

Introduction

I am not suggesting that you discard your old and familiar ways of thinking about space and spatiality, but rather that you question them in new ways that are aimed at opening up and expanding the scope and critical sensibility of your already established spatial or geographical imaginations.

Edward Soja, *Thirdspace*.

Space is one of the most ancient, debated, and widely used concepts, both in narrative and in everyday language. As far as narrative is concerned, tradition used to conceive space as one of the two dimensions used to analyze narrative works together with time. However, its relevance has become newly evident at the beginning of the 20th century, with the so-called *spatial turn* within. What I find interesting about space is the multiplicity of meanings and connotations it has acquired. Indeed, space as a term may be used to refer to an abstract dimension, as well as to the personal space people need. Furthermore, besides its literal meaning, it is often used metaphorically. Henri Lefebvre (1974), for example, identifies three spatial concepts, physical space, mental, and social space, indivisibly linked and dependant on each other. Physical space is probably the easiest to identify and to perceive as a sensorial experience. Secondly, there is a mental space, where people analyse and elaborate rationally physical and social events. Finally, social space can be defined as the network of relations established by people. Lefebvre, together with Foucault, Soja, and Bhabha, is one of the major authors who focus on space and redefine the concept with their contribute.

This work analyses the dimension of space and how it is represented in Taiye Selasi's *Ghana Must Go* and Teju Cole's *Open City* and *Everyday is for The Thief*. Before providing an outline of the dissertation, I wish to highlight the main reason why the "old-fashioned" concept of space became extremely fascinating to me. After reading (and loving) Selasi's work, I spent some time trying to learn something more about her life, aesthetics, and literary activity. During my exploration, I came across a dialogue between Selasi and Cole¹ dealing with identity (and identities), Afropolitanism, countries, cities, etc. In particular, what the authors underline is the difficulty to find a definition for themselves. "I'm a bit of a problem for the categorisers, partly because I

¹ <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2016/aug/05/teju-cole-taiye-selasi-interview-known-strange-things>. Accessed on 10th April 2019.

don't fight the categories. I'm comfortable being described as Afropolitan, or African, or American, or pan-African. Or Yoruba, or Brooklynite, or black, or Nigerian. Whatever. As long as the labels are numerous."² I appreciated how the concept of identity was linked to space, while contributing to redefine it.

For this reason, I decided to explore and analyse their works from the spatial point of view. Before carrying out the analysis of these authors' works, my work provides a theoretical background for space as a concept. The first chapter deals with the concept of space and how it has changed over time. In order to tackle the idea of space critically, it is crucial to focus on its relation with a wide range of concepts, in particular with time. In narrative studies, space and time have always been referred to as two antithetical dimensions, with the first subordinated to the second. Indeed, if time was seen as the sequence of events, space served only as a static background for narration. The *spatial turn* of early 20th century shows how the same idea of movement is implicit in the dimension of space, and therefore how the two dimensions are actually interdependent. Noteworthy examples of the relation time-space are Michel Foucault's *heterotopia* and Bakhtin's *chronotopos*. Furthermore, it will be explored how the terminology related to space may be varied. Similar terms, such as place, and setting, may be used by different authors to refer to slightly different concepts. Finally, the last part of the chapter focuses on the redefinition of the dimension of space provided by the introduction of concepts such as *third space* (Bhabha). From a metaphorical point of view, third space shows how definite labels and categories are useless, as reality in all its aspects, including space, is the result of relations and contaminations, in other words, it is hybrid. The redefinition of space, and the concept of *third space* in particular, is central to postcolonial studies, which aim at creating a new space for the subaltern, at finding a voice for those who could not speak.

On the basis of the theoretical framework provided, the second chapter of this dissertation carries out an analysis of the dimension of space in Selasi's novel *Ghana Must Go* (2013). Furthermore, it introduces the term *Afropolitan*, a term Selasi herself coined in 2005 to represent her personal experience of dislocation. Of African origins, she was born in London and grew up in Boston, Massachusetts. A whole generation of

² <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2016/aug/05/teju-cole-taiye-selasi-interview-known-strange-things>. Accessed on 10th April 2019.

young, educated Africans began to recognize themselves in the definition of Afropolitanism Selasi provided. Exactly as third space, Afropolitan creates a new “in-between” space. The concept becomes significant and useful also for the analysis of her novel. In fact, Selasi’s characters can be defined as Afropolitans for their African origins, their life in the West (America), and for the difficulty to find where they belong. The movement of the characters across the Atlantic, and the connections between them allows us to define the space of the novel as Atlantic. Indeed, it overlays national or continental borders and is created by the relationships and the “routes” of characters across the ocean (Gilroy 1993). The dimension of space is analyzed in its representations throughout the novel. I focus on the way the relation space and time is handled as well as on the possibility or not to identify a place. Furthermore, it is underlined how space is created through language, as Selasi creates a certain space thanks to the repetition of words, verbs of movements, etc. A noteworthy example of recurrent elements are Kweku’s slippers, which may be considered as a sort of file rouge throughout the whole novel.

The final chapter focuses on the analysis of space in Teju Cole’s *Open City* (2011) and *Every Day is for The Thief* (2015). In the light of the overview of Afropolitanism provided in chapter 2, I discuss whether Cole may be defined as Afropolitan. His African origins and American life make him similar to Selasi, and fit in the definition. As previously mentioned, it is interesting how he rejects every singular, definite, and precise geographical and identitarian label, while accepting multiple and multifaceted ones. To borrow Gilroy’s words (1993), the labels should include his “roots” as well as “his routes”. It is interesting to underline how Selasi and Cole are close to each other and still create different narrative works, even though some common themes such as the need of belonging can be identified. Cole’s production of space is one of the aspects in which the two authors diverge. A case in point is the comparison between the Atlantic space of *Ghana Must Go* and the detailed, well-localized set of *Open City*, where New York is rendered through precise descriptions. The structure of chapter 3 replicates chapter 2’s one: I focus on the way in which space and time are entangled; on how space is related to language and the ways in which it becomes visible through it, and finally discuss whether space can be considered place. In this regard, specific attention is devoted to the cities in Cole’s works.

Chapter 1 A Theoretical Framework for Space

The focus of this work is the dimension of space together with the redefinition. In particular, it will be analyzed how spatial discourse is carried out in Taiye Selasi's and Teju Cole's works. This first chapter provides a theoretical background for the dimension of space and its relations with other terms and dimensions, such as time. The relation time-space deserves a particular focus, as the two terms have often been considered opposite and mutually exclusive, synonyms of movement and stasis respectively (Bridgemann 2005, Tuan 1977:190). This is closely linked to the opposition-relation between narration or description. After denying their opposition and showing their interaction, it is important to explore other terms which could replace or accompany the concept of space, such as place, setting or narrative. Furthermore, it is relevant to focus on the way space is constructed. I will do that by capitalizing on the work of Henri Lefebvre, one of the main theorists of space, whose works inspired and influenced the large majority of the authors named in this work. I would like to underline that all the different terms and concepts which will be taken into consideration and analyzed are not to be considered as independent or even contrasting worlds. On the contrary, their ongoing relation makes them overlap, or, to borrow a postcolonial term from Homi K. Bhabha, hybridize.

1.1 Time and Space

Time and space are now considered two important (or the main) dimensions to take into consideration when narrating facts or events. Collocating events and situations is necessary both for writers and speakers as nothing can occur or develop outside a spatial and temporal frame. It is also important to underline how it may become difficult for listeners or readers to get a complete comprehension without an exhaustive temporal and spatial background. Therefore, time and space are seen as two complementary categories, interdependent from and in a constant relation with one another, to that point that their semantic fields may sometimes overlap.

The contemporary scene is however different from the past, where time and space were considered in a relation of binary opposition, one the negation of the other. Thus far,

space has traditionally been viewed as a backdrop to plot, subordinated to time (Zoran 1984: 330). Space was considered as a static background, a framework for the events happening, only a container with no active role (Altworth 2015: 2). On the contrary, it has been shown how space serves relevant, even though still under-explored roles. The traditional connotation of space has been challenged by many authors, such as Gerald Prince (1982: 32) who explores the possibility of narrating without explicating the relation between space and narration. What he points out is that, even though it may be possible to narrate without explicating the dimension of space, space is often mentioned and it often plays a role in the events narrated.

Seymour Chatman goes further in the definition of the active role of space (Chatman in Altworth 2015: 17) by identifying a relation or a “critical boundary” between characters and what he calls *setting*, a term which I will go into deeper analysis later in this chapter. Setting can involve both human mind and external world, with non human objects becoming sort of characters; at the same time, humans can become elements of setting (in particular minor characters). Space can therefore be conceived as a dynamic network of people, elements of the external world, of the human mind, etc. An example taken from Teju Cole’s *Open City* may be useful to make the concept clearer. Julius, the main (and almost only) character of the novel wanders the streets of New York throughout the whole novel. The city influences his thoughts and feelings in such a permeating way that it cannot be considered merely a background, but rather a character. The importance of New York and its role in the novel will be further explored in chapter 2.

It may be useful to refer to definitions of space provided by different dictionaries. The Oxford Dictionary reads as follows “1) A continuous area or expanse which is free, available, or unoccupied. 2) The dimensions of height, depth, and width within which all things exist and move. 3) An interval of time (often used to suggest that the time is short considering what has happened or been achieved in it).”³

³ <https://www.lexico.com/en/definition/space>. Accessed on 10th March 2019.

Merriam Webster underlines the same elements “1) a period of time/also: its duration. 2) a boundless three-dimensional extent in which objects and events occur and have relative position and direction”.⁴

Finally, the Cambridge Dictionary defines space as “1) an empty area that is available to be used. 2) the area around everything that exists, continuing in all directions”.⁵

All the definitions provided share the connotation of space as an empty area available for characters to move, which is a geometrical meaning. However, it should be added that the use of the concept can be both literal and metaphorical. As Ryan points out ([2009] 2014), in narrative, space is often used in a metaphorical sense, which does not refer to physical, empty space. For example, we can talk of mental spaces, consisting in groups of meanings in one’s mind. Spatial relations and oppositions (ex. high and low) can acquire non-spatial meanings, such as good or bad, valuable or non-valuable.

The aforementioned association between characters and space (Chatman in Alworth 2015: 17) leads to the concept of body, through which we experience space. As previously shown, the movement of bodies in space allow us to experience the spatial dimension. Therefore, it should not be surprising that abstract concepts are often represented by metaphors dealing with bodies, moving or not in space (Lakoff and Johnson 1980). Given the body as reference, the aforementioned spatial oppositions (ex. high and low, up and down) are nothing but the direct consequence of the bodily activity of moving.

When considering space, there are two main questions under discussion: the supremacy of time over space and the connotation given to space itself. As far as the first problem is concerned, it is important to underline the theoretical neglect and subordination of space, which creates an asymmetrical relation (Zoran 1984: 309). Given that each narrative has temporal and spatial structures, time has always been foregrounded as it was considered as the motion of the narration. On the contrary, space was seen as stasis, as static description, and therefore not equally important. As Theresa Bridgemann (2005) points out, time has often been linked with the idea of movement, sequence of events, whereas space was often considered as a pause or a slowing down in the

⁴ <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/space>. Accessed on 10th March 2019.

⁵ <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/it/dictionary/english/space>. Accessed on 10th March 2019.

narration. What emerges from this example is that these categories were considered as a strictly binary opposition, without any acknowledgement of their mutual relation and contamination. Indeed, stories are often thought of as sequence of events interrupted by description, where narration seems to stop. Therefore, narration and description tended to be considered as synonyms for time and space respectively, in a system of binary opposition, where one automatically excluded the other.

Evidences of the relation and overlapping of time and space destroy the binary opposition proposed by tradition. An emblematic example of the refusal of binarism comes from Bhabha's notions of *thirdspace* and *hybridity* (Bhabha 1994) which will be analysed later in this chapter. What will be hopefully clear in the analysis of chapters 2 and 3, is that time and space cannot be considered as part of the background only; on the contrary they may become the center of events. For example, Taiye Selasi's *Ghana Must Go* shows how space is constructed through the movement of characters across the Atlantic. Spatial relationships as movements of things and people is one of the possible ways to create space according to Zoran (1984: 314) "space does not involve only static objects and relationships- things also move and change. Space is one aspect of spacetime (chronotopos)."

Time could no longer be considered the only independent variable and the center of narration; it should be replaced by a more complex, bidimensional and hybridized concept of "space time". Description turns out to be more than a mere backdrop to action or example of realism; its active role allows it to form what Marsh calls "submerged plot" (Marsh 2009: 79). What is suggested by this concept is that there is a story behind the official one, and it is the one told by what have always been considered details, margins.

Given that the binary opposition between time and space has been "recently" invalidated, new spaces are taken into consideration and explored. This leads to the different connotations given to space by different authors. Zoran (1984: 314) for example includes the idea of movement in the definition of space, as part of what is called *chronotopos*, a term introduced by Bakhtin which may be defined as "intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships" (Bakhtin 2008:3). The definition given by Bakhtin reads as follows:

In the literary artistic chronotope, spatial and temporal indicators are fused into one carefully thought-out, concrete whole. Time, as it were, thickens, takes on flesh, becomes artistically visible; likewise, space becomes charged and responsive to the movements of time, plot and history. The intersection of axes and fusion of indicators characterizes the artistic chronotope. (2008: 3)

Such a reflection has its origins in Kant's conception of time and space as categories used by individuals to perceive and analyze the reality and their experience. At the same time, the theory of the chronotope shares a common ground with Einstein's relativity theory given that both in physical and fictional world time and space are strictly related and interdependent from each other. If the old connotation of space seems more and more inadequate, space can still be conceived of as a multi-layered term, including both the topographical level (coming from tradition) and movements of things and people (Zoran in Bridgemann 2005). This broader connotation of space includes also the aspect of movement, so that space could also be created by the movement of characters themselves (Tuan 1977).

A interesting remark on the theoretical take on space deals with how individuals perceive and act in space through the use of their body (Ryan 2009; Casey 1993). The very first human experience is the perception of being a body located in place. One of the first authors to consider body as an instrument of spatial dimension is Aristotle, who defines place as "a possible habitat for a body". As Ryan points out, the spatial metaphors which are widely used in everyday life are nothing but the mirror of the bodily experience of place.

The embodied nature of mind is reflected in language by families of metaphors that concretize abstract concepts in terms of bodies moving through or situated in space. Words like up and down, front and back, high and low, organize space using the body as point of reference. Due to the erect position of the body, up and down are the most prolific sources of metaphors: e.g. happy is up, sad is down; more is up, less is down; etc. Front and back are mainly used as metaphors of

time: in our culture, the future is ahead and the past is behind. Other spatial schemata that provide important sources of metaphors are the conduit, the journey, the path, and the container (space as a whole can be seen as a container). (Ryan 2009)

As a consequence, the way individuals perceive their body moving in a space influences the final perception of the space itself (Casey 1993). Lefebvre argues that space should be regarded as a social reality and therefore inextricably associated with the presence of individuals. The relation of human beings with their bodies in a necessary premise to establish a relationship between them and the place they are inhabiting or moving in. In his words, human beings “know that they have a space and that they are in this space.” (Casey 1991: 294). Foucault (1980) adds to the relation body/space the notion of power. As previously stated, space is no longer considered neutral, on the contrary it is strictly associated with the dimension of power. Individual act and move in space with their body and body is therefore a place of resistance and can be used as an individual form of authority.

Yi- Fu Tuan (1977: 190) distinguishes between space and place, a difference which will be explored in the next paragraph. For now, it is enough to say that the connotation given to space by Bridgeman is mirrored in the term “place”. According to Tuan, path and pauses, synonyms for time and place respectively, are interdependent and complementary, as they constitute the idea of home. The concept of home will be central to the exploration of space here proposed and to the novels which will be analyzed in the next chapters. As far as space is concerned, Tuan proposes another distinction between place and space, which will be the object of next paragraph (1977: 4).

1.2 Space and Place

“We do not live in space. Instead, we live in places” (Gibson in Casey 1993:xiii)

I decided to begin this paragraph with this quotation by Gibson, because it represents an opinion shared by a large number of the authors here taken into consideration. The

previous paragraph dealt with the distinction between time and space, their asymmetrical relationship and the connotation given to space (can it include movement or is it only stasis?). This section explores further the notion of space in its relation with place. We should be bear in mind that often these terms represent meanings which may differ according to different authors. Furthermore, they are in constant relation and may therefore overlap and merge.

Starting from the aforementioned Tuan (1977: 4), the distinction between space and place he proposed seems to match the meaning given to the two terms in the quotation. First of all, even though Tuan acknowledges that space and place tend to merge, space is conceived as more abstract and place as concrete, the one it may be found in a map (1977: 76). If the first implies freedom of movement, the second one represents a pause and “each pause in movement makes it possible for location to be transformed into place” (1977: 6). This distinction movement/pause can easily remind us of the difference between time and space as narration and description. In other words, it may be said that place is the concrete realization of space, which means giving more details, attributing a meaning, the sense of familiar. Important is also the apparently contradictory meanings given to both concepts. Indeed, if space is linked with freedom, it also involves threat and danger; in the same way, place is associated both with the idea of security and with the idea of enclosure (space being humanized). Human experience can include both: space can be experienced simply by having room to move, while place when it becomes familiar, acquires value and can even become shelter, i.e. home. As Tuan (1977: 137) puts it, home is an intimate experience of place, which can be represented by events but also by people.

Aristotle was one of the first to consider the importance of place, which he defines as “the first of all things” (Aristotle in Casey 1993: 15). Place for Aristotle is a multifaceted term. First of all, it can be defined by “possible habitat” for a possible body; body is therefore an instrument used to perceive place (Casey 1997: 45). The importance of body in the spatial perception will be evident in the analysis of the novels in chapters 2 and 3 and therefore, worth a detailed analysis later. However, it is important to underline here the strict relation between body and place, as the way we move and perceive our body strongly influence the way we experience the place in

which we are moving (Casey 1997: 233). Being a possible habitat, place (and places) are conceived by Aristotle as real points on a possible map, whereas space is imaginary and can be thought of as the measurement of the distance between points.

Casey (1997) suggests an interesting analysis of place, by anchoring the term in ideas of landscape, body, movement, experience, and identity. I would like to provide a hopefully exhaustive outlook of his thinking, which will however be analyzed further in the next chapters. According to Casey, the movement of bodies defines places and distinguishes them from sites. As moving is necessary for humans, “to be is to be in place” (Casey 1997: 14), a phenomenon defined as *implacement*. This connotation of place linked to movement allows him to define place as “more an event than a thing”, and therefore part of narratives’ main features. In this sense, it can be easily understood why authors such as Aristotle considered it prior to all things (Aristotle 1094a: 1-2).

Experience and identity are strictly related one to the other and to places. As previously mentioned, experience is made through the movement of bodies and the collection of our experiences in different places builds our identity. Indeed, not only does place define that we are, but also who we are (Casey 1997: xiii). For this reason, Casey defines place as “what takes place between body and landscape” (1993: 29).

One noteworthy contribution comes from Zoran (1984: 323), whose idea of space and place seems to mirror the distinction suggested by the initial quotation and based on concreteness and abstractedness. The spatial structure suggested by Zoran will be discussed in further details when dealing with the production of space. For now, it suffices to know that he distinguishes three levels of structuring: the topographical, the chronotopic, and the textual. I will now focus only on the first level, which conceives space as a static entity which produces a sort of map. Scenes occurring in the topographical level of spatial structure are called places (1984: 323). Spaces can have different forms, such as cities or streets. In other words, “A place is a certain point, plane, or volume, spatially continuous and with fairly distinct boundaries, or else surrounded by a spatial partition separating it from other spatial units.” (1984: 323)

Transforming space into place is a common human activity, which allows individuals to give value to the space they are living in and to the relationships there established. Only

with an “intimate experience of place”, individuals are able to feel sense of belonging, or sense of place. (Tuan 1977: 137). Sense of place is a general concept which describes the relationship between people and their (local) spatial settings, including other concepts such as place attachment, place identity and place dependence (Jorgensen and Stedman 2001). Place attachment can be defined as a positive emotional bond that develops between groups or individuals and their environment. Place identity is “a sub-structure of the self-identity of the person consisting of, broadly conceived, cognition about the physical world in which the individual lives” (Jorgensen and Stedman 2001). Place dependence refers to how well a setting serves goal achievement given an existing range of alternatives (Jorgensen and Stedman 2001).

1.3 A closer look at terminology

As previously mentioned, the terminology regarding space may differ from author to author or the same term could refer to (slightly) different concepts. It turns out that the theoretical background is much more complex and multifaceted, with overlapping or contrasting reflections. I will try to explore here the variety of the terminology connected with space:

- Setting: represented by “propositions referring to the same spatio-temporal complex” (Prince 1982:73). Ryan (2009) describes it as “the general socio-historico-geographical environment in which the action takes place”. It is a relatively stable category throughout the text, whereas according to Prince (1982:73), it can be dynamic or static.
- Spatial frames: spatial frames refer to the immediate surroundings of events, the various locations shown. Spatial frames flow into each other, merge and may overlap, especially if their boundaries are not clear cut (ex. different rooms separated by a door). Furthermore, they are organized in a hierarchical structure, where one contains others (Ryan 2009). The same concept is referred to by Zoran (1984:324) as a *field of vision*, defined as “being here”; the field of vision which will follow or preceded are perceived as there. It may be important to underline that

according to Zoran, the concept of *field of vision* may solve the dichotomy between narration and description as they cannot be considered as simply containing explicit information about space. On the contrary, they may be a description as well as an action, a dialogue, etc.

- Story space: identifies the space relevant to the plot, created by the movement or the thoughts of characters. For example, in Selasi's *Ghana Must Go*, we can identify an Atlantic space, designed by the movement of characters stretching across the Atlantic. As already mentioned, Cole's *Open City* develops almost entirely in New York, and the map created by the wandering of the main characters follows the development of thoughts.
- Narrative world: “the story space completed by the reader's imagination on the basis of cultural knowledge and real world experience” (Ryan 2009). The imagination of readers make them perceive the narrative world as coherent, unified and existing geography, even though the story could take place in imaginary landscapes.
- Narrative universe: merges the world presented as fully existing in the text and the worlds constructed by characters with their beliefs, fears, fantasies, thinking, etc.
- Location: usually linked to the events occurring in it. As Bridgemann suggests (2005), it is important because it influences the way people experience the world. The concept of location could therefore be associated with the idea of *perspective*.
- Landscape: not so common in narratives. According to the Oxford Dictionaries, this term refers to “All the visible features of an area of land, often considered in terms of their aesthetic appeal”. Mitchell (2002: vii) in his analysis of landscape, place and space observes that, even though often considered as synonyms, a distinction between them should be made. What he underlines, is that landscape is usually seen as

background, a two-dimensional element opposed to the three-dimensional conception of space. Furthermore, landscape seems to be based on generality, something overlooked more than looked at.

- Site: particularly relevant for Foucault. it may be defined as the relation between different elements in space, which means that it builds networks, lines, grids. It is concrete in the abstractness of space. In other words, "space takes for us the form of the relations among sites" (Foucault in Soja 1996: 156).

1.4 The production of space

After having introduced the notion of space and its relation with other terms, in particular with time and place, it may be useful to focus now on how space is constructed in narrative texts. Various concepts already introduced will be underlined again here. First of all, in the previous paragraphs, I have underlined how time and place have traditionally been set in opposition. Time was perceived as the sequence of events and therefore, center of narrative, while space was perceived merely as a background, with no particular role. As a consequence, it is easy to understand the preeminence given to time, which created a symmetrical relation (Zoran 1984:309). Furthermore, it has been observed the shift in the conception of space throughout the centuries. If in the 19th century it was considered as a concrete, stable backdrop for plot, in modernism it is filtered through personal experience. Postmodernism challenged even the idea of one world only, opening the possibility for different worlds to emerge and merge (Bridgemann 2005). As far as the relation between space and place is concerned, it has been mentioned that while the first is more general and abstract, the latter acquires a precise, concrete connotation. The focus of this paragraph will be therefore the way space is constructed in narrative according to different authors, such as Lefebvre and Soja.

As already mentioned, one of the main voices in spatial discourse is Henri Lefebvre with his work *The Production of Space* (1991). Given the resonance his thinking acquired among other intellectuals, I find it useful to start from his conception of space,

in order to analyze how it influenced others, such as Soja. First of all, Lefebvre underlines how the meaning of space used to be mainly geometrical (empty space), with no social connotation. Only later, it was borrowed by philosophers such as Kant, who defined space as one of the mental categories, *a priori*, used by individuals to give sense to reality. The concept, then appropriated and revised by mathematics, was still too far away from the real and social space. It is important in this respect to define what social space is.

(Social) space is not a thing among other things, nor a product among other products: rather, it subsumes things produced, and encompasses their interrelationships in their coexistence and simultaneity - their (relative) order and/or (relative) disorder. It is the outcome of a sequence and set of operations, and thus cannot be reduced to the rank of a simple object. At the same time there is nothing imagined, unreal or 'ideal' about it as compared, for example, with science, representations, ideas or dreams. Itself the outcome of past actions, social space is what permits fresh actions to occur, while suggesting others and prohibiting yet others. (Lefebvre 1991: 73)

Lefebvre felt the need of a "unitary theory" to bridge the gap between the theoretical and the practical. Indeed, the opposition between real and imagined space, called by Lefebvre *perceived* and *conceived space*, existed in theory only. What Lefebvre proposes is a logical-epistemological conception of space, where it is considered in a frame, in a network of relations as "space considered only in isolation is an empty abstraction" (Lefebvre 1991: 12). His new perspective on space challenges a reality (and therefore also a space) based on a dual mode of thinking by introducing a third term, which may be called *thirdspace* borrowing a term developed by Edward W. Soja (Soja 1986: 2). The importance of the concept of *third space* deserves a section on its own. Indeed, starting from Lefebvre, it influenced thinkers such as Foucault, Soja, Bhabha and Spivak, with a great relevance in Postcolonial Studies.

It may be useful to underline again how the concept of space has more and more been related to the idea of movement, sequence, dynamism. What was once domain of time

alone, as sequence of events, has become feature of space too. Therefore, it is difficult (if not impossible) to identify a binary opposition between time and space, whose borders are blurred. Attempts to show the active role of space in narrative gave birth to the idea of a multi-layered conception of the term. For example, Johnson (2005) introduces three concepts to explain how space is constructed in different narratives:

- *paths*: plots could be made of networks, relationships, goals, decisions which may diverge or converge and therefore, lead the story in a certain direction or not;
- *container*: this idea is strictly connected with inside-outside. They may be rooms or houses as well as cities;
- *portal*: such as doorways, which allows characters to enter or exit a room, a house, etc. or windows, through which they observe and are observed.

This classification is strictly associated with the idea of perspective, or point of view, that can be both physical and emotional (Bridgemann 2005). What is important to underline is the relation and interdependence between the two. A physical perspective, due to the position of bodies in space often influences feelings and thoughts. Zoran (1984:322) argues that the perspective organization of a text is provided by the use of language, which makes it different from the perspective of drawings and photographs. In drawings, the perspective is built on an axe stretching from the onlooker to the horizon, where objects get smaller; in contrast, the spatial perspective created by language develops on a binary opposition of here and there. Here and there as well as the perspective will be relevant concepts for the analysis of the novels chosen (ibid.). For example, in *Ghana Must Go* the fact of being stretched across the Atlantic provides the character with different point of view and feelings on Kweku's death, the principal event that opens the book.

Gabriel Zoran (1984: 315) suggests a distinction based on three different levels of spatial structure:

- *The topographical level:* space is conceived as a static entity, “self-existent and independent from the temporal structure of the text” (1984: 315). Descriptions are probably the most evident case, but narrative or dialogic parts may serve the reconstruction of topographical structure as well. In other words, this structure builds a map, sufficiently clear but not exhaustive, which encompasses both the horizontal structure (inside and outside, far and near) as well as the vertical one (up and down). Space in the topographical structure is neutral and all potential, as there the movement is free without defined directions. It may be interesting to underline that the map may have patterns based on the quality of things, for example patterns of colors (Zoran 1984: 317). Colors will be relevant in Selasi's *Ghana Must Go*, as they are associated to cities or countries and create in this way a sort of (Atlantic) map.
- *the chronotopic level:* *chronotopos* is an Einsteinian term introduced into literary criticism by Bakhtin (1978), who defines it the complex of space and time, including objects, events, etc. In contrast, Zoran (1984: 318) focuses on the effects of chronotopos on the structure of space. This level includes synchronic and diachronic relations, each of which has peculiar effect on the spatial structure of texts. As far as the first one is concerned, at every moment of the narrative there will be objects at rest and in motion. Both rest and motion are relative terms, determined by the narrative and can be defined as follows: “rest is the state of being bound to a given spatial context, while movement is the ability to cut oneself off from spatial context and to switch over to different contexts”. (1984: 318)

If the topographical structure dealt with a neutral construction of space, diachronic relations of the chronotopos identifies defined directions in space. This means that places are given a specific role in the narrative. If there is a place defined as point of departure (point a) and another as the target (point b), the movement from *a* to *b* is allowed but not viceversa. The directions determine axes of movement, which are not related to motion itself but to the reasons behind (will, intentions, ideals). What emerges

from a chronotopic conception of space is not a neutral movement, but rather a movement dominated by field of powers. (1984: 318)

- *the textual level*: Refers to the structure of space derived from the fact that it is formed within the verbal text, which imposes patterns of organizations. These patterns are mainly due to three features of the verbal text:
 - the selectivity of language: language is selective in the sense that it cannot provide readers with a complete report about space. Such an exhaustive report is however not necessary, as it will be more useful for them to be provided with details on the narrative plane.
 - the temporal continuum: the fact that language provides information in a linear order opens questions about the principle behind the order chosen and about the effects of that order. As far as the principal of sequences is concerned, it may be based on the chronotopical level (tracing movements), on the topographical level (from upper to lower, from closer to further) or on non-spatial orders (same category). The order chosen imposes a direction, with a process similar to the axes of movements, but here it is determined by the verbal arrangement only.
 - the point of view: as mentioned above, the point of view imposes a perspective on a text, represented by the binary opposition here and there (Zoran 1984:322) the relation between the two occur in two ways: between the location of that act of narration and the world and within the world between things perceived in the foreground and in the background.

1.5 Third space

As previously mentioned, the introduction of a third term challenges and destroys the binary representation of space by adding another possibility (Soja 1996: 2). In doing this, the dual mode of representation of reality, and consequently of space, is replaced by a trialectics. The term introduced is defined differently by different authors, such as *third space* by Soja and Bhabha or *heterotopias* in Foucault's words. The creation of a

third space is to be considered the result of this process of rethinking the production of reality and consequently also the production of space. The need for a redefinition of the concept of space mirrors an ever-evolving, multifaceted reality that traditional, binary representations are no longer able to represent. In this section, I will focus on Henri Lefebvre, Edward W. Soja, Michel Foucault, and on postcolonial authors such as Homi K. Bhabha, bell hooks, and Gayatri Spivak. All of them strongly contributed to the creation and representation of third space.

1.5.1 Henri Lefebvre and the trialectics of space

It may be useful to begin this overlook with Henri Lefebvre, with his best known work *The Production of Space* where he chooses space as his primary point of view to interpret reality. Lefebvre (1991) argues that space has always been neglected by tradition that according to which the reality was a system of binary oppositions which prioritized time. However, space is as important as time as it permeates every aspect of society.

This new importance given to space is the outcome of the social connotation it is provided with. Space is defined as a “social reality”, and therefore not a thing but, in Lefebvre’s words “a product and a means of production” (Lefebvre 1991: 85) at the same time. It cannot be considered neither mental or material, “neither subject nor the object” (1991: 73) and both at once. It is therefore both “result and cause, product and producer” (1991: 142). Such a connotation provides an increasingly complex idea of spatiality, which is not to be seen only as an object or a product well identifiable and easy to define. On the contrary, it also involves the relations between all the aspects of reality: products, individuals, thoughts, meanings, etc. In other words, it establishes a relation between “everything that is produced either by nature or by society – living beings, things, objects, works, signs and symbols” (1991: 101). In order to understand the social dimension of space, it is also important to focus on the role of individuals, how they are influenced by space and how they act in space.

‘Human beings’ do not stand before, or amidst, social space;
they do not relate to the space of society as they might to a

picture, a show, or a mirror. They know that they have a space and that they are in this space. They do not merely enjoy a vision, a contemplation, a spectacle — for they act and situate themselves in space as active participants. They are accordingly situated in a series of enveloping levels each of which implies the others, and the sequence of which accounts for social practice. (Lefebvre 1991: 294)

The social dimension of space involves therefore the active role of individuals, who are not only spectators but act, move, think and react. Furthermore, considering spatiality as a “social reality” implies a redefinition of the role of language. Descartes argues that reality exists independently from the human ability to grasp and describe it completely through language. On the contrary, being space a social production, for Lefebvre language does not precede space, but the production of space is simultaneous with the production of a language and code (1991: 16-18). In other words, while producing space, human beings produce also a sort of “spatial code”, created by individuals to refer to space more or less conventionally. Indeed, it is not clear whether a general code can be identified or if we are dealing with specific codes, common to members of a particular community, group, etc. However, in both cases, the existence of a code implies a process of signification, which influences the way that space is decoded or read (1991: 17). An example is provided by Yi Fu Tuan (1977: 137) with his concept of home being an “intimate experience”, a place which has acquired value also thanks to the presence of people.

Given his conception of social space, which aims at destroying a dual mode of representation, Lefebvre feels the need to create a unitary theory, including the fields of the physical, the mental and the social (1991: 11), i.e. an interdisciplinary approach. This unity is provided by the fact that all spaces are produced. What he proposes is “une dialectique de triplicité”, translated as a “transdisciplinary triple-dialectic” (Soja 1996: 6). In particular, tradition presented a dual mode of thinking about space: first place and second place, real and imagined, what Descartes defined as *res cogitans* and *res extensa*. This system of binary oppositions is well explained by Lefebvre as follows:

philosophy reverted to supposedly ‘relevant’ dualities, drawing with it -or perhaps being drawn by — several specialized sciences, and proceeding, in the name of transparency, to define intelligibility in terms of opposites and systems of opposites. Such a system can have neither materiality nor loose ends: it is a ‘perfect’ system whose rationality is supposed, when subjected to mental scrutiny, to be self-evident. This paradigm apparently has the magic power to turn obscurity into transparency and to move the ‘object’ out of the shadows into the light merely by articulating it. In short, it has the power to *decrypt*. (Lefebvre 1991: 40-41)

This binary, perfect system of representation of reality in general and of space in particular is challenged by the introduction of a third term, an “Other”. In other words, first space and second space, *the perceived* and *the conceived*, are accompanied by a third space, *the lived*. This process of “thirling-as-othering” is applied to space in particular, but it is an element which could help resist binary oppositions in general. Lefebvre is proposing “A triad: that is, three elements and not two”, in order to avoid binary relations as they “boil down to oppositions, contrasts or antagonisms” (1991: 39). Introducing a third term increases the complexity of space and consequently the difficulty in categorizing it.

The form of social space is encounter, assembly, simultaneity. But what assembles, or what is assembled? The answer is: everything that there is in space, everything that is produced either by nature or by society, either through their co-operation or through their conflicts. Everything: living beings, things, objects, works, signs and symbols. Natural space juxtaposes and thus disperses: it puts places and that which occupies them side by side. It particularizes. By contrast, social space implies actual or potential assembly at a single point, or around that point. It implies therefore the possibility of accumulation. (Lefebvre 1991: 101)

It is this “possibility of accumulation”, of simultaneity which makes the process of categorizing space so complicated and probably inadequate. This means that also providing an exhaustive definition has become increasingly difficult. Is it a reality? An instrument? A mode of representation? All of these at once or none?

Space does not eliminate the other materials or resources that play a part in the socio-political arena, be they raw materials or the most finished of products, be they businesses or ‘culture’. Rather, it brings them all together and then in a sense substitutes itself for each factor separately by enveloping it. The outcome is a vast movement in terms of which space can no longer be looked upon as an ‘essence’, as an object distinct from the point of view of (or as compared with) ‘subjects’, as answering to a logic of its own. Nor can it be treated as a result or resultant, as an empirically verifiable effect of a past, a history or a society. Is space indeed a medium? A milieu? An intermediary? It is doubtless all of these, but its role is less and less neutral, more and more active, both as instrument and as goal, as means and as end. Confining it to so narrow a category as that of ‘medium’ is consequently woefully inadequate. (Lefebvre 1991: 410-411).

In Lefebvre’s words these first, second and third space are defined as: *spatial practice*, *representations of space* and *representational space* respectively (Lefebvre 1991: 38-39).

- *spatial practice*, or *the perceived*: it is the result of human choices and practices in space, what individuals do in their daily routine. It establishes a close association between daily routine and urban landscape and therefore it can be represented by the movement of individuals in their city, village, etc. In this sense, spatial practice implies a certain degree of *competence*, due to people’s relationship to that space (1991: 38). As a consequence, that competence will be evident while they act in the world, i.e. in their *performance*. This dimension of space is experienced directly, it is empirical before being conceptualized and this is the reason why it is often taken for granted in everyday life. What is also

important to underline is that spatial practice ensures the continuity and cohesion of society (1991: 33).

- *representations of space*, or *the conceived*: they deal with space from a more theoretical, scientific point of view, i.e. with discourses on space. It is the space as conceived by urbanists, scientists, planners and even artists. Conceptions of space are often represented and produced by verbal signs. This means that this spatial dimension is not only associated with expert knowledge, but also that expert knowledge requires specific codes and signs (1991: 39). It may be important to focus on the relation of interdependence between space and language. According to Lefebvre, “Every language is located in a space. Every discourse says something about a space (places or sets of places); and every discourse is emitted from a space” (1991: 132). Therefore, language is influenced by a space, i.e. it is space-specific, and produces that space at the same time. This relativity undermines Kant’s conception of an absolute, *a priori* knowledge or truth.
- *representational space*, or *the lived*: it is the third term, the other introduced in and against traditional dualism. It may be said that it includes and merges the two aforementioned dimensions, as it is both the space of users, who live in it and the space of artists seeking to describe it. It embodies complex symbolisms, coded or not and it is often represented by non verbal signs. Representational space overlays physical space and enters a symbolic dimension, it conceives space as completely lived, as real moments of presence. (1991: 40)

In order to grasp these three dimensions of space, it may be useful to use a concrete example such as the body, whose relevance in space will be further explored in the next paragraphs. Body is the means through which individuals experience space directly. Indeed, the relationship between subjects and their own body is necessary to develop a relation between subjects and space. First of all, *social practice* of the body (*the perceived*) deals with its gestures, movement, use of senses. Secondly, representations of the body come from an authority, such as scientific knowledge, anatomy, physiology, the idea of sickness and cure. Finally, lived bodily experience is inextricably associated with culture, and therefore it may be considered culture-specific. Indeed,

Localizations can absolutely not be taken for granted where the lived experience of the body is concerned: under the pressure of morality, it is even possible to achieve the strange result of a body without organs - a body chastised, as it were, to the point of being castrated (Lefebvre 1991: 40).

1.5.2 Foucault ad heterotopias

Another interesting contribution to third space comes from Michel Foucault with his concept of *heterotopias*. As previously mentioned, Foucault argues that the foregrounding of time over space should be rebalanced. Indeed, social beings live and act in time and space, which means that both a historical and geographical context is necessary and relevant. If the tradition had considered geography as subaltern to history, only a framework for the events, they are now both included in Foucault's interdisciplinary approach. However, it is important to underline that his negation of the subalternity of space does not lead to its hegemony. In other words, the shift in focus he is proposing does not aim at stating the supremacy of spatiality over historicity.

For all those who confuse history with the old schemas of evolution, living continuity, organic development, the progress of consciousness or the project of existence, the use of spatial terms seems to have the air of an anti-history. If one started to talk in terms of space that meant one was hostile to time. It meant, as the fools say, that one 'denied history', that one was a 'technocrat'. They didn't understand that to trace the forms of implantation, delimitation and demarcation of objects, the modes of tabulation, the organization of domains meant the throwing into relief of historical ones, needless to say of power. The specializing description of discursive realities gives on to the analysis of related effects of power. (Foucault, 1980: 70-71)

Therefore, human beings, as well as art and knowledge, turn out to be both “time bound” and “space bound”, which means that the *where* is as important as the *when* (Foucault 1980: 150). This interdisciplinary approach aims at contrasting the dual mode of representation suggested by tradition by introducing space in a trialectics formed by knowledge and power. What is also interesting to notice in Foucault’s reflection is that space and its production are related to power, as the three terms involved in that trialectic are in constant relation with each other. If previously, space was instrumental to the production of new knowledge, in Foucault’s term “[space] is not a neutral social praxis, but one that is appropriated to for the specific goals of implementation of power, which makes the art of space craft a power/knowledge in its essence.” (Foucault 1980: 80)

The new approach of space deals also with what Foucault defines *heterotopias*. Heterotopias corresponds to what Soja defines as *Thirdspace* and represents a new spatial thinking which contrasts a binary representation by introducing an Other. In other words, the above mentioned trialectic of reality can be applied to every aspect of society, and therefore is also mirrored in a trialectic conception of space.

But what are heterotopias? Foucault himself in his work *Of Other Spaces* (1967) does not provide a real definition. What he does is trying to compare them with *utopias*, which are basically unreal places, present in every society, bearing a direct or inverted analogy with the real world. Furthermore, every society is believed to have other spaces, which include and at the same time are different from the others.

[...] something like counter-sites, a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted. Places of this kind are outside of all places, even though it may be possible to indicate their location in reality. (Foucault 1986: 24)

One noteworthy example provided by Foucault is the mirror, which is both a symbol of *utopias* and *heterotopias*. On one hand, it is a utopia because it is a placeless place as it transfers things and individuals in a place where they are not, a place hidden under the surface of reality. On the other hand, the mirror is a concrete element, physically

localized which produces a counter place on the position that people occupy, as they see themselves in a place where they are not .At the same time, the gaze coming from the other side of the mirror brings them back to their reality, where they are standing (1986: 24).

As already stated, heterotopias are Foucault's contribution to and declination of the concept of third space, his own way to open that dual mode of representation. The creation of an Other space, a third one has to be considered a reaction to a binary mode of representation, that was no longer adequate. This is particularly evident in Postcolonial Studies, with authors such as Homi K. Bhabha, and Paul Gilroy.

1.5.3 Soja and thirdspace

The trialectics of space suggested by Lefebvre is analysed, discussed and shared by other authors such as Edward W. Soja. In his work *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-And-Imagined Places* (1996), he analyses how the dialectics of reality (and consequently of space) has slowly become trialectic, thanks to the introduction of a third term. Some of the authors he deals with, such as Foucault, Spivak, Hooks and Bhabha, will be also analyzed here for their contribution to the notion of third space.

Soja draws from Lefebvre and feels the same need to focus on spatiality. The insertion of spatiality is due to the new social relevance given to this dimension, so that space can no longer be considered something of limited importance, incidentally linked to reality (Soja, 1989: 71). On the contrary, reality and social relations exist because they are in space. In Soja's words

[...] all social relations become real and concrete, a part of our lived existence, only when they are spatially 'inscribed' — that is concretely represented — in the social production of space. Social reality is not just coincidentally spatial, existing 'in' space, it is presuppositionally and ontologically spatial. There is no unspatialized social reality. There are no spatial social processes. Even in the realm of pure abstraction there is a

pervasive and pertinent, if often hidden, spatial dimension. (Soja 1996: 46)

In order to show the relevance that space has acquired and its involvement in the production and analysis of reality, Soja suggests a schema where spatiality participate together with historicity and sociality in what he calls “the trialectics of being” (1991: 71) (figure 1).



Figure 1 The trialectics of being

The creation of a trialectic conception of reality, with the introduction of spatiality is mirrored in the production of a trialectics of space. As

previously stated, the dual mode of spatial representation coming from tradition involved the real space (*the perceived*) as opposed to the imagined one (*the conceived*).

Considering another set of choices avoids the binary oppositions, a process referred to as “thirding of the spatial imagination” (1991: 11). The perceived and the conceived space (first and second space) are inadequate for an interconnected space, hence the need to include a lived space, which allows to form in this way a “trialectics of Spatiality” (1991: 65) (figure 2).

What is also interesting about Soja’s contribution to the concept of third space is its parallelism with Jorge Luis Borges’ *Aleph*, the title of a collection of stories and a short story itself. In order to understand the importance of this concept for Soja, it may be probably useful to provide a brief overview of what it is in Borges’ universe. The *Aleph* is found by the narrator in a cellar of a friend’s house, a poet, who needed to stay in that house because the Aleph allowed him to write. We are told that an Aleph is “a point which contains all



Figure 2 The trialectics of Spatiality

the other points, a space that contains all spaces” (Borges 1949).⁶ This simultaneity is to be found in the same origin of the name. It is the first letter of the Hebrew, Arabic, as well as Phoenician, Aramaic, and Syriac alphabets, and the number 1 in Hebrew. According to the Judaic Kabbalah, it represents the origin of the universe, the one which includes all numbers. This simultaneity, overlapping and interdependence is the reason behind Soja’s parallelism with thirdspace as “transcending composite of all spaces” (Soja 1996: 62).

1.6 Space in Postcolonial Studies and its connection to Power

“It is surprising how long the problem of space took to emerge as an historico-political one. [...] A whole history remains to be written of spaces which would at the same time be the history of powers (both these terms in the plural)”

(Foucault 1980: 149)

As already mentioned, space has progressively lost its original neutrality as a term and has instead become politically connotated. I would like to continue with Foucault, who in his work *Power/Knowledge* (1980), considers space as a political problem. First of all, he argues that the same fact that spatial metaphors are widely used and common should lead people to grasp their deeper meaning, beyond the geographical one.⁷

Once knowledge can be analysed in terms of region, domain, implantation, displacement, transposition, one is able to capture the process by which knowledge functions as a form of power and disseminates the effects of power. There is an administration of

⁶ <http://web.mit.edu/allanmc/www/borgesaleph.pdf>. Accessed on 8th March 2019.

⁷ The turning point in Foucault’s conception is the acknowledgement of a power/knowledge dimension hidden behind the surface. What has been neglected for so long was that the very production of the space is not neutral; on the contrary, it is the effect of a relation of power, and therefore of a political project (Foucault 1980: 70-71). It is also important to underline that, according to Foucault, relations of power have to be sustained by discursive strategies in order to legitimate themselves. Legitimization is strictly associated with the idea of truth. In other words, Foucault builds a triangle made of truth, power and knowledge.

knowledge, a politics of knowledge, relations of power which pass via knowledge and which, if one tries to transcribe them, lead one to consider forms of domination designated by such notions as field, region and territory (Foucault 1980: 699).

Another important contribution to the redefinition of power relationships with the introduction of the notion of third space has been brought by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. Like Bhabha, she is concerned with going beyond a pretended heterogeneous image of society in order to unveil its real heterogeneity (Spivak 1988: 20). Her analysis deals with the acknowledgement of the differences brought by the subaltern voices, by the margins. Spivak chooses marginality in order to transform it in the center. What she argues is that a process of “reworlding”, of reconfiguration of spaces is needed. Choosing marginality means reversing the point of reference, renegotiating the conception of normality. It involves reconfiguring the same concepts of center and periphery together with the relations of power they involve. In her words, “Spaces can be real and imagined. Spaces can tell stories and unfold histories. Spaces can be interrupted, appropriated, and transformed through artistic and literary practice” (1990: 40-1).

When dealing with third space, I think it is interesting to focus on postcolonialism because of the peculiar importance that this concept acquires within such field of inquiry and theoretical critique. As previously seen, creating another set of possibilities is the attempt to escape a binary representation of the world. In postcolonial studies, third space is also linked to a series of concepts, such as *marginality*, *hybridity*, *in-betweenness*, etc., which will be explored further in this paragraph.

What postcolonial critique points out is that history has always been narrated by the dominants’ point of view, by the ones in control of power. In order to maintain and reproduce that power, their version of history had to be considered as the natural, obvious and legitimate one. In other words, the dominant’s history is only a version of history, and therefore a partial, relative, localized and situated representation of reality. Of course, representing their version as the only possible was instrumental to their maintenance of hegemonic power. In doing this, the ones not in control, i.e. the subaltern, were unaware of the power strategy behind that reproduction of reality so that

it would not be questioned or put under discussion. The two concepts I have just introduced, *hegemony*⁸ and *subalternity*,⁹ are both relevant in Postcolonial Studies and closely associated to one another.

Postcolonial Studies aim at allowing the subaltern to speak, focusing on the other version of history, the one given by marginality. In this respect, it may be said that Postcolonial Studies challenge the idea of margins as well as the idea of a center. It is interesting to underline how terms that describe power relations, such as hegemony and subalternity, are often represented by spatial metaphors, for example center and margins. The idea undermined is the existence of different group and ranks, each of them characterized by well-defined and pure values and beliefs. A part from being probably anachronistic, such a perspective means also ignoring the Others and their

⁸ *Hegemony* (Ashcroft, Griffith and Tiffin 2007: 106) is now generally defined as “domination by consent”. This connotation of the words has been provided by the Italian marxist Antonio Gramsci in the 1930s. His analysis dealt with the reasons behind the success of the ruling class in presenting its own interests as the ones of the collectivity. Hegemony does not use force in its exercise of power; on the contrary, power is achieved through a more subtle way of persuasion, for example the use of media. This way of influencing people’s thought was widely used by imperialism in the process of colonization. Euro-centric values, representations and beliefs were presented as the most valuable ones, as the point of reference. The concept of hegemony includes and involves the concept of subalternity, in the sense that the hegemonic power aims at maintaining the representation of Others as subaltern. Subaltern, as defined by Gramsci, are the ones subject to the hegemony of the ruling class. In Gilroy’s words, the subaltern subject is a voiceless “counterculture of modernity” (1993: 1), the other side of history. This means not only that there is another version, equally legitimate and complex, but also that the one presented by hegemonic power as the truth is only a version, a partial representation of reality. This means that the reproduction of reality proposed by imperialism creates and constructs a binary representation which consisted in the definition of a center, Europe and of margins, Others.

⁹ *Subaltern*, meaning ‘of inferior rank’, is a term used by Antonio Gramsci to refer to those groups who are subject to the hegemony of the ruling classes. Gramsci argues that history of the subaltern groups, even though fragmented, was just as complex and valuable as the history of the dominant classes, although the history of the latter is usually accepted as ‘official’ history. The term has been adapted to postcolonial studies thanks to the Subaltern Studies project, that aimed to reread and promote a discussion of subaltern themes in South Asian Studies. The purpose of this group of historians was to redress the imbalance created in academic work by a tendency to focus on élites and élite culture in South Asian historiography, considering theirs as the official history instead of a version of it.

movement, their contribution to the history of the Western culture. Movements, migrations, and contacts have produced an hybrid, global world.

One of the most relevant representatives of postcolonial critique is Homi K. Bhabha with his concept of *thirdspace*. As already mentioned, in postcolonial critique, the process of adding a third term is always linked to the idea of *hybridity*¹⁰ and *marginality*¹¹. Therefore, Bhabha's concept is the result of that process of that has been here referred to as "thirding-as-othering". These terms should be considered as a mode of representation more than a category, which Bhabha applies to postcolonial analysis. Bhabha's *thirdspace* is given an active role of resisting and of fighting an imposed, unbalanced mode of representation.

These 'in-between' spaces provide the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood -singular or communal - that initiate new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration, and contestation, in the act of defining the idea of society itself. [...] It is in the emergence of the interstices — the overlap and displacement of domains of difference — that the intersubjective and collective in-betweens of nationness,

¹⁰ This concept can be considered as Bhabha's representation of third space, which consists in "going beyond" (Bhabha 1994: 1). What he underlines is that the location of culture, to use the title of his work, consists nowadays in going beyond. "What is theoretically innovative, and politically crucial, is the need to think beyond narratives of original and initial subjectivities and to focus on those moments or processes that are produced in the articulation of cultural differences." (Bhabha 1994: 1-2) Going beyond is therefore to be considered as a necessary condition of contemporary society, a multifaceted reality where binary oppositions are not longer suitable parameters. This process of going beyond is to be applied to every aspect of society, gender, race, culture, time and space and aims at discovering its hybridity (more or less hidden). The result of this thirding process cannot be a pure space, but on the contrary an "in-between" one.

¹¹ *Marginality* is the condition of being on the margins, far from the access of power, i.e. the condition of being subaltern. Even though this condition is imposed by Europe, which poses itself as the center and consequently represents others as peripheral, the same definition of subalternity shows how the concept can be reversed. Indeed, margins can be seen as places of resistance, which aim at replacing the center rather than destroying that dual mode of representation (hooks 1990: 209). In this sense, postcolonial critique may be seen as a process of empowerment of the subaltern ones through the use of their voice.

community interest, crosscultural values are negotiated. (Bhabha 1994: 1-2)

One of the seminal works about how space is rethought by Postcolonial Studies is Paul Gilroy's *The Black Atlantic* (1993). His book rethinks the geography of the world by challenging the late eighteenth-early nineteenth century Western rhetoric. As previously mentioned, the process of "thirding" with the introduction of a third space has undermined the traditional system of binary oppositions in which the society in all its aspects was believed to consist. In this sense, Gilroy's reflection can be seen as a concrete form of that theoretical redefinition of the concept of space.

In particular, he focuses on how in that binarism, black and white cultures have always been considered immutable and mutually exclusive. Whereas, the movement of people has created a contact and an interaction between the two worlds, and consequently an hybridization of both, to use Bhabha's terms. Gilroy relocates the discourse of modernity to the triangular route of the slave trade. The forced deportation of slaves between West Africa, Caribbean or American colonies and the European colonial powers was indeed the first occasion of interaction between groups of different ethnic origins and more simply between blacks and whites. In this sense, the Atlantic is renamed "black". Crossing the Atlantic was the key movement between the two worlds, a movement that Gilroy himself represents with the image of the ship, carrying slaves during the slave trade. Due to the movement of people and the interaction between them, Gilroy argues that, their identity cannot be confined inside national borders. On the contrary, it is a mosaic of their "roots" and "routes". Being in between origins and diaspora, is what Gilroy calls "double consciousness".

Striving to be both European and black requires some specific forms of double consciousness. By saying this I do not mean to suggest that taking on either or both of these unfinished identities necessarily exhausts the subjective resources of any particular individual. However, where racist, nationalist, or ethnically absolutist discourses orchestrate political relationships so that these ideas appear to be mutually exclusive, occupying the space between them or trying to demonstrate their continuity

has been viewed as a provocative and even oppositional act of political insubordination. (Gilroy 1993: 1)

What Gilroy underlines is how the binary representation of reality and of black and white cultures in his case, as two opposite, mutually exclusive entities served a specific political project. The redefinition of power relationships in Postcolonial Studies is strictly connected to a redefinition of space. Indeed, trying to redefine that configuration of space by creating a third one has also been considered as a subversive political act.

Chapter 2 Space in Taiye Selasi's works

As previously mentioned, this work aims at analysing the dimension of space in Taiye Selasi's and Teju Cole's novels. In order to do this, I find it necessary to explore space as a concept starting from the changes it has undergone throughout the centuries. It has been already underlined how the spatial turn has changed the static connotation given to space and rejected its subordination to the dimension of time. Introducing the idea of movement in the connotation of space produced a hybridization, interdependence and overlapping of the concepts of space and time. This idea of movement in space is central in Selasi's novel *Ghana Must Go*, which is the object of this chapter. However, before providing the real analysis, it may be useful to introduce the author together with one of the main concepts she coined, i.e. *Afropolitanism*. This term was first used by Selasi in her essay "Bye-bye Barbar" (2005) and contributed to create what is called *Afropolitanism*. The next paragraphs show how it is difficult to define the multifaceted, heterogeneous group of authors and ideas connected with Afropolitanism. This is showed by the fact that authors which consider themselves Afropolitans come up with diametrically different works. This is the case of Teju Cole, whose *Open City* differs from *Ghana Must Go* even though the two authors are both identified as Afropolitans. As it will be clearer by carrying out the analysis, being Afropolitan is deeply associated with the idea of movement, central to Selasi's work as well as in the analysis of space advanced in this chapter.

The biography of Taiye Selasi is relevant not only as a necessary background for her works. Getting to know her allows to find connections between her story and her novel, even though *Ghana Must Go* is not an autobiographical work. Taiye Selasi is a writer and a photographer. Of Ghanaian father and Nigerian mother, she was born in London in 1979. The elder of twin daughters, her name means first twin in her mother's native Yoruba. After her parents split up when she and her sister were still infants, Taiye and her sister moved to America with their mother and were raised in Boston, Massachusetts. Selasi holds a BA in American Studies from Yale and earned her MPhil in International Relations from Nuffield College, Oxford. Selasi chose the latter after 9/11, a decision she explained saying "I wanted to know why people were flying planes into buildings. My dad lived in Saudi Arabia, and I hated to see that part of the world

demonized”.¹² She has lived in New York, New Delhi, Rome, and is currently living in Lisbon. She can be considered as a transnational figure, even though she prefers not to. As it will be argued, she tends to describe herself as multilocal, a term which will be further analysed in this introduction.

Selasi’s surname has a curious story. In Boston, her mother married an American man and the twins took their stepfather’s last name, Williams. Only years later, the children were able to meet their father and at that point, their last name changed to his, Wosornu. However, after a while Taiye and her sister felt that her surnames had not been fair to their mother, so they decided to include their mother’s surname. She became Tuakli-Wosornu. Where did Selasi come from? While writing *Ghana Must Go* she felt that the hyphenated name did not completely match with her identity. She wanted to balance her Yoruba name with something from her father’s native Ewe. It was him who came up with the perfect surname to put on the cover of her book, *Selasi*, translated as “answered prayer”.¹³ In a way, every time Selasi felt the need to change her name she underwent some sort of reincarnation, she experienced a new beginning. This also shows how her identity cannot be traced easily, and therefore how sometimes it is difficult to label the identity of people. As it will be underlined, this is central to her reflection upon Afropolitans as well as to the redefinition of space she proposes.

At Princeton, she met Toni Morrison, one of her main sources of inspiration, to whom Selasi told that she has always wanted to be a writer. Morrison answered with a deadline: a manuscript from her in one year. On schedule, she wrote the short story *The Sex Lives of African Girls*,¹⁴ published by UK Literary magazine *Granta* in 2011 then shortened *Sex Lives* into the story that officially made her a young writer to watch. It was also included in *Best American Short Stories 2012*.

In 2013 Selasi published her debut novel, *Ghana Must Go*. However, the real inspiration that shaped this book came seven years before, during that one-year deadline

¹² <https://www.elle.com/fashion/personal-style/a13801/taiye-selasi-profile/>. Accessed on 20th March 2019.

¹³ <https://www.elle.com/fashion/personal-style/a13801/taiye-selasi-profile/>. Accessed on 20th March 2019.

¹⁴ <https://granta.com/the-sex-lives-of-african-girls/>. Accessed on 18th March 2019.

her mentor, Toni Morrison, gave her. She states that the structure, the story, and its characters suddenly appeared while she was on a yoga retreat in Sweden.¹⁵ The pages which came out found the approval of Salman Rushdie, which contributed to increase the popularity of the book even before it was published. This eagerly anticipated novel met the expectations: “stunning” and “arresting” are only two of the praises it received. Furthermore, *The Wall Street Journal* and *The Economist* selected *Ghana Must Go* as one of the 10 best books of 2013. In the same year the novel has rocketed Selasi onto the Granta Best Young British Novelists list.¹⁶

After the publication of her first novel, she gave some hundred talks around the world. Her 2015 TED talk, “Don’t Ask Where I’m From; Ask Where I’m a Local” has reached over a million viewers, redefining the way identity is thought of. In particular, she complicates the idea of African identity. Every talk she gave began with an introduction referring to her national identity. Using it as the opening sentence shows how it is still considered one of the first useful information to describe someone, to put him or her in a sort of frame.

Every introduction began, alas, with a lie. Taiye Selasi comes from Ghana and Nigeria, or Taiye Selasi comes from England and the States. Whenever I heard this opening sentence, no matter the country that concluded it, England, America, Ghana, and Nigeria, I thought “But that’s not true”. Yes, I was born in England and grew up in the United States. My mum was born in England and raised in Nigeria, currently living in Ghana. My father was born in Gold Coast, a British colony, raised in Ghana and has lived for over forty years in the kingdom of Saudi Arabia. For this reason, my introducers also called me multinational. But Nike is multinational, I thought. I am a human being.¹⁷

¹⁵<https://channel.louisiana.dk/video/taiye-selasi-colum-mccann-we-are-all-multi-local>. Accessed on 21st March 2019.

¹⁶ <https://enkaire.org/2016/10/02/taiye-selasi-afropolitan/>. Accessed on 18th March 2019.

¹⁷ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LYCKzpXEW6E>. Accessed on 21st March 2019.

This means that also the introduction made here is incomplete and inadequate to describe her as a human being. What she points out is that national identity is invented and should not therefore be considered able to identify people. Therefore, Selasi wonders how can a human being come from a concept. If national identity is only a construction and therefore, inadequate to define people, what could accomplish that task? In a talk with writer Colum McCann¹⁸ in Louisiana, she was inspired by what McCann calls “being a citizen of elsewhere”. From this starting point, Selasi elaborates her concept of multi-local. The focus has shifted from national identity to human experience, which means going from a macro dimension to a micro dimension, i.e. the local. The real challenge is finding a way to be yourself, with your several homes and multiple identities and it is everyone’s right to be recognized as such. Besides being a challenge, according to Selasi it is also what human beings aspire to:

what all human beings are looking for is a way to just be themselves, but what many of us are struggling with is the weight of group identity, religion, nation, state, color, these things which are fabricated [...], imagined but imagined in a way that becomes heavy, becomes real and it’s painfully imposed (Selasi 2013)

My previous introduction should therefore be changed in something like “she feels herself a local in Ghana, Nigeria, New York”. Her multi-local experience builds a chorus of voices, like the one contained in *Ghana Must Go*.

2.1 Taiye Selasi and Afropolitanism

In 2005 Selasi published her seminal essay “Bye-Bye, Babar (or: What is an Afropolitan?)” in *The LIP Magazine*.¹⁹ Here she coined the term *Afropolitan*.²⁰ Selasi

¹⁸ <https://channel.louisiana.dk/video/taiye-selasi-colum-mccann-we-are-all-multi-local>. Accessed on 20th March 2019.

¹⁹ <http://thelip.robertsharp.co.uk/?p=76>. Accessed on 17th March 2019.

²⁰ In his essay “Afropolitanism” (2007), Achille Mbembe contributed substantially to the development of the concept which he defines as “the presence of the elsewhere in the here”. With *Afropolitanism*, Mbembe refers to the interweaving of Black and non-Black people moving in, out and across Africa.

explicitly states that the article describes her own singular experience, and therefore is not aiming at representing everyone, even if many other stories can be similar to hers. Nonetheless, her article paved the way for further elaborations and sparked a movement among young transnational Africans, called Afropolitanism.

With the term Afropolitan, Selasi redefines what it means to be African today, complicating concepts such as identity and home. For the aim of this work, it is important to underline that by complicating such ideas the same idea of space is challenged and complicated. Even though this chapter explores *Ghana Must Go*, I think it is important to focus on this essay for two main reasons. First of all, it has gained a wide resonance among a whole new generation of Africans who feel in some way represented. Secondly, for the importance it has in Selasi's thinking and writing. Her concept redefines space by creating a new one, which can be considered as Bhabha's *third space*, a space "in-between" traditional connotations of space, such as national identities. Therefore, it can be considered an interpretative key for Selasi's following literary production.

Before exploring the innovative concept coined by Selasi, it may be useful to focus on the meaning of the essay, as it already unveils that redefinition. The "Babar" of the title may refer to an elephant, the hero of a series of illustrated story-book by the French writer and illustrator Jean de Brunhoff and his son Laurent. After his mother was shot by hunters, Babar was taken to town and civilized. When he returns to the forest, he is crowned king, marries Celeste and flows off in an air balloon to go on adventures. The books became the centre of a controversy as they were read as an allegory for French colonialism. In this sense, Babar would represent a young native, going to France for education and coming back to his native country to teach civilization, in the way the French considered it. A second more explicit reference Selasi makes is to the widely known film *Coming to America*(1988), with Eddie Murphy starring in the leading role. He plays Prince Akeem, the prince of the fictional African region of Zamunda. When his parents organize an arranged marriage for him, he rebels and travels to New York

Even though both Mbembe and Selasi shared the idea of a transnational Africa, Selasi used the term to name a generation whose parents had left Africa and who had consequently grown up between several Western metropolises, and who had come into contact with multiple languages and cultures.

City with his friend Semmi to look for the perfect wife on his own. In order to do this, they go undercover posing as poor African students and working in a fast food. In the famous scene Selasi refers to, within his palace ground Akeem pets an elephant saying “Oh, hello Babar”. It may be possible to consider Babar as a sort of symbol of the consideration of European towards Africans, as passive and in need of “civilization”. In the light of these considerations, it is easy to realize that Selasi reverses the stereotype by replacing hello with bye-bye. This means what was before has been abandoned and redefined.

In other words, Selasi with “Bye-Bye, Babar” tries to give a different answer to the question “What does it mean to be African?”. In doing this, she complicates both the idea of home and identity. For the new generation of Africans, is it possible (and fair) to talk about a single home and a single identity?

Were you to ask any of these beautiful, brown-skinned people that basic question – ‘where are you from?’ – you’d get no single answer from a single smiling dancer. This one lives in London but was raised in Toronto and born in Accra; that one works in Lagos but grew up in Houston, Texas. ‘Home’ for this lot is many things: where their parents are from; where they go for vacation; where they went to school; where they see old friends; where they live (or live this year). Like so many African young people working and living in cities around the globe, they belong to no single geography, but feel at home in many.²¹

What Selasi underlines is that it is not easy to talk and write about Africa even though the continent has always been fixed in the eyes of Europeans, simplified and, therefore, easy to label. But this new generation of “beautiful, brown-skinned people”²² escapes every attempt to use the traditional definition based on national identity which had never fit them. In other words, a shift has taken place. Not being able to recognize a single home and to find a suitable identity does not necessarily means having none, but having several. Afropolitan represents this need for redefinition, which is the result of a

²¹ <http://thelip.robertsharp.co.uk/?p=76>. Accessed on 17th March 2019.

²² <http://thelip.robertsharp.co.uk/?p=76>. Accessed on 17th March 2019.

new awareness of being a mosaic of multiple homes and multiple identities—none of them able to represent them alone but all necessary. In Selasi's words:

They (read: we) are Afropolitans – the newest generation of African emigrants, coming soon or collected already at a law firm/chem lab/jazz lounge near you. You'll know us by our funny blend of London fashion, New York jargon, African ethics, and academic successes. Some of us are ethnic mixes, e.g. Ghanaian and Canadian, Nigerian and Swiss; others merely cultural mutts: American accent, European affect, African ethos. Most of us are multilingual: in addition to English and a Romantic or two, we understand some indigenous tongue and speak a few urban vernaculars. There is at least one place on the African Continent to which we tie our sense of self: be it a nation-state (Ethiopia), a city (Ibadan), or an auntie's kitchen. Then there's the G8 city or two (or three) that we know like the backs of our hands, and the various institutions that know us for our famed focus. We are Afropolitans: not citizens, but Africans of the world.²³

Years later, in the aforementioned talk held in Louisiana in 2013 with Colum McCann,²⁴ Selasi is asked to explore again her neologism "Afropolitan". The author explains her condition which led to the term using the image of a small white room, which she borrows from McCann.

There are these four doors that lead to my possible identity which are Ghanaian, because my father's from Ghana, Nigerian, my mother is Nigerian and Scottish, American because I spent a lot of time there perfecting this American accent, British because I was born in England and I hold the British passport. And yet, I sort of stood [...] in this small white room of identitylist/ness, because in Ghana nobody believes that I'm Ghanaian, in Nigeria the same, in Britain, if I turn on my British accent it gets a little bit easier but in America absolutely

²³ <http://thelip.robertsharp.co.uk/?p=76>. Accessed on 17th March 2019.

²⁴ <https://channel.louisiana.dk/video/tayie-selasi-colum-mccann-we-are-all-multi-local>. Accessed on 20th March 2019.

not. So, I was always being told you're not this, you're not that, you're not this, you're not that. [...] it occurred to me that perhaps that are other people in this empty chamber with me. What I wanted to do was still consider that many of us who has this inextricable bond to Africa, had also an incredibly hybrid and contemporary identity. And I gave those people, my people, my cousins and me the name Afropolitan. But when I hear this phrase, I realize that I was speaking actually of an international body of people and I just happened to be writing about those from Africa (Selasi 2013).

In sum, Afropolitans are some new multifaceted young Africans, whose identity is a complex puzzle escaping definition. Selasi herself is part of the second generation of African migrants, who have settled in the Western world and who achieved new positions in the artistic domain. The second wave of migrants, to whom Selasi's parents belong, left Africa in the 1960s-70s, forming a New African diaspora.²⁵ The first African diaspora was the first wave of forced African migration that began during the Transatlantic slave trade (16th-19th century). African slaves were captured by Europeans and brought to Europe and then to South and North America.

Their condition of "in-betweeness" is a sum and a negotiation of different identities. They have all travelled, and lived in different countries, in Europe or in the US. At the same time, they are closely tied to Africa, even though in different ways, as each of them has a different personal experience. This is crucial in Selasi's principle of multilocality. Instead of treating Africa as a country, as colonialism did, it has to be considered as a huge, heterogeneous continent made of a multiplicity of experiences. The focus then becomes the individual, the micro dimension, the local. This is the reason why, in *Ghana Must Go*, Selasi writes the story of a family without aiming at

²⁵In order to understand the great importance of this movement of people, the *New York Times* in 2009 reports that more Africans have decided to move to the United States or to Canada in the 1970s-80s-90s than had been forcibly brought during slave trade (Okpewho and Nzegwu 2009). Of course the main difference between the two movements is the voluntary character of the new Diaspora, while the previous one, the result of the slave trade, was a real deportation of people from Africa to America. Furthermore, the new Diaspora deals with a different typology of migrants, highly educated, and/or professionals. Some of them go back to Africa after a while; others decide to stay abroad.

narrating the story of a continent, which would be impossible. In Gilroy's words (1993), every human being, and these young Africans in particular, are a matter of roots and routes. This means that every person is a sum of his origins and of the experiences he/she makes during his/her life. Therefore, the routes taken contribute to the creation of one's identity as little pieces of a mosaic. This produces a redefinition of space itself, as each person may belong to several places at the same time, and therefore belong to a space that overcomes national borders and becomes Atlantic.

Despite the harsh critics Afropolitanism and "Bye-Bye, Babar" have received, I have never felt that Selasi wanted to trace a general rule to apply to everyone everywhere. My feeling seems to be confirmed by her 2016 essay "Afropolitan — No Less and No More",²⁶ where she discusses and evaluates the concept she herself coined ten years before in her previous essay. The author goes through the ideas of her 2005 essay, the criticism it has received and its reception. Has Afropolitanism developed? And if yes, how? First of all, even if Selasi has in some way become a spokesman for a new African generation, she did not intend to put forward a sort of general rule in which everyone would feel included. On the contrary, "Bye-Bye, Babar" was more a personal experience and, as such not valid for everyone. However, its reception shows what Selasi calls "the power of writing" (Selasi 2016). In other words, how a personal, individual experience written down can make different people recognize themselves in it, feel that they belong.

In 2005, I wrote an essay describing a particular experience. No less and no more. No less in that I believed then and believe now that much of the power of writing—fiction or non—resides in the transformative power of description. To hear one's experience described in words can fundamentally change the way one sees oneself: where one once felt entirely alone she now feels utterly human. [...] "Bye-Bye, Babar" said to a great many people (myself foremost), "You are not isolated." To those for whom the description rings true the essay says, "You belong." It says no less than this—and no more.

²⁶ <https://enkare.org/2016/10/02/taiye-selasi-afropolitan/>. Accessed on 18^h March 2019.

The revolutionary power of these ideas lies in this sense of belonging young Africans have often been deprived of. The turning point is considering human beings as a mosaic of identities and homes in the plural, without trying to give people a label. In other words, without trying to confine them inside the space defined by national borders. Besides the redefinition of the concepts of home and identity, Afropolitan has strongly contributed to the creation of a new, hybrid, and more complicated idea of space. This means that identity is more fluid than fixed; the fluidity comes together with the high level of mobility of today's generation of Africans. As Selasi puts it, "Bye-Bye, Babar" "is no more than a consideration of a singular reality that has done no less than create space for those who call it their own. To create space. This is why I write anything at all and why I wrote "Bye-Bye, Babar".²⁷

2.2 Afropolitanism in *Ghana Must Go*

The redefinition of space suggested by the term Afropolitan is crucial to *Ghana Must Go*. The characters of Selasi's novel are Afropolitans, they have roots in a continent and their routes brought them to another. In neither of them though, they are able to feel a sense of belonging. That condition of "in-betweeness" is felt negatively and is translated as sense of inferiority and of being left out. Selasi's neologism complicates both the idea of identity and home. Identity is no longer defined by the country of provenience. Selasi herself has to face the fact that she did not have one. As a consequence, home is also difficult to be defined.

Furthermore, complicating the aforementioned concepts means complicating the idea of return/coming back as well. Is there a home? Or are there several? And is it possible to come back somewhere? It should be underlined that coming back home involves not only the spatial dimension but also the temporal one. In some way, it is the attempt at finding not only a certain place, but also a certain time, period of life. However, if the movement in the spatial dimension can still be done, the time travel is impossible. In Selasi's words

²⁷ <https://enkare.org/2016/10/02/taiye-selasi-afropolitan/>. Accessed on 18th March 2018.

In my own thinking about home I started to wonder how anybody goes back to anywhere. We're often faced with this question: do you intend to go back? The problem with this question as he [Mohsin Hamid, Pakistani author] helped me understand is that nobody can go back, at least because that place that you loved is not that place anymore and the you that loved has become somebody else. (Selasi 2013)

When thinking about it, it is absurd to hope to go back in time as time has gone by both for the place and for the emigrant. It is an attempt bound to fail. This interrelation of time and space associated with the idea of going back home is relevant in *Ghana Must Go*. All of the characters can be considered Afropolitans, even though the novel is not autobiographical.²⁸ The Sais, the protagonists of the novel, are not a poor, needy African family, the one that may be expected by literary tradition. The image of Africans Selasi draws in this book is new and unexpected. She relates the story of educated, wealthy people, active and aware of their diversity; a representation considered by many as too elitarian.

“Kweku dies barefoot on a sunrise before sunrise, his slippers by the doorway to the bedroom like dogs” (Selasi 2013: 3). This is how the novel begins. This event is probably the most striking and unexpected to begin a novel with but, I think, it strongly contributes to make it so powerful. So, as the novel opens, Kweku Sai, a Ghanaian surgeon who emigrated to Boston and then returned to Ghana, is dying in the garden of his house. He is dying of a heart attack, which is rendered slowly and leaves him the time to think about beauty, fragility, about his four children and his first wife Folasadé,

²⁸Besides the Afropolitan issue, the novel contains several recognizable elements of Selasi's life. The name of one of the twins, Taiwo, is the masculine correspondent for Taiye, meaning first-born twin. The African countries mentioned, Ghana and Nigeria, reflect the origins of Selasi's parents; cities both in Africa and in America (Accra, Lagos, Boston), are some of the cities she feels local in. Finally, the jobs of characters: Kweku Sai is a surgeon as Selasi's father is, she is an artist and a pianist like Kehinde. All these hints may lead readers to think that the author has put parts of herself here and there, which is undoubtedly true even though not intentional. As she states, she did not want her work to be autobiographical.

parts of a family he has abandoned many years before. In the meantime, his second wife Ama is still sleeping nearby. Across the ocean the four now grown-up children, Olu, Taiwo and Kehinde, and Sadie, learn that Kweku has just died. They all decide to leave the US to attend their father's funeral in Ghana even though there had been no relationship with him since when he left them. The reunion of the four and Fola obliges them to face what has been left unsaid for so long. Pain, inadequacy, resentment, regrets, and anger are to come through in order to find a way to be a family again.

Ghana Must Go is therefore the story of the Sai family, whose members are scattered all over the world when readers meet them. It is a story of how a family pulls apart and comes together by an unpredictable event, the death of the father Kweku Sai. This event becomes a sort of magnet for the members of the family, and an opportunity for a new beginning both as a family and as individuals. All the characters move in space and create, with their routes, a new, Atlantic space.

Kweku and Fola leave Africa looking for a better life across the ocean. As often happens with migrants, success is central to their lives as it was the engine that pushed them to move and settle in America. Both of them are educated, and have reached a certain social status. In America however, Kweku in particular seems not able to feel at home, as his leaving shows. Going back to Africa does not mean that he is able to find a home in Ghana though; on the contrary, he remains "a stranger in Accra as in Boston. Alone." (2013: 248) His (and their) space is not confined within national borders; it is the result of their lives in Accra and in Boston. The only home they will be able to find in the end is in the coming together of the family, whose space is made of the characters themselves and the relations between them.

The four children, as a second generation of migrants, were born and have always lived in the US. Their life fits Selasi's definition of Afropolitans. Nonetheless, they do not seem able to live this new space positively. Their skin color links them with a continent, Africa, to which they do not belong but which causes episodes of racism, a sense of inferiority and the inability to feel that they belong somewhere. Their condition is a sort of limbo, also from an economical point of view, and is compared by Kehinde to a color, gray, a shade more than a color itself.

Why do we live here, he wondered, suddenly angry, *in grayness*, like shadows, like things made of ash, with their frail dreams of wealth overwhelmed by faint dread that the whole thing might one day just up and collapse? Was there something about them that kept them in a limbo despite their intelligence and all their hard work? [...] He thought of his classmates, the rich ones in Brookline, the poor ones in Metco, and he in between, somehow stuck in the middle with none of the comforts of in-group belonging, ashamed and afraid. (2103: 221)

The last sentence explicitly states how the same members of the family, even the four children, perceive their diversity, their inability to belong, which makes it difficult to find a place to call home. Their condition as Afropolitans is not lived as a richness, but as uncertainty, confusion. Their uneasiness about their multifaceted identity is quite the reverse of the definition of Afropolitan in Selasi's "Bye-Bye, Babar". They experience the new redefined space but they are not able to elaborate it. Therefore, it becomes clear that space as a dimension acquires different connotations that do not allow us to identify it as a precise point on a map. On the contrary, it is created by characters themselves and by their network of routes across the Atlantic.

2.3 Space as Time: the character of Kweku Sai

In chapter 1, it has been referred to the changes that space as a concept has undergone during the centuries. The first, and most radical is the *spatial turn* of early twentieth century (Soja 2008), when space was given a greater relevance. The traditional connotation of space as stasis and time as sequence of events lead to the predominance of time over space. This schema was challenged by the introduction of the notion of movement (before featured to time only), in the connotation of space. Therefore, the two dimensions turned out to be closely associated, and interdependent.²⁹

²⁹ As previously underlined, some of the major contributors in showing this interconnection was Bakhtin's term *chronotopos* together with Foucault's *heterotopias*.

Movement is at the very heart of Selasi's *Ghana Must Go*. First of all, right from the very first pages, it is clear that the Sai family is scattered across the world, and across the Atlantic in particular. The Atlantic as a space is certainly a concrete, geographical element, but it acquires more and more a metaphorical meaning. To borrow Gilroy's terms (1993), which fit perfectly the analysis of this novel, the Atlantic is seen as an entanglement of "routes" that lead the characters away from their "roots", from Ghana to the US. This kind of journey is typical of "migrant novels", where characters leave their country often looking for better opportunities, sworn out their roots and put them down somewhere else. However, "migrant novels" often involve a dream-like image of home, and a deep longing for coming back. Crossing the Atlantic in the other direction, i.e. coming back, is always perceived by characters themselves as an attempt to go back in time, to a previous self. The interdependence of space and time is evident in this movement in space that is considered as a movement back in time.

Kweku's crossing the Atlantic to go back to Ghana is a concrete movement in space, perceived also as a movement back in time. His attempt may sound strange if considering that he has accomplished his American dream of professional success. However, if on one side, America has been the country of opportunity, and success for Kweku, on the other, it has also deceived him. He was wrongfully fired after the death of a rich woman, whose donations made up a huge part of the hospital income. After this episode, he decides to leave the US and return to Ghana. His attempt is not only to escape a country which has hurt him; it may also be considered as an attempt to go back to his previous self, to whom he was before being a migrant, erasing what has happened in between. However, what has happened in between has changed him. In Bhabha's words (1994), Kweku has become a hybrid, occupies an in-between space, and is shaped by all his past experiences that cannot be erased by a movement in space. He has been changed by his "routes" and therefore, it is impossible to go back to his "roots". If the movement in space is certainly possible, going back in time is not. Kweku has become a stranger to his native Ghana exactly as he was in Boston. His being "other" in both cities is well expressed by his elder son Olu: "a stranger in Accra as in Boston" (2013: 248).

The failure of Kweku's journey in time is also caused by the fact that the city, Accra, and the country have changed as he has. When going back, Kweku is probably expecting to find the country he has left many years before. However, that country does not exist anymore. Space as a dimension does not remain fixed while time goes by. On the contrary, the passing of time causes the evolution of space, which proves how the two dimensions are mixed. This means that, it is inevitable that attempt to go back in time, such as Kweku's, are doomed to fail.

Kweku's death is rendered slowly and leaves him the time to think about beauty, fragility, about his four children and his first wife Folasadé, parts of a family he has abandoned many years before. It is the first event of the book and the first episode where the entanglement between space and time is evident. Indeed, Kweku is stuck in a definite point in the world, and while he is dying glimpses of his past are revealed through flashbacks, with which his life can be given a chronological order. These insights on his past are temporal windows that help readers understand what happened before his being there. The same narrative technique to produce space and time is used with all the characters. Across the ocean the four now grown-up children, Olu, Taiwo and Kehinde, and Sadie, learn that Kweku has just died. When readers meet the family, all the members are far from each other, and seem to have lost their relationship. The focus switches from one characters to another, from one city to another.

The first example of Selasi's technique is when the four children and Fola receive news of Kweku's death. The same moment is shown from different points of view, in a multifocal perspective. The narrative multifocality is the key to the understanding of the story, as it reflects the multilocality of the Sais. It looks as if different cameras shoot the same moment in time in different places. The characters are not previously introduced, but when the camera focuses on each of them, in their place, temporal parenthesis open on their past. The different scenes juxtaposed in the novel belong both to a different time and a different space. Often, the shift between them does not mirror a physical movement of the characters, but follow a mental connection, a memory. For example, while dying, Kweku feels something he has felt when Sadie was born, "The last time he felt this [overwhelmed] was with Sadie" (2913: 11). This thought leads to that moment

in his past and then to her present place and life, when she hears the news of her father's death.

Due to these connections in space and time, it is not easy to understand the strategy Selasi used to produce space. Using Ryan (2009) terminology, is it a "tour strategy", with the space being described as the characters move, or a "map view", where the description is provided from above, from an omniscient eye? Maybe both at once. On one hand, it can be considered a "tour strategy" as readers follow the movement of a camera, often provided by mental connections between characters. Obviously, the movement in space is metaphorical, as it is not given by the physical movement of characters but by the movement of their thoughts. However, in the last part of the novel, when the family joins for Kweku's funeral, readers follow their real journey back to Ghana, so the "tour strategy" is applied in its literal sense. The first part of the novel could also be seen as a "map view", as if the story was seen from above. In this sense, the different scenes become points in a map, even though it is not told by an omniscient narrator. On the contrary, Selasi's writing is multifocal in the sense that the story is told by a chorus of voices, in different times and space. It is the dynamic narration itself which provides a dynamic conception of space.

It may be said that the narrative technique of *Ghana Must Go* puts together a horizontal, and a vertical dimension at once. The first one deals with space, as the focus shifts from one place to another, from one character to another establishing a connection between different points in the world. In doing this, the story expands in a vertical dimension, i.e. time. In fact, as it shifts in space among the different members of the Sai family, it opens temporal insights on their past. In Johnson's words (2009), it may be said that Selasi's space is produced through *portals*, allowing the characters to enter or exit and observe, even though metaphorical. *Portals* are typically represented by doorway or windows which allows characters to enter, exit or observe. Even though in the novel there are no concrete doors or windows, a given moment in present time and space leads somewhere, in a past moment else of the characters' life. Each glimpse on their previous life looks like a piece of a mosaic that help reconstruct the chronological story, and to understand the reason behind their position in space.

2.4 Space, place and home

It has already been mentioned how the difference between “space” and “place” as concepts may be debatable, and may change according to different authors. However, a distinction based on the different degrees of abstractness is widely accepted. Space is conceived as an abstract dimension, while place is concrete, the point that may be found in a map. For this reason, it is possible to consider place as the concrete realization of space. If space is often used symbolically, place is only used for its literal meaning. Space turns into place when more details are introduced, and when a higher degree of familiarity is achieved. Therefore, home can be interpreted as the highest form of place, “an intimate experience of place” (Tuan 1977: 133).

Ghana Must Go deals with the dimension of space in a peculiar way in the sense that the story overcomes national borders and crosses the Atlantic. Countries as well as cities mentioned. For example, Ghana is referred to more than once together with his capital, Accra. On the contrary, Nigeria is not there as a country but Lagos as a city is. As far as the United States is concerned, the two cities relevant for the book are Boston, where Kweku and Fola moved and where the children grew up, and New York, where some of them live.

I argue that space in *Ghana Must Go* does not become place, if we consider a positive connotation of the term. Place is the result of the attribution of meaning which provides a concrete form to the abstractness of space. A peculiar example of place is “home”, a term which refers to feelings and human relationships more than to a country, a city or a building. Therefore, it may be easy to give place a positive connotation only. However, it is important to underline that a detailed, punctual knowledge of a place, even of “home” itself is not forcefully positive: it could also be hostile, a place where you do not belong. Referring to a positive definition of place, it is possible to recognize two elements in the novel that do not fit in. First of all, it is not possible to identify the space presented as a point in a map, as it is a space created by the relations between characters. These connections link people scattered through both side of the Atlantic. For this reason, if looking for a definition of the spatial dimension in *Ghana Must Go*, it may be considered as “Atlantic”. Secondly, when dealing with the four siblings, there is hardly no degree of familiarity, of affection with the afore mentioned countries, and

cities. Ghana and Accra were Kweku's place (here "place" does fit in as he was familiar with them) but not the children's. Lagos was Uncle Femi's city, where Taiwo and Kehinde went but whose memory is painful.³⁰ Boston is where the children grew up, it should be familiar but somehow they do not belong completely. In the same way, New York is there without being described, known, and recognized as "home".

That deep, affective experience of place Tuan has suggested (1977) is not there physically as long as the family is scattered and divided. The only sense of belonging is felt after they are able to talk, to solve open questions, and to reconnect as a family. Therefore, I claim that the only place that can be found in the novel is more an affective, symbolical than a physical one, i.e. the family. It is true that Ghana, where they met, is a physical country, whose value however lies more in its being Kweku's place. The children's going back is not a journey back to Ghana, but a journey back to their father, and to where they can be whole. Their inability to find a place, and eventually call it "home", to belong somewhere may be due to the lack of familiar relations that, once restored, are able to stand for "home".

It is important to notice how the countries, and the cities mentioned are always associated with different colors, that can be seen as the one of the few elements of familiarity of characters. Lawson (2000) provides a theoretical background on colors, and on how they are perceived by the human eye in space. According to him, warm (or advancing) colors such as red and yellow appear more dominant than cool (or receding) ones. This means that also in the description of space, warm colors tend to be foregrounded and cool colors are often backgrounded, for example blue skies. The colors used in *Ghana Must Go* are both warm and cold, depending both on the different cities or countries and also on the character's perspective.

Ghana for example is associated with the color green, with the idea of luxury, "lush Ghana, soft Ghana, verdant Ghana [...]" (Selasi 2013: 11). This positive association is made by Kweku, who was born in Ghana, has lived there, and has gone back to his ideal country. On the contrary, the four children have a negative impression of Accra, the capital of Ghana. When they arrive at the airport, Kehinde compares the city to "A

³⁰ As children, the twins were sent to their wealthy Uncle Femi in Lagos. Here, they are forced to have a sexual intercourse, that is one of the untold events that will be revealed towards the end of the novel.

suburb. With dust”, and the color he foregrounds is beige, of buildings, “the same faded beige as the air and the foliage, [...]” (2013: 208). The same adjective “dusty” is also used when referring to Western picture of Africa, to the prejudices against it (2013: 305). Lagos is also represented by the color gray, so it is in the twins’ eyes after arriving at Uncle Femi’s. “Lagos, through the window, was not as he’d pictures, 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” (Cole 2013: 167). After many years, Taiwo remembers the grayness in seeing Lagos for the first time. This gray and dirty picture of the city is strictly connected to the sexual intercourse the twins are forced to have. As far as Boston is concerned, all the memories of the city have to do with cold and snow; sometimes remembering Boston was a trick to try to feel the cold and lessen the pressure of the humidity of Africa. It is associated with an element, snow, more than with the color white itself: “telling stories about Boston, most involving the snow, as if by remembering the cold they may actually *feel* it” (2013: 277). However, the city is also remembered as a contrast between black and white. While staring at Ling sleeping, Olu compares the contrast between her black hair and the white pillow to Boston: “The black of the hair on the white of the pillow reminds him of Sunday in Boston, the snow, of the dark and the drumbeat, the slick black on cotton the only familiar among so much strange.” (2013: 301)

Therefore, colors are linked to the physical appearance of countries and cities but acquire a symbolical meaning as well. Grayness in particular is also associated to the condition of “in-betweeness” of the Sai family, to the members’ inability to belong somewhere. It may be Bhabha’s *third space*, created by the family’s *hybridity*.

The Sais, and in particular the children’s difficulty to belong, is caused by their skin color(brown). In America, this color links them to another continent, Africa, which however, the children do not know. Brown in the novel can also be the symbol of a perceived sense of aesthetic inferiority. This is particularly true for Sadie, whose white best friend Philae becomes her model, her ideal of beauty. In a way, she is constantly comparing to a standard, to a hegemonic idea of beauty, which is white.

It is relevant to underline how the Atlantic is present in the novel, so that it could be added to the list above. What could be difficult to define is how it is present, literally or

metaphorically. It is undoubtedly true that it is a concrete, natural element dividing continents, Africa and America in this case. However, the Atlantic of *Ghana Must Go* fits the redefinition of space proposed by Gilroy's *Black Atlantic* (1993). The ocean is a network of "routes", created by the characters' movements in both directions, from Africa to America, and back. Therefore, the Atlantic created is made by the connections, physical, and mental among the family scattered across the world. However, I think that the ocean plays an ambivalent role as a space. Indeed, it could be seen also as void, as absence, as it is the space that divides and that represents somehow their being scattered throughout the world. As it will be argued later in this chapter, absence in the novel is as strong as presence, as it is evident in this passage in which Fola perceives the absence of her children. The lack of their voices and heartbeats becomes a sound itself.

when she paused in the hall in between the two bedrooms and noticed the silence. And that she was alone. *Gone, they were gone*, all the voices, the bodies, one lover, four children, their heartbeats, the hum, heat and motion and murmur, the rush and the babble, a river gone dry while she'd wept. She remained. She stood there, a remnant, as conspicuously alone as a thing left behind on a beach in the night, suddenly aware of the silence, its newness and strangeness, the *sound* of her solitude, clear, absolute. (2013: 226)

2.5 Space as micro and macro

Ghana Must Go creates a space that overcomes national borders, and could be defined as Atlantic. However, besides this macro dimension of space, the novel also deals with a micro dimension of space, mainly represented by the human body. As already argued in chapter one, the body is the first and main instrument through which we experience space (Casey 1997). This is shown by the fact that spatial language is based on the body's position and the position of other things compared to the body. Therefore, the

perception of one's own body is necessary to acquire a perception and knowledge of space.

It is interesting to underline how the macro space of *Ghana Must Go*, which I have called Atlantic, is mirrored in a micro space, the human body. In other words, the body becomes a sort of micro map of the novel. This means that the presence of characters dislocated in the world is felt in different parts of the body by some of the characters, specifically, the parents. Using Lawson's words (2000), this is both sensation, as it is felt through the five senses, and perception, as there is rational elaboration of what is sensed. The two main examples are Kweku and Fola, who apart from being separated since many years, share the same perception of their family.

Kweku's death is an example of dilated time, which means that an event that lasts a few minutes, takes many pages to be narrated. Indeed, through the flashbacks that he has while dying, his whole life can be reconstructed. It may be curious to think that he physically perceives the family he has decided to abandon years before.

Never smoked. His heart is strong. But it isn't, and he knows it.
It is broken in four places. Just the cracks in the beginning, left
untreated now for years. His mother in Kokrobité, Olu in
Boston, Kofi in Jamestown, Folasadé all over. That woman, all
over him, deep in the fascia, in the muscle, in the tissue, in the
matter, in the blood. He is dying of a broken heart. He cannot
help but laugh at this. Or try to. (Selasi 2013: 90)

Besides the apparently absurdity of such a death for a surgeon, as the laugh shows, there seems to be a wound that has never healed and that has broken his heart into pieces. In this way, it mirrors the different geographical collocations of characters and becomes a micro reflection of the macro space of the novel. From a symbolical point of view, the heart can be considered as the space of the family, where relationships and connection are still alive despite the dislocation of the members.

The same could be said of Fola, who is the protagonist of a stunning passage, where she senses and perceives the presence and even the feelings of her children inside her own body. A night when she is overwhelmed by fear without however knowing why she

touches her own stomach, where each part is associated with one of the four children. In this way, she tries to understand what is wrong with them.

She touches her stomach in the four different places, the quadrants of her torso between waist and chest: first the upper right (Olu) beneath her right breast, then the lower right (Taiwo) where she has the small scar, then the lower left (Kehinde) adjacent to Taiwo, then the upper left (Sadie), the baby, her heart. Stopping briefly at each to observe the sensation, the movement or stillness beneath the one palm. Sensing. (2013: 99)

Exactly as Kweku's heart, Fola's stomach becomes an instrument and a sign that allows her to perceive that something bad is happening. "Sensing" refers to a bodily, sensorial experience: Fola's body becomes a micro map of the world where each part is linked to a different character.

Olu— all quiet. The sadness as usual, as soft and persistent as the sound of a fan. Taiwo— the tension. Light tugging sensation. But no sense of danger, no cause for alarm. Kehinde— the absence, the echoing absence made bearable by the certainty that *if*, she would know [...] Last, Sadie— fluttering, butterflies, a new thing this restlessness, this looking for something, not finding it.

Fine.

Sadness, tension, absence, angst— but *fine*, as she birthed them, alive if not well, in the world, fish in water, in the condition she delivered them (breathing and struggling) and this is enough. (2013: 99)

In her exploration, her stomach becomes a micro space of the world across which her four children are scattered. She finds out they are all fine, but the strange sensation persists as someone is missing. There is a little piece of this space, the one reserved to Kweku, that is felt more as an "emptiness" than as a presence.

upper left.

There it is.

The movement she was feeling for.

Left upper quadrant, in the vicinity of Sadie but closer to the heart. not a tugging or a tightening or a throbbing of dread but an echo, an emptiness, an emptying out. A familiar sensation. Not the one she was feeling for, fearful of (auguring harm done the child) but remembered, unmistakable, from four decades prior, a memory she forgot she still has. (2013: 102)

This is one of the aforementioned cases in the novel, where absence is so pregnant to become presence. In other words, an empty space is a space itself, and it is heavily sensed exactly as a space full of presence is.

However, in *Ghana Must Go* there is a third character concerned with a bodily perception of space. After arriving in Ghana for her father's funeral, Said, the youngest of the four children, is the protagonist of an episode similar to Fola's one. One morning, she is waken by a sense of emptiness: "feeling something is missing, Sadie opens her eyes. Fola is missing, though her scent lies there tightly. The butterflies, too, have abandoned her chest. She feels with some wonder and a touch of suspicion the void in her middle, her shirt damp with sweat" (2013: 310).

Sadie is characterized by a strong sense of inferiority and of not belonging. This is felt both with respect to her best friend, when she compares to a standard idea of (white) beauty, and with regards to her family, where she feels excluded by and different from her siblings. Her uneasiness seems to be resolved when, at Kweku's funeral in Ghana, she suddenly begins to dance without even knowing how to. Her dance is a revolutionary act given the fact that she had always considered her body ugly, not endowed with any gift. Furthermore, her moving in space seems to be connected to self-consciousness. As Casey (1997) underlines, the perception of one's own body is necessary to the perception of space. Body and space are closely associated and interdependent so that while starting moving, Sadie becomes aware of her own body

and begins to consider it worthy. From a more symbolical point of view, it looks as if Sadie, by dancing and making peace with her body, is finally able to find her place in the world, the way to be herself together with the feeling of belonging somewhere.

2.6 Space and language

As Ryan points out (2009), spatial language is common in literature and more or less hidden in everyday conversations as well. This is due to the fact that people experience space through their body, and refer to that universal experience when communicating with others. However, it should be remembered how space is often used metaphorically, which is also the case with this novel. In *Ghana Must Go* in particular, the language mirrors the peculiar space created by Selasi. It has already been said that it can be considered as an Atlantic space, resulting from the relationships and connections of characters. The ocean is crossed in both directions by a number of routes, concretely given by the movement of people, as well as symbolical, created by mental connections.

An example of spatial language is present in the title of the novel, where space is mentioned in the form of a precise country, Ghana. The title unveils a metaphorical connotation, strictly connected with the idea of movement. *Ghana Must Go*³¹ has a double meaning. On one hand, it was a Nigerian slogan directed at incoming Ghanians during political unrest in 1983. In 1969 Ghana enforced the Aliens Compliance Order, in which immigrants, most of them Nigerians, were forcefully expelled from the country. Secondly, it refers to the red-and-blue checked plastic bags, and to large boxes used by refugees to carry their luggage. The title is therefore a sort of metaphor for mobility, movement like the one that involves the members of the Sai family. Throughout the novel, Ghana is referred to as a real country, Kweku's native country in Africa, where he goes back, and where the four children go after his death. However, from a symbolical point of view, it is the place where the family rejoins and where their relationship is restored. I do not think this could have happened somewhere else, as it

³¹ This reference is totally ignored in the Italian translation, *La bellezza delle cose fragili* (literally: The beauty of fragile things). I personally find it a wonderful choice, careful of the novel. Indeed, Kweku's very last reflection before dying presents a repetition of the words "beauty", "fragility", and "things".

was the only place they could be together again, given that Kweku died and his funeral is held there.

The structure of the novel makes explicit reference to movement in space. Indeed, the novel is divided into three parts, named with a verb of movement at different tenses: “Gone”, “Going”, and “Go”. “Gone” begins with Kweku’s death, as suggested by the verb tense, and focuses on Kweku and his life through flashbacks. The continuous form of “Going” refers to the journey from America to Ghana of the four children to attend their father’s funeral. Finally, “Go” in the infinitive form is the moment where suspended issues are resumed and resolved. One of the amazing aspects of *Ghana Must Go* is that a funeral, the loss of someone is what bring the family together again. Therefore, besides a real movement from one point to another across the Atlantic, the novel narrates how the Sais move from being separated entities to being a unity again.

“Coming back” is an important and recurrent linguistic and thematic element in the whole novel, even though there are two episodes where it is more evident. First of all, after being wrongfully fired by the hospital in Boston, Kweku goes back to Ghana in his attempt to go back in time. His second time crossing the Atlantic breaks the family, which falls into single pieces that seem no longer able to be together. At the same time, however, *Ghana Must Go* is also the story of a family that comes back together, both physically and symbolically. From a concrete point of view, Kweku’s funeral is the first time after many years when all the Sais are in the same city and country at the same time. Symbolically speaking, their affective relationship is finally restored and this allow them to be a family even if living dislocated. “Going back” is a concept closely associated to *where*. I think that the *where* in this novel can be family, as a symbolical place made by the relationship and the mental connection between them.

Strictly associated with “coming back” is the concept of “leaving”, at the very heart of immigrant novels and of *Ghana Must Go* as well. The verb “to leave” appears several times in different forms, such as “left”, “leaving”, “leave”. It may be said that the space created by Selasi is the result of leaving. It is a process that designs routes that may separate or link. One of the main example of its relevance both from a linguistic and a semantic point of view is the refrain *Why did I ever leave you?* (2013: 63, 314) that appears three times throughout the novel. The repetition of this lyric create is a sort of

file rouge that links Kweku and Fola in different times and spaces. It may be said that this refrain contains the space (and time) of the story. Indeed, it is first mentioned by Kweku while he is dying at the beginning of the book and answered in the end in his imaginary dialogue with Fola:

Why did I ever leave you?

“I also left you.” She breathes in the smell of forgotten familiar. She presses the soles to her dampening cheeks. “We did what we knew. It was what we knew. Leaving.”

Was it?

“We were immigrants. Immigrants leave.”

[...] *Couldn't we have learned? Not to leave?*

“I don't know.” (2013: 314-315)

This reflection on leaving can be taken as a representation for the whole novel. *Ghana Must Go* presents a space created by leaving and departures, made of different point linked to each other by a network of connections. What emerges from this passage is that leaving was somehow necessary for them, and necessary for coming back. Therefore, it may be said that language strongly contributes to the production of space in Selasi's novel. First of all, there is a wide use of spatial language, in particular related to people's movement in space. Furthermore, it creates connections, relations between different moments and characters.

Ghana Must Go is characterized by a deep network of connections, be them psychological (thoughts, memories) or physical (movement of characters in space). Space in writing is therefore produced through the use of language, in particular through the repetition of elements. A noteworthy example in the novel are the “slippers”, a detail that could seem insignificant. On the contrary, I argue that slippers can be considered a sort of file rouge across the space of the novel and they are a reminiscent of the importance the micro-level has in Selasi's work. “Slippers” appear in the very first line as well as in the very last. In this way, the space created by this element looks like a

circle, but the starting point of the novel does not coincide with the final one. “Slippers” may be considered a symbol of the journey of the Sais from dislocation to unity.

The novel opens as follows: “Kweku dies barefoot on a Sunday before sunrise, his slippers by the doorway to the bedroom like dogs.” (2013: 3) The fact that an apparently insignificant detail is recorded shows that it carries a profound meaning in the novel. While dying, Kweku himself wonders why he is barefoot.

Only now does he notice that he’s not wearing slippers, with the sting of the cool on his bare-bottomed feet. How long has it been since he’s gone outside barefoot, gone *anywhere* barefoot, felt wet on his feet? Can’t recall. (Decades prior, in the darkness before daybreak with the ocean beside, moon above, long ago.) He jerks himself back as if jumping off coals, fully conscious. Thinks: where are my slippers? (2013: 37)

His question shows the strangeness of his condition. If slippers are strictly connected with the concept of home, the lack of them may mean that Kweku has not found a real home after abandoning his previous family. If considering space from a symbolical point of view, slippers are the visible sign of the presence and the belonging of someone somewhere.

It is curious and unexpected how his children as well focus on this detail after hearing about their father’s death. This is why Taiwo for, example, for many years after Kweku’s death, focuses on the fact that he was barefoot.

For many years after, when Taiwo thinks of her father, she’ll picture him here in the garden like this, with his feet in the grass and the dew on his feet, and she’ll ask herself: *where were his slippers?* It is the least of all questions unasked and unanswered, the least of what’s wrong with the picture—man down, perhaps poisoned by an illiterate (Olu’s secret belief) or just dead in the tradition of people who just die (Mom’s) or punished by God for his various sins (Sadie’s) or exhausted by them (Kehinde’s)—but Taiwo will ask. *Where were his slippers?* (2013: 37)

This extract shows how every character seems to have his/her own theory on the reasons behind Kweku's death. The absurdity of such a death is mirrored in the strangeness of Taiwo's wondering about his slippers. It is interesting to notice how the same question forms in Kehinde's mind when thinking about his father. As previously said, the psychological connections between characters, and between the twins in particular, establish a link between the different points of the Atlantic space of the novel. Slippers are also an element that belong to their memories. It looks as if, in their attempt to forgot their life with their father, "slippers" remain as a remnant in their mind.

Time passed and this wall grew weak.

Until, without warning, a thought. Where were his slippers?
And again a week later. The crack in the wall. It was the one thing they forgot to erase from their stories, the disease-carrying mosquito on the evacuation plane: not a moment or a memory, a remembered detail in an anecdote, but a detail in every anecdote, omnipresent, the ground. (2013: 39)

While following the file rouge traced by this element throughout the novel, readers are lead to the vary last scene, the profound meaning of slippers can be grasped completely. In *Ghana Must Go* they are the symbol of Kweku's presence in space as well as the symbol of home itself. Indeed, after the funeral, Ama, Kweku's second wife, brings Kweku's slippers back to Fola. "She picks up his slippers and brings them inside" (2013: 318). This movement from outside to inside looks like a return home, where the Sai family has come together and has probably learnt how to be whole. For this reason, I argue that "slippers" symbolize their coming together as a family, their attempt to be "home". In this sense, the whole novel can be seen as a process to find a place, where they belong and to feel what Tuan (1997) called an "intimate experience of place."

Chapter 3: Space in Teju Cole's works

As previously stated, the aim of this work is analysing the dimension of space in Teju Cole's and Taiye Selasi's novels. However, in order to carry out the analysis properly, I found it useful and necessary to provide a theoretical background of space as a concept, which was the aim of the first chapter. The second chapter dealt with the introduction of Taiye Selasi, and with the analysis of her novel *Ghana Must Go*. It has also been introduced a term Selasi herself coined in 2005, i.e. *Afropolitan*, which gave birth to a movement called *Afropolitanism*. This term will be further discussed in this third chapter, which focuses on spatiality in Teju Cole's *Open City* and *Everyday is For The Thief*. Before going through the novels, it may be useful to introduce the author in order to have an exhaustive context for his work. In doing this, it will be discussed whether Cole belongs to, or feels himself part of *Afropolitanism*. As it will be shown, this term can be considered a link between Selasi and Cole. However, the analysis carried out in chapters 2 and 3 shows how a similar starting point can lead to different results. This will be clearer in the way the dimension of space is treated and produced in the above mentioned works. After providing a brief overview of Cole, this chapter consists basically of two different parts, one for each novel by Cole. Both works are briefly introduced before focusing on spatiality and the way it is produced. In doing this, I also refer to a number of book reviews as well as to Cole's collection of essays *Known and Strange Things* and to his photo book *Punto d'Ombra*. Both of these works are introduced and briefly explored in the next paragraph.

Teju Cole was born in Kalamazoo, Michigan in 1975 to Nigerian parents. Shortly after his birth, his mother brought him back to Lagos, where he grew up. His father joined them a few years later after receiving his MBA. At the age of 17 he moved back to the United States to attend Kalamazoo College, where he graduated in 1996. He enrolled in an African Art History program at the School of Oriental and African Studies in London, followed by a doctorate in Art History at Columbia University. He is the Gore Vidal Professor of the Practice of Creative Writing at Harvard. After a long stay in New York, he currently lives in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

Teju Cole has held many lectures in different American and European Universities; in 2018, he was a Poynter Journalism Fellow at Yale University. His writing was awarded

important prizes such as the 2015 Windham Campbell Prize for Fiction, a 2015 US Artists award, and a 2018 Guggenheim Fellowship.

Cole is the photography critic of *The New York Times*, where he is currently holding the photography column “On Photography”. His photos have been presented in solo exhibitions both inside and outside the US, in Italy, Iceland, India, Germany, and Switzerland. Furthermore, he has also contributed in many magazines, among which *The New York Times*, *The New Yorker*, *Granta*, and *Brick*.

He is the author of a novel, *Open City* and a novella, *Every Day is for the Thief*, which will be further analysed in this chapter. Furthermore, a large number of the essays he wrote have been grouped in his essay collection *Known and Strange Things*. Following a chronological order, the last published work is the photo book *Punto d’Ombra*, published in English with the title *Blind Spot*. These two last works will be used in my work as sources in my attempt to depict Cole’s universe. Both of them will be briefly introduced and explored here.

3.1 Is Teju Cole Afropolitan?

Afropolitanism first appeared in Selasi’s 2005 essay “Bye-Bye, Barbar (or: What is an Afropolitan?)”, a work that has already been analyzed in chapter 2. Introducing the term as well as the author’s reflection on it was useful and necessary to provide a background to Teju Cole as well. As previously stated, *Afropolitanism* is a heterogeneous and multifaceted concept and, therefore, not easy to be explained. On one hand, Cole’s background is similar to Selasi’s and to her description of *Afropolitans*. Indeed, both of them have African origins (Nigerian for Cole and Ghanaian and Nigerian for Selasi), but have been educated and spent most of or their whole life in Europe and America. On the other hand, when reading the novels of the two authors, they are so different that it may become difficult to assign them to the “same” background. This shows how people that could be defined Afropolitans can come up with different works and results.

In the introduction to my work, I have already referred to the dialogue between Cole and Selasi³² as it serves as a representation for the authors' conception of national identity. This is of course inextricably linked to the term *Afropolitan*, which is also used as a category. How is Teju Cole defined? In the afore mentioned interview, Selasi quotes the Nigerian novelist Elnathan John "Are you Afropolitan, like TaiyeSelasi? Are you an African writer, like Ngugi and his protégés? Are you lost like Teju Cole? We cannot place him."³³ From his point of view therefore, Cole cannot be considered (and classified) as Afropolitan, and even cannot be defined at all. But how does Teju Cole feel about his national identity and the attempts to classify him?

I'm a bit of a problem for the categorisers, partly because I don't fight the categories. I'm comfortable being described as Afropolitan, or African, or American, or pan-African. Or Yoruba, or Brooklynite, or black, or Nigerian. Whatever. As long as the labels are numerous. I'm "local" in many places. But I don't think this is a greater or lesser life than the one lived by people who are more grounded in one terrain. (Cole 2016)

Cole underlines how he finds it impossible to be defined by a single label and how numerous labels on the contrary may suit the complexity of representing his identity. However, Cole's identity is not to be considered as superior because multifaceted, and yet it has to be fully recognized. He does not reject the term Afropolitan, on the contrary he accepts it as well as others, highlighting again how labels are difficult to give and also useless. His being local in many places is a clear reference to Selasi's concept of "multilocal", already explored in chapter 2.

One of the labels Teju Cole has been given is *Afro-pessimistic*. *Afropessimism* refers to a strongly negative perception of Africa which gained currency during the 80s. Spread by Africanists settled in the West, it represents Africa, and Sub-Saharan Africa in particular, as too riddle with problems to be saved. There would be no space for an

³² <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2016/aug/05/teju-cole-taiye-selasi-interview-known-strange-things>. Accessed on 15th February 2019.

³³ <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2016/aug/05/teju-cole-taiye-selasi-interview-known-strange-things>. Accessed on 15th February 2019.

economic development or for good governance. This conception originates from the ever going oppression that black people have suffered. As Cole himself explains,

Categories like Afro-pessimism are just a little bit empty, sometimes. Lagos is shit; people really suffer so we are not going to paint a picture that makes it look rosy. But on the other hand, when you acknowledge that Lagos is shit but it's our Lagos, and we take care of each other a little bit, that's also largely a relief. If you do something that has many layers and some people just have a tag-line to describe it, then they are not talking about you. They are talking about themselves.³⁴ (Cole)

The rejection of one single label and the acceptance of multiple ones seem to suggest an Afropolitan, as depicted by Selasi. What is crucial to analyze is how Afropolitanism redefines the old conception of space. In this view, space is conceived as movement, and it is a movement which lead people to leave home behind. The same idea of home as a fixed referential place is challenged by Afropolitanism.

It is important to underline how crossing the Atlantic and leaving home acquire peculiar meanings in the experience of African Americans in the US. It turns out their movement in space changes the perspective and make black people perceive their blackness, not always accepted. There are considered black bodies and not people; to use Fanon's terms, they are stuck in the gaze of Whites. Cole himself as well as his characters in the novels analyzed report episodes of racism and attempt to erase the story of African Americans.

So, Nigeria haunts me in terms of being a space of unfinished histories. But my identity maps onto other things: being a Lagosian (Lagos is like a city-state), being a West African, being African, being a part of the Black Atlantic. I identify strongly with the historical network that connects New York,

³⁴<https://www.pmnewsnigeria.com/2018/08/14/contemplation-is-african-a-conversation-with-teju-cole/>.

Accessed on 25th February 2019.

New Orleans, Rio de Janeiro, and Lagos an ideal for me in two ways. But, as a subject, Nigeria won't let go of me. (2016: 84)

Afropolitanism is made of second- or third-generation Africans and Cole himself admits that he does not belong in the history of slave trade. However, in some way his blackness associates him with a country and a continent that actually he does not know. In light of these considerations, it may be wondered what Cole's relation with history is. In particular, what is his relation with the history of the Black Atlantic many African Americans are linked to. "History won't let go of us. We're pinned to it." (2016: 280) affirms Cole in one of his journeys to Alabama. Being there, as well as in other places which played a relevant role in the slave trade, makes him even more aware of the connections existing between himself, his people, and their history.

I remember—this is an overstatement, but it feels right—I remember the things suffered here by Africans. It is strange to think I would have understood the pleas at the whipping post, that they would have been in my own language, the language of my people—my people sold off into slavery by my people. A blood knot ties each of us to ancient acts of violence. I am unhappy and at home. (2016: 296)

"My people" is used both to refer to Africans and to Americans to underline how he feels at home in both, how both parts build his identity. Furthermore, the history of violence, that "bloody knot" has affected both Africa and America.

Cole's point of view on America is that of a recent African immigrant, even though he was actually born there. "Citizenship is an act of the imagination. I was born American, but I also had to learn to become American" (2016: 374). The consideration of his country, as well as the perception of himself in that country, had to be adjusted in order to face the changes America itself has undergone.

3.2 Non-narrative works

Known and Strange Things was published in the New Yorker in 2016. It includes 55 essays, some of them already pre-published and gone viral, spanning disparate subjects such as art, literature, politics, the condition of being black, etc. The essays are divided into four sections: “Reading Things”, “Seeing Things”, “Being There”, and an “Epilogue”. The four parts clearly combine Cole’s sources of inspiration spanning through the entire world, with his personal experience of traveller. Indeed, “Reading Things” collects the main literary sources that have influenced his life and works, such as James Baldwin, Tomas Tranströmer, Derek Walcott, and Naipaul. “Seeing Things” deals with visual arts and mainly with photography and photographers, like Cartier Bresson, Roy DeCarava and Malick Sidibé. As previously mentioned, his being a photographer influences his style of writing. Indeed, according to Lauren Elkins of *The Financial Times*, “Cole’s essays read a lot like these photographs”. These essays seem therefore to be written by a “novelist’s skill and a photographer’s eye”. Finally, “Being There” focuses on Cole’s peregrinations, which often end up in places relevant for his formation, places closely associated with authors that have become his touchstones.

This combination of first-hand experience which go along with what he has read and seen throughout his life is visible right from the preface. It begins with the first words of *Beowulf*, whose reiteration has become an habit for Cole who states those are the words that he learnt as a child and that constantly come into his mind. The same goes for a Yoruba tongue-twister and some jokes. This means that all those pieces contributed to form his identity. At the same time, it is underlined how people’s decisions, choices, movements build and define who they are.

Years ago, I memorized that opening page. After a while, those were the words that came most readily to hand when I was testing the flow of ink. [...] We are our habits in sum. [...] I reiterate Beowulf, I recite my Yoruba tongue-twister, I tell Lucian Freud’s joke: we are creature of private convention. But we are also the ways in which we enlarge our coasts. (Cole 2016: xiv)

*Punto d'Ombra*³⁵ is a photographic book firstly published in Italian in 2016 and in English in 2017 as *Blind Spot*. Cole has been asked several times why he chose Italy to launch his work, and his answer may be easier than expected. His relation with the country was first established by photography both from a professional and a personal level. Indeed, his main sources of inspiration are Italian photographers, such as Luigi Ghirri, Guido Guidi, and Gabriele Basilico. Probably also thanks to their artistic contribution, he fell in love with Italy, which he considers as one of his place of self-recognition. In an interview to the Italian website “Sguardi”,³⁶ Cole states that even though the Italian edition was to be released before the English one, the title of the English version came up first. Then, he asked his Italian editors how he could render the idea in Italian and they suggested “punto d'ombra” instead of the literal translation “macchia cieca”.

Cole himself admits that finding a suitable definition for his work may be difficult, and probably useless. Indeed, he describes it as “a genre-crossing work of photography and texts”. It can be considered as a visual diary, where photos and text are deeply interwoven and strictly related to each other. Every little reflection bears the name of a city, so that while reading, readers follow the author's peregrinations around the world. The 80 photos have been taken between September 2011 and November 2015 but they are not presented in a chronological order. Cole often focuses on apparently insignificant details somehow catching his attention in a certain city and serving as a starting point for his reflections, short stories or memories. In most of the images there is no human presence; when there is, individuals are seen from behind. As he underlines in an interview with Rebecca Norris Webb, landscape photography is always associated with belonging, which is not however to be associated to one country or city only. Cole is pointing at an identity built up of different pieces, a home made up of several homes. This means also never being at home, as he states “I don't really feel completely at

³⁵*Punto d'Ombra* was also the title of one of Cole's first photographic exhibitions, held in Milan in 2016. The organization of the exhibition mirrors that of the book, where images alternate with texts. The book was named one of the best books of the year by *Time Magazine*.

³⁶ <https://www.nikonschool.it/sguardi/106/teju-cole.php>. Accessed on 4th April 2019.

home in any landscape: Italy does one thing for me, Nigeria does another, Switzerland does another”.³⁷

Images and words do not always correspond, sometimes their relation is hidden and difficult to grasp for readers. What is then the principle behind? Analogy, both in writing and photography; trying to draw from those works similar to what he aims at. Exploring the relations between images and words is probably the aim of this work and a challenge posed by the author to his readers. This combination of different forms rises a fundamental question: is one prior to the other? Probably not. They are probably to be considered as complementary forms, whose combination is created as if it were a poem. At the end of his book, Cole himself defines it as a “lyric essay that combines photography and text” (Cole 2017: 324). It could be said there are two kinds of journeys the readers are engaged in with the author. They follow Cole while he physically moves from Berlin to Lagos, from New York City to Selma, and get to see what he sees thanks to his photographs. Furthermore, the texts allow readers to enter the place the narrator is in.

Photographs are crucial to *Blind Spot* as they strongly contribute to the creation of a space, or a “map of the world”, as Cole himself defines it in his postscript (Cole 2017: 324). This map is created by his movements around the world, from one city to another. In his peregrinations, it is easy to find cities or countries familiar to readers who are already acquaintances with the author. Therefore, this book can be seen as a sort of hypertext which establishes links between places. Readers are taken in this way around the world with the author. In some of these places they find themselves in a city they have already been thanks to another book. It is the case of New York for example, where Cole follows a girl and captures her in several photos. This wandering around the city could have been Julius’ in *Open City*.

Relations between different journeys to the same city are also established. The reflection seems to continue, so that readers can follow different story lines, each one dealing with a particular journey or moment. In this sense, the book can also be seen as a collection of travel diaries kept by the author. An example is provided by Lagos, where in the first pages of the book, a man is sleeping (Cole 2017: 4); after a while, the

³⁷ <http://www.shotsandmurmurs.com/three-questions-with-teju-cole/>. Accessed on 26th March 2019.

author describes what he sees outside the church when the aforementioned man was sleeping (2017: 40). In between, several cities begin to be narrated and will come up again after Lagos. In this way, readers may fill the gaps and see for example what Cole has done before a certain episode narrated in one of his works. For example, the author visit to a zoo in Sao Paulo is the occasion to state the reason why he is there, that is finding the right angle from which a photograph he had seen was taken (Cole 2017: 112). That photograph titled *Men on a Rooftop* was taken by the Swiss photographer René Burri in Sao Paulo in 1960. It can be found in his collection of essays and it is the subject of one of them, *Shadows in Sao Paulo* (Cole 2016: 313).

3.3 Space and Time

Space is a relevant dimension in Cole's *Open City* and *Every Day is For the Thief* both from a literal and a symbolical point of view. As Ryan (2009) argues, in everyday conversations, spatial language is commonly used more in its metaphorical connotation than in its literal one. The space there depicted is not the static background suggested by tradition for the sequence of events, and therefore subordinated to time (Zoran 1984: 330). On the contrary, it is the space resulting from the *spatial turn* of the twentieth century, whose main representative was Michel Foucault. The turning point was the insertion of the idea of movement in the connotation of space that was conceived as a synonym for stasis basically. As a result, the two dimensions of time and space, always seen in binary, oppositionary terms, turn out to be blurred and interdependent.

One of the most relevant theoretical contribute to the entanglement of space and time, is Bakhtin's concept of *chronotopos*, or spacetime (Bakhtin 1981). It can be defined as the "intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships" (Bakhtin 1981: 425-426). These concepts are the visible sign that the idea of movement is part of the dimension of space, as space is deeply interwoven with time.

A redefinition of the static concept of space has come from Gilroy's *Black Atlantic* (1993). In that book, the author claims that the Atlantic can be seen not only as a sea, in its material and physical essence, but also as an interconnections of routes witnessing people's stories. The routes he is referring to are the movement caused by the slave

trade when African people were bought and brought to America. The ships that crossed the ocean have drawn bloody trajectories on the sea. From a symbolical point of view, crossing the Atlantic as a spatial movement could mean establish a temporal relation between past, Africa, and present, America. This reflection is useful to analyze how time and space are entangled in Cole's narrative works.

Right from the title, it is undoubtedly clear that space plays a relevant role in Cole's novel *Open City* (2011). It is a space deeply interwoven with time, as movement itself is the major, and almost only event, of the whole book. The plot is simple to summarize. Julius, the main character and narrator, strolls through the streets of New York. The encounters he makes are opportunities to uncover anecdotes of his life and to deal with contemporary social and political issues. For most of the book, he is alone, walking aimlessly through the city or talking one to one with an interlocutor. Walking is therefore the main movement, present since the very first lines of the novel, that read as follows "And so, when I began to go on evening walks last fall, I found Morningside Heights an easy place from which to set out into the city." (Cole 2011: 3).

Given the interdependence between time and space, it is important to state how a movement in space often hides and is conceived as a movement in time. In chapter 2, I show how this is a relevant feature of Selasi's *Ghana Must Go*. What is also important to underline is that the entanglement of the two dimensions is a typical feature of the so-called "migrant novels", as already discussed in the analysis of Selasi's narrative work. This genre is closely linked to the idea of success expected to be found in a new country. Immigrant stories consist in swearing out roots and putting them down elsewhere, which means finding another country, city or village that will hopefully be called home. Can Cole's narrative works be considered examples of "migrant literature"? As far as *Open City* is concerned, the answer is not so simple. Julius' life in America is connected to the opportunity to study and work as psychiatrist. The same opportunity would probably be prevented if he had lived all his life in Nigeria. However, readers are constantly in contact with his sense of discomfort, solitude and deracination, which is not what it would be expected by "home". For this reason, I do not think that Julius considers New York as home. In the same way, he does not find a sense of belonging in Brussels, where he goes to look for his German grandmother and to

reconnect with his origins or in Lagos, which seems a sort of ghost throughout the novel.

Every Day is for The Thief has a slightly different direction, as it deals with a journey back home. It is undoubtedly true that this kind of journey is both a movement in space and in time. Because fifteen years have passed, both the character and the city are not the same. The experiences the nameless narrator has done made him different, as he interiorized the assumption of a West life and sees the world through those lens. “My worrying is a luxury that few can afford” (Cole 2013: 19), realizes the narrator as if to explain his reaction towards Lagos. The episodes of corruptions for example are unacceptable, scandalous for him, used to a more regulated society, but are perfectly normal for those who have spent all their life there. At the same time the place has changed as well and may not fit the dream-like place one has in mind. When facing the changes a place has undergone, one is both a stranger and an insider and none of them at the same time. He/she finds himself “in between” in a place he/she it is not able to recognize completely as home. The great absent, at least physically, here is America, even though it is perceived through the ongoing comparison between Lagos and the city he lives in. Furthermore, the New World is associated with the idea of professional success.

The representation of space provided focuses therefore on the movement of someone in space, which is a bodily experience. Since the binary division time-space began to be challenged, body has been considered as the first and main instrument to experience space. Individuals perceive and act in space through the use of their body (Ryan 2009; Casey 1993). According to these authors, the very first human experience is the perception of being a body located in space. One of the first authors to consider body as an instrument of spatial dimension is Aristotle, who defines place as “a possible habitat for a body”. As Ryan points out, the spatial metaphors which are widely used in everyday life are nothing but the mirror of the bodily experience of place.

The embodied nature of mind is reflected in language by families of metaphors that concretize abstract concepts in terms of bodies moving through or situated in space. Words like up and down, front and back, high and low, organize space using

the body as point of reference. Due to the erect position of the body, up and down are the most prolific sources of metaphors: e.g. happy is up, sad is down; more is up, less is down; etc. Front and back are mainly used as metaphors of time: in our culture, the future is ahead and the past is behind. Other spatial schemata that provide important sources of metaphors are the conduit, the journey, the path, and the container (space as a whole can be seen as a container). (Ryan 2009)

As a consequence, the way individuals perceive their body moving in a space influences the final perception of the space itself (Casey 1993). Lefebvre argues that space should be regarded as a social reality and therefore, it is inextricably associated with the presence of individuals. The relation of human beings with their bodies is a necessary premise to establish a relationship between them and the place they are living or moving in. In his words, human beings “know that they have a space and that they are in this space” (Casey 1991:294). As previously stated, space is no longer considered neutral, on the contrary it is strictly associated with the dimension of power. Individual act and move in space with their body and body is therefore a place of resistance and can be used as an individual form of authority.

What is also interesting to underline is the symbolic connotation movement can acquire. Indeed, as readers follow Julius through the streets of New York, they are engaged in a journey inside his mind as well. This insight into Julius’ thoughts allow critics to compare Cole’s work to James Joyce and to Virginia Woolf for his style of writing. Stream of consciousness, lack of punctuation and detailed psychological description were the elements which helped establish the parallelism. The author himself admits their works were among his touchstones. From this symbolical point of view, space and time are even more evidently entangled. Indeed, Julius’ movement in space, i.e. wandering through New York, is a time journey as well. It becomes the instrument through which pieces of his past are brought into surface. This allows readers to reconstruct the character’s personal history. In sum, the movement in and through space is also used to open parenthesis on Julius’ past and rebuild a timeline.

As far as *Open City* is concerned, the past seems to emerge in Julius' wandering through New York in an ambivalent way. On one hand, there is the past of his personal history, glimpses of which come out now and then. On the other hand, past can be also conceived as the history of Africans, and slave trade. Even though the connection with Nigeria seems to fade, the same fact of being black identifies him with that sort of history. Julius is pragmatic in recognizing that he does not belong in that history and has even lost his connection with that place. "And you, do you go to Nigeria a lot? I don't, I said. My last visit happened two years ago, and that was after a gap of fifteen years; and it was a brief visit. Being busy all these years was part of it, and losing some of the connection, as you said, also plays a role" (2011: 142). In one of his reflections, Julius challenges the same idea of past and collocates Nigeria as belonging only on the personal level.

The past, if there is such a thing, is mostly empty space, great expanses of nothing, in which significant persons and events float. Nigeria was like that for me: mostly forgotten, except for those few things that I remembered with an outsize intensity. These were the things that had been solidified in my mind by reiteration, that recurred in dreams and daily thoughts: certain faces, certain conversations, which, taken as a group, represented a secure version of the past that I had been constructing since 1992. (2011: 155)

What emerges from this extract is the attribution of meaning to a place, Nigeria, thanks to personal memories. On the contrary, he does not feel part of the history of Nigeria, and of Africa in general, which however comes up during his walking aimlessly in the city. What he underlines is that New York has erased the past of African Americans. This is effectively shown in Julius' visit to monuments such as the Negro Burial Ground, identified simply by an inscription. It has been built over and forgotten, an example of how history is written, erased, and rewritten.

The perception of movement in space as movement in time is more evident in *Every Day is for The Thief*. The narrator goes back to Lagos after fifteen years and the journey from America to Africa is an opportunity to reconnect with what he calls, or used to

call, “home”. Therefore, it is inevitable to come into contact with past. “But what past do I have in mind? The nation’s. I think. But perhaps I am also thinking of mine, perhaps the two are connected” (2013: 145). Therefore, his account is based both on his personal history and past, and on the country’s. As far as his personal memories are concerned, his journey of return is an entanglement of “familiar” and “stranger”, sometimes both at once. It is the case of his aunt’s house, that is familiar but has inevitably changed during the years. “The house, of course, is unchanged. It is smaller only in my memory. Memory and the intervening years, many of which I have spent in cramped English flats and American apartments” (2013: 22). The narrator underlines how the house has changed only in his memory, due to a change in his perspective. Not only memories themselves can be blurred, but also the years he spent in America challenged his perception of the place. An interesting passage focuses on the memory of his mother, which is much more fable than the narrator himself had expected. He left without telling his family, so that the break has been sudden and abrupt:

In this journey of return, the greatest surprise is how inessential her memory is to me, how inessential I have made it, even in revisiting sites that we knew together, or in seeing many people who knew us both. People know better than to ask about her. This is what it is to be a stranger: when you leave, there is no void. Mother was a stranger here. (2013: 120)

This brief insight on his mother life shows both how her memory is fable and inessential to him, but also to the country where she lived, to the people who knew her. It may be surprising not to consider his mother among the familiar relationships that link the narrator to Nigeria. It looks as if she has remained a stranger to his son as well; her memory has faded away exactly as she has.

Even though a journey of return is inextricably associated to one’s memory, his visit to Lagos becomes an opportunity to reflect on its past and on the memory Nigeria has preserved as a country. Art becomes a powerful tool able to establish a relationship between different places and different times. Indeed, the narrator has known the history of Nigeria in European and American museums. The National Museum of Lagos, that he visited as a young boy, has been one of his memorial touchstones during his years

abroad. “All people who are far from home have something they hold on to. For me, it was the museum and the meaning I had invested in its collection” (2013: 72). However, the narrator’s visit to the museum is deceiving, as there are no critical accounts of Nigerian history in Nigeria. The Atlantic slave trade, for example, is simply summarized as an “obnoxious practice” (2013: 78) without going deeper into the human tragedy and the role local governments had in it, the consequences for “Nigerian” population, etc. “Why is history uncontested here? There is no sight of that dispute over words, that battle over versions of stories that marks the creative inner life of a society. Where are the contradictory voices? [...] The past is not even past” (2013: 117).

3.4 Space or place?

The theoretical framework provided in chapter 1 strongly contribute to the analysis of the dimension of space in Cole’s narrative works. After focusing on the interdependent relation between space and time, it may be interesting to try to define whether the works analyzed deal with space or with place. In order to do that, it may be useful to refer to some of the previously mentioned authors.

Tuan (1977: 4), for example, recognizes that the two concepts of space and place tend to merge and often require each other to be defined. However, he acknowledges that, while space is abstract, place is more concrete as it is the point that may be found on a map. The key concept of movement, used before for the distinction between time and space, is important here as well. Indeed, if space implies freedom of movement, place represents a pause and “each pause in movement makes it possible for location to be transformed into place” (1977: 6). In other words, it may be said that place is the concrete realization of space, which occurs through the attribution of meaning and a degree of familiarity. Before the spatial turn, this dichotomy movement/pause was seen as synonym for time and space, narration and description. In the light of this, I interrogate whether Cole’s work fit more the connotation of space or of place.

Open City presents a detailed map of the streets of New York, that is where most of the book is set. Julius is used to walk through the city, has some favorite paths in mind, which means that he has a great familiarity with the area he moves in. Therefore, I think

that New York is definitely a place, as it becomes concrete in front of the readers' eyes. This is achieved by Cole's use of precise descriptions, mostly of the streets, where the narrator spends most of the time, but also of buildings, libraries, stations, etc. Here is an example of how New York as a place is produced:

I walked out by the doors leading to Wall Street proper. Outside, people moved around, talking on their phones, presumably headed home, but I heard no traffic noise. The reason became clear right away when I saw the blockades that had been set up on both ends of the street, either for security or because of ongoing construction. Wall Street, from where I stood on the corner of William Street all the way down to Broadway, a distance of several blocks, was shut off from vehicular traffic, and had been transformed into a pedestrian zone; what one heard was human voices and the click of heels on pavement. I walked toward the west. (2011: 46)

Less evidently than in *Open City*, the representation of space presented in *Every Day is for the Thief* can fit the definition of place. The novella is set in Nigeria, and in Lagos in particular. The nameless narrator comes back "home" after years spent in the US, a journey that Cole himself did in 2005.³⁸ In this case, the degree of familiarity seems to be obvious, but it is not. Indeed, even though "home" should bear the highest degree of familiarity, he is not able to recognize it completely. He perceives that he is not a stranger but he does not feel as an insider anymore. In between his leaving and coming back, are the experiences he made, which changed his perspective, and the changes the place itself has undergone. As previously mentioned, the concretization of space in place passes also through the attribution of meaning. From this point of view, it is undeniable that "home" is a place, as it is defined also by the relationships built in there that establish the link between the person and the place. In Cole's words, "The word "home" sits in my mouth like foreign food. So simple a word and so hard to pin to its

³⁸ The novella was born as an online blog Cole kept during his journey back to Nigeria and published as a book only years after.

meaning. We have not left yet, and already there is something drawing me back to this city, to this country.” (2013: 156)”

Transforming space into place is a human activity, as “we do not live in space. We love in places” (Casey 1993: xiii). It may however be wondered how Cole produces concretely the places he presents. In both his works here analyzed, Cole uses what Ryan (2009) defines as “tour strategy”. This technique of producing and representing space is based on the movement of someone. It represents space dynamically, through the eyes of someone moving in space. This is exactly what happens in both Cole’s works even though it is even more evident in *Open City*, where readers follow Julius wandering across the city. According to Ryan (2009), the tour strategy contrasts what she calls “map view”, which consists in a panoramic perspective spreading in vertical and in horizontal. It could be the perspective of the disembodied god’s eye point of view as well as the panoramic view of an observer situated on an elevated point. It has been already said that the spatial representation provided by Julius’ wandering in New York creates a map of the city. However, the use of “map” should not be misleading, as the so-called “map strategy” observes from a fixed, high point. On the contrary, the map produced in Cole’s novel is constructed through the movement of the main character.

The same “tour strategy” is used in *Every Day is for the Thief*, even though less evidently. In the narrator’s journey back to Lagos, readers discover the city as the nameless character moves in space. Maintaining the previous metaphor, it is his moving through space that creates a map of the space itself. As previously said, the return of the nameless narrator has a symbolical meaning, as it is a physical movement interwoven with a temporal one. The character already had a map of Lagos in mind but, after fifteen years, the map has to be adjusted or recreated, due to the changes the city has undergone and to the lens through which he looks at it.

Johnson (2005) introduces three ways of producing space, the places in both Cole’s novels present features of *paths*, *containers* and *portals*. Cities are constructed as paths in the literal sense, as the author created a real map of that world. In a metaphorical connotation, the movement of characters leads the story in a certain direction, through certain thoughts and memories. Indeed, in both books, the concrete direction the character takes while walking lead him to certain thoughts. As *containers* the cities

presented are well-defined places, in which the characters move. However, the books present also a movement, physical or mental, outside them. In *Open City* for example, Julius exits New York concretely when he goes to Brussels but also when his thoughts bring him far away. For this reason, I argue that the places analyzed could be considered also as *portals*, even though in a more metaphorical sense than the one suggested by Johnson. The exit is not a doorway or a window, but more a mental activity which leads characters somewhere else in space and time, such as memories.

While moving, both Julius and the nameless narrator of *Every Day is for the Thief* provide detailed descriptions of the places they are in, i.e. New York and Lagos. These precise accounts strongly contribute to the definition of Cole's cities as places. They allow readers to enter the story perfectly, like photographs. Whether the characters' descriptions can be seen as pauses to their strolling and wandering, this is debatable. These "photographs" of the city are not the result of real pauses. On the contrary, they are taken as long as the narrator moves around the city. It may be important to underline how Cole himself is a street photographer. Photography has therefore a great relevance in his writing. First of all, *Every Day is for the Thief*, exactly as his essays, contains photographs by the author that are the visible sign of his passion. According to Lauren Elkins of *The Financial Times*, "Cole's essays read a lot like these photographs";³⁹ I would say that his photographer's eye influences his style of writing in general. For this reasons, I think that his descriptions are photographs taken by words, even though camera and eye are not the same. As Hustvedt underlines,

The camera's eye is not the human eye. The camera takes in everything inside its frame. We do not. Human beings have poor peripheral vision. Details vanish because we cannot focus on everything at once. Sequences blur. We pay attention to what is most salient for us. [...] we are prone to cultural biases.
(Hustvedt 2017: x)

The human eye and therefore the map created through the character's perception may be perceived as subjective, personal and biased. On the contrary, the camera is given a

³⁹ <https://www.ft.com/content/d0e1c308-53dc-11e6-9664-e0bdc13c3bef>. Accessed on 12th March 2019.

higher reliability. In other words, photographs are considered more reliable than words. However, as Cole recalls,

The camera is an act of transformation. It can make what it sees more beautiful, more gruesome, milder, darker, all the while insisting on the plain reality of its depiction. This is what Brecht meant in 1931 when he wrote, “The camera is just as capable of lying as the typewriter.” (2016: 217)

What is the role of Cole’s photographs and descriptions? I think it consists in catching and stopping a moment in time and space. In Cartier-Bressons’ words, photography is based on “the decisive moment”. Where does a good photography come from? Is there a rule or a formula? Or, as far as language is concerned, is there a reason behind the author’s careful description of a certain street, building, etc.? What emerges is that there is no general rule to be followed, as much is up to the sensibility of the single photographer or writer. If every situation is made up of a number of potential moments to be fixed by a camera, in the same situation different photographers may come up with different photographs, each one focusing on a different instant. This means that the photographs we find in Cole’s work are the result of a personal perception, moments he felt worth remembering. I have avoided the word “choice” because, as Bressons and Cole himself underline, “It is the photo that takes you” (Cole 2016: 161).

In this last paragraph, it has been underlined how the places Cole presents are rendered through the use of language. In both his works, the author uses a spatial language, sometimes starting from the very first lines or even from the title. How space is reproduced through the use of language will be the subject of the next section.

3.5 Place as cities

“Cities are the humanity’s greatest invention.” (Cole 2016: 85)

It has already been underlined how the production of space in Cole’s works realizes itself in places, concrete and precise points in a map. In both works, these places, with their peculiar features, are cities. As the initial quotation highlights, setting his books in

cities is not a casualty, but a precise choice by the author. In *Open City*, the cities that come up more or less directly are spread through three continents: New York, Brussels, and Lagos. Lagos is also the focus of *Every Day is for the Thief*.

Before presenting the cities in Cole's works, it may be important to underline three aspects. First of all, cities are the ideal place for urban strollers, as they concentrate examples of modernity, creativeness, and diversity. Furthermore, cities are the places he knows the best, having grown up in Lagos and living in New York. Indeed, he defines himself as a "city boy". As far as the style is concerned, the author underlines that "it is impossible to write in a linear way about and in cities." (2016: 85). Both his "wandering" books could remind readers of Joyce's *Ulysses*, where narration is not linear but made of fragments, sometimes in conflict with each other.

What all cities have in common, independently from their location in the world, is that they are "simultaneous spaces", where millions of stories get in contacts and are interwoven. They are seen as melting pots, where diversities, creativities, opportunities emerge. From this point of view, Cole shares Italo Calvino's definition of "continuous cities" (2016: 227), according to whom cities around the world are more uniform than expected to the point that "Only the name of the airport changes" (2016: 227). Calvino has been considered one of the most eminent representatives of the reconceptualization of space. In his work *Invisible Cities* (1972), he does not deal with recognizable cities, but with symbolical ones.⁴⁰ He defies the geometry and the geography of traditional space, challenging the possibility of reducing the chaotic, multiple worlds to a map. In doing this, he undermines an example of the Travel literature, *The Travels of Marco Polo* (c. 1300). Marco Polo is the protagonist of Calvino's novel as well, where however his journey is more complex and symbolical. The cities of Calvino's world are deeply similar and interrelated at the point that they cannot be considered as singular, well-recognizable entities. It is impossible to identify borders between them; all the cities of the world could be seen as a single, huge city. As Calvino himself explains,

⁴⁰ *Invisible Cities* (Italian *Le città invisibili*) deals with a total of fifty-five cities, all bearing women's names. The novel is a conversation between the Mongol Emperor Kublai Khan and the explorer Marco Polo. The narrated cities become meditation on a wide range of topics, such as cultures, language, time, and death. In a noteworthy passage, Polo states that glimpses of his hometown, Venice, are in every city he mentions.

“There is the city where you arrive for the first time, and there is another city which you leave never to return. Each deserves a different name: perhaps I have already spoken of Irene under other names; perhaps I have spoken only of Irene” (1972: 125).

New York

Open City is mostly set in New York. The city is however much more than a simple “setting”. Indeed, it is so present and so central in the novel than it can be considered as a real character. Therefore, it can be recognized the “critical boundary” Chatman (2015: 17) has identified between characters and what he calls setting. This “critical boundary” is an interdependence relation. This means that setting can consist both of human mind and external world. Non-human objects become sort of characters; at the same time, humans can become elements of setting (in particular minor characters). In this way, space is conceived as a dynamic network of people, elements of the external world, of the human mind, etc. As a consequence, human subjects may mirror the feeling of a place and viceversa. This is exactly what happens in the novel with New York and Julius. Both are affected by a trauma, which can be identified in the terroristic attack of September 11, 2001. As far as Julius is concerned, the narration could be seen as his slow and uncompleted personal process of finding a voice after it. From the city’s point of view, the story is also the unresolved mourning of a city, which however has suffered many other traumas that have been erased. The fragilities of the city come up in Julius’s conversations, especially with Farouq.⁴¹

Chatman’s “critical boundary” between the character and the place may lead to acknowledge that Julius is a representation of New York and stands for it in the same way that Farouq represents and speaks for Brussels.

Open City, in particular, can be considered a “wandering” book, as Julius spends most of his time strolling in the streets of New York. Walking is a movement of the body in space, and one of the simplest way to experience space. It is interesting to observe how the figure of the stroller or *flâneur* draws heavily from both the European and the

⁴¹Farouq is the holder of an internet point in Brussels, with whom Julius holds conversations that unveil the contemporary issue of his society and his opinions about them.

American tradition. Underlining the peculiarity of the *flâneur* in New York acquires particular importance, as Cole adapts it to his contemporary world.

The figure of the literary *flâneur* originated at the beginning of the 19th century in Paris, the then capital of European modernization. The Universal Exposition which took place in 1889 boosted the city's economical, technological, and cultural growth. The modernization of the city, a symbol of which is the Eiffel Tower (1889), contributed to change the city's architectural landscape. This dynamicity made Paris the cradle of European contemporaneity and the ideal place for the *flâneur* to wander. The *flâneur* can be defined as "the casual wanderer, observer and reporter of street-life in the modern city".⁴² This concept was first explored by the poet Charles Baudelaire in his collection of poems *Les Fleurs du mal* (1857). His *flâneur* is an outsider, a stroller who observes the city and establishes with it an ambivalent relation. On the one hand, he remains dissociated from it, he lives in his solitude; on the other hand, he needs to blend with the crowd in order to hide in it and achieve anonymity. However, the detached position he takes does not allow him to identify with the people he comes in contact with. In Baudelaire's words,

For the perfect flâneur, for the passionate spectator, it is an immense joy to set up house in the heart of the multitude, amid the ebb and flow of the movement, in the midst of the fugitive and the infinite. To be away from home and yet to feel oneself everywhere at home; to see the world, to be at the centre of the world, and yet remain hidden from the world—such are a few slightest pleasures of the flâneur. (1864: 9)

At the beginning of the 20th century, Walter Benjamin continues the reflection begun with Baudelaire by providing the flâneur with a different connotation. In his work *The Arcades Project* (1927-1940), the flâneur is still the pioneer and the first observer of modernity but the city around him or her is alien, corrupted by man-made economic consumption. Benjamin's stroller is overwhelmed by the ever-evolving environment he is no longer able to control.

⁴² <http://psychogeographicreview.com/ baudelaire-benjamin-and-the-birth-of-the-flaneur/>. Accessed on the 10th April 2019.

As far as American literature is concerned, the figure of the flâneur was first used by Edgar Allan Poe. The writer is considered the initiator of the genre of detective fiction thanks to his short story *The Man of the Crowd* (1840). Here a nameless narrator sits in a café in London observing people passing by on the street. Suddenly, the narrator is attracted by a man in the crowd and starts chasing him. Poe's stroller begins to wander around the city in quest for someone; strolling becomes a passion, an instinctive need. In doing this, his urban walker does not fit the traditional canons of the flâneur, who does not stroll looking for someone or something. Even though different in some way, Poe's is the first example of urban walker in American literature and it gave birth to the so-called American walk narrative.

For the flâneur presented above, cities are the ideal place to stroll, to wander and to lose himself in his thoughts. In "wandering" books, however, New York has a peculiar meaning. The urban stroller is the representative of modernity, and New York has been one of the most modern and energetic cities in the world, which makes it an ideal place for flâneurs. The city shows some peculiarities that were analyzed by Kenneth Jackson and David Dunbar (2002); some of them are useful for the image of New York reported in *Open City*.

First, its contact with diversities and heterogeneity have made it a symbol of freedom, of opportunity, and of the American dream itself. Julius is the visible sign of diversity for his blackness which links him to another abstract, theoretical space, i.e. Nigeria. What the narrator underlines is his sense of deracination, his experience of racism that does not allow his experience to fit in the definition of the traditional flâneur perfectly.

Secondly, New York has a different rhythm, as everything and everyone seems to be faster there. Julius' walking crosses the city slowly, while the place around him runs. Maybe it is in this different speed that the source of his deracination can be found. In other words, his inability to catch up with the place he moves in enables him to recognize himself in it. However, it is also true that walking is for Julius a useful way to cross the city as it allows him to achieve a deeper relationship with the self.

Thirdly, New York is worldly known for its density. Even though it may seem a paradox, its enormous crowd offers both loneliness and solitude. Julius's relation with

the crowd is ambivalent. On the one hand, he looks for it in the streets, where he is surrounded by many solitudes. On the other, he escapes it wherever people are too close to each other. What changes between the two different attitudes is the closeness of places that oblige Julius to touch others, undermining in this way his personal bubble. “Aboveground I was with thousands of others in their solitude, but in the subway, standing close to strangers, jostling them and being jostled by them for space and breathing room, all of us reenacting unacknowledged traumas, the solitude intensified” (2011:6)

Finally, at an urbanistic level, one of New York’s most important characteristics is its grid system,⁴³ aimed at rationalizing the landscape following the logic of geometrical organization. The project had a great impact both on the city’s appearance and on the movement of people. The grid establishes coordinates which are able to orient people’s walking, such as Julius’. Indeed, he is able to create a map following the paths he has created in the city while moving in it.

In sum, New York has a great relevance in the novel *Open City* and there is a close relation between the city and Julius to the point that the two parts seem to share the same trauma and the same feelings, i.e. sorrow or struggle.

Brussels

With the idea of “continuous cities”, Cole establishes and explains the relation between New York and Brussels, the second city that appears in the novel and the focus of this paragraph. Brussels is more difficult to define as space or place. Indeed, Julius goes to Belgium to find his grandmother in his attempt to reconnect with his origins. Even though he stays there for a month and stroll through the city as he used to in New York, Brussels is not and does not become familiar for him. Even though this is his third visit to the city, he knows nothing about it when he arrives, apart from the history. He relies on his brief, superficial experiences of the city as well as on what other people tell him, and while there, he does not find the answers he is looking for. Therefore, Brussels is a

⁴³In 1811, with the Commissioners Plan, Manhattan was redesigned thanks to the creation of a schematic grid that changed the city’s aspect. This project aimed at applying the logic of geometrical regularity to simplify and rationalize the landscape.

space in Julius' mind as it is abstract, general, it has more a symbolical meaning than a physical presence. On the other hand, it can be considered as a place in the sense that the geography of the city is being drawn while he moves around, with the same "tour strategy" of New York. However, the map created in Brussels is not so precise and detailed as the one created at "home".

What is the meaning of Brussels? From a symbolical point of view, it is a possible solution to Julius' need of belonging, a possible link with his roots. However, as Cole himself admits he does no great effort to find her. The author wanted a place which could stand as a double for New York. Brussels is a crossroads for what is darkest in Europe, it is a city where past has been haunted and it hosts the headquarters of some EU institutions now, i.e. it is a centre of power now. The sense of unfinished past, of loss and mourning mirror in a way the feeling of New York.

Furthermore, Brussels gives Cole and Julius the opportunity to meditate on the social, economic, racial differences between Europe and America, to reflect on what it means to be "others". The immigrant voice is heard through Farouq, a former student and the holder of an internet point in the city. Cole admits that a parallelism has to be established between characters and cities they live in. Therefore, Farouq stands for Brussels exactly as Julius could be seen as a representative for New York. However, it is interesting to notice how both of them represents their cities but they do not recognize themselves in them and they are not acknowledged as "proper representatives" of the cities they inhabit.

What is the difference between New York and Brussels? From the linguistic point of view, as previously said, both are described in details so that for both a map is created. As soon as he arrives in Belgium, Julius' attention focuses on the city's physical appearance and mood and compares it to New York's.

It was a glimpse of impressive sophistication and wealth, that first experience of Europe. Outside the hotel, I had noticed the order and grayness, the modesty and regularity of the houses, and the cool formality of the people, against which American

life, my first real contact with which came a few weeks later,
had seemed lurid. (2011: 96-97)

Brussels looks like a new, “technocrats’ city” (2011: 97), built on the purpose of being central to the formation and the management of the European Union. However, Julius and Cole⁴⁴ show their knowledge of its history. Indeed, the second insight on the city offered to readers is a brief overview of its history. Situated at an intersection of Holland, Germany, England, and France, Belgium and its cities had been surrounded by the war but not touched directly by it.

Surrender, of course, played a role in this form of survival, as did negotiation with invading powers. Had Brussels’s rulers not opted to declare it an open city and thereby exempt it from bombardment during the Second World War, it might have been reduced to rubble. (2011: 97)

It is interesting to notice how Brussels is here defined as an “open city”, in the military connotation of the expression. The title however seemed to refer to New York only. The use of the same “label” to refer to two different cities (and continents) lead readers to think of similarities more than differences, and of a big space more than singular places. Julius expects them to be different, especially for what concerns political and social issues, such as racism. On the contrary, it turns out that they are more similar than expected. This is a representation of Italo Calvino’s idea of “continuous cities”. The common things that the two cities seem to share is also evident in the fact that Julius feels the same “sense of isolation” here even more than in New York. Furthermore, the continuity of cities is mirrored in the use of the continuity of movement, i.e. “walking aimlessly” (2011: 108), which seems to move with Julius across the ocean. It looks as if the same scene, with the same characters and thoughts, is being reproduced in a different place, on the other side of the ocean.

⁴⁴Teju Cole is also a professional historian of early Netherlandish art and in the book there are various references to Dutch culture. For this reason, it has been wondered whether there was something autobiographical in the characters. However, Cole himself stated that there is no identification with the characters, all of them stay fictional to him.

The days went by slowly, and my sense of being entirely alone in the city intensified. Most days I stayed indoors, reading, but I read without pleasure. On the occasions when I went out, I wandered aimlessly in the parks and in the museum district. (2011: 108)

Brussels is more a double than a counterpart to New York. It may be useful to bear in mind that space as a concept can be both literal and metaphorical. “Perspective” is a concept that includes both connotations. According to Uspenskij, perspective is based on the narrator’s positioning within the story space and “this positioning may coincide with the location of a specific character whose movements are followed by the narrator, or it may move across a certain area that contains several characters as the focus of the discourse alternates between different individuals” (1973: 57-65). In *Open City*, both of the options can be recognized as the perspective moves according to space and characters as well. Indeed, it is clear that most of the novel is taken from Julius’ point of view in New York, and his moving to Brussels reverses the perspective, as America itself is seen from the outside for the first time. Furthermore, the new perspective given by the new city (and side of the ocean) is put forward by another individual, Farouq. Thanks to the conversations with Farouq, Cole shows how things change when the starting point changes. For example, Julius’ expectations of Belgium as a “color-blind” country (2011: 89) are denied by Farouq’s “Europe is not free. The rhetoric claims freedom, but only the rhetoric” (2011: 122).

Lagos

Lagos is central to Cole’s novella *Every Day is for the Thief*, where a nameless narrator returns to Nigeria after fifteen years in New York. As previously said, Lagos has a great relevance for the author as well, as it is the city where he grew up. However, he claims that the nameless character remains fictional to him. What should be said is that the book started as a blog (published and then erased) he kept during his journey back to Nigeria in 2005.

In a way, this city is slightly different with respect to the others, as it hosts the particular experience of “going back home”. Referring to the aforementioned distinction between

space and place (Ryan, 2009), home is place, be it a city, a village, a country. Indeed, home presupposes that a certain location has become familiar and has acquired value, i.e. it has become a place. Home is referred to as an idea of shelter, thanks also to the people and to the network of relationships between them. People are so relevant in the idea of place that their missing challenges the permanent nature of places. Indeed, even though the nameless narrator has what Yi FuTuan calls “an intimate experience of place” (199: 136), he is not able to recognize it completely. The environment of the city is “strange” and “familiar”(2013: 65)at the same time due to the changes both the viewer and the place have undergone. On one hand, the narrator’s experience in America has changed the lens with which he observes his native Lagos. On the other hand, Lagos itself has changed and in many ways it has come closer to the West lifestyle. The narrator constantly compares Lagos to New York, the city he is living in, he is familiar with, even though it is never defined as “home”. Therefore, many aspects of Lagos become unexpected compared to the American life, such as corruption. “I have mentally rehearsed a reaction for a possible encounter with such corruption at the airport in Lagos. But to walk in off a New York street and face a brazen demand for a bribe: that is a shock I am ill-prepared for.” (2013: 7)

It may be said that Lagos is “home” compared to America because it bears a part of the narrator’s personal history. Therefore, his expectations of Lagos are based on his memories. This is particularly evident in family relations and connections, which sometimes grow so strong and bold that resist changes in space and time, such as the relationship with his first cousin and with the city of his memory. In the narrator’s memories, Lagos is no longer a real, geographically precise place; it becomes an ideal, lovely, more abstract city.

It is also true that home as a place often includes the dream of going back permanently, but this is not true for the narrator of this novella. If the city of his childhood can be idealized, there are aspects which seem to fit that image, such as the nobility of spirit of citizens. However, it is inevitable to consider the difficult reality he finds himself in when he arrives, such as corruption. The contrast between the two images is evident and does not allow that myth of “going back” to perpetuate in this book. Indeed, the narrator is constantly in between attraction to his “home” and disappointment with a city he is

not able to recognize. “I am not going to move back to Lagos. No way” (2013: 69) is followed by “I am going to move back to Lagos. I must” (2013: 69).

Memory indeed has a great relevance in the narrator’s visit to his native city. If on one hand, his idea of the city relies on his memory, Lagos seems to have no use for history and no memory. The narrator looks for the city history in art, as a form of permanence, eternity and memory. Paradoxically enough, his wonderful experience of African art was linked to exhibitions in Western museums, especially in New York, but the expectations there arisen do not match with African reality.

What each of those places had done was create a desire in me to see this astonishing art at its best, to see it in its own home. London, New York, and Berlin had made me long for Lagos. The West had sharpened my appetite for ancient African art. And Lagos is proving a crushing disappointment. (2013: 74)

Lagos can be considered similar to the New York of *Open City* because both cities erased their past or part of it. What emerges from the narrator’s visit to Lagos’ National Museum is that the historical account is “sycophantic, inaccurate, uncritical, and desperately outdated” (2013: 79). Furthermore, in the text Lagos is explicitly connected to the New World, and to New Orleans in particular, “the largest market for human chattel in the New World” (2013: 112). The “secret twinship” between the two cities is established by the Black Atlantic, by the human cargo starting from Lagos and ending up in New Orleans. This interrelation creates a new geography of the world, where the history of a city or of a country is to be found in other cities and countries. This shows how all the points in the map are closely related to and depending on each other. The history that links Lagos and New Orleans is far from secret for those who want to see it. “This history is missing from Lagos. There is no monument to the great wound. There is no day of remembrance, no commemorative museum” (2013: 114). The attitude of the city towards its past is ironically defined by the narrator as “the sleep of innocents” (2013: 114).

The memory of Lagos comes up also in the last chapter, when the narrator is back in New York and goes through his recent journey to Nigeria. In this account, the image

provided is given by the new experience of Lagos he has just had, which has rewritten his memories in a way. The city is defined both as a “desert” and a “labirinth” (2013: 158-159). It is a desert as he wanders alone with no particular aim, on a hot afternoon.

Losing my geographical bearings in this way always brings ambiguous emotions. Not knowing where I am exposes me to various dangers, and there is always a possibility that I will be accosted by a hostile party. On the other hand, letting go of my moorings makes me connect to the city as a pure place, through which I move without prejudging what I will see when I come around a corner. (2013: 159)

It is curious that the same city compared to a desert is also defined a “labyrinth”. Indeed, the two labels seems in contrast with each other, as a desert is by definition empty, whereas a labyrinth is so full with the same thing that it is impossible to keep track of one’s direction. However, the two concepts share at least two relevant features. First of all, they are such peculiar and anonymous places that, once entered there are no reference about their location in the world. Secondly, both are so disorienting that people loose points of reference and sense of direction. However, even though disorienting, Lagos, or that part of Lagos is not a maze. “A labyrinth’s winding paths lead, finally, to the meaningful center. A maze in contrast, is full of cul-de-sacs, dead ends, false signals; a maze is the trickster god’s domain. [...] I sense an intentionality to my being there. It feels like a return” (2013: 159).

Lagos in *Every Day is for the Thief* is also narrated through photographs taken by the author. It has been already said that Cole’s writing style, and its descriptions first of all, can be compared to images. Words and photos are therefore relevant in the author’s production of space. Here nameless images interrupt the narration abruptly, without introduction and sometimes without an evident, direct connection with words. The photographs of the novella show glimpses of a place, Lagos, often banal so that they look insignificant. However, to use Foucault’s words, they are also little moments of *heterotopias*, pieces of the entanglement of time and space captured by the photographer’s sensibility. “Aesthetically, the photographs operate as a living, breathing

association of memories and provide sensations of events as they unfold; display becomes active as the past writhes with the present.”⁴⁵

As Cole himself underlines, sometimes the reasons behind a photo are difficult to explain as they belong to an impulse, to something irrational. This is the reason why the photos included in the book appear simple, banal, even blurred (fig. 1, 2, 3)



Fig.3



Fig. 2



Fig. 3

The black-and-white photos in the book contribute strongly to create the city as a place, as they witness moments in Lagos but there is little human presence. When there is,

⁴⁵ <http://www.neonsignsmag.com/truth-be-told>. Accessed on 15th May 2019.

figures are almost always blurred, seen from behind. This is due to the fact that the so-called “object photography” help people identify with it, which would be impossible if photos focus on precise faces and features.

As far as the space of *Open City* is concerned, the action switches between New York, where most of the book is set, and Brussels. Lagos is absent but its absence is present, the city occupies space. The color of the protagonist’s skin associates him with a continent, Africa, which is often charged with prejudices. Julius more than once mentions episodes of racisms. Furthermore, he holds a Yoruba middle name, Olatubosun, which declares his father’s provenance. However, both his skin color and his name are misleading in the sense that people could attribute him an identity he does not recognize himself in. On the contrary, Julius has never lived in Nigeria and feel that both his blackness and his Yoruba name do not represent him.

3.6 Space as language

It is undoubtedly that the production of space in novels passes through language, and basically through words. As already mentioned, however, space is inextricably entangled with time and the manifestation of this interdependence is movement. The idea of movement in space is there in almost the totality of stories, as it represents the bodily perception of space. The language of the two works analyzed here is so simple, spontaneous, informal and natural that it may be difficult to notice how many references to space (and place) there are. This shows how spatial language is widely present also in everyday life and conversations. As Sonntag (2003) underlines, spatial metaphors are sometimes used to refer to temporal forms, which confirms that space is often used in a metaphorical sense.

“Perception” as a term may be considered as the first step of the human understanding of space, that ends with a rational elaboration of what has been sensed. In Lawson’s words,

it is easy to forget that space is also perceived through the sensations of sound, smell and even touch. Perception is actually

more than just sensation. Perception is an active process through which we make sense of the world around us. To do this of course we rely upon sensation, but we normally integrate the experience of all our senses without conscious analysis. (2011: 42)

This integration of senses and experience is known as “synaesthesia”, which literally means “the coming together of the senses so that experience is reported across normal sensory boundaries” (Lawson 2001: 43). In other words, this phenomenon proves a communication between senses and the neurological activity of the brain, between what is sensed and what is perceived.

Due to the fact that people experience space primarily through their body, and therefore in their everyday life, spatial language is so common both in writing and in everyday conversations that sometimes it is used unawares. However, it is obvious that it becomes central especially in “wandering” books, such as *Open City* and *Every Day is for the Thief*. Both the novels analysed are concerned with the movement produced in space, with the way space is created and crossed by characters. Indeed, Cole uses a large quantity of verbs of movement, especially “walk” and “wander”, which are the essence of book such as those analyzed. These expressions of movement integrate the five senses through which space is sensed and perceived. Therefore, it may be said that a part of the spatial vocabulary is given by the senses, in particular sight, smell and touch. As far as the novels analysed here is concerned, particularly important is sight.

First of all, in both novels sight has a great relevance both from a physical and from a symbolical point of view. The first is obviously given by the eyes of the narrators who see and provide an account of New York, Brussels, and Lagos. Indeed, the three cities are described in their architectural outlook, mostly outside, and in their mood. I have already argued that both narrators create a map of the place they are in, as readers follow them in their movement. However, that map is not a static image, but is actively produced through an ongoing process of perception. Indeed, as Lawson (2001: 44) underlines, even though the description is precise and allegedly trustworthy, people are usually bad at defining size and distance if not in comparison. Therefore, everything the narrators see is described according to what surrounds it and to the way he elaborates it.

It is important to underline that the importance of sight is witnessed through words, in particular descriptions, as well as through photos.

Sight is connected to perspective, that is, to the view given by one's position in the world. From the symbolical point of view, perspective indicates the ideas, beliefs, and thought one has that are cultural biased. In other words, Julius in *Open City* and the nameless narrator of *Everyday is for the Thief* represent the perspective of New York,⁴⁶ or at least of that side of the Atlantic. The perspective is reversed when they go to Brussels and Lagos respectively; it is the same world but the point of reference has shifted. From there, America as well becomes an object, something that is seen. The center becomes periphery depending on where one position him or herself.

A noteworthy example of language connected with sight is the term "blind spot". As previously said, besides being the title of Cole's photographic book, it appears in both novels here analysed as well as in one of his essays. For this reason, I argue that sight, eye, perspective is much more than a sensorial, even involuntarily activity; on the contrary, it becomes crucial in the author's writing. "Blind spot" as a term is an example of spatial language. Indeed, it is a limit in sight, a relevant sense to perceive space, both from a physical and a symbolical point of view. First of all, the "big blind spot syndrome" or "papillophlebitis" is the perforation of the retina which limits the sight and changes the perception of the space. From a symbolical point of view, the term represents what is there but not seen, hidden under the surface. In both cases the perception of the world around changes. In *Open City*, Julius (like Teju Cole) is diagnosed with papillophlebitis. The physical limitation becomes an opportunity to reflect on how much is left unseen in the psychiatric field:

I have felt that most of the work of psychiatrists in particular, and mental health professionals in general, was a blind spot so broad that it had taken over most of the eye. What we knew, I said to him, was so much less than what remained in darkness,

⁴⁶ As far as *Everyday is for the Thief* is concerned, readers meet the narrator when he is landing in Lagos. The fifteen years he spent in New York are not narrated, but hidden in his expectations, reactions and judgements.

and in this great limitation lay the appeal and frustration of the profession. (Cole 2011: 239)

Furthermore, the second time “blind spot” appears is Julius’ reflection on how much is missed of the starlight. The stars people from the earth can see while looking at the sky are a small portion of the stars in the sky, whose light has not come yet. The stars’ visibility itself is perceived as movement by the human eye, and at the same time it is the visible sign of the stars’ movement. This means that the empty space, the void, is a space full of something that we cannot see. “I wished I could meet the unseen starlight halfway, starlight that was unreachable because my entire being was caught up in a blind spot, starlight that was coming as fast as it could, covering almost seven hundred million miles every hour” (Cole 2011: 256-257).

Besides the sensorial sphere, through which people primarily experience space, spatial language involves other terms, more connected to an attribution of meaning. I would like to focus on the concepts of “return” and of “home”, present especially in *Everyday is for the Thief*. The close relation between the two is not easy to analyse. Indeed, they often appear together and need each other to be defined. “Return” is a particular movement in space which in most cases presupposes “home”; in the same way “home” is often linked to the idea of going back. Indeed, “home” is often associated with “homesickness” (from the German “heimweh”), the intense feeling of missing home which can be the reason of one’s going back (Cole 2013: 231).

The journey of the nameless narrator can be considered as a journey of “return” in Lagos, a city that can be considered as his “home” even though it has changed and he is not able to recognize it completely as such. Paradoxically enough, the narrator uses the word “return” for a part of the city where he had never been before. “It feels like a return, like a center, though it is not a place I have ever been before” (Cole 2013: 159). Is it possible to feel at home in an unknown place? What does “home” involve? This can be explained easily by recalling what Tuan (1997) argued: home is not only a location; it also includes human presence, the people in there. Cole himself claims that it is important to “reconsider what counts as home. The term ‘at home’ describes both a location and a state of being. You can stay at home or feel at home, and often those two notions coincide. But what about when they don’t?” (2016: 232) For this reason, it may

be said that the narrator is technically at home in Lagos as a place, where he lived as a child and where part of his family is. Whether he feels at home is debatable, he probably does somewhere, in certain spots of Lagos as well as he may be in certain spots of New York.

Julius in *Open City* cannot find “home”, neither in the city he lives in nor in his European roots. Furthermore, a sense of belonging cannot be found in his relationships, as he is basically alone, afraid, and refuse the contact with others. It is impossible therefore to go back somewhere, as there seems to be no starting point. What could be useful to deal with his situation is the German concepts of “fernweh” (antonym of “heimweh”) and “wanderlust”. “Fernweh is a longing to be away from home, a desire to be in faraway places” (Cole 2013: 232). However, even though the will to be always somewhere else fits Julius’ state of being, the concept is defined in respect to “home”. Terms which could feed his inability to find a place to call “home” are “estrangement” and “deracination”, the lack of roots.

In *Open City* there is also an important a reflection concerning language and names in particular. What Julius underlines is the importance of his name that connects him to a place far from New York that he does not know, Germany. His second name comes from the Yoruba tradition and associated him to Nigeria, where he has never lived.

The name Julius linked me to another place and was, with my passport and my skin color, one of the intensifiers of my sense of being different, of being set apart, in Nigeria. I had a Yoruba middle name, Olatubosun, which I never used. That name surprised me a little each time I saw it on my passport or birth certificate, like something that belonged to someone else but had been long held in my keeping. (2011: 78)

This extract shows how language, names in this case, sometimes fail to represent the human experience. Julius’s names seem to declare his belonging to a country, a culture, a state of being, in which however he does not belong. His first name Julius comes after his German mother Juliana; the Yoruba middle name reveals his Nigerian origins. Both seems stranger to him, belonging to somewhere else. To use Gilroy’s terms (1992), his

names mirror his roots, if we may consider them as such, but do not reflect his routes. Julius' routes lead him to and through New York. The place he is living in may provide him the opportunity to find a home out of his lack of roots. On the contrary, it seems to intensify his sense of "unbelonging".

As far as names are concerned, the narrator of *Every Day is for the Thief* is nameless. According to the previous paragraph, the lack of a name does not allow readers to locate the character somewhere in the world. However, as previously shown, associating him/her to a place does not mean representing his identity exhaustively. Cole himself claims that information about the character are not important, it could be whoever coming back for holiday after many years spent abroad. It is then possible to reconstruct his history thanks to the places declared: Lagos, the city that he calls home, and New York where he has been living for 15 years. "Where you have been, including where you have travelled, has a great deal to do with who and what we are." (Casey 1993: 303).

Conclusion

This work focuses on the dimension of space in Taiye Selasi's *Ghana Must Go* and Teju Cole's *Open City* and *Every Day is for the Thief*. The theoretical background of chapter 1 provided the concepts necessary to carry out the analysis. Given the wide use of the concept of space both in everyday life and in narrative, it has acquired a varied spectrum of meanings. Besides the literal and most immediate one, it is often used metaphorically. Starting from a traditional, static connotation of space, I have underlined how space has been rethought and redefined theoretically. The analysis of the books shows how Selasi and Cole converge in this redefined meaning of space in their narrative works. The relation between space and time, the possibility to use other terms, such as place, and the opportunity to create new spaces were the main elements underlined in the analysis. A noteworthy aspect shared by Selasi and Cole was Afropolitanism, a concept that redefines home, identity as well as space. However, even though sharing this multicultural background, space is produced differently by the two authors, as the focus on different elements of their works shows.

Selasi's novel *Ghana Must Go* is the story of the Sai family scattered throughout the world without contacts between its members. Kweku and Fola are two Ghanaian immigrants in the US, where they moved looking for professional success. Their four children were born and have always lived in the US. After being wrongfully fired, Kweku abandons his family and goes back to Ghana, where Fola as well goes back after many years. The characters are therefore in different points of a map that stretches across the ocean. For this reason, I have argued that the new space created by Selasi in her novel can be considered an Atlantic space, a space in between defined, localized spaces, i.e. countries and continents. From a metaphorical point of view, Selasi's Atlantic space represents the characters' feeling of "in-betweenness". The Atlantic in *Ghana Must Go* can be thought of as a space, created by the relationships between characters dislocated across the ocean.

I discuss the way in which space is produced in the analyzed works. On the one hand, it is possible to identify a "map view" (Ryan 2009) in the sense that the cities where characters are, create a sort of points in a map. This "produced" world is not seen through an omniscient eye. The narration is based on a multifocal point of view: it looks

as if a camera focuses on the same moment lived by different characters, providing thus different points of view. On the other hand, the way in which space is created can be considered a “tour strategy” (Ryan 2009), as this multifocality is pursued moving in space and focusing each time on a different character.

Given the interdependence between space and time, I have explored the way in which the two dimensions are treated and interwoven in the analyzed novel. Indeed, as the story moves in space, from one point of the world to another, it opens temporal windows on the characters’ past and allows readers to build the family’s story.

Furthermore, I discuss whether the space produced can be considered place, meaning the acquisition of a higher degree of details and familiarity. In my analysis, I argue that *Ghana Must Go* presents a space that never becomes familiar. This is proved by the characters’ inability to belong and feel at “home” somewhere. However, it is true that they are able to find a “home” towards the end of the book in the restored relationship with each other. In this case, “home” is a place whose meaning is given by the people in it. Therefore, the novel may also be considered as a story of a family in search of a place to call “home”.

Space is analyzed in its relation with the body. The body is the first instrument through which human beings perceive space. Indeed, space is bodily sensed: it is no casualty that space is often described taking the body as point of reference. This bodily perception of space is also the reason why spatial language is widely used in every day conversations. In *Ghana Must Go*, the body plays a central role, as it becomes a micro representation of Selasi’s macro world. Indeed, the different position of the characters across the world, which builds the macro dimension of space, is mirrored in the human body, on a micro level. In my analysis, I focus on two meaningful examples regarding Kweku and Fola. While dying, Kweku perceives his heart breaking in four pieces, each one standing for a person, who is dislocated somewhere else in the world. Each point serves as a link between a specific moment in time and space and another one. The same goes for Fola, who is awoken at night by a strange sensation and touches her stomach looking for something wrong. Through the different parts of her stomach, she tries to sense her children, and what is happening to them. Here as well, the different points in which the four siblings are located are represented by and felt through Fola’s

body. The connections created between micro and macro dimension of space cross the ocean and strongly contribute to the creation of the Atlantic as a crossroads of “routes”.

Finally, space is also created by language. My analysis focuses on the way in which the repetition of words contributes to the creation of the space of *Ghana Must Go*. I argue that, from a linguistic point of view, the Atlantic space of the novel is build especially by words or concept suggesting movement in space, such as “leave”, “go back”, “return”, etc. These movements show how the Atlantic ocean is crossed in both directions by the characters. From a symbolical point of view, the repetition of words may represent connections between different characters and events. The most evident example is given by the repetition of the refrain “*Why did I ever leave you?*” appearing three times, from the very first pages to the last one. In this sense, it may be considered as a file rouge that brings the Sai family from division to unity, from leaving to coming together. I also focus on another element, the “slippers”, which appear in the very first line of the novel as well as in the very last. What it was important to understand was the type of space that they create. Slippers are used to move in space and are also linked to the concept of “home”. In the very last pages, slippers are brought by Amato Fola, that brings them inside. They may be seen a symbol of Kweku, who is finally able to find a home. In this sense, the space created by the slippers is a sort of circle from being home to being home again passing through leaving.

The final chapter of this work deals with the analysis of space in Teju Cole’s *Open City* and *Every Day is for The Thief*. In order to carry out my analysis, I use the theoretical background of chapter 1 and the same structure of chapter 2. However, the elements I have focused on are different as space is obviously declined in a different way by Cole. Crucial to the production of space in his writing is the role of photography, as testified to by the photos he often inserts in his works. I argue that his writing may be considered “photographic”, in the sense that his descriptions are so detailed that they look like pictures. In order to do this, Cole uses what Ryan (2009) calls “tour strategy”, where space is discovered by readers along with the character, while he/she moves in space. This is true for both narrative works, even though it is more evident in *Open City*. Indeed, most of the novel deals with Julius wandering around New York, a city which he is familiar with and describes in details.

As in Selasi's, in Cole's works, movement in space is linked to time and in particular to memories. As *Open City* opens, Julius is not introduced, but already walking aimlessly, which is the real event of the novel. For this reason, Julius can be considered as a *flâneur*, a narrative figure that is a stroller and a urban walker. Pieces of his personal story can be retraced through some thoughts and memories that come every now and then. In this way, readers know that he has African and European origins, but has almost always lived in New York, which means that he is somehow linked to different places but belongs to no one. Memory is also central to *Every Day is for The Thief*, where the nameless protagonist goes back to Lagos after fifteen years in America. The city he finds himself in is inevitably compared to the city of his memories, which has acquired a dream-like shade. Memories are linked to the relationship between Lagos and time, i.e. between Lagos and its history. It may come as a paradox that the city has somehow erased its past (and some of its horrible episodes, such as the slave trade) or reported it uncritically. In this sense, Lagos is similar to the New York of *Open City*, which has hidden the story of African Americans.

Secondly, I discuss the possibility to define the space produced in Cole's narrative works as place. This is undoubtedly possible for New York in *Open City*, as the city is described in details and is familiar to Julius. However, his need of belonging shows how this familiarity with the city does not translate in a sense of "home". The case of Brussels is slightly more difficult to be defined. Julius goes there looking for his grandmother, for his origins, in other words for a sense of belonging, which he is unable to find. On the one hand, it is a precise, well-localized point in the world, whose history and physical appearance is precisely reported and, thus fits in Yi-Fu Tuan's definition of place, as a familiar, detailed and concrete form of space (1977). On the other, unlike New York, there is no sense of familiarity as it is a city the protagonist does not know by heart. Going to Brussels is Julius' attempt to reconnect with his origins, to find a place where to belong, but his solitude and lack of roots is there as well, a fact that makes Brussels a counterpart for New York. As far as *Every Day is for The Thief* is concerned, Lagos is a peculiar example of place. Indeed, it is a concrete, well-described, familiar city that was home to the nameless narrator and that still hosts part of his family. However, after many years abroad, home is both familiar and unknown, as both the city and himself have changed throughout the years. This means that the narrator's

sense of familiarity is reduced by changes and, as a consequence, it is not possible to recognize that place as “home”.

Cities play a central role in the three works analyzed. I have paid particular attention to New York in the novel *Open City*, for its relevance as a city in the literary tradition. Indeed, being the center of modernity, it becomes the ideal place for flâneurs to stroll, and observe. New York is the “open city” of the title, a definition that has an ambivalent meaning. On the one hand, the adjective “open” is positively associated to open-minded, open to diversity. However, Cole explains that there is also a military connotation of the term: “open city” was used to identify a city that surrendered to the enemies not to be destroyed. In this latter connotation, the same “label” is also used to describe Brussels. The use of the same term together with the sense of isolation that haunts Julius in both cities show how the two cities are more similar than expected. This reflects Italo Calvino’s idea of “continuous cities”. I also focus on absence, that is there in both works even though differently. In *Open City* the absent element is Nigeria, a country that Julius does not know but with which he is associated due to his skin color and his national origin. In the same way, *Every Day is for The Thief* is set in Lagos but New York is in the narrator’s mind and stands as a term of comparison. In other words, what is absent provides a lens through which the narrators observe, analyze, and judge the reality they are in.

Finally, exactly as already done with Selasi’s novel, I analyze the way in which Cole produces space through language. The most evident examples are the name of countries and cities, as they identify precise points in Cole’s “map of the world” (Cole 2017: 324). Furthermore, these different places are perceived through an integration of senses and experience, what Lawson calls “synaesthesia” (2011: 42). The body, and senses in particular, are therefore the first step in the human understanding and elaboration of space. Among the senses, sight is the most present, as the detailed descriptions show. Readers see space, be it New York, Brussels or Lagos, through the narrators’ eyes. From a symbolical point of view, sight is also associated to perspective, i.e. the vision, ideas, beliefs one has due to his position in space. The narrators’ lives in New York provide them with a perspective on themselves and the world around them, which is modified when they go to Brussels or Lagos. An example of language associated with

sight is “blind spot”, that appears in both works, and shows how sight, eye, and perspective are crucial to Cole’s writing. From the literal and medical point of view, “blind spot” is a limit in sight, also called “papillophlebitis”, and therefore a limit in one’s perception of space. From a symbolical point of view, it represents the unseen, what is hidden under the surface and will never be understood completely.

In sum, both Selasi and Cole create a new rendition of space, represented by the characters’ condition of in-betweenness and their lack of ‘home’. This shows how the dimension of space is much more blurred, indefinite, and hybrid than traditionally expected. This lack of certainties gives the opportunity to rethink a concept such as space, which was traditionally considered as static. Space is rather created by a network of relationships that overlays national borders, connecting in this way different points of the world.

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Abstract

Questa tesi si propone di analizzare lo spazio nei lavori di Taiye Selasi, *Ghana Must Go* (2013) e di Teju Cole, *Open City* (2011) e *Every Day is for the Thief* (2015). Prima di affrontare l'analisi vera e propria, è necessario fornire un quadro generale sulla dimensione dello spazio nella letteratura, soffermandomi sugli autori che maggiormente hanno contribuito all'evoluzione del concetto. È importante sottolineare come il concetto di spazio sia stato oggetto di un dibattito lungo secoli e sia tutt'ora presente a livello sociale. Infatti, il termine "spazio" è spesso usato sia nelle conversazioni informali che in letteratura, più in senso metaforico che letterale. È quindi importante analizzare l'evoluzione del concetto nel tempo, con particolare attenzione ai concetti con cui esso si relaziona, come quello di tempo e di luogo (*place*).

Il concetto di spazio è interconnesso ad altri concetti, termini e dimensioni. Nella tradizione letteraria, spazio è sempre stata una delle principali dimensioni considerate nell'analisi dei testi narrativi, insieme al tempo. Secondo la tradizione, spazio e tempo sarebbero contrapposti e non ugualmente importanti. Il tempo infatti era rappresentato dalla successione degli eventi e quindi prioritario sullo spazio, considerato come un mero sfondo, statico. Il punto di svolta è rappresentato da ciò che Edward W. Soja chiama *svolta spaziale* (en. *spatial turn*). Si tratta di un movimento intellettuale di inizio ventesimo secolo che pone l'accento sullo spazio e in particolare sul suo significato nelle scienze umanistiche. È importante sottolineare come il crescente interesse verso lo spazio non releghi il tempo ad una posizione secondaria. Al contrario, questo movimento si propone di mostrare come le due componenti siano strettamente legate ed interconnesse al punto da compenetrarsi. L'interdipendenza tra i concetti di tempo e spazio è garantita dall'inserimento dell'idea di movimento, di azione nella dimensione spaziale, idea al centro dell'analisi proposta. Si assiste quindi ad una ridefinizione della realtà e, di conseguenza, anche dello spazio, per il quale risultano inadatte le categoriche fisse, statiche e isolate della tradizione. Il risultato è uno spazio più difficile da definire perché influenzato da altri fattori, come il tempo, e sfugge qualsiasi tentativo di limitarlo, sia dal punto di vista fisico che linguistico.

La difficoltà di etichettare lo spazio in modo definito e fisso si riflette nei numerosi termini ad esso affini, che talvolta assumono significati leggermente diversi a seconda

dell'autore. In particolare, è importante sottolineare la relazione spazio (*space*) e luogo (*place*). Mentre il primo rimane un concetto generale, astratto, il secondo può essere considerato come un punto in una mappa, con collocazione e caratteristiche precise (Tuan 1977). Quindi, lo spazio si concretizza e diventa luogo quando vengono forniti maggiori dettagli e viene acquisito un grado più alto di familiarità. Un esempio molto importante di luogo è 'casa' (home). 'Casa' è un punto ben preciso, in cui le relazioni interpersonali che si stabiliscono e mantengono giocano un ruolo fondamentale nel creare senso di appartenenza. Se trasformare spazio in luogo è un'attività umana molto frequente, non è immediato che un luogo a noi familiare diventi effettivamente "casa" e sia in grado di fornire appartenenza, come mostrano le opere analizzate. Infatti, i protagonisti sono spesso schiacciati da un senso di sradicamento o di non appartenenza, dalla mancanza di un luogo da chiamare 'casa'. La loro difficoltà è dovuta e/o accentuata dal loro background multiculturale, diviso tra Africa e Occidente, tra le loro origini e la realtà che effettivamente vivono.

Nella ridefinizione del concetto di spazio assumono notevole importanza i contributi di autori come Henri Lefebvre, Michel Foucault, Edward W. Soja, Homi K. Bhabha e Paul Gilroy. Tutti questi autori, pur con teorie diverse, sono accomunati dal tentativo di ripensare lo spazio creandone uno nuovo, un terzo, che scardini il binarismo proposto nella tradizione. Henri Lefebvre nella sua opera "La produzione dello spazio" (1974) propone una "trialettica della spazialità", che si articola in *spazi percepiti*, *spazi concepiti* e *spazi vissuti*. Questa configurazione triplice dello spazio riflette una configurazione triplice della realtà in socialità-storicità-spazialità, dove è proprio la dimensione dello spazio ad essere inserita e a far saltare il sistema binario.

Foucault ripensa lo spazio introducendo il termine *eterotopia* (*heterotopia*). Le eterotopie sono spazi diversi da tutti gli altri spazi sociali, ibridi, presenti in tutte le società ma che assumono un valore specifico in ognuna di esse. Dal punto di vista più teorico, è un'eterotopia l'età dell'adolescenza proprio per il suo essere transitoria e instabile. Nel concreto, si traducono in luoghi come prigione, cimitero, giardino, ecc. Un'altra manifestazione della nuova concezione di spazio è il "terzo spazio" (third space) di Soja, che si propone di rielaborare la teoria della "trialettica della spazialità" di Lefebvre. Soja considera gli spazi percepiti come un "primo spazio", quelli concepiti

come un “secondo spazio” e quelli vissuti come un “terzo spazio”. Questo nuovo spazio creato è una zona di coesistenza e compenetrazione tra i primi due, che quindi si ibridizzano.

L'ibridizzazione è uno dei concetti più importanti del pensiero di Bhabha, che trasferisce il concetto di “terzo spazio” in una prospettiva postcoloniale. Nella relazione tra dominatori e subalterni, entrambe le parti influenzano e sono influenzate reciprocamente. Si crea quindi una zona di contatto, un “terzo spazio” che si traduce in “ibridità culturale”, che include le differenze e scardina la gerarchia coloniale tra dominatori e dominati. Il contributo di Bhabha dimostra come ci sia margine di negoziazione e contaminazione tra le culture, tanto da rendere impossibile considerarle come omogenee e unitarie. Le culture diventano ibride grazie al contatto, allo spostamento di persone. Nel caso dell'Africa si parla di diaspora, suddivisa in due ondate: la prima era la deportazione forzata di africani in America in qualità di schiavi, la seconda invece fa riferimento all'ingente flusso di africani di seconda generazione che si muovono nel mondo tra diverse nazioni e culture.

Un ruolo fondamentale nella ridefinizione dello spazio in ottica postcoloniale è ricoperto da Gilroy con la sua opera *The Black Atlantic*. In essa, l'autore propone una nuova configurazione dell'Atlantico come intreccio di *da dove vieni (roots)* e *dove sei ora (routes)*. La condizione diasporica secondo Gilroy è un insieme di tensione e sospensione fra le origini e la propria esperienza, un insieme di sentimenti come dolore, e nostalgia, ma anche fluidità, contaminazione. Oltre da essere geograficamente in mezzo a dei continenti, sparandoli e unendoli allo stesso tempo, l'Atlantico è anche di uno spazio nuovo, terzo, fatto di flussi, incontri e ibridazioni fra culture. Gilroy riparte dalla nozione di doppia coscienza di Du Bois, ovvero dalla condizione esistenziale dei deportati che erano contemporaneamente coinvolti ed esclusi dalla nazione in cui si trovano come schiavi, mantenendo comunque un legame con il loro paese di origine, che diventa spazio di libertà e risorsa per la sopravvivenza. Questa è la condizione tragica che Gilroy esprime con l'espressione Black Atlantic, “un sistema di interazione e comunicazione storica, culturale, politica e linguistica che ebbe origine con la schiavitù stessa [...] Nella sua evoluzione, la schiavitù del nuovo mondo mescolò

gruppi diversi di persone in combinazioni complesse e imprevedibili” (Gilroy 1993: 18).

La rilettura della dimensione dello spazio è fondamentale per l'analisi delle opere scelte. Entrambi gli autori infatti, pur con grandi differenze nella loro produzione dello spazio, creano uno “spazio terzo”.

Il romanzo di Taiye Selasi *Ghana Must Go*⁴⁷ presenta una dimensione dello spazio totalmente nuova e più complessa rispetto alla sfondo statico proposto dalla tradizione. Questo è favorito da una nuova configurazione spaziale che l'autrice identifica con il termine *Afropolitan* da lei stessa coniato nel 2005 in un articolo intitolato “Bye-Bye Babar”.⁴⁸ *Afropolitan* identifica quegli africani di seconda generazione, che mantengono un legame con l'Africa per il loro colore della pelle ma che vivono tutta o gran parte della loro vita altrove, in Europa e soprattutto in America. Selasi usa questo termine per raccontare se stessa e la sua personale esperienza, visto che le etichette di identità nazionale non sono in grado di rappresentarne la complessità. Nata a Londra da padre ghanese e madre nigeriana, è cresciuta in Massachusetts. Si è laureata presso la Yale University e ha poi proseguito i suoi studi presso l'università di Oxford. È interessante notare come il termine *afropolitan* crei un nuovo spazio per una generazione di giovani africani in costante movimento. Allo stesso tempo però, viene ridefinito un continente, l'Africa, da sempre stigmatizzato agli occhi dell'Occidente come povero, inferiore, di minor valore economico e culturale. Proprio per questa immagine elitaria, troppo idealizzata e secondo alcuni finta, *afropolitan* ha ricevuto numerose critiche.

I protagonisti di *Ghana Must Go* possono tutti essere considerati *afropolitans*. I Sai, infatti, sono una famiglia agiata: i genitori Kweku e Fola emigrano negli Stati Uniti alla ricerca di migliori opportunità professionali, mentre i figli nascono e crescono in America. Kweku all'improvviso abbandona la famiglia che, progressivamente, si sfalda. All'inizio del romanzo i componenti della famiglia sono isolati, in luoghi diversi del mondo, lontani l'uno dall'altro. Kweku è in Ghana, dove muore, Fola torna in Ghana, i figli rimangono in America ma senza alcun contatto. Ogni personaggio può essere considerato un punto nella mappa del mondo; la geografia che si crea unendo i vari

⁴⁷ Il romanzo è stato tradotto in italiano come *La bellezza delle cose fragili*.

⁴⁸ <http://thelip.robertsharp.co.uk/?p=76>. Accessed on 17th March 2019.

punti è una rete di strade, direzioni e percorsi attraverso l'Atlantico. Proprio per il fatto che l'oceano diventa un insieme di "routes" come suggerito da Gilroy, lo spazio creato nel romanzo può essere considerato "atlantico". La condizione di afropolitan è una condizione ibrida, di mezzo, caratteristica che viene vissuta come ricchezza da Selasi ma non allo stesso modo dai suoi personaggi. Essi infatti subiscono il loro essere ibridi, in quanto ciò non permette loro di trovare un senso di appartenenza: non si riconoscono né nei pregiudizi americani sull'Africa, né negli Stati Uniti in cui stanno vivendo.

Nella dimensione dello spazio nel romanzo di Selasi, si può vedere come essa si intrecci alla dimensione del tempo. Infatti, nel momento in cui il focus della narrazione si sposta su un personaggio, in un determinato tempo e spazio, si apre uno scorcio sul suo passato tramite dei flashback. Queste finestre temporali sparse nel testo permettono ai lettori di ricostruire la storia quasi come fosse un mosaico. L'intreccio tra tempo e spazio è in particolar modo rappresentato dal personaggio di Kweku, il cui ritorno in Ghana dall'America può essere interpretato come un tentativo di tornare indietro nel tempo. Per questo aspetto, *Ghana Must Go* possiede alcune caratteristiche della cosiddetta "letteratura migrante" (*migrant literature*), che racchiude storie scritte da o che hanno come soggetto immigrati. I fenomeni migratori sono molto spesso il risultato di una politica coloniale, elemento che rende la "letteratura migrante" molto vicina alla "letteratura postcoloniale", che comprende tutto ciò che ideologicamente si oppone alla logica egemonica coloniale.

Per quanto riguarda la distinzione tra spazio (*space*) e luogo (*place*), può essere difficile determinare quale viene scelto da Selasi nel romanzo. Trasformare lo spazio, dimensione astratta, in luogo, concreto e dotato di significato è un'attività umana molto comune basata sul grado di familiarità e di affettività del parlante. È interessante il caso del luogo "casa", il cui significato è dato dal sistema di relazioni che in essa si stabiliscono. Considerata questa frequente associazione positiva tra luogo e affettività, famiglia, è difficile considerare luogo lo spazio creato da Selasi. Infatti, tutta la famiglia Sai sembra pervasa da un senso di non appartenenza, di incapacità di riconoscersi nel posto in cui è e di conseguenza di mancanza di relazioni significative. Tuttavia, anche se molto frequente, la connotazione positiva non è necessariamente insita nella definizione di luogo. Le città, o i paesi in cui si trovano i personaggi pur rimanendo ad essi straniere

e persino ostili a volte, possono essere considerati luoghi in quanto conosciuti, abituali e concreti, ben localizzabili in una mappa.

Per quanto riguarda il concetto di “casa”, esso viene rappresentato da un elemento ricorrente e fondamentale nella creazione di spazio nel romanzo: le pantofole (*slippers*). Esse compaiono fin dalle prime righe del romanzo, alla morte di Kweku e ritornano più volte nei ricordi dei suoi figli e della moglie. È particolarmente importante la sua presenza alla fine del romanzo, quando Ama, la seconda moglie, consegna le pantofole a Fola, che le porta dentro casa. In questo senso, questo elemento può essere considerato simbolo di casa così come simbolo di presenza, di qualcuno che rimane (*stay*) a differenza di ciò che la famiglia ha fatto (*leave*). Dal punto di vista linguistico ci sono altre ripetizioni importanti che contribuiscono a creare legami tra diversi personaggi e diversi momenti e quindi a creare spazio. La più evidente di queste ripetizioni riguarda il ritornello di una canzone, *Why did I ever leave you?*, ricordata da Kweku mentre sta morendo e ripresa nel suo dialogo immaginario con Fola alla fine. È importante non solo perché alla fine si riesce a rispondere alla domanda e a perdonare, ma anche perché contiene uno dei verbi più importanti del romanzo, *leave*. È proprio la partenza, di Kweku prima e degli altri membri poi, a disegnare la geografia di *Ghana Must Go*, a creare quella rete di relazioni che formano lo spazio qui definito “Atlantico”.

Il secondo autore su cui questa tesi si concentra è Teju Cole, scrittore, fotografo e critico. Nato in America da genitori nigeriani, vive a Lagos fino a 17 anni, quando decide di tornare negli Stati Uniti dove tutt’ora risiede. Questa brevissima biografia permette di discutere se e come l’autore possa essere considerato afropolitan. La sua esperienza personale è distribuita in e lo lega a diversi paesi, tanto che la sua identità non può essere facilmente etichettata. Questo suggerisce uno spazio diverso da quello della tradizione, labile, sfumato, in mezzo (*in between*) a spazi definiti come paesi e continenti. Rientra quindi in quella ridefinizione della dimensione dello spazio insita nel termine coniato da Selasi, che Cole stesso non rinnega. Nonostante ciò, la produzione dello spazio nelle opere qui analizzate, *Open City* e *Everyday is for The Thief*, è molto diversa da quella di *Ghana Must Go*. Questo dimostra come punti di partenza simili, come il background multiculturale dei due autori, possa poi portare a risultati, ottiche e prospettive molto diverse.

Tutte le città presenti nelle opere analizzate, New York, Bruxelles e Lagos, sono luoghi (*place*), precisi, ben localizzati e descritti nel dettaglio. Lo spazio di *Open City* si identifica principalmente nella città di New York, con una breve parentesi ambientata a Bruxelles. Si tratta di uno spazio descritto nei minimi particolari man mano che il protagonista, Julius, lo attraversa (*tour strategy*). In questo modo, sembra che lo spazio venga creato e venga scoperto dai lettori insieme a Julius, nel momento in cui lui si muove in esso. Gli scorci di città che vengono catturati dallo sguardo del protagonista e narratore assomigliano a fotografie per la loro ricchezza di dettagli che permette ai lettori di avvicinarsi alla storia. La fotografia gioca un ruolo fondamentale nella vita di Cole, al punto che nei suoi lavori (*Open city* escluso) decide di inserire fotografie, anche scattate da lui stesso. In *Every Day is for The Thief* per esempio, nel racconto del protagonista sono talvolta inserite foto che catturano momenti quotidiani, a volte apparentemente insignificanti ma che hanno colpito il fotografo. Lo spazio in questo romanzo è creato con la *tour strategy*, scoperta e la descrizione di Lagos in questo caso accompagnano il movimento del protagonista, anche se in modo meno evidente rispetto ad *Open City*, dove era il movimento stesso ad essere il centro del romanzo. In questa seconda opera invece, si tratta di un movimento alla riscoperta di Lagos, dove il narratore ha vissuto e da dove è rimasto lontano per quindici anni. È quindi inevitabile che la sua descrizione dello spazio sia un tentativo di riconoscere e riconoscersi nella città che è stata casa sua; il suo sguardo su Lagos è strettamente legato ai ricordi, che riaffiorano spesso e che stabiliscono un paragone tra ciò che era e ciò che è.

La memoria e i ricordi sono strettamente legati alla dimensione del tempo, che si intreccia alla dimensione dello spazio, ridefinendola. Infatti, anche nei lavori di Cole lo spazio segue l'innovazione portata dalla "svolta spaziale": è quindi legato all'idea di movimento e interconnesso con altre dimensioni, come il tempo. In entrambe le opere di Cole qui analizzate, mentre i personaggi si muovono nello spazio, vengono aperte finestre temporali sul loro passato o sul passato della città in cui si trovano. In *Open City*, Julius rimane un personaggio enigmatico della cui storia ogni tanto vengono fornite informazioni, talvolta sorprendenti. Per esempio, l'incontro con una ragazza che il protagonista ha violentato in Nigeria sconvolge quell'empatia che il lettore avrebbe potuto provare nei suoi confronti e mostra quanto Julius rimanga oscuro. Sono allo stesso modo enigmatiche anche New York e Bruxelles, che smettono quasi di essere

due città differenti visto il sentimento di sradicamento e solitudine che Julius prova in entrambe. Mentre vaga per le strade di entrambe, Julius incontra strade, monumenti, persone che diventano occasioni per riflettere sulla storia contemporanea e passata della città stessa, spesso legata anche all'esperienza Afroamericana. Le finestre temporali aperte in *Every Day is for The Thief* riguardano sia la storia di Lagos che la storia personale del protagonista. Per quanto riguarda Lagos, viene evidenziato come il tempo passato l'abbia resa diversa dalla città che il narratore ricorda ed è perciò inevitabile una sorta di paragone. Inoltre, ci si sofferma su come la storia della città, e in particolare la drammatica esperienza della tratta degli schiavi sia stata cancellata, e come invece tracce permangano in altre città del mondo. Questo mostra come si tratti di uno spazio interconnesso, al punto che la storia di un luogo è dislocata in e appartiene a diversi luoghi.

Esattamente come per *Ghana Must Go*, la riflessione sul modo in cui la dimensione dello spazio è prodotta tramite il linguaggio. In *Open City* (tradotto in italiano come "Città aperta"), il primo e più evidente esempio di linguaggio spaziale è il titolo. Innanzitutto viene menzionata la città che, in entrambi i lavori di Cole, è la rappresentazione di come lo spazio astratto si concretizzi. "Città aperta" dal punto di vista simbolico identifica una città aperta mentalmente, tollerante alle differenze; dal punto di vista militare, è una città che si arrende alle forze nemiche senza combattimenti, per non essere distrutta. Un altro esempio di linguaggio spaziale, fondamentale per l'analisi delle opere, anche se meno evidente, è "blind spot" (in italiano "punto d'ombra"), presente in tutte le opere di Cole e titolo di una di esse. "Blind spot" si riferisce ad un'esperienza personale dell'autore, al quale viene diagnosticata la papillo flebite, una macchia nera che lo priva quasi completamente della vista ad un occhio. Accanto alla connotazione medica, l'espressione ne assume anche una simbolica, indicando tutto ciò che non viene visto della realtà in quanto sotto la sua superficie visibile. Questa riflessione rimanda alla percezione dello spazio tramite il corpo e in particolare i cinque sensi, di cui la vista può essere considerato il principale viste anche le descrizioni dettagliate dei luoghi. In entrambe le opere analizzate la vista assume un ruolo fondamentale anche simbolicamente, per essere legata al concetto di prospettiva da cui il mondo viene visto e giudicato.

