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**BETWEEN EMPATHY AND APATHY:
LIMINALITY AND THE NEW DIASPORIC
SPACE OF “TRANSNATIONALITY”**

Ineke Jolink

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Between Empathy and Apathy: Liminality and the New Diasporic Space of "Transnationality"

Ineke Jolink

In her 2005 article "Bye-Bye Babar" or "What is an Afropolitan,"¹ the novelist Taiye Selasi describes a party at London's Medicine Bar, drawing a vivid picture of what she calls "cultural hybridity," where, she says, "even the DJ is an ethnic fusion: Nigerian and Romanian," and she continues:

Were you to ask any of these beautiful, brown-skinned people that basic question – 'where are you from?' – you'd get no single answer from a single smiling dancer. This one lives in London but was raised in Toronto and born in Accra; that one works in Lagos but grew up in Houston, Texas. 'Home' for this lot is many things: where their parents are from; where they go for vacation; where they went to school; where they see old friends; where they live (or live *this* year). Like so many African young people working and living in cities around the globe, they belong to no single geography, but feel at home in many.

These "Afropolitans: not citizens, but Africans of the world," Selasi explains, are the children of those "young, gifted and broke," who, starting in the 1960s, had "left Africa in pursuit of higher education and happiness abroad." Indeed, as she notes, between 1960 and 1975, they were some 27,000 and between 1975 and 1984 another 40,000, doubling again by 1987. Selasi, herself a child of this generation, with two successful medical doctors as parents, emphasizes "the extent to which the modern adolescent African is tasked to forge a sense of self from wildly disparate sources." And she adds: "You'd never know it, looking at those dapper lawyers in global firms, but most were once supremely self-conscious of being so 'in

¹ *The LIP Magazine*. thelip.robertsharp.co.uk/?p=76; accessed 15-08-2015

between”’—what she has called “lost in transnation,” with perhaps a wink to the well-known 2003 Sofia Coppola film *Lost in Translation*.²

Notwithstanding this in-betweenness and lostness of “the baby-Afropolitan,” as she puts it, Selasi sees the position as privileged. She writes:

To ‘be’ Nigerian is to belong to a passionate nation; to be Yoruba, to be heir to a spiritual depth; to be American, to ascribe to a cultural breadth; to be British, to pass customs quickly. That is, this is what it means for me – and that is the Afropolitan privilege.

Indeed, Selasi herself is a good example of the Afropolitan, Nigerian on her mother’s side and Ghanaian on her father’s, having been born in London, raised in Massachusetts, graduated from Yale and Oxford, and now living in Rome, and, we must assume, at ease in all these places.

Selasi’s term Afropolitan immediately hit the spot, but not always positively, as is shown, for instance, by the Round Table discussion “Fantasy or Reality? Afropolitan Narratives of the 21st Century” at the *Africa Writes 2013 Festival*.³ The critic Okwunodu Ogbechi, in his paper “Afropolitanism - Africa without Africans,”⁴ focuses, for instance, on the way in which a small group of African artists is able to commercialize African art forms for western markets, exploiting the African population just as the West has always done, while to Emma Dabiri, in her contribution “Why I’m Not An Afropolitan,”⁵ this type of criticism can be likened to that pronounced against second-wave feminists, who, as she puts it, “failed to identify their privilege as white and middle class, claiming to speak for all women,” because, as she says, “while we may all be Africans, there is a huge gap between my African experience and my father’s houseboys.”

In contrast to most people on the African continent—or in the West for that matter—Selasi’s Afropolitans, these new-world citizens, seem to move fluently from one context to the other in this “new diasporic space,” within the hybridity, or overlap, of “transnationality.” Even if Selasi talks of “lost in transnation,” the position is considered a privileged one. The

² This article was first presented orally as “Between Empathy and Apathy: Into the New Diasporic Space of Transnationality,” at the International Conference of the Collegium for African American Research (CAAR) *Mobilising Memory: Creating African Atlantic Identities*, Liverpool, England (June 24-27, 2015). It was published in *Homage à Claude Cohen-Safir*, Hanane Boutenbat, Stéphanie Genty and Gérald Préher eds. (Université Paris 8 Vincennes Saint- Denis, 2017), pp. 199-213. A revised version was delivered as a lecture at the Transitions Seminar organized by The LIMEN Research Group (UAM) online on 14 December 2022. A video recording of the session is available at http://www.limenandtext.com/rst_online%20videos.html.

³ africawrites.org ; accessed 15-08-2015.

⁴ aachronym.blogspot.com/.../afropolitanism-more-africa-without; accessed 15-08-2015.

⁵ africasacountry.com/2014/01/why-im-not-an-afropolitan; accessed 15-08-2015.

question I am posing myself, then, is where in recent immigration *novels* the liminality or “in-betweenness” of the first generation turns into the hybridity, or overlap of the second and, related to this, where they place themselves between *empathy* and *apathy* (that is, between the fullness of passion for their roots and the lack of this). I chose for this project three novels published in 2013,⁶ one of which I will focus on: Taije Selasi’s own highly acclaimed debut novel *Ghana Must Go*.

The classic immigration novel can be seen as one long *rite de passage*, but a failed one, where the subject never really reaches the other side of the divide. In fact, much of American literature places itself within this space of transition, in which the individual or group hovers, as it were, on the threshold of a “new world,” alienated both from its original and from its adoptive culture. American literature, then, can be seen as an evolving collection of immigrant literatures and the great American theme, as many critics have argued, is alienation.

With its title *Ghana Must Go* Selasi’s novel situates itself immediately within the alienation of a deported people, as it refers to the “Ghana Must Go” ruling of the winter of 1983, when Nigeria deported at least 300.000 Ghanaians, the phrase, to this day naming the type of bag that people from Ghana were forced to pack their belongings in: the “Ghana must Go Tote Bag.” The in-betweenness that this deportation has caused in the people involved forms the deepest level of *liminality* in the novel.

As we know, the term *liminality* is related to the Latin *limen*, meaning *threshold*—a piece of stone or wood that is crossed when one enters a building or goes from one room to the next inside a building, an ever-so-short in-between space. This is actually the opening image of the book:

Kweku dies barefoot on a Sunday before sunrise, his slippers by the doorway to the bedroom like dogs. At the moment he is on the threshold between sunroom and garden... (3).

Indeed, when the father of the Sai family, Kweku, dies suddenly of a heart attack, he does so “on the threshold” of his house, the threshold being the classical form of spatial liminality. Not only that, he does so “before sunrise”⁷—dawn, the in-between of night and day, together with dusk, the in-between of day and night, forming the two most basic temporal liminalities.

⁶ Adichie, Chimamanda Ngozi. *Americanah*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2013; Bulawayo, NoViolet. *We Need New Names*. New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2013; Selasi, Taije. *Ghana Must Go*. New York: Penguin, 2013.

⁷ It is a well-established medical fact that “the peak hours for sudden cardiac death [...] occur between 6 AM and 10 AM,” www.prevention.com/.../prevent-early-morning-heart-attack; accessed 30-04-2015.

And if this were not enough, his sudden death happens “on a Sunday,” in the in-between of two working weeks, a cultural liminality. On top of all this, Kweku had come to America as a medical student, married his Nigerian wife Folasadé there, and raised a family of four children—a son, Olu, a pair of twins, daughter Taiwo and son Kehinde, and the benjamin of the family, daughter Sadie—before he returned, alone and estranged, to his native country Ghana and dies there suddenly.

The three-part novel—tracing the life of a couple of what Selasi called the “young, gifted and broke [...] in pursuit of higher education and happiness”—in fact dedicates all of its first 90 pages to an in-depth exploration of the temporal liminalities of dying, as the text puts it: the “forty minutes on average between onset and death” that intervene “between first pang and last breath” (7). His dying taking place within the “odd sense of pause” of a Sunday morning—with time “suspended between darkness and daybreak”—Kweku is “suspended with it, adrift in the grey” (62). These liminalities are emphasised linguistically by their simple present tenses, as well as by repeated conditionals:

Had he continued out of the sunroom [...] [m]ost likely he'd noticed the constriction in the chest [...]. Would have tracked down the heparin [...]. Would have called his friend Benson, another Ghanian from Hopkins [...]. Would have gotten ahold of Benson, agreed to meet him at the hospital. Would have found his sneakers [...]. Would have tried to think [...]. Would have glanced at the clock. Would have driven to the hospital [...]. Would have noticed (62-63).

These present tenses and conditionals are flanked on one side by the past tenses of memories that go through the protagonist's mind and on the other by the future tense of the reactions of his children. Indeed, it is in the “in-between” of these two temporal positions—past and future—that the “unexceptional heart attack” occurring to an “exceptional surgeon” (7) positions itself, with the “pangs” that announce it forcing the doctor into the present, standing for everything fragile, vulnerable, and ephemeral that he, educated to minister to their opposites—health, protection, and survival—had not wanted to see. Indeed, cut off from the past, “at the moment he is on the threshold, transfixed by the garden,” Kweku asks himself: “*How in the world he has missed this?*” (21; italics in the text). Cut off from the missed occasions for enjoyment in the past, the doctor is now also cut off from the future.

This first concerns the question that his oldest son, Olu, will pose himself concerning the “pangs” that happen in “those snatches of silence between trigger and action when the challenge of the minute is the sole focus of the mind and the whole world slows down as to watch what will happen” (7). Himself a successful physician, Olu knows, and he knows his father knows, that such “pangs” demand immediate action. So, the question will haunt him

from then on into the future: why did his father do nothing to save himself? What “*arrested him*” (8; italics in the text).

Secondly, this concerns the question that his oldest daughter, Taiwo, will ask herself: “*where were his slippers?*” (37; italics in the text). This is an even more haunting question, as she has asked herself the same question over the years, in unguarded moments, “when it slip[ped] in disguise through a crack in the wall she and Kehinde [her twin brother] erected” (37). Selasi writes:

It was the one thing they forgot to erase from their stories, [...] not a moment or a memory, a remembered detail in an anecdote, but a detail in *every* anecdote, omnipresent, the ground. So they missed them, didn’t delete them, let them stay where they were, where they’ve remained, present, latent, fomenting the past.

The slippers (39; italics in the text).

These two haunting questions form a bridge from the future back to the past, pointing directly to the liminal position of their father, a brilliant boy who had wanted to be a doctor to make up for his sister’s dying from treatable TB in Ghana, and who had received a scholarship to the US that would take him forever away from his people. Olu, for one, remembers how, as a child, he noticed the liminal position of his immigrant-father:

For all of his life when he’d looked for his father [...] scanning quickly to spot Kweku’s face in the bleachers at meets or the seats at recitals, he’d scanned for the contrast, first and foremost for brown. A bluish color brown appropriately likened to chocolate and coffee, the complexion that he had himself—and that no one else had, no other father in Boston (247).

And on the one occasion he had visited his father after his return to Ghana, Olu sees him “singular, without the benefit of contrast, without the backdrop (on white) and *still* different (on brown)” (247; italics in the text). Indeed, at the airport he observes from a distance an unexpectedly small man,

[...] thinning hair neatly cut, those same wire-frame glasses, scientist-immigrant glasses, the same ones as wore his professors at Yale (as if all nonwhite postgrads in America in the seventies had arrived from their homelands and received the same pair). [...] just a man in a crowd with an odd sort of bearing, a stranger in Accra as in Boston (248).

The feelings of Olu’s mother, Kweku’s estranged wife Folasadé, thinking back to her life—first in Nigeria, where her father was murdered and her mother died in childbirth, then being taken to Ghana and to America, where she studied to be a lawyer but became a florist,

giving up her career to support her husband's studies—lend subjectivity to this image of a "no-where-man":

Whether this house or that one, this passport or that, whether Baltimore or Lagos or Boston or Accra, whether expensive clothes or hand-me-downs or florist or lawyer or life or death—didn't much matter in the end. If one could die identityless, estranged from all contexts, then one could live estranged from all context as well (107).

The text, here, draws a clear picture of Selasi's "Afropolitan" position, except that its liminal status lacks any sense of freedom or privilege.

The most liminal figures in the novel, however, are the twins, presented in the Yoruba myth of *ibeji* (twins) as:

two halves of one spirit, a spirit too massive to fit in one body, and liminal beings, half human, half deity, to be honored, even worshipped accordingly. The second twin specifically—the changeling and the trickster, less fascinated by the affairs of the world than the first—comes to earth with great reluctance and remains with greater effort, homesick for the spiritual realms. On the eve of their birth into physical bodies, this skeptical second twin says to the first, "Go out and see if the world is good. If it's good, stay there. If it's not, come back." The first twin Taiyewo (from the Yoruba *to aije wo*, "to see and taste the world," shortened *Taiye* [the author's own name] or *Taiwo*) obediently leaves the womb on her reconnaissance mission and likes the world enough to remain. Kehinde (from the Yoruba *kehin de*, "to arrive next"), on noting that this other half hasn't returned, sets out at his leisure to join his Taiyewo, deigning to assume human form. The Yoruba thus consider Kehinde the elder: born second, but wiser, so "older" (83; italics in the text).

Indeed, if it is the first twin, Taiwo, who remembers the concrete aspects of it—the question of their father's slippers—it is the second twin, Kehinde, who is cursed with the knowledge of what had actually happened to enclose this specific family within the liminal.

Even if their father was able to build a brilliant career as a surgeon, this does not save him from being accused of malpractice when he is forced into operating on a patient whose appendicitis is too far advanced, and he is afterwards blamed for her death. At the age of twelve, Taiwo had found her father in the living-room at night, asleep and obviously drunk, "still in blue scrubs, lightly spattered with red, as if he'd left the OR and gone straight to the car" (44). The slippers he always wore had slipped from his feet, exposing the soles she had never seen, "chafed, calloused, raw, the skin black in some places, puffed at the toes. It was as if he'd quite literally crossed burning sands barefoot" (46). Intuitively Taiwo knows she has to hide these traces of her father's childhood sufferings, hurrying to put the slippers back

on his feet, while he mumbles in his sleep “no” and “It was too late” (46). From this moment on, every time Taiwo thinks of her father—“when the thought slips in slyly through that crack in the wall—and the picture of him dead in a garden slips with it, his soles purpled, naked, for anyone to see—she’ll ask herself hopelessly, ‘Where were his slippers?’ and, as she did when she was twelve, she’ll start to cry” (46).

But while she did not understand what had happened, the second twin, Kehinde, born second but wiser and thus older, did. Fired from his job—which is not only unjust, and racist, but impossible to acknowledge after all the sacrifices that were made by others for him—Kweku continues to pretend for eleven months that he still works at the hospital, before he is dragged out of the building before the eyes of this youngest twin, the knowing one:

[...] but here Kehinde was: appearing calmly in the lobby at precisely the same moment two men dragged a madman across it.

“Get your hands off me!” he was shouting at the security guards [while one of his colleagues responded] “He’s *not* a doctor here, excuse me! He was fired! Last year!”

Just as Kehinde appeared.

Just like that (79; italics in the text).

After this, the father, Kweku, sees no other possibility than to disappear, leaving wife and children forever. As a result, the twins are sent to Lagos, to spend some time with their mother’s family, where, instead of finding their African roots, they learn to loath Taiwo’s light color and become, at the age of 13, the victims of severe sexual abuse.

The children of this family, it is clear, are no Afropolitans. Only the oldest son, Olu, has managed a successful career, as a doctor, like his father. Still, being extremely organized, extremely meticulous, rigid even, there is in him no trace of the freedom or privilege of the Afropolitan position. And to the youngest daughter, Sadie, their position is not one of privilege either. Compared to the old-stock Americans around her, she thinks:

It is that they are weightless, the Sais, scattered fivesome, a family without gravity, completely unbound. With nothing as heavy as money beneath them, all pulling them down to the same piece of earth, a vertical axis, nor roots spreading out underneath them, with no living grandparent, no history, a horizontal—they’ve floated, have scattered, drifting outward, or inward, barely noticing when someone has slipped off the grid (146-147).

This passage strikes one with its multiple negations: its prefix *un-*, its suffix *-less*, its preposition *without*, its noun *nothing*, its participles *nor* and *no*, and its verbs denoting a lack of stability: *scattered*, *pulling down*, *float*, *drifting*, *slipped off*. No “Afropolitan” freedom or privilege, obviously, for Sadie, nor for the twins: the sister Taiwo, who starts a relationship

with the Dean of her law school and drops out when he forsakes her (129; 175), and the brother Kehinde, an artist, who makes a suicide attempt—"thin T's into both of his wrists as a way out of the hurting" (165)—spends time in a clinic afterwards, and is now hiding from his family.

So, what the Afropolitan position, in this novel, shows is basically an absence, an emptiness, a void, both within the family and without, in the larger social and even national context. Indeed, the individual members of the Sai family survive without any real ties, to each other or to others, either in the US or in Africa, in a state of *a-pathy*, of being lost within a limbo where even the emotion of suffering has worn off. But the death of the father proves a turning point. Having come to Ghana for his funeral, they finally learn about him and visit ancient relatives. Most of all, however, they learn about each other and about themselves.

To start with the older brother, Olu is forced to give up the "order and cleanliness" he has established together with his wife Ling—"the clean way they chitchat, never arguing, never lying, never asking for truths" (302)—as he now finds in their place "a large, messy silence, subsuming, like damp" (303). At this moment, standing in the doorway, the same position of the threshold that his father last occupied, he "hears in this silence his heart beating hard, to the sound of her breaths" (303).

Let me draw your attention, here, to the attributive clause *He hears his heart beating hard*, consisting of the attributive verb *hear* and its complement *his heart beating hard*, a so-called *small-clause*. In the linguist Frederieke van der Leek's definition, the term *small-clause* refers to the complement of a mental activity verb either with a nonfinite verb without the marker *to* or with a verb in the progressive tense.⁸ The small-clause, in fact, is one of four types of complements of a mental activity verb—such as to hear, to see, to wonder, to doubt, to believe, to know, to conclude etc.—the other forms being: the *that-clause*, the *how-clause* and the *to-infinitive clause*. In this order they convey a decreasing epistemic evaluation of the attributed experience, from a conclusion partly or wholly based on prior knowledge (the *that-clause*) to an evaluation of a process witnessed (the *how-clause*), to an evaluation based on immediately available information (the *to-infinitive clause*) and finally to an expression of "raw experience" (the *small-clause*). Indeed, in contrast to the other types of complements of mental activity verbs, the *small-clause* is non-epistemic—in that it makes no reference whatsoever to a truth judgment by either the narrator or the character. In other words, it allows for the expression of experience without any intellectual mediation, 'raw' as it were.

⁸ "Significant Syntax: The Case of Exceptional Passives." DWPELL 27 (1992): 1-28.

From a narratological point of view, one might consider the series from *that-clause* all the way to *small-clause* in terms of a decreasing distance between narrator and character. The well-known narratologist Dorrit Cohn, in her work *Transparent Minds: Narrative Modes for Presenting Consciousness*, for instance, distinguishes two different ways of narrating consciousness, or psycho-narration: one that is “dominated by a prominent narrator who, even as he focuses intently on an individual psyche, remains emphatically distanced from the consciousness he narrates,” which she calls *dissonant*, and, on the other hand, one that is “mediated by a narrator who remains effaced and who readily fuses with the consciousness he narrates,” which she calls *consonant* (Cohn 26). She talks in this respect of *narrated monologue*, a form of free indirect discourse specifically concerned with mental verbs.⁹ The way she explains it, *narrated monologue* appears “as a kind of mask, from behind which sounds the voice of a figural mind,” meanwhile

cast[ing] a peculiarly penumbral light on the figural consciousness, suspending it on the threshold of verbalization in a manner that cannot be achieved by direct quotation (Cohn 103).

It is interesting for us that Cohn chooses, here, the liminal imagery of “penumbral light”—shadowy and indefinite—to talk about this narrative mode. Equally interesting is the image of the “threshold” that she uses here, the archetypal image of liminality—and the suspension on it, together with the penumbral light that characterizes the in-between of light and dark, of night and day, one of the typically liminal tropes of the Gothic.

Yes, we *can* consider the small-clause as a gold-mine for the depiction of the various forms of threshold experience, in the border-space between dissonant and consonant psycho-narration. In fact, because it conveys phenomena as experienced rather than epistemically, without passing judgment as to what is real in the outside world, it is associated with limited, disturbed or altered consciousness, when intellectual mediation is underdeveloped, degenerated or temporarily dysfunctional, such as those connected with mental retardation, mental illness, epilepsy, situations of extreme mental stress or exhaustion, but also of dreamlike, hypnotic, hallucinatory states, and the exalted states associated with religion and

⁹ The often-used terms for this narrative mode—*free indirect discourse*, *style indirect libre* (in French) and *erlebte rede* (in German)—are considered too broad by Cohn, who uses *narrated monologue* strictly as a term for rendering consciousness, figural thought—in French, *pensée avec* (Cohn 111)—not the broader subject of discourse (Cohn 109f.).

the poetic sublime—on which I have published elsewhere¹⁰—not to forget simply the redeeming emptiness that the cleaning of the slates of daily preoccupations can provide. The new possibilities that the liminal void can open up may entail an ever so short liberation from all conventions. This may make a new form of understanding possible, an epiphany, as is the case here. In “Betwixt and Between: The Liminal Period in *Rites de Passage*,” from *The Forest of Symbols: Aspects of Ndembu Ritual* (1967), Victor Turner writes: “Liminality may perhaps be regarded as the Nay to all positive structural assertions, but as in some sense the source of them all, and, more than that, as a realm of pure possibility whence novel configurations of ideas and relations may arise” (1967: 97).

After this theoretic intermezzo, let us return now to the passage depicting Olu’s state of mind and the linguistic form that the narrator has chosen to do so:

- not the intellectualizing attributive that-clause “he hears that his heart is beating hard”;
- not the mechanical attributive how-clause “he hears how his heart is beating hard”
- not the simple to-infinitive clause “he hears his heart to be beating hard.”
- but the intuitive small-clause “he hears his heart beating hard”

Indeed, Olu’s state of upheaval, and the emotional break-through this causes, are effectively set in motion through a single *small-clause*, which presents the letting go of his rigid control, so that *a-pathy*—this emptiness of feeling—can lift, and he is able to share,

¹⁰ See, for instance, Ineke Jolink: “Liminality and Linguistics: A Stylistic Analysis of Grace King’s *Balcony Stories*,” in Melissa Walker Heidari and Brigitte Zaugg (eds.), *Nineteenth-Century Southern Women Writers: Grace King and Modernism*. New York, Routledge, 2020, pp. 61-76; “Desperate Powerfulness or Powerful Desperation: The Female Body in Melanie Wallace’s *Blue Horse Dreaming*,” in *Femmes et Pouvoir, Women in Power*. Paris: Résonances, 2019, pp. 231-245; “The In-Between of Jazz and the Blues: Beyond Marginality in Esi Edugyan’s *Half-Blood Blues*,” in *Écritures minoritaires de la mémoire dans les Amériques: Memorial Minor Writings in the America*. Anne Garrait and Christine Dualé, eds. Clermont Ferrand UP, 2019. As Ineke Bocking, for instance: “An Interdisciplinary Approach to the Gothic Heart of Gaines’s *The Autobiography of Jane Pittman*,” in *Approaches to Teaching The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman and Other Works*. New York: Modern Language Association, 2019, pp. 35-47; “Aspects of Liminality in Vladimir Nabokov’s *Lolita*,” in Ada Savin (ed.), *Migration and Exile: Charting New Literary and Artistic Territories*, Newcastle upon Tyne, Cambridge, England, Scholars Publishing, 2013, pp. 73-81; “Ferveur religieuse et approche cognitive de la proposition réduite,” in *Mélanges de science religieuse*, Catholic University of Lille, France, 2013, pp. 45-56; “The Importance of Deixis and Attributive Style for the study of Theory of Mind: The Example of William Faulkner’s Disturbed Characters,” in Paula Leverage, Howard Mancing and Richard Schweickert, eds, *Theory of Mind and Literature*, West-Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 2012, pp. 175-187.

with his wife Ling and from his liminal position, "lean[ing] on the doorframe," what is a painful truth:

The man came from nothing; he struggled, I *know*. I *want* to be proud of him. Of all he accomplished. I know he accomplished so much. But I can't. I hate him for living in that dirty apartment. I hate him for being that African man. I hate him for hurting my mother, for leaving, for dying, I hate him for dying alone (306; italics in the text).

As you see, the control of "I *know*," "I *want*," "I know" can now be broken down to a—for Olu— uncharacteristic "I can't," which turns out to be liberating and allows him to finally hear Ling's voice, her consoling words "Maybe it was the best he could do" (306).

Turning to the twins now, when Kehinde and Taiwo experience the moment that brings them together, there is, once again, the image of the heart, linking it to the final moments of their father's life, as well as the rare appearance of the *small-clause* introducing it:

He [Kehinde] *feels his heart swell*" (308; my emphasis).

By avoiding the *that-clause*, the *how-clause* and the *to-infinitive clause*—"He feels that his heart swells"; "He feels how his heart swells" and "He feels his heart to swell" respectively—in favor of the *small-clause*, the text breaks down the borders that had come to divide the twins at the time of their sexual abuse, when Kehinde was forced, for the amusement of the grown-ups watching them, to become aroused over his sister's body. This issue is too heavy for words, but the *small-clause* allows for an opening, which gives the *a-pathy* that had existed between them ever since, a chance of being conquered.

Likewise, the youngest sister, Sadie, the bulimic, "unpretty one" (268), takes a step towards overcoming *her a-pathy*, this time on a visit to her father's native village. For this scene, Selasi uses once more the image of the heart, linking up again with the father's broken heart. And once more there is the sudden appearance of the linguistic structure of the *small-clause*:

She's never been particularly drawn to this music, to African drumming, though she wonders why not: the reaction is visceral, *she feels her heart slow, or succumb* to this new form of beating (267; my emphasis).

Here also, Selasi avoids the attributive *that-clause* "She feels that her heart slows," as well as the *how-clause* "She feels how her heart slows" and the *to-infinitive clause* "She feels her heart to slow," in favor of the "raw," unmediated experience that the *small-clause* conveys.

Thus, the experience can only intensify when Sadie accepts an invitation to dance:

No one will know what it is in this moment that overwhelms Sadie, not even Sadie herself, as the insistent lead dancer catches hold of her elbow and repeats, tugging gently, "Please sees-tah, please come." [...] There are tears in Sadie's eyes that will fall if she doesn't, so she stares at the ground, at the girl's small bare feet. One two, one two, one two, one two. A surrogate heartbeat. Calmer and surer. She takes a few steps. *Hears the onlookers cheering*" (269; my emphasis).

Once more, the liberating moment is conveyed *not* through the *that-clause* "Hears that the onlookers are cheering," *nor* through the *how-clause* "Hears how the onlookers are cheering" or the *to-infinitive clause* "Hears the onlookers to be cheering," but instead through another *small-clause*. Here it creates a trance that, without the posturing of Afropolitanism, moves the individual character out of the limen and grounds her in the fullness of passion that is *em-pathy*, and the sharedness of suffering that is *com-passion*. Perhaps it is now that they can become real Afropolitans.

These subtle re-positionings of the members of the Sai family within the new diasporic space of "transnationality"—each time presented through the extraordinary linguistic form of the small-clause allowing the narrator to enter the liminal space between self and other—show that the accomplished novelist succeeds better in her fiction than in an essay, when it comes to presenting the complexities of Afropolitans caught within the liminality of *a-pathy* and *em-pathy*.

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