Conceptual Historiography

Afropolitan[ism], Global African [Futurity] & Digital Space as Place

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Introduction

Contemporarily, scholars have acknowledged that the internet and social media function as a primary site for connection, identity formation, and political organization for marginalized communities as can be seen via online communities such as Black Twitter, and hashtag echo chambers on social media sites. Scholars across fields such as Cultural Studies, Digital Humanities, Sociology, Black Studies, and Information Technology have recognized the utility of the internet and the digital space more largely as a traceable phenomenon with material implications for interpersonal relationships, identity affirmation, and even social movement organizing (Ransby, 2018). Take for instance, the utility of the social media site Twitter in creating an online space for Black people to connect with one another through the sub space of "Black Twitter" (Ransby, 2018) While Black twitter was not a formalized digital ecosystem its potential was fully realized as it contributed directly to the organizational goals and communications of the Black Lives Matter Movement (Ransby, 2018). This digital phenomenon was the result of the power of the hashtag "#BlackLivesMatter" which compiled and circulated information regarding police brutality and violence against Black people on twitter. According to Ransby this hashtag was tweeted approximately a hundred thousand times a day between 2013-2017 (2018).

With attention to the progression of this conception of online communities, this has taken a more overt tone as tech companies are beginning to develop "digital nations" or "network states" in order to posit the utility of digital technology as a potential space for national or cultural identity formulation (Brock, 2022) More specifically, this conceptual historiographical analysis emerges directly out of my master's thesis in Pan-African Studies which aims to explore

the Afropolitan digital platform which intends to create a "digital nation" for African people across global Africa (or the diaspora). Further, the ultimate research question for the thesis project is as follows: What tensions exist between the Afropolitan digital platform's stated vision of African futurity and the lived experiences of its platform members, and how do these tensions reveal contemporary conceptions of global Africanness and Pan-Africanism in the digital space? Consequently, this research integrates a variety of concepts in order to examine the Afropolitan Digital Platforms stated intentions and its material realities.

The first two concepts this historiography will include are *Global Africanness* and *Pan-Africanness* which emerges within scholarship in approximately 1900. While these terms are similar and typically function in similar ways– subtle distinctions between the two reveal an evolution in the trajectory of the conceptual field over time, thereby highlighting a number of contentions and stagnations in the development of the field. Understanding the conceptual trajectory of this term will also contextualize the stability of these terms as they function or emerge within the digital space. Secondly, this historiography will examine the concept of *African Futurity* alongside its varying iterations such as *Afro-Futurism,* and *African Futurism.* Important to note, these terms each emerge at different historical periods in varied conceptual fields with some fundamental distinctions in their deployment. While these terms appear similar and function in seemingly synonymous ways, each term speaks to nuanced distinctions in this conceptual field as scholars, novelists, and artists engage with Africa and Global African experiences in a speculative way. These two conceptual terms are the historic concepts related to my research question that have remained in the literature for upwards of three decades.

On the other hand, the contemporary context of this research study engages two novel conceptions that are relatively youthful in their emergence and circulation through the literature. Firstly, *Afropolitan* is an extraordinarily contemporary concept which was first coined in 2005 to describe a new generation of "worldly Africans" that engage with their African identity through a classed, educated, and trans-national perspective (Selasi, 2005). Secondly, the conception of digital space [as place] is also an innovative and new formulation reminiscent of the current digital era in which this research explores. Many scholars in the Information Technology, Media, and Communication Studies field have identified that Digital Spaces (such as social media sites, and online communities function) as sites for identity creation especially for marginalized groups, such as Black people.

Global Africanness & Pan Africanism (1900-2018)

As stated previously, the concepts of Global Africanness and Pan-Africanness function complementary to each other yet emerge formally in scholarship at varying historical periods. Beginning with Pan-Africanism, its theoretical, scholarly, and academic origins are slightly different from its political origins. More importantly, these academic and political differences have been expressed as points of contention throughout the political arena and the theoretical arena. Politically, Pan-Africanism as an articulated framework or concept can be traced back to the Pan-African Congresses through speeches and manifestos such as "To the Nations of The World Speech" delivered by W.E.B D Bois in 1900 in London at the 1st Pan-African congress. (Du Bois, 1900). Further, this first formal Pan-African Congress emerged out of the formulation of the African Association in London by Henry Sylvester-Williams in 1897 (Adejumobi, 2008).

Essentially, Sylvester-Williams (who was a West-Indian Barrister) sought to establish a forum for Africans and those living in the diaspora to "address their common problems" and to unite under a sense of Pan-African unity (Adejumobi, 2008). This first Pan-African Congress included several Black intellectual leaders from across the diaspora who opposed colonialism in Africa and racism (Adejumobi, 2008). As a result, this conference attracted global attention and placed the term " 'Pan-African' in the lexicon of international affairs and making it part of the standard vocabulary of Black intellectuals.". (Adejumobi, 2008).

Following the first Pan-African Congress in 1900, Marcus Garvey established the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) in 1914 as a grassroots Pan-African movement to achieve Black Nationalism through the unification of Black people across the diaspora (Marcus Garvey (August 17, 1887 - June 10, 1940), 2020). This organization exhibited a number of differences from the Pan-African Congress hosted in 1900. Namely, while the UNIA grew in popularity among lower- and working-class Black immigrants in cities, the Pan-African congress engaged an audience of Black intellectuals (Adejumobi, 2008; Marcus Garvey (August 17, 1887 - June 10, 1940), 2020; Henrik Clarke, 1974). Further, in an attempt to appeal to Black working-class people across the diaspora, Garvey needed to position himself in a way that would appeal to their immediate desires. This led to the incorporation of a variety of speaking engagements which emphasized the need for economic improvement amongst Black people (Henrik Clarke, 1974). This appears to be a direct contrast to the strategies of the Pan-African congress which intended to engage a more elite and classed articulation of the struggles of African people globally.

While Du Bois and a number of other scholars continued to politically engage with Pan-Africanism through a number of congresses, Garvey's UNIA was more concerned with the material conditions of working-class people and how to improve them (Marcus Garvey (August 17, 1887 - June 10, 1940), 2020). This led to Garvey's development of the Back to Africa Movement which posited the conception of Black liberation as tethered to the mass emigration of Black people to the African continent in order to evade the realities of economic and racial oppression in the U.S. (Marcus Garvey (August 17, 1887 - June 10, 1940), 2020). Contrastingly, Du Bois' approach heralded this political agenda as anti-thetical to Pan-Africanism and actually as a form of Black separatism (Marcus Garvey (August 17, 1887 - June 10, 1940), 2020; Shepperson, 1962).

Theoretically, Pan-Africanism has evolved alongside its political conceptions and has in fact, reflected the longstanding debate between Pan-Africanism as posited by Black intellectuals and Pan-Africanism as posited by mass movements such as the UNIA. This is evident in Shepperson's "Pan-Africanism and "Pan-Africanism": Some Historical Notes" where he clearly articulates and grapples with Pan-Africanism and Pan-Africanism (1962). The distinction between these two formulations is found in the capitalization of the *P* in Pan-Africanism versus the lowercase formulation. While capital "P" Pan-Africanism refers to the variety of Pan-African Congresses held by Black intellectual leaders, Shepperson claims that lowercase "p" Pan-Africanism engages with the Garvey's form of Pan-Africanism (1962). Moreover, Shepperson asserts that Garvey's form of lowercase "p" Pan-Africanism has not been attributed to any formal movement and is purely recognizable due to its cultural elements, which are also akin to

the highly contested conception of "negritude" (1962). In other words, early intellectual deployments further solidify this highly combated political assertion of the term.

On the other hand, Emerson's "Pan-Africanism" which was also published in 1962 engages with the conception of Pan-Africanism by centralizing the African continent in his conception (1962). More specifically, Emerson states that the formal decolonization of the African continent has created the perfect conditions for African countries to begin developing a unification framework in order engage a sense of "self-determinization and territorial integrity" (1962). Emerson continues stating that Pan-African unification if the continent proved to be difficult due to the tension between the consolidation of independent states from colonial borders alongside the ideological push for a sense African unity beyond these colonial borders (1962). To state differently, Emerson posits that while Pan-African unity is the ideal outcome of the independence of the African continent, a more feasible political unification outcome would be to unify regions of the African continent based on their linguistic or regional alliances (1962). Further, Emerson denotes that Pan-Africanism on the continent has manifested in either the Casablanca bloc which was the more radical sector or the Monrovia bloc which was a bit more conservative, and sovereignty focused (1962).

Interestingly, the literature on Pan-Africanism engages conceptions of Black Nationalism, (as can be seen in Marcus Garvey's UNIA), Black Internationalism (which is a more contemporary iteration), and Global Africanness which also engages with the inherent connection of Black people's oppressions, experiences and shared identity. In the case of Global Africanness, Michael West's "Global Africa: The Emergence and Evolution of an Idea (2005), traces the chronological development of the concept of Global Africanness, as it emerges in response to

the creation of African Diaspora curricula in higher education. Additionally, he emphasizes the centrality of bodies of water—especially the Atlantic Ocean—as the symbolic and organizational core of African Diaspora studies (West, 2005). More specifically, West defines "Global Africa" as the idea that Africans and people of African descent across the world share common historical experiences, most notably slavery, colonialism, and racial oppression (West, 2005).

West further historicizes the evolution of global Africanness by dividing it into key periods: the 1770s to 1900, 1900–1945, 1945–1963, and from 1963 onward (2005). Within these eras, he highlights ideological and religious movements and political frameworks such as Ethiopianism, Redemptionism, and Vindicationism, all of which have helped shape the political consciousness of Black people across Global Africa (West, 2005). West also connects Pan-Africanism directly to the wave of African decolonization (2005). He frames it as both a political and symbolic project aimed at unifying African countries through a shared framework (West, 2005). This framing is similar to some earlier conceptions of Pan-Africanism from Emerson (1962).

Around this era, Micere Mũgo's "Re-envisioning Pan-Africanism: What is the Role of Gender, Youth and the Masses?" engages with Pan-Africanism by reformulating the conception and positing that its essence is rooted in the lived experiences of women and children (2002). Moreover, Mugo's formulation of Pan-Africanism challenges traditional masculinist and elite-centered interpretations by highlighting the need for a more inclusive vision that reflects the demographic and cultural shifts among Africa's youth and marginalized populations (2002). Additionally, Mugo's iteration of Pan-Africanism posits that it must transcend its functionality as merely a political framework or organizational strategy (2005). Instead, Mũgo conceptualizes it

as an "essence" or a lived, everyday expression of collective Black experience that transcends geopolitical boundaries and formal structures (2005).

In his 2018 chapter *"The Pan-African Experience: From the Organization of African Unity to the African Union,"* Horace Campbell reimagines Pan-Africanism as a political framework through a radical, emancipatory lens rooted in the African philosophy of *ubuntu* and a commitment to liberation from all forms of domination. By examining the historical transition from the Organization of African Unity (OAU) to the African Union (AU), Campbell critiques the limitations of earlier Pan-African political and organizational frameworks (2018). Instead, he proposes a transformative conception of Pan-Africanism that centers emancipatory politics which draws from Marxist thought and Black feminist theory to expand the notion of self-determination beyond national sovereignty toward total liberation from racial, gendered, and class-based oppression (Campbell, 2018).

African Futurity, African-Futurism, & Afro Futurism (1995- 2023)

As stated previously, the conception of African futurity is useful in this conceptual historiography as these terms have been deployed by the Afropolitan digital platform to communicate the platforms stated vision (Afropolitan, n.d). Further, the concepts of Afro-futurism, African Futurity, and African-Futurism, have been used in different formulations and function in similar ways yet speak to nuanced distinctions in this conceptual field as scholars, novelists, and artists engage with both the African continent and Global African experiences in a speculative manner. Ultimately, there's a distinction between African Futurity and African-Futurisms as rooted in potentialities while Afro-futurism is rooted in an imaginative or creative space emerging from the Blak diaspora.

Historically, one of the first recognitions of this concept emerges in Mark Dery's "Black to the Future" which was published in 1995 (1995). In *Black to the Future*, Mark Dery engages with a number of popluar science fiction authors (such as Samuel R. Delany, Greg Tate, and Tricia Rose) to define Afro-Futurism as a speculative genre that navigates Black historical erasure and futuristic imagining. Dery points out that very few Black authors—naming, Octavia Butler, Steve Barnes, and Charles Saunders—have traditionally written science fiction, despite the genre's intrinsic resonance with the lived experiences of Black Americans (1995). He further states that Black existence in the U.S. as already science fictional as it is marked by "alien abduction", hostile technological systems, and surreal realities shaped by forcefields of violence and structural erasure (Dery, 1995). Within this context, Afro-Futurism becomes a cultural and literary mode that speculates on African American futures, using science fiction as a lens through which to explore oppression, displacement, and possibility.

Further in the text, author Samuel Delany asserts that his commitment to science fiction is rooted in the interrogation of political systems such as oppression, imperialism, power, and national identity while speculative fiction author Tricia Rose emphasizes the importance of historical memory, suggesting that envisioning Black futures demands a deep reckoning with the past (Dery, 2005). Yet, Dery notes a crucial paradox at the heart of Afro-Futurism: how can a people so thoroughly erased from dominant historical narratives dare to imagine the future? In its marginality and refusal to be fully absorbed into centralized political movements, Afro-Futurism finds its strength and strategic efficacy as a subversive cultural art (Dery, 1995) Considering that Dery's "Black to the Future" is a primary canonical text which describes

Afrofuturism trough the conceptions and perspectives of literary work and science fiction, it is crucial to engage other iterations of this Afro-Futurism concept across time.

In her chapter "Creating and Imagining Black Futures through Afrofuturism" (2019), Grace Gipson explores how Afrofuturism functions as a site of cultural production, digital engagement, and historical reimagining (2019). Citing Ytasha Womack's definition of Afrofuturism as "an intersection of imagination, technology, the future, and liberation," Gipson highlights how social media platforms like Twitter have expanded the reach and impact of Afrofuturist discourse (Gipson, 2019). Gipson also argues that scholars, artists, and activists are increasingly using digital platforms to engage with Afrofuturism not only as an aesthetic or literary movement but as a space of intellectual inquiry, technological critique, and cultural memory. She emphasizes that while Afrofuturist aesthetics and literature have been widely discussed, the technological and digital dimensions have been underexplored— hence the justification for her study on how Afrofuturism manifests in the social media space.

Afrofuturism, as explored in the works of Sami Schalk Morris in her "Black Girls Are from the Future: Afrofuturist Feminism in Octavia E. Butler's "Fledgling." and Ruth Mayer in her ""Africa As an Alien Future": The Middle Passage, Afrofuturism, and Postcolonial Waterworlds", functions as both a site of imaginative resistance and a critique of lived realities (2012, 2000). In Morris' analysis of Octavia E. Butler's *Fledgling*, Morris presents the novel as a Black feminist Afrofuturist text that reconfigures identity, kinship, and intimacy through non-monogamous, queer, and vampire-human hybrid family structures (2012). Rather than offering a utopian vision, *Fledgling* embraces the radical possibilities of intimacy that challenge normative boundaries and continues to position Afrofuturism as foundational to the literary work of many

Black authors. Morris emphasizes that Afrofuturist feminism insists on writing Black women into the future, even when they are continuously erased from the present (2012). On the other hand, Mayer's work frames Africa as both a lost ancestral past and an alien future and (2000). She contends that Afrofuturism often depicts fantasy spaces that function as emotional refuges from real-world traumas (Mayer, 2000). Further, she examines the Middle Passage as a story of time travel and forced displacement suggests that Black existence itself mirrors science fiction's core themes of estrangement and dislocation. While Mayer emphasizes the lived experiences that posit the utility of Afro Futurism by literary scholars, Morris examines how Afro futurist feminism manifests in the work of the Afrofuturist and speculative fiction author Toni Morrison (2012, 2000).

Beyond the literary manifestations of Afro-futurism, Tegan Bristow's introduction entitled "From Afro-Futurism to Post-African Futures" within the *Technoetic Arts: A Journal of Speculative Research* engages the conception of African Futures or African Futurism (2014). Within this article, Bristow challenges dominant understandings of futurism by highlighting the long-standing presence of technological thinking within African cultural traditions (2014). The author argues that African technologies of healing, and spiritual knowledge should be seen as legitimate techno-cultural and inherently futurist practices, rather than as folklore or pre-modern relics (Bristow, 2014). Bristow makes a clear distinction between *Afrofuturism*, which she characterizes as primarily rooted in African American cultural and political experiences, and the concept of *Post African Futures* and *African-Futurism,* which emerges from a different ontological and geographical context (2014). Bristow also draws attention to African-based engagements with speculative imagination that do not rely on diasporic frameworks and cites Pamela

Phatsimo Sunstrum as the originator of the term "African Futures" (2014). Moreover, this conception of African Futures urges scholars, novelist, and artists to consider futures that are deeply embedded in African historical continuities rather than imposed from Western visions of technological progress (Bristow, 2014).

In 2017, Gavin Steingo's "African Afro-Futurism: Allegories and Speculation" presents a seemingly combined formulation of these concepts through his conception African Afro-Futurism (2017). More specifically, Steingo states "I use the term "African Afro-futurism" as shorthand to refer to creative practices and theoretical activity on the African continent, but with a full acknowledgement of the term's ambiguities and limitations" (2017). Steingo presents this formulation in response to a tension between two modes of Afro-futurism— allegory, and speculation (2017). According to the author, the allegory form of afro futurism refers to futurist symbols that represent real-world issues and is often used within the African American context of creative and literary works (Steingo, 2017). In contrast, the speculative form of Afro-futurism represents an imaginative and unknowable reality that is severed from social problems and is what the author would posit as African Afro-Futurisms (2017). Further this formulation of African Afro-Futurism is distinct from Afro Futurism as it emerges not solely from the historical legacy of the Transatlantic Slave Trade but also from the legacy of Colonialism, Apartheid, and local cosmologies and epistemologies and spiritual practices (Steingo, 2017). Moreover, this author even posits that African Afro-Futurisms should be willing to engage with an unknown speculative reality that is post-human and is free from the recreation of racial trauma from oppression in literary and creative works (Steingo, 2017).

More contemporarily, Aaron Smith's "Defining our Future on Our Terms" in *Afrocentricity in AfroFuturism: Toward Afrocentric Futurism* posits that the common conception of Afro-Futurism has the potential to be developed and transformed through a more intentional commitment to Afrocentricity which would then result in "Afrocentric Futurism" (2023). Similar to other alternative formulations to Afro futurism, this author makes a clear distinction between their projected conception and the widely accepted formulation by Mark Deary in 1995 (Smith, 2023). In this, Smith claims that Afro-futurism is typically associated with African American Techno-cultures or speculative fiction and often disconnected from African epistemologies due to its localization within the U.S Black experience (2023). He continues his critique by stating that Afrofuturist texts often treat Afrocentricity as periphery and hollows African cultural relics of meaning thereby engaging in a "negative aestheticism" process (Smith, 2023). Further, Smith argues that Afrocentric futurism instead, centers African people as agents in the creative space while drawing form African spiritual practices, cosmology and epistemologies (2023). Also, it is important to note that the conception of Afrocentrism that Smith deploys emerges from the work of Molefi Kete Asante which posits that Africans must be understood as agents in history rather than passive objects (2023).

Conversely, Yaw Ofosu-Kusi and Motoji Matsuda's "The Contemporary World and African Potentials" in *The Challenge of African Potentials: Conviviality, Informality and Futurity,* uses the discussions and debates from the 8th African Potentials Forum in Accra Ghana to posit the conception of *African Potentials* or *African Futurity* (2020). While most of the literature regarding the varying conceptions of Afro-Futurism engage creative and literary works in a speculative manner, this chapter engages with the genuine realities and possibilities present in Africa

(Ofusu-Kusi & Matsuda, 2020). Essentially, the authors argue that African's future potential can be harnessed through a renewed attention to the varying "informal systems" within African countries as it has the ability to function as an adaptive response to structural adjustment and neoliberal collapse (2020). As such, these sites of informal systems and economies, should be harnessed as points of innovation instead of being perceived as weaknesses and failures. Interestingly, this recent conception of African futurity posits a grounded optimistic outlook for the African continent and engages with the material realities of citizens in African countries.

As can be seen, since 1995, there has been multiple formulations, debates, and reconfigurations of the Afro-Futurism or a forward-looking perspective amongst Black people across the diaspora. These debates and formulations represent the ever-evolving balance of forces within academic scholarship as Africa has increasingly become more central to debates and literature regarding the future of Black people. Additionally, as Africa becomes more central to conversations regarding its future in both speculative creative formats and grounded political realities, it is evident that this conception will continue to evolve in the scholarship to represent these material realities. With this evolution, there appears to be a growing divergence between Afro-Futurism and African Futurism, the latter of which centers the continent more directly, drawing from indigenous knowledge systems, spiritual technologies, and local realities rather than diasporic imagination alone. This shift not only reclaims futurity as a space of African agency but also insists that African societies, histories, and epistemologies have always contained their own speculative dimensions (Ofusu-Kusi & Matsuda, 2020).

Afropolitan[ism] (2005-2022)

As stated previously, Afropolitan as a concept is extraordinarily novel as it originally emerged in 2005 through an article by Taiye Selasi entitled "Bye-Bye Babar" which was published in LIP Magazine (2005). Since then, the term has provided language for a vast population of seemingly elite, educated, trans-national Africans. Since its inception in Selasi's article, the term has also been up for clarification and contestation, and application in a variety of contexts. The research question which this concept derives from also engages with an applied iteration of this conception through the Afropolitan digital platform (Afropolitan, n.d). Regardless, since 2005, scholars within cultural studies and political theory have been engaging the term.

Taiye Selasi's "Bye-Bye Babar" characterizes the identity and lived experience of an Afropolitan by stating

> "They (read: we) are Afropolitans – the newest generation of African emigrants, coming soon or collected already at a law firm/chem lab/jazz lounge near you. You'll know us by our funny blend of London fashion, New York jargon, African ethics, and academic successes. Some of us are ethnic mixes, e.g. Ghanaian and Canadian, Nigerian and Swiss; others merely cultural mutts: American accent, European affect, African ethos. Most of us are multilingual: in addition to English and a Romantic or two, we understand some indigenous tongue and speak a few urban vernaculars. There is at least one place on The African Continent to which we tie our sense of self: be it a nation-state (Ethiopia), a city (Ibadan), or an auntie's kitchen. Then there's the G8 city or two (or three) that we know like the backs of our hands, and the various institutions that know us for our famed focus. We are Afropolitans: not citizens, but Africans of the world" (2005).

In other words, the Afropolitan refers to the worldly, multilingual, well educated, African who may render the African continent as their home country but identify with transnational perspectives and personality traits (Selasi, 2005). Further, throughout this article, Selasi emphasizes the elite career choices of Afropolitan thereby rendering this identity as inherently classed and contingent upon economic standing and educational attainment (2005). Adjepong's "*Afropolitan Projects: Redefining Blackness, Sexualities, and Cultures from Houston to Accra by Anima Adjepong"* which was published in 2021 provides an ethnographic examination of some of the manifestations of the elitism baked into this identity formulation. On the other hand, Achille Mbembe claims to have coined the term in academic spaces and literature thereby rendering the conception of Taiye Selasi somewhat invisible while heralding his academic formulation (2016). Achille Mbembe's "Afropolitanism" claims that the formulation of Afropolitanism emerges out of the necessity to reckon with the realities of transformations within African societies (2016). Further, Mbmebe posits that contemporary African thought has been dominated by three intellectual paradigms– namely, Anticolonial nationalism, African Marxism/Socialism, and Pan-Africanism— and that Afropolitanism offers an intellectual paradigm which deviates from the prescribed epistemologies (2016).

Equally important, Mbembe also frames the Afropolitan identity as intentionally void of racialization and ethnocentrisms as he claims that the term has emerged from the multi-racial context of South Africa (2016). This argument by Mbembe completely fails to recognize the lived experiences that Selasi describes in her "Bye-Bye Babar" (2005). Additionally, Mbembe frames Afropolitanism as a response to the global movement of people and cultural intermixing of Africans in different regions of the world (2016). Further, he posits that Africa has always

been a site of mobility (as both a destination via colonialism and a point of departure through the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade and Labor Migration) (2016). Similarly, Chilezona Eze's 2016 work entitled "We Afropolitans" connects Afropolitanism's inherent aspect of global spatial mobility to an internal mobility within self-identified Afropolitans to seek connection rather than difference (2016). This work by Eze also states that Afropolitanism recognizes identity as a relational phenomenon rather than a stagnant idea (2016). As a result, Afropolitans typically have the ability possess multiple forms of consciousness due to their vast perception of the world and engagement with different perspectives (Eze, 2016).

On the other hand, multiple scholars have argued that the term comes with wide array of blind spots warranting critique in debate. Dabiri's "Why I am (still) not an Afropolitan" of 2016 critiques Afropolitanism as a classed and elitist cultural project, overly invested in global consumerism—both in being consumed by the West and in engaging in marketable cosmopolitan aesthetics that sensationalize the experiences of typical African on the continent (2016). Similarly, Chielozona Eze's "The politics of Afropolitanism" has raised concerns about the political implications of Afropolitanism and how it conflates or even undermines the radical solidarities once central to Pan-Africanism (2016). While Ede approaches Afropolitanism as a metropolitan, transnational identity marked by individual agency, symbolic capital, and upward class mobility—especially among elite diasporic Africans in the West, Dabiri further warns that the collapse of Afropolitanism into a form of lifestyle branding erodes its political potential (2016; 2016).

Conversely, Ashleigh Harris's *Afropolitanism and the novel: de-realizing Africa* critiques how literary representations of diasporic Afropolitans can render other African identities—and their

material struggles—invisible, thereby narrowing the field of representation (2020). More specifically, Harris posits that the Afropolitan identity is commonly reproduced and reified through literature and media especially literature emerging from the African continent (2020). Chilezona Eze alludes to this in his "Rethinking African Culture and Identity: The Afropolitan Model" by referencing Taiye Selasi's *Ghana Must Go's* and Chimamanda Adichie's Americanah as the characters in each of these novels would potentially be Afropolitans that emigrate to or from the African continent in pursuit of education or opportunity (2014). Regardless, Harris claims that reproduction of Afropolitan characters within novels both affirm the genuine reality of the identity while also rendering typical Africans that remain in the African continent invisible, and thus their global subjugation is minimized through this erasure over conflation of elite Africans with a typical African experience (2020).

Digital Space [as Place] (2018-2022) EDIT

In *Distributed Blackness*, André Brock Jr. repositions digital space as a meaningful place where Black life and culture unfolds, thrives, and reshapes dominant techno-cultures which has reflected white-western hegemony (2020). Brock rejects the "digital divide" narrative that casts Black communities as "technologically deficient or digitally illiterate" by highlighting the vibrancy and innovation of Black digital practices through spaces such as Black Twitter (2020). According to Brock Black Twitter, emerges as a Technocultural place—a dynamic site where cultural rituals, shared emotion, humor, and catharsis are continually enacted. Through performative acts like hash tagging, users create communal landmarks that make visible their histories, politics, and affective realities. Rather than being peripheral to digital culture, these

practices reveal Black digital presence as foundational to the structure and texture of online space.

Brock further conceptualizes Blackness not simply as a material or visual signifier but as an *informational identity*—a living, mediated presence that inhabits and shapes digital place (2022). Through platforms like Twitter, Black users negotiate a digital double consciousness: aware of themselves as both creators and surveilled subjects within these spaces. Yet rather than being constrained by this awareness, they transform digital platforms into places of expression, subversion, and belonging. These are not just platforms to be used but instead they become culturally inscribed places where Black identity is not only performed but lived, archived, and imagined anew (Brock, 2022). In this way, Brock invites an understanding of the internet as a geography of Black cultural possibility, rather than merely a technological interface (Brock, 2022).

Conclusion

By tracing conceptual evolution of Global Africanness, Pan-Africanism, African Futurity, and Afropolitanism across the last century, this historiography has revealed how each term emerges in response to shifting historical, political, and technological realities. From Pan-Africanism's early formations as both an elite-driven intellectual movement and grassroots liberation strategy, to its later reframing through Black feminism and emancipatory politics, we see a foundational commitment to uniting Black people globally through their shared differences. This same impulse animates the emergence of Global Africanness, which formalizes the recognition of a transnational Black identity rooted in shared experiences of displacement

from slavery, colonialism, and the spread of the African diaspora. Together, these early concepts laid the ideological groundwork for future-facing frameworks like Afro-Futurism and African Futurism which imagine and clarify speculative, liberatory Black futures through art, literature, cosmology, and genuine political realities.

This speculative orientation takes on new dimensions when it enters the digital realm, particularly as conceptualizations like Afropolitanism and digital space-as-place begin to explore what it means to inhabit Black identity in globalized, technologized environments. The Afropolitan identity— which has been characterized by global mobility and elite transnationalism— reflects both the potential and the tensions of articulating African futures in the digital age(Deary, 1995; Eze, 2016). It is precisely in the digital space, as argued by scholars like André Brock Jr., where Black people actively shape and inscribe cultural meaning through ritual, performance, and communal belonging (Brock, 2022).In this way, this historiography not only traces how each concept has evolved in response to its era, but it also identifies a subtle convergence and intersection which will be useful in grappling with my original research question. Ultimately, this intellectual mapping reveals that concepts such as Pan-Africanism, African Futurity, and Afropolitanism are not static, but iterative and dialogical as they are shaped by the demands and material conditions of the moment. Their ongoing reinterpretation in digital space not only affirms the centrality of African agency in defining Black futures but also underscores the internet as an emergent site of conceptual possibility.

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