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Department of Technology and Aesthetics
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“LUXURY REFUGEES” OR “PEOPLE IN THE SEARCH OF A LIFE”?

The causes and effects of migration in Taiye Selasi’s *Ghana Must Go*,
and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s *Americanah*

Maria Bäcke, Kristianstad University, Sweden

“Luxury refugees” has become a fairly common, derogatory term in media for people fleeing from sometimes war-torn areas, but, since they often have access to both money and the latest technology, they are often not regarded as “real refugees.” The image of the prototypical refugee often involves a person who has left everything behind, whose only belongings are the clothes he or she is wearing and some minor symbolic items reminding them of the home they have been forced to leave behind — a tragic, but heroic image. Those who use the term “luxury refugees” in a derogatory manner do not seem to realise, as professor of global health Hans Rosling argues: most of the people in the world today have had similar possibilities and access to the same type of technologies as anyone living in the western part of the world for quite some time now (Borgström), and therefore bring this with them if they can, and, in addition, that those who flee — especially those fleeing to the west — are the people, primarily belonging to the middle class, who have the means to do so (Clemens 13). The really poor are most often left behind to cope at the best of their abilities. Some of the countries migrants originate from at the time of writing are Syria, Pakistan, Ghana and Nigeria. Syria is currently an obvious war zone haunted by several conflicting interest groups, Pakistan has battled the talibans for years, and Nigeria has well-known problems with the islamist group Boko Haram, although these problems affect only a small portion of the large country. Ghana, however, is one of the most stable democracies in Africa, with a steady improvement in living standards since the early 1990s, and as such the country is seemingly not a self-evident emigration candidate. Nevertheless, higher living standards usually equals a growing population, which requires jobs, and, as migration and development researcher Michael Clemens suggests, “[i]f wages are downwardly rigid this can mean ri-

sing unemployment and thus emigration pressure—compounded because younger workers are much more likely to migrate internationally than their older counterparts” (Clemens 12). This, in fact, foregrounds financial stability as a key reason causing people, especially the young, to flee their home countries, and this has been described in recent literature. In this essay, my empirical examples will be taken from two novels set in two of the countries mentioned above — Nigeria and Ghana — which have been written by the authors Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie and Taiye Selasi. Both Adichie, born in Nigeria and educated in the US, and Selasi, a British-American born in London to Nigerian and Ghanaian parents, describe the struggles of immigrants to the West. Adiche primarily focuses on the experiences of first-generation immigrants whereas Selasi focuses on both first-generation and second-generation ones, thus mirroring their own experiences and backgrounds. In this essay, my intention is to explore issues of migration and integration as displayed in Adichie’s *Americanah* and Selasi’s *Ghana Must Go*.

The characters in both novels are products of post-colonial Nigeria and Ghana. Both countries were parts of the British Empire, Ghana until 1957 and Nigeria until 1960, and to draw on post-colonial theory is therefore pertinent. In his seminal work *Orientalism*, Edward Said describes the mechanisms of colonial power and how the colonial powers made use of academic disciplines such as “philology, lexicography, history, biology, political and economic theory, novel-writing and lyric poetry” (15) to create acceptance and support for their imperialist worldview. As Lois Tyson puts it:

Thus, colonialist ideology, which is inherently Eurocentric, was a pervasive force in the British schools established in the colonies to inculcate British culture and values in the indigenous peoples and therefore forestall rebellion. It’s difficult to rebel against a

system or a people one has been programmed, over several generations, to consider superior. (421)

Since the fall of the empires, a first wave of literature emerged with authors such as Nigerian Chinua Achebe, Kenyan Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o and India's Salman Rushdie at the forefront. "Postcolonial theorists often describe the colonial subject as having a *double consciousness* or *double vision*, in other words, a consciousness or a way of perceiving the world that is divided between two antagonistic cultures: that of the colonizer and that of the indigenous community" (Tyson 421, emphasis in the original) and this is what all three authors, and many others with them, have provided examples of. With authors such as Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie and Taiye Selasi, we move to the next generation of post-colonial writers, who are often pre-occupied with the effects of the diaspora and a hybrid afropolitan (to use Selasi's own term, indicating a globalised African) identity, since, as indicated above, several of them portrayed people moving away from their native countries in search of a better future, which was a mirror image of the exodus that actually happened: "Forced migration, either as a quest for employment, including indentured servitude, or as the result of enslavement, scattered large numbers of peoples around the globe, and large populations of their descendants have remained in the *diaspora*, or separated from their original homeland" (Tyson 221, emphasis in the original). In line with the double consciousness or double vision mentioned above, and the effect this has on individuals, cultural theorist Stuart Hall sees "identity as a 'production,' which is never complete, always in the process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation. The view problematises the very authority and authenticity to which the term, 'cultural identity,' lays claim" (Hall 51). In the cases of Adichie and Selasi, the identities of their characters are a product, but also an ongoing production, in which their West-African roots merge with the results of their contexts in Europe and North-America. Echoing post-modernist philosopher Gilles Deleuze and psychiatrist and political activist Félix Guattari, Hall argues that "[c]ultural identity, in this ... sense, is a matter of 'becoming' as well as of 'being' (52). The identity produc-

tion in question is problematised by the fact that the first position is the subject — the imperial "I" — and the second is, using Edward Said's term, the colonised Other. As Hall remarks, while invoking social theorist Michel Foucault, the colonial masters "had the power to make us see and experience ourselves as 'Other.' Every regime of representation is a regime of power formed, as Foucault reminds us" (52). As such, the inheritance of colonial thought becomes a power struggle within individuals involving a binary opposition between the superior colonially influenced "me" and the — by this logic — inferior indigenous "me." These are some of the issues the characters in *Americanah* and *Ghana Must Go* grapple with, which, together with a less than understanding host country, makes their existence as refugees and/or migrants difficult.

Obinze Maduewesi, the son of a Nigerian university professor and the male main character in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah*, describes the feeling of not being a "real refugee" in the eyes of the British when attending a party in London:

Alexa, and the other guests, and perhaps even Georgina [the white British hostess who is married to Obinze's Nigerian school friend, Emenike], all understood the fleeing from war, from the kind of poverty that crushed human souls, but they would not understand the need to escape from the oppressive lethargy of choicelessness. They would not understand why people like him, who were raised well-fed and watered but mired in dissatisfaction, conditioned from birth to look towards somewhere else, eternally convinced that real lives happened in that somewhere else, were no resolved to do dangerous things, illegal things, so as to leave, none of them starving, or raped, or from burned villages, but merely hungry for choice and certainty. (Adichie 276)

The above quote firmly puts Obinze in the "luxury refugee" camp according to the logic of the British — and Western — view of refugees or migrants. In line with Lois Tyson above, Adichie thus points to, and attempts to highlight, the very reason why people, who seem to live in well-functioning societies aim outwards and upwards and become parts of the migrant numbers in the world: they are conditioned from birth to look for the "real life" happening somewhere else. This "somewhere else" is often

linked to the colonial system and the idea of the mother country, which, as discussed above, was viewed as better, more well organised and a model for its colonies.

The mother country does not necessarily welcome its former subjects with open arms, however. Adichie describes how Obinze felt that

[t]he wind blowing across the British Isles was odorous with fear of asylum seekers, infecting everybody with the panic of impending doom, and so articles were written and read, simply and stridently, as though the writers lived in a world in which the present was unconnected to the past, and they had never considered this to be the normal course of history: the influx into Britain of black and brown people from countries created by Britain. (Adichie 259)

The precarious situation of the refugees is often exploited by criminal element. Having travelled to Great Britain using money borrowed from his university professor mother and on a three-month tourist visa, Obinze is trying to find a way to stay in the country: "He still hadn't found someone. Last week, he had met two Nigerian men, distant friends of a friend, who said they knew an Eastern European woman, and he had paid them a hundred pounds. Now, they did not return his calls and their mobile phones went directly to voicemail" (Adichie 256). His own insecure position in the country stands in stark contrast to Emenike's situation, who, through this marriage, has become a naturalised British citizen. Obinze notices how this has altered the way Emenike acts:

"Oh, that's a bit tatty," Emenike said. He had changed. His voice had taken on an unfamiliar modulation, his delivery slower, the temperature of his entire being much lower.

"We could go to that new place in Kensington, it's not that far."

"I'm not sure Obinze will find it very interesting, darling," Georgina said.

"Oh, I think he'll like it," Emenike said. Self-satisfaction, that was the difference in him. He was married to a British woman, lived in a British home, worked at a British job, travelled on a British passport" (Adichie 267).

As Obinze ponders the changes he sees in Emenike, he "still was not sure whether Emenike had become a person who believed that something was beautiful because it was handmade by poor people in a foreign country, or whether

he had simply learned to pretend so" (Adichie 271). Obinze then realises to which extent Emenike feels safe in his role as a Brit when he hears him say the following: "'But the Americans love us Brits, they love the accent and the Queen and the double-decker' ... There, it had been said: the man considered himself British" (Adichie 272). The gulf between the two former schoolmates widens and the contrast is immense, as Obinze is arrested just before he is to marry Cleotilde, a young woman he does not know, but has been paired with by the Nigerians "helping" illegal immigrants to remain in Great Britain. Obinze is asked by the policeman

"Were you aware that your visa had expired?"

'Yes,' Obinze said.

'Were you about to have a sham marriage?'

'No, Cleotilde and I have been dating for a while.'

'I can arrange for a lawyer for you, but it's obvious you'll be deported,' the immigration officer said evenly" (Adichie 279).

Obinze is. Attempting to save some of his dignity, he states that he voluntarily wishes to go back to Nigeria. The immigration officer "got up a little too hastily, as though grateful that his job had been made easier. Obinze watched him leave. He was going to tick on a form that his client was willing to be removed. 'Removed.' That word made Obinze feel inanimate. A thing to be removed. A thing without breath and mind. A thing" (Adichie 279). Obinze lands in Lagos and the dream of a "real life somewhere else" has now come to an end. His context is again Nigeria and this time Obinze gets to work within the constraints of a cultural and national affiliation, from which he has attempted to remove himself. The Empire does not value him. Obinze only option is to create an existence for himself in Nigeria, re-inventing himself with a focus on his native country and eventually he becomes a very successful property developer (431).

Obinze's highschool sweetheart and *Americanah's* female protagonist, Ifemelu, is in a slightly different position. Prior to 9/11, she has applied for, and been granted, an American student visa, the same visa Obinze is denied when he applies (post 9/11). She attends university in the US and builds a life there. Having lost touch

with Obinze, she is dating both Caucasian and African-American males, successfully works at various jobs, and becomes increasingly preoccupied with the covert — and overt — manifestations of racial prejudice and intolerance she sees around her. At a party she attends with her Caucasian boyfriend Carl, she scolds a fellow coloured woman for maintaining that race is no longer an issue:

"The only reason you say that race was not an issue is because you wish it was not. We all wish it was not. But it's a lie. I came from a country where race was not an issue. I did not think of myself as black and I only became black when I came to America. When you are black in America and you fall in love with a white person, race doesn't matter when you're alone together because it's just you and your love. But the minute you step outside, race matters. But we don't talk about it. We don't even tell our white partners the small things that piss us off and the things we wish they understood better, because we're worried they will say we're overreacting, or we're being too sensitive. And we don't want them to say, Look how far we've come, just forty years ago it would have been illegal for us to even be a couple blah blah blah, because you know what we're thinking when they say that? We're thinking why the fuck should it ever have been illegal anyway? But we don't say any of that stuff. We let it pile up inside our heads and when we come to nice liberal dinners like this, we say that race doesn't matter, because that's what we're supposed to say, to keep our nice liberal friends comfortable. It's true. I speak from experience."

The host, a Frenchwoman, glanced at her American husband, a slyly pleased smile on her face; the most unforgettable dinner parties happened when guests said unexpected, and potentially offensive things.

The poet shook her head and said to the host, "I'd love to take some of that wonderful dip home if you have any left." (Adichie 290-1)

In this manner, Adichie shows the reader how racial domination is constructed — and how talk about it is avoided — in liberal environments in the US. The reluctance to talk about the racial inequalities that still exist is tangible. Adichie further highlights these inequalities by giving the following example, in which Ifemelu explains the importance of having role models looking or seeming similar to yourself to Curt, as they are noticing the uniformity of the cover girls when browsing the magazine section at a store:

So three black women in maybe two thousand pages of women's magazines, and all of them biracial or racially ambiguous, so they could also be Indian or Puerto Rican or something. Not one of them is dark. Not one of them looks like me, so I can't get clues for make-up from these magazines. Look, this article tells you to pinch your cheeks for colour because all their readers are supposed to have cheeks you can pinch for colour. (Adichie 295)

Ifemelu's relationship with Curt ends soon after, but as a result of her interest in racial issues, she launches the blog *Raceteenth or Curious Observations by a Non-American Black on the Subject of Blackness in America* (296), which becomes very popular (303). On this blog, she proposes, among other things, the idea that racism indeed is still alive, albeit with different connotations and expressions than racial hatred had in former decades:

In America, racism exists but racists are all gone. Racists belong to the past. Racists are thin-lipped mean white people in the movies about the civil rights era. Here's the thing: the manifestation of racism has changed but the language has not. So if you haven't lynched somebody then you can't be called a racist. If you're not a bloodsucking monster, then you can't be called a racist. Somebody has to be able to say that racists are not monsters. They are people with loving families, regular folk who pay taxes. Somebody needs to get the job of deciding who is racist and who isn't. Or maybe it's time to just scrap the word 'racist.' Find something new. Like Racial Disorder Syndrome. And we could have different categories for sufferers of this syndrome: mild, medium and acute. (Adichie 315)

Ifemelu thus engages in a redefinition of her own identity as a Nigerian, as a Non-American black in the US, and as a woman throughout her thirteen years in America. She adapts to her new environment, but this does not stop her from analysing and questioning it. Ifemelu's position is one of privilege, however. She is an academic and lives in a manner many of the African immigrants can only dream about. At the hairdresser's, Senegalese Aisha braids her hair and asks:

*"How you get your papers?" ...
"I got mine from work," [Ifemelu] said. "The company I worked for sponsored my green card."
"Oh," Aisha said, as though she had just realized that Ifemelu belonged to a group of people whose green cards simply fell from the sky" ... "Last year. My father die and I don't go. Because of papers. But*

*maybe, if Chijioke marry me, when my mother die,
I can go. She is sick now. But I send her money.*"
(Adichie 363-4).

In this dialogue, it becomes clear that it is not only the social standing that differs between these women. The different levels of education, revealed by Aisha's less idiomatic English, highlights yet another aspect of the possibilities for integration in various layers of society. Aisha's only chance of getting a green card in the US would be, just as in Obinze's case in Great Britain, by marrying someone who is an American citizen.

Ifemelu other long-term relationship, while she lives in the US, is with an African American academic called Blaine. They have more in common than Ifemelu had with Carl, and they fight for many of the same thing, for instance by being a part of the election campaign for the not yet elected Barack Obama. Nevertheless, Ifemelu does not feel at home or at ease in the company of Blaine's friends:

There were things that existed for him that she could not penetrate. With his close friends, she often felt vaguely lost. They were youngish and well-dressed and righteous, their sentences filled with "sort of," and "the ways in which;" they gathered at a bar every Thursday, and sometimes one of them had a dinner party, where Ifemelu mostly listened, saying little, looking at them in wonder: were they serious, these people who were so enraged about imported vegetables that ripened in trucks? They wanted to stop child labour in Africa. They would not buy clothes made by underpaid workers in Asia. They looked at the world with an impractical, luminous earnestness that moved her, but never convinced her. Surrounded by them, Blaine hummed with references unfamiliar to her, and he would seem far away, as though he belonged to them, and when he finally looked at her, his eyes warm and loving, she felt something like relief. (Adichie 314)

Ifemelu eventually decides to leave Blaine and, without knowing exactly why, she also decides to move back to Lagos and Nigeria, where she starts a new career, a career where other issues than race are to be foregrounded. Again, it becomes clear that racism, as Ifemelu describes in the quote above, only became an issue when she came to America — and it stops being an issue when she leaves. Again, she is forced to adjust her identity to fit this new, Nigerian context.

This move makes Ifemelu question her success as a writer on race, but also as an immigrant. It is clear that she, in the US, is a successful voice in the debate on racial issues, but she is not thereby seen as successful in Nigerian eyes, as this topic would not be seen as a relevant part of Nigerian identity formation. Her interest in the topic of race is met with a shrug in Nigeria. Kelechi Garuba, a Nigerian writer she hears about in the US, "was sure the Non-American Black [author of Ifemelu's blog, i.e. Ifemelu herself] was Caribbean because Africans don't care about race" (318) and, as Ifemelu becomes the new features editor of *Zoe Magazine*, the reaction of a colleague is "Why race?" as she considers "discovering race" to be a rather exotic and self-indulgent phenomenon (406). Nevertheless, in the Nigerian context, Ifemelu does have her status as an Americanah, someone who has lived in the US and gained a wider experience of the world. In line with the idea of the superior position of colonial powers post-colonial theorist refer to above — in this case this would refer to both the UK and the US — Adichie highlights the importance and weight these countries still seems to carry among people in Nigeria. Another one of Ifemelu's colleagues, also educated in the US, invites Ifemelu to the Nigeropolitan Club, which is only open to people who have moved back to Nigeria from abroad, "some from England, but mostly from the US" (405). Her American background is clearly a plus also in the eyes of Aunty Onenu, the owner of *Zoe Magazine*, who likes to say "[m]ost of my staff are foreign graduates while that woman at *Glass* [the competing women's magazine] hires riff-raff who cannot punctuate sentences!" (Adichie 402). Ifemelu is bored by her work at the magazine, however, and her focus on the critical type of journalism she learned in the US does not sit well with the owner and her co-workers (419). Ifemelu starts a new blog, *The Small Redemptions of Lagos*, on which she has a chance to examine Lagos and Nigeria from a more critical perspective (421), which quickly engages a large audience and sparks huge debates. Had Ifemelu chosen a career in a more traditional field, such as doctor, lawyer or something similar, she might have been viewed as a more self-

evident asset within a Nigerian context upon her return to her native country.

Doctor Kweku Sai, M.D. in Taiye Selasi's *Ghana Must Go* is a well-reputed surgeon, exactly the person who would be welcome back to his native country, Ghana, when he finishes his education in the US. He has come to America "fleeing a peace that could kill" (91) and he meets his Nigerian future wife, Folasadé Savage — "on the run from a war" (91) — in Pennsylvania and her plans for studying law are put on hold as she becomes pregnant with their oldest son, Olu. Kweku is extremely aware of his young wife's sacrifice:

He could hear only Fola—at twenty-three years old, with her law school acceptance letter framed on the wall, with a full ride to Georgetown and Olu in utero—say, "One dream's enough for the both of us." She would follow him to Baltimore and postpone studying law ... But they knew. Or he knew: that her sacrifice was endless. And as the Sacrifice was endless, so must be the Success. (Selasi 73, emphasis in the original)

The pressure is on. While Fola begins to sell flowers in the streets, Kweku only has one option: to succeed with his medical studies for the sake of his growing family. Olu is their firstborn, the twins, Taiwo and Kehinde, are born next and then, ten weeks prematurely to a family that is slowly moving away from being a tightly knit, loving unit orbiting around the parents' love for each other and for their children, to an enterprise — the *Successful Family* —, their youngest daughter, Sadie, is born. As Taiwo recalls:

There was 'him,' straining daily to perform the Provider, and Fola's star turn as Suburban Housewife, and Olu's fastidious-cum-favored First Son; the Artist, gifted, awkward [Kehinde]; and the Baby [Sadie]. Then she [Taiwo]. Determined to deliver a flawless performance, to fly from the stage chased by thunderous applause, Darling Daughter of champions, elementary school standout, the brightest of pupils in bright eyed class pictures. No one asked her to do this. Not him, never Fola. No one mapped their joint progress toward the one goal—were they there yet? had they made it? had they become a Successful Family—but she knew to keep going, to keep striving, by the hum. (Selasi 123-4)

As Taiwo looks at the windows of the neighbouring houses, she sees that the inhabitants are "Successful Families" already and that these had "finished the heavy lifting generations ago ...

that the goal had been reached" (Selasi 124). In Taiwo's eyes the others had not only houses, but *homes*, which she did not feel that they themselves had. Their already settled neighbours did not have to start from scratch, as the Sai family did. Here, Taiye Selasi highlights the enormous difference between the situation of immigrants and those who have lived in that country for generations. In a similar manner, Sadie later describes the sensation that her own family is "spread out ... light, diffuse" (Selasi 146) whereas her college friend "Phylae's family is heavy, a solid thing, weighted, perhaps by the money, an anchor of sorts? It holds them together, the wealth, Sadie sees this, it makes them invested in one solid thing and so keeps them together ... a gravitational pull" (Selasi 146). What both Taiwo and Sadie notices is that their own family is not as firmly planted in their environment as their neighbours or American friends are. The immigration experience is displayed as resulting in more shallow root systems. To add to the multiplicity and rootlessness, it becomes known that the Sais do not only have Ghanaian and Nigerian ancestry, as the twins learn when they as 13-year-olds come to live with Fola's half-brother Femi in Lagos. They get to see a painting of their white Scottish grandmother, whom both Taiwo and Kehinde resemble to a tee (Selasi 167, 172), thus being introduced to yet another patch of their family's colourful — and heterogeneous — past. This sense of unity, the weight and the feeling of belonging are something the Sais are lacking and it is a part of what they, as immigrants, are striving to create or re-create.

Neither Sadie's nor the twins' discoveries have yet taken place, however, when the family's joint endeavour of becoming a Successful Family grinds to a halt, as Dr. Kweku Sai is forced to resign from his job due to unjust malpractice accusations. These accusations, put forward by the Cabots, a rich family who are also the patrons of research sciences at the hospital, have clear overtones of racism. They demand his resignation since he has been unable to save the life of one of their family members, a case which most likely was a lost cause even before he attempted surgery, and the hospital lets him go. To save face in the eyes of his own family, Kweku pretends to go to work for another

eleven months (Selasi 75) until he is forcibly thrown out of his former workplace:

"Get your hands off me!" he was shouting at the security guards. And Ernie [an old security guard] at his colleagues, "He's a doctor here! Stop!" And Dr. Yuki [a former colleague] at Ernie, "He's not a doctor here, excuse me! He was fired! Last year!" Just as Kehinde [Kweku's son] appeared. (Selasi 79)

The greatest tragedy for Kweku is that his son, Kehinde, actually sees him being thrown out, which echoes the humiliating situation Obinze deals with in *Americanah*, as he is thrown out of Great Britain. Both Selasi and Adichie explore the vulnerability of these two men, who both carry the dream of a new and better life in the "superior" colonial power — and fail. As Kweku and Kehinde drive home, the precocious boy reveals that he sees much more of the dynamics in the family than his father thinks he does and, as Kweku parks on the street outside their house, he asks Kehinde to keep quiet about what happened at the hospital — thus asking his young son to help him save face — and hurry inside since Fola and the rest of the family will be waiting for them, saying that he will be there shortly (82-3). He will not. At this very instant, Kweku leaves his family. Hours later he calls his wife:

He said very simply that he was sorry and he was leaving. That if she sold the house at value, she'd have enough to start again. That it was quite possible that he had never actually deserved her, not really. That he'd wiped them out trying to beat the odds.

"Beat the odds. What does that mean? Are you in danger? Have you been gambling? Are you in physical danger? Where are you?" (He was nowhere.) He said it was for the best and that again he was sorry. That she'd be better off without him. "I'm letting you go."

"What does that mean?"

"All his love to the children.

"When are you coming home?" she wept.

He wasn't. (Selasi 86)

Kweku has failed to fulfil the dreams of education and the swift social climb of the immigrant. The goal was "endless success" and he failed. He was unable to create stability and a better life for himself and his family. The lawsuit he files against the hospital fails and he feels betrayed by the Americans: *"Let him go, let him go, let him*

go, let him go. That's all these white people were good for was letting him go" (Selasi 71-2). He moves back to Ghana and continues his work as a surgeon there — a knife-wielding artist according to a former colleague (Selasi 114) — but the success he had envisioned in the US has slipped through his fingers.

With Kweku gone, the family forces him out of their reality, their everyday lives, their family and their stories:

By the way she retold it, their father wasn't in it [the story]. It was Mom's plan, night-sledding; there were four sleds, not five. Then Kehinde would tell one. And so on and so forth, short stories of snow, until they both fell asleep. Until the man was erased— from their stories and so their childhoods (which only existed as stories, Taiwo knew this, still knows). Not dead. Never dead. They never wished the man dead or pretended that he was dead. Just deleted, walled off. (Selasi 39)

Kweku thus becomes a nobody to his own family. After the divorce, Fola — now using her maiden name Savage — brings up their young family, forsaking her own dream of becoming a lawyer for the necessities of everyday life. The oldest son Olu goes to college, then medical school, and becomes a surgeon just like his father. The oldest daughter Taiwo follows in her mother's footsteps, attempting to fulfil her mother's dream of becoming a lawyer. Taiwo's twin brother Kehinde is on the verge of becoming a famous artist and, by the end of the novel and after having felt lost and without a purpose, Sadie realises that her own talent and passion revolves around dancing to the beat of the drums (253). The Sai children all know that success is expected of them. These second generation immigrants are eager to be a part of the American society they have been born into: "Olu had just started at Milton Academy and was insistent upon eating what prep school kids ate. The cupboards were now stocked with mysteriously named products like Mi-Del Organic Lemon Snaps" (Selasi 43) and there seems to be some sort of competition between the siblings: "Who can be the most well-adjusted?", since, in a flash of jealousy, Taiwo views Olu and his wife Ling (of Chinese descent) as "a picture of perfection, New Immigrant Perfection" (Selasi 127). Simultaneously, there are examples of the children idealising their parents and vice ver-

sa, and as such requiring perfection from each other. Both Olu and Kweku want the other to be a different and better version of themselves (253) and the fact that neither of them can live up to their own, nor the other person's, ideals breaks their hearts. In addition, a cultural aspect is introduced as Olu describes, to Ling, how he has fought to overcome people's prejudices of Africans:

*You say that you're African and you want to excuse it, explain but I'm smart. There's no value implied. You feel it. You say 'Asia, ancient China, ancient India,' and everyone things ooh, ancient wisdom of the East. You say 'ancient Africa,' and 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, because you know, Ling, you fear what they think but don't say. And then, one day you hear it out loud.* (Selasi 305, emphasis in the original)

There is a certain element of self-loathing in Olu's account, a self-loathing that is fuelled by the reactions of the people he meets. One example is Ling's father Dr. Wei, who works at MIT and who, when meeting Olu, says that the couple cannot have his blessing. After having praised African students for their intelligence and diligence when studying in the US, Ling's father states his reason for not doing so:

*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 having and raping, cutting genitals off? Young children and nuns slitting throats with machetes, those girls in the Congo, this thing in Sudan?... 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 now moral backbone. **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?* (Selasi 119-20, emphasis in the original)

In pointing out the falseness of Dr. Wei's generalisations, Olu, at the time, earns both self-respect and the respect of his wife, who does not feel that her father values herself or her sister, and therefore considers his attack on "the African male" doubly incorrect. However, Olu's own image of his father is mixed: "The man came from nothing; he struggled, I know. I want

to be proud of him. Of all he accomplished. I know he accomplished so much. But I can't. I hate him for living in that dirty apartment. I hate him for being that African man" (306) who, as the man in Dr. Wei's example, leaves his wife and family at the drop of a hat. In this sense, Olu does want to be better than his father, better than the preconceived ideas of Africans in America.

When the whole family arrives in Ghana for their father's funeral, the family members are all trying to create a bridge to the country of their ancestors, just like Kweku has tried to do in the last sixteen years of his life (since he moved back to Ghana). In his mind, his second and much younger wife Ama becomes such a bridge. On the one hand he thinks she looks like his daughter Taiwo when she sleeps, and she therefore reminds him of his "American life" and of his family he has lost and, on the other hand, Ama reminds him of his dead mother, the sounds and the heat of West Africa (52). Similar to Ifemelu and her blended American-influenced Americanah identity, Kweku personifies the immigrant torn between the world he became a part of as an immigrant and the slightly altered old world he has to get to know anew as he returns to West Africa. As such, they both display the double consciousness of the post-colonial Other.

The same is true of Fola. With the youngest child, Sadie, in college, she, as well, moves back to West Africa. She has inherited a house in Accra, Ghana, and she knows that she is seen as something out of the ordinary by the Ghanaians:

She is a woman, first; unmarried, worse; a Nigerian, worst; and fair-skinned. As suspicious persons go in Ghana, she might as well be a known terrorist. The staff, whom she inherited along with the house and its 1970s orange-wool-upholstered wooden furniture, sort of tiptoes around her poorly masking their shock. That she moved here alone. To sell flowers. (Selasi 100, emphasis in the original)

In Ghana, Fola's background in the US allows her, as a woman, to be more industrious, but it does not shield her from the reactions when she does not conform to Ghanaian traditions. The staff reacts against her peculiar custom of saying "Thank you," when they perform their

duties, and her "How *are* you?" when she greets them in the morning (101, emphasis in the original). Simultaneously, upon arrival in the US, she reacted against the American manner of not seeing her as an individual, Folasadé Somayina Savage, but a "native of a generic War-Torn Nation" (107) and treated with kid gloves, because of the fact that she had lost her father in that war and, as a result, was imagined to be devastated and, again as a result, it is implied, thought to barely function and therefore of little use in the American context.

Nevertheless, the immigrant experience does indeed mark the Sai family for life. At the end of the novel, Fola has come to terms with Kweku having left her and says (to her image of him): "'I also left you.' She breathes in the smell of forgotten familiar [Kweku's slippers still carry his smell]. She presses the soles to her dampening cheeks. 'We did what we knew. It was what we knew. Leaving.... We were immigrants. Immigrants leave'" (Selasi 316). In doing so, she also realises what the next step is: "We [she and Kweku] learned how to love. Let them [their children] learn how to stay" (Selasi 317). In the midst of war, dysfunctional families, moving to another continent, Kweku and Fola indeed learned how to love, but staying has been left to figure out for their children, and there are positive signs. Olu's and Ling's relationship is deepening and growing, and there are indications that staying is actually being learned. Also Taiwo and Kehinde are coming to terms with their past, thus creating a greater feeling of calmness and ease in their lives, and Sadie is finding her passion, which in itself is another bridge between the past and the now, between Africa and America, and between various — non-immigrant, first generation and second generation — family members.

From one vantage point — that they were in fact not fleeing from wars or the harshest possible condition — Obinze, Ifemelu, Kweku and perhaps also Fola can all be viewed as "luxury refugees," since their reasons for emigrating have more to do with money and opportunities than physical hardships, but simultaneously they are all examples of people trying to create a better future for themselves, attempting to fulfil the expectations of their ancestors as

well as creating a better platform and future for their children. They belong to the second category — people in search of a new life — and they did have the money to flee. In showing the struggles of these individuals, even if most of them are not scarred by wars or starvation, both novels question the very notion of the concept "luxury refugees" as they insist that the attempt to build a better future, seeing the enormous effort this involves, ought to be viewed as a basic human right and that we ought to look at the individuals rather than an anonymous mass of refugees.

In addition, what both Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie and Taiye Selasi show us is that when people search for, and attempt to create, new lives for themselves in new cultural contexts, no mistakes are allowed. A person who does not self-evidently "belong" in a cultural or geographical context is often given only one opportunity to succeed there. There are no safety nets if you, rightly or wrongly, are accused of misconduct or break laws in the process. The feeling of safety does not come easily. In Obinze's friend Emenike's case, it comes with a British passport. For the rest of the first generation immigrants, the concept of safety and belonging does not seem to have any bearing until they are back in West Africa, and at this point, their hybrid identities might still make them feel "in between."

All of the first generation immigrant characters in the two novels — Obinze, Ifemelu, Kweku, and Fola — move back to West Africa. The two women, who have stayed the longest in America, bring with them a sense of female power and authority, that does not appear to be in line with Nigerian or Ghanaian conventions, as the examples above show. Ifemelu and Fola have both analysed their possibilities and constraints in their American contexts, adapted to that environment and made the best they could within its limitations. Back in Ghana and Nigeria, respectively, both women are strong enough to challenge the viewpoints of the Ghanaian and Nigerian cultures and traditions with the aim to enlarge their own freedom of movement and perhaps also inspire other Nigerian and Ghanaian women to follow in their footsteps — or at least point to alternative ways of living. Their

feminist aims and ideas baffle people in their West-African environment and might cause them to be outcasts or at least fringe characters in their native countries as well. Back in Nigeria and Ghana, the paradox of the lure of the West and the usually negative reactions to Ifemelu's and Fola's independence are striking. Both Selasi and Adichie point to the fascination many people in the novels display for the idea of life in America and in Great Britain and this is true both for people who have spent some time in these countries, and therefore bask in admiration, and for those who only have the old image of these countries as projected by the colonialists. In general, both Adichie and Selasi attempt to portray the UK and the US more truthfully, not as model societies where everyone lives in luxury, but as places where ordinary people live their often mundane lives. In the novels, this creates yet another paradox: Ifemelu and Fola do not really risk being outcasts or fringe characters in Nigeria and Ghana, since the fact that they have lived in the US absolves them from any real reproach. Their "eccentricities" are tolerated, since they probably are a result of their years in the glorified West.

The numbers of refugees in the world today have, as far as we know, never been larger. As Michael Clemens and Hans Rosling point out, it is not the poorest who flee to the richer countries in the West, it is the relatively wealthy middle-class, and this fact is mirrored in both *Americanah* and in *Ghana Must Go*. As a result, those who successfully manage to make this journey are often perceived as having a responsibility to those who help them flee. It might be that the migrants have borrowed money that ought to be paid back. It might be that they, in turn, carry the obligation to welcome and help relatives or friends who make the same journey at a later date. Implied for these migrants/refugees is the demand to succeed in their new context. Since they have been given this opportunity, they are supposed to perhaps marry well, get good educations and good jobs. This is the task of first generation immigrants.

What might be interesting to notice is that in *Ghana Must Go*, the Sai children, second generation immigrants, are expected to take on a slightly different role, yet another new identity.

They are still supposed to study hard and to land good jobs, but while the identity of their parents is a hybrid one, they seem to be expected to move on, from this hybridity, into something new. Fola's wish is that her children are to "learn how to stay" and this gives a hint to the task of the second generation immigrants: they are to set down roots, build a durable foundation, make the family stable again after the upheaval of migration. This is a huge task, both in terms of time and effort, for the characters in the novels — and if we scale this idea to be relevant in the larger context of today's refugee crisis and the number of people on the move in our world today, we might expect an effort beyond belief for all refugees to find their footing in new contexts all over the world in the years to come. To recognise this undertaking for what it is might be a first step, and the glimpses of these efforts we gain by reading novels such as *Americanah* and *Ghana Must Go*, might be an adequate first step.

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