

# Toward De-exceptionalizing Migration: Intra-African Diasporic Writing in South Africa

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## ABSTRACT

Migration has never before occupied such a prominent place in African cultural production as it does today. Yet, notwithstanding an increasing focus on intra-African migration in the social sciences, literary migration scholarship has largely focused on African migration to the West, as the growing body of studies on outward-oriented Afropolitan migration novels indicates. In this paper, I examine how the Afropolitan consciousness that structures South-North migration novels is reframed in literature of continental migration and mobility in post-Marikana South Africa. While the themes of xenophobia and migration have emerged as central preoccupations in South African literature from the early 2000s onward, there has been a shift in literary production more recently with the publication of a range of works by African diasporic writers in South Africa. Drawing on Ekow Duker's *Yellowbone* (2019), Rémy Ngamije's *The Eternal Audience of One* (2019), and Sue Nyathi's *The Gold Diggers* (2018), I argue that these texts interrogate South Africa's complex relationship to "Africanness" and forge new pathways for continental dialogue that allow us to resituate South African-based writing within larger debates in contemporary African literary studies. This category of intra-African diasporic fiction calls into question simplifying binaries of outward, Western-oriented African writing and locally produced popular, yet internationally disregarded, texts (Harris). Rather, it scrutinizes the idea of "Africa" in global literary circuits from the position of intra-African diasporic subjectivities. Drawing attention to the long history of intra-African mobilities, the cross-continental thrust in many of these works also productively speaks to recent scholarly efforts to reframe migration studies in ways that insist on the de-exceptionalization of migration and the breakdown of binary formulations of migrant and non-migrant identities.

## INTRODUCTION

To the West is the house of fortune  
 To the East is the house of fire.  
 You must journey South from time to time.  
 As for the North, it is best forgotten.  
 (African proverb) (Omotoso)

The above proverb serves as an epigraph to Kole Omotoso's 1994 *Season of Migration to the South: Africa's Crisis Reconsidered*, detailing his account of his family's emigration from Nigeria to South Africa in January 1992 after being offered a professorial position at the University of the Western Cape. Invoking Tayeb Salih's seminal *Season of Migration to the North* (1969), Omotoso redirects the focus of migratory narratives away from the Global North, narrating his account of intra-African migration to the southern tip of the continent. In other words, he challenges us to "recenter . . . the South in Studies of Migration" (Fiddian-Qasmieh 1), which migration scholars in the social sciences have increasingly begun to highlight. Omotoso writes: "Europe and America had begun to weary him with their loud objections to immigrants from Africa. For him, then, it would have to be the season of migration to the South" (3). Tapping into multiple genres, Omotoso's work is a manifestation of his simultaneous disillusionment with the pan-African dream and his renewed hope for intra-African solidarity, encapsulated by the South African democratic promise of the early 1990s. Having been "part of his intellectual make-up from even beyond his undergraduate days, when he and his schoolfriends had read Alex la Guma, and Alan Paton . . . , recited the poems of Dennis Brutus and performed the plays of Athol Fugard" (8), South Africa for him promises to provide answers through its transition to democracy "to map a way out of the deadlock of post-colonial Africa" (9).

Where migration to South Africa for Kole Omotoso during the early transition years seems intimately tied to the reconciliatory euphoria of the "rainbow nation" idea, works by his children of both Nigerian and Barbadian parentage—actor and filmmaker Akin Omotoso and novelist Yewande Omotoso—exude rather different affective registers. Akin Omotoso's films *God Is African* (2003) and *Man on Ground* (2011) not only bring into sharp relief the discursive and physical violence on the African migrant body, but also negotiate the ways in which migrants confronted with the violence and trauma of xenophobia imagine affective spaces of intra-African connectivity and solidarity (Mkhize). *Bom Boy*, Yewande Omotoso's debut novel, with its rejection of fixity and its embrace of pluri-locality and relationality, marks a further shift away from the orientation of her father's work by examining the multiplicities of Africanness and intra-African migratory and diasporic subjectivities in her Cape Town setting (see Fasselt, "Nigeria").<sup>1</sup>

Her protagonists' migratory trajectories articulate a growing awareness of what Achille Mbembe, in his continental-based formulation of Afropolitanism, describes as the "relativisation of primary roots and memberships" and the "interweaving of the here and there" (28). This gives rise to an Afropolitan consciousness negotiated across multiple localities and subject positions, and emphasizes "a pluralism of African cultures in one geographical space"

(Balakrishnan 1). It is in this sense that *Bom Boy* expands the conventional scope of Afropolitan writing—a hotly debated category mainly ascribed to works by diasporic writers located in the Global North and critiqued for being a fleeting fashion, an espousal of elitism, Western-oriented commercialism, and apoliticalness (Hodapp 4). In doing so, the novel underlines the centrality of the African continent in the “historical phenomenon of worlds in movement” (Mbembe 27) and rejects narrow formulations of “Africanness” that are tied to assumed indigeneity, while actively foregrounding the asymmetries of the unbroken legacies of (settler-) colonial violence, which mediate movements across and beyond the continent. The novel, therefore, resonates with Chielozona Eze’s philosophical conception of Afropolitanism as an ethics of relationality that “highlights the fluidity in African self-perception and visions of the world” (214) and undermines fraught references to an “authentic Africa,” a notion that continues to haunt critical engagements with Afropolitanism. At the core of debates around Afropolitanism and its perception of being “insufficiently African,” as Aretha Phiri observes, seems to lie some literary critics’ “own embeddedness in . . . (re)colonising structures” issuing from an “over-determined, prescriptive ethnographic imperative for the representation of an archetypal, definite African ‘everyday life’ and identity” (39). As a text concerned with various movements across the continent, and Cape Town’s diverse and divisive social landscape that rewrites the classic Bildungsroman through an animist realist paradigm, Omotoso’s novel cuts through dichotomous categorizations of African literature advanced by some of the critics of Afropolitanism: Ashleigh Harris, for example, contends that extroverted Afropolitan diasporic novels are complicit in circumventing Africa—what she theorizes as various forms of “de-realization”—by sidestepping “depictions of African everyday life” and “African languages and stylistic and literary legacies,” whereas novels by African-based writers “concerned with distinctly African social, economic, and environmental matters can be seen to mobilize an irrealist aesthetic and style, one that is complexly embedded in the environmental, political, and economic realities on the continent today” (Harris 175).

The complexities of migration and diaspora addressed in the multi-generational work of the Omotoso family is reflective of a larger body of cultural and literary texts that focus on the increasingly more multifaceted migration from other parts of the continent to South Africa. This movement occurred after the country’s transition to democracy but has thus far received scant critical attention in studies of African migration narratives and the “new African diaspora[s]” (Okpewho and Nzegwu). These diasporas—what Paul Tiyambe Zeleza terms the “diasporas of structural adjustment” (55)—are a result of the dire economic, political, and social effects of the World Bank’s and IMF’s push of sweeping structural adjustment programs across the continent in the early 1980s. It is against this background that this article seeks to examine the disparate experiences of migration reflected in works by intra-African diasporic writers who live in, or have published in, South Africa in an attempt to counter the hegemonic narrative of African diasporic writing in the West by “pluralizing the African diasporas and mapping their multiple identities and identifications with [the signifier] Africa” (Zeleza 38). After briefly situating my discussion within recent considerations around xenophobia and transnationalism in critical scholarship on South African literature, I trace the emergence of texts by diasporic writers from other African

countries in South Africa, arguing for a broader and internally differentiated conception of contemporary African diasporas as an index of the multiplicity and complexity across “Africanness.” Turning to a more detailed analysis of three novels by intra-African diasporic writers, I then examine *Yellowbone* (2019) by Ghanaian-born author Ekow Duker, who has lived in South Africa since 2000. This text engages with the Ghanaian diaspora in the former homeland of the Transkei through an intimate father-daughter relationship that decenters patrilineal lines of descent. Then, I discuss a narrative attempt to de-exceptionalize migration in *The Eternal Audience of One* (2019) by Rwandan-Namibian author Rémy Ngamiye. Finally, I examine *The Gold-Diggers* (2018) by Zimbabwean-born Sue Nyathi as a novel that foregrounds precarious and gendered experiences of Zimbabwean migration to South Africa. This article by no means aims to present a comprehensive set of tenets of African diasporic literature in South Africa or define it in opposition to Western-oriented migration narratives. Rather, considering the dearth of studies in this area, it sets out as an exploratory contribution to the emerging sub-field of intra-African migration and diasporic literatures that will hopefully engender a more in-depth, interdisciplinary analysis and theorization in the future.

## WRITING INTRA-AFRICAN MIGRATION AND DIASPORA IN SOUTH AFRICA

South Africa has for some time been a hub of intra-African migration and diasporic writing yet has hardly been considered in the outpouring of critical scholarship on contemporary Afrodiasporic fiction with its privileging of South-North migration routes. As Ato Quayson writes, “the emphasis in the most widely-read new African writers is now no longer on what happens to the African located in Africa, but what happens to the African resident in London, New York, Edinburgh, Berlin, or Rome who keeps dreaming nostalgically of Africa” (149). While covering a range of African migration narratives, the recently published *Penguin Book of Migration Literature* (Ahmad 2019), for example, in its extensive appendix only mentions six titles in relation to South Africa, most of which address emigration from the country to the West or the return of exiles to post-apartheid South Africa. Yet, in line with the observed “migration turn” (Iheka and Taylor 1) in contemporary African literary and cultural production, writing in South Africa has begun to refashion the political novel of the past to engage with the changing dynamics of migration from elsewhere on the continent post-apartheid.

Economic migrants from other southern African countries have been coming to South Africa for more than 150 years, which makes claims to newness difficult to uphold (Crush 12–13). However, despite such historical continuities, new forms of mobility, migration, and diaspora have emerged in contemporary South Africa as a result of new local, regional, and global forces—after the end of apartheid and the fall of the Berlin Wall and in an “age of migration” marked by “multidirectional, reversible and often unpredictable [migratory] patterns” (Zamorano Llena 8). Whereas in the past, it was mainly contract workers from the southern African region who labored in the mines of the country, present migration from the continent appears more multifaceted—with South Africa serving as a host nation for migrants of a vast range of backgrounds from the entire continent cutting across class, gender,

sexuality, age, language, religion, and migration status (Crush and McDonald). Traditionally conceived as a male phenomenon, migration from other African countries in recent years has witnessed a substantial increase in women migrants, bringing into sharp focus the gendered experience of migration (Mbiyozo 3). Where migration to South Africa has historically been regarded as temporary, migrants increasingly regard the country as a more permanent destination, signaling the formation of more visible intra-African diasporic communities (Crush et al. 221).

Yet despite this opening up to the continent, critics have begun to speak of a “crisis of hospitality” (Strauss 105) in South Africa resulting from the ongoing anti-African immigrant violence, which began in the early 1990s. As Jean and John L. Comaroff observe, “a phobia about foreigners, above all from elsewhere in Africa, has been the illicit offspring of the fledgling democracy—waxing, paradoxically perhaps, alongside appeals to the African Renaissance and ubuntu, a common African humanity” (645). The so-called “xenophobic attacks” of May 2008, during which sixty-two people (African migrants and South Africans perceived as “foreigners”) lost their lives and thousands were displaced, particularly shattered the country’s image of the rainbow nation and Africa’s “showcase democracy” (Mbembe, “Afrique”). Not since the transition to democracy had South Africa experienced collective violence on such a large scale. The outbreak seemed to jolt the country and the global community into a feeling that South Africans were “living at the end of the dream years” (Nuttall and McGregor 10), a sentiment that was further heightened by the 2012 Marikana massacre that again unambiguously “reveal[ed] the crisis inherent in South Africa’s liberal democratic project and its moral basis” (Reddy ch. 7). The ongoing violence against African migrants called for a reassessment of South Africa’s self-portrayal as a nation, along with its growing role and responsibility as a host society for migrants from the entire African continent.

While a comprehensive analysis of the emerging body of writing dealing with current migration from elsewhere on the continent to South Africa has not yet been undertaken, the topic has been addressed in a range of scholarly articles on individual texts and broader trends in post-apartheid literature. Transnational connectivity is central to Ronit Frenkel and Craig MacKenzie’s notion of post-transitional writing in which connections with the continent, as Meg Samuelson notes, “are drawn by exploring various movements into South Africa” (115). Similarly, Michael Titlestad speaks of South Africa’s homecoming to the African continent following apartheid discourse where “‘Africa’ was always elsewhere” (186). Whereas J. U. Jacobs in *Diaspora and Identity in South African Fiction* (2016) mainly frames his discussion around older, more established diasporas, he also briefly addresses—in relation to Schonstein Pinnock’s *Skyline*—what he tentatively terms the “intra-African diaspora” in an attempt not to subsume South African-based texts under “the homogenising/pan-Africanist concept of an African diaspora” (20). Alongside this emphasis on continental connectivity, critics have also observed literary engagement with increasingly violent mobilizations of narrow forms of national belonging that find expression in xenophobic or Afrophobic violence. For Michael Green, the theme of xenophobia has become a key feature of the “post-apartheid canon” (334), whereas Elleke Boehmer sees this as part of the “relentless repetition” (*Postcolonial* 90) of crises that continue to structure South African writing after apartheid.

Marking this turn to concerns with migration from other parts of the continent in the South African literary space was the publication of Phaswane Mpe's *Welcome to Our Hillbrow* (2001), K. Sello Duiker's *The Quiet Violence of Dreams* (2001), Patricia Schonstein's *Skyline* (2000), and *Going Home* (2005) by Angolan-born writer Simão Kikamba in the early 2000s. While these texts insert the subject of migration within a larger framework of transnational connectivity that has permeated literary production in South Africa from its very beginning (Helgesson 427), they also bring into focus new local and global migration dynamics of the contemporary moment. An even more pronounced body of migration literature followed the "xenophobic violence" of 2008. It is during this period that we find greater generic diversity and an increasing number of texts by African authors from other parts of the continent next to a more sustained exploration of the topic by South African writers. Zukiswa Wanner, for example, who was born in Zambia to a Zimbabwean mother and South African father and now lives in Kenya, writes in the afterword to her third novel *Men of the South* (2010) that she crafted her Zimbabwean character in the text "while mus[ing] on the senselessness of the negrophobic attacks" (219).<sup>2</sup> These narratives undermine perceptions that the new political novel in the post-apartheid space is found mainly in the realm of crime writing (De Kock, "Losing"). Just as the crime novel, through its critical commentary on post-apartheid socio-political culture, "promotes critical discourse and debate which are foundational tenets of a healthy democracy" (Naidu and Le Roux 292), so too does migration and diasporic writing refract engagement with South African nationhood and xenophobia in the media and social sciences through various aesthetic interventions.<sup>3</sup>

Among the most widely known works by these intra-African diasporic writers are Yewande Omotoso's novels, the short story collection *Shadows* (2012) by Zimbabwean-born Novuyo Rosa Tshuma, who lived in South Africa before moving to the USA and whose collection—like Nyathi's and Wanner's texts—centers on Zimbabwean-South African migratory movements and the Zimbabwean diaspora in South Africa. Part of Binyavanga Wainaina's memoir *One Day I Will Write About This Place* (2011) recounts his years as a student at the University of Transkei (now Walter Sisulu University) during the early 1990s, where he is surrounded "by a network of relatives, professionals from Africa outside South Africa" (98) who make him feel more at home in a South Africa that refuses to be considered part of the continent. Duker's *Yellowbone* partly shares the 1990s Eastern Cape setting with Wainaina's text but takes us from the latter's East African familial cartographies to the Ghanaian diaspora in South Africa, while Rémy Ngamije's *The Eternal Audience of One* (2019) presents a larger transcontinental migratory canvas spanning across Rwanda, the former Zaire, Kenya, Namibia, and South Africa. Where Ijangolet S. Ogwang's *Bildungsroman, An Image in a Mirror* (2018) and Hawa Jande Golakai's crime novels *The Lazarus Effect* and *The Score* (2011, 2015) foreground the subject positions of young women migrants, a Ugandan student (Ogwang), and an investigative journalist from Liberia (Golakai), the final part of Nnanna Ikpo's *Fimí Silẹ Forever: Heaven Gave It to Me* (2017) narrates the flight of the text's queer protagonists to South Africa in the aftermath of the proclamation of the Same-Sex Marriage Prohibition Act of 2014 in Nigeria. The forthcoming *Strangers of Braamfontein* (2021) by Onyeka Nwelue and Nuruddin Farah's final part of his latest trilogy (tentatively titled *In the Scheme of Things*), which will be set among

the Somali community in Johannesburg (Farah and Moolla), further testify to the increasing weight of diverse and internally differentiated intra-African migration and diasporic texts on the South African literary terrain.

Given the presence of migration writing by both South Africans and writers from other African countries, this body of writing further unsettles narrow definitions of a South African literary canon, resonating with Leon de Kock's assertion that recent writing in the country has "hungrily embraced a larger membership of 'world' literature" ("Judging" 31). Indeed, many of these texts not only recast the ways in which "South Africanness" is understood and performed, but also stretch the contentious notion of South African literature, unhinging it from the limits of the country's national borders and from South African citizenship and writing themselves into the fold of the larger fields of (intra-)African migration and diasporic literature. This group of African diasporic authors residing or publishing in South Africa thus rewrite the country from both within and without, fostering multidirectional interlinkages and conversations with literary traditions across the continent and its diasporas, while simultaneously transforming South African literary traditions. To be sure, this is not to suggest that South African-based intra-continental migration literature is written by African diasporic writers alone—a claim that would disregard the widely observed shift from the exclusionary dynamics inherent in the older term of "migrant writing" to a broader conception of "migration literature" in order to acknowledge that "political and social processes of immigration shape the whole literary system" (Walkowitz 533). Yet the aim of this article is to point to the multiplicities and multi-localities of African diasporic writing transcending the conventional focus on the Global North. It is in this vein, that the analysis of selected primary texts in the following sections is grounded in an understanding of the concept of the African diaspora as multivalent and shifting, as "a process, a space and a discourse" continuously being "made, unmade and remade" (Zezeza 41). My focus on the intra-African diaspora in South Africa thus aligns with recent efforts to take account of the plurality of the African diaspora within an array of significations across time and place that, as Brent Hayes Edwards contends, resists "easy recourse to origins" and "forces us to consider discourses of cultural and political linkage only through and across difference" (31). The novels by Ekow Duker, Rémy Ngamije, and Sue Nyathi testify to the widening range in which migrant and diasporic subjectivities are being articulated in intra-African diasporic writing, further remapping the uneven topography of literature in South Africa.

## DECENTERING DIASPORIC GENEALOGIES IN *YELLOWBONE*

Ekow Duker's multi-stranded fourth novel *Yellowbone* (2019) is divided into three parts that are named after its settings in Mthatha, London, and Nsawam, Ghana. It launches multiple diasporic geographies and subjectivities into play with each other, thereby providing an understanding of (intra-)African diasporas and their positionings vis-à-vis "Africa." This understanding interrogates not only mythical identifications with an originary, homogenous "homeland" but also the frequently naturalized ties of diaspora to patrilineal genealogies. Duker engages with the intra-African diaspora through the lens of an intimate father-daughter relationship put to the test in South Africa's environment of colorism and the psychological



damage wrought by coloniality and attendant discourses on skin-color hierarchies. By focusing on skilled migration from Ghana to the former Bantustan of the Transkei, the novel also foregrounds a largely silenced form of migration and diasporic formation in current South African public discourse and critical scholarship that largely center on post-apartheid migration from elsewhere on the continent and, therefore, often risk eclipsing continuities in migratory patterns.

One of the two main narrative strands tells the story of Kojo Bentil and his light-skinned daughter Karabo. Bentil, also known as Teacher due to his utter devotion to his profession and the high esteem in which the community holds him, arrives in Mthatha from Ghana in 1989. The narrative spans the time from Karabo's early childhood in the mid-2000s to her young adulthood as an architecture student in London. Karabo's Xhosa-Tswana mother Precious, one of Teacher's former students and also a light-skinned woman, resists her family's admonition not to marry Teacher on the grounds of his dark complexion that risks "taking the family backward" (Duker 16). Teacher's life as a member of an emerging new African diaspora toward the end of apartheid in Mthatha is thus characterized by the dual experiences of reverence and otherness in a community marked by the unbroken legacies of what Lynn M. Thomas in her work on skin lightening describes as "the privileging of whiteness and lightness that flourished through European institutions of slavery and colonial rule" (236) and was further entrenched by apartheid's system of racial classification. Teacher's hopes of finding a more lucrative job outside Mthatha after the 1994 elections, which, as he assumes, inspired "all the white establishments . . . to demonstrate that they were on the right side of history" (Duker 18), are shattered when he learns that the school has employed a lesser qualified teacher whom "the students could relate to," thinking that he is considered "too black" (Duker 19). The text's narration of the democratic transition, then, unfolds in perpetual tension between lines of rupture and continuity marked by the afterlife of what Thiven Reddy terms the "violent legacies carved out of settler-colonial modernity" (ch. 1).

Within the context of post-apartheid xenophobic rhetoric that has been leveled against black African migrants from other parts of the continent, the body of "the African migrant" has frequently been positioned as a marker of abject otherness whereby bodily appearance and movement are understood as easily readable indicators of "imagined citizenship and foreignness" (Matsinhe 302). David Matsinhe terms this the "bodily ideals of [South African] citizenship" (303) that are associated with particular languages and accents of South Africa's dominant Nguni and Sotho languages and lighter shades of complexion. Significantly, Teacher's position, as a liminal diasporic subject in relation to such constrictive conceptions of belonging and citizenship, is also marked at the narrative level where the gaps and silences in the narration of his migratory experience mirror his marginalized status in pre- and post-1994 South Africa.

It is this status as a revered outsider that also informs his relationship with his daughter. Many father-daughter narratives by African writers have been studied in relation to the crisis of the postcolonial nation and their reimagining of the masculinist "national family drama" through "the daughter's relationship to the national father" (Boehmer, *Stories* 107). Duker's novel similarly departs from the conventional genealogy of father and son but resituates the father-daughter plot within the contexts of migration, diaspora, and return as well as the fissures



these produce within the Bentil family. Growing up, Karabo is driven by paternal approval, “want[ing] to be like Teacher” (40), and sharing his love for knowledge. Further complicating Teacher’s status among his extended family and community is the question of Karabo’s paternity that haunts the narrative but also calls for a reimagining of patrilineal lines of descent that permeate dominant constructions of the family unit and diaspora. Much of the first and final parts of the narrative engage with the anxiety of Teacher’s parents about Karabo’s light complexion and the demands made on Teacher to finally confirm his fatherhood as Teacher suspects that Precious’s former white employer with whom she had a brief affair might be Karabo’s biological father. Notwithstanding these suspicions, Teacher and Karabo—despite Karabo’s increasing realization of her father’s fallibility—embrace a reconfigured model of diasporic kinship grounded in self-generated affective ties that undercut the traditional investment of diaspora in “genealogical notions of racial descent, filiation, and biological traceability” (Eng 13). It is not surprising, then, that when Teacher is confirmed as her biological father at the very end of the novel after his mother’s forceful collection of Karabo’s blood sample, Karabo simply retorts that she had “always known she was” his daughter (Duker 343). Here, Duker contrasts Teacher’s parents’ hunger for certitude and a biological lineage with Karabo’s overt dismissal of biological parenthood as the only form of permissible parenthood and her privileging of affective bonds over discourses of provenance. While the parental rivalry over Karabo might be read on an allegorical level to depict national rivalry between South Africa and Ghana, the fissures within post-apartheid society, as well as its ambivalent relationship to other parts of the continent, the novel’s reenvisioning of kinship outside the orthodoxies of biology also transcends such allegorical function. Its idea of kinship invokes Eze’s conceptualization of Afropolitanism as an expression of “elective affinities” (235)—affinities rooted neither exclusively in Ghana nor in South Africa but reouted through an interweaving of multiple African geographies and cultures.

Duker’s vociferous counterweight to normative templates of national and diasporic family formation also translates into an alternative approach to what Ato Quayson describes as the practice of “genealogical accounting.” As a cornerstone of the diasporic imaginary, this “involves stories of the ‘how-we-got-here’ variety,” establishing “a nexus of affiliations” (147) that links the individual diasporic subject to the larger diasporic community and, at times, takes on the form of a roots narrative tracing diasporic trajectories back to an originary homeland. While the father-daughter bond in the novel is strengthened through Teacher’s storytelling about Ghana, his recrafted “roots narrative” paints a complex picture of a country that resists the mythologizing impulse of diasporic homeland desire; it is attentive to more nuanced articulations of Africanness and blackness which tend to be obscured in South African discourse on the “rest of the continent.” Significantly, the stories that Karabo most vividly remembers relate to the Cape Coast Castle during the time of the transatlantic slave trade. In contrast to both Gilroy’s *Black Atlantic* model that largely disarticulates Africa and, therefore, “reinstates a binary between Africa and the West” (Goyal 9) and the Afrocentrist “roots narratives,” the novel invalidates a narrative of “the noble African kingdom as Middle Passage Blackness so often imagines it” (Wright, “Diaspora” 225). Through Teacher’s storytelling, the novel instead portrays a multitude of actors that complicate accounts of a clear division between white slavers and black slaves. He tells Karabo how

his father's Fante ancestors "in what was then the Gold Coast, collaborated with the Europeans to sell his mother's people into slavery" (Duker 6). In his stories, the image of the Cape Coast Castle looms large as a site of memory and mourning to commemorate but also pass on the traumatic history of the slave trade to his daughter:

When Karabo was small, Teacher would bring the picture [of Cape Coast Castle] into her room and prop it up on the bed and she'd stare at it, wide-eyed with excitement. Then he'd tell her stories about the English governor and his soldiers and how resplendent and precise they were in their red uniforms and polished black boots. He told her about the merchants and the local chiefs they bartered with, about the fishermen who dried their nets on the rocks around the castle. He told her about the chapel on the upper floor with the wooden shutters that opened out onto the sea. Karabo was so captivated by Teacher's stories of Cape Coast castle that when she fell asleep, she could hear the sound of Englishmen singing hymns while the slaves wailed in the dungeons beneath their feet. (Duker 84)

While the depiction of the British might initially paint a romanticized picture of life at the castle at the height of the slave trade in the 18th century, the stark visual and sonic contrast between the splendor and hymns above and the wailing of slaves in the dungeon below appear to give Karabo a sense of the horrors of the slave trade. The Cape Coast Castle and other coastal slave castles are central to discussions around diasporic roots tourism, which according to Bayo Holsey are a product "of an extended conversation between Ghana and segments of the African diaspora" where "various notions of connection are regularly mobilized" (152). Duker, however, approaches the transatlantic slave trade from the position of a diasporic subject in post-apartheid South Africa in order to center resonant questions of trans-continental fractures and solidarities. If roots tourism and roots narratives are invested in the unearthing of a clear ancestral line as a restorative project of recovery and reunion with "Africa" as well as celebration of black solidarity, Teacher's narration of the diverse actors involved in the castle economy, as well as his divided family history, points rather to the impossibilities of such neat closures and the pluralities of Africanness and blackness—resonating with Michelle Wright's term of the spatiotemporal phenomenon of blackness dependent on "*when* and *where* it is being imagined, defined, and performed and in what locations" (*Physics* 3).

The third part of the novel enacts the traditional trajectory of the roots narrative when Teacher returns to Ghana and Karabo visits her father, yet determinedly also redirects the teleological project of ancestral recovery. Teacher returns to Ghana after Karabo leaves their Mthatha home to study architecture in London, where she not only hopes to further her education but also yearns to escape from South Africans talking behind her back "about where she came from or how she spoke" and their "mental calculations about the shade of her skin" to make "judgements about her character" (Duker 211). Yet notwithstanding her optimistic expectations, she is confronted with racist stereotypes about the continent specifically during a visit of her boyfriend's mother and, in an act of revenge, decides not to return a priceless Guadagnini violin that belongs to the mother. Rather, she takes it with her to Ghana where she is arrested for theft and incarcerated

in Nsawam Female Prison. It is here that the father-daughter relationship that structures much of the earlier plot increasingly recedes into the background, giving way to an emphasis on the intimate bonds between the female prisoners from across Ghana and other African countries. The prison space ironically emerges as a place of community, belonging, and solidarity that, however, markedly contrasts with the idea of “home as inheritance” (Hartman qtd. in Saunders 13) on which diasporic roots narratives are founded. Even though the women are incarcerated, their community can productively be read through Saidiya Hartman’s notion of “home as making” and “creating conditions that make dwelling possible” (qtd. in Saunders 13), which she sees as central to diasporic and maroon communities. This notion is especially apparent in the final image of Karabo sleeping in Auntie Abena’s arms before her release that gestures toward alternative, non-patrilineal forms of affiliation and kinship: “That night Karabo slept in Auntie Abena’s bed with the old woman’s arm draped protectively over her. She took Auntie Abena’s hand and rubbed it over her face. She covered the inside of her palm with small kisses and inhaled deeply of her old woman’s smell” (Duker 329). Similarly, Karabo’s friendship and language exchange with Fatima from the north of Ghana encapsulates this notion of home as a processual co-construction without, however, romanticizing their bond that, as both young women know, will not last beyond Karabo’s release. Although Karabo reunites with her mother (who has traveled to Ghana from South Africa) and her father upon her release, the ending does not move toward a narrative of diasporic homecoming and rebirth in Ghana but foregrounds Karabo’s diasporic identity as shaped by a multiplicity of localities in a similar manner to the diasporic trajectories across eastern and southern Africa in Rémy Ngamije’s novel.

#### DE-EXCEPTIONALIZING MIGRATION IN *THE ETERNAL AUDIENCE OF ONE*

Published in South Africa by Blackbird Books in 2019, *The Eternal Audience of One*, by Rwandan-Namibian writer Ngamije, is a millennial intra-African migration novel that traces, through a series of flashbacks, the coming-of-age story of its protagonist, Séraphin Turihamwe, alongside his family’s migratory journeys across seven countries. While Ngamije’s expansive debut demands an examination of a range of frequently overlooked aspects in African literary studies such as the Namibian literary landscape, post-genocide Rwandan diasporic fiction, and the growing body of texts by Rwandan writers interrogating the current RPF-government’s “attempts to create a unified narrative of the Genocide Against the Tutsi” with clear-cut victim and perpetrator identities (Hitchcott 159), I will mainly focus on the ways in which the novel reconfigures approaches to migration and diaspora. As Ngamije observes in several interviews, his novel not only intends to dislodge hegemonic narratives of South-North migration away from the African continent by foregrounding migration from East Africa to southern Africa but is most interested in “normalizing” migration and movement (Van Wyk). Indeed, the text’s narration of the flight of Séraphin’s family from Rwanda to Goma in then Zaire in the aftermath of the genocide, their lives in the diaspora, first in Nairobi and later in Windhoek, his parents’ studies in Brussels and Paris in the 1970s as part of post-independent Rwanda’s national elite next to the novel’s central focus

on Séraphin's life as a student in Cape Town, highlight the multiplicities and differentially positioned forms of movement—across the continuum of forced and voluntary—while at the same time forging connections between these varying experiences of migrancy. In Ngamije's narrative world, migration and various other forms of mobilities of diasporic subjects thus represent the norm rather than the exception. The novel challenges us to read contemporary South Africa through these diverse transcontinental movements and, more specifically, from the perspective of a diasporic writer in neighboring Namibia thirty years after independence from South Africa's apartheid rule.

Most notably, Ngamije frames his migration narrative through the Rwandan proverb "Ukize inkuba arayiganira: To survive the thunder is to tell the tale" (5) that serves as an epigraph to the first part of the novel and is put into conversation with the ancient Greek *theatrum mundi* metaphor. In an essay for an undergraduate scholarship program, Séraphin writes:

"All the world's a stage . . ." upon which we perform for the eternal audience of one. Only the person who makes it to the end knows what everything was all about. He who survives the thunder, gets to tell the tale. Life will only make sense right at the end, when the person who has been living it can look back and realise that the tragic nature of life is actually a comedy. (Ngamije 277)

While the author elucidates on the light-hearted tenor in which the proverb is commonly used by Rwandans to illustrate how "everything is a mere story when it has been survived" (Ngamije, "When"), the novel also illuminates the darker undercurrent in the proverb underscoring how history and the archival record are controlled by survivors. In relation to the family's flight from Rwanda, these metafictional lines, therefore, draw attention both to his mother's tenacity to survive and offer her sons a stable life—captured in her aphorism about beginnings: "[e]verything that is not the end, must be the start of something else" (276)—and the many stories of migration and displacement that are erased from the records. Departing from the Renaissance use of the image of the world as a stage on which all human beings are assigned a particular role by God as the master puppeteer, Ngamije reworks and destabilizes the *theatrum mundi* metaphor and its erstwhile certainties of a divinely ordained, incontrovertible social order through a postmodern aesthetics of plurality, uncertainty, and migrancy. The novel utilizes a stage metaphor to emphasize the epochal significance of migration, not only as emblematic of our contemporary moment but also as an integral and transformative, rather than exceptional, part of society. As Albert Gier notes, later variations of the "world-as-a-stage" trope present a panoramic view of a world or community that is symbolic of the life worlds of the audience or the social existence of humankind (10). It is through this overarching framework, alongside a wider range of intertextual strategies that draw on literary and popular cultural intertexts from across the globe, that Ngamije's novel enunciates a form of worldliness and firmly places itself on a world literary stage. As such, the novel can be read through what Harry Garuba and Christopher E. W. Ouma, with reference to "the discursive construction of West African literature as world literature," term the practice of "provincializ[ing] world literature," whereby writers "first strategically position themselves on

a global plane of legibility and then reconfigure or extend the frontiers of the discourses as they are conventionally represented" (447). *The Eternal Audience of One* taps into the current global interest in displacement and migration but reframes dominant discourses on the subject by taking an intra-African angle, a narrative choice that resists the universalizing impulse of the *theatrum mundi* metaphor to transform "the migrant" into an emblem of the contemporary human condition without considering the geopolitical particularities of migration and specific migrants' lived experiences.

Séraphin's open-ended trajectories not only crystallize the novel's rethinking of migration in terms of temporal boundedness, with neat beginnings and endings, but also highlight the racialized mobility politics on the continent. One crucial instance in the novel narrates Séraphin's return journey to Windhoek from Cape Town, where he is finalizing his law degree at the fictitious Remms University during the December holidays. The Namibian border post is depicted as "a port of entry which was porous for white tourists and semi-permeable for black African nationalities who needed to prostrate themselves before the mercurial stamp-wielding gods of the immigration and border control" (Ngamije 16). Séraphin's experience of racialized border security practices—encapsulated here in the image of the all-powerful postcolonial bureaucrat—are echoed in his mother's observations about the asymmetry between black migrants who are vilified as "foreigners, or refugees, or aliens" and the framing of "white[s] [as desirable and skilled] expats" (Ngamije 121). The novel's repeated reference to racialized mobility regimes and border control thus reveals how movement across postcolonial African borders remains haunted by colonial modernity's construction of mobile black bodies as threatening. While Ngamije's novel shares the narrative focus on mobility and migration of predominantly middle-class characters with many Afropolitan novels set in the West and equally insists on "normalizing the worldliness of Africans" (Hodapp 4), Séraphin, who is "determined to be a citizen of the world" (Ngamije 33), is unable to partake in what detractors of Afropolitanism have termed the "too easy global Africanness" (Hodapp 4) and boundless mobility of Afropolitan writers and characters. Instead, Séraphin is "a citizen of a world he has not seen" (Ngamije 55), a world encountered through his immersion in reading, music, television, radio, as well as through his family's movements across eastern and southern Africa. Moreover, the narrative repeatedly reveals the precariousness and fragility of Séraphin's family's diasporic middle-class life, whose anxious striving for upward mobility and belonging is related in moments of sharp satire.

Expanding the conventional geographies of Afropolitan literature, the novel, like Duker's text, also draws attention to South Africa's complex and contradictory relationship to "Africanness" that marks Séraphin's time in Cape Town. Although offering a robust critique of South Africa's persistent grip on post-independence Namibia, which, as the text dramatizes, even after its "armed struggle against South Africa's choking apartheid embrace" (Ngamije 38), continues to live in its "shadow and in its favour" (Ngamije 121), Séraphin also upholds the center-periphery structure enforced by apartheid with Cape Town epitomizing cosmopolitan worldliness in contrast to the "stifling Windhoek confines" (Ngamije 31). Séraphin's Windhoek home is "a constant source of stress, a place of conformity, foreign family roots trying to burrow into arid Namibian soil which failed to

nourish him" (Ngamije 11). Pertinently couched in this metaphor of arduous, if not altogether impossible, rooting is Séraphin's family's unfulfilled desire for belonging that may only be achieved in the diaspora since post-1994 Rwanda is imagined as an unwelcoming space and mourned for as a forever-lost, irrecoverable homeland by his parents' generation. Rehearsing the traditional *Bildungsroman's* conflict of the *Bildungs*-hero with his familial and social surroundings, the novel stages Séraphin's attempts to break free from this stifling home environment and journey into the "world." While Séraphin associates Cape Town with adventure and unrestrained sexual exploits, he cannot escape the city's deep social fissures and injustices. Indeed, the novel in its simultaneously humorous and acerbic satirical tone presents a piercing critique of South Africa's glorified transition and the rainbow myth, particularly in its narration of the meteoric transformation of the student body at Remms university—a stand-in for the University of Cape Town—from "bleached bone-white" (Ngamije 208) to "a full-scale baptism of blackness" (Ngamije 209). The teleological narrative of liberation is steeped in the belief that, as Neil Lazarus observes, South Africa "would not decompose, as it had elsewhere on the continent, into ethnic chauvinism or class rule" (611) and is most sharply exposed by the narrative voice in the following lines: "So it came to pass that just as South Africa was ecstatically ingesting yet more collective opium, this time from the delirium of finally overcoming the apartheid myopia, two tiny countries in East Africa plunged into their own fever dreams" (Ngamije 210). By juxtaposing South Africa's first democratic elections to the radically different moment of the Rwandan civil war and genocide through a shared language of delirium, Ngamije's text calls on South Africa to situate its post-apartheid moment within a wider geography of postcolonial experiences and histories on the continent. Such an interrelational view of postcolonial histories across the continent would allow for greater consideration of how the traumatic afterlives of colonial modernity permeate the postcolonial and post-apartheid present and impact cross-continental relations.

Séraphin's friends are dubbed the "High Lords of Empireland," whose millennial "religion is the perennial here and now" (Ngamije 94), and present a microcosm of the complexities and anxieties of belonging in post-2010 South Africa while at the same time imagining new affective geographies. It is through this motley group of Séraphin's seven friends from Zimbabwe, Nigeria, Kenya, and South Africa—part "friends in foreignness" (Ngamije 241), part fellow law and Remms students—that the narrative further insists on the aforementioned normalization of migratory lives as an essential element of the post-apartheid space and, specifically, the university. Although Séraphin and his friends from Zimbabwe, Kenya, and Nigeria are uneasily situated between black and white South Africans and problematically framed alternately as either "white ally" or "better black" by students and staff, the group's annual ritual of peeing on Remms's memorial (a nod to the #RhodesMustFall protests) portrays African migrants as integral rather than marginal to the project of decolonizing the South African higher education space.

If Ngamije's framing of migration as a "normal experience" in various interviews risks downplaying the exigency of certain migrants in the face of xenophobia, as well as flattening the subtleties of different forms of migration and mobility, his novel de-exceptionalizes migration in a more nuanced way that undercuts antithetical configurations of "migrants" and "citizens" while still being

mindful not to universalize the migrant figure and homogenize diverse forms of migration. An encounter between a Namibian security guard and Séraphin's father Guillome in Windhoek offers a pointed critique of these politico-legal categories of identification when the guard avers—despite Guillome's insistence that he is a “permanent resident . . . in Namibia”—that they are both refugees “[b]ecause [they] are not home” (Ngamije 144). While initially visibly annoyed by the guard's ignorance about Rwanda and his diffuse “long-held thesis about displaced identities” (Ngamije 144), Guillome finally inquires about the guard's background and learns that he is from the north of the country and came to Windhoek in search for work: “I come here for work. Because home is no work. And if home is no work, then you cannot make home. So I come here. Like you. Refugee. I try to make home” (Ngamije 144). This encounter, then, also reads as an invitation to rethink possibilities of alliance and solidarity that might be forged through an acknowledgment of shared social marginality and migrancy across class and national divides. In this sense, the novel challenges readings of intra-African diasporic writing as an exception to southern African literatures and particularly the South African cultural and literary landscape.

#### GENDER, PRECARIOUS MIGRATION, AND “PASSING” IN *GOLD DIGGERS*

In contrast to Duker's and Ngamije's texts about upwardly mobile, middle-class migrants and diasporic subjects, Sue Nyathi's *The Gold Diggers* foregrounds more precarious forms of migration and mobility, albeit differently inflected by gender, age, language, class, etc., in its narration of the crossing of the Limpopo River—a waterscape that functions simultaneously as a symbolic boundary and connecting tissue—by a diverse group of migrants. Centering on migration from Zimbabwe to South Africa as well as the Zimbabwean diaspora in the country, the novel sheds light on the local specificities of migratory experiences in the context of shared borders and close historical, cultural, and linguistic ties. Nyathi, who grew up in Bulawayo, relocated to Johannesburg in 2008—a move that, as her website states, allowed her to “pursue . . . the idea to get published more vigorously because there was a more vibrant literary and publishing industry in South Africa” (Nyathi, “About”). As such, Nyathi's work forms part of a growing body of South African-based Zimbabwean diasporic writing that engages with the Zimbabwean political and economic crisis from the vantage point of its neighboring South Africa. It simultaneously scrutinizes South Africa's ambivalent, if not downright violent, reception of Zimbabwean migrants (see Fasselt, “Clandestine Crossings”).

Much like depictions of Zimbabwean migration to the West, these texts began to appear around 2008 in the context of deepening socioeconomic and political crises in Zimbabwe, higher levels of outmigration, intensified political violence following Zanu-PF's and Mugabe's loss of the first round of the parliamentary and presidential elections in March 2008, and the “xenophobic attacks” in South Africa. These shifts in migratory patterns need to be placed within a long and complex history of movement across the Limpopo River, which changed with the imposition of colonial borders as a result of the British colonization of the Zimbabwean plateau in 1890 when the river became “a juridical divide between the British-controlled territory of Southern Rhodesia and the Transvaal . . . under the control of the Boer



(Afrikaner)," separating "the Venda, Shangaan, Sotho, and other groups astride the Limpopo River into two polities with competing sovereignties" (Musoni 11). Similarly, Zimbabwean migration to South Africa, particularly in the context of apartheid South Africa's exploitation of labor from neighboring countries in its mines and commercial farms, is an established rather than new trope in the literatures of both countries. Writing after 2008 addresses the shift toward more permanent migration across a wide spectrum of educational, class, language, gender, and age backgrounds (Crush et al., "The Third Wave"). However, it also expands the dominant engagements of earlier male migrants—figures of the farm and mine worker, "digging for that precious gold which is not theirs" (Vera 5), or, more generally, the *Mujubheki* (Shona for "one who has been to Johannesburg") (T. Ndlovu).

Adopting a polyvocal narrative style that features a range of focalizers, Nyathi's novel follows the journeys of eight Zimbabwean migrants without the required immigration papers who seek new fortunes in "the promised land" (Nyathi) of South Africa and its "city of gold," Johannesburg. The author's focus on a group of migrants from various backgrounds—all of whom board the *umalayitsha's* (transporter's) Toyota Quantum taxi in Bulawayo and clandestinely cross the Beitbridge border to reach Johannesburg—engenders a nuanced balance between testifying to the migrants' collective struggles and the complexities of individual lived experiences that challenges monolithic representations of so-called "undocumented migrants." In its astute rewriting of the classic Jim comes to Joburg trope, the novel also brings into sharp relief the gendered nuances of the precarious migrants' departures, border crossings, and experiences in South Africa by revealing the intersecting vulnerabilities of her six migrant women characters and how women's bodies often become the very sites onto which the violence of South Africa's restrictive immigration laws are physically played out. This intricate link between gender violence and the ways in which South Africa's borders are policed and managed, powerfully surfaces in the description of the Beitbridge border town focalized through the *umalayitsha*: "Night or day, the border town never closed its eyes. Its gateposts were always wide open like the thighs of a prostitute ready to receive and expel the constant stream of traffic that descended on the border town" (Nyathi 17). These lines, in conjunction with the sexual abuse of migrant women after they cross the river, expose how patriarchal and colonial discourses of African women's hypersexuality are not only mobilized at the border but are also integral to the very processes of the border regime. After crossing the river, the group of migrants are stopped by *ogumaguma* (gangs operating in the border region), who, as "self-proclaimed border agents" (Musoni 142), order the migrants to strip naked and search them for money and valuables. The narrative illustrates how the passage across the border is negotiated over women's bodies when one of the bandits select Thulisiwe, a young woman accompanying one of the transporters, as their victim and grant the others passage. The momentary shift in narrative perspective to Thulisiwe when the transporter does not come to her defense becomes a powerful illustration of how migrants' precarity operates differentially and highlights the violence meted out against women's bodies by all the actors involved.

Nyathi's extensive use of prolepsis interlaced with the narration of the group's border crossing into South Africa affords us more detailed insights into the women's different motivations for departure. As a result, the text counters

what Dohra Ahmad describes as the “simplistic, unidirectional immigration narrative by acknowledging migrants as people with deep histories . . . that predate their migration” (xxiii) and, moreover, resists dominant images of “the anguished or traumatised African woman . . . as a symbol of ‘suffering Africa’” (Lewis 15)—images that are frequently perpetuated in representations of African women’s migration to South Africa. While most of the women characters, like the male migrants in the novel, seek better opportunities, their migration is also prompted by victimization and restrictive traditional gender expectations. Whereas a yearlong sexual abuse by her father and deadly revenge are presented as the primary reasons for Chenai’s flight from Bulawayo, Portia hopes to break out of her circumscribed role as dutiful daughter-in-law and sedentary homemaker in her mother-in-law’s poverty-stricken rural homestead; Lindani—whose life prior to her departure to South Africa is narrated in detail in Nyathi’s debut *The Polygamist* (2012)—decides in a chance encounter with the *umalayitsha* Melusi that he “would be her meal ticket until her future looked more certain” (Nyathi 86) and spontaneously accompanies him on the journey to South Africa. Read together, these accounts complicate the dominant focus on Zimbabwe’s so-called “crisis migration” in public discourse and disrupt wide-held perceptions of African women as passive and dependent migrants. Recent literary engagements with the Zimbabwean crisis by authors located in the West as, Isaac Ndlovu notes, read both as “instances of disruption and rapprochement, resistance, and conformity” (107) to the expectations of the global literary market and, according to Akin Adesokan, a readership “invested in the representation of contemporary Africa as a site of perennial political and humanitarian emergencies” (11). In South Africa, where sensationalist images of Zimbabweans “flooding” the country are circulated by local media, Nyathi has to negotiate similar market pressures but is also writing in a context of a long history of cross-border ties that she mobilizes to resist demands for the exotic.

In Johannesburg, some of the women, as I have shown elsewhere (Fasselt, “Precarious Crossings”), erase their migrant heritage in an attempt to pass as South African, which presents itself as a viable escape route out of their precarious lives as migrant woman. For example, Portia and Chenai’s mother, Sibongile—who has lived in Johannesburg for some time prior to her daughter’s arrival—uses a strategic blending in and performance of national belonging to evade xenophobic rhetoric, deportation, and facilitate upward economic mobility. It is particularly through the depiction of “passing” in terms of nationality that the text reveals the precarious position of Zimbabwean migrant women in South Africa, the strictures and narrow conceptualization of South African belonging and citizenship but also emphasizes their porous borders. Sibongile, a Ndebele speaker and former history teacher who works as a domestic worker in Johannesburg, for a long time withholds her migratory background “preferring to be synonymous with her South African friends” (Nyathi 98) and other domestic workers who “complain bitterly . . . about how their own children could not get jobs because of all the Zimbabweans who were now living illegally in their country” (Nyathi 100). While this strategic performance of South Africanness affords Sibongile, Portia, and Dumisani (a fellow traveler from Bulawayo) an opportunity for economic survival and success, it also means living with the constant fear of being detected and generates a perpetual sense of instability

and impermanence. Commenting on the practice of racial passing in the United States, Nadine Ehlers writes that “while passing may undercut systems of inequality through granting the individual access to white racial privilege, it also works to undercut itself” given that “[i]t is predicated on the imperative to not be detected,” which means that “the threat it represents cannot be registered” (125). Yet Nyathi’s narrative consistently visibilizes the “threat” of passing through its foregrounding of performativity in different passages of figural narration, illuminating that passing is also “about demanding appreciation of the idea that all identities are processual, intersubjective, and contested/contestable” (Jackson and Jones 14). Reworking the apartheid narrative of racial passing that has been deemed as outdated in the post-apartheid context, Nyathi shows how passing is a timely form to comment on the precarious position of Zimbabwean migrants in South Africa as well as the arbitrary construction of borders and boundaries that demands rethinking of transnational forms of relationality.

## CONCLUSION: TOWARD EXPANDING GEOGRAPHIES OF AFRICAN DIASPORIC WRITING

Much recent scholarship has attempted to complicate the idea of Afropolitan writing as a single, grand narrative of “Africa *rising*” (Dabiri 106), featuring upwardly mobile African characters and oriented mainly toward Western audiences’ tastes and ideas of “Africa.” Similarly, the emergent body of South African-based intra-African diasporic writing by authors such as Yewande Omotoso, Ekow Duker, Rémy Ngamije, Sue Nyathi, and others demands that Afropolitan diasporic writing become unfettered from such a formulaic singularity to fully acknowledge its multifocal orientation and diverse geographies beyond the hegemonic South-North paradigm. Narrativizing the multifaceted experiences of intra-African diasporic subjects, these texts conceptualize contemporary migration, mobility, and diaspora in a way that both adheres to the demands of the global literary market of what Zeleza terms “the formulaic focus on transnational and migrant subjectivities and textualities” (“Introduction” 14) in recent African literature, but also resists such dictates through their insistence on plurality and multiaxiality. This cannot easily be molded into the binary constructs such as of migrant trauma and otherness versus celebratory integration into the script of neoliberal globalism, a unified diaspora tied to an originary homeland versus migratory and diasporic selves untethered to collective identities, exceptionalized mobility versus normalized sedentariness and Western-oriented Afropolitan writing versus continental-based literature grounded in an “authentic” African “everyday life.” Where Duker juxtaposes the injurious discourse of colorism with certain “bodily ideals” (Matsinhe 303) as indexes of belonging in South Africa with an understanding of kinship outside the confines of patrilinear genealogies that structure both the national and diasporic family unit, Ngamije draws on the *theatrum mundi* metaphor to de-exceptionalize migration without, however, crafting his characters as representatives of a decontextualized figure of the contemporary “African migrant.” In her focus on precarious migrancy and gender, Nyathi dramatizes the arbitrary construction of borders and boundaries in the southern African context through the practice of passing.

If, as Kwame Appiah argues, “African literature in the metropolitan languages . . . reflects in many subtle ways the historical encounter between Africa and the West” (20), the position of African diasporic writers in the local South African literary marketplace equally mirrors South Africa’s complex and contradictory relationship to “Africanness.” Even if, as Helgesson writes, “no coherent South African literary-historical narrative will ever present itself” (416), it seems indisputable that the contemporary South African literary landscape is beginning to be shaped by intra-African diasporic writers who bring diverse geographies of the continent, as well as a multiplicity of forms and scales of migrancy into conversation with South African literary traditions, questioning conceived ideas about who produces literature in South Africa and insisting on different conceptualizations of belonging. Seeking such alternative notions of belonging that position movement and ongoing home-making as shared rather than exceptionalizing practices and modes of becoming, Yewande Omotoso asks in her reflections on Johannesburg: “what it will take to finally be from *here*. . . . This is Jo’burg, after all; who, really, is *from* here? It seems whoever you speak to tells you a story of how their parents or their parents’ parents arrived. Isn’t that the essence of city-ness, a place we *make* home?” (“Ways”).

## NOTES

1. Narrated through the twin accounts of father and son—Oscar, a mixed-race doctoral student and university lecturer of Nigerian and South African parentage, and Leke, whom his “colored” mother Elaine gives up for adoption to a white South African couple when Oscar is imprisoned for a murder he has not committed—the multi-stranded, achronological novel traces a range of movements between South Africa and Nigeria next to detailing Leke’s alienating experience as a second-generation diasporic subject in Cape Town in the post-2000s. Although initially resembling a “return to roots” format, Leke’s engagement with his Yoruba background through Oscar’s letters steeped in Yoruba myth and storytelling resists essentialist notions of recovery and diasporic homecoming. Rather, the novel’s final scenes—Leke’s visit to a sangoma to lift a longstanding family curse on his father’s side of the family—gesture toward the multiplicity of affiliations, histories, and cosmologies that shape Leke’s diasporic subjectivity straddling Yoruba and Xhosa cosmologies and the largely secular world of his adoptive parents but also his biological mother’s history of trauma and abuse.

2. Defying narrow national affiliations in favor of highlighting the complexities and ambiguities of literary belonging, Wanner understands herself more broadly as an African or pan-African writer, calling into question easy divisions between migration narratives produced by South African authors and writers from other parts of the continent. She says: “I am not the one who determines who claims me. I think of my identity as primarily African” (*The Herald*).

3. This is not to suggest that some of these texts cannot be categorized as both crime fiction and migration/diasporic writing. See, for example, Hawa Jande Golakai’s works.

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