leke's throat results from his fear of having to invite classmates to his birthday party, leading him to leave the invitation cards his adoptive mother Jane has given him in the locker at school. Images taken from the fields of botany and medicine come to characterize Leke's relation to the outside world throughout the novel, signifying both his painful isolation and fear of human contact and his desire to be part of a social community. The author employs the theme of adoption to address pertinent issues about identity, national belonging, and Afropolitanism. Doing so, she takes the controversial issues of adoption and fostering beyond the mere focus on the racial that characterized some novels engaging with the topic during apartheid—notably Nadine Gordimer's *Burger's Daughter* (1979) and Dalene Matthee's *Fiela's Child* [*Fiela se Kind*] (1985).

In *Kin of Another Kind: Transracial Adoption in American Literature*, Cynthia Callahan highlights the symbolic function of the theme of adoption in literature, noting that "fictional adoptions are not simply mimetic; as a literary trope, adoption allows authors to metaphorically speak to broader questions about identity and belonging" (1–2). Scholarship on adoption has recurrently emphasized its Janus-faced nature of being at once transgressive and conformist. As Nancy E. Riley and Krista E. van Vleet argue, adoption, on the one hand, "produces new conceptualizations of family and challenges normative versions of how to make and remake families," but, on the other, it "follows normative social patterns and hierarchies," mirroring "inequalities in race, socioecomomic class, nationality, and gender" (8). Omotoso's use of the trope of adoption reflects precisely this paradoxical structure.

As well as emphasizing Leke's profound alienation following his disconnection from his birth parents and the death of his adoptive mother, Jane, she explores the potential of adoption to reconfigure traditional family models in post-apartheid South Africa and to foster an Afropolitan spirit.

Focusing on the reimagination of family, *Bom Boy* can, furthermore, be related to a body of post-apartheid writing employing the family trope in the context of national redefinition. Set during the transition and the immediate post-apartheid years, these works frequently make use of the family metaphor to write minority identities, especially queer identities, into the fold of the new nation (Munro). In doing so, they aim to undermine traditional figurations of nations as "domestic genealogies" founded on the ideal of the patriarchal heterosexual family unit (McClintock 91). The trope of adoption prominently features in Nadine Gordimer's 1994 novel, *None to Accompany Me*, in which a lesbian couple adopts a multiracial child. Munro suggests that Gordimer employs the theme as "a sign of the alignment of lesbianism and the rainbow nation and, at the same time, a critique of a (white) gay identity politics that does not take material (racialized) power relations into account" (192). While Gordimer's novel positions adoption as a radical means to challenge apartheid's alignment of the family with racial purity; it also cautions against using this new formation of family as a celebratory symbol of multiracial conviviality.

Omotoso, I suggest, follows a similar trajectory to Gordimer in her critical engagement with adoption. Yet, while *None to Accompany Me* situates adoption as an alternative and potentially progressive way to reimagine the ties between different groups within the nation, *Bom Boy* uses the family metaphor primarily to explore new transnational connections—both post-apartheid migration to South Africa from elsewhere on the continent and, in particular, the country's vexed relationship with Nigeria. In opposition to the stock Nigerian characters populating the novels discussed above, the Nigerian/South African protagonists in Omotoso's novel are multilayered and form part of a new, even if fragile, post-apartheid South African family. Leke's intimate bond with his adoptive mother, Jane, subverts traditional understandings of kinship along the lines of blood and physical resemblance. His childhood memories of security and comfort are intricately linked to Jane's reassuring touch, the only remedy against the physical symptoms of his social anxieties mentioned above. It is, thus, not surprising that, in later life, he frequently relates his experiences of human connection and physical contact to his memory of Jane's touch (117). Touch, regarded as the primary and most natural of human senses, is, thus, insolubly bound to Jane, undermining the idea of the "unnaturalness" of the adoptive mother.

The critique of adoption as "unnatural" is given further emphasis in the novel through Leke's and Jane's main mutual activity, namely the tending of Jane's garden. After Jane dies of cancer when Leke is ten years old, Leke continues to attend to plants and soil with the utmost devotion. Gardening for Leke remains a hobby intimately tied to the remembrance of his adoptive mother. Working in his own small garden one afternoon, he is transported back into his childhood: "The mulch fell with soft thuds and Leke thought of blankets, and Jane kissing him goodnight. 'Sh, Sh,' he whispered and afterwards wondered who he was talking to" (81). By associating the soft falling of mulch with Jane's goodnight kisses, the

narrative posits transracial and trans-African adoption in post-apartheid South Africa as an alternative mode of family-making.

The contours of Omotoso's image of the garden are, thus, flexible and permeable, forming a sharp contrast to the fenced-in garden spaces throughout the country's history. For, in contrast to the idea of tending one's garden as a private pastime, the practice of gardening in the South African context has been intricately intertwined with the country's colonial and apartheid history. Beginning with the establishment of a "garden colony" by the Dutch in the 17th century, the garden has become inscribed as a suburban space demarcating racial division and inequality over the past centuries. The post-apartheid era has witnessed a renewed interest in gardening and particularly in indigenous vegetation. As Jean and John Comaroff argue, "discourses of nature cast a sharp light on the everyday actions and events through which definitions of belonging and citizenship—and their dark underside, the politics of exclusion—are being reframed in the postcolony" (257). Discussing the burgeoning popularity of indigenous gardening in South Africa, Sally-Ann Murray writes:

> the process of indigenous gardening entails many forms of self-denial, as well as inconsistent refusals and recognitions of the moral complicity between discourses of environmental control and vestigial racism. Both restrict movement across borders, and indeed the right to settlement, of supposedly undesirable, migrant populations who, it is feared, would quickly take root, take over, if but given the chance. (51)

Gardening in *Bom Boy*, by contrast, is devoid of this recuperation of the indigenous. Leke and Jane attend to a variety of indigenous and non-indigenous plants. Local clivias grow next to a rhododendron, orchids, star jasmine, South American rubber trees, as well as a bougainvillea and the garden has a small Koi pond. Binding adoptive son and mother together through this shared tending to the soil, the novel appears to problematize the very idea of naturalness and indigeneity, allowing rather than restricting movement across borders. By extension, Omotoso thus also questions common views on the "naturalness" of only particular family formations with a homogenous racial and national makeup. While adoption in literary texts, according to Patricia Howe, "is frequently seen as a process of domestication, running parallel to activities such as building and gardening," Omotoso's treatment of the theme upsets an antagonistic understanding of the relationship between nature and adoption (124). The pastime of gardening neither stands for Leke's assimilation or naturalization nor does it amount to an unequivocal claim on his part to land and belonging. Rather, one may tentatively suggest that the gardening practice portrayed in the novel reflects some of the core ideas inherent in Mbembe's understanding of Afropolitanism. The assortment of plants of various origins along with the novel's endorsement of adoption as natural appears to be in line with Afropolitanism's "uncompromising critique of primary affiliations" (Mbembe, "Thinking"). At the same time, the many local plants as well as the Koi pond indicate that Jane's and Leke's gardening practice is rooted in an African setting. This may lead us to read the garden metaphor in *Bom Boy* not so much in terms of the noun's etymological root of "enclosure," but also as an opening up of spaces and the social institution of family.

The garden, however, constitutes the only space where Leke can find a sense of fulfillment, peace of mind, and connection with his surroundings. While the deployment of the family metaphor speaks to a national idea that intends to celebrate multiculturalism and Afropolitanism, the novel also highlights that this vision leaves a lot to be desired. Far from being a definite symbol of hope, the adoption theme at the same time highlights deep-seated fissures in the national self-image that fashions itself as hospitable to migrants from elsewhere in Africa. Omotoso's reluctance to endorse a celebratory conception of Afropolitanism surfaces particularly in her portrayal of Leke's strong experience of dissociation from his social surroundings. His classmates call him a "kid-for-hire" after deducing from his parents' skin color that he is adopted (2). His withdrawal from social interaction with his age-mates, thus, mirrors what Gina Miranda Samuels notes in another context, that "the centrality yet absence of physical resemblance is embedded in the identity work of most adopted persons" (86). Leke's adoptive parents do not address their unshared biological origins and racial appearance, contributing further toward Leke's alienation from society. In this fashion, the novel dramatizes the inherent ambiguity of adoption. Its acceptance of that which is not one's own as one's own, on the one hand, opens the possibility of a more inclusive remaking of the self. On the other, the etymological roots of the term in Latin, *adoptāre*, denoting "to take (a child) and bring it up as one's own," "to accept" yet also to "take over," "to name after oneself" ("adopt"), already point to (potential) processes of erasure accompanying the practice.

Leke's feeling of dissociation finds expression particularly in his preoccupation with distant elsewheres. At an early age, he starts collecting atlases and globes that "ranged from key-ring to a basketball-sized sphere" and, rather than socializing with his peers, he imagines himself traveling to other parts of the world (8). In contrast to the practice of gardening, which appears indicative of a grounding in the local, Leke here seems to wish himself away from his surroundings. Complementing his fascination with remote geographies is his repeated flight to the world of dreams, the only sphere where he is able to live up to his own, as well as society's, expectations. Indeed, his loneliness is punctuated only at nighttime when he becomes the center of attention and human relations seem more easily realizable: "He stood surrounded by a crowd of boys; they were laughing and patting him on the back. They played on the school cricket grounds and Leke hit a century, running the pitch he'd tripped on during the day to a chorus of sniggers" (1–2). His relegation to the role of social outsider, I contend, may not only be attributed to his interracial and transnational adoption. Arguably, his feeling of alienation also stems from the disengagement of his surroundings with his Nigerian/Yoruba heritage. This most forcefully surfaces in his repeated wonderings about the meaning of his name:

> "What kind of name is that anyway?" Leke mumbled. It had become a rhetorical question over time. He'd asked it in earnest when he was younger but nothing Marcus [his adoptive father] said was useful in fending off school bullies. A Google search brought up a motley selection of answers: Leke was a fashionable clothing brand in Antwerp. There was Albanian Leke and 1000ALL converted into about 7EUR. It was the name of a restaurant in a Balinese resort. It was a town in Diksmuide—a part of Belgium. (168)

We later learn that his full name is "Ifaleke. Ifa—the creator—is the victor" (56). Parallel to his father's experience, Leke's search for the origins of his name, as the above passage illustrates, highlights the Cape's linkages to the West rather than the African continent.

Leke's adult life continues to be marked by extreme loneliness and social isolation. While, with the advancement of adulthood, he has learned to "disguise his dreams and dreaming world and 'make it,'" "[n]ights still swallowed him whole into far-off voyages, his sleep populated with intense friendships, kissing and other intimacies his daylight life were barren of" (21). Propelled by a desperate desire for human closeness, he visits various hospitals and medical practices, where fleeting moments of human touch afford him a momentary presence in the world surrounding him. Yet Leke's social anxiety and inability to connect with other human beings in a "natural" setting, I propose, cannot merely be read as an individual's psychological disposition, but is closely interconnected with the city's yawning social chasms.

Leke perceives Cape Town as a space of intersecting yet disconnected parallel worlds. Describing one of his favorite streets in Leke's neighborhood, the narrator, using Leke as a focalizer figure, notes:

> It seemed more suited to the trendy surrounding suburbs that had been redeveloped but somehow it landed up amidst the old and creaking neighbourhood that was excluded from the gentrification project. Still people visited it, walking and stopping to drink coffee, browsing the quaint second-hand bookstore or letting their tongues water over dainty cakes arranged in shop windows. They ignored the beggars and the skollies stretched out on the narrow pavement, nursing hangovers, careful to side step mysterious puddles and avoid eye-contact with girls too young to be mothers proffering their crying babies as evidence of their desperation. (153)

This juxtaposition of the leisurely strolling middle-class and the city's downtrodden inhabitants once again betrays the novel's deep-seated critique of unequivocal descriptions of Cape Town as an Afropolitan city. Excluded from any form of human contact, the beggars and young mothers are positioned outside the community of trendy people and are, thus, equally denied participation in the Afropolitan project. For the embrace of a wider, global humanity to which cosmopolitanism aspires, as Garuba argues, "involves first being located within a local *human* community which the cosmopolitan subject seeks to transcend" ("Cosmopolitan Disconnect"). The mothers' desperate "propelling" of their babies emphasizes the futility in their striving for acceptance within the local community. One would have to concede that the city space as portrayed here allows for the emergence of new modes of connectivity untainted by the clearly demarcated identities of the apartheid era, as suggested by the all-inclusive designation "people." This community, however, is constituted by the consumption and intellectual pursuits of an upwardly mobile middle class. In this sense, then, *Bom Boy* posits Afropolitanism as an elite, middle-class subjectivity and critiques the emergence of social class as the new arbiter of participation and exclusion. Leke's non-participation, as we have seen, however, complicates this critique of Afropolitanism in terms of social class differentials, as he undoubtedly grows up in a middle-class context.

The reasons for Leke's exclusion from the local human community, Omotoso seems to suggest, can be attributed to his uncertainty about his past and a long-standing family curse that bars male family members from forming bonds of love. Only after engaging with the letters Oscar wrote to him from prison, and reminding him of his Nigerian heritage-cum-curse, is Leke able to form meaningful human relationships. Significantly, he can only begin to confront his past and explore his background with the help of Tsotso, a young South African woman whom he initially stalks and with whom he falls in love. It is through his conversations with Tsotso and realizing their mutuality that Leke is able to overcome his social isolation. Learning of their shared experience of not knowing their biological parents, Leke for the first time realizes that he has never communicated this detail in his biography to anyone, but considered it "a blight on his life, an embarrassing disfigurement" (183). When his step-father, Marcus, hands over an envelope with old letters from "before" to him, Leke's troubled relationship with his past becomes even more visible (64). Not only is he unable to open the letters, but their mere presence in his flat haunts him, so that he is only able to sleep again when he has left them at Tsotso's house. Tsotso's reading of his father's letters to him, then, becomes an act of liberation, freeing Leke from entrapment and isolation and allowing him to fill in the blank spaces of his identity, such as the origins of his name.

Omotoso, thus, probes some of the key concepts of postcolonial scholarship, which frowns on notions of origin and roots as central categories in identity formation. At first glance, Leke's trajectory may resemble what Judith Modell calls "the rhetoric of the adoptee," according to which "search movement, knowing one's heritage and ethnicity contributes to the formation of an integrated identity" (219). "Information about and connections with those who came before," in this view, "complete the circle of the self" (Ibid. 219). One may argue that Omotoso appears to posit the connection with one's roots as a prerequisite to coming to terms with oneself. Yet, I propose that the mode through which Leke finally confronts his past is equally, and perhaps more importantly, constitutive of his "new" self.

Leke's reengagement with his past (with Tsotso's help), one might contend, allows for a twofold process of grounding: a grounding in the local South African setting as well as in his Yoruba heritage. The direct you-address of Leke in his father's letters creates, over the distance of time and space, a bond between father and son. Moreover, Leke becomes part of a local human community through the act of being read to. His relationship with Tsotso shows him that his dreams about human contact can actually become reality, blurring his, until then, strictly separate worlds of daytime and night (237). The centrality of reading for Leke's reconnection with both the local and the wider worlds is reminiscent of Appiah's narrative-centered notion of cosmopolitanism, which "begins with the simple idea that in the human community, as in national communities, we need to develop habits of coexistence: conversation in its older meaning, of living together, association" (xvii). Rather than positing a set of universal precepts as the underlying principle of cosmopolitanism, *Bom Boy* invokes a notion of cosmopolitanism that is triggered by reading, being read to, and love.

Crucially, the last pages of the novel discard the earlier juxtaposition and fierce rivalry between Cape Town's colonial and Nigeria's indigenous (Yoruba) heritage in favor of linking the spiritual traditions of both geographies. Here, Cape

Town is no longer clad in the robe of its erstwhile colonizers but emerges as a city with its own local spirituality. While most Nigerian authors living in the West engage with questions of religious syncretism between their country's various indigenous religions and Christianity, Omotoso draws together two African cosmologies. After reading in his father's letters about the family curse, Leke dreams about visiting the babalawo (Ifa diviner) his grandparents consulted years ago as he wishes to be liberated from the repercussions of the curse. While the diviner is willing to lift the curse, he informs Leke that this is only possible on the condition that "you'll never know what it is. . . . [I]t will come and when it comes, you'll know this is it but you don't know what you're waiting for and you don't know when it's coming" (243). Leke's response with the words "[a] life of dread" is indicative of his search for security and finality, a form of resolution characteristic of the traditional telos-driven bildungsroman. The babalawo's judgment is reminiscent of the overall role of the Ifa diviner who never presents an "exact prediction for the future but a poetically described precedent" (Finnegan 198). In light of this, we may posit that the absence of a strictly linear development and closure encapsulated in the diviner's prediction unsettles the final reintegration of the hero into society, characteristic of the conventional bildungsroman.

Following this scene, Leke and Tsotso visit a sangoma in Cape Town to lift the curse. Contrary to their assumptions, the sangoma knows about Leke's family history and the babalawo's divination. The end of the novel, it seems, is saturated with the author's desire to bridge and draw attention to the similarities between Yoruba and Xhosa beliefs in divination. What this scene indicates, then, is Leke's (re)connection to local as well as Yoruba traditions. This, we may argue, has wider ramifications for the novel's conceptualization of identity, place, and Afropolitanism. If Afropolitanism has any currency in *Bom Boy*, it is an Africa-centered Afropolitanism that takes as its origin not primarily one's being of Africa and the world at the same time. What demarcates Omotoso's Afropolitanism from that of Nigerian writers in the West is an intricate connectedness to two African settings: South Africa and Nigeria. This intimates that *Bom Boy* makes both the local and Yoruba culture the foundation for shaping an alternative future for Leke after his breakout from a world of isolation.

Yet the sangoma's prophecy determinedly differs from that of the babalawo in Leke's dream. While the babalawo's verdict expresses epistemological uncertainty, the sangoma, by contrast, offers Leke a more stabilizing vision of the future. She predicts the birth of the couple's child, who will take up the profession of a healer to make up for the wrongdoings of his/her ancestors. Could one say, then, that the novel posits an idealized final image of yet another "rainbow" family, characterized not by a heterogeneous racial makeup but by a bond between a South African and second-generation Nigerian immigrant? Would the novel, in this sense, not follow the traditional trajectory of the bildungsroman? While this may be a compelling reading, the babalawo's less closure-driven prediction, nonetheless, remains with us as we read the final lines of the novel. We may, thus, argue that the novel refuses to unreservedly posit or strictly denounce the sangoma's reconciliatory vision. The tension between the babalawo's and the sangoma's predictions, thus, curtails the emergence of an uncritical celebratory notion of Afropolitanism. While Afropolitan identities, as the novel has shown, may emerge from relations of mutuality, Omotoso "reroutes" these and ties them

strictly to the African continent. By interlinking Yoruba myth with the migrant experience in the Cape, the novel, furthermore, opens up a new arena for scholarship engaging with the Yoruba diaspora, which has so far mainly focused on the Atlantic world. *Bom Boy* can, thus, also be regarded as an inaugural text opening up multiple new pathways for the study of non-Western transnational links from the vantage point of the Cape.

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NOTES

1. In March 2012, 125 Nigerians, as Aghogho Akpome and Fritz Nganje write, "were denied entry into South Africa at OR Tambo airport in Johannesburg on the grounds that they possessed fake health documents" (see also Segatti et al.).

2. Omotoso's novel may be regarded as part of a growing body of works produced by writers from the African continent living in South Africa such as Simão Kikamba's *Going Home* and H. J. Golakai's *The Lazarus Effect* (see Fasselt "Opening").

3. See also Nkosi; Dingome.

4. Mbari Press, furthermore, published two important works by South African writers: Alex La Guma's first novel, *A Walk in the Night* (1962), which became one of the most popular South African texts taught at anglophone universities across the continent, and Dennis Brutus's poetry collection *Sirens, Knuckles and Boots* (1963) (see Lindfors, "The Teaching").

5. See, for instance, Wole Soyinka's *Mandela's Earth and Other Poems*, J. P. Clark-Bekederemo's *Mandela and Other Poems*, Femi Ojo-Ade's "Ogoni," and Ogaga Ifowodo's *Madiba*. Particularly Soyinka's work displays a fixation on South Africa that comes to the fore in his early play *The Invention*, his long poem *Ogun Abibiman*, his Nobel Lecture "This Past Must Address Its Present," dedicated to Nelson Mandela, and in *The Burden of Memory, the Muse of Forgiveness*.

6. Although Nigeria had been one of the foremost supporters of the anti-apartheid movement on the continent and acted as host to numerous South African exiles, the ANC was keen to dissociate itself from its former benefactor during the transition years. As Soyinka observes in his memoir, *You Must Set Forth at Dawn*, "[t]he party was obsessed with its self-image of ideological purity, ostentatiously contemptuous of Nigeria as a nation that lacked political direction or a progressive ideology." The ANC considered Nigeria "a spoilt, rich brat, a crude succession of hotchpotch dictatorships and feudal conspiracies" and was "morbidly afraid of contamination by the directionless nature of Nigerian society" (287–88).

7. This violence found its most brutal expression in the so-called "xenophobic attacks" of May/June 2008, in which more than sixty-two people lost their lives (Hassim et al.).

8. Duiker's *The Quiet Violence of Dreams* (2001), in contrast to the other novels (with the exception of *Refuge)*, which mainly feature male Nigerian characters, depicts a Nigerian woman. Together with her husband from the DRC, she comes to share a Cape Town flat with the novel's main protagonist, Tshepo. She also acts as the first-person narrator in one of the chapters. A further exception is the Nigerian character in Mpe's novel, who only appears briefly toward the end as the boyfriend of one of the central characters: he is not framed as a conman either. Moreover, Lauren Beukes's main South African protagonist, Zinzi December, in *Zoo City* (2010) is a 419 scammer. The novel undermines the stereotypical association of the practice with Nigerians without resorting to didacticism.

9. For a critical discussion of the terms, see Herman and Vervaeck.

10. Ndebele, in his critical essay "Turkish Tales and Some Thoughts on South African Fiction," condemns the utilization of easily identifiable "surface symbols of the South African reality" in apartheid writing, which as he states "appear in most of our writing as finished products, often without a personal history" (15).

11. Segatti et al. highlight the fact that while some Nigerians are involved in drug dealing, "neither quantitative statistics from police and correctional services nor qualitative research among the police justifies claims that Nigerians are over-represented in criminal activities" (5).

12. Commenting on the image of Nigerians in the public sphere, Segatti et al. note, "The fact that the very real but demographically marginal involvement of Nigerian nationals in criminal activities continues to obfuscate the richness and diversity of Nigerians' presence only bears testimony to poor reporting by the South African press and a lack of curiosity among the country's scholars" (6).

13. J. K. S. Makokha emphasizes that "The forces of the local and nativism are also hindering such expansion and spread of cultural cosmopolitanism in Africa. . . . Afropolitanism becomes problematic in such contexts as well as within the politics of narrow nationalisms re-emerging across parts of the continent. . . . How else should we understand the paradox that Mbembe's Johannesburg is a fulcrum of forces of cosmopolitanism as well as a theatre of the xenophobic attacks of 2008?" (15).

14. The notion has been controversially discussed (particularly in 2010/2011) in relation to the University of Cape Town's Afropolitan agenda propagated by its vice-chancellor Dr. Max Price, which coincided with plans to "disestablish" UCT's Centre for African Studies (CAS) and integrate it into a "new school for critical inquiry in Africa." With UCT's increasingly market- rather than knowledge-driven agenda, students and staff at CAS feared that this might further marginalize African Studies at a university still riven by the legacy of apartheid inequalities (see Praeg).

15. Coined by Mitchell Cohen, the notion of "rooted cosmopolitanism" has most famously been taken up by Kwame Anthony Appiah, for whom cosmopolitanism is primarily an ethical question and who envisages "rooted cosmopolitanism" as taking a middle position, not strictly opposed to nationalism but not advocating a world beyond the nation state either (*The Ethics of Identity*; *Cosmopolitanism*).

16. According to Gerard Delanty, "[a] case could be made for critical cosmopolitanism simply as a critique of other conceptions of cosmopolitanism." Yet he, furthermore, asserts that "one can make a stronger claim for critical cosmopolitanism as an account of social and political reality that seeks to identify transformational possibilities within the present" (38).

17. For a critical discussion of the notion of precolonial heritage, see Herwitz (10). One may problematize this decision to contrast Cape Town and "Nigeria." If UCT and the Rhodes Memorial are representative of Cape Town, it would be crucial to address whether the spaces and icons from Leke's home are representative of "Nigeria."

18. Leon de Kock's notion of the "seam," which he borrows from Noël Mostert's *Frontiers*, signifies "the site of both convergence and difference" (De Kock 12). Other terms are, for instance, Sanders's "complicities" and Clingman's notion of the "boundary" as "the place of contiguity and crossing" ("Writing Spaces" 52, see also Clingman, *The Grammar*). See also Titlestad.

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