

Negotiating Home and Situating Identity: A Study of Taiye Selasi's *Ghana Must Go*

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Abstract

This study aimed to investigate how degenerate migrants in Ghana Must Go construct their identities and define their home(s) since they face the issue of displacement due to the many spaces and cultures they encounter. It was also to determine the extent to which the writers have been able to yield unique solutions to these problems for the second-generation migrant. The study applied the concept of Afropolitanism and Hybridity theory in investigating the novels. The primary text, critical works about the issues of home and identity, and the ideologies of the writer were put under scrutiny to arrive at the findings.

At the end of the analysis, we notice that the characters do not succumb to a victim position but they try to attain an identity that celebrates personal achievement over cultural identity. We also notice that the characters become hybrids of the many cultures they encounter. Lastly, they cannot fully belong to any nation and so become transnationals who keep shifting homes. Finally, the writers push for multiple identities instead of one authentic cultural identity and suggest that such an identity is a powerful tool to project the image of Africa.

Keywords: African Diaspora, Home, Identity, Afropolitanism, Ghana Must Go

1. INTRODUCTION

Home and identity have been at the center of most postcolonial investigations of literature and society. Consequently, this study is premised on these two vital issues in the Postcolonial discourse. Using Taiye Selasi's *Ghana Must Go*, the study seeks to find out how the characters who are Africans born and/or bred in the Diaspora negotiate their identities and the extent to which they see their present location(s) as home. Diaspora is a dislodgment from a geographical place of origin and relocation to another country (Shain and Barth). Considering this viewpoint, 'Diaspora' can, therefore, be described as communities of people who find themselves outside their homelands through migration, or exile as a consequence of colonialism, trade, globalization, or the quest for better opportunities. This study considers specifically the African diaspora and how its members construct homes and negotiate their identities. An African Diaspora is "any group of Africans and descendants of African ancestors who are alien residents, expellees, refugees, expatriates, immigrants, or ethnic minorities sharing spaces with other racial groups outside Africa" (Lawal 202). What is considered the second wave of African migration to the West occurred largely in the 1960s. This time, it was voluntary and largely for education and in search of better opportunities. This group is, therefore known as the new Diaspora. It is estimated that about 140 million Africans are in the Diaspora (Atnafu, Adamnesh, and Adamek). Diasporans encounter identity crises because they are uncertain about where they belong and where to place themselves among others. Bhabha defines identity as "a process of identifying with and through another object, an object of otherness, at which point the agency of identification – the subject – is itself always ambivalent, because of the intervention of that otherness" (qtd. in Rutherford 211). The issues of "Self" and "Otherness" are significant since identification happens through discovering similarities and differences in one's cultural environment.

The earlier theorists, such as Edward Said suggest a fixed identity where an individual should belong to one particular culture (qtd. in Ashcroft et al). However, Mwangi states in "Africa Writes Back to Self: Metafiction, Gender, Sexuality", that, "new, engaging twenty-first-century African writing from the continent and the Diaspora is neither a 'writing back' to Europe nor an

endorsement of Euro-American neo-colonialism. It is, first and foremost, about self-perception" (3). He further explains that "the recurrent trend in contemporary discourse is not a liberation and nationalist struggle; rather it foregrounds the average African's path to redemption, more specifically identity reconfiguration." Thus Mwangi suggests that Africans are more concerned now with individual identity formation and self rather than cultural identity formation. These two notions about identity evoke Culler's opinion about identity formation. According to him, an individual possesses 'multiple' identities. He explains that each person has a 'given' identity and a 'made/manufactured identity'. One acquires the given identity by 'birth' or by 'origin', that is, the individual's national identity, cultural identity, race, or ethnic identity. This essay will explore both the 'given' identities and the 'made' identities of the characters and which one they lean more towards.

There is an inherent contradiction in the concept of "home" and its definition is an issue for Postcolonialists. We can ask ourselves many questions to which there are no easy answers. Where is the home for second-generation Africans born in the Diaspora? Can they call a country that has colonized their ancestors, one which refuses, through racism, to recognize their existence and their rights to that existence as 'home'? On the other hand, can they regard a place of their ancestry, in which they do not have any direct experience or memory, as 'home'? The characters in the selected texts, experience discrimination in their host countries and a much greater challenge of not fully belonging to their country of origin. The people in their homeland see them as 'black foreigners' and do not seem to see them as members of that community.

Magu observes that because Africans in the diaspora are caught between their ancestors' culture and that of the mainstream society, they face something which is beyond Du Bois' 'Double Consciousness' where "one ever feels his twoness, - an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideas in one dark body" (qtd. in Gilroy 126). They rather face multiple consciousnesses. So, this study of *Ghana Must Go* aims to determine how the major characters, who are away from their original homelands, define 'home' and construct their identities and whether the writers and chosen

characters of the selected novels profess a fluid and multifaceted identity and view home as a psychological concept rather than geographical. It is also to determine the extent to which the two novels throw light on the dilemmas of home and identity among African migrants.

1.2 Afropolitan Identity: Re-inventing the African Identity

The study employed the concept of Afropolitanism and Hybridity theory in analyzing the text. Afropolitans are the second generation of Africans who have occupied the cosmopolitan space and rising in their endeavors. In her essay, "Bye-Bye Barbar", Selasi describes a new generation of Africans in the West, of which she is part, as possessing a different identity from those in Africa. This is what she says about her breed of Africans:

The newest generation of African emigrants, coming soon or collected already at a law firm/chem lab/jazz lounge near you. You'll know us by our funny blend of London, fashion, New York jargon, African ethics, and academic successes. Some of us are mixes. e.g. Ghanaian and Canadian, Nigerian and Swiss; others merely cultural mutts: American accent, European affect, African ethos.... We are Afropolitans: not citizens but Africans of the world. (p. 528)

A critical look at this concept suggests that Afropolitans trace their roots and ancestry to Africa but propagate a different form of nationalism, suggesting that their duty is to the world and not just to Africa. However, they encounter some of the problems of the first-generation migrants but have addressed them by studying their setting and negotiating the space for their maximum benefits.

The phenomenon also appears as an opposition to Afropessimism and a better alternative to Pan-Africanism. "Earlier intellectuals aimed to write themselves into a re-vision of black people in the global world; hence Pan-Africanism is as much about the unity of subjectivity" (Sterling 129). Afropolitanism, on the other hand, is a way of being in the world, refusing any system of victim identity. This does not mean that Afropolitance is not mindful of the biases imposed on the continent and its people

by the law of the world. It is also a political and cultural stance concerning nation, race, and the issue of difference in general.

Consequently, Morales maintains that “Afropolitanism has improved the image of Africa by furthering the complexity – thematically and geographically – of African writing”. Hence, “Afropolitanism is a brilliant attitude which can contribute to completing the yet unfinished decolonization process of Africa...” (Eze 244). What these positions suggest is that Afropolitanism, as a form of identity, gives a positive image to people of African origin. These people have refused to be in a victimized position and have decided to “forge a sense of self” that shifts their marginalized identities to the center.

1.4 Cultural Hybridity and Multiple Identities: The Afropolitan Consciousness

At the core of Afropolitanism is the concept of Hybridity and it matters a lot in the identity formation of second and third-generation Africans in the Diaspora. Gray, in his defense of Homi Bhabha (2005) argues that:

modern diasporas are obliged to inhabit at least two identities, to speak at least two cultural languages, and to negotiate and ‘translate’ between them. In this way, they are the products of the cultures of hybridity...these hybrids retain strong links to identifications with the traditions and places of their ‘origin’. But they are without the illusion of any actual ‘return’ to the past. (p. 361)

Homi Bhabha’s “Third Space of Enunciation” explains how “fixed identifications open up the possibility of cultural hybridity that entertains the difference without an assumed or imposed hierarchy” (4). Writers like Papastergiadis, Yazdih, and Rutherford uphold the potential of cultural hybridity to be a dominant tool for the marginalized subject to change the established order and construct better identities. They argue that one vital feature of cultural hybridity is “the creation of a third space carrying the potential to generate new forms of identity for marginalized and culturally displaced subjects.”

The challenge of Afropolitans is that they are tasked to forge a sense of self from wildly disparate sources...self-conscious of being so in between. The bar scene Selasi describes at the opening of her essay depicts that Afropolitans are hybrids of different cultures who produce a new category of identity (528). A person's identity can be bicultural, which means that an individual's identity is "based on a balancing or blending of the two cultures" (Berry et al). Thus, hybridity provides a way out of double consciousness, and "allows the inscription of the agency of the subaltern, and even permit a restructuring and destabilizing of power" (Prabhu). Hybrid identities challenge conventional notions of identity and position identity as complex, multifaceted, and ever-changing. Like Afropolitanism, we can use a critical approach to hybridity that positions it as "a communicative practice of meaning and power for exploring the politics of marginalized subjects" (Kraidy). Eze, affirms this when he says:

Afropolitans believe that being African is not reductive to color, heritage, or autochthony; rather, being African is expansive. ... We are not half this and half that; we are this and that. We are Igbo and Yoruba and Efik and Xhosa; we are black and white and brown. We are home in Enugu, Lagos, Johannesburg, Bayreuth, Nairobi or Chicago. We are fitted not just with double consciousness; we possess multiple consciousnesses, for we perceive the world from multiple perspectives (117).

Afropolitans, therefore, celebrate their hybrid states and use their multicultural membership to their advantage when the need arises.

2. METHODOLOGY

In this study, I use a qualitative approach to analyzing the selected texts. Taiye Selasi's *Ghana Must Go* is the primary source of data. The analysis starts with a brief background of the novelist's life, and the circumstances around which she was separated from her country of origin. Next, I provide a summary of the plot of the novel being analyzed before finally moving on to a detailed discussion of the literary representation of home and identity through some selected characters' experiences using the

critical ideas from the concepts of Hybridity and Afropolitanism. The discussion ends with a conclusion that summarizes the novelistic representations of home and identity in the novel. I subscribe to the notion that any work of art is closely connected to its creator. That is not to say that the work of art has no value without its creator, but it is to say that the value of any form of art depends greatly on the being of its maker. Therefore, I agree with Edward Said's view that "to value literature at all is fundamentally to value it as the individual work of an individual writer tangled up in circumstances taken for granted by everyone, such things as residence, nationality, a familiar locale, language, friends and so on" (xv). Sorlin) echoes this when he says, "the artist talks from the place he occupies in the world...what he tries to express is grounded in a particular experience" (qtd. In Ricci). As a result, I will be reading the novels in this study and interpreting them in the light of the authors' lives and opinions. Therefore, I will be referring to interviews, talks, articles, online documentaries, reviews, and blogs that are associated with the authors to thoroughly examine their interest in the issues of home and identity.

3. DISCUSSION

3.1 Global Africans: Identities of the Sai Children

If one could die identityless, estranged from all context, then one could live estranged from all context as well. (Selasi 107)

Ghana Must Go is, in a way, autobiographical hence many critics hold the view that Selasi's novel was inspired by her essay, "Bye-Bye Barbar". It is important to understand Selasi's position within this discourse. Selasi, who considers herself an African of the world, was born in 1972 in London to a Nigerian mother and a Ghanaian father. She was raised in the United States and currently lives in Rome. These settings she has occupied are all reflected in the lives of her characters in the novel. Just like her characters, her life is marked by cultural plurality and complexity. According to Sy, Selasi feels that she finds home everywhere, yet truly belongs nowhere. The novel, which represents new perspectives in the diaspora discourse, provides a

way of identification for the Africans in the Diaspora and has contributed to the necessary conversation about the challenge of national identity. Through the experiences of her characters, Selasi seeks to deconstruct the narratives of fixed identities, homelands, borders, nationhood, and placement in the Diaspora.

Kweku and Fola's children represent the Diaspora generation whose parents had left the continent in the 'brain drain' of the 1960s–70s, and who had consequently moved across many different Western metropolises, provoking a mixed or multiple identities. Kweku Sai and Folasade Savage migrated from Ghana and Nigeria respectively, on scholarship under the European missionaries, to America. Their children are therefore prototypical Afropolitans and this is reflected in their attitudes to life, their interpersonal relationships, and world views. Through their stories, each of them forms a personal identity that is inspired by the various spaces they occupy in the world.

In the process of forming these identities, one of the major challenges for them is having to deal with their Otherness. The four children experience the challenge of being associated with the negative perceptions of their race. Olu observes this dilemma confronting the African immigrants in the Diaspora:

You live your whole life in this world, these worlds, and you know what they think of you, you know what they see. You say you are African and you want to excuse it, explain because I am smart ... You wish you didn't give a shit, but somehow you do...you fear what they think but don't say (Selasi 305).

Given that they were born and bred in America, one might think that they should be spared this kind of racial prejudice but the whites perceive that they do not belong because they have African parents. Because of these stereotypes, the children try hard to behave like the whites to fit in. Taiwo, the twin girl, despite being "a product of *there*" and "extraordinarily good-looking" (Selasi 219), due to her Scottish background, having her mother's model-like figure, and possessing a "formidable intelligence", had issues with her Black identity. She admits that she grew dreadlocks because she wanted to "fit in" with the white girls at her "predominantly white college" (Selasi 138). Taiwo's reference to dreadlocks as 'black white-girl hair' alludes to the

fact that in Western culture, hair is only beautiful if it is long and can be tied in a ponytail which would make it seem like the hair of a white girl. She further adds that being able to run in the rain is a 'white woman's privilege' because she does not have to worry about her hair when it rains but on the contrary, a black girl does not have that advantage which confirms Taiwo's dissatisfaction with her Black identity. As such, in her identity formation process, Taiwo struggles with the African identity and this forces her to desire to look like the white girls.

Similarly, Sadie, the youngest child, who was born in Boston, battles with her typical African looks, and her weight. Adding to this frustration, the whites cannot pronounce her name properly and this makes her resent her Africanness in a way. To deal with this, she behaves like her white schoolmates, starting her comments with overdrawn *mums* and overusing *whatever* and *likes*. She believes that her mates who are from different races "are ethnically heterogeneous and culturally homogenous per force of exposure" (Selasi 146). Thus, they behave like white people because of their association with them. However, this could also mean that they all feel that being white is superior so if they cannot look like them, at least, they can behave like them. Sadie secretly wants to be white and wishes that she could simply be Philae, her white friend (Selasi 146). She tries so hard to integrate herself into the white family at St Barth's but she realizes that "she doesn't belong". Again, she tries ballet and she has 'great potential' but then she feels "she was great at ballet but no ballerina" (Selasi 213) because she thinks that the white girls have the perfect looks to be ballerinas but she does not look like one. Even after Sadie meets her father's sister whom she shares a striking resemblance and gets to know where she inherited her physical features, she is still not satisfied with her Blackness and wants to be white and beautiful because what is promoted in society she lives in is the idea that 'white is beautiful' and 'black is ugly'.

Kehinde, the twin boy, was born in Boston, educated in Nigeria and England, won the Fulbright to Mali, waited tables in Paris, lived in London and Brooklyn, and was "busy becoming the world-famous artist" (Sealsi 176). He, however, deals with feelings of inferiority because of his identity. Due to their Scottish ancestry, Kehinde and Taiwo look different from the other

siblings. They have a skin color that falls in between black and white and this makes Kehinde question where he falls between Black and White. Because he has no past or family history he could relate to, he feels he does not belong to a specific group of people until Uncle Femi shows him a portrait of his maternal grandmother who was half-Scottish and half-Nigerian. He wishes to know his family lineage or, at least, have their photos but his parents never talked about their families or showed them any pictures. In effect, Kehinde's experience reflects Selasi's explanation in her essay that, Afropolitans are "[b]rown-skinned without a bedrock sense of 'blackness,' on the one hand; and often teased by African family members for 'acting white' on the other – the baby-Afropolitan can get what I call lost in translation" (para. 8). The challenge for Kehinde and his siblings is that, despite all these crises they face in the West as a result of their race, they cannot also fully count as Africans because they have not experienced the continent and do not know the culture of the people. In addition, Olu wishes that he knew his family history because, for him, that would represent not just a family history but also an identity.

Despite all these identity crises, the children actively carve a new identity for themselves where they insist on being defined by their achievements and their self-worth. They refuse to represent any specific African identity and are determined to rise above the stereotypes that come with being Black. This ideology of identity formation also pushes them to exhibit Selasi's description of "matching their parents in several degrees, and/or achieving things their people in the grand sense of it only dreamed of". All of them are extremely gifted in terms of their academic aptitude and strive to be top in their various careers. Taiwo is one of the best law students at Oxford University.

Olu, the eldest child, becomes an orthopedic surgeon much like his father and shines among his contemporaries. He deals with the challenge of being African by insisting on being identified by his personality and not where he is from. For Olu, national identity usually carries with it a meaning of homogeneity that makes people impose a predefined understanding of the individual they are interacting with. However, he does not want to be understood within this framework. In the novel when he first meets Ling at an Asian American Cultural Centre in Yale, she asks: Are you Asian? And he simply responds "I'm Olu".

Balakrishnan confirms that “Afropolitans have the willingness to break from received racial molds: a dispensation grounded in the emphasis of individual self-fashioning over collective solidarity” (576). Olu represents the group that advocates the concept of belonging to a human race and insists on being citizens of the world and not any cultural society. Thus Olu goes through Coleman’s “transcultural process of change and of evolution which is necessary among...different cultures, and that eventually [makes us] stop being Indo-Canadian or Ukranian-Canadian; we simply become human” (qtd. in Akingbe & Adeniyi 37).

His brother, Kehinde, used to feel like a stranger who did not belong in the family because he had not lived up to the standard of pursuing medicine like his brother to fulfill his father’s dream of having his practice, the Sai and Sons family business. It is only when he forms his own identity by being a world-renowned artist and seeks to “exist in the world” and have a place in it that he feels a sense of belonging. Just like his children, Kweku Sai wanted to be “at home in the world” (Selasi 198) and be identified with his achievements and not the stories of poverty and war hence became “an exceptional surgeon” (Selasi 7) as Beth Israel Hospital, Boston. His skill earned him the nickname, the “Ghanaian Ben Carson”: He had dared to become. To be free....to be “human.” Beyond being a “citizen” To have somehow unhooked his little story from the larger ones, the stories of Country and Poverty and War that swallowed up the stories of the people around him and spat them up faceless... (Selasi 91).

However, eventually, he is not able to resist and object but allows himself to be subdued by the West’s constructed defeatist paradigm for African immigrants. He accepts that he comes from a defeated race and background. More so, Fola, who flees Africa to find a home in the West, returns to Ghana when faced with another challenge. While the children see themselves as having a place in that space, Kweku and his wife see themselves as immigrants. The term immigrant connotes a sense of no belonging. Hence Kweku and Fola’s decision to resort to Africa confirms the argument by Berry et. al. They claim that migrants are “unable to resolve the cultural identity issues that they face and are uncertain about their place in society, perhaps wanting to be part of the larger society but lacking the skills and ability to

make contacts" (5). The difference between the parents and the children is that the parents are not able to challenge the pressures from the West. The children remain undaunted and convinced that they belong and have a place in the world. At the end of the novel, Kweku's apparition appears and tells Fola, "We were immigrants. Immigrants leave, cowards. Let [the children] learn how to stay" (Selasi 317).

It is this insistence on personality over race as a form of identity that makes Sadie "restless" when she thinks "she is lacking entirely in gifts" (Selasi 215) and that her siblings are more talented than she is. She was "looking for something, not finding it" (Selasi 126). She only gets a sense of identity and belonging towards the end of the story when she discovers her gift of dancing in Ghana.

3.1.2 The Sai Children as (Multi)Cultural Hybrids

This blend of cultures from different parts of the world gives the Sai family a hybrid genealogy making the children multicultural. Rather than attempting to maintain one distinct identity, the siblings embrace hybridity and possess multiple identities. As Selasi writes in her article, "Bye-bye Babar":

You'll know us by our funny blend of London fashion, New York jargon, African ethics, and academic successes. Some of us are ethnic mixes, e.g. Ghanaian and Canadian, Nigerian and Swiss; others merely cultural mutts: American accent, European affect, African ethos. Most of us are multilingual: in addition to English...we understand some indigenous tongue".

The Sai children are ethnic mixes because their mother is Yoruba, their father is Ga and they have a Scottish heritage because their grandmother was half-Scottish. Olu resembles his mother but inherits the dark skin of his father; the twins take after their Scottish grandmother, Sadie resembles her father's sister who is Ga but she also has light skin, Native American cheekbones, black hair, and blue eyes. Thus the children's appearances are outward reflections of their mixed ethnicities.

Also, they possess multiple cultural identities in a way that makes them "cultural mutts". They were born in the United States of America to African parents, Kehinde and Taiwo were

schooled in Nigeria and London, and Olu and Sadie were schooled in the United States. The various cultures they come into contact with influence their lives in several ways. They do not fully belong to any of these cultures either because they have not experienced them fully or because their people do not accept them. Hence they are somewhere in between these cultures. In this sense, they have identities that are a mixture of the several spaces they have experienced. Their ethnicity and the multiple cultures they have experienced make them "People in the world" (Selasi 166) and not people of any particular culture or ethnic group.

They also possess a remarkable dress sense which is reflective of their hybrid nature and the various cultures they identify with; not fully American or African. Taiwo, who was born in Boston, lives in New York and was schooled in Nigeria and England, she blends the two cultures she is affiliated with when she dresses. Consequently, when she goes to interview Dean Rudd for the *Law Review Magazine*, she goes dressed, "in a blue velvet blazer, dress cum dashiki; the tongue in cheek dress code, half devil-may-care, quarter Yoruba priestess, quarter prim British schoolgirl, her upsweep locks dripping tendrils...(Selasi 130)." Kehinde is described as one who usually wears "sweatpants, an NYU T-shirt with Moroccan babouches. He also keeps dreadlocks which Dean Rudd describes as Afrocentric.

Further, the characters across generations through their relationship choices reflect and promote cultural hybridity. While their parents only make true friends with Africans while in America, they feel comfortable with people from other cultures. Olu Sai marries an Asian American, Ling Wei, while his parents probably found love in each other because they were both Africans. Sadie befriends and falls in love with a Greek-American, Philae. Taiwo falls in love with the Dean of Law School who is American while her twin brother has a Gujarati for an assistant. Later, he even confesses to Taiwo that he is in love with her. It is, therefore, valid to say that the construction of the hybrid identity of the Sai children is based on their coming into contact and interacting with people from different cultures. This interracial blending and relations foreground the possibility of cultural intermixing in the era of globalization.

Besides, during the children's visit to Ghana for their father's funeral, they portray that they are truly hybrids. Fola

serves jollof egusi, a Nigerian dish that her American-born and bred children do not find strange. Just as they are used to American dishes, the children do not see anything wrong with eating Jollof egusi because it is not a new meal to them. They were also comfortable eating rice and beans in their father's family house at Kokrobite.

Again, there are elements of hybridization in their choice of music. In New York, the radio is heard playing an Afro-pop hit by a Sierra Leonean artist. Kehinde is seen listening to Saint Saën's *Danse Macabre*. His new technique of painting on a mud cloth is again an African art tradition. This merging of artistic traditions of Western and African styles demonstrates Kehinde's hybridized identity.

3.2 Finding a Place in the World: What Home Means for the Sai Children

They don't know. One should know where one comes from, don't you think? It's important....how we all came to be."

(Selasi 173)

Olu and his siblings are neither indifferent nor dismissive of "home", rather, they express a longing and a striving desire for it. However, unlike their parents, who claim one location as home, the four siblings feel at home in several spaces. Selasi explains that "while our parents claim one country as home, we must define our relationship to the places we live". Kweku and Fola come from Ghana and Nigeria respectively; their children were born in the United States where through studies and residence, they are inhabitants of various cities including New York, Yale, Pennsylvania, Massachusetts, Boston, London in the United Kingdom, and Lagos in Nigeria. Home for them is not where one was born or where one originated from but the many places that have influenced their personalities. Selasi foregrounds this by exemplifying through her text that 'home' attains its values and meanings based on things such as the safety, warmth, and mental and emotional sanity it offers, among other things that are available to its inhabitants. The implication is that there is no fixed permanent home for them and the attachment to place does not resonate with them. Rather than having one home, they

could have several homes at a time where they can choose to stop claiming a particular place as home when they encounter any unpleasant experience.

Home, for the characters in the novel, is relative and extremely personally connected. The siblings have individual affinity to different places which invariably become their homes. Taiwo always felt “out of place” in Brookline. She feels that even the white ghosts feel more at home than she does. When she visits Ghana, for the first time, and finds a house on the beach she is found thinking of the home that her father tried to create. Taiwo understands that one can “never find a home or a home that would last”. As she thinks of home and homelands on the beach in Ghana, it suddenly dawns on her that she “is a stranger here also” (Selasi 273). Taiwo does not believe that a person can call a place home by the mere fact that he/she lives there. This is a traditional way of seeing a home and Selasi rejects it. In Brooklyn, the Sai family has a house of their own “but not a home” because it lacks the sense of “familyness” (Selasi 124). Taiwo admires her neighbors who have reached the goal of successful families and sees them as having a home. Sadie also finds more of a home in Philae Frick Negroponte’s house instead of her own house because it has a sense of a real family. This foregrounds the notion that home is where one feels contented and not one particular place or location.

Experience is also a determining factor in the making of a home for the siblings. Taiwo and Kehinde’s terrible experience in Lagos, the place of origin of their mother, erases any affiliation they can have with it as their home. The memory of performing a sexual act troubles the twins psychologically and haunts them even in their adulthood. Kehinde vows never to go to Nigeria again due to that experience. Again, for their elder brother, Olu, he feels at home wherever his wife is due to the experiences they share. He sees his home in New York as “the perfect home he’d imagine” (Selasi 302) because of the memories and experiences he has created there with his wife, Ling.

Further, the characters feel that they are not entitled to any nation as their home. They experience ambivalent relationships both with their homeland and their host land. This takes us back to the in-between space that the siblings inhabit. Although they could consider Africa as well as America as their

home, they are not always accepted in these spaces, which makes them struggle to fit in. They are not just African neither are they American, but a little bit of both. This can be seen when they all visit Ghana for the first time. The fact that they even need VISAs before traveling to their country of origin suggests that they cannot fully claim it as their home. The driver who picks up Taiwo and Kehinde from the airport thinks they are Americans while in America the whites also see them as Africans. The children do not deny their African roots but also, do not point to Africa as their home - they simply refer to Ghana and Nigeria as their parents' countries. Throughout the novel, they do not have any familiar relationship with their parents' relatives. Selasi feels the same way as her characters when she describes her experience of going to Ghana with her sister for the first time:

I think when we first went to Ghana, I thought we were going to feel sort of this open-armed embrace. Like, "Welcome home..." But it wasn't like that. There was no instantaneous sense of belonging. I felt the same combination of belonging and unbelonging in Ghana that I did in England and the States. ...it occurred to me that there is no place in the world where I can go and say, "This place is mine." ...I started thinking about that experience of being a deterritorialized brown person, of knowing yourself home in many places but not wholly at home in any (Sy).

Taiwo lives fully on earth, in the world, in and of it, not grounded. She sounds English because she was schooled in England, thus considering it another home. She looks like a Ghanaian because her father is and her mother is Nigerian. Again the driver that picks Taiwo and Kehinde from the airport in Ghana perceives them to be American tourists, though they were in their father's country and could comfortably claim it as their home. This issue of home comes up when a driver asks Taiwo, "Where are you from? What are you?" Taiwo's answer was "I don't know" (Selasi 126). Just like Taiwo does to the driver in the USA, he answers "Our father is from here". This indicates that the siblings privilege culture over nation-states and have completely shed off the notion of nation and borders. Citizenship bears no significance in what becomes home for them. The children do not

count Ghana Nigeria or even America as home. They never claim that they are from any of these places. Again, when they all get to Ghana their mother simply says “Welcome to Ghana” and not “Welcome home”. This shows that she does not claim Ghana as a home for her kids. This confirms Selasi’s assertion that:

were you to ask any of these ... people that basic question - ‘where are you from?’
- you’d get no single answer... ‘Home’ for this lot is many things: where they are from; where they go for vacation; where they went to school; and where they live (or live this year)...they belong to no single geography, but feel at home in many. (Selasi).

To this end, we cannot say the characters are ‘multinationals’ because it still connotes that there are borders. We can describe the characters as transnationals who are at home in the world, where they can claim any part of it as their home. “It is now widely accepted that for many people around the world, physical location and legal citizenship may not be the most salient forms of social, political or economic affiliation” (Abebe 10). Due to this, the characters are not so bothered about and constrained by geopolitical connections. They seem to enjoy the variety that their multiple identities offer them. Kehinde had won the Fulbright to Mali, had worked as a waiter in Paris, and then started showcasing his paintings in London (Selasi 176). He considers the many places he has been to as home. Sadie had never been to Africa and Kehinde thinks “it’s nothing to be ashamed of” (240). He lives fully in the world without being grounded. “It has always been his magic trick to be there without being there....this is what he lives from. The art of not being there” (Selasi 164). Sadie, his youngest sister “is alive if not well, in the world just like a fish in water” (Selasi 99). Thus the siblings live freely in the world without being bothered about being attached to one particular nation or culture. They do not know the heritage and history of their parents but are not even bothered about it. Their challenge of the feeling of despair is borne out of their family problems and not because they do not feel comfortable in the several spaces they occupy.

3.3 Reworking the Social Script: An Afropolitan Image of Africa

In *Ghana Must Go*, Selasi presents how Africa is regarded and engaged within the world. Ling's father's narrow view of "the dysfunctions of Africa" is that of "disease, civil war, raping, cutting genitals off, slitting throats with machetes, intellectual incapacity, inferiority, and backwardness" (Selasi 120). Even though he admits that "African immigrants are the future of the academy" (p.118), he still writes them off and generalizes all Africans as one homogenous group with the same immoral behavior.

Despite Olu's exceptional academic and professional achievements, Dr. Ling cannot overlook his Africanness. He expresses his stereotype towards Africans by refusing to consent to Olu's relationship with his daughter with the claim that African men "have no respect for the family. The fathers don't honor their children or wives." He reminds Olu of how his father, Kweku, failed by abandoning his wife and children. He is not certain if Olu would abandon his daughter like many African men are in the habit of doing (Selasi 119-120).

The above portrays how the continent is perceived with negative and degrading generalizations. The African identity is framed by the view of the continent being one homogenous region. Unlike an individual who is Italian or German and is very rarely referred to as European, a Ghanaian or Nigerian will always be referred to as African when abroad. However, the Sai children do not subscribe to this Otherness but they possess a "willingness to critique and celebrate the parts of Africa that mean most to them" (Selasi).

They also understand that there are aspects of the continent that are very positive and worth celebrating. Kehinde observes that "Lagos...was not as he pictured, not luscious, the tropics, bright yellow and green. It was...urban grey, the sky ... clogged with tall buildings, a dirty Hong Kong" (Selasi 167), Taiwo observes some beauty and "she'd laugh to herself that first evening in Lagos, in the car passing streets that made Brookline look broke..." (Selasi 42). This narrative counters the negative image of Africa being a jungle.

Olu and his siblings can be described as Africans who are tired of the harmful rhetoric about Africa and are trying to reinvent, reclaim, and empower the continent through their

achievements. Olu always had the desire “to do better” (Selasi 306) than the African men that Dr. Wei describes. In the end, Olu, and by extension all his siblings, succeed in alienating themselves from the typical African image created by the West. Olu replies to Dr. Wei: “I’m just like my father, I’m proud to be like him. He’s a surgeon like I am, the best in his field” (Selasi 120). Thus Olu shapes his identity in the way he wishes no one would see Africans and “somehow unhooked his little story from the larger ones (Selasi 91). This explains why he hates his father for being an “African man” by walking out on his wife and children. Kweku reprimands Olu, “You can’t...give up when you’re hurt. Please. You get that from me. That’s what I do, what I’ve done. But you’re different. You’re different from me, son -...you’re better” (Selasi 253).

4. CONCLUSION

Selasi propagates individual identity over that national identity and uses her novel to challenge the stereotypical views of Africa placing the second-generation migrant at the forefront of changing this narrative. A critical look at these characters suggests that they profess to be people in and of the world but with African roots. They do not deny their African-ness but use these ‘given’ identities to create a better version of ‘African’. The hybrid understanding of the Sai children stands in contrast to pure cultural identification. The characters, among other characteristics, choose to belong to a transnational community classifying it as a valid identity. With this hybrid identity, they transcend one distinct culture and prove that one’s identity is not singular but multiple and they use their in-betweenness to produce positive images about themselves. Again, they do not prioritize one culture over the other but they take the parts that are meaningful to them from all the cultures they encounter. In this sense, they can overcome their Otherness because they do not find any culture superior.

They stress the fact that ‘home’ need not essentially be one’s country of origin or a fixed location but a place where one feels comfortable. We observe that the characters have a sense of home where they have been able to build productive relationships. They are aware of the political and ideological constructs related to the African continent and, at the same time,

have a willingness to create a positive image. It is important to conclude by saying that transcultural identities can lead to the growth and development of Africa. This is seen in *Ghana Must Go* through the lives of the Sai children, as their hybrid identities perfectly situate Africa in the present global context.

This new, fluid "anyplace/anywhere welcoming" conception of home and identity is based, as discussed above, on the exigencies of histories of hybridism as evidenced in the lived experiences of millions of Africans across the world. Whether we refer to it as Afropolitanism or historicize it as a logical aftermath of globalization and its intended and/or sometimes unintended consequences to the Africans of the world, we need to acknowledge how it points to a significant shift in Afro-identitarian paradigms that deserves careful scholarly attention especially since it also coincides with emerging discourses connected with 21st-century cosmopolitanisms and the fates of Africans who live it daily in practical terms.

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