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بعث أفريقيا الغد في سياق التحولات المعولمة :

رهانات و آفاق

Afropolitan Identities: Representations of African immigrant experiences in African hip hop

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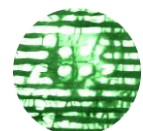


Introduction

The presence of African hip hop artists among African immigrant communities in the US has provided new opportunities to understand changing migrant experiences and environments. Post-2000 migrants from Africa to the United States arrived in an environment impacted by heightened security in a post-9/11 era, often resulting in a more vigorous enforcement of immigration laws and increased anti-immigrant sentiment. They also migrated during a time when improvements in technology, communication, and social media allowed for an altered relationship with both host and home. The hip hop artists among these migrants have provided social commentary on their experiences, as well as their place at home and in the Diaspora. Their music has narrated the migrant experiences of post-2000 African migrants, and the increased internationalization of many of these migrants.

These artists, through their music, provide a new and important link between the new African Diaspora and home. Their music is a form of cultural representation that serves to construct for us an understanding of African migrant experiences and identities. By understanding hip hop music as cultural representation, as a method by which African migrant experiences are constructed and depicted, we are able to examine the contributions of African hip hop artists to our understandings of African migration experiences, feelings of alienation, and ties to home. A constructivist view of cultural representation asserts that our knowledge of everything is shaped by representations (Barker, 2012; Hall, 2013). Whether it is through a news broadcast, a history book, or a poem, our understandings of the world and how we identify with that world are shaped by representations. These representations construct for us the meanings that our understandings are based on. In addition, all representations emanate from a cultural system. So, while humans share many similar ways of processing certain cultural clues, our own cultural background (system) determines how we filter and process certain representations. When we understand the cultural system, we are better able to decipher the meanings being represented. This research, therefore, attempts to put in proper context the systems within which these artists operate, so that we better understand the meanings of the words and symbols they utilize.

An examination of African hip hop music and the cultural systems these artists utilize to construct narratives of African immigrant experiences also tells us a lot about who these artists are speaking to and what they want their audiences to know. This study will examine the music of Ghanaian artists Samuel Bazawule aka Blitz the Ambassador, Kwame Tsikata aka M.anifest, and Emmanuel Owusu-Bonsu aka Wanlov the Kubolor, and Ugandan artist Edwin Ruyonga aka Krukid (now Ruyonga). We see the ways in which their music depicts certain realities for African migrants in the US. This depiction informs its audience of African immigrant realities, while at the same engaging fellow migrants, and would-be migrants, in conversations around those same realities.



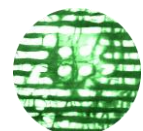
Immigrant Chronicles: Coming to America

"My people came on boats & planes/some with passports, some stow away/not knowing the future so we pray/in'challa, things will be better/that's what we say when we write our letters" – M.anifest (2011), "Coming to America"

The factors that influence the migration patterns of Africans primarily revolve around desires for self-improvement, a desire to better one's lot (Arango, 2000; Takougang, 2003; Moore, 2013). International migrants go in search of economic and educational opportunities that they believe they can find outside of their home country. Several texts discuss the experiences of migrants who come to the United States from Africa to better their economic conditions but instead find economic, social, and legal hardship (Arango, 2000; Takougang, 2003; Dosi, Rushubirwa, & Myers, 2007; Obiakor & Afoláyan, 2007; Gonzalez, 2007, Stebleton, 2012). Studies by Dosi et al (2007) and Stebleton (2012) focus on African college students studying in the US and the difficulties they face, including economic problems, socialization issues, and the struggle to stay in status and in school. Stebleton (2012) found that African students often faced discrimination and racism, which served as barriers to "acculturation and acculturative stress" (p. 54). These studies reinforce narratives created in the music of the four artists in this study, all of whom came to the US to pursue a university education, and all of whom speak of the financial stresses and discrimination they experienced.

Many artists themselves begin their narratives of the migrant experience prior to departure. For example, Burns (2009) examines the articulation of migrant experiences by Ghanaian performers in the Diaspora. He presents Koo Nimo's song *Aborokyiri Abrabo* (Overseas Life), an artist who, like the four artists in this study, describes the anticipation of migration followed by the difficult realities faced by many African immigrants in the West. The four artists in this study begin with their visions of life in the US, their expectations for their American lives, and the process of securing a visa to travel. The artists' imaginations of America as a land of opportunity were a large part of their decisions to migrate. Their music reflects the difficulties in getting the visa and the naiveté of many visa seekers to the realities of the United States.

In the introduction to his first album *Raisin in the Sun* (2005), Krukid begins the album with a conversation between two Africans reflecting on life in America. In the skit the two are discussing how much better life in the US must be. The conversation reflects a view that America is ripe with opportunities and that all one needs to do is make it there. The tone of the skit is a sort of a satirical look at visions of the American dream in Africa. This sentiment is revisited later when Krukid suggests that he beat the odds in being able to travel to the U.S. Two years later, in his 2007 album *Black Immigrant Mixtape* Krukid revisits his



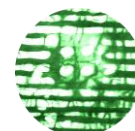
decision to migrate. He discusses migrating from Kampala, Uganda to Champaign, Illinois, saying that he often felt “like a Black immigrant sneaking in past the government”. On his album *Afr-i-can* (2007) and since his return to Uganda, Krukid continued to express the failure of the American dream for many African migrants.

Blitz the Ambassador also reflects on his pre-immigrant experience, lamenting in his song “Dying to Live” that he landed at “*JFK with a duffle bag and a dream*”. In Blitz the Ambassador’s 2011 song “Native Sun” he portrays an almost depressing image of visa applicants, saying “...*we was all looking for a way out/across the border/lining up for visa like sheep to the slaughter*”. The use of this analogy (sheep lining up to be slaughtered) can be seen as both Blitz the Ambassador commentating on the visa application process, and revealing his own naiveté about America when he applied for a visa.

M.anifest’s second album, *Immigrant Chronicles: Coming to America* (2011), has five songs that address his immigration experience, and is almost an ode to African immigrant struggles in the US. “Motherland”, “Suffer”, “Blue”, “Motion Picture”, and “Coming to America” all take the audience through his decision to go to America and the culture shock he experienced after arriving in America.

M.anifest’s lyrics present the harsh irony of thinking one has arrived, only to find a different type of suffering. In “Motion Picture” (2011) M.anifest sings “*young dummy/thought it was the land of milk and honey/hunger pains in my tummy/why is everything about money*”. In “Coming to America” he also speaks to the financial pressures Africans face, indicating that it leads many to seek degrees, and others to commit crimes, such as 419 scams. Similarly in Wanlov the Kubolor’s song “Green Card” the artist says “*We fought to get off the slave yard/ now we fight to get us a green card/why do we work for this stuff so hard?/ how you living and you working graveyard?*” All of the artists discuss the problem of trying to elude immigration officials in the US, struggles to pay bills, and being forced to work low wage jobs because of a lack of proper documentation. In Wanlov’s song “Green Card” he talks about running out of money and being told that he needs to get a job. Because of his lack of papers (student visa holders are often not allowed to work off campus), he only has two options: work with someone else’s papers or get paid under the table.

It may be important to briefly point out that while most literature deals with African experiences post arrival, there have been several songs that focus on the visa process. The consular section at the US embassy in Ghana is one of the more notoriously difficult US consular sections in Africa, and has inspired commentary by a few artists. Songs about the difficulty in securing a visa to the US from Ghana include Blitz the Ambassador’s song “Native Sun” and Wanlov the Kubolor’s song “Green Card”. Ghana-based, Ghanaian musician Reggie Rockstone also talks about the difficulty of getting a visa from the US embassy in his song “Visa”. In a review of US consular offices on the popular website VisaJourney.com, the consular section at the US embassy in Accra, Ghana scored among the lowest in Africa. The comments on the reviews of the consular section included references to





the treatment of applicants, a lack of assistance in understanding procedure, and a seeming disregard for the applicants' wait times. Negative experiences at the consular section at the US embassy often become the migrant's first official experience with United States immigration, something that is reflected in the music of some of the Ghanaian artists.

“Green Card” by Wanlov the Kubolor

Stand for days/At the American consulate

They're running late/Push back your interview date

So you won't stay/They ask for a bank state

Meant to bring one/Forgot

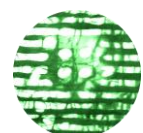
Now they close gates/Bills ain't paid

Money spent on visa fees/You crying

Landlady standing vis a vis/C'est la vie mon amis

Ask Uncle Kofi/Maybe he's got connections at the embassy

Wanlov the Kubolor has been extremely outspoken about his own immigration experiences. He produced an introspective piece on the interactions between immigration officials and African migrants titled “Laredo”. The song is a narration of Wanlov’s experience with immigration and law enforcement officials in Texas, which is where he was studying at the time. The song starts with Wanlov getting pulled over by the police and later being handed over to immigration officials. Wanlov, who was out of status, was taken to a private detention facility in Laredo, Texas. He describes the scene in the detention facility as being no better than a prison. He describes people who were stuck in the “prison”, and had little or no resources. Wanlov is one of the first hip hop artists from Africa to discuss and depict their experiences in a US immigrant detention facility. Wanlov had the resources to secure legal representation and was able to leave the detention facility. Wanlov, who married an African American woman, later decided to go back to Ghana, rather than stay and fight the immigration case. In the song he reflects that he could not believe that he was locked up simply for not paying school fees. In the song he goes on to talk about the slow deportation process and the money being made off of the detainees. All of the artist experiences in this study reflect a post-9/11 environment, where stricter, sometimes repressive views of migrants, often result in them being criminalized. Many languish in detention centers waiting for trial. Some states, like Texas, have seen stricter enforcement of federal immigration laws. Veney (2009) points out that states and municipalities can actually make money in detaining migrants. Being detained by immigration is a traumatic experience for migrants, but is not the only stress that faces these migrants.



Alienation

Farred (2010) presents the concept of “out of contextness” to describe the Diaspora experience, saying that it is a sense of not having a home, and of not being completely at home in any location after prolonged absences. Of living in the Diaspora, Farred says: “to live diasporically is to recognize the condition of living without the possibility of a singular context” (2010, p. 263). Farred points to expressions of “out of contextness” found within literature and music from diasporic artists who express feelings of being alienated from their homeland and feeling distressed in their host culture. There have been several other scholarly works that have also taken up the topic of alienation among African immigrants in the West (Nwadiora, 1995; Arthur, 2000; Rong & Brown, 2001; Lewis, 2006; Burns, 2009). Burns (2009) discussion of the works of Ghanaian performers articulates these feelings of “out of contextness”, or alienation. Burns asserts that for Ghanaian musicians of the post-colonial generation “a new subject for the blues became the difficulties faced by Ghanaians living abroad” (Burns, 2009, p. 128).

The music of African hip hop artists in the US further constructs the experience of “out of contextness” or alienation, specifically among post-9/11 young, male African migrants to the United States. There are definite similarities to the depictions of alienation found in colonial (Léopold Senghor’s “A La Mort” in 1938) and post-colonial (Syl Cheney-Coker’s *Concerto for an Exile* in 1973) poetry written by earlier African migrants (Soyinka, 2002; Lewis, 2006; Oripeloye, 2012). These similarities include depictions of loneliness, frustration with racism/discrimination, and longing memories of home. There are also important differences.

Improved communication, new technology, and social media have all had an impact on the ways in which migrants reconnect with home. Many 21st Century African migrants are arriving in cities with already flourishing African communities. These communities have religious and civic associations, grocery stores, restaurants, and clothing shops, which may lessen the difficulties of separation for many. Many migrants are therefore able to maintain an existence between these two communities through social media and improvements in technology. New (and social) media is therefore allowing “migrants to be both in Diaspora and at home” (Nzegwu, 2009, p. 361). This does indeed change, but does not eliminate, the feelings of alienation among African migrants.

In a statement on the emotional impact of being an African in a hostile land, M.anifest delivers the following line in his song “Motion Picture”: *“in Ghana I was a human being/o/here I'm an alien, a martian Mandingo”*. M.anifest’s song “Blue” and Wanlov’s song “Smallest Time” deal with the profound sense of alienation they feel as African migrants in America. The hook for “Smallest Time” shows mourning: *“My people I dey greet you/Africa I miss you/I dey come o”*





“Smallest Time” by Wanlov the Kubolor

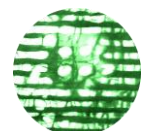
*Then my mind be say I dey go some better yard/I never know say there hard
Sometimes I got so lonely/wanted to see my family
Spent money on phone calls/Voices helped me cross those pitfalls
Oh chale, where my possies dey/I don't know if I can make it through another day*

The lyrics of the songs are reminiscent of poetry written by Senghor and others that dealt with longings for home and feelings of alienation. “Blue” is told from the voice of the immigrant longing for home, for the food and culture of his people. M.anifest reminisces over eating kelewele and fufu, and of walking barefoot. He talks about seeing images of Ghanaian food and culture in his dreams, and even talks of missing hearing the cock crow in the morning. The chorus, which is sung in pidgin, laments on the overwhelming feelings of nostalgia, and blues, for home.

“Blue” by M.anifest

*I got dirty feet that I tap on this dirty beat/Many men never heard of me
But certainly if they follow my trajectory/They would find that I'm royalty
And the younger me/Wants to climb on a mango tree
And I miss me felling free/And I miss me eating that Kelewele
Girls shaking their wele right in front of me
And I miss me walking barefooted and innocent/Talking pidgin, Ghanaian citizen
Pounding of fufu, I miss the beat/And I miss them calling me Dadabee, (Haye!)
Home is where my heart is/Torn from home, could be so heartless
Visual memoirs of a travelling artist/Case of the blues I got it the baddest*

Blitz the Ambassador, Wanlov the Kubolor, and Krukid have all used the sound of the familiar cock crowing in their songs, as what can be seen as a symbol for home. The sound, familiar throughout Africa, ties them to their memories of home. Other symbols include food, music, and familiar landmarks. M.anifest's video for “Coming to America” was shot in Minneapolis and in it he presents himself as an outsider, as a new arrival who is different from everyone else. In the various scenes M.anifest presents his Ghanaian self, juxtaposed against various images of American life. In one scene we see M.anifest on a commuter train

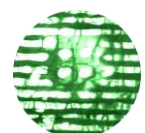


wearing African clothing and jewelry, and holding a “Ghana-must-go” bag. He is clearly showing himself as an outsider, as someone in a foreign culture surrounded by people who do not look like him. Of the symbols he uses to separate himself from everyone else, one of the most impactful is the “Ghana-must-go” bag, an instantly recognizable item for many Africans. These large, cheap (less than USD\$10) plastic bags with checkered patterns are called many things throughout Africa. Anyone traveling in Africa will find them tied atop long distance buses, holding a market seller’s goods, or used as storage in people’s homes. While they can be bought in America, they are mostly found in shops that cater to immigrant communities, making the use of the bag a salient symbol for “other” in America.

Within the music of these migrant artists there are feelings of alienation, but importantly there is also a rejection of assimilation, of losing one’s “Africaness”, which is a dominant theme, particularly with Wanlov, who raps primarily in Pidgin. Wanlov’s song “Asem” is partly in Twi and partly in Pidgin, and paints an image of his daily life in America. He talks about the stereotypes of Africans and those that judge him based on his looks. Wanlov’s song “Choptime” tells his listeners to *“forget your fork, your spoon, your knife”*, suggesting that he is more comfortable eating with his hands. The song “Gentleman” is a collaboration with Wanlov and M.anifest. In it both declare their pride in an African identity, but do so while holding that identity up against more so called refined European aesthetics. The chorus is sung in Pidgin and declares: *“I no be gentleman at all’o/I be African man original”*. The song signals the retention of an African identity, of African culture and aesthetics in the face of pressures to adopt a more “civilized”, Western, or gentlemanly identity and demeanor. In the song Wanlov declares: *“in our simplicity we are elegant/so to us your coast and tie are irrelevant/give up my culture for your religion? I can’t”*.

In the face of alienation, there is a definite rejection of assimilation. Many see the goal for many migrants as partial or full assimilation into American culture, often considered the natural progression for African migrants navigating host and home (Shaw-Taylor, 2007; Moore, 2013). For all of the artists studied, there is an emphasis on representing their national (and continental) identities, and rejecting assimilation.

Using hip hop culture, with its roots in urban Black America, the artists are able to re-emphasize African identities. A foundation of hip hop lies in representation, representing who one is, where one is from. Location and origins are at the core of a hip hop artist’s identity. Representation within hip hop therefore means linguistically, lyrically, and ascetically an artist represents a particular location. In hip hop, artists often talk about where they are from, give stories of their hometown, and boast of coming from a certain city. Thus, hip hop may have provided African artists a tool to assert both Pan African and African identities. For example, all of the artists use hip hop/African American vernacular to express African immigrant experiences; to discuss alienation, struggle, and ties to home.



Ties home

Studies have found that familial and community ties are strong among African (and other) migrants (Dosi et al, 2007; Stebleton, 2012; Okome, 2012). These ties come with responsibilities that include sending money home, calling home regularly, and helping relatives planning to travel to the US (Stebleton, 2012; Okome, 2012). Ties to home have impacted the decisions of many immigrants to return home (Okome, 2012). Other factors include economic and legal problems in the US, and economic opportunities at home. Okome's (2012) look at reverse migration among African immigrants suggests that economic opportunities at home drive a lot of reverse migration. Okome (2012) points in part to economic opportunities, family ties, and feelings of nostalgia to explain return. The artists in this study fall into that pattern, though at least one, Wanlov the Kubolor, has been open about his immigration problems as a partial cause for his return to Ghana.

While critical of social and political issues in both the US and their home countries, the artists in the study paint a much more positive image of their ties to home. Krukid's album *Afr-i-can* is his last before returning to Uganda. On it, he seems to reclaim his Ugandan roots, and delves a bit more into the immigration experience. Even though he acknowledges that he chose to leave Uganda, he still laments on the pain of not being with his family and the support system that exists in Uganda. He expresses values of "we are, therefore I am" in talking about the support system that exists within his family and community in Uganda. In almost a prelude to his return to Uganda, he also reflects on life and the importance of his journey.

All of the artists talk about the importance of buying phone cards to call home and of the need to send money home. Krukid's song "Family" talks about calling home and feeling helpless when he hears about problems back home. Wanlov's "Smallest Time" reflects on spending money on phone cards just to hear familiar voices. Wanlov directs the lyrics of this song to Africans living in the US who are also missing home. In the 2011 songs "Suffer" and "Coming to America" M.anifest also speaks of ties to home. "Coming to America" goes into the pressure to send money home and adjusting to life in America, including the difficulties of adjusting to school, language barriers, "*phone cards, long distance, broken hearts*". Blitz the Ambassador's song "Call Waiting" features Benin-born, US-based artist Angélique Kidjo. The song is telephone conversation between a son (Blitz) and his mother (Kidjo). The son talks about the money he sent, the difficulties in paying rent, and his plan to permanently return to Ghana. The song depicts the pain of separation for mother and son, with the son offering serious contemplation on returning home.

The decisions to return home were forecast in the music of the four musicians. For example, after his arrival in the US, Blitz the Ambassador released an album and two EPs. In all of those projects, he sung almost exclusively in English. In his 2011 album *Native Sun*, he includes more African rhythms as well as verses and whole songs sung in Twi. *Native Sun* was a conscious move towards a more Ghanaian sound, something that is also reflected in his



lyrics. All four of the artists have since returned home, either permanently or temporarily. All four have also tapped back into the local music scene, where they started their careers before leaving for the United States. Wanlov was the first to move back home, returning to Ghana in 2007. Krukid returned to Uganda in 2011 and M.anifest moved back to Ghana in 2012, while Blitz the Ambassador travels between Ghana and the US regularly.

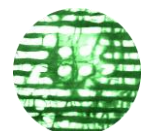
Since their return to Africa the music of the artists reflects almost a re-immersion into their home cultures. This is heard in lyrics and accents that celebrate home, as well through collaborations and projects with local artists. In Krukid/Ruyong's post-return songs, "Pearl City Anthem" and "Here I Come", he sings lines like "*oh UG how I missed you*" and "*man it's so good to be home*". In reference to his earlier song "City Life", he sings about what has and has not changed in Kampala. Like "City Life", "Pearl City Anthem" and "Here I Come" are a celebration of life in Kampala, of a typical urban scene in Africa. Upon returning to Ghana, Wanlov the Kubolor linked up with M3nsa, a Ghanaian hip hop artist based in London, to form Fokn Boiz. Wanlov always performed in Pidgin, and continues to do so. He has, however, become known for always wearing an African wrapper around his waist and never wearing shoes. Wanlov has more expressly expressed a rejection of not only Western values, but also of what he see as Westernized African values.

While the three who have permanently returned have embarked on numerous local projects, they do contribute interesting questions on the possibility of return. All may still be seen as outsiders by some in their home country, and all have found that simply returning and declaring your intentions to stay have not been enough to gain full acceptance. Wanlov and M.anifest have embarked on projects in other parts of Africa and Europe as well. Blitz the Ambassador maintains a home in Brooklyn, New York, but has also toured and done projects throughout Africa, Europe, Asia, and Latin America. This leads to the final discussion of this research. Some may argue that these artists have not simply returned home, that they have become part of, and represent, a growing number of transnational Africans. Through their music they construct identities that are rooted in Africa, but that express transnational experiences. They use Twi, Pidgin, or Luganda, along with African American dialects. They use African rhythms, jazz, and hip hop beats in their music. They often use hip hop/African American idioms to construct African experiences, and do all of this in a manner that reflects ownership of African and hip hop culture.

Afropolitan Dreams

"I represent African with a spectacular street vernacular" – M.anifest (2007), *Manifestations*

The artists in this study represent a growing number of transnational Africans. Their experiences are similar to what Owusu (2006) found in his study of transnationalism among

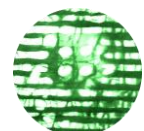


Ghanaian migrants in Canada. In this sense transnationalism is looked at as ties maintained between host and home countries. According to Owusu (2006), transnationalism describes most African migrant experiences, which are defined by regular communication with, and travel to, home countries. This transnationalism includes regular remittances, participating in social and political discussions at home, and plans to return home (Owusu). Owusu's (2006) study found that 75% of their study's respondents had returned to visit Ghana, with many returning several times. Looking at Owusu's description of transnational Ghanaians in Canada, we can see similarities with the artists in this study.

There is no question that a discussion of transnational Africans necessitates examinations of class. Many migrants are working jobs that do not provide the needed income to regularly travel home, or do not have the immigration papers that would allow them to return to the US if they leave. Though all of the artists in this study came from middle to upper income families, while they were in the US there was a definite loss in status. Their experiences and conditions were similar to other migrants. After developing successful music careers, these artists gained access to resources to travel, and to become more transnational. Now, most of the artists travel regularly between not only their home and host countries, but other countries as well. They have developed transnational, global, Afropolitan identities.

The term Afropolitan is often used to describe Africans that are transnational (or cosmopolitan). The term's use is traced to Achille Mbembe's 2001 article "Ways of Seeing: Beyond the New Nativism". The term was further popularized by Taiye Tuakli-Wosornu's (Selasi) 2005 article "Bye-Bye Barbar". There are several definitions of the term. Most definitions describe Afropolitans as Africans that 1. Are multicultural in their expressions (fashion, language, dining), 2. Are at home in a variety of international settings, 3. Are academically and/or financially successful in diverse fields, 4. Are a product of the migrants that left Africa from the 1960s to the 1980s or middle to upper income Africans at home, 5. Have spent a lot of time traveling between the West and Africa, and 6. Have a unique relationship with Africa, in a way that allows them to both critique and celebrate Africa (Tuakli-Wosornu, 2005; Makokha, 2010; Tutton, 2012).

The term has come under heavy criticism for its glorification of the lives of African elites, its celebration of Africanizing Western products, its embrace of consumer capitalism, and its classism, which is all disconnected from the lives of most Africans (Santana, 2013; Tveit, 2013). These criticisms are all valid, as most celebrations of Afropolitanism focus on material aspects and ascetics. The term does, however, bring up some important observations of a growing population of global Africans. Not only does the term Afropolitan describe many of Owusu's (2006) transnational Africans, it also describes Africans whose experiences include three or more additional countries. Little research has been done on this group, which includes not only artists, like the ones featured in this research, but Africans in a host of careers and fields.

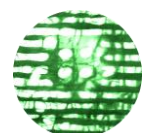


However, Mbembe's (2007) critique of Pan Africanism, dismissal of Pan African identities, and promotion of a post-racial-esque, multicultural art utopia, has largely caused backlash against Afropolitanism. This backlash influenced Binyavanga Wainaina's speech "I am a Pan-Africanist, not an Afropolitan", which provides important critique of the term and its implication for a Pan African identity (Santana, 2013). Despite Mbembe and Wainaina's criticisms, the two identities are not mutually exclusive. Unfortunately, both Mbembe and Wainaina ignore the politicization of Afropolitans, which is evidenced by their work and activism in community groups, grassroots movements, NGOs,... and through their art. Wainaina and others' "attempt to rid African literary and cultural studies of the ghost of Afropolitanism" (Santana, 2013) will not extinguish this growing population of African migrants.

Given the criticism of Afropolitanism's focus on consumerism and aesthetics, African literature and pop culture produced by "Afropolitans" have also come under scrutiny. This includes criticisms of popular magazines like *Afropolitan* and *Arise*, contemporary fashion ascetics, and contemporary African literature like Taiye Selasi's *Ghana Must Go*, for example, is critical of the "Afropolitan African novel", which he sees as being produced by and for "fellow Afropolitans" (Santana, 2013). Many contemporary, transnational, African authors are categorized as Afropolitan due to their transnational lives and the transnational themes of their literary works (Makokha, 2010; Lee, 2014).

Similar to the artists in this study, these African transnationals differ from the Africans who came to the US in the 1960s and 1970s, as well as those that came in the 1980s and 1990s. On the migrants that came to the US in the 1980s, Takougang (2003) says "unlike their counterparts in the 1960s and 70s who were anxious to return home after acquiring an American education in order to contribute in the task of nation building, an overwhelming majority of recent immigrants are more interested in establishing permanent residency in the United States" (p. 1). This post-2000 group of migrants has learned and benefitted from earlier migrations, as well as improvements in technology and communication that allowed them to have to maintain and expand transnational linkages. Some have moved back to Africa, some have stayed in the West, but many spend time traveling between the West, Africa, and other regions. Whether they have dual citizenship, permanent residency, US citizenship, or a visa, the question of home and return differs for them in some important ways.

Blitz the Ambassador's 2014 album *Afropolitan Dreams* and his identifying himself as Afropolitan is telling. In an interview with National Public Radio, Blitz the Ambassador is asked about his use of the term Afropolitan. He credits Taiye Selasi and her 2005 article as the inspiration for his use of the term: "I was looking for something that described who I was in terms of being young, being creative and being global. But at the end of the day, I felt what the Afropolitan part of it really revolves around returning home" (NPR, 2014). Blitz the Ambassador, a socially conscious artist, also claims a Pan African identity. The title of the press release for his 2011 album *Native Sun* declared: "Diasporighteousness: Blitz the



Ambassador Brings the Pan-African Noise with Native Sun”. Blitz the Ambassador uses his music to address racial oppression of African Americans and Africans. In addition to his use of African American/hip hop vernacular, he also utilizes other African influences in his musical messages. He used Swahili in the songs “Uhuru” and “Victory” to address political struggle, while the song “Wahala” channels Fela, and features artists from Brazil and The Congo. Blitz claiming an Afropolitan and a Pan African identity challenges both Mbembe and Wainaina’s assertions that the two identities are not compatible.

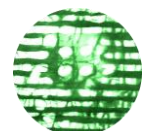
Other artists in this study see Afropolitanism as a movement or a direction that African (hip hop) music is headed in. In 2012 M.anifest spoke of the term Afropolitan in an interview discussing the future of African music. While not defining the term, he looked at it as expressing the global connectedness of African music (Jones, 2012). In 2013 Krukid/Ruyonga called his type of music “Afropolitan rap”, saying that it “infuses aspects of different African cultures to hip hop” (Semwezi, 2013). Krukid/Ruyonga said that this was the direction African hip hop was headed, and away from a simple imitation of American rap. In 2014, Wanlov the Kubolor and M3nsa performed at Afropolitan Vibes, a monthly music concert held in Lagos and spoke of the platform the concerts provide as being symbolic of a movement that is spreading across Africa and abroad (Afropolitan Vibes, 2014).

Afropolitans are not simply Africans living in the West, as some would suggest. For many transnationals home has been redefined. They can no longer return home and pick up where they left off. Home has changed, and so have they. So while allegiances continue to be to home countries, they have formed identities that are uniquely transnational.

Conclusion

Farred (2010) discusses the important linkages between culture and the Diaspora, saying that culture articulates the experiences of the Diaspora. Through the music of African hip hop artists certain African migrant experiences are constructed. They are constructed through lyrics that inform the listener of African migrant experiences and the idea of return. Burns (2009) discusses how the music of Ghanaian artists in the Diaspora changes over time, as it reflects contact with difference influences. He describes how artists often develop Pan African identities in addition to national ones (Burns, 2009). Because of their involvement with hip hop music and culture before migrating, the African hip hop artists in this study started developing Pan African identities earlier, and that those identities were reinforced once in the United States.

Perhaps because of these experiences and influences, these artists have also had to find their audience, who are often fellow transnationals. In a 2014 interview with nydjlive.com (2014), Wanlov the Kubolor stated that he has had problems connecting with Ghanaian audiences. He stated that he and M3nsa were “treated as outcasts” (nydjlive.com, 2014). In conversations with Ghanaians in Ghana, several indicated that they did not fully understand or

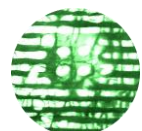




relate to much of the music of Blitz the Ambassador or M.anifest. All of these artists are negotiating their place, influenced by both home and Diaspora; their music differs in that the narratives they construct speak to transnational experiences of, especially, post-2000 African migrants.

The voices of African hip hop artists among those post-2000 migrants have allowed for the construction of new narratives of African migrant experiences. US-based African hip hop artists represent a coalescence of African and Diaspora experiences and identities. Positioned at an intersection of both African and African American cultures, they are simultaneously alienated from both. It is thus through their music that a certain African immigrant experience is constructed, one that is connected to both Diaspora and home. And, it is through the artists themselves that we understand the impact of African migrant experiences on the idea of home and the importance of return.

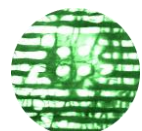
African hip hop weaves several narratives of African immigrant experiences and serves as commentary on broader discussions of migration, Diaspora experiences, alienation, identity, and of return. These US-based African hip hop artists construct a reality of African immigrant experiences in America, contributing to existing literature on both African migration and the resonance of cultural representation. African hip hop artists depict certain realities of African migrants in the US, as well as the place of Diaspora and home in African immigrant identities. This depiction informs its audience of African immigrant realities, while at the same time engaging fellow migrants, and would be migrants, in conversations around those same realities.





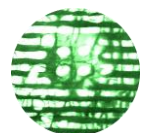
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Appendix: Albums & tracks referenced in the text

Blitz the Ambassador (2009) *Stereotype*

“Dying to Live”

Blitz the Ambassador (2011) *Native Sun*

“Wahala”

“Victory”

“Native Sun”

Blitz the Ambassador (2014) *Afropolitan Dreams*

“Call Waiting”

Krukid (2007) *Black Immigrant Mixtape*

“Black Immigrant”

Krukid (2007) *Afr-i-can*

“African”

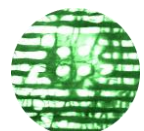
“City Life”

“Family”

Krukid/Ruyonga (2013) *Victory Music*

“Pearl City Anthem”

“Here I Come”





M.anifest (2007) *Manifestations*

“Gentleman”

“Africa Represent”

M.anifest (2011) *Immigrant Chronicles: Coming to America*

“Motherland”

“Suffer”

“Blue”

“Motion Picture”

“Coming to America”

Wanlov the Kubolor (2007) *Green Card*

“Green Card”

“Asem”

“Choptime”

“Laredo”

“Smallest Time”

