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„‘Narratives of un/belonging’: Afropolitanism(s) in *Ghana*  
*Must Go and Beyond*“

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## **Declaration of Authenticity**

I confirm to have conceived and written this master thesis by myself.

Quotations from other authors and any ideas borrowed and/or passages paraphrased from the works of other authors are all clearly marked within the text or in the footnotes and acknowledged in the bibliographical references.

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*Karoline Eadie*

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## 1. Introduction<sup>1</sup>

*So here you are,  
Too foreign for home  
Too foreign for here  
Never enough for both.*

Ijeoma Umebinyuo<sup>2</sup>

“Afropolitanism is the realization that existence is always hyphenated” (Eze 2014: 245). In fact, in the course of this thesis it will become evident that it is not possible to pin down exactly what Afropolitanism is and can or cannot achieve; rather, several approaches to Afropolitanisms will be explained.

This thesis aims to explore changing identity constructions and contested sites of struggle that selected Anglophone African writers and their works have been confronted with in recent years as new terminology is attempting to capture complex phenomena such as Afropolitanism(s) in conversation with, for instance, Pan-Africanism, Négritude and Cosmopolitanism.

First, a theoretical chapter will give a short historical overview of selected Anglophone African writing. Scholar Chielozona Eze describes the changing qualities and ways of expressing African identity over the past sixty years and suggests writers and intellectuals such as the Nigerian writer Chinua Achebe and Léopold Sédar Senghor from Senegal were paramount in rediscovering and shaping postcolonial African cultural understanding (Eze 2014). The “father of African literature”, Chinua Achebe described being African not only as an ongoing process but also as carrying “tags [of] meaning, and a penalty and a responsibility” (qtd. in Eze 2014: 236).

Next, terms such as Pan-Africanism, Négritude, Afro-pessimism and Afrocentrism will be discussed and contrasted. Since “cultures have always been characterized by fluidity and exchange” (Kortenaar 30), and migration “to, from and within” (Mbembe 2007: 28) the continent has been part of the African experience, Eze does not see any sense in selecting mutually exclusive view-points of insiders and outsiders; rather, he emphasizes the need to “keep talking” (2014: 239). Eze’s outlook is thus similar to Jean-Loup Amselle on questions of (cultural) diversity: “[F]or there to be an identity, society, culture or ethnicity, it is not necessary for the members to agree on what defines that culture: it is enough that they agree to debate or negotiate the terms of

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<sup>1</sup> The title of this thesis, “narratives of un/belonging” is borrowed from a chapter heading in Moura-Koçoğlu’s book *Narrating indigenous modernities: transcultural dimensions in contemporary Māori literature* and is also used by Gehrmann (66).

<sup>2</sup> qtd. in *The Diaspora Blues* (Ankobrey: 242)

that identity” (qtd. in Kortenaar 32). The idea of culture as an on-going process is also underpinned by Walter Benn Michaels’ concept of “cultural work” (qtd. in Kortenaar 40).

Terms such as authenticity and hybridization necessarily imply a problematic construction of insiders versus outsiders, a “notion of cultural purity” to determine what may be considered authentic and what may not (Kortenaar 30). Appiah aptly describes “the idea of cultural purity [as] an oxymoron”, since extensive contact and mixing between notably “different” (in terms of language, culture etc.) groups of people has been a reality since at least the beginning of international trade, geographical exploration and colonialism (2006: 113). For such endeavours to reasonably work, such mixing would have had to foreground shared commonality rather than difference. Hogan supports a universalist standpoint when he claims that

[u]niversalism is a view that all people and all human societies share fundamental cognitive, emotive, ethical, and other properties and principles. Clearly, all forms of racism and colonialist ethnocentrism are anti-universalist, for they necessarily assume profound and consequential differences between people and/or between cultures. (Hogan xv)

Building on a concept of universalism, Eze suggests a relational approach to the formation of differing identities, cultural practices, and the actual interaction of humans, since “immutable, exclusive, or inclusive” terms no longer apply (2014: 235). Kortenaar describes culture as a process because “culture [...] is not a pre-descriptive grammar but rather a reservoir of often contradictory potential practices that social actors can make use of when communal identity is being renegotiated, as it always is” (31).

This thesis wants to put Afropolitanism in the context of 21<sup>st</sup> century African (or at least of fictional) experiences of which the general reader may learn more by reading a wide range of African or Afro-diasporic authors. As far as literary production is concerned, a number of challenges of today’s authors are mentioned, such as the publishing industry, where choices about who is published are often wielded in the West, supported by a system of literary critics in Western media. Yet, while it continues to be a struggle, there is hope that literary production on the continent will become increasingly available to a larger number of readers, partly due to online publishing. In the interim period, a reader might pick up *Ghana Must Go* or *Americanah* in a bookshop or public library and use these stories as a starting point to discover Chinua Achebe, Flora Nwapa or other past and present African (diasporan) writers. Whatever one may criticize in these novels, they broaden the output and visibility of African writing. Eze reminds us that limiting one’s discourse

to the pitfalls of nationalistic and essentialist viewpoints within the African continent has led to “many instances of genocide and ethnic cleansing” (2014: 236). Yet, there is evidence of a growing counter-movement of predominantly African scholars for whom ‘Afropolitan’ is yet another term for a privileged, elitist stance which has no real relevance for the majority of people of African descent or diasporic experience (see Bosch Santana 2016, Dabiri 2013, Fasselt 2015, Tveit 2013). In this context, the changing and multifaceted roles ascribed to Afropolitanism, be they, for instance, a brand and a commercial marketing tool, a media phenomenon or a political stance with a potential ethical dimension will be addressed. Next, Selasi’s brief essay *Bye-Bye, Babar* will be analysed and the elements important for an Afropolitan reading will be identified. This section concludes with some biographical background information on Taiye Selasi, the author of the novel *Ghana Must Go*.

Section 3 will provide a theoretical overview of concepts of identity formation in post-colonial contact zones and across an increasingly connected, mobile world, virtual or actual. Some specifics of cultural contact and ensuing coping mechanisms will be described, with an emphasis on acculturation theory and transnationalism. Cosmopolitanism, another contested term, will be presented as one strategy to interact with others as someone “whose allegiance is to the worldwide community of human beings” (Nussbaum 4). Eze envisions a broadly humanistic viewpoint for, amongst others, the *Afro polites* (2016: 114), where an inclusionary cosmopolitan approach, i.e. a basic openness to conversation with, rather than an oppositional model of relating to others, appears more appropriate (see Anderson 2006).

In Section 4, the theory on cultural identity and acculturation theory as well as Afropolitan aspects in literary criticism will be applied to six fictional characters, namely the members of the core Sai family – a set of parents and their four children in *Ghana Must Go*. It will be shown that the protagonists display features of a hyphenated identity. It is suggested that the path of parents and children, as they negotiate their paths as first or second-generation migrants to the United States, varies considerably. The protagonists undergo complex processes of identity formation, characterized by many opportunities as well as by loss and insecurities. At the same time, their various experiences can be read as rites of passage and learning processes which may eventually lead to a more reconciled existence, containing a multitude of elements which are “polychromatic, polymorphic, diverse, and open” (Eze 2014: 245). Furthermore, other elements such as place, structure and literary devices will be discussed.



## 2. Key Terms and Background Information

Section 2 gives some contextual information for the later discussion of Afropolitanism. Firstly, the development of Anglophone African writing will be introduced referring to a number of works of fiction as well as various challenges that writers may face. Before delving into Afropolitanism(s) and examples thereof in Selasi's essay, some brief information on Pan-Africanism and Négritude is given since the latter two are seen by a number of scholars as pertinent points of departure for any discussions on Afropolitanism.

### 2.1. Selected Anglophone African Writing – A Brief

#### Historical Overview

Throughout history, orality was the predominant method of communicating and preserving cultural knowledge across much of the African continent. In contrast, a Semitic language was used by people living in today's Eritrea and Ethiopia from the 5<sup>th</sup> century (mainly for religious texts) and was replaced by Amharic in the 14<sup>th</sup> century. By the 18<sup>th</sup> century, across East and West Africa, Arabic script was used for indigenous languages such as Swahili and Hausa. From the 19<sup>th</sup> century onwards, the arrival of Christian missionaries who wanted to translate the bible often led to the transcribing of languages such as Igbo, Yoruba or Zulu into the Latin alphabet. Inadvertently, written expression in indigenous languages was thus furthered (see Gikandi 2009). Besides the bible, other canonical, often didactic English texts also found their way into indigenous languages; John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress* remains the most translated English work of literature on the African continent, starting with a Xhosa translation printed by Lovedale Press in the 1860s (Gikandi 2009: 122)<sup>3</sup>.

As a result of the Berlin conference in 1884, the African continent was carved up amongst fourteen European nations, among them France, the British Empire and Portugal. Towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, colonial influences became much more prevalent in everyday life across most of Africa, compared to earlier, smaller-scale colonial activities by the Dutch in Southern Africa from the 17<sup>th</sup> century, or the Portuguese in Angola from the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Gikandi claims that “[m]odern African

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<sup>3</sup> Due to length constraints, this thesis cannot give a thorough historic overview of the introduction and impact of European languages (such as Portuguese, Dutch or English) on African literary production. Furthermore, the historical development of Anglophone African writing is presented by a small selection only.

literature was produced in the crucible of colonialism” (379), whether written in an indigenous language or in one of the former colonisers’ languages, such as French or English.

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century and up to the second world war, texts set in Africa were mostly written by Europeans (or their descendants) for a European audience, such as Olive Schreiner’s *The Story of An African Farm* (1883). Gikandi calls works such as Tania Blixen’s *Out of Africa*, “production of texts on ‘natives’ ” (379), who are most often depicted as a group and act as a background or foil to the main story line and protagonists; in this case, the ill-fated love story between an American pilot and a Danish aristocrat, who owns a coffee plantation in Kenya.

Rolfes Robert Reginald Dhlomo was the first (South African) Zulu writer who had a novel in English published by the South African Lovedale Press in 1928: *An African Tragedy* (Gikandi 2009: 139). Dhlomo was educated at a missionary school, became a teacher and a writer, and wrote stories in Zulu as well as in English (Gaylard 53). *An African Tragedy* is a typical “morality tale” and describes a young man’s move from his native village to Johannesburg on a quest to earn enough money to pay the bride price (i.e. the dowry needed to be allowed to marry). The novel’s didactic intent, foreshadowed by its title, becomes apparent when the abandonment of his Christian values leads to the undoing of the main protagonist. Tellingly, the publisher’s foreword recommends the 40-page text “as a contribution towards staying the decline of Native life in large cities and towns” (Gaylard 53). To a certain extent, Dhlomo resisted the “missionary discourse” by writing a number of historical stories about Zulu traditions in Zulu and English; he considered himself a “translator” between ethnic groups (Gaylard 65). For a number of years, Dhlomo worked as a mine clerk in Johannesburg and wrote a range of stories in English and in Zulu, which give a fictional, yet convincingly realistic view of the challenges faced by “ordinary” Africans, such as miners and housewives. Dhlomo also tackled topics such as potential conflicts in families about the choice of traditional healers versus Western medicine and adapted the style of some of his stories to be closer to oral storytelling (Gaylard 62-63).

The first novel by a Nigerian woman in English was Flora Nwapa’s *Efuru*, published in London in 1966. In 1977, she founded Tana Press in Nigeria (Gikandi 2009: 397). Nwapa portrays a young Igbo wife, Efuru, who is unable to have any further children after the death of her first daughter. Her first and her second husband abandon her in

favour of other wives and eventually Efurū is chosen by the lake goddess to worship her instead of striving to become a mother. (see Pucherová 2019<sup>4</sup>).

Heinemann Press started publishing novels from the continent in 1958 (always in paperback copies in order to make them more affordable) with *Things Fall Apart* as its first work (Joseph 359). As a result of the novel's success, the Heinemann African Writers Series (AWS) was established in 1962 as a milestone in making writing from the continent more accessible to a wider audience (Joseph 359). By 1965, 20,000 copies had been sold in his native Nigeria compared with 800 books in Britain (Achebe 1973:1). He became the series' editorial advisor from the series' inception for a period of ten years; in the last forty years more than 200 titles have been published, either originally written in English or translated from African and European languages (see Joseph; Currey).

Thus, 1958 marks an important year for Anglophone African Writing with the publication of Chinua Achebe's first novel *Things Fall Apart*. Achebe decided to write this novel as a response to Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, which in his famous 1977 lecture "An Image of Africa: Racism in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*" he convincingly showed to be a racist text, despite its literary merits: "The real question is the dehumanization of Africa and Africans which this age-long attitude has fostered and continues to foster in the world" (21).

Further important milestones in the development of writing from the continent are the African nationalist novel, childhood memoir and political autobiography (see Pucherová). To represent these genres, one writer will be mentioned for each genre.

The African nationalist novel aimed to recover traditional culture, orality and spiritualism and act as a statement against Western (cultural) domination and suppression: Kenyan writer Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *Grain of Wheat*, written in 1967, depicts the fallout from the Mau Mau uprisings in Kenya before independence from Britain and culminates in the Uhuru (Independence Day) celebrations on 12 December 1963 (Gikandi 2009: 371). South African Peter Abrahams, born in 1919 near Johannesburg published *Tell Freedom: Memories of Africa* originally in 1954 as a childhood memoir detailing the author's impoverished circumstances following the death of his father. His earlier book *Mine Boy* from 1946 describes the effects of racism on a youngster who moves from the countryside to the great city. Abrahams

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<sup>4</sup> Chapter 2.1. is largely based on Dorota Pucherová's lecture "Issues in African Literature: Past and Present", held at the University of Vienna (Department of African Studies) in Winter term 2019/20.

later moved to the UK, where he was involved with organising the Pan-African congress, and finally Jamaica but continued writing stories set in South African background and the Caribbean. Jomo Kenyatta's *Suffering without bitterness* is an example of a political autobiography and describes the author's life from a childhood in a Kikuyu village at the end of the 19th century to becoming the first president of independent Kenya in 1933 (Gikandi 2009: 263-264).

In the context of finally gaining political independence from colonial rule and finding their own voices, African writers saw themselves as duty-bound to recover their self-respect and visibility against a history of oppression and silence. Achebe postulated in his famous essay that “the role of the writer in a new *African* nation” was to show

that African people did not hear of culture for the first time from Europeans; that their societies were not mindless but frequently had a philosophy of great depth and value and beauty; that they had poetry and above all, they had dignity. [...] The writer's duty is to help them regain it by showing them in human terms what happened to them, what they lost. (1978: 8)

Achebe has remained an important influence on 21<sup>st</sup> century African writing; for instance, *Ghana Must Go* and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's first novel, *Purple Hibiscus*, reference the title of *Things Fall Apart*. In *Ghana Must Go*, Olu is reading the book as a fourteen-year-old as he awaits his sister's birth at the hospital, looking after his twin siblings. Adichie's novel *Purple Hibiscus* starts thus “Things started to fall apart at home when...”. Building on their predecessors, African writers of the current generation are much less concerned with “writing back” to colonial times but claim the freedom to choose their own focus in regard to topics. According to Gikandi, “African literature comes to be located in a unique global moment: the continent most important writers are as likely to be found in Europe and North America as they are in the continent itself” (2009: 144). The next section will look at some of the challenges that today's writers may encounter.

## **2.2. Challenges of the Anglophone African Writer<sup>5</sup>**

This section deals with the inherent quandaries in trying to define (Anglophone) African literature as well as the challenges Anglophone African writers may face today regarding subject matter, genre or language(s) of expression.

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<sup>5</sup> Due to length constraints, this overview is limited to a small number of selected works.

The difficulty in delineating what constitutes African writing is summed up by Ethiopian-American writer Maaza Mengiste who suggests that “Africa is a continent of 55 recognised states, with a population of over 1 billion and more than 2,000 languages”, thus there can be no simplistic answer to the question of who an African writer is or what should be termed African writing (*The Guardian* 2013). In a similar vein, Taiye Selasi argued in 2013 that despite the “body of written and oral texts produced by storytellers on and from the continent”, the category “African literature” made little sense, as the continent and its diaspora are too diverse, and no analogous categories such as “European” or “Asian” writing exist. In her “literary Utopia” literature ought to be rather grouped into which kind of story was being told; she would, for example, categorize *Ghana Must Go* as belonging to the “Seriously Dysfunctional Family” section rather than any generic African or diasporic literature (see Egoro).

Despite the impossibility to clearly delineate African from other writing, one may refer to Nadine Gordimer, who in 1970 famously stated that “African writing is writing done in any language by Africans themselves and by others of whatever skin color who share with Africans the experience of having been shaped, mentally and spiritually, by Africa rather than anywhere else in the world” (9). She also described African literature as predominantly “committed literature”; this focus, in her opinion was unlikely to change (11). Even today, many African writers face a burden of commitment either implicitly or explicitly. Binyavanga Wainanina’s much cited essay “How to write about Africa” is a satirical interpretation of some of the expectations and constraints that writers with an African sensibility may face:

Always use the word ‘Africa’ or ‘Darkness’ or ‘Safari’ in your title. Subtitles may include the words ‘Zanzibar’, ‘Masai’, ‘Zulu’, ‘Zambezi’, ‘Congo’, ‘Nile’, ‘Big’, ‘Sky’, ‘Shadow’, ‘Drum’, ‘Sun’ or ‘Bygone’. Also useful are words such as ‘Guerrillas’, ‘Timeless’, ‘Primordial’ and ‘Tribal’. Note that ‘People’ means Africans who are not black, while ‘The People’ means black Africans. Never have a picture of a well-adjusted African on the cover of your book, or in it, unless that African has won the Nobel Prize. An AK-47, prominent ribs, naked breasts: use these. If you must include an African, make sure you get one in Masai or Zulu or Dogon dress. In your text, treat Africa as if it were one country. It is hot and dusty with rolling grasslands and huge herds of animals and tall, thin people who are starving. Or it is hot and steamy with very short people who eat primates. Don’t get bogged down with precise descriptions. Africa is big: fifty-four countries, 900 million people who are too busy starving and dying and warring and emigrating to read your book. The continent is full of deserts, jungles, highlands, savannahs and many other things, but your reader doesn’t care about all that, so keep your descriptions romantic and evocative and unparticular. [...] Always end your book with Nelson Mandela saying something about rainbows or renaissances. Because you care. (2008)

Taiye Selasi similarly stated in a 2015 interview that African (Afro-diasporic) writers faced the “burden of representing their continent” (*The Guardian*). She suggested that many more works are needed by a much wider range of authors, also in indigenous languages, since “we ask those [existing well-known] novels to do too much”. Knudsen and Rahbek suggest that a claim to a common humanity, expressed by Afropolitan characters across a range of novels, counteracts this “representational burden of having to embody the quintessential ‘African’” (294). Likewise, in an interview in the German weekly *DIE ZEIT* from 2014, Nigerian writer Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie rejects the notion that her ethnicity should limit her to certain topics and explains that prior to coming to the U.S. to study, she saw herself as “Nigerian” rather than “black”. Selasi similarly grapples with demands as “[i]t seems that every new writer with any remote connection to the continent of Africa, either willingly or unwillingly, has first to wrestle with this question of identity before talking about what should matter most: their book” (Selasi 2015).

As far as a writer’s potential ethical responsibilities towards her work is concerned, Nigerian writer Sefi Atta feels responsibility exclusively towards her text, rather than her ethnicity or nationality (Knudsen and Rahbek 187). Nigerian writer Chika Unigwe, who Knudsen and Rahbek consider a third-generation Nigerian writer, critically comments that writing coming out of Africa is still read “as anthropological literature” (Knudsen and Rahbek 193); she does not consider it her role as a writer to either comment on or explain Nigeria, but rather have her writing be judged on its own merits. Adichie equally dismisses that any kind of literature should be understood as “anthropology” (Adichie 2006: 46). Writers such as Chika Unigwe or Brian Chikwava from Zimbabwe limit their “sense of responsibility to [their] readers and [their] characters” rather than any bigger cause (Knudsen and Rahbek 198-208). Writer Elif Shafak, who grew up in both Turkey and the United Kingdom, and writes in both English and Turkish, puts it thus:

Motherlands are beloved, no doubt; sometimes they can also be exasperating and maddening. Yet I have also come to learn that for writers and poets for whom national borders and cultural barriers are there to be questioned, again and again, there is, in truth, only one motherland, perpetual and portable: storyland. (367)

Similar to the choice of subject matter, Anglophone African writers have been heavily criticised for writing in any of the former colonisers’ languages rather than an African language. Achebe dealt with this dilemma in his unique way by adopting English, a language he had been educated in, and transforming it into his own vehicle for

expression. He famously posited that African writers “intended to do unheard things with [the English language]”, thus paving the way for other Anglophone African writers. Already in 1965 he suggested that “those African writers who have chosen to write in English or French are not unpatriotic smart alecks with an eye on the main chance—outside their own countries. They are by-products of the same process that made the new nation-states of Africa” (28).

However, he equally stresses that in order to suit his purpose, a world language like English “will have to be a new English, still in full communion with its ancestral home but altered to suit its new African surroundings.” (1965: 30). He put forward an interesting point, namely that almost all Scottish, Irish, or Welsh writers adapted to using a foreign language, imposed on them by their English-speaking conquerors and over time, made it their own (2010: 97).

Achebe believed that writing in English enabled him to connect to over 200 ethnicities in his native Nigeria (see 2010). Achebe further maintained that the difficulty in teaching children in their native languages (rather than English, for instance) lay more in the fact of ethnic mixing, which had created the “linguistic pluralism of modern African states” than erstwhile imperialism (2010: 106). For instance, opting for English as a language of instruction in Ghana under President Kwame Nkrumah, was a political choice to minimise issues of linguistic favouritism, which may have resulted in potential ethnic conflicts (2010: 105-106). Achebe saw both indigenous and European languages as valid vehicles for African writers and saw no need to choose one over the other (Achebe 2010: 97). In a similar vein, Achille Mbembe claims that “French, English, Portuguese have become African languages”, and thus perceives publishing novels in the erstwhile colonizers’ languages no longer as detrimental (Balakrishnan and Mbembe 35). Adams Bodomo quotes English, French, Swahili, Hausa and Arabic as the five most widely spoken languages on the African continent<sup>6</sup>. The establishment of the AWS facilitated that at least Anglophone African writing from the continent became more accessible. Achebe acknowledged the series as an important milestone in making Anglophone African writing more visible, albeit for a predominantly white audience (2010: 99).

In contrast, Kenyan scholar Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, who reverted to Gikuyu in 1977 for his creative writing (1994: 27), holds an Afrocentrist view that African writing must

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<sup>6</sup> Lecture “Language and Literature in their Social Contexts” at the Department of African Studies, University of Vienna (14 October 2013)

be written in African languages exclusively. However, not every Anglophone African writer has one or more African languages at their command, particularly not in the case of diasporic communities. As far as Taiye Selasi is concerned, she was raised in the U.S. without acquiring either of her parents' native languages. For writers of African descent in a similar linguistic situation, it seems a logical conclusion that they would publish texts in the language they have been exposed to from birth and have been educated in.

Gikandi addresses challenges faced by the Anglophone African writer, who is often writing for a global audience and notes the constraints if African novelists also want to succeed economically. The effects of globalization mean that more power about a novel's success may be wielded by a review in a Western newspaper or the marketing department of a Western publishing house in comparison to a newspaper or publisher based on the continent. (Knudsen and Rahbek 57)<sup>7</sup>.

The next section will give a short overview of Pan-Africanism and Négritude, as Kwame Appiah, Cheryl Sterling, Aretha Phiri, amongst other scholars, refer to these concepts as important reference points that permeate the discussion on Afropolitanism.

### **2.3. Pan-Africanism and Négritude**

According to Knudsen and Rahbek, the idea of Pan-Africanism goes back more than two hundred years, with the basis that "all Africans share a common history and a common destiny" (32). According to Neumann and Rippl, "Pan-Africanism [...] situates Africa as the origin of a genuinely African identity as it attempts to revitalize a largely suppressed African heritage" (163). However, they understand Pan-Africanism based "on a set of binary oppositions", where the "African" is a representative of what the "European", as the erstwhile colonizer, is not and vice versa. Such binary concepts do no longer suffice in a world where the mixing of people, ethnicities and cultures has for a long time been a tangible reality. Makokha claims that Africa has become much more visible on the world stage through the role South Africa has fulfilled since the end of apartheid in 1994, as the African powerhouse in an economic and cultural sense (14). The African Union not only celebrated their 50th anniversary (Sterling 129), but in the new millennium its

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<sup>7</sup> Due to length constraints, this thesis cannot give a detailed view on the effect of publishing/marketing of African authors in the West beyond a brief mention.



members have increasingly been discussing the eventual emergence of a “United States of Africa” as a possible route for a new political path for the African continent (Makokha 14).

Aretha Phiri distinguishes between Pan-Africanism and Afrocentrism, the latter “support[ing] the idea that universal history commenced in Africa” (2017: 155). Towards the end of the 19th century, Pan-Africanism had evolved in diasporic African (American) communities wishing to return to the continent (see Sterling). Appiah calls Edward William Blyden one of the “father[s] of Pan-Africanism” (1993: 21). Kasanda traces the development of the Pan-Africanist idea via Edward W. Blyden, Booker T. Washington, Anna Julia Cooper, and W.E.B. Du Bois to Marcus M. Garvey. The fifth Pan-African Congress, which took place in Manchester in 1945 under the catchphrase: “Africa for Africans” (Kasanda 2016: 187) was instrumental in finally passing the leadership of the movement from African Americans, to Africans of the continent towards the 1950s (Pierre 188). In 1945, political leaders like Kwame Nkrumah, who became Ghana’s first president upon the nation’s independence, understood Pan-Africanism as a steppingstone towards a political unification across the continent, comprising an economic as well as a military union (Kasanda 2016: 188).

Today, Kasanda suggests that Pan-Africanism should no longer be seen as a struggle against the white oppressor based on race, but rather as a “struggle for human dignity” on a much more universal scale (2016: 179). Kasanda equally perceives the original meaning of Pan-Africanism as outdated, in fact, “ossified” (2018: 393), since the world can no longer be understood in binary oppositions of black and white. Kasanda, in fact, understands that the thinkers of Pan-Africanism and Négritude intended first and foremost to “critique a system viewed as unjust and as denying human dignity to black People” (2018: 389). Alpha Abebe understands Afropolitanism as “a new form of Pan-Africanism, it is one that is rooted in a cultural aesthetic more than a political ambition, its leaders run blogs rather than political parties, and it calls for a reinterpretation rather than return to African culture[s] and values” (Morales 224). Interestingly, Appiah draws a comparison between the founding fathers of Pan-Africanist ideas such as W. E. B. Du Bois and Taiye Selasi or Achille Mbembe, in ascribing all of them to be members of the “Bildungsbürgertum”, educated at “universities whose names we know” (Knudsen and Rahbek 114).

Kasanda suggests that the very notion of African unity, a “supranational state” disregards the heterogeneous cultures and social practices within the African

continent, which make a Pan-Africanist construct essentialist and unrealistic (2016: 188). Sterling, on the other hand, suggests that a theory which potentially affects “a collectivity of over a billion people” is only seen as essentialist because it concerns blackness (2016: 129). Kasanda further states that movements of people *to* the continent historically have been well-established over the last centuries – be they from European, Arab, or Asian countries along with substantial inner-continental movement. As regards movement *from* the continent, he differentiates between involuntary movement (overshadowed by trauma and violence, mainly connected to slavery) and voluntary movement. Such voluntary, and more recent movement has been undertaken by people who leave Africa for employment, educational purposes or to improve their economic prospects, in short, in search of a better life – these people are so-called sojourners (Kasanda 2016: 191). Minna Salami aims to combine Pan-Africanism with cosmopolitanism and understands Afropolitanism to be a result of interweaving these ideas (Knudsen and Rahbek 32).

Yet, along with Dabiri and Musila, Kasanda emphasize the sometimes grim reality of many individuals, such as, for example, refugees, “who do not have the language skills, higher level education, enough financial resources in order to travel all over the world” (2016: 193), for whom Kasanda believes an updated version of Pan-Africanism, beyond “Afrocentrism and nativist theories” would be a more relevant concept than Afropolitanism. Instead, he suggests “black people solidarity” as a starting point (Kasanda 2016: 179).

Cheryl Sterling believes E.W. Blyden’s Pan-Africanist ideals to be more relevant than Appiah’s view of cosmopolitanism or Afropolitan models to the development of what she terms “a global Afro-humanist tradition” (119). Wachira Kigotho sees Pan-Africanism as more of a political movement, and focuses on what he understands as Afropolitanism’s potential to support projects of social change and the return of some members of the diaspora to the continent.

Négritude can be seen as an aesthetic and intellectual movement with a focus on literary production, which assumes a commonality between all people of African descent. Its development can be traced to 1930s Paris, when three francophone black students, namely Aimé Césaire from Martinique, Léopold Sédar Senghor from Senegal, and Léon Damas from French Guyana, founded the newspaper “*L'Étudiant noir*”, which first popularized the term as well as made poems and articles by above intellectuals available to a wider audience. Senghor became not only the first black

member of the L'Académie française, but in 1960, also the first elected president of Senegal. Césaire became mayor of Fort-de-France, Martinique's capital, in 1945 and later, like Damas, a member of the French national assembly. Senghor adopted French nationality and spent his final years in France (Gikandi 2009: 364-366).

Nadine Gordimer describes Négritude as a movement which, despite being from outside Africa, could become one of the beginnings of modern African writing, because it was motivated by a deep need shared by many black people "to present oneself, in full self-acceptance, in the opposing dignity of one's own house" (11). However, from today's viewpoint it seems contradictory that African and Caribbean intellectuals, who studied at Western universities and used French for their writing, developed an approach to their "Africanness", which posited a return to a bygone, simpler African lifestyle in their work, such as Césaire's *Cahier d'un Retour au Pays Natal* (*Notebook of a return to the native land*) from 1939.

In their works, they foregrounded the alleged emotionality and closer connection to the nature of the African mind above a rational and more technical approach to life. Thus, Négritude has been criticized by Appiah and Ngugi wa Thiongo for romanticizing and essentializing black people, and as being rooted predominantly in a historic communal lifestyle, based on indigenous cultures and religions. Furthermore, Négritude ignores the fact of long-standing creolization, and further implies a separation of different races based upon inherent differences, thus partly aping segregationist rhetoric. Kasanda highlights the inherent "discourse on race", implicit in both Pan-Africanism and Négritude, "between the aspirations of African people to universality and their claim to peculiarity" (2018: 388). Wole Soyinka is another well-known critic of Négritude; he expressed his misgivings aptly in a famous quote at the "Conference of African Writers of English Expression" at Makerere college in Kampala in 1962: "The tiger does not broadcast its tigritude; it manifests it by pouncing on its prey and eating it" (qtd. in Morales 229). Appiah, on the other hand, believes that the production of "interesting literature" should be considered more important than any underlying racialized concepts of Négritude. The next section explores Afropolitanism from a range of angles.

## **2.4. Approaching Afropolitanism(s)**

As an introduction to Afropolitanism, Mbembe suggests that it

is not the same as Pan-Africanism or négritude. Afropolitanism is an aesthetic and a particular poetic of the world. It is a way of being in the world, refusing

on principle any form of victim identity – which does not mean that it is not aware of the injustice and violence inflicted on the continent and its people by the law of the world. It is also a political and a cultural stance in relation to the nation, to race and to the issue of difference in general. (2007: 28-29)

In Kasanda's understanding of Afropolitanism, "African identity is shaped through cultural crossings and diversity based on people's inwards and outwards flows." (2016: 192). Chielozone Eze understands Afropolitanism to combine elements of cosmopolitanism with the idea of an 'Afro polites' into a complex phenomenon with an empowering, potentially political and even ethical stance. In his view, the concept extends beyond the criticism of exploitation and commercialization into a new kind of black agency characterized by openness and virtual as well as actual mobility, within or beyond the African continent. A broader interpretation of Afropolitan ideas may encompass a humanistic, anti-essentialist viewpoint, superseding binary views of race and ethnicity. Such concepts depend on a certain openness to an active engagement with the other, along the lines of an "emphatic imagination" (Eze 2014: 243). Eze stresses the importance of a relational identity, where individuals complement each other, and the diversity of human experience becomes a basis of conversation rather than conflict. He suggests that "[t]he Afropolitan is one who stakes moral claims to Africa and the world, and conversely admits that others can lay the same claim to Africa. The Afropolitan believes that being African is not reductive to colour, heritage [...] rather being African is expansive" (2015: 117).

Scholars agree that two people can be credited with the wider dissemination of the term. Since its first arrival in the scholarly debate approximately fifteen years ago with Achille Mbembe's essay *African Modes of Self-Writing*, translated from the French, (Balakrishnan 7), Afropolitanism has certainly been shown to be a multi-faceted and contested phenomenon, to the extent that Ede suggests "Afropolitanisms" as a more suitable term (2016: 88). This section will look at several scholarly viewpoints, which classify Afropolitanism as a political stance and a new type of black agency, or a mere marketing ploy for commercial purposes and commodification.

The wider conversation on Afropolitanism was launched in 2005, when Taiye Selasi, or rather "Taiye Tuakli-Wosornu" (Makokha 16) published her somewhat self-deprecating essay *Bye-Bye, Babar*, where she describes the lifestyle of a minority of affluent youngsters, who, while seemingly only loosely and conveniently connected to their African heritage, are free to travel the world and make use of many opportunities due to their high level of education, mobility and financial security.

This essay was first published online in LIP magazine, and after a quiet stretch gained currency by being republished in various arenas, mostly to do with art exhibitions and the like (Telasi Stranded Place). The overall tone of her “(in)famous essay” (Knudsen and Rahbek 39) essay paints a superficial picture of Third Culture Kids (TCK) which can be misleading.

Despite the impression gained by many readers at a first glance, Selasi later stated that she never intended to write “from a position of power”, but rather “from a position of pain ... [in which] my twin sister and I [...] were acutely aware at all times of our non-belonging” (Bady and Selasi 158). She describes her own experiences of growing up – while certainly privileged - as equally disorientating and rather confusing. By writing about her experiences and putting her observations into context, she created a “space” to develop a much-needed sense of “belonging” (Selasi 2013c). Selasi wrote her essay out of a feeling of displacement rather than in disregard to the disadvantaged masses of stationary Africans who are denied essential opportunities in life. Selasi never claimed that she was speaking for a majority of Africans or ignoring “the grotesque social and economic inequalities that continue [...] on the continent”, neither was she interested in “creating categories for creative output” (Knudsen and Rahbek 290).

Appiah, while understanding Afropolitanism as a “term of privilege”, makes it clear that Afropolitan “writers are [not] climbing over the bodies of dead Africans” to achieve their popularity and commercial success (Rahbek and Knudsen 147).

Knudsen and Rahbek point out that despite the foregrounding of “the lives and perspectives of writers among the [diasporan] 160 million Africans (or people of African lineage), which is often critiqued in Afro-diasporic literature, the voices of these communities should not be dismissed lightly” (294).

Interestingly, Cameroonian scholar Mbembe, who works at Witwatersrand University in Johannesburg, sees Afropolitanism in a much broader sense, with Afropolitans living in “Afropolises” such as Johannesburg, Accra or large Western cities (Makokha 18). He claims that it is not a new phenomenon, but rather “an ancient phenomenon evident across centuries of continental history” (Makokha 18), with well-established historical as well as contemporary patterns of “itinerancy, mobility and displacement” (Mbembe qtd. in Makokha 27). Eze similarly stresses that movement within the continent has had a long tradition and therefore can be covered by this term. In fact, he sees mobility as one of the key elements in the discussion, be that “spatial” or “interior” mobility, a mobility of the mind (115). He cautions against the

“mythologies of authenticity” which he understands to contrast with a moral sense of “openness” towards one’s fellow human beings. For Eze, “(a)n Afropolitan, [...] is that human being on the African continent or of African descent who has realized that her identity can no longer be explained in purist, essentialist, and oppositional terms or by reference only to Africa” (2014: 240). In this way, Afropolitanism transcends race or heritage; thus, an Afropolitan may, for instance, be also white, Asian, or Indian or any combination of ethnicities (see Mbembe 2002). Mbembe also presents an ethical viewpoint where Afropolitans may stake “moral claims to Africa and the world, and conversely admit” that others (i.e. persons who do not identify as Afropolitans) may lay an equal claim to Africa (2002: 117).

Eze introduces a “relational model of identity” which allows for what he terms an “I-Thou relationship” in order to facilitate dialogue with other human beings in an “empathic imagination” rather than a “sympathetic imagination” (2014: 237-239). He considers an “empathic imagination” to entail an absence of power relations, whereas a “sympathetic” imagination suggests that one person is in a superior position to the one/s they are communicating with (Eze 2014: 243).

Interestingly, Eze understands an Afropolitan stance as focused on the community, rather than the individual. Balakrishnan develops the idea of such large-scale communities further by adding a political dimension, when she claims that “Africa’s cosmopolitan cities and zones are now thought to be harbingers of a new post-racial political future” (1). In her opinion, the European colonizers fragmented the African continent along arbitrary political borders, causing substantial hindrances to the development of any successfully functioning nation states by creating homelands and erecting metropolitan centres for the administration of the colonies. However, while these metropolises were originally perceived as a threat to stability due to the envisioned “detrribalization” of villagers leaving for the big cities, such spaces today are moving towards a network of “circulation and mobility” (34), and are thus at the forefront of a “radical break in the history of African emancipatory politics to engage in universalist non-racial thought from an African perspective” (Balakrishnan 7). She sees Afropolitanism as a type of catalyst, “claiming Africa as the future [of the world] while simultaneously letting go of its colonial past” (8). Similarly, Mbembe perceives Afropolitanism as a useful tool, “[c]osmopolitan in scope, anti-essentialist, open to cultural and intellectual hybridization”, fully aware of Africa’s difficult and diverse history, towards the “yet unfinished decolonization process of Africa” (qtd. in Gehrman 64).

Makokha sees scope for Afropolitanism as a space to discuss “borders and spaces of new African identities” (17). Knudsen and Rahbek understand Homi Bhabha’s “third space as a qualifying precursor of the Afropolitan space”, “where the idea of purity is superseded by the reality of intermingling cultures [...] that effectively blur boundaries” (33).

Gikandi describes Afropolitanism as a welcome alternative to Afro-pessimism’s “trope of crisis” (see Nothias) which previously put constraints on artistic expression and subject matter and suggests Afropolitanism as “an opportunity for reimagining new narratives of the future” (2011: 10). He posits Afropolitanism as a “hermeneutics of redemption” (Gikandi 2011: 9), put into place against the “nausea of history” (Ede 2016: 93). Mbembe equally rejects a “victim identity” in favour of a “a political and a cultural stance in relation to the nation, to race and to the issue of difference in general”, which considers the difficult past and present of the African continent but rejects concepts such as new nativism as simplistic (2016: 28). Gladys Ankobrey welcomes Afropolitanism as “a refreshing counter-narrative” to the way stories from and about Africans have been shaped in the West.

In contrast, Irish-Nigerian scholar Emma Dabiri, who was at first excited about the possibility of shedding the hyphen in favour of a new term (Knudsen and Rahbek 166), remains a stern critic of Afropolitanism, pointing out its inherent dangers of “becoming the dominant narrative for Africa[n success]” in literature (105). She likens that effect to the activities of “second-wave feminists” who were unaware of their privileged position as affluent white women when they believed they spoke for all womankind (105). Dabiri discusses the emergency of the “Hipster Africa Experience”, which sees an adoption of Western lifestyle choices amongst a minority of well-off Africans (106), both in Africa and across Europe and the United States. In fact, she perceives the term as “irreparably tarnished” (107) due to its connection with on-line shopping, high-end consumer goods and the general “chilling commodification” of any marketable, superficially African element (104). She further suggests that since African American black cultures have already been extensively exploited for mainly Western markets, now “authentic, more virgin, black cultures” are required - yet another raw material to be extracted from the black continent (105). It stands to reason this would be a surface authenticity only, since the days of traditional Igbo village life at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century as depicted in *Things Fall Apart* (1958) by the “Father of African Literature”, Chinua Achebe, have long since gone.

Dabiri misses “progressive activism” (104) in the face of “poverty [...] endemic for millions, [where] a privileged few telling us how great everything is, how much opportunity and potential is available, [are] drown[ing] out the voices of a majority [...] denied basic life chances” (106).

Grace Musila is also sceptical about the concept, which in her opinion has developed only partially, as it was “expected to run before it had [found] its feet” (110), and rather exclusively into “a particular kind of affluent mobility in the global north”, where any type of African continental experience is turned into a marketable “Africa lite” product (110). In agreement with Dabiri, she asks the rhetorical question whether “a Somali shopkeeper in a SA township [is] Afropolitan in the same way as Taiye Selasi?” Furthermore, she is concerned about the apparent need for an additional qualifier from cosmopolitan to Afropolitan, when similarly, mobile, affluent Westerners have not adopted terms such as “Europolitans” or “Amerropolitans” (Musila 112).

Coetzee picks up on the image of the displaced “Somali shopkeeper” when he envisages “the beginnings of an activist scholarly agenda in which ‘the Afropolitan’ is reimaged to include the stealthy figure crossing the Mediterranean by boat, and the Somali shopkeeper in a South African town-ship” (103). Gikandi tries to reconcile different ends of the spectrum when he proposes at least two groups of Afropolitans – one example may be “taxi drivers in Accra”, who by means of the internet and their smartphones, “can live outside the boundaries of Ghana in their imagination” (Knudsen and Rahbek 49). The second group are, for instance, most of the guests attending *Ghana Must Go*’s book launch in Accra, whom he perceived as “children of the elite”, primarily educated and living in the West (Knudsen and Rahbek 49).

Mobility is another important element of the Afropolitan discussion. Gehrman (2016) places “spatial mobility” next to “digital mobility”, which opens new avenues to discuss and disseminate ideas on Afropolitanism and claims that this phenomenon is thus undoubtedly connected to the use of social media and cyberspace (63). In this context, one needs to mention Minna Salami, of Nigerian-Finnish heritage whose blog is called “Ms Afropolitan” and who has become a widely-recognized proponent of Afropolitanism. She started her blog in 2010 as a response to Selasi’s essay (Knudsen and Rahbek 158). In 2015, she published a list comprising 32 items on what Afropolitanism meant for her, an unofficial manifesto. She maintains that “Afropolitanism is a conceptual [glocal, i.e. both global and local] space in which



African heritage realities are both interrogated and understood with the tools and nuances of modern-day globalisation”, yet is also acutely aware that

Afropolitanism is largely shaped by people who have time for ideological ruminations and cultural expression. People who are struggling for food, or fleeing wars, or struggling with other disabling structures, sadly rarely have the luxury to debate ideology, be it feminism, marxism, socialism etc. (Salami, view 17 of 32 views)

Despite her awareness that poverty remains one of the most pressing problems across the continent, she credits Afropolitanism with the potential to address economic equality, amongst other issues, “through the rational mind (dissemination, discussion, interpretation); the subconscious spirit (art, culture, mythology, fashion, poetry, aesthetics); and the animus – motivation to action” (view 19). Salami responds to the criticism that “Africans who live across cultural and economic boundaries [are] only to be contemplated as mimetically white” (Knudsen and Rahbek 121), by proposing only half-jokingly that people like her would not pass the “AAST (African Authenticity Standard Test)”, due to their mixed heritage and upbringing, their “blended selfhoods”.

Regarding the critiques on commercialism, Gehrman comments on the “marketability of Afropolitan authors” (66), which does point towards a commercialization made possible primarily by financially viable marketing departments of U.S. or British publishers. Ede suggests that such authors “pander to the white metropolitan gaze in targeting that public as its first literary audience” (2016: 94), while a “secondary continental [African] audience” is neglected in favour of a “primary metropolitan readership”, by “extroversion” (Eileen Julien qtd. in Ede 2016: 93). Authors such as Taiye Selasi or Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, in Ede’s view, neglect their “moral or ethical duty to the continent”, which they merely view as source material to be exploited and deny “black group agency” in favour of their own agenda, presumably commercial success and literary merit (2016: 97). According to Ede, this situation is exacerbated by the system of literary awards, where predominantly Western literary prizes seem to defer prestige, while African literary prizes are so far much less visible (2016: 94). As far as commercial success for authors writing about Afropolitan characters is concerned, Ede suggests that Western publishing houses play a prominent and problematic role (2016: 94). Gehrman similarly points towards the unprecedented (financial) success on the German book market of authors such as Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, Teju Cole or Taiye Selasi over the last few years. Not only were their books translated into German at record speed, Selasi and Cole’s covers featured in the German quality weekly paper *DIE ZEIT* in

2013 and 2015 respectively (2016: 66). Dorota Pucherová comments on “the depressing state of African publishing [...], continued low literacy rates, and a fragile intellectual infrastructure”, with the result that “to break into the global market necessarily means to publish in London or New York” (14). According to Toivanen, “the ways in which certain Afropolitan star authors are being marketed”, is suggestive of Afropolitanism being “a spiced-up variation of cosmopolitanism” (197).

However, in reference to the publication and dissemination of *Ghana Must Go*, Selasi states that because of the dearth of reliable publishing options in Ghana she tried to at least “launch the novel in Accra”, which was what she had intended. In the end, her parents helped her organize two events in Ghana, at which her book was available for sale, and it could later be bought by local readers at the hospital where her mother works (See Selasi 2015).

Regarding the publishing industry, Pucherová critically examines the complex role of the Caine prize, which was created in 2000 by “British LibDem MEP Baroness Emma Nicholson in memory of her husband, Michael Caine, former chairman of Booker plc and philanthropist in Africa” to promote “African” writing in English or translated into English (2012: 13). Unfortunately, while in many cases having launched their winners’ (international) careers, the prize remains ambiguous because of its origin as well as the judging of literary merit, which appears to remain firmly rooted in the West (see Pucherová 2012).

As regards the dissemination of academic discourse on Afropolitanism, in the foreword to *Negotiation Afropolitanism: Essays on Borders and Spaces in Contemporary African Literature and Folklore*, Gikandi expresses concerns that in the past, predominantly only a select elite based in Western academia had been shaping opinions on Afropolitanism; however, he remarks that more recently a wide range of topics by various research institutions on the African continent provide vibrant and necessary evidence of “African sites of knowledge in global debates” (11). To summarise, comparing various scholars’ viewpoints, it is evident that Afropolitanisms are differently understood by different people. According to Ryan Skinner, Afropolitanisms defy definitions because of their very nature of “negotiating multiple modes of identification and senses of place” (5).

It seems relevant that there is an on-going wide-ranging discussion, be it on the internet via bloggers, artists, or in the academic arena, on how African or Afro-diasporic sensibilities in general, and the artistic expression of such in particular, is going to develop in the years to come. There seems to be agreement that the time is

ripe to move away from previous tropes of misery, in the past expressed by Afropessimism. The necessary, but now to an extent outdated stance of Africans being primarily depicted as victims of colonization, a writing-back to the colonizer, or predominantly nationalist novels, do no longer encompass all of Anglophone African writing.

In regards to literary production, one main strand sees Afropolitanism as a steppingstone to a new post-racial, inter-relational African identity, creating a space for (currently a minority of privileged) African or Afro-diasporic people to take a stance in the world and for their stories to be heard. Knudsen and Rahbek thus posit Afropolitanism as “a space of enquiry [...] where reconnections between Africa and the diaspora can be explored” (48). Eze, referencing NoViolet Bulawayo’s 2013 novel *We Need New Names* suggests that African writers “need new names not because we are new – we are not; rather, we need new names because we have new stories to tell about our world. These stories acknowledge those of our ancestors but seek to expand them in order to contain our extended arc of existence” (2016: 115). Ede goes as far as declaring Afropolitanism a “cultural politics [...] as a coping mechanism against the nausea of history” (2016: 93). Barack Obama’s “audacity of hope” towards a more equal future for members of different ethnicities comes to mind as another necessary antidote to history (356). Rahbek and Knudsen stress that the vibrant debate surrounding the term is due to persons like Kenyan scholar Amandla Ooko-Ombaka, who are increasingly leading and controlling the conversation on the meaning of being an African in today’s global world (27). Wainanina differentiates between two main strands of Afropolitanism: a relatively recent one as represented by Selasi’s “globetrotting African elite” and a long-standing one based on Mbembe’s understanding of African history including migration within, to and from the continent (25).

Alternatively, another strand of research dismisses Afropolitanism as a mere fad and marketing ploy, once again in the service of commodification and exploitation, where any connection to Africa is simply fulfilling the West’s demand for a fresh supply of “tamed exoticism” (see Dabiri). Martha Tveit understands Selasi’s portrayal of an Afropolitan lifestyle as supporting a “reductive narrative of Africa and the African, [...] in turn [...] an important part of neocolonial soft power structures” (qtd. in Skinner 5). Dabiri equally perceives some of the literary figureheads such as Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie or Taiye Selasi as tainted by their commercial success in the West and their hipster lifestyle (106).

While the novel certainly neither claims to nor can give a rounded view of the African diaspora(s), in line with Skinner, I suggest it should not be easily dismissed as only pandering to affluent Western reading sensibilities and its potential commercial success, but deserves a more thorough investigation and interpretation. I agree with Grace Adeniyi Ogunyankin who suggests that Afropolitanism should be understood in a much broader sense, thus generating a more inclusive space for

Africans of any social class who respect, value and embrace their ‘Africanness’ – which can have various meanings for different people – and are at the same time aware that, at the level of their everyday realities, embodiment and social political thought, they are very much connected to, and influenced by, the global. (39)

Focusing less on mobility, she believes such a reading would be closer to a wider spectrum of African lives and thus more acceptable to critics of Afropolitanism as yet another “single story” .

Morales argues that Afropolitanism “should not be interpreted as an all-inclusive theory of modern African writing that essentializes the younger writers, particularly those living in the diaspora” (226). Instead, I share Morales’ view that “Afropolitanism simply creates [...] another space for future thinking and evaluation of the literature” (226). In fact, Morales advocates for “a future [that] is an alliance of generations to provide a creative space for African’s writing in and outside the continent“ (223). I share Emelda Ucham’s view who suggests that Afropolitanism provides a useful framework to recent Anglophone African literatures (98). As far as the literary analysis of *Ghana Must Go* is concerned, it is important to investigate the novel’s protagonists as fully rounded characters, including their strengths, flaws and coping strategies. If one only applied the more obvious criteria gained by skimming Selasi’s essay, the characters would be reduced almost to caricatures of restless overachievers who maintain a consumer lifestyle and are only vaguely connected to their largely unknown African heritage. One should not be misled by foregrounding the Western upbringing and expensive education the Sai children are exposed to and equating those opportunities with an unencumbered upbringing and a happy life. Afropolitanism for the characters in *Ghana Must Go* means to balance a cultural void in terms of their parents’ back stories with a wealth of opportunity and economic security among a heterogeneous U.S. society. I strive to combine various angles on Afropolitanism, focusing on the element that Afropolitanism enables an important “space of enquiry” (Knudsen and Rahbek 48). This space is needed to allow for the insecurities, sense of loss and sometimes futile attempts of connecting with each

other, their parents and the African continent. On the other hand, this space can also be used to celebrate what is unique in their blended experiences, as they perform a range of roles depending on context. Once the protagonists have consciously acknowledged the positive as well as the negative aspects their situation warrants them as members of the African diaspora, they may be able to forge a clearer path for their futures. In order to better understand which markers indicate an Afropolitan reading according to Taiye Selasi's essay, the next section takes a closer look at them.

## **2.5. Afropolitanism in *Bye-Bye, Babar*<sup>8</sup>**

In 2005, Taiye Selasi published an on-line text entitled *Bye-Bye, Babar (Or: What is an Afropolitan?)*, which according to Knudsen and Rahbek can be seen as a starting point to “an Afropolitan literary aesthetics[...], a space of critical enquiry what it means to be a twenty-first-century African in, or of, the world [...] from quite different backgrounds and perspectives” (291-292), and should not be dismissed lightly because of its brevity and somewhat glib tone. Besides Taiye Selasi, Achille Mbembe and Minna Salami are seen as the three pertinent “founders of (a new) discursivity” on Afropolitanism (Knudsen and Rahbek 292).

The title of the essay refers to the 1988 movie “Coming to America”, when Eddy Murphy, who plays crown prince Akeem of the fictional African kingdom Zamunda, greets his pet elephant in the grounds of his Zamundian palace with “Hello, Babar” (*BBB* 323). For Selasi, saying good-bye to Babar may signify a departure both from the continent (as the first wave of voluntary African immigrants in search of higher education in the West left from the 1960s onwards), and from the tropes of a humourous, entirely unrealistic depiction of an African character, namely Prince Akeem.

The impetus to write the text arose from Selasi's frustration as she was constantly being told by others about her “non-belonging” – she was never Ghanaian or British or American or Nigerian “enough”, and yet felt connected to rituals and experienced meaningful relationships in those and other places (2015: 158).

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<sup>8</sup> Selasi's original text on the LIP magazine website was entitled *Bye-Bye Babar*; it was later included in Penguin's 2013 *Ghana Must Go* and amended to *Bye-Bye, Babar (Or: What is an Afropolitan?)*. To aid readability, “Selasi *Bye-Bye, Babar (Or: What is an Afropolitan?)*” will be abbreviated to *BBB*; pages are referenced according to the printed version in the 2013 Penguin edition of *Ghana Must Go*.

At the beginning of the text Selasi portrays Afropolitans somewhat “self-congratulatory” as highly attractive, professional young adults enjoying themselves across the globe, equipped with an excellent education, multilingual and affluent, thus free to follow whatever life plans they may have. Yet, Knudsen and Rahbek posit that despite the first impression readers may gain from this text, seeing Afropolitans as spoilt TCK who have sold out to Western values and propagate an “Africa lite” sentiment, the characters in *Ghana Must Go* are Afropolitans with multi-faceted, often difficult responses to their complicated (if comparatively privileged) upbringing.

According to Selasi, beneath this glossy surface lies a more nuanced approach to the continent by representatives of this group, their “willingness to complicate Africa; namely, to engage with, critique and celebrate the *parts* of Africa that mean most to [them]” (BBB 324). Selasi, while congratulating David Adjaye, OBE (a Ghanaian-Tanzanian-British architect) and Andrew Ashong (a Ghanaian-British singer-songwriter and DJ) on their success, also laments the brain drain from the continent and ascribes Afropolitans in many cases with the willingness to seriously consider Africa and its many different peoples’ needs by giving back, going back or otherwise “invest[ing] in Africa’s future” (BBB 326). Eze ascribes Selasi’s Afropolitans with a “consciousness” about Africa, a “transcultural affinity” which provides them with “multiple perspectives” (2016: 115) and a willingness to engage “from the belief that *to be is to relate* (emphasis added)” (2020: 148).

In her 2014 TED Talk, when being asked where she is from, Selasi does not see herself as belonging to one or more nations, but rather to local experiences, comprised of “rituals”, “relationships” and “restrictions”. She describes, for example, rituals as meals shared with people whom she has a close relationship with, irrelevant of their nationality or place of residence. In her view, restrictions refer to the possibilities to travel, based on passports and/or financial means, which are unavailable to a large number of stationary Africans as well as to governments which curtail free movement of their citizens. For her, “home” is the place where she can share experiences and “shopkeepers know your face”; the rituals of her childhood family home are those of the global South. She foregrounds the importance of being “local” in a number of places rather than being “from” somewhere specific. According to Minna Salami, the combination of both local and global creates a new state of being, namely being “glocal”. Salami believes that Afropolitanism is a useful concept

because it focuses on “the African experience of glocalism”, “the bridge between the ‘I’, ‘humanity’ and Africa” (Knudsen and Rahbek 159).

According to Selasi and Ankobrey, identities of Afropolitans are shaped by the process of “performance” of different roles in different places, which can be “deeply enriching”, yet confusing, at times. Selasi suggests that an Afropolitan needs to align her identity along “three dimensions: national, racial, cultural” (BBB 325), which requires multiple ways of relating to others and can be challenging work in process. Thus, Selasi sees a person’s individual identity in conversation with and in relation to group attachments, for instance “to ‘be Ghanaian’ is to find beloved family in Ghana” (BBB 326).

A number of topics are raised in the text which can be seen as indicative of Selasi’s view of an Afropolitan approach to the world:

First, “mobility” is a common factor amongst the people she describes, as they are familiar with “at least one place on the continent to which [they] tie [their] sense of self” as well as having experienced a number of “G8 cities” across the globe (BBB 323).

“Lived hybridity” is expressed through areas such as fashion, “kente cloth worn over low-waisted jeans” (BBB 322), language (“[m]ost of us are multilingual” (BBB 323)) or perceiving oneself as an ethnic/cultural mix.

“Lofty ambitions” are evident in young people who are described as high achievers, “matching our parents in number of [university] degrees and/or achieving things our people in the grand sense only dreamed of” (BBB 324).

“A space” to interrogate their sense of self and belonging without “oversimplify[ing] [...] what is ailing in Africa alongside the desire to honour what is unique” (BBB 324).

“A complicated relationship” to both ‘Home’ and their African roots is mentioned, including “a sense of shame” due to their lack of knowledge about their “parents’ birthplaces”, or due to struggling to digest the reality of such places which in many cases they only know from occasional visits (BBB 325). Interestingly, Ankobrey introduces the term of ‘Afro-cool’ to describe a move from “shame to pride” about their heritage that she noticed amongst a group of young Londoners with roots in Jamaica, Ghana, Nigeria, Lebanon and Sierra Leone whom she interviewed (340).

Selasi describes the Afropolitan generation as the children of the “young, gifted and broke” who left the continent from the 1960s onwards, a majority of whom settled in “Canada, Britain and the United States” (BBB 323). Despite the apparent privileges

that a middle-class upbringing in the U.S. or Europe warrants them, they must decide where they fit into mainstream society. They do not have an ancestral homeland as do their parents, and while many of them are interested in Africa as a concept, they grow up as “cultural mutts” (BBB 323). Eze supports this idea of the “cultural mutt” and of interconnected identities, as

(a)n Afropolitan, in my understanding, is that human being on the African continent or of African descent who has realized that her identity can no longer be explained in purist, essentialist, and oppositional terms or by reference only to Africa. Afropolitans claim that they are no longer just X as opposed to Y; rather they are A and B and X. Their realities are already intermixed with the realities of even their erstwhile oppressors. It is not possible to go back to their native place, since they are all mutts, biologically or culturally. (2014: 240)

Applying the descriptions from *Bye-Bye, Babar to Ghana Must Go*, there are clear differences between the first and the second-generation protagonists. Bradatan, Popan and Melton state that second-generation migrants usually consider “home” a different place than do their parents, as in many cases they are born and raised in the host country (171). In *Ghana Must Go*, the children’s sense of purpose is not as clear as is their parents’, as it was not formulated by the particular (economic) struggle and hardships their parents experienced. Instead, their lives are characterized by comparative ease and multiple opportunities – as well as by a sense of restlessness, loss, and anxiety. According to Selasi, being “[b]rown-skinned without an inherited sense of blackness on the one hand and chided by family members for acting white on the other” can result in significant unease or an overriding sense of being “lost in transnation” (BBB 325). Gikandi, Knudsen and Rahbek equally describe “deeply felt anxieties about belonging, even (or perhaps especially) in people or characters who appear to be privileged through mobility, education and class background” (54; 293). Amongst such persons one may – by her own admission – count Taiye Selasi who is briefly portrayed in the next section.

## 2.6. Taiye Selasi

The author of a work of fiction should certainly not be confused with the narrator. However, since Knudsen and Rahbek, among others, suggest that “Afropolitan writers” write texts with “Afropolitan characters”, it makes sense to have a look at some biographical information on Taiye Selasi (birth name: Taiye Tuakli-Wosornu). She was born in 1979 in London but grew up on the East coast of the United States in Massachusetts. She attended universities in the U.S. (Yale) and in the UK (Oxford). Her family has a mixed ethnic background, with Nigerian Yoruba/Ghanaian Ga as



well as a Scottish heritage. According to her TEDtalk from 2014, she understands herself to be multi local, in the sense of being rooted to a number of local places, for example “New York, Accra and Rome”. She is a writer, photographer, and blogger<sup>9</sup>. Both parents are doctors: her mother, Juliette Modupe Tuakli M.D. (to whom the novel is dedicated) is a paediatrician and university professor at the University of Ghana. Her father Prof. Lade Wosornu belongs to the faculty of Imam Abdulrahman Bin Faisal University of Saudi Arabia<sup>10</sup>.

Besides *Ghana Must Go*, she has written a number of short stories, for instance *The Sex Lives of African Girls* or *Driver* (Bady and Selasi 150). In 2013, she received a nomination by Granta as one of twenty Best British Writers. In 2014, to coincide with Port Harcourt being UNESCO World Book Capital, Binyavanga Wainaina had instigated a search for “new writing from Africa south of the Sahara” from inside and outside the African continent. Selasi was nominated as one of the 39 most promising authors of African descent and a 10-page excerpt of *Ghana Must Go* was included. The anthology *Africa39: New Writing from Africa South of the Sahara* was published by Bloomsbury with a foreword by Wole Soyinka. The anthology’s editor, Ellah Wakatam Allfrey, calls these texts, written in English or translated into English from Kiswahili, Igbo, Lingala, French, Spanish and Portuguese and representing sixteen subsaharan countries, “a snapshot of the potential offerings from a vast continent of storytellers” (*Africa 39* xxi).

In the case of *Ghana Must Go*, Selasi admitted that to an extent she used her own biography as source material. However, she emphasizes that despite surface similarities, the novel is in no way an autobiographical text. Rather, she thought it made sense to write about certain things she knew from her own life in order to be able to concentrate her creativity on the fictional elements. Selasi’s text “for the British newspaper *The Guardian* reveals similarities between her own family’s life experiences and those of the Sai family (2013c): She also has a Scottish great-grandmother; she and her twin sister Yetsa Kehinde Adebodunde Olubunmi Tuakli-Wosornu (*GMG* 320) were born two months prematurely and were nursed to health by their paediatrician mother; her father, a surgeon, left her family, living in

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<sup>9</sup> Somewhat surprisingly, Selasi does not identify as an Afropolitan writer; instead, she describes being an Afropolitan as pertaining to her personal identity (see Selasi 2013b).

<sup>10</sup> All biographical information is based on Morales 2017, Gehrman 2016 and Selasi’s *Guardian* article from 2013.

Brookline, when she and her twin sister were very young; she only travelled to Ghana at the age of fifteen, when she met her father's previous wives and half-siblings at Christmas; both her parents returned to Ghana in later life; she did not grow up speaking either her mother's Yoruba or her father's Ewe.

When, as a teenager, Selasi finally met her father's relatives in Ghana, she particularly remembers the "shame" she felt at "the poverty, the polygamy, one stereotype of African dysfunction after another". She eventually travelled across West Africa to get to know her parents' roots and through experiencing contemporary African life, she developed and reconciled her own relationship to the continent. Selasi understands herself as a storyteller about a " 'simply' human" family rather than "the social 'truth' of the African (post)migrant experience" (Knudsen and Rahbek 122-123).

The next section investigates the impact of cultural contact on the development of cultural identities, and some strategies are presented that might be employed by people who are members of a minority due to their own (or their parents') migration. Acculturation theory, transnationalism and cosmopolitanism are introduced as background information to the identity development of people who might call themselves "cultural mutts" (BBB 323).

### **3. Culture and Identity after Post–Colonialism<sup>11</sup>**

This section discusses how identities are formed and influenced by the societies we live in, and how different cultural strands develop. Several strategies are presented, which individuals may (have to) choose consciously or unconsciously in order to deal with these processes on a personal level, be they consequences of emigration, the lingering after-effects of colonization, or a hybrid upbringing.

These strategies will be applied to the behaviour of the main six characters of *Ghana Must Go* in the literary analysis. It is important to distinguish between the different generations in the Sai family: While their four children are born and raised in the United States, the parents are both first-generation African immigrants who flee poverty (Kweko) and a civil war (Folasadé). These first-generation migrants employ different techniques from their children to negotiate their cultural ties when engaging with their African heritage. While the parent generation may find it difficult to settle

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<sup>11</sup> Subchapters 3.1. and 3.2. build on my 2014 seminar paper *Quality Street and Everyday Use: Two young women searching for their identity*.

in the United States, they are more purpose-driven and draw strength from the notion of a physical home on the continent they could (at least in theory) return to. Their children fit in more easily with U.S. mainstream society, yet struggle with a sense of purpose and neither have a place to call home on the continent nor, it seems, in the States. Thus, being a first or a second-generation migrant presents different challenges as well as different opportunities, which will be investigated in the next section.

### 3.1. Cultural Contact

Cultures which are relevant for large numbers of people can be called “primary cultural complexes”, i.e., for instance a “metropolitan tradition” in large urban centres, or a range of “indigenous tradition” predominantly in rural areas and “various syncretistic ‘contact cultures’” as a result of contact (Hogan xii).

He describes the differences between basic cultures and syncretistic contact cultures, quoting examples for

‘basic’ culture – English culture in England and Igbo culture in the interior Igbo villages. [...] [R]egions of high intensity contact (e.g. Lagos), develop two sorts of Creolized culture. Most obviously, indigenous culture is affected by metropolitan culture – through English education, forced Christianization, or simply through the partial Europeanization produced by the structure of work and the physical and economic environment. (Hogan 5)

Once modifications to existing cultures have occurred, these would be referred to as “contact cultures”. One may assume that in today’s globalized world, very few (if any) indigenous cultures remain, as cultural contact has been inevitable over the course of history. He proposes a universalist rather than an absolutist viewpoint in order to reconcile today’s often problematic, i.e. conflicting and competing cultural scenarios and posits that universalism can be taxing, as it would necessitate “a self-conscious effort to understand precisely what is common across different cultures - empirically, normatively, experientially” (xvi). An absolutist outlook, on the other hand, is more restrictive and prescriptive, assuming that only “one culturally particular set of precepts of practices applies to everyone” (Hogan xvi).

Hogan describes Kenyan writer and activist Ngugi wa Thiong’o as someone who calls himself “an unrepentant universalist”, but equally insists on the importance of “cultural particularity and diversity” (Hogan xvii). He believes that such an approach may enable a “deep compatibility of universalism and particularism” as a prerequisite for cultural pluralism (Hogan xvii). Similarly, Kortenaar, another scholar working on issues of cultural contact and identity in a post-colonial setting, believes that any

“discussion of culture in postcolonial literary criticism revolves around the twin poles of authenticity and hybridization” (30).

Clearly, he is aware of the dilemma of terminology, for instance when “authenticity and creolization actually challenge people to identify with a certain image of themselves and so to adopt a certain identity” and potentially problematic results if “certain modes of dressing, speaking, and writing [would be perceived] as belonging *properly* to oneself and [one would] reject other styles as false” (Kortenaar 31). The fundamental difficulty implicit in terms such as “hybridization” and “authenticity” would be the need to revert to a “notion of cultural purity” – impossible to define - in any given context (Kortenaar 30).

I understand these terms not so much as mutually exclusive, but rather as a continuum which can accommodate a range of responses and eventual behaviours.

For individuals, hybridization can mean to accept “some measure of interfertilization (or creolization or mongrelization or metissage)” (Kortenaar 30). Bhabha also suggests “mimicry” and “hybridization” as outcomes of cultural contact (2004). Creolization accepts a pragmatic viewpoint, i.e. that “colonialism [...] is irreversible” (Kortenaar 30). Yet, “[t]hat position does not leave the former colonized without a culture: they have a hybrid or creole culture that has borrowed from the metropolitan culture and in the process subverted and indigenized it” (Kortenaar 30).

Importantly, regardless of which type of cultural expression a writer or indeed any individual human being identifies with, is that “cultures have always been characterized by fluidity and exchange” (Kortenaar 30). He argues that individuals or “cultural agents must construct their lives within these inherited parameters” (Kortenaar 31), yet have much scope in fashioning their own world-view: “Culture [...] is not a pre-descriptive grammar but rather a reservoir of often contradictory potential practices that social actors can make use of when communal identity is being renegotiated, as it always is”.

Therefore, Kortenaar prefers to use the above terminology as “metaphors” by which identities “have always been constructed”, even if this involves a split into “members and nonmembers, [...] loyalists and traitors” (Kortenaar 31). He concludes that “[a]uthenticity and creolization are best regarded as valuable rhetorical tools that can be made to serve liberation” (Kortenaar 41). In other words, he emphasizes the relevance and willingness to engage in on-going communication between human beings as the most important element in any kind of cultural exchange: “the ongoing debate over what the shared culture is, how members should behave, and what

children should be taught” (Kortenaar 31). The next section suggests a number of strategies that people exposed to changing cultural environments may adopt.

### **3.2. Cultural Identity and Strategies**

In many parts of the world, the development of cultural identities has traditionally been “bound up with colonialism [...] and with struggles against colonialism” (Hogan xi). Mbembe points out that colonialism was not inflicted on Africa exclusively by Westerners, but rather an unfortunate combined effort, “the result of western violence as well as the work of a swarm of African auxiliaries seeking profit” (2002: 262). Since the after-effects of colonization still linger in many formerly colonized nations like e.g. Nigeria, Hogan calls this situation “postcolonization rather than postcolonialism” (Hogan xix).

Besides the impact of historical events over long periods of time, such as wars and resulting shifts in power, which other factors contribute to the development of individual or group identity? Hogan believes human identity to consist of “a representational or referential component and a procedural or “skills” component”, both very much shaped by social learning (Hogan 9).

One’s reflective identity is made up of several elements which underpin one’s understanding of ourselves in certain categories, such as gender or skin colour. These categories and their respective significance are defined by “social standard practices” (Hogan 10, 322). Since such practices are usually well established, they make it difficult for any individual to objectively evaluate their relevance.

One’s practical identity encompasses socially learned behaviour, which contains “all of one’s unreflective knowledge about how to act or interact in typical situations” (Hogan 9, 322). In contrast to Kortenaar, Hogan leaves little room for individuals to develop their identities outside any learned behaviour they grew up with. Instead, he suggests that potential changes in one’s behaviour are caused rather by changes in one’s social environment.

Unfortunately, when people leave their accustomed cultural background, they may find themselves “caught between [...] conflicting sets of imperatives” (Hogan), where ones’ acquired cultural practices no longer match the new environment. The resulting cultural alienation may be improved by three main pathways, namely “embracing indigenous tradition, striving for full Europeanization, or combining the two” (Hogan 10).

The first approach, “embracing indigenous tradition” comprises “[o]rthodoxy, [u]nreflective [c]onformism, and [r]eaction” (Hogan 10). He describes “orthodoxy” as a positive attitude which aims for “a genuine reintegration with the living, changing practices [...] of the tradition” (Hogan 10) and suggests there is scope for extending one’s practices if so required. In contrast, people who adhere to an “unreflective conformism” approach continue practices they believe to be traditional, but which often are only “a mindless reiteration which denies any criticism, and lacks a full understanding of which purpose is served by which custom or behavior” (Hogan 10). Finally, “reaction” encompasses “reactionary traditionalism/nativism/racialism”, an even more extreme perception of the world, which he places near “fundamentalism”. Important in a fundamentalist world view would be a clear distinction between cultural practices seen as “authentic” and such seen as forced upon a “pure” community by outside influences, most notably Western colonialism and Western practices in general – these would be rejected, often violently (Hogan 12).

The second approach, “striving for full Europeanization” in order to deal with cultural alienation comprises “assimilation” and “mimeticism” (Hogan 14).

Hogan defines assimilation as “the full acceptance and internalization of the other basic culture” (Hogan 14). Interestingly, Hogan clarifies that assimilation is a potential possibility for any human being, i.e. equally the colonizer, the colonized or anybody who finds themselves immersed in a different culture away from their original upbringing. He makes the point that assimilation can also be based on a person’s personal interest, for instance in a foreign language or culture and is thus adopted by choice rather than by (economic or political) necessity or brute force. Mimeticism, on the other hand, is perceived as a submissive imitation of different cultural practices without a positive emotional connection; it may lead to a rejection of “indigenous traditions, [including] those aspects of [another] culture which overlap with indigenous traditions” (Hogan 15).

A third strategy, combining aspects of both strategies, is called “syncretism”. He describes syncretism as an attempt to

[choose] what seems best from each, and bringing them together into a new culture, ideally superior to both precedents – or, if not superior, at least better suited to those people who have internalized aspects of both cultures. (Hogan 16)

A similar concept is expressed by Wendy Knepper, who refers to “bricolage” as an umbrella term, where existing practices are adapted to mean new things in different circumstances; “a cultural process [which] could serve for articulating identity in an

increasingly globalized world” (71). While she places instances of bricolage and bricoleurs predominantly in the Caribbean region, this term may cover similar processes around the world, when ideally, if perhaps unrealistically, “processes of colonization, creolization, and globalization enable new forms of communal enrichment through [...] intermixtures” (Knepper 72).

Hogan argues that for example, most “Anglo-phone postcolonization writers” have opted for some form of cultural syncretism, which makes sense in the light of their educational background and intended audience (Hogan 16).

While syncretism/bricolage may provide viable, even liberating options for some, Hogan describes “alienating hybridity” as a problematic effect of cultural contact and describes a person affected by it as someone who

internalizes the alien culture after extensive education, typically including a period in the metropolis. His/Her racial or ethnic origin prevents true acceptance in the foreign culture, and the internalization of the foreign culture makes him/her (in Achebe’s phrase) “no longer at ease” in the home culture as well. (Hogan 17)

Such people may

[r]ather than becoming cosmopolitan members of a newly globalized world, [...] tend to feel displaced, dislocated on two continents and caught on the margins of two cultures that are themselves in a rapid state of flux. (Kakutani 2009)

While Hogan assumed a relatively simple structure of one “previous” culture versus one “new culture”, his model is rarely applicable in today’s world, simply because any nation today comprises multiple groups of people with a wide range of backgrounds and experiences. In other words, a person from an African nation arriving in the West today would already have been shaped by a wide spectrum of cultural experiences and have in a majority of cases grown up multilingual and adept at performing various social roles according to context. In their new environment, for instance in London, which has large communities with various ethnic and linguistic backgrounds, this person would then be exposed to another range of cultures. They would most likely have to make conscious choices whether to assimilate towards the majority population, and/or towards some of the minority communities. However, it is important to note that humans experience social groups and their own identity through performance and tend to adjust their behaviour to the setting. In fact, as general mobility has increased significantly, the world has also become a much more complicated place. The next section will therefore introduce acculturation theory as a more relevant concept to explain people’s adaptation to a changed cultural

environment and will introduce useful terminology such as “acculturative stress” and “behavioral shifts”.

### **3.3. Acculturation Theory**

According to John Berry, acculturation occurs when

[i]ndigenous national populations experience neo-colonization and demonstrate resistance, while new waves of immigrants, sojourners, and refugees flow from these economic and political changes, and large ethnocultural populations become established in most countries. (Berry 700)<sup>12</sup>

Long-term contact between an established majority and an ever-increasing influx of minorities, often due to globalization, may result in a multitude of (ideally, if somewhat unrealistically, reciprocal) acculturation processes between various groups. However, several factors decide which strategies of acculturation are adopted by individuals as well as by societies.

So-called “push/pull factors” (for instance, destitute refugees fleeing their homeland due to war, economic or political instability versus affluent migrants choosing to leave their homeland to study or work abroad) as well as the general attitude, i.e. opportunities offered by the receiving country are decisive in which strategies are adopted by immigrants and societies alike. Generally speaking, as majorities are in charge of political power, they wield substantially more agency compared to any minorities settling in these societies. Thus, acculturation is often expected to occur predominantly in the domain of the immigrant.

Berry defines four theoretical concepts along a continuum, which can be applied to both minority and majority society:

Migrants (or their descendants) who maintain their heritage culture whilst seeking new relationships amongst the majority cultures, opt for “integration” (termed “multiculturalism” if dictated by the majority, resulting in an “integrated cluster”).

Migrants (or their descendants) who maintain their heritage culture whilst minimizing new relationships amongst the majority cultures, opt for “separation”, and are found in an “ethnic cluster” (termed “segregation”, if dictated by the majority).

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<sup>12</sup> Section 3.3. is based on Berry (2005) without giving explicit page numbers for each new term.



Migrants (or their descendants) who do not hold on to their heritage culture whilst seeking new relationships amongst the majority cultures, embrace “assimilation” and form a “nationalist cluster” (termed “melting pot”, if dictated by the majority).

Migrants (or their descendants) who neither maintain their heritage culture nor forge meaningful new relationships amongst the majority cultures, move towards “marginalization”, and become members of a “marginalized cluster” (termed “exclusion”, if dictated by the majority).

According to Berry, aligning one’s behaviour along a continuum of preserving one’s own culture while adopting at least some of the majority’s cultural traits causes “behavioral shifts”, which comprise non-threatening adjustments towards the expectation of the mainstream society. At the other end of the spectrum, “acculturative stress” occurs when the expectations of the majority (opposed to a minority viewpoint) create noticeable conflicts within the individual. The cost to the individual of either behavioral shifts or acculturative stress depends on which coping strategy has been chosen, either consciously or subconsciously.

The flaw of models that are applied to human beings is the realization that as individuals we cannot be put into neat boxes. Neither can our behaviour as well as responses by others be predicted along clear definitions or split into tidy categories. However, as a general guideline, Berry’s model helps to understand processes of acculturation and is supported, for instance, by empirical evidence of more than 5,300 youngsters who had moved or been born as second-generation immigrants into thirteen different countries ranging from Australia, Canada, the U.S., New Zealand, Israel to eight European nations (Berry et al. 2006). These were compared to more than 2,600 so-called “national youth” whose ages ranged from thirteen to adulthood. The results showed that most of the young people identified with the “integrated cluster”, followed by the “ethnic cluster”, the “national cluster” and finally a minority, who identified with the “marginalized cluster”. Members of the marginalized cluster, in fact, were accounted for in a “diffuse cluster”; according to Berry et al. they “lack a clear orientation and appear to be marginal and confused” (324). Anyone in this cluster was at risk of not only serious levels of acculturative stress, but also of failing to settle and meaningfully engage with their “society of settlement” (324). According to above study, by their own evaluation, migrants, who were able to apply a more integrative strategy to acculturalization processes, were more successful in terms of (physical and mental) health, socio-economic achievements and overall life satisfaction than the other three types of identification. However, it was equally

critical that they were able to integrate their ethnic heritage into their lives, at least to a certain extent. Negating their background was not a successful strategy to achieve satisfaction with one's life and position in mainstream society.

It seems important to keep in mind that there is bound to be an overlap between these categories. In some areas such as their work environment, people may lean towards an integrated cluster. When spending time with their families, the ethnic element may become more relevant, for example in sharing traditional foods or customs. And finally, living on the margins of society will most certainly cause detrimental effects on individuals as well as on the majority society. In many cases, acculturation theory is interconnected to transnationalism, as people increasingly mix in multicultural societies. The next section will investigate transnational practices and shed some light on the new African diaspora.

### **3.4. Transnationalism and the New African Diaspora**

When people continue to engage with their homelands and the cultural practices they brought with them, while at the same time engaging with the culture(s) and living in a different country, transnational activities occur<sup>13</sup> (Kebede 2019; Bradatan et al. 2010).

Such practices, also described as transnational ties, can be highly individual and often contribute to the process of identity formation. They can help members of both the first and second-generation African migrants (either people born to first-generation African immigrants to the United States, or people who moved there as youngsters) to negotiate their process of identity formation into a kind of composite identity. Such practices either happen on an actual or a virtual level, for instance, by sending remittances to relatives on the continent, keeping in touch with the homeland (or parental homeland) via modern technology, being part of cultural activities through shared languages and food inside and outside the home (for instance joining “African societies” at university) or regularly visiting the continent. According to Kassahun Kebede, “transnational engagement” is likely to decrease over the course of time, i.e. a third, fourth or further generation will most likely become more aligned to majority groups within the United States (125).

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<sup>13</sup> While transnationalism is a world-wide phenomenon, this thesis focuses on the African diaspora into the United States in the second half of the 20th century (i.e. the relevant time period for most of the novel).

The hopes, which significantly increased with President Obama's election in 2007, of creating a post-racial society where Du Bois' "color line" would no longer have an impact have to a large extent been dashed, despite the "Black Lives Matter" movement gaining traction (see Sterling). Sadly, the year 2020 is consistent as a year when across the U.S. people are being killed or injured because they are black (men), for example, George Floyd in May and Jacob Blake in August. In addition, according to APM research lab's "The Color of Coronavirus" project, deaths from COVID19 are up to 3.6 times higher among "Black or African American" U.S. citizens. The reasons for these mortality rates can be seen as the result of long-standing systemic racism, evident for example in limited access to health care, poverty, poorer health in general and demographic clusters in areas which were most severely hit by the virus. Despite general scientific agreement that "race-based theorizing, as well as race identification, is seen as outdated thinking", the reality of systemic aggression against Black bodies, particularly in the U.S., sadly remains the lived reality of many ( Sterling 120).

For the time being, the U.S.' highly racialized society tends to lump together heterogenous groups into larger container categories simply based on their physical appearance, thus losing distinctions (see e.g. Msia Kibona Clark). The process of grouping diverse black people in American mainstream society into a normative category, namely African American, has been termed "African Americanization"- as an example, Kebede quotes the dearth of options for any further distinction than "Black/African American" on the 2010 U.S. census form. In contrast, the category "Other Asian" provides room to specify a more exact definition (Kebede 127). One term for heterogenous "American Africans" was coined by scholar Ali Mazrui; yet, people who may fit the category may resist being labelled in this way (Kebede 127).

Gikandi explains how the reality of "interpellation" creates racialized identities in the U.S. (as of course, elsewhere), as, for example, white South Africans are not generally perceived as "Africans of the continent", but predominantly as "white" (61). Adichie describes that she only became "Black", when she first moved to the U.S. to study as an undergraduate – previously, she had perceived herself as one Nigerian amongst other Nigerians or as Igbo. Selasi used to think of two categories of people: "Nigerians" and everybody else, as in her own words she entered Lagos any time she went home. When Selasi started high school she suddenly "occupied space with African-American people, who wanted to know – for reasons I completely understand [...] are you for us or against us?" (Bady and Selasi 159). When Selasi arrived in Oxford, she finally met "West African people who had grown up outside of

West Africa, but also outside of the binary matrix of race as it exists in the States” (Bady and Selasi 159).

According to Clark, a plethora of terminology has emerged to cover the more recent flow of Africans into the U.S., for instance “the new African Americans”, “the other African Americans”, “foreign-born African Americans”, “first generation African Americans of African descent” or “African Americans of recent African descent” (169).

Kebede prefers the term “new African diaspora” to describe a heterogenous group of African first and second-generation migrants to the United States. While these individuals or their families may have ties to any of 55 African nation states, a majority come from Ethiopia, Ghana, and Nigeria, and they often settle in New York and Washington (Kebede 126). Over the last thirty years, a steady increase of settlers from the African continent to the U.S. has reached above 2,5 million, not counting illegal black immigrants, estimated in 2018 at 619,000 persons (Kebede 133). Kebede expresses hope that members of the new African diaspora, who are living mainly in the West, may disseminate fresh views on Africa as a continent and offer a different, “non-victimized” view of themselves and their heritage, particularly as many of them are well-educated, members of “professional elites, traders, and students” (126). In many cases, African migrants have been choosing their own identity markers, for instance “Nigerian American” (Clark 173). This process of self-labelling may be an important tool in combatting insecurities about one’s place in society (Hoersting 19). In Clark’s study of second-generation migrants one can observe a wide range of responses to the complexities of growing up as a black person with African affiliation in the U.S.: for instance, one individual identifies as African American due to his socialization at school, but marginalizes his Nigerian heritage. Others foreground the socialization they received in their Nigerian homes rather than an overarching African American identity that they are often ascribed by others. A third simultaneously identifies as “a Nigerian, an African, and an African American” (Clark 173). She highlights the potential pressure that second-generation African immigrants may face, either from their parents who do not want their children to become too “Americanized”, or amongst their peer-group who can be concerned about losing their African heritage by blending into the larger African American society (see e.g. Clark).

Interestingly, one’s focus on either an ethnic (e.g. Igbo), a more generic “African”, or an African American identity can vary significantly even within the same family and

may depend on the social setting. For example, members of the parent generation attend an African American church, but socialize within a Nigerian community, while their children perceive themselves first and foremost as African American.

In Anima Adjepong's qualitative study of college-educated, "primarily U.S.-raised children of Ghanaian immigrants" (254) she found that a majority of this group engage in Afropolitan projects and ascribe to identities "rooted in a contemporary Africa and interconnected with Western education, upward mobility, disparate political views, black racial consciousness and postracial aspirations" (255).

In many cases, a composite identity or even multiple identities can make sense for people who have been raised with more than one core identity. Thus, they may choose to integrate various approaches to their African descent, depending on their audience. When one understands social identity formation as the performance of different roles in different settings, this allows for a more complex representation in general. The idea of employing multiple facets of identity according to the setting seems attractive. Yet, according to Hoersting and Jenkins, there is often a price attached to the advantages "of a cross-cultural upbringing", namely the danger of "cultural homelessness"; or at least, a difficulty in working out a sense of belonging. Hoersting recommends "affirmation, commitment and belonging" as strategies against the potential lack of a "cultural home" (19).

As Afropolitanism is often connected with ideas on cosmopolitanism (in fact, the second part of the term is borrowed from cosmopolitanism), the next section will question whether concept of cosmopolitanism have anything to offer to combat cultural rootlessness and where the differences to Afropolitanism are.

### **3.5. Cosmopolitanism – Citizens of the World**

The term "cosmopolitan" can be traced to ancient Greece, where in fourth century BC, the Cynics put forward the term "citizen of the cosmos" (Appiah 2006: xiv). Appiah traces the idea from the Stoics, via the Enlightenment, Kant and Wieland to Voltaire, as two intermingling concepts. First of all, a cosmopolitan is committed to the well-being of other humans, be they one's nearest relatives, one's countrymen or any other citizen of the world. Secondly, as human cultures and behaviours differ widely, a cosmopolitan keeps an open mind and welcomes difference (Appiah 2006: xv).

Appiah postulates that at the beginning of mankind, humans were conditioned to live in small communities, where they were bound to personally know and depend on

each other. Only during the last few centuries and due to modern technology, particularly in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, have we become much more aware of the world's diverse population, "the global tribe we have become" (2006: xiii). He suggests that the very fact of connectedness comes with its own moral compass – a responsibility towards "[e]ach person you know about and can affect" (xiii). Yet, he equally admits that cosmopolitanism should not be understood as a solution to the question of a peaceful co-existence among people, but rather as the challenge (2006: xiii).

Sterling sees inherent problems in Appiah's take on cosmopolitanism as it is predominantly based on Western historic discourses blighted by myopic views because its proponents "only valued one kind or people" (124). She suggests that the foundations of the Enlightenment's humanistic tradition need to be urgently revisited and reassessed as they are tainted by derogatory views of the "other", particularly anyone not white. Skinner likewise comments on the Eurocentric and universalist elements of what he calls "traditional" cosmopolitanism, resulting in a "remoteness [...] to the varied everyday lives of modern-day Africans that has led some scholars to question the analytic value of cosmopolitanism as a conceptual tool in African studies" (9). Instead, he argues for "qualified cosmopolitanisms", to

resignify the master trope of transnational space and subjectivity – cosmopolitanism – in order to signal the potential of apparently peripheral and provincial subject positions to act globally, and to shift the center of global agency to such peripheries and provinces of the global social and spatial order. (Skinner 6)

Bhabha introduces the idea of a "vernacular cosmopolitanism" which he describes in the context of the "double life of British minorities" who are able to negotiate a range of cultural practices, which he dubs "cultural translation" (139).

Toivanen likens an elusive concept of Afropolitanism to a Kantian view of cosmopolitanism in its elitist and universalist outlook as "both welcomed and celebrated, but also subject to strenuous criticism [which] has inherited at least some of the complexity often identified with cosmopolitanism" (190). In a similar vein, Nigerian writer Chika Unigwe highlights that both terms may "create exclusions and divisions"; instead, she prefers to see Afropolitanism as a predominantly "creative space" (Knudsen and Rahbek 191).

Musila questions why people of African descent would need or even should consider a separate term to connect them with concepts of cosmopolitanism, as corresponding terms such as "Europolitans" or "Amerropolitans" do not exist – according to her, this new term expresses, once again, a "non-belonging" for Africans she objects to (112).

Gikandi, interestingly, distinguishes between Afropolitans and African cosmopolitans; the main difference he sees is the fact that African cosmopolitans lack the insecurities of many Afropolitans, as “they seem to be at home in the world [and] take belonging for granted” (50). Because of opposing viewpoints, it remains difficult to decide where Afropolitanism and cosmopolitanism overlap and differ; finally, section 4 is dedicated to Selasi’s novel and its literary interpretation along an Afropolitan and transnational reading.

## **4. Literary Analysis: Afropolitan Identities in Taiye**

### **Selasi’s *Ghana Must Go***

The title of the novel refers to the forcible removal of Ghanaians and other West African citizens from Nigeria in 1983; many transported their belongings in sturdy plastic bags, which are still in wide circulation today and referred to as “Ghana Must Go bags” in various parts of Africa (Knudsen and Rahbek 116). The bag and Kweku’s slippers are “ambivalent metaphors for (troublesome) travel and (unsettled) home” and the Sai children need to unpack their parents’ metaphorical bags before they can start comprehending and dealing with their own baggage (Knudsen and Rahbek 116). *Ghana Must Go* also references the subjective imperative that decides Kweku’s and Fola’s future as they leave Ghana for a “better life” in the United States. Eventually though, both are compelled to return to Ghana in an almost ironical twist of having to “Go To Ghana”. Section 4.1 to 4.5 focus on the six main characters of *Ghana Must Go* and what can be said about their identities as Afropolitans (in Selasi’s sense) as well as in Gikandi’s sense. Furthermore, acculturation and transnationality theory is applied to the protagonist’s experiences. These sections distinguish between the identity formation processes between the parents’ and the children’s generation, i.e. between first and second-generation African migrants. The remaining sections refer to different aspects of the novel, such as place, structure and style.

#### **4.1. Kweku and Folasadé**

Although Kweku and Folasadé both left Africa because of traumatic experiences, they have a common goal upon their arrival in the U.S. They are

[o]rphans, escapees, at large in a world history, both hailing from countries last great in the eighteenth century – but prideful (braver, hopeful) and

brimful and broke – so very desperately seeking home and adventure, finding both.” (Selasi *Ghana Must Go* 91<sup>14</sup>)

Despite their humble beginnings in Boston, their expectations are high. Both want to study at university. Kweku, who tragically lost his sister to curable TB, vows to become a doctor so he will never again experience such failure in the face of illness. He eventually becomes “ ‘a knife-wielding artist,’ general surgeon without equal” (*GMG* 6). Kweku has “*dared* to become,” “a father and a doctor” when, ultimately, escaping from his impoverished childhood home would already have been enough of an achievement (*GMG* 91). Kweku cannot believe his good fortune when he meets Fola and forthwith she becomes his anchor; he finds “[h]ome’ in her touch, in the soft of her Afro” (91).

Folasadé plans to study law but abandons her goal when she discovers her first pregnancy. Since she will not be able to take up her law studies, Kweku must succeed for them both, however, “as the Sacrifice was endless, so was his Success.” (*GMG* 73). The capitalization of both sacrifice and emphasizes the importance of the deal that Kweku and Folasadé strike, “his success for her sacrifice” (*GMG* 73). As in Langston Hughes’ famous poem *Harlem*, “one dream” (*GMG* 73) has to suffice for both of them; yet, the broken promise of her missed opportunity is an unresolved issue that eventually impacts on all family members’ lives.

As a means of overcoming his childhood’s poverty and helplessness, Kweku fully embraces Western technology, epitomized by the so-called “monster”, a well-oiled “machine” that is the hospital. He is impressed” [b]y how shiny, how brilliant, how clean and well ordered, how white-and-bright-chrome, how machinelike” (*GMG* 68) it is. Every day, Kweku is reassured by the sensory impressions of order and reliability which he identifies with, a far cry removed from his upbringing in a straw-hut:

to hear the machine-sounds: clicking, beeping, humming, hush. To breathe the machine-smells: pungent, metallic, disinfectant. To think machine-thoughts: clean, cut, find, pluck, sew, snip. He felt like an astronaut wearing astronaut-white landed recently and unexpectedly on an alien ship. Newly fluent in the language but still foreign to the locals.” (*GMG* 69)

Kweku is aware that at least in the beginning, he is surrounded by “aliens”, in an almost awe-inspiring environment, which he strives to join as a “convert” (*GMG* 69). He is immensely proud to become part of the “beast”, as a response to the

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<sup>14</sup> To aid readability, “Selasi, *Ghana Must Go*” will be abbreviated to *GMG*.



powerlessness he experienced as a child, particularly regarding the loss of his sister. He thus foreshadows Olu's overwhelming desire "to control: over every form of messiness, over human emotion, human weakness, dirtiness, sickness, complications" (*GMG* 69). Kweku also assimilates a Western attitude towards providing luxuries above and beyond the needs of his family - in contrast to his own upbringing in Ghana, he does not want his children to lack for anything: "The hours he worked were an *expression* of his affection, in direct proportion to his commitment to keeping them well: well educated, well traveled, well regarded by other adults. [...] What he wanted, and what he wasn't, as a child" (*GMG* 47).

Kweku, aged sixteen, left his mother and siblings on a scholarship and vowed to return to her and present her with his medical degree and his first-born son to make amends. His return represents his need for an integration of his impoverished childhood and his formative years in the U.S.; Kweku thus hopes to make up for having marginalized his heritage in favour of integrating into professional middle-class life in the States. He sustains himself by imagining his homecoming which should absolve him from his guilt and seeing

[t]ears in [his] mother's eyes. Wonder, joy, amazement. The awe of the siblings. The jubilation. Cue drums. Then the dancing and feasting, fish grilled, a goat slaughtered, red sparks from the fire leaping for joy in the sky, a black sky thick with star, the ocean roaring contentedly. The reunion a bridge, her fulfillment the brick. (*GMG* 52-53)

Tragically, when Kweku does visit her with new-born Olu, his mother has only just died, and he is denied her blessing and a much-needed reconciliation.

As Knudsen and Rahbek point out, Kweku performs many roles as a human being and as a migrant - his 'invisible cameraman' is keeping him on track, constantly observing him to see whether he is the "Man Who He Wishes to Be and Who He Left to Become" (*GMG* 4). The cameraman first appears in Kweku's imagination when he leaves Ghana and experiences cultural alienation. Yet, he is determined to placate his feelings of guilt towards his mother and Fola by being exceptionally successful. He becomes not only "[t]he Considerate Husband" (*GMG* 4), but also the "Intelligent Parent" (*GMG* 15) and, of course, the "Well-Respected Doctor" (*GMG* 14).

Kweku accepts his heritage without bitterness,

[h]e didn't add it all up—loss of sister, later mother, absent father, scourge of colonialism, birth into poverty and all that—and lament that he'd had a sad life, an unfair one, shake his fists at the heavens, asking why. Never rage. He very simply considered it, where he came from, what he'd come through, who he was, and concluded that it was forgettable, all. He had no *need* for remembering, as if the details were remarkable, as if anyone would forget it all

happened if he did. It would happen to someone else, a million and one someone else: the same senseless losses, the same tearless hurts. This was one perk of growing up poor in the tropics. No one ever needed the details. There was the one basic storyline, which everyone knew, with the few custom endings to choose now and again. Basic: humming grandmas and polycentric dancing and drinks made from tree sap and patriarchy. Custom: boy-child Gets Out, good at science or soccer, dies young, becomes priest, child-soldier or similar. Nothing remarkable and so nothing to remember. (*GMG* 28)

Kweku does not consider himself important enough to feel sorry for his upbringing, as he understands himself to be among millions with a similar story.

Through irony he has also found a way to deal with everyday racism, for example before he is roped into a last-ditch operation which he performs against his better judgement. When his training is being questioned, he quips that “[i]n the jungle” he was taught by “[c]himpanzees [...]. Great instructors. Who knew?” (*GMG* 74).

Over time, Kweku provides an upper middle-class lifestyle for his family and earns prestige in the United States. His children have ballet and art classes and piano lessons, and they live in an impressive brownstone in Brookline (*GMG* 64). He develops a “mash-up cosmopolitan asceticism”, expressed, for instance, by his love of slippers which he believes to be “affordable for all, a unique form of protection against the dangers of home” (*GMG* 39).

However, he cannot accept that the most important achievement he has garnered in the U.S., his outstanding medical career, is ultimately not honoured by the hospital administration. He has struggled to assimilate into U.S. society and marginalized most of his ties to Ghana. His unfair dismissal breaks Kweku and further leads to the break-up of his family, reminiscent of his father’s desertion of Kweku’s birth family in Ghana. His father was publicly humiliated by a flogging and even jailed. As he could neither defend himself nor his wife from the unwanted attentions of an English sergeant, he later disappeared without a trace; some believe he committed suicide by drowning (*GMG* 58-59).

Kweku’s life is overshadowed by an alienating hybridity; as the cultural syncretism he strove for did not work out in the long run. Despite his hitherto flawless medical reputation he is ultimately rejected for being African, a pawn the hospital administration is willing to sacrifice in the avoidance of a lawsuit. His broken dream reveals how fragile Kweku’s life is after all; he is crippled by both shame and pride, which prevent him from owning up to Fola and starting afresh somewhere else, respectively. Kweku hates the pity which he experiences in the lawyer’s office Kleinman & Kleinman where over an 11-month period he tries to fight against his

“wrongful dismissal” whilst pretending to his family that everything is fine (*GMG* 69). By accident, Kehinde witnesses his father’s forcible removal from the hospital. Kweku sees no alternative to departing from his family on the same night. After months of absence, when he has overcome his fear of confronting Fola with his shattered dream, his family have already left the former family home and he loses touch with them entirely.

Kweku returns to Ghana in the hope of salvaging his career and self-respect. Furthermore, he is finally able to build his own house which is one long-held dream he can indeed fulfil. His new home combines elements of his life in the U.S. by its clean und unembellished lines, a courtyard with “slabs of slate” to rebut anything “lush, soft, or verdant” (*GMG* 5). Ultimately, due his sheer tenacity and stubbornness his builder Mr. Lamptey manages to reassert one element of the tropics in Kweku’s house after all by keeping the mango tree in his garden.

When Kweku is dying, he reflects on his life’s ambitions and realizes that in fact

he found what he hadn’t dared seek. When it would have been enough to have found his way out, to have started where he started and to have ended up farther, a father and a doctor, whatever else he’s become. To have *dared* to become. To escape would have sufficed. To be “free,” if one wants swelling strings, to be “human”. Beyond being “citizen,” beyond being “poor.” It was all he was after in the end, a human story, a way to be Kweku beyond being poor. To have somehow unhooked his little story from the larger ones, the stories of Country and of Poverty and of War that had swallowed up the stories of the people around him and spat them up faceless, nameless Villagers, cogs; to have fled, thus unhooked, on the small SS Sai for the vastness and smallness of life free of want: the petty triumphs and defeats of the Self (profession, family) versus those of the State (grinding work, civil war) – *yes, this would have been quite enough*, Kweku thinks. Born in dust, dead in grass. Progress. Distant shore reached. (*GMG* 91)

Fola and Kweku first met in Pennsylvania and neither shared their background with the other: “[i]t was almost as if they had taken some oath – not just they, their whole circle [...], clever grandsons of servants, bright fugitive immigrants – an oath to uphold their shared right to stay silent (so *not* to stay the prior selves, the broken, battered, embarrassed selves who lived in stories and died in silence” (*GMG* 197). Fola believed in Kweku and wanted him to feel secure of his place in the United States. She is disturbed to “watch him seek approval from far lesser men [...] with hope that he, too, might soon be so at home in the world” (*GMG* 198). She is depicted as a strong and rather impetuous, emotional character. Fola and Kweku can be seen as belonging to the integrated cluster in the sense that they combine at least some

practices like traditional food while striving for the attainment of Western education and professional success.

Fola grew up in Nigeria in considerable wealth, yet motherless, as her half Igbo, half Scottish mother Somayina Nwaneri died giving birth to her only child. While growing up, Fola embraces her Igbo heritage, for instance when she enjoys local food, like “[a] bush girl’s breakfast’ as [her Yoruba father] called it, mocking. Powdered yam in ice water, her favorite” (*GMG* 104). Her father Olukayodé (Kayo) Savage realized the importance of communication in a multilingual, (post)colonial setting and “spoke the major Nigerian languages plus French, Swahili, Arabic, and snatches of Twi.” He advised Fola to “[a]lways learn the local language. Never let on to the locals”, which can be seen as evidence of his view on the general population (*GMG* 101-102).

However, while still living in Nigeria, she is also aware of Western (pop) culture and adopts some traits, for instance by wearing Western fashion and listening to the Beatles, whose posters decorate her bedroom. When her father is killed during a visit to the maternal grand-parents she has never met, she has her first traumatic, almost psychic experience: “Incredible, unbearable, interminable openness appearing now around her, above her, beyond her, a gaping, inside her, a hole, or a mouth: unfamiliar, wet, hollow and hungry. Un-appeasable” (*GMG* 105). This experience of loss will accompany her throughout her life, but will ultimately make her stronger: a survivor.

Fola is forced to leave her childhood home at the age of thirteen, escaping the violence in Nigeria to live with her father’s friend’s parents in Ghana. Aged nineteen, she emigrates to the U.S. in order to pursue her studies. Upon arrival, she experiences cultural alienation as she discovers

[t]hat she’d stopped being Folasadé Somayina Savage and had become instead the *native* (emphasis added) of a generic War-Torn Nation. Without specifics. Without the smell of rum or posters of the Beatles or a kente blanket tossed across a king-size bed or portraits. Just some war-torn nation, hopeless and inhuman and as humid as a war-torn nation anywhere, all war-torn nations everywhere. (*GMG* 107)

Despite being perceived as a generic war refugee by most Americans, Fola manages to make a fresh start in the United States. She meets Kweku and together they create a life and a home, especially once they become parents. When asked where Fola is from, she resorts to humour and answers “[the] Empire [...] [and t]he British” (*GMG* 116).

Fola is a “natural entrepreneur, a Nigerian’s Nigerian” who starts her business selling flowers first from the pavement, later from a stand inside the hospital where Kweku

works until she sets up her own flower shop (*GMG* 64). Fola is also “a natural-born warrior” (*GMG* 86) who defies the odds that despite growing up an orphan after her father’s murder, she does not give up.

Fola dresses with a mix of Western clothes she obtains from Goodwill and combines these with a “gold-flecked *asooke*, the Nigerian cloth. Nigerians were far more artful than Ghanaians with their head wraps” (*GMG* 53). She creates other transnational activities, as she is good at making “the something-from-nothingness, the making of the best of it, an ode to Halloween, her most favorite of rites, what with spirits in costume and giving of gifts” (*GMG* 154). She is happy to draw a likeness to a “Yoruba fetish ceremony, with candy” (*GMG* 154). Fola claims a connection with her African past by “sovereignty over naming [...] (first name: Nigerian, middle name: Ghanaian, third name: Savage, last name: Sai)” (*GMG* 18). However, she fails in naming Sadie “*Idowu*, that goat-meat-tough name Fola loved for the long-suffering child born directly after twins” as the baby’s name is accidentally recorded as Folasadé at the hospital (*GMG* 17-18). Cooking and eating egusi and jollof rice are examples of lived transnational practices or transnational ties and serve as identity markers. The Sai children are familiar with these dishes, which Fola would have also prepared in the United States. Egusi is served at important moments in the narrative, for example when Fola visits Kweku’s second wife to offer her condolences, and when the Sai family gathers for Christmas in Ghana.

After yet another argument with her youngest daughter, on impulse Fola returns to Accra to a house she recently inherited from her “surrogate father”, Sena Wosornu, and continues to employ his former staff. It becomes clear that living in the U.S. has significantly changed Folasadé – she acts contrary to local expectations, by being a single “woman, first; unmarried, worse; a Nigerian, worst; and fair-skinned. As suspicious persons go in Ghana, she might as well be a known terrorist” (*GMG* 100). Folasadé needs to readjust to a different way of life in Ghana, but she will continue to adhere to elements of a Western lifestyle, such as smoking in public, eating the “weeds” (lemongrass) and “bizarrely” thanking the cook, houseboy or gatekeeper for their services. She notes that many Africans share a

disregard [...] for flowers, the indifference of the abundantly blessed (or psychologically battered—the chronic self-loather who can’t accept, even with evidence, that anything native to him, occurring in abundance, in excess, without effort, has value). (*GMG* 101)

Fola realizes Kewku’s death by experiencing a visceral physical reaction similar to the one when hearing about her father’s death. She reflects that in the long run, she has

stopped caring whether she lives in “Baltimore or Lagos or Boston or Accra”, the specifics are no longer relevant; she has left behind the “narrowness [...] of her former individuality” (GMG 107). However, Kweku’s death makes it possible for her scattered children to meet in Accra and starts a process of reconciliation and healing. In one of their many internal dialogues she thanks Kweku: “I got what I wanted. You sent them all home “ (GMG 317).

Fola originally intends to scatter Kweku’s ashes into the sea, but she finally decides against it because the members of their family have been “*scattered enough*” ; she lets the Atlantic take away the urn after wishing Kweku a final good-bye (GMG 314). Fola and Olu are Afropolitans in Mbembe’s sense as they have travelled and lived in a number of communities, on and off the continent. They do not share the superficial gloss of Selasi’s *BBB*’s Afropolitans, despite their erstwhile success in the U.S., yet, they are fortunate in knowing what Ghana means to them and thus being able to return.

## 4.2. Olu

Olu (whose full first name is Olukayodé) is Kweku and Folasadé’s first-born. His first name means “God brings happiness” (GMG viii) and is the same as the name of his murdered maternal grandfather. From the beginning, Olu is sensitive to unspoken expectations to make up for Folasadé’s sacrifice. He follows in his father’s footsteps and, academically gifted, becomes an orthopaedic surgeon. As an adult, he strongly feels that he must carry on where his father failed. Olu feels angry with and guilty about his father in equal measure.

Tellingly, he is reading Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart*, while he is waiting in hospital and minding his younger siblings when his youngest sister is born prematurely (GMG 12). Sadie’s birth showcases Olu’s trust in his father at the age of fourteen, when he fully expects his father to be able to save her. At the same time, Sadie’s birth heralds the start of their difficulties as a family, which ultimately disintegrates.

A clear picture of their problematic father-son relationship emerges when Olu finally accepts the yearly plane tickets sent by his father from Ghana. Instead of attending his own graduation, which also happens to be Olu’s birthday, he finally visits Kweku in Accra. Upon his arrival he is surprised to newly observe his father’s appearance, opposed to the one he is used to living in the U.S., based on phenotypical differences:

as if seeing the man clearly for the first time in his life, suddenly seeing him singular, without the benefit of contrast, without the backdrop (on white) and *still* different (on brown). [...] Not a father, a surgeon, a Ghanaian, a hero, a

monster, just one Kweku Sai, just a man in a crowd with an odd sort of bearing, *a stranger in Accra as in Boston* (emphasis added). Alone. (GMG 247-248)

Although Olu gains a greater understanding into Kweku's isolation, he reacts very negatively to his father's lover June, whom he meets by accident and who is much less sophisticated than his own mother. Olu is shocked that his father appears entirely defeated, "with this look on his face of a man without honor" (GMG 253). The two men fail to connect, and Olu flees from a further confrontation with his father by leaving Ghana within 24 hours after his arrival. It appears that Olu's relationship with Kweku is built on "generations of father-son silence and shame" (GMG 6).

Nevertheless, coming to Ghana as an adult, Olu also experiences his own physical appearance in a new way, no longer as a member of a minority but instead he notes "the newness of majority, seeming familiar to oneself, chancing to catch his reflection in the window of a passing car and thinking for a moment he was looking at the driver" (GMG 249). Olu Sai becomes "African" in Ghana in an inverted experience to the Nigerian author Sefi Atta who only became "black" and "African" upon her arrival in the United Kingdom at the age of fourteen (Knudsen and Rahbek 182).

Whilst growing up, Olu chooses a strategy of assimilation into a highly structured, almost clinical way of life, as far removed from emotional turmoil as possible. Olu experiences casual racism when his friends' parents perceive him as "a *prodigiously intelligent* (emphasis added) athlete" despite his "dark chocolate skin" (GMG 251). When he feels overwhelmed by the complexity of going to Accra and confronting the death of his father, he craves to

go back to that order and cleanliness. He wants to go back [...] to their jogs before sunrise and to-do lists on the refrigerator, their white squares of furniture welcoming them back, to their muted-toned clothing all folded and hung, to their meals of lean meat and dark greens and whole grains, to their kisses good-bye in the morning post jogging, their kisses hello in the evening, in scrubs, to the clean way they chitchat, never arguing, never lying, never asking for truths. (GMG 302)

Olu has found a life partner whom he can engage with in a "perfect" relationship, where expectations are clear and can be fulfilled. His coping strategy is creating order in his life with Ling, to live a life "inoculated against disorder, indestructibly clean", documented in a neat row of "their photos in matching white frames" (GMG 302).

According to Taiwo, he shows some “white boy” behaviour, “guzzling water from Nalgenes<sup>15</sup>, wearing Tevas in snow” (GMG 249).

Olu battles with his own perception of his African heritage; he hates it that “everyone thinks *irrelevant*. Dusty and irrelevant. Lost. No one gives a shit. You want them to see you as something of value, not dusty, not irrelevant, not backward, you know? You wish you didn’t give a shit, but somehow you do” (GMG 305). Interestingly, although he has grown up in the States, he identifies as “African” and loathes the way he feels compelled to combat negative connotations and stereotypes.

However, Olu is tested even in his relationship with Ling, as her father does not approve of him, fearing that Olu may fit “that stereotype. The African dad who walks out on his kids.” (GMG 305). Olu had wrongly interpreted Dr. Wei’s apparent self-consciousness, perhaps due to “the accent that coated his consonants, a threat to the facile delivery”, a reminder of having emigrated from China as a young man, as a bonding element (GMG 119). Ultimately, Olu is rejected by a man of a different ethnicity who has a higher status due to his age and longstanding professional success. Olu has to contend with Dr. Wei’s scathing observations regarding the lack of morality he perceives in “Africans”, which he applies to Olu despite the fact that Olu has lived his entire life in the U.S.:

“You know, I never understood the dysfunctions of Africa. The greed of the leaders, disease, civil war. Still dying of *malaria* in the twenty-first century, still hacking and raping, cutting genitals off? Young children and nuns slitting throats with machetes, those girls in the Congo, this thing in Sudan? As a young man in China, I assumed it was ignorance. Intellectual incapacity, inferiority perhaps. Needless to say, I was wrong, as I’ve noted. When I came here I saw I was wrong. Fair enough. But the backwardness persists even now, and why is that? When African men are so bright? as we’ve said. And the women, too, don’t get me wrong, I’m not sexist. But why is that place still so backward? I ask. And you know what I think? No respect for the family. The fathers don’t honor their children or wives. The Olu I knew, Oluwalekun Abayomi? Had two bastard children plus three by the wife. *A brain without equal but no moral backbone* (emphasis added). That’s why you have the child soldier, the rape. How can you value another man’s daughter, or son, when you don’t even value your own?” (GMG 119-120)

While this rejection is reminiscent of Okonkwo’s by a British soldier in Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart*, in contrast to his father (punished by hospital management, powerless to defend his position), and his grandfather (castigated by a British sergeant), Olu is able to assert his position and claim Ling as his wife. In fact, it is

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<sup>15</sup> Nalgene: expensive metal water bottle; Tevas: out-door footwear



Ling who, listening in on her father berating Olu, suggests that they get married in Las Vegas immediately (*GMG* 121).

On their trip to bury his father, whom Ling has unfortunately never met, Olu eventually reveals his love-hate relationship with his father. He “*want[s]* to be proud of him” (*GMG* 306), because he is aware of Kweku’s enormous struggle to make it in the U.S., especially given his humble beginnings. He finally admits his own worries, self-doubt and anxiety about following in his father’s footsteps. Olu desperately wants to disprove the persistent stereotype of the hopeless African father (*GMG* 305). In owning up to his own vulnerability, Olu allows himself to emotionally become more deeply connected to Ling. She is the one who reconciles him with Kweku’s flaws in the end and facilitates healing: “Maybe what he did was the best he could do” (*GMG* 306). She affirms her love to him by their passionate lovemaking, which paves the way to a more mature relationship for them both and a definite homecoming for Olu (*GMG* 307).

### 4.3. Taiwo and Kehinde

“Taiyewo (from the Yoruba *to aiye wo*, “to see and taste the world”, shortened to *Taiye* or *Taiwo*)” is the first-born twin, Kehinde “[...]“Yoruba: *kehin de*, “to arrive next”)” the second-born; evident, at least to Yoruba speakers (*GMG* 84). According to Yoruba culture, the second baby to be born is assumed “wiser”, as it lets the first baby find out about the world before deciding whether or not to follow (*GMG* 84). From the beginning they are described as strikingly beautiful; furthermore, Kehinde is a budding artist and Taiwo is academically gifted.

Yet, being talented and growing up in a financially secure household in the States does not automatically translate into a secure upbringing. Taiwo feels that her family has not yet arrived at being “a Successful Family”, since they only have a house, “[*b*]ut not a home” (*GMG* 124). She longs for “placid familiness”, a sense of belonging, built on generations (*GMG* 124). She yearns for what she describes as “that warm-yellow-glowing-inside-ness of home” (*GMG* 123). Taiwo believes that

[t]he families in the windows were Successful Families already, had finished the heavy lifting generations ago, were not building or straining or making an effort; the goal had been reached. They could rest now, calm down. At night, through their windows, she saw them there, finished, [...] with feet up on cushions, at rest and at home. (*GMG* 124)

Taiwo struggles to find her place not only at home but also as a black girl among a majority of white students, expressed for example by her hairstyle: “Dreadlocks are

black white-girl hair. A Black Power solution to a Bluest Eye problem: the desire to have long, swinging, ponytail hair. The braids take too long after a while, the extensions. But you still need a hairstyle for running in rain” (*GMG* 138).

Taiwo has to come to terms with the shame and betrayal she connects with her parents. She likens Kweku’s departure to a “ship sinking slowly, weighed down by the shame” (*GMG* 274). Twelve-year-old Taiwo first gains an understanding of his vulnerability by accidentally seeing the scarred soles of his feet that Kweku normally hides with his slippers. Taiwo realizes that her “solid wooden father” is not invincible but rather a “marionette abandoned by its manipulator” (*GMG* 44-45). It is the first time she experiences “an odd emptiness, weightlessness, [...] as if for a moment she’d ceased to exist: some new odd sense of sadness, part grief, part compassion, which foreshadows her later separation of her body and mind ” (*GMG* 44-45). Taiwo carefully returns her father’s slippers to his ravaged feet in the hope of unseeing and unknowing what in part she understands as her father’s deceit in not showing who he truly is. Taiwo is deeply shocked by this discovery and feels unsettled about what else he may have been hiding from her.

Once she has come to Ghana, Taiwo finally understands that she is not only angry with her father, but that her mother’s betrayal was much more damaging. Fola was the one “to cut off the ropes, set the lifeboats adrift” (*GMG* 274). Taiwo accuses her mother of sending them as teenagers to her half-brother to Lagos “for the cost of tuition”, “like two fatted calves to the altar” (*GMG* 274). Both twins experience confusion and cultural homelessness when they arrive in Lagos, exacerbated by their complete lack of a trustworthy guardian or anyone else who can help them. On the drive from the airport to their Uncle’s house, Kehinde’s first impression of Nigeria does not live up to the expectations he brings with him from the U.S.:

Lagos, through the window, was not as he’d pictured, not luscious, the tropics, bright yellow and green. It was gray, urban-gray, the sky smoggy and muted and clogged with tall buildings, a dirty Hong Kong. The highway from the airport was packed with huge lorries and rusting *okadas* and shiny Mercedes, all honking, one long steady whine of annoyance, the whole city singing the same nasal dirge. The palm trees looked weary. The harbor was gray, the same shade as the sky, full of barges and yachts. As they’d crossed the bridge, leaving the island of Ikeja for the mainland, Lagos Island, he glimpsed a large sign: THIS IS LAGOS. Not *Welcome to Lagos, Lagos Welcomes You*, but simply THIS IS LAGOS. (*GMG* 167)

Lagos is less “exotic”, and much closer in appearance to an unwelcoming late 20<sup>th</sup> century city than he had imagined. Taiwo has her first period and becomes aware of her budding sexuality (*GMG* 279-281), without a mother or friend to talk to. During

this period Kehinde also experiences his sexual awakening, which their Uncle perverts for his own gratification. Over a period of time, he forces Kehinde to repeatedly assault his sister until the children are finally rescued by a family friend.

Kehinde and Taiwo, united yet estranged by their joint trauma and unable to resolve their experiences in Lagos, leave the U.S. as soon as they can to travel extensively and live abroad. Kehinde

left after school, won the Fulbright to Mali, waited tables in Paris, started showing in London, and never came home. She, too, got a scholarship to study in England, two years she had lived there, in Oxford, not far, but he never suggested she visit in Mali, nor the next year in Paris, never said he was there. She left, started law school; he never came to see her. (*GMG* 176)

For years they avoid meeting each other despite repeated invitations by Kehinde. When they finally meet up, Taiwo has just been in the media's focus for having an affair with the dean of her law school. She asks Kehinde for his opinion with a secret hope that he can validate her despite being "embroiled in a 'scandal' " (*GMG* 176). Kehinde is worried about his sister as he does not understand why she wants to attend law school in the first place besides following in Fola's footsteps. He feels he has failed her by not being available for her when she needed a friend or a close relative. Out of concern for her well-being, Kehinde criticises Taiwo's affair and by an unfortunate slip of the tongue he calls her a "whore" (*GMG* 177). Enraged beyond reason, Taiwo challenges Kehinde to own up to his behaviour in Lagos, and a vicious physical fight ensues. Afterwards, Taiwo breaks off all contact to her brother.

Kehinde feels that he "didn't belong" (*GMG* 242) in his family from the start and neither can he resolve their conflict. In desperation, he attempts suicide by cutting his wrists, but is saved by his steadfast assistant Sangna, a foreshadowing of their future relationship. Kehinde spends six months as an in-patient at a psychiatric unit in England until he is deemed well enough to return to live independently again. Sangna arranges for his new apartment-cum-studio in New York, where he continues to process his complicated relationship with Taiwo by a series of nine life-size portraits of his sister, which are variations of the nine muses (*GMG* 162). His appearance is also cause to question his belonging and he envies Sadie and Olu their appearance, as

they bear such a resemblance to the people they come from, Olu a darker-skinned Fola, classically Yoruba, Sadie a lighter-skinned Kweku, classically Ga. [...] [I]t's a record of something, he thinks, a visual record of the history of a People, capital P, in the world. That he can find, and finds familiar, the same squarish lip shape, the high-riding brow bone and regal hooked nose on his mother and brother as carved out of ivory by sixteenth century artisans on ritual masks, that the face keeps repeating, the one face, over and over, across ages and oceans and lovers and wars, like a printmaker's matrix, a good one,

worth reusing—is wondrous to Kehinde. He envies them this. His siblings and their parents belong to a People, bear the *stamp of belonging* (emphasis added). (GMG 166)

He is considered too handsome, yet he feels that he is a disappointment to his father for not becoming a doctor and disenfranchised from his most important family relationship, the one with his sister.

Taiwo's life is characterized by loss; loss of trust in her mother, her father and her twin brother and an overarching distrust in life. In vain, she tries to address this emptiness and loneliness through psychotherapy. Taiwo responds to her experiences by failing expectations (=dropping out of law school) and involving herself with unsuitable men to escape from her “feelings of emptiness”, “a force field of sorrow”, made apparent by her “insomnia, her lifelong companion” (GMG 125). Meaningless relationships replace her former most meaningful family connections as an outlet for her self-loathing. In Lagos, Taiwo first learned to escape her own body, when she severed her mind from her body to survive the abuse. These experiences massively increased her insecurities about her role and place in the world; after a few years of excelling academically, she rejects academia by giving up her promising law studies; she comes to the conclusion that her fellow students are “the same group of cowards seeking solace in schoolwork” (GMG 206). Taiwo studies at Oxford University for two years before returning to New York to enroll at law school. Perhaps subconsciously she feels she has to pursue her mother's deferred dream as a way to reconnect with her and honour the “god of Approval” that has characterized her life for so long (GMG 130). Instead, Taiwo starts an affair with Dean Rudd, albeit feeling ill-suited to it as she is “an overachiever only playing at temptress, an ex-goody-two-shoes in bad girl footwear” (GMG 136).

Taiwo and Kehinde could be classified as fellow Afropolitans, similar to the ones in *Bye-Bye, Babar* through their mobility, academic achievements and even their physical features, being ethnic mixes. Yet, the twins' beauty is a hindrance rather than an advantage. Taiwo experiences it as “envy in women, desire in men” and it stalls her attempts at meaningful friendships with either gender (GMG 128). The twins' beauty, including their light skin tone and facial features, is somewhat problematically ascribed in part to the genetic heritage of their Scottish great-grandmother. Kehinde displays transnational activities by using influences he picked up on his Fulbright grant in Mali in his artwork, for example “so-called mud-cloth,

the new thing, a departure from the portraits he's made out beadwork since going abroad" (*GMG* 163). Neumann and Rippl describe Kehinde's art as hybrid, combining sources from African and European traditions and thus opening "to rethink aesthetic categories and value the hybridization of cultures" (172). His sojourns to Mali, Paris and London are of course a wonderful opportunity to travel but also his way of escaping from the conflict he cannot resolve with Taiwo.

She displays a blended selfhood in the way she dresses, "half devil-may-care, quarter Yoruba priestess, quarter prim British schoolgirl" (*GMG* 130) and the British accent she acquires during her studies in the United Kingdom. Essentially though, she feels "[a] *fraud*" (*GMG* 137), stuck in an overriding sense of un-belonging. In lieu of meaningful relationships she resorts to feeling kinship with a random Ghanaian taxi driver. They are two "angels in a snow globe, both silent and smiling, two African strangers alone in the snow" (*GMG* 141).

When Kehinde and Taiwo travel from the airport to their mother's house in Accra, the driver resents driving passengers who look like him but who are so much better off economically. Despite Kehinde's protestations, he considers them to be naive tourists, stupid enough to give far too many U.S. dollar notes to a crippled beggar (*GMG* 209). The driver makes fun of them because they do not even know where their father was born; something that is so ridiculous to Taiwo that she starts to laugh and is unable to stop. Taiwo does not understand

why all of them do this, still now, even now, the African Filial Piety act? Lowered eyes, lowered voices, feigned shyness, bent shoulders, the curse of their culture, exaltation of deference, that beaten-in impulse to show oneself obedient and worthy of praise for one's reverence of Order (never mind that the Order is crumbling, corrupted, departed, dysfunctional: respect must be shown it. (*GMG* 233)

Taiwo and Kweku share two ambitions – to find a place where they belong and perhaps, in the hope of achieving this goal, to return to a parent on African soil. While Kweku wants to present his first-born son to his mother as a token of his success in the United States, Taiwo wants to punish her father for running away and leaving the family in a vulnerable position. She wants to confront him with the terrible consequences that being sent to Nigeria had for her and Kehinde. However, when Taiwo arrives in Ghana, she realizes for the first time that her father's ambition "to belong" in the U.S. were doomed from the start: They are "out of place [...], as they always felt, an African family in Brookline; as *she* always felt late at night in her bedroom, the ghosts more at home there than she was" (*GMG* 272-273). Over the

course of her stay in Ghana, she starts to develop empathy with her father as she sums up Kweku's life in the U.S. thus:

He conquered new land and he founded a house, but his shame was too great and his conquest was sold. [...] *Poor little boy*, who had walked on this beach, who had dreamed of grand homes and new homelands, she thinks, with his feet cracking open, his soles turning black, never guessing his error (she'd have told him if he'd asked): that he'd never find a home, or a home that would last. That one never feels home who feels shame, never will. (*GMG* 273)

Her own rootlessness comes to light on her walk on a Ghanaian beach: ultimately, after running away from her mother, she “just stops walking, has nowhere to go, is a stranger here also” (*GMG* 273). Having retraced her father's footsteps along the beach, Taiwo first realizes that her anger and self-destructive behaviour are only partly the result of her father's departure; she suddenly understands that she is furious with her mother for sending them to Nigeria. They have their first honest conversation about the reasons Fola sent the twins away. It emerges that Fola, herself unmothered, doubted herself as a single “scared” and “lonely” mother (*GMG* 291), who would have been unable to provide the stimulation and enrichment her gifted children deserved according to their teachers. Fola's admission of having, after all, failed the twins despite her best intentions is the first step to rebuilding their relationship. When they can share their grief, they are finally able to cross the emotional abyss that has separated them for many years, and they reconnect. Taiwo and Fola's renewed relationship makes it possible for Taiwo to reach out to Kehinde and they likewise have their first proper conversation since they were teenagers. Eventually, Kehinde asks Taiwo for her forgiveness (*GMG* 309) and they are able to move on from their grief to a new relationship as adults. Their unique bond resurfaces when they are able to hear each other's inner monologues again. When Kehinde shares his feelings for his assistant with his alter ego Taiwo, he is able to admit them to himself for the first time.

#### **4.4. Sadé/Sadie**

Last-born Sadie also struggles to work out her place within the Sai family. By the time she is growing up, her “family” is predominantly characterised by emptiness and loss, as her father and her siblings have left to pursue their own aspirations and/or flee from a dysfunctional family life.

She has no obvious talents, unlike “Olu's calm brilliance”, “Taiwo's dark genius” or “Kehinde's pure talent” and grows up with the absence of her father being a given rather than having both parents around (*GMG* 214). Her father lost faith in his host

country as well as in his own ability to perform his twin roles as father and husband. Despite resourceful Fola, who rises to the occasion and does her best to keep the family together, “Baby” grows up in a world that has indeed fallen apart. Sadie develops a suffocating bond with her mother due to the absence of her father, as well as to her precarious start in life – as a very premature baby it was unclear whether she was going to survive. She was supposed to be called Idowu, the one “[b]orn after twins” (*GMG* vii). Her father names her by accident Folasadé, as he is thinking of his wife when the nurse asks for Sadie’s name. Sadie later shortens “Sade” to a more English-sounding version, i.e. Sadie. Her mother does not notice that Sadie is growing up and keeps referring to her as “Baby”, wanting to hold on to her last child. In contrast to various references to the physical beauty of the twins, Sadie is described as physically resembling her Ghanaian aunt Naa who is dark-skinned and stocky. While growing up in the U.S., Sadie finds it difficult to accept the way her body looks, and her deep unhappiness is expressed through bulimia. Phiri (2017: 150) compares Sadie’s negative self-description with the way American slaves would have been advertised:

Her eyes are too small and her nose is too round and she hasn’t got cheekbones like Taiwo or Philae, nor long slender limbs nor a clean chiseled jaw nor a dipping-in waist nor a jutting-out clavicle. She’s five foot four, solid, not fat per se, stocky, pale milky-tea skin, number-four-colored hair, neither tall nor petite, with no edges, no angles; she looks like a doll, one she wouldn’t have wanted. (*GMG* 265)

Phiri describes Sadie’s longing for a different body as an example of the “bluest eye problem” in reference to Toni Morrison’s novel (2017: 150). Although on the surface Sadie believes to live in a post-racial society, she is at odds with her own appearance and experiences Du Bois’ “double-consciousness” (Phiri 2017: 150). Sadie’s is only able to “revers[e] the imperialist white gaze” through her aunt Naa’s acknowledgement as a long-missed family member along with her truly welcoming words (Phiri 2017: 152).

Taiwo suspects that Sadie “secretly wants to be white” (*GMG* 146). Sadie has hardly had any African American friends and believes that all the students she mixes with “carry this patina of whiteness” and are going to end up in similar careers: “ethnically heterogeneous and culturally homogenous, per force of exposure, osmosis, adolescence” (*GMG* 146). Knudsen and Rahbek challenge the assumption that people of African descent whose lives cross “cultural and economic boundaries” are limiting themselves to “mimicking whiteness”, as suggested by Rita Nketiah and Sedef Arat-Koc (119-121). Sadie, in fact, aspires not to look like but rather to belong to her white

friend Philae's family, to share her solid family tree which is evident in the various family photographs displayed on the family home's landing (*GMG* 146). As she grows up, she is seen by the mothers of other girls as a desirable friend, "a Good Influence on daughters, with good grades and good manners, what a peach, *so polite!*" (*GMG* 143). Yet, none of these mothers is aware of Sadie's need to connect with "real" families by rifling through their bathrooms, sniffing their towels and taking a little memento here and there (*GMG* 143). Likewise, her coping strategy of bulimia goes unnoticed. She misses having grandparents as well as a store of family stories to anchor her. This dearth of family heirlooms and connections is a gaping hole that Sadie struggles to fill through the process of eating and purging herself, with the hope of filling an emotional void. Olu equally experiences cultural rootlessness by missing their family's history, with his parents being very cautious about sharing any background stories with their children.

Unlike Olu or the twins she has never even visited anyone or anywhere in Africa until she travels to Ghana for her father's funeral. Her siblings have not shared their personal experiences of Nigeria, Ghana or Mali with her either and so she cannot claim any actual connection to the continent except as her parents' birthplace.

Somewhat predictably, Sadie has a moment of epiphany in Krokobité, when one of her aunts believes her to be a reincarnation of Ekua, Kweku's sister who died of TB aged eleven. Sadie realizes that she shares Ekua's talent to dance to traditional drums, the sound of which she discovers to be "[a] surrogate heartbeat" (*GMG* 269). Phiri describes the process from Sadie's stationary kneeling in the performance of her bulimia to her joyful dancing movement as "rupture transformed into rapture" (2017: 153).

Through her visit to her father's village, Sadie experiences her own homecoming as she realizes her family is partially rooted in Ghana and she is finally able to connect to her father's cultural background. While Sadie will return to her studies in the U.S., she will be more grounded and more appreciative of her family's situation. Having concluded the six main characters' individual sections, 4.5 focuses on Afropolitan elements in particular and sheds some light on the destructive family dynamics.



## 4.5. Afropolitan Elements and Dysfunctional Relationships

In section 2.5. the following elements were listed as characteristic of an Afropolitan experience according to Selasi's essay: "mobility", "lived hybridity", "lofty ambitions", "space", and a "complicated relationship to places including a sense of shame".

As far as the Sai children are concerned, mobility only applies to the twins. They had to move to Lagos (albeit for a short, yet decisive period) and later restlessly moved between Europe, African and the States. Their mobility is, of course, indicative of their privilege (they move to further their higher education), but at the same time their restlessness points towards a flight rather than fight response in dealing with their trauma. Olu and Sadie have not left the States and have hardly any or no personal experience of the African continent.

Lived hybridity plays only a marginal role. With the exception of Kehinde, whose imagination turns African and European influences into art, the children are very much based in U.S. society. More as a token, they will eat traditional dishes and use the occasional Yoruba word when talking with each other, but they have no strong connection to their parents' cultural background and are yet to meet "beloved family in Ghana" (*BBB* 326).

In regard to lofty ambitions, all children have a strong need to succeed. They are able to fully make use of the opportunities they are given by an expensive education; however, succeeding does not make them particularly happy. Rather, they feel under constant pressure to achieve to please their parents and fill the emotional void their family finds itself in. Chasing accolades is fuelled by their lack of belonging and a way of achieving status.

In regard to questioning their roots, the necessary space to interrogate their family history and their relationships, it appears that only Kweku's death and the unavoidable journey to Ghana makes the children face what they have been avoiding. Ghana grants them the opportunity to take stock of who they are, and only when they share each other's stories do they have a chance to integrate their experiences into a happier future. Living the Afropolitan experience appears to be a complex process, which in the Sai's case is eased by economic security and success. However, by no means is it a straightforward path to becoming the "aren't-we-the-coolest-damn-people-on-earth" (*BBB* 326), as Selasi puts it in a somewhat tongue-in-cheek fashion. The children's sense of shame is based on memories of their father's vulnerability and their own lack of agency in difficult situations. Unfortunately, it appears that all

relationships within the Sai family are characterized by a lack of communication and connection, inaccurate assumptions about each other, a crippling sense of shame, as well as an overriding need for a sense of belonging, a proper “home”.

Kweku feels incredibly lucky that Fola chose him, yet a part of him never believed that their relationship was going to last. He suspects that on some level he is not good enough for her, especially as she gave up her career plans for his studies and their family. Compared to his closest five friends who are somewhat in awe of Fola, Kweku is shy and retiring in manner and comes across as a “geek” (*GMG* 231). When he fails, he cannot bear to face telling Fola the truth and, sadly, underestimates her loyalty and inner strength. Kweku has become accustomed to loss over the course of his life. As he lies dying, he remembers four explicit losses that break his heart: the loss of his sister Eku, his mother’s death, meeting Kofi, his houseboy, and losing Fola. Perhaps the first two losses conditioned him to stop fighting eventually, as he ultimately accepts the loss of his family and life in the United States. The one loss he felt he could and had to fight was his dismissal. Failing this one particular struggle, he admits defeat and returns to Accra.

Fola is fierce and steadfast in her love for her children, particularly for neonate Sadie whom she wants to protect at all costs. However, at some level she cannot believe that her relationship with Kweku will last either, because they “were immigrants. Immigrants leave” (*GMG* 316). Once Kweku left her and the children, and penniless at that, she does not give him a second chance to explain what happened. She divorces Kweku and moves on to the next stage of her life, ceasing all contact. Having grown up without a mother and having lost her father as a teenager, she is accustomed to starting afresh, however difficult it may be.

Olu feels angry about his father’s abandonment and about his relationship with June, whom he considers an unsuitable match, almost an insult to his mother. He is torn between feeling proud of his father’s qualities as a surgeon and his faults as a human being, particularly when criticised by an outsider, Dr. Wei. Olu remembers the time when his mother had a mental break-down over the possibility of Sadie dying, and how afterwards his parents no longer worked together, but each pursued their individual dreams, for her “grown-up babies”, for him “private practice” (*GMG* 223). The special place he had experienced as the first-born son, who spent time with his parents individually, was lost after Sadie came home from the INCU.

Regarding his siblings, Olu has “never really comprehended” how Kehinde operates; as far as he is concerned, he seems to just glide through life smoothly (*GMG* 183). Olu

feels compelled to excel and put lots of effort into all he does; he fears disappointment in himself and that others may judge him harshly lest he always performs at top level. Olu also envies Kehinde for his good looks and is ready to believe that any woman in her right mind (including his own wife) would choose “glamorous and famous and wealthy” Kehinde over him (*GMG* 224).

Over Lagos, Taiwo has lost the former closeness with Kehinde and they remain estranged. She wrongly assumes “perfect Olu” to be her father’s favourite, yet Olu knows “nothing of hot things, of wrong things, of loss, failure, passion, lust, sorrow or love” (*GMG* 128). She thinks Olu is critical of her academic development and resents his assumed superiority. She believes Sadie to be jealous of her looks and to be her mother’s favourite. She feels enraged with Sadie, whom she perceives as “small Sadie, sweet Sadie, clean Sadie, pure Sadie, as cute as a baby they can’t help but hug” (*GMG* 273). She is angry with her mother for abandoning her to Uncle Femi’s abuse in Nigeria, as she believes her mother should have known better. In short, prior to returning to Accra, there is no one left in her family that she has a supportive relationship with.

Kehinde feels he has failed his father, as he could not stop him from leaving his family and by not becoming a doctor. Furthermore, Kehinde was unable to protect Taiwo in Nigeria. Trying to save her from being exploited by random men, he became a perpetrator and complicit in her abuse. Once he has returned to New York from his years abroad, he finds out where Taiwo lives and starts watching her, lacking the courage to speak to her. He is surprised that “nobody has noticed nor harassed him, a black man at the window, with dread-locks, no coat, although it’s always been his magic trick to be there without being there, too muddy his form, not to need to be known” (*GMG* 164). Kehinde is aware that being seen as a black man who is aimlessly loitering in the streets of New York poses a risk to his own safety. Thus, he has cultivated the art of being invisible.

Sadie believes that she carries no weight in the Sai family, as her siblings are either absent or too self-absorbed to be interested in her. Her father, whom she refers to as “[t]he Man from the Story” (*GMG* 149) left when she was only four and is not talked about much in her family home. She also believes that Taiwo does not like her and “resents [her] for getting to stay” when the twins were shipped off to Lagos (*GMG* 150). The relationship with her mother is very close, as they lived together “for ten years without siblings” (*GMG* 154). Sadie does not trust anyone in her family enough to tell them about her bulimia and her desperate urge to belong to one of her friends’

families. Sadie sometimes feels like an impostor, playing at being a family with her mother, whom she equally admires and resents. When Fola demands that all her children come and visit her at Christmas, she has a big fight with her mother. Sadie had been looking forward to spending Christmas with her friend Philae in St. Barth's that year; her biannual escape from the feeling that "she *doesn't* belong" (GMG 158). Sadie cannot make her mother understand that if she met her siblings for a family occasion, they would all "feel the difference, the heartbreaking difference, between what they've become and what a Family should be" (GMG 158).

The next section takes a closer look at the way several characters are described regarding their physical appearance. It is suggested that phenotypical descriptions are problematic as they seem to be almost automatically endowed with subtexts, depending on who the narrator and the reader are.

### **4.6. Representation of Characters**

The portrayal of the above protagonists, as well as the more "sinister" protagonists (Babafemi Savage and Niké Savage), is problematic insofar their physical descriptions seem to perpetuate a simplistic representation.

"Baby", the spitting image of her Ghanaian aunt Naa, finds it nigh on impossible to accept her own looks. Phiri remarks that Naa's description is "essentialising race and ethnicity" (2017: 153). Sadie has internalized a strong self-loathing based on her appearance. She describes the young dancer in Krokobité as having "thick arms, thighs, high buttocks, broad shoulders, small bosom, the same solid body she has. And hates. [...] *I hate this body, it is ugly, I hate how it looks*" (GMG 267-268). Through the epiphany of joining the villagers' dancing, Sadie surprises herself by finding a sense of acceptance and even joy in what her body can do.

In contrast, Fola, Taiwo and Kehinde are described as being remarkably beautiful, which can be read as a result of ethnic mixing with a white forebear. There are several references to the lighter skin colour of the twins and their more European features, for example Taiwo's "conch-shell" coloured lips and "clear amber eyes" (GMG 5, 291), the implicit message being that they are perceived as more attractive than their darker sister. In this way, the novel mirrors the reality of global pigmentocracy or colorism in Western media, which seem to favour stars like Beyoncé who certainly appears to be lighter-skinned and more European-looking in her facial features. Kenyan Actress Lupita Nyong'o regrets that at least in Western media, there is still a dearth of dark-skinned role models, particularly with natural or shaved hair. In fact,

as a child she used to pray for “lighter skin”; her attitude to her own complexion only changed when she became aware of dark-skinned South Sudan model Alek Wek (see Kilday). A similar sentiment is expressed by “Sweetness”, a new mother in Toni Morrison’s novel *God Help the Child* who is shocked by her new-born daughter’s skin tone which she refers to as “[m]idnight black, Sudanese black” (3). In fact, her husband Louis leaves her as he denies that Lula Ann could be his child. For a long time, Sweetness wishes her daughter “hadn’t been born with that terrible color”, as she realizes it will make her life more difficult (5). Phiri points out that Sadie would have rejected a “doll” (*GMG* 265), which looked like her and references studies on skin perception amongst children from 2010 (2017: 150). The CNN study investigated the views of 133 children between the ages of four to ten from New York and Georgia, which showed that they, irrespective of their own skin colour, clearly had a “white bias”, associating positive character attributes with lighter skin tones and vice versa (CNN 2010).

On the other hand, when Kehinde first catches sight of his grandmother’s portrait at Femi’s house he actually finds her revolutive as she is “neither African nor white, who belonged to no People, no past he had heard of, who sat on the wall, cold with death, cut from ice, the only member of their family they had ever vaguely looked like, this pale, hateful beauty” (*GMG* 172). Upon the twins’ arrival in Lagos, fourteen-year-old Taiwo believes that “Nigerians [...] *like* being angry, to derive pleasure from conflict, some physical thrill; she would watch them in the marketplace, at school, the way they carried on, their eyes alive with pleasure as they screamed and tore their hair” (*GMG* 278).

The description of Fola’s half-brother, Babafemi (Femi) and his wife Niké renders them inhuman, and is reminiscent of the description of “natives” in Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*: “[his uncle’s] face was all angles and thick-lidded eyes too wide open and red-rimmed, a dull shade of brown, upturned nose, low-set mouth, the proportions the problem, thin cheeks far too narrow for features this wide “ (*GMG* 171). Neither he nor his wife have any redeeming features, either physically or emotionally, and this becomes evident in Femi’s “[b]lack, thick-lidded eyes gazing back at her, red-rimmed, the wild sort of a gaze of a man on a drug, matching smile (hard, unfocused), the wife there beside him gone ashen with rage, the new wig a blond bob.” (*GMG* 233). Femi is depicted as an archetypical evil (black) man who has not only tricked his half-sister Fola out of her inheritance, but also became “a dealer of women, small arms, and cocaine, [...] an underworld wunderkid” who takes

pleasure in power games and child abuse (*GMG* 236). Niké has had her "skin chemically bleached to a wan grayish-beige and a tawny-brown wig falling slick to her shoulders, red lipstick and blush bloodying cheekbones and lips." (*GMG* 167-168). She is a two-dimensional character, whose inability to have children has made her cruel and vicious towards her niece and nephew.

Numerous African characters are, at least to an extent, described by either stereotypical behaviour or appearance, for instance the "sucking of teeth" is ascribed sixteen times to either Kweku, "the old woman", Femi, Niké, Kweku's half-sister Naa, or an unnamed taxi driver. This seems to apply also to the description of Fola's father who is "kind, broad-shouldered, woolly haired" (*GMG* 102). "Woolly hair and woolen suit and broad and buoyant shoulders bobbing, bobbing, bobbing out of view" (*GMG* 104). Ama, a young woman from Kweku's home village and his former employee, a nurse who is "simple and supple" (*GMG* 52), appears to be used by Kweku almost as a crutch. However, she is a "woman that cries out for care" and seems to be satisfied with her situation as Kweku's young wife (*GMG* 315). For Kweku, his second wife fulfils the role of a bridge between his own childhood and "his daughter, (a), a modern thing entirely and a product of there, North America, snow, cow products, *thoughts of the future* (emphasis added), of his mother, (b), an ancient thing, a product of *here*, hut, heat, raffia, West Africa, *the perpetual past* (emphasis added)" (*GMG* 52). With Ama by his side, Kweku is finally able to reconcile the different parts of his lived experience, although part of him remains firmly committed to Fola, for example by having "K" and "F" carved into the door handles of his house. Towards the end of the novel, the former wife and the widowed second wife meet and Ama returns Kweku's slippers to Folasadé's as a sign of respect. In a nod to the novel's title, the slippers are given to Fola in "a plastic Ghana Must Go bag" (*GMG* 316).

Despite his own Ghanaian roots, Kweku develops a conflicted view of his fellow countrymen, as he "had never hired a Ghanaian to do anything (or anything aesthetic) without that Ghanaian reinterpreting his instructions somehow" (*GMG* 32). He also remains wary of "the odd breed of African: fearless and rich", criminals he has heard of connected to robberies in Lagos' affluent Victoria Island (*GMG* 3). Kweku's ambivalent response to Accra and his fellow Africans is at least partly due to his experiences abroad. While he knows that his roots are Ghanaian and life in the United States has ultimately disappointed him deeply, his view of Ghana has changed, and he now sees it from an outsider's perspective as well. The next section

wants to show which part various geographical places play in the narrative as the protagonists try to make sense of them.

#### 4.7. Places as Characters

The African continent (predominantly through Ghana, Nigeria, and a mention of Mali) and the West (mostly the U.S.) can also be understood as characters and are thus essential elements of the novel.

In my understanding, everyday modern life in a number of African locations is portrayed more interestingly than life in the West: there are some positive images, for instance, in the compound where Kweku grew up, the Sai family are reassured by the sense of community and acceptance as family members which they receive like an unforeseen gift from Kweku's relatives. The reader is presented, for example, with a number of images of busy market scenes and ordinary life in Accra. However, it is not a folkloristic, idealizing depiction but also highlights gender inequality (only the boys attend school in Kweku's village: *GMG* 266) and lack of opportunity (Kofi's "indomitable cheerfulness" despite his poverty: *GMG* 24). Kehinde finds creative inspiration in Mali (*GMG* 241) and the colourfully styled coffins, common in Ghana, lead to his next project, "[a] home [...] for the homeless, a home in the space after bodies" (*GMG* 295-296). Sadie learns to appreciate her father's roots and change her perception of her own and others' appearance.

As far as the past is concerned, more negative images including violence, deprivation and cultural alienation are shown. There are a number of departures for members of the Sai family, caused by trauma: Fola flees Nigeria from a civil war; Kweku flees Ghana from abject poverty; Taiwo and Kehinde flee from an abusive situation in Lagos. Lagos is described as a tirelessly busy city that takes little heed of individuals. Kehinde explains to Sadie why their parents never took the family to Africa: "They were hurt....Their countries hurt them." (*GMG* 240). Yet, Kweku and Fola returned to Ghana when the hopes they had for their lives in the West were dashed. In that sense, modern Ghana becomes a haven to them and also Kweku's final resting place. Ultimately, Kweku sums up his complicated relationship with Ghana at the moment of his death: "lush Ghana, soft Ghana, verdant Ghana, where fragile things die" (*GMG* 11).

Accra and Lagos are places where the Sai children without an inherent connection to their parents' place of birth test their preconceptions of what an African city may be like versus their actual first impressions upon their arrival. When Olu visits Accra as

a young adult, he is struck by surprise as, for the first time, he sees his father and himself merge into a sea of people who share physical similarities – a hitherto unknown “newness of majority” (*GMG* 249). Olu rejoices in the recognition that - at least by his looks - he will, for once, fit in. Accra is less tropical than anticipated and reminds him of Delhi with its “small honking taxis, good cheer, dusty haze, well-planned roads somehow wanting for order, retail signboards with hand-painted faces” (*GMG* 249). Olu’s reaction to Accra is similar to the twins’ first impressions of Lagos, which they also pictured rather differently.

When as young adults Taiwo and Kehinde first arrive in Accra, they experience a sense of cultural alienation as well as confusion as their taxi driver treats them as clueless foreigners who do not understand their surroundings. At the same time, they are genuinely welcomed as family members by their father’s relatives in Krokobité.

The Sai children are conflicted about the way they feel about Africa – it lures them back, surprises them and to an extent, challenges them. At the end of the novel, the Sai family is having their Christmas dinner in Accra. The implication is that this time, their departure from the African continent will be a positive experience rather than a desperate flight. It becomes much more plausible that in the future, spending time in Ghana will be something the children will be looking forward to rather than dreading. Finally, as they manage to reconnect to each other, and as a family bury their father in Ghana, it enables the children to move on with their lives. For this specific family, Accra and Krokobité become a place of epiphanies and reconciliation.

Regarding the children, as far as they have any kind of home, America is their home. The West is portrayed as a place where – particularly in the U.S. – one can follow one’s dream; however, this comes at a price. There seems to be a constant struggle to prove oneself, to achieve more than others, to be accepted by a majority society. The Sai’s children cultural rootlessness makes them into relentless overachievers who are taking ballet classes, piano lessons and art classes, and are excelling at sports in addition to their academic achievements. There may be no place for failure in the West, particularly if one doubts one’s sense of belonging, including one’s “right” to be part of American society. All in all, the West seems much less varied in its portrayal than the glimpses the reader gains of life in Ghana and Nigeria. The final section of the literary analysis is concerned with structural and stylistic elements.



## 4.8. Structure, Style, and Literary Devices

Regarding the novel's structure, there are three parts of roughly equal length – “GONE”, “GOING” and “GO”. The novel has a circular, elliptical structure, starting and ending in Ghana, where resolution is achieved around the time of Christmas and Kweku's funeral. Gikandi asks his students to read the novel multiple times in order to fill in the gaps which the non-linear narrative creates (Knudsen and Rahbek 56). This “fragmented prose style” of the novel works particularly well in challenging assumptions about an orderly, privileged life of Afropolitans, precisely because of the narrative breaks (Gikandi in Knudsen and Rahbek 56). “GONE” focuses on Kweku's reflections about his life and his relationships as he lies dying. “GOING” describes all members of the family in more detail in their current situation, without revealing clues about their past and culminates in the children's joint preparations to travel to Ghana. The urgency that is caused by their father's impending funeral overrides any hesitation to get in touch with each other they may have had previously; the reader realizes that the siblings are quite estranged from each other, but rally forces to support their mother. In the final section “GO”, the reader learns most about the main characters' past as a prerequisite to understanding the long-standing conflicts and misunderstandings between various members of the family. Their shared visit to Ghana makes a rather private “Truth and Reconciliation Commission” possible, which allows for reconciliations and occurrences of closure, for instance between Taiwo and Kehinde, or between Taiwo and her mother. Furthermore, the children realize that as second-generation U.S. citizens visiting an African village, they have more in common with their siblings than they thought. To make their visit even more meaningful, they are also welcomed into their father's village by some of his relatives. Their father's sister and others might consider Kweku's ex-wife and children solely as “Americanah”, i.e. Africans who return from the U.S., yet they are ready to host them and make them feel welcome. Gikandi describes the various examples of reconciliation and redemption, which the Sai family experience around the time of their visit for Kewku's funeral, Sadie's birthday and Christmas as “allegorical” (Knudsen and Rahbek 59), a narrative pushed to the limits of creditability to make up for the inherent, long-lasting anxieties of the protagonists. He sees these “redemptive moments” as an antidote to the characters' deep-rooted anxieties and does not particularly look for “realism” in *Ghana Must Go* (Knudsen and Rahbek 59-60). To my mind, the protagonists' inner struggles are so pronounced and deep-rooted that only “a triple homecoming” can heal them. They need to be reassured that in a

moment of great family crisis, they will cooperate; that they are more similar to each other than they thought, and that they are welcome as who they are in their father's home village and their mother's new home in Accra. In addition to these three instances of exchanging their untethered state for a much stronger sense of connection, the reader learns that close relationships create a home: Olu finds his home with Ling; Kehinde realizes that Sangna anchors him. Like their parents before them, whose loving relationship became their haven for many years (*GMG* 91).

The novel is written in a somewhat elevated style and has been described as elitist (Toivanen 202). Selasi uses wordplay and alliteration, for instance "Saintly Sangna, the assistant-*cum*-accountant" (*GMG* 163). Kweku's moment of death is compared to "sliding deeper into reverie, remembrance and re-other things (regret, remorse, resentment, reassessment)" (*GMG* 21). Olu is described as "the fastidious-*cum*-favored-*cum*-fallen First Son" (*GMG* 128). At times, the elaborate, wordy style of writing tends to distract from the narrative, for example when Taiwo is described through her father's inner monologue as having "black thicket for eyelash and carved rock for cheekbone and gemstone for eyes, her pink lips the same color as the inside of conch shells, impossibly beautiful, an impossible girl" (*GMG* 5). Throughout the text, a number of expressions in Yoruba (spoken in Nigeria), Twi or Akan (Ghanaian languages) are used in conversations or musings of characters. These expressions do not form part of the overview of "Pronunciations" which precedes the novel and only explains the meaning and origin of names. The novel also provides a "family tree" which lists the fourteen most relevant characters. Within the family tree it strikes me as somewhat odd that Maud Nwaneri is subtitled as "Scottish" and Olabimbo, Babafemi's mother, as "Mistress".

There are also some supernatural elements in the novel, for instance when Kweku and Folasadé have imaginary conversations after his passing. A final "conversation" takes place, when Fola thanks Kweku for sending their children to Ghana, making it possible for them to reconnect and move on to a new phase of their lives. In their imaginary conversation, Kweku berates himself for not having done enough in the U.S. but rather having behaved like a coward. Fola reassures him that their children will be ok once they "learn how to stay" (*GMG* 317). Folasadé is described to be able to feel each of her children in a quadrant of her womb, however, it turns out that most of the time, she has no inkling of what is actually happening to her children.

Several physical items are important recurring metaphors in *Ghana Must Go*, which symbolize different decisive moments in the main protagonists' development. The kente cloth or throw symbolizes Fola's Yoruba heritage: her father's kente cloth is one of only a handful of items she was able to keep when she had to flee from Lagos to Accra as a teenager. It is a tangible object, which shows the long journey Fola has undertaken by having become "threadbare, faded and soft, with the blacks turned to grays and the reds turned to pinks—but her favorite thing [...] unearthed in the basement in Brookline [amongst] Fola's old things" (*GMG* 153). Many years later, young Sadie dresses up in the cloth and calls herself a Yoruba queen. Fola sadly does not make use of this opportunity to tell Sadie (or any of her other children) about her difficult past, but affirms Sadie's enthusiasm by calling her "a little princess" (*GMG* 153).

Kweku's slippers are a poignant metaphor for his life's journey: he grew up without shoes, and bears scarred feet, which he tries to hide. Kweku acknowledges the importance of protecting what is vulnerable; in his Boston house he keeps a wide choice of slippers for any potential guests. The slippers are an appropriate prop for his reinvention as someone who is living a successful life. They also represent movement to and fro - from impoverished schoolboy to successful surgeon in the U.S., back to his last years of practice and eventual retirement in Ghana. They are faithful like "dogs" (*GMG* 3). Knudsen and Rahbek understand Kweku's "slippers as a telling leitmotif" that trace Kweku's story (127). On his final journey, just before he dies in his garden from a heart-attack, he is shocked by being barefoot for the first time in decades, a return to his humble beginnings (*GMG* 37). Taiwo equally asks herself where Kweku's slippers were at the time of his death as she is fully aware of how important it was to her father to protect his feet from view (*GMG* 46).

The image of single boats indicates either a potentially meaningful journey or a failed one. Kweku's stationary mother, "frozen in time pounding yam into past" (*GMG* 61) keeps a close watch on the beach and perhaps dreams of leaving on a boat. Kweku and Fola do leave and are optimistic that they will find a better life in the U.S.; they are

[t]wo boats lost at sea, washed to shore in Pennsylvania ("Pencil-whenever") of all places [...]. Orphans, escapees, at large in world history, both hailing from countries last great in the eighteenth century – but prideful (braver, hopeful) and brimful and broke – so very desperately seeking home and adventure, finding both! (*GMG* 91)

On occasion, the imagery of boats, drifting without purpose or even ship-wrecked becomes a harbinger of dashed hopes, isolation, and trauma. The boat adrift is a

powerful metaphor, as the largest part of bodies of water are "international waters"; not belonging to any nation. Furthermore, "boats lost at sea" sadly reference the stark reality of refugees' lives lost when trying to reach Europe. Fola feels she is "a newly wrecked ship on a shore in the dark" when she reflects on her father's murder in the wake of Kweku's death (*GMG* 107). Taiwo reflects on being cast out to sea by her mother, when she "cut off the ropes, set the lifeboats adrift" (*GMG* 274). She experiences the discovery of Kweku's feet as a moment of utter shame, and assumes that their family is lost in "an ocean, their ship sinking slowly" (*GMG* 274).

Moving on to less tangible objects, snow, at first, is a reason to enjoy life in their host country. While Kweku is still working as a surgeon and living with his family, one time the Sai family go sledging in the middle of the night. This sudden snowfall is a promise of a fresh start in an exciting new country that even has snow to offer. However, when the twins are struggling in Lagos, they edit their memories of this happy night to exclude Kweku entirely (*GMG* 38). Snowflakes also have more ambivalent connotations; they hide and separate humans from each other. Knudsen and Rahbek (129) compare the image of silent snowflakes over Boston, which cover up the imperfections of the Sai family life, to an ornament inside a snow-globe being covered by artificial snowflakes. The image of their family being stranded in a snow globe is at once pretty, but rather isolating. Furthermore, the fleeting, transient and weightless quality of snowflakes is a fitting image for the non-settled state of Kweku and Fola. Their family is "drifting outward, or inward, barely noticing when someone has slipped off the grid" (*GMG* 147). Whilst becoming "restless overachievers, always on the move", the children all feel untethered in the world, as they are missing the grounding narrative of their parents' lives prior to their move to the U.S. (Knudsen and Rahbek 129). Being deposited outside her home by a Ghanaian taxi driver who is properly protected by dressing for harsh weather conditions, makes scantily dressed Taiwo question her (clothing) choices, not appropriate in a snowstorm (*GMG* 141). The blue butterfly appears at crucial moments and represents moments of significant change in the narrative: it can be seen as a symbol of death and the passing of the soul, or more generally, a transformation. The first mention, regarding Kweku, includes a reference to his feet: "Fluttering its wings against his soles as if to soothe them. Open, shut. The dog smells new death and barks, startling the butterfly. It flaps its wings once, flies away" (*GMG* 92). It can also be perceived as a symbol for the fragility of life – it is here one moment, to be gone the next: a butterfly leaves

Kweku's mother's foot upon her passing: "It fluttered around his mother's foot, a lazy lap, then lifted off, flapping blithely toward the triangular dome and out the little window. Gone" (*GMG* 59).

The feeling of butterflies in Fola's stomach heralds critical moments in her children's and her husband's lives. She feels acute pain when Kehinde tries to commit suicide, which is mirrored by an actual flow of blood from cutting herself with a knife by accident at that moment. She also experiences severe physical pain as Kweku dies. Her stomach, split into a section for each of her children, acts as a seismograph to gauge her children's state of well-being. Often, she feels a sense of "sadness" in Olu's quarter, a sense of "absence" in Kehinde's quarter, a sense of "tension" in Taiwo's section - Sadie's section leaves behind a general sense of "angst" (*GMG* 99). When she is disconnected from her children, she feels a sense of painful emptiness in her lower body.

The final section aims to conclude the thesis' scope in terms of context, the disentanglement of Afropolitanism from Pan-Africanism, Négritude and Cosmopolitanism as well as the validity of Afropolitanism as a means of identity formation and in literary studies. A recap of what Afropolitanism means for Selasi's six main characters is given as well as information regarding potential limitations and this thesis' outlook.

## 5. Conclusion

This thesis was concerned with the emerging terminology around “Afropolitanism(s)” which has been much discussed in scholarly debates and created quite a stir amongst advocates and critics of the concept during the last fifteen years. The context of the term Afropolitanism can be seen in the changing roles of the Anglophone African writer from the time of African nations’ gaining political independence around the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century to the publication of a number of diasporic texts in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century. It was discussed that moving away from Achebe’s understanding of the novelist as teacher, a number of African and Afro-diasporic writers such as Adichie, Mengiste<sup>16</sup> or Selasi no longer feel restricted in terms of subject matter and/or language of expression and resent being criticised for presenting African characters who do not fit well-established stereotypes of deprivation and poverty. Rather, these authors would like their stories to be read as “human stories” instead of predominantly anthropological or trauma literature. It was also mentioned that the system of publishing African writing is still very much influenced by Western publishing houses, literary prizes and criticism. The economic power wielded by Western media is seen as a danger that any Afropolitan discourse may become the new “single story” that is being told about African or Afro-diasporic lives.

A brief look at Pan-Africanism and Négritude showed that Afropolitanism, in comparison, is seen by scholars such as Kasanda and Mbembe as offering a wider discourse, beyond racialized ideas of what it means to be African in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Selasi’s 2005 essay *Bye-Bye, Babar* was investigated for clues of what may constitute an Afropolitan approach way of life. It became apparent that a cursory reading of the essay could give a misleading interpretation of the more subtle effects so-called “Afropolitans”, predominantly Africans of the Western diaspora who are well-educated, economically independent and general high-fliers, are exposed to because of an upbringing far removed from their parents’ birthplaces. It is important to note that as far as *Ghana Must Go* and one of the founding texts *Bye-Bye, Babar go*, Selasi explicitly stated that her intention was neither to represent any part of the African continent or its inhabitants nor that she intended to start a scholarly discussion on African and/or Afro-diasporic writing. Selasi simply wanted to write a human story about characters who struggle with their own identity, their family and working out

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<sup>16</sup> On 15 September 2020, Maaza Mengiste’s novel *The Shadow King* was shortlisted for the Booker prize 2020 as one of six entries; as was *This Mournable Body* by Zimbabwean writer Tsitsi Dangarembga.

where to belong in the United States, the West in general, and in a Ghanaian context. Yet, these human characters have important stories to tell about African sensibilities in the context of cultural hybridity, blended selfhoods and their struggle to find their cultural home(s) and identities in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

A chapter on culture and identity tried to understand how concepts of acculturation theory, transnationalism and cosmopolitanism can be used to understand the development of hyphenated identities for people who have grown up as “cultural mutts” due to their (parents’ or families’) cultural heritage, yet are based in a different majority setting. In today’s international communities, identity can no longer be based on simplistic assumptions of being and/or belonging to only one or another, but rather that it is related to performing different roles in different contexts (BBB323). This becomes evident, for example, in the new African diaspora in the United States.

It was mentioned that a Kantian view of cosmopolitanism in particular is built on a Eurocentric world view predominantly shaped by Europeans who understood themselves to be superior to other ethnic groups. Cosmopolitanism needs to be critically reassessed and further developed to potentially become a useful, more inclusive concept that does not smack of elitism and exclusion. Similarly, Afropolitanism has been accused of ignoring the masses of African or Afro-diasporic people who have little or no agency in their lives, let alone in academic discourse.

Since the terms Afropolitan and Afropolitanism(s) have only been part of a scholarly debate for a relatively short time, the debate on the potential usefulness and application of Afropolitan ideas is continuously evolving. Despite efforts by many scholars, based in Africa and in the West, the term defies clear boundaries and is applied to a range of concepts. Broadly speaking, Afropolitanism can be understood as an opportunity to extend the discussion on what it means to be an African or belonging to the African diaspora in the 21<sup>st</sup> century by creating spaces for different representation. Such spaces may predominantly relate to a demographic of more affluent professionals among the approximately 160 million Africans or their descendants in the Western diaspora. In this understanding, Afropolitanism can open a third or further space where people may claim allegiances to various parts of the world, as well as the whole human race.

The term Afropolitanism suffers not only from its relative novelty but also from its application to commercial enterprise where an Africa lite gloss is used as a marketing tool. An Afropolitan gloss has been accused of making products such as fashion, and

also literature, more palatable to a wider audience who is eagerly expecting new raw material. The debate gets more complicated with the emergence of recent novels such as *Ghana Must Go*, *Americanah* or *Open City*, whose characters, as well as their authors, appear to be representatives of privileged Afropolitans, far removed from the reality of most lives on the African continent or among the less fortunate members of the diaspora. Selasi rightly said that in the Afropolitan context, far too much was asked of a small number of texts as ideas about Afropolitanism(s) were “expected to run before” they could even walk ( Musila 110).

Having compared the superficially self-congratulatory description of Afropolitans in Selasi’s essay *Bye-Bye, Babar* to *Ghana Must Go*, it becomes clear that the novel is a much richer text, which also portrays the negative aspects of growing up far removed from one’s parents’ stories and background. I concur with Knudsen and Rahbek, Ucham and Gikandi, amongst others, that Afropolitan characters and their stories certainly enrich African literary production, even if “Afropolitan authors” never intended to create a new literary aesthetics or be spokespersons of a generic African experience. As far as *Ghana Must Go* is concerned, sharing Afropolitan characteristics such as access to mobility, high ambitions, lived hybridity and performing different roles in different contexts does not automatically ensure that the Sai children’s lives’ are unencumbered by insecurities, or free from a sense of loss and several unhealthy coping strategies such as bulimia, attempted suicide or remaining in damaging relationships. Despite their opportunities and relative affluence these “Afropolitans” face their own struggles, self-doubt and suffer from cultural homelessness, shame and isolation. In fact, each of the members of the Sai family find their own coping strategies to deal with loss and anguish.

Kweku outwardly assimilates into the role of a successful surgeon and is part of the professional machine that constitutes Boston hospital. He believes in the miracle of modern medicine to overcome the trauma of his sister Ekua’s early death. Providing for his family in every conceivable sense are his strategies to blot out his childhood poverty and fatherless upbringing. Yet, when his American dream falls apart, he sees no alternative to returning to Ghana where he sheds his aspirations and creates a much less ambitious life. When he marries for a second time, he accomplishes his personal reconciliation through establishing a connection between his childhood (his mother), the U.S. years (Taiwo) and contemporary Ghana (Ama).



Fola, motherless from birth and fatherless from her teenage years, becomes mother and later father to her four children. She is resourceful and sets up her own business, yet she is beset by doubts that she cannot offer the twins all the opportunities they seem to deserve. A part of her honours her African roots by giving her children Yoruba names and serving typical dishes. Yet, ultimately she does not believe that as immigrants they have a permanent place in the United States. After Kweku's departure, she leaves not only the Sai family house, but a few years later her life in the West on the spur of the moment. Kweku and Fola's denial of sharing their backstories which each other and with their children leaves all members of the Sai family untethered in their cultural rootlessness. They all grasp at any crutch that will anchor them in some way and create a sense of belonging.

Olu follows in his father's footsteps by becoming a doctor and thus part of a clinical environment. Together with his wife he strives for a life devoid of any turmoil, but rather sterile and highly organized in nature. As a teenager he was unwilling to discuss his father's situation when Kweku approached him, and he was helpless in the face of his parents' break-up. When he visits his father in Ghana on a whim, he is unable to communicate with him and returns to his clinical, distanced view of the world. He desperately needs to prove to both himself, his father-in-law and the world in general that he is different from the heavy burden of the negative stereotype of an unreliable African man and/or future father.

The twins Taiwo and Kehinde are in turns angry with their parents and crave their affection and approval. Their exposure to a traumatizing experience in Lagos during their teens foreshadows a challenging adulthood. Taiwo engages in meaningless relationships and shuns her formerly closest family ally, Kehinde. Kehinde mourns the loss of innocence, the erstwhile close relationship with his sister and the disappearance of his father. He restlessly moves from place to place, finding some release in his art where he manages to merge hybrid artistic influences much better than integrating his African heritage into his day-to-day life. However, with the loss of Taiwo's affection he is cut loose as well and, at one point, attempts suicide.

Sadie, who must no longer be called "Baby", also feels lonely. Her mother can be claustrophobic, yet eventually deserts her as well. Sadie exercises control in her life through her bulimia and spiriting herself away to her friend Philae who has plenty of family history she is only too happy to share with Sadie.

The novel's plot sends all members of the family to Kweku's ancestral village. While the children, accustomed to living in the United States, find Ghana in turn

fascinating, confusing, and disappointing, they learn of their father's family and history. This knowledge complements their individual quests for roots, which they will hopefully be able to integrate into their actual lives far away from Krokobité. Coming to Ghana exposes them to another kind of cultural alienation, which nevertheless broadens their outlook into a greater acceptance of both their parents' situation and their own internal conflicts. Once a space for their insecurities becomes available, the remaining members of the Sai family can move on with their lives. Being honest with each other and finally sharing stories of their own brings reconciliation and healing, especially when they realize that their individual discovery of "home" is connected to the people that mean the most to them. If they allow room for the negative as well as the positive elements of who they are, their "intrinsically multi-dimensional thinking" (BBB 326) can enrich their lives. From being "lost in transnation", integrating their experiences and attitudes can help individuals' narratives to develop towards multiple belonging(s) rather than to remain untethered in an overarching arena of unbelonging. In my understanding, an Afropolitan outlook on life generates various relational processes between the individual, within their closest relationships and with places: "home", with the African continent and within a third space, where transnational practices, lived hybridity and accompanying acculturative stress can (ideally) be reconciled into a blended identity; a „homecoming“ on various levels.

A limitation of this thesis lies in the fact that due to the relatively recent discussion of Afropolitanism(s), new views are constantly emerging; Knudsen and Rahbek refer to "an emerging aesthetics" (291), Salami to a "constant flux" (291). Thus, this thesis can only give a snapshot of research until 2020. Furthermore, it may have been worthwhile to compare two recent novels with Afropolitan characters to each other. However, due to length constraints it seemed to be more valuable to analyse *Ghana Must Go* in more detail.

Regarding Afropolitanism(s)' many facets, it will certainly be intriguing to follow the discussion among scholars, bloggers and other stakeholders with an interest in African sensibilities and aesthetics and see which new ideas are going to emerge in the future. It is very much to be hoped that despite numerous challenges in publishing, rather than a new single story, a wide range of voices with many different backgrounds will find audiences for their texts, both on the continent and globally.

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## 8. Appendix

### Abstract

Tensions between advocates and critics of Afropolitanism(s) have informed Afro-diasporic discourses since the term's dissemination amongst a wider audience with the publication of Achille Mbembe's *African Modes of Self-Writing* in 2002 and Taiye Selasi's essay *Bye-Bye, Babar* in 2005. This thesis investigates Afropolitanism's potential connection to Pan-Africanism and Négritude in the context of the changing situation of the Anglophone African writer in terms of (Western) expectations towards language, subject matter and the power wielded by the Western literary industry. Selasi's novel *Ghana Must Go* (2013) is analysed based on her essay with regard to mobility, lived hybridity, ambitions and a complicated relationship to "home" and the African continent. It becomes clear that the six main Afropolitan characters are "lost in transnation" and face significant struggles as they suffer from acculturative stress and employ (damaging) strategies to overcome their cultural homelessness. Referring to acculturation, transnationalism, and cosmopolitanism theory, I suggest that Afropolitans, despite their economic advantages, constantly need to (re)negotiate their performance of different roles and identities in African and Western (geographical and cultural) contexts. Within the new African diaspora to the US, first and second-generation migrants chose different paths to reconcile their mixed experiences; in the novel, blended selfhoods can ultimately only be achieved by making space for openly sharing each other's (troubled) human stories. Afropolitanism does not offer another "single story" with an Africa lite gloss, but rather creates spaces for the cultural expression of lived hybridity amongst, at least, some members of the new African diaspora. In an emerging literary aesthetics, Afropolitan characters add meaningful stories to the voices from the African continent and its recent diasporas.

## German Abstract

Afrodiasporische Diskurse über „Afropolitanism(s)“ werden seit der Begriffseinführung durch die Veröffentlichung von Achille Mbembes *African Modes of Self-Writing* (2002) und Taiye Selasis Essay *Bye-Bye, Babar* (2005) von Spannungen zwischen Befürwortern und Kritikern geprägt. Diese Arbeit untersucht Verbindungen des „Afropolitanism“ mit Panafrikanismus und Négritude im Kontext der sich wandelnden Situation anglophoner afrikanischer Schriftsteller in Hinblick auf (westliche) Erwartungen an Sprache, Themen und die Macht der westlichen Literaturindustrie. Selasis Roman *Ghana Must Go* (2013) wird anhand ihres Essays in Hinblick auf Mobilität, gelebte Hybridität, beruflichen Ehrgeiz und der komplizierten Beziehung zur „Heimat“ und dem afrikanischen Kontinent analysiert. Es wird deutlich, dass die sechs Hauptfiguren unter akulturellem Stress leiden und (destruktive) Strategien anwenden, um ihre kulturelle Heimatlosigkeit zu überwinden. In Bezug auf Akkulturation, Transnationalismus und Kosmopolitismus zeige ich auf, dass „Afropolitans“ trotz ihrer wirtschaftlichen Möglichkeiten permanent verschiedene Rollen und Identitäten in afrikanischen und westlichen (geographischen und kulturellen) Kontexten verhandeln müssen. Innerhalb der rezenten afrikanischen Diaspora in den USA haben Migranten der ersten und zweiten Generation unterschiedliche Wege gewählt, um ihre unterschiedlichen Erlebnisse in Einklang zu bringen. Im Roman können „blended selfhoods“ letztendlich nur erreicht werden, indem Raum geschaffen wird, (traumatische) Erlebnisse miteinander zu teilen. „Afropolitanism“ steht nicht für eine weitere „single story“ mit afrikanischem Touch, sondern schafft Räume für den Ausdruck gelebter Hybridität, zumindest für Teile der neuen afrikanischen Diaspora. „Afropolitans“ tragen in einer sich entwickelnden literarischen Ästhetik entscheidend zum Chor afrikanisch(stämmiger) Stimmen des afrikanischen Kontinents und seiner Diaspora bei.

## Timeline and Glossary

### Timeline

- 1929 – Kweku’s mother is born; acc. to the novel, she is born in “1941 [sic]” (GMG 61)
- 1951 – Kweku’s birth (mother is 22) as one of 6 children
- 1953 – Folasadé is born (death of her mother)
- 1958 – *Things fall Apart* is published
- 1966 – Folasadé, aged 13, flees from Nigeria to Ghana after her father’s murder
- 1967 – Kweku’s sister dies; he leaves Ghana at 16; start of Biafran War
- 1974 – Kweku and Folasadé get married
- 1975 – Kweku is 24 and visits Ghana with baby Olu; his mother dies aged 46
- 1980 – The twins are born when Olu is 5
- 1981 – Military coup in Ghana
- 1982 – Kweku’s feet are seen by Taiwo
- 1983 – Mass expulsion of Ghanaians/West-Africans from Nigeria: “Ghana Must Go”
- 1989 – Sadie is born when Olu is 14
- 1993 – Kweku’s wrongful dismissal; Kehinde is the last family member to see him
- 1994 – The twins are sent to Lagos for 40 weeks; Kweku returns to Ghana
- 1997 – Olu visits Kweku in Accra instead of attending his own graduation; the twins complete high school (both graduations happen on Olu’s birthday, 26 May)
- 2002 – Kweku moves into his new house at age 51
- 2004 – Takes 2<sup>nd</sup> wife at age 53
- 2009 – Dies at age 57; Christmas and family reconciliations in Ghana

### Glossary:<sup>17</sup>

- Akwaaba* – Twi: “Welcome” (GMG 254)
- Aso oke* – Nigerian head wrap (GMG 53)
- Banku* – Ghanaian dish (GMG 231)
- Bella naija* – beautiful Nigeria (GMG 126)
- Bubu* – traditional African clothing (GMG 59)
- E se* – Yoruba: “Thank you” (GMG 243)
- Egba* – subgroup of Yoruba (GMG 87)

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<sup>17</sup> The glosses were compiled either using direct translations in the text or from the context of their use.

*Ey Chalé – Ghanaian greeting (GMG 66)*

*Gye nyame – an Akan symbol for God’s omnipotence (GMG 40)*

*Iya-ibeji – Yoruba: mother of twins (GMG 9)*

*Ki lo de ke – Yoruba: “what’s up” (GMG 172)*

*lappa – West African waist cloth (GMG 250)*

*Mo n mo – Yoruba: “I know” (GMG 104)*

*Na wow o – ? (GMG 104)*

*Obroni – Akan: foreigner/white person (GMG 48)*

*Okunrin mi – Yoruba: my son (GMG 55)*

*Tro-tro – Ghanaian minibus (GMG 260)*

*Victoria Island – wealthy part of Lagos*

***The word count (1.-5.), excluding references, is approx. 30,000 words.***