



Inherited Wounds, Reclaimed Identities: Intergenerational Trauma and Diasporic Memory in Yaa Gyasi's *Homegoing*

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Abstract

This study examines the themes of intergenerational trauma and diasporic memory as represented in Yaa Gyasi's *Homegoing*. The novel explores the psychological and cultural impact of the transatlantic slave trade on African identities, transmitted across generations in the form of unresolved trauma, silences, and broken familial connections. Drawing on trauma theory, postmemory theory, and postcolonial thought, this analysis explores the impact of historical violence, especially slavery and colonialism, on identity formation and cultural continuity in the African diaspora. Marianne Hirsch's concept of postmemory is important for exploring how descendants of survivors of trauma inherit not only their forebears' suffering but also their resilience, resistance, and collective memory. The theory of deferred trauma by Cathy Caruth explains the fractured and postponed nature of traumatic memories, resonating in the characters' lives years after the occurrence of the event. In a book of two opposing narratives between half-sisters Effia and Esi, symbolic of variant destinies within the African diaspora, the

research narrows the endless struggle against lost identities, at risk of violence of dis-placement. *Homegoing* presents itself as an uncompromising literary investigation of the cyclical nature of trauma and how it operates to form not only individual histories but also diasporic collective memory. What this work examines is the importance of narrative, memory, and cultural practices within the process of healing and identity reformulation.

Keywords: Intergenerational Trauma, Diasporic Identity, Postmemory, African Literature, Homegoing

I. Introduction

Background of the Study

The Transatlantic Slave Trade is one of the most devastating and defining African moments, spanning from the 15th to the 19th century. In these centuries, millions of Africans were uprooted from their homes and transported across the Atlantic to the Americas. This involuntary displacement was accompanied by unimaginable brutality and devastation, dismantling African societies and



deconstructing the social, political, and cultural institutions which had underpinned numerous communities along the western coastline of the continent, e.g., the Gold Coast area (1). Above all, this slave trade was not a voluntary economic contract but a regime of coercion, exploitation, and unspeakable violence that irreversibly changed African identities and diasporic legacies. A midpoint of this grotesque system was the Middle Passage, the oceanic travel where subjects endured end route to enslavement. Conditions aboard slave ships were dreadful; historian Stephanie Smallwood characterizes them as "floating tombs," where captives experienced atrocious overcrowding, starvation, disease, physical violence, and psychological terror at sea for weeks or months (1). Death was highly prevalent, and bodies were regularly dumped overboard in the sea with no ceremony, severing critical spiritual links central to much African cosmologies and death and afterlife religious traditions. Paul Gilroy's "slave sublime" articulates the Middle Passage as an unrepresentable site of suffering and loss whose entire extremity cannot be represented but still resonates in shared memory in ritual, narrative, and cultural practice (2). Slavery trauma exceeded physical pain and resulted in what sociologist Orlando Patterson has called "social death" (3). It refers to the severing of kinship ties, wiping out native languages, and dislocating religious and cultural rituals, thus ending enslaved Africans' earlier social lives and severing their connections to their ancestral worlds. It serves as the source of much of the cultural memory and identity formation of the African diaspora and of works on African literature exploring the residual psychic scars of this rupturing. Unlike erasure, this memory is contested and reshaped, creating new cultural forms across diasporic spaces.

Africans in the diaspora were reformed and reinterpreted in their heritage to new spaces. As Toyin Falola (2001) argues, the African diaspora is a discipline of virulent loss and productive regeneration (4). African languages, religious practices, musical styles, and philosophies were reinterpreted and syncretized to meet the requirements of survival and resistance. African-based religions like Vodou, Santería, and other syncretic religious activities became key sites for cultural continuity, psychological resilience, and community building in the Americas and the Caribbean. This reconstruction of cultural heritage has been required in upholding African lineage and identity in the face of centuries of displacement and trauma.

Today's African diaspora is a global dispersed people united not only by shared origins but also by similar histories of slavery, colonial oppression, and racial exclusion. Scholars such as Stuart Hall and Paul Gilroy conceptualize diaspora identity as one forged in the furnace of displacement with an ongoing tension between holding on to African roots and adapting to new geopolitical conditions (5,2). Diasporic culture is thus not nostalgic return or imitation but a hybrid construction engaging positively with difference and ongoing connection to Africa.

African cultural production and literature still reclaim and voice the diaspora's experience, resisting colonial erasures. The Middle Passage also remains a powerful symbol and a recurring theme throughout African narratives, not to gratuitously indulge pain but to reclaim dignity and testimony for African histories (6). This literature has collective memory and trauma in resistant forms that lie outside of official historiographies, and offers arenas for healing and reconstruction of identity.

Intergenerational trauma, or transgenerational trauma, is a key concept for understanding how the legacy of the slave trade continues to influence African identities. Marianne Hirsch's postmemory theory describes how grandchildren of survivors of traumatic experiences remember and are charged with their grandparents' suffering through narratives, rituals, and performances, without firsthand experience (7). This prolonged transmission rewrites between generations histories and identities, as observed in African writing that negotiates fractured genealogies and the heritage of continued violence. The trauma theory of "belatedness" by Cathy Caruth also explains this about how trauma will not be incorporated in due course and rather comes up later as fragmented memories, emotional disturbance, or symbolic visions in literature (8). This theoretical framework is best suited to comprehend African narratives arising out of precolonial and colonial disruptions, stories that are often circular and marked by silences. Postcolonial African history complicates the transmission of trauma because the colonialists used to silence indigenous histories, and thus new ways of remembrance like ritual and oral tradition were needed.

African oral traditions remain center stage here, functioning as transmission, preservation, and cure. Such traditions counteract colonial silencing and produce shared modes of storytelling that place resilience and resistance at the center (9). Literary works addressing intergenerational trauma do not just tell stories of victimhood; they reclaim cultural



memory and narrate histories submerged by mainstream narratives. Symbolic images such as fire, ancestral visions, and body rituals are well represented as metaphors for trauma and survival in African writing.

Postcolonial African literature tends to challenge identity formation in the shadow of slavery, colonialism, and displacement. Academics like Chinua Achebe and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o have critically examined the colonial framing of identity and alienation from culture, with particular reference to the need to decolonize African knowledges and reclaim indigenous languages as sites of cultural sovereignty and resistance (10,11). Ngũgĩ argues in particular that language is not merely a means of communication but also a weapon of emancipation.

Du Bois's "*double consciousness*" applies chiefly to African Americans, yet the fragmented subjectivity he accounts for finds African parallels wherein colonized subjects wrestle with impositions of identity and the conflict between native and colonial outlooks. This intranational conflict is the unifying thread of African literary debates of identity lost and rebuilt through historic violence. Paul Gilroy's diaspora theory fills out these views by describing the African diaspora as the space for hybrid cultural identity forged through displacement, survival, and resistance (2). African literature today deploys this hybridity to broker fractured genealogies and forge continuity in the face of rupture. In short, African literature performs how trauma of colonialism and slavery is transmitted and reworked through narrative. Its narratives are both testimonial to historical wounds and location of collective healing, recovering marginalized histories and laying bare the profound effect of historical violence on African identity and collective memory.

Statement of the Problem

Although there have been some strides made in theories of trauma as well as postcolonial studies, African historical trauma, particularly that concerning the transatlantic slave trade and its lingering effects, is excluded from the global literary and critical discourse. Much of trauma theory has focused on European contexts, such as the Holocaust and world wars, and has stayed relatively silent about the systemic and intergenerational trauma of African people through racial violence, colonialism, and slavery (12). Stef Craps's call to decolonize trauma studies demands attention to structural racialized trauma historically erased or minimized, covering up the long-lasting

psychological and cultural wounding passed on through African generations.

Postcolonial and African diasporic literature has often depicted dislocated identities caused by exile and historical ruptures, but little research has successfully combined such depictions with theories of trauma and memory. For instance, Silverman (2015) criticizes the scant theorization of the dynamics of trauma-memory across African contexts, pointing to a lack of rich analysis of how colonial and slavery traumas influence identity formation(13). Similarly, Hirsch (2012) argues that African postcolonial fiction needs to engage more with theory around memory so that the enduring impact of colonial violence can be better addressed in novels such as Aminatta Forna's *The Memory of Love* (2010)(14,15).

While these novels touch on themes of trauma in general, they resist close analysis of intergenerational trauma written through African and decolonial perspectives. Notably, the specific psychological and cultural legacies of slavery, especially as dramatized in Yaa Gyasi's *Homegoing*, have received limited scholarly attention within African literary criticism. Classic works tend to place historical and political structures at the expense of the nuance of emotional and psychic inter-generational transmission of trauma (6,2).

The theory of Cathy Caruth (1996), placing the belatedness of trauma, how its effects aren't processed on occasion but appears in fragmentary memory and symptoms, offers a theory under-explored in African literary production(8). *Homegoing* eloquently illustrates this through the likes of Akua tormented by hallucinations, Ness marred with body scars, and Yaw living testimony of inherited silences, all constituting evidence for Marianne Hirsch's postmemory theory (2008) in which trauma is inherited through family and cultural narratives and not experiential(7).

Paul Gilroy's notion of diaspora as hybrid identity formation through coerced migration (1993) is amenable to this analysis but has rarely been applied in detail to *Homegoing*(2). Prior studies often treat diaspora broadly without detailing the specific genealogical ruptures and identity recoveries depicted in Gyasi's novel. Marcus's quest to recover veiled family histories is a quintessential example of cultural resistance which offers a "counterculture of modernity" countering historical erasure, a distinction point from other diaspora literature focused on displacement but not this reconstruction. In general, although scholars have acknowledged African diaspora identity and trauma



from either historic or generalized cultural perspectives, there seems to be some research gap when it comes to intergenerational psychological and cultural trauma dramatized in *Homegoing* from an African-centered, trauma theory-informed, and decolonial perspective. This study aims to fill this gap by analyzing how *Homegoing* represents inherited trauma, broken identities, and cultural memory and illuminates the novel as witness and healer in the formation of post-slavery African identity.

II. Aim and Objectives of the Study

The primary aim of this study is to examine the effects of historical trauma and fragmented identity in Yaa Gyasi's *Homegoing*. The study specifically seeks to:

- To examine the portrayal of identity formation across generations in *Homegoing*, highlighting how descendants navigate complex cultural inheritances shaped by slavery and colonialism.
- To analyze how trauma is transmitted through family lineages in the novel, emphasizing the psychological and symbolic effects of unresolved historical violence.
- To assess the psychological and sociocultural impact of slavery on Gyasi's characters, focusing on how their relationships, memory, and self-perception reflect inherited scars of displacement and oppression.

Scope of the Study

This study focuses on the representation of intergenerational trauma, identity construction, and collective memory in Yaa Gyasi's *Homegoing*, situating the novel within African and African diasporic literary traditions. It investigates how historical events such as slavery and colonialism shape psychological, cultural, and social realities across generations. The research is delimited to an analysis of the novel's structure, themes, and characterization using trauma theory, postmemory theory, and postcolonial perspectives, particularly the works of Cathy Caruth, Marianne Hirsch, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, Frantz Fanon, Paul Gilroy, and Stuart Hall. The study also considers how memory functions as a cultural archive and a mechanism for healing, emphasizing oral tradition and communal narratives in African societies. It excludes broader comparative analyses with other novels or historical documents, focusing solely on *Homegoing* as a literary case study for understanding trauma transmission and identity formation in African-descended communities.

III. Research Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research methodology, emphasizing literary analysis as the central approach for investigating the themes of trauma, identity, memory, and displacement in Yaa Gyasi's *Homegoing*. The focus will be on how these themes are represented through the experiences of two primary lineages in the novel: Effia's Ghanaian descendants and Esi's African-American descendants. The analysis will employ a close reading method, where selected passages, characters, and narrative structures are carefully examined in depth to uncover the ways in which intergenerational trauma affects the characters' identities.

To conduct this analysis, the study will primarily engage in character analysis, focusing on key figures such as Effia, Esi, Akua, Yaw, H, Willie, and Marcus. These characters are pivotal for understanding the transmission of trauma across generations, and their experiences of identity, displacement, and adaptation will be analyzed. By delving into the psychological and emotional responses of these characters, the research will highlight how their personal histories are shaped by the legacies of slavery and colonialism, with trauma acting as both a defining and disruptive force in their lives.

The study will also involve a detailed textual analysis, examining the recurring themes of trauma, memory, and cultural adaptation within the narrative. The examination will explore how the trauma of slavery and colonialism reverberates across generations, influencing the personal and collective identities of the characters. Through this analysis, the study aims to identify how Gyasi's use of narrative structure serves to depict the psychological and cultural impact of historical violence, making these themes not only central to the individual stories but also integral to the broader diasporic experience.

A comparative approach will be employed to analyze the experiences of African-descended characters from both the African continent and the African-American community. This comparison will explore the similarities and differences in their struggles with fragmented identities, trauma, and memory, shedding light on the complexities of diasporic identities. By examining the differing yet interconnected experiences of these characters, the study will offer a nuanced perspective on how trauma manifests differently across the two lineages and the varying responses to it.



The study will also draw from secondary sources, including academic journal articles, books, and existing literature on *Homegoing*, trauma theory, postcolonial studies, and diaspora studies. These sources will be reviewed to contextualize the findings within the broader academic discourse on African and African-American literary studies, providing a theoretical and cultural framework for the analysis.

Finally, a qualitative content analysis approach will be applied, identifying key themes and motifs within the text that relate to trauma and identity. This analysis will focus on the characters' actions, dialogue, and symbolic elements in the narrative, interpreting how trauma is conveyed and the impact it has on cultural identity. The study aims to offer a deeper understanding of how *Homegoing* uses its narrative structure to address the effects of historical trauma and displacement, particularly in the context of African diasporic identities.

IV. Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

Introduction

This research dives into the deep stories of trauma, identity, and memory in African literature, focusing on Yaa Gyasi's powerful novel *Homegoing*. It asks a primary question: how does the deep pain passed down from slavery and colonialism shape who people are, generation after generation? For solutions, we look through the lens of trauma theory, the paradigm of "postmemory" (how we inherit memories we did not experience), and postcolonial theory. The study also listens carefully to African cultural narratives, oral traditions, and diasporic experience, demonstrating how the psychological and cultural wounds of the past continue to persist. By invoking theorists including Cathy Caruth, Marianne Hirsch, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, Paul Gilroy, and Stuart Hall, the book explores how this inherited trauma is remembered, narrated, and ultimately resisted in these works.

Conceptual Framework

Historical Trauma in African Contexts

Historical trauma, a cumulative and collective emotional and psychological injury across generations, explains the powerful and long-standing effects of cataclysmic events such as the transatlantic slave trade and colonialism on African individuals and their descendants. Historical trauma

in African contexts encompasses not only the immediate suffering of individuals but also the systemic erasure of social structures, cultural identity, and communal cohesion, replicating cycles of pain and suffering that extend far beyond the original events (16).

This model recognizes that trauma is not only personal but based in a group's history, affecting communities' emotional lives, interpersonal relationships, and access to resources over generations. In African societies, historical trauma includes the wholesale displacement of peoples through the slave trade, the destruction of traditional governance and family systems under colonization, and continued socio-economic marginalization under post-colonial regimes (6,3). These collective wounds have been manifested in broken family systems, degradation of languages and cultural practices, and psychological distress passed from generation to generation (16).

More recent scholarship highlights the physiological as well as psychological dimensions of this intergenerational trauma. Epigenetic studies provide evidence of trauma leaving biological markers affecting descendants' vulnerabilities to mental illness, demonstrating historical trauma operates through both social and biological pathways (16). This beyond individual pathology to recognize trauma as systemic, structural, and embodied.

In African populations, the legacies of slavery and colonial violence have contributed to social phenomena such as mistrust of institutions, dissolution of communal support networks, and cycles of poverty and marginalization (6,16). The dismantling of extended family networks and cultural norms under slavery and colonialism compounds psychological injuries, and restoration is rendered complex and multifaceted.

Further, African cultural and oral traditions provide rich possibilities for transmitting traumatic memories and healing. Storytelling, ritual, and communal practices are tools of resilience, resistance, and reclamation of agency. These cultural forms complement the dominant Western clinical models, which fail to adequately address the collective and historical facets of African trauma (6,16).

The notion of historical trauma in African contexts thus suggests an integrated approach that unites memory, identity, cultural continuity, and socio-political realities. It recognizes trauma as a lived and inherited experience affecting various dimensions of life and identity, emphasizing the need for community-based healing processes reconnecting



people to their cultural pasts and collective futures (6,16).

In this study, historical trauma guides the examination of how the traumatic legacy of slavery and

colonialism affects identity formation and cultural memory across generations in Yaa Gyasi's *Homegoing*. The concept enables exploration of the novel's portrayal of psychological and cultural injuries passed down family lines, reflecting both the discontinuities and stubborn continuities of African histories and identities.

Identity Construction and Cultural Continuity

The construction of identity in African contexts is a complex, dynamic process significantly influenced by such historical events as slavery, colonialism, and postcolonial state-formation. It is a negotiation between colonial-placed structures, cultural heritage, and contemporary sociopolitical realities, all of which influence the sense that individuals and groups have of themselves and where they fit in the world. African identity then continues to be fluid but in a state of perpetual reconstruction on the basis of memory, culture, and socio-historical experiences (5,4).

Postcolonial African literature serves as a vehicle through which this dynamic identity can be expressed. Chinua Achebe and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o express the dilemmas in upholding native conventions and confronting the colonial heritage of domination (10,11). Ngũgĩ's call to "decolonize the mind" positions language and culture as sites of identity formation and resistance to colonial erasure, where local epistemologies need to be reclaimed and cultural sovereignty needs to be exercised. Similarly, Achebe's texts question cultural continuity via reinscribing African history and narrative within the literary canon, countering colonial misrepresentations (10).

Postcolonial identity is also further complicated by the diaspora and displacement produced by forced migration such as the transatlantic slave trade. Paul Gilroy's *Black Atlantic* theorizes diasporic identity as hybrid and fluid, produced via cultural exchange and historical rupture (2). Stuart Hall does this in addition by imagining diaspora identity as one of continuity with African origins and transformation through novel experiences in the diaspora, emphasizing "difference and continuity" (5). The same dialectic exists in African writing that negotiates fractured genealogies and cultural survival and illustrates how identity is maintained even in displacement contexts.

In addition, identity in African cultures is based on cultural continuity gained through oral traditions, ritual, and narrative. They solidify collective identity and communal bonds in addition to historical memory; resilience during trauma and historical violence is thus ensured (6,16). Continuity is critical in healing intergenerational traumas in that it links the current identities to the ancestral experiences and solidifies cultural knowledge between survivors and its replication among descendants. Being in possession of their identity therefore entails recovering history and culture as empowerment and healing sources. Literature like Yaa Gyasi's *Homegoing* dramatizes these processes, tracing characters' negotiations with inherited trauma and cultural legacies shaped by slavery and colonialism. It reflects broader African concerns with memory, belonging, and identity reconstruction, positioning identity as both ruptured and continuous.

To summarize, African identity formation is a multifaceted cultural, social, and political process informed by both historical trauma and ongoing efforts for cultural survival and self-definition. Themes of hybridity, cultural resilience, and memory underlie this process, which remains central to understanding the individual and collective African experiences as presented in contemporary literature.

Interrelation of Trauma, Identity, and Memory in African Texts

Trauma, identity, and memory are in an interrelational triadic relation in African life and literature. These notions do not function in vacuo but relate with one another in dynamic and reciprocal relations which present the history and contemporary experiences of Africans and their progeny. The legacy of slavery, colonialism, and their ongoing socio-political legacies has introduced wounds which seep into collective and individual identities, transmitted and remade through modes of memory. Thus, African literature tends to probe the manners in which the traumatic past is recalled, how identity is dismantled and rebuilt, and how memory becomes simultaneously a weight and a potential site of healing.

a. Trauma and Memory as Universal to African Identity

Trauma in African literature is most often understood as rooted in histories of violence and displacement, such as the transatlantic slave trade, colonialism, and apartheid, that disrupted communities and broke continuity with past



generations (6,16). This trauma is not only personal anguish but collective pain with a social relationship and cultural life impact across generations. Memory plays a crucial mediating role between trauma and identity. In African writing, memory as a platform of both suffering and resilience recalls the history of horrors and offers a context through which communities are able to re-stitch torn apart identities. Marianne Hirsch's postmemory theory, while developed through Holocaust studies, is surprisingly applicable here: grandchildren acquire memories of trauma from narratives, rituals, and cultural practices, which inform their sense of self without actually experiencing the original traumatic events themselves (7). This postmemory produces a cultural awareness where history lives in collective memory, structuring identity in diasporic and continental geographies. For example, Abdulrazak Gurnah's *By the Sea* (2018) describes characters haunted by specters of displacement and colonial trauma. The novel illustrates the ways that memory breaks up and warps, with trauma shaping identity in tentative, fluid ways (17). Anyanwu, Emeka figures wrestle with reconciling their pasts with their present lives, symptomatic of memory's ambiguity as source of pain and empowerment (18). Memory in African novels is also usually depicted as non-linear, disjointed, and resistant to closure in order to mirror the tangled mind of trauma survivors and their descendants. This is a reflection of trauma's "belatedness", its late and unfinished inscription in consciousness, paraphrased by Cathy Caruth (8,19). These narrative strategies allow African literature to speak to repressed histories and shed light on intergenerational psychological impacts, describing how identity is built from remembered and un-faced pasts.

b. Identity as a Site of Trauma's Impact and Cultural Negotiation

African literature vividly narrates how trauma shapes identity along lines of loss, rupture, hybridity, and healing. Identity is portrayed as always being bargained, disseminated by violent histories, but also robust and creative in its reconstruction. Paul Gilroy's "Black Atlantic" diaspora places identity formation within displacing and cross-cultural transfer contexts, emphasizing hybridity as central to African diasporic lives (2). Stuart Hall further elucidates diaspora identity as a process balancing continuity with African roots and difference shaped by new environments (5).

In literary works such as Yaa Gyasi's *Homegoing*, characters trace genealogies marked by slavery and colonialism, illustrating how

trauma interrupts familial and cultural continuity but also how identity emerges from the struggle to reckon with this legacy. Identity is not static or unified here; it is a terrain where trauma and memory intersect, forming a layered identity of self that includes past fragmentation and ongoing redefinition. African writing not only thus stages trauma's horrendous effect on identity but also stages identity's role in survival and resistance. In re-narrating the past and reclaiming history, African writers create spaces for psychological and cultural healing, re-establishing social connection and upholding ancestral continuity (4).

c. Memory as Cultural Archive and Healing Mechanism

Memory in African writing functions both as an archive of painful histories and healing and resilience mechanism. Oral testimonies, ritual recollections, and collective narration serve to place individuals on a wider history and culture spectrum so that dismembered selves can be restored. The practices bind past and present together so that societies can talk about trauma but also have hope and restoration (6).

In highlighting memory, African literature highlights the fact that cultural practice is important in mediating collective trauma. Trauma transmission through memory is not passive but active interpretation, challenge, and, in some instances, reworking of story. This approach opposes Western clinical models that isolate trauma to individuals, giving primacy instead to its communal, historical, and structural dimensions (20).

In *Homegoing*, to illustrate, the very form of the novel approximates oral tradition, shifting point of view across generations to show how memory and trauma are transmitted through family lines. This approach captures how memory moves and builds identity over time, revealing silence, loss, and recovery as interwoven processes (2,7).

Conclusively, the dynamic among trauma, identity, and memory in African writing involves complex dynamics by multi-faceted historical experiences. Trauma disrupts identity and challenges cultural continuity but memory offers a narrative to reclaim history, subvert erasure, and reconstruct fractured selves. African literature articulates trauma as not only a pain but also an enduring element of cultural consciousness that informs what communities are and believe they are. With the triadic focus of their study, scholars can observe the ways in which African literature depicts the ongoing negotiation of past and present, self and group, suffering and survival. This theoretical framework directly influences the study



of *Homegoing* and similar works, where inherited trauma, searching for identity, and acts of remembering converge to capture the African historical experience and its resonances in modern life.

Theoretical Framework

Overview of Trauma Theory

Trauma theory analyzes the way in which individuals and groups experience, process, and represent the psychological impact of traumatic or catastrophic events. Based on its account on psychoanalytic theory, especially Freud's work, trauma theory evolved to explain why certain events are not processed at the time of the event but rather come back later in the form of intrusive recollections, flashbacks, or affective disturbances (8). Over time, trauma studies have moved from the arena of clinical psychology to touch literature, history, and social studies.

Within African contexts, trauma theory takes on characteristic dimensions owing to the collective and repetitive character of trauma based on events like transatlantic slave trade, colonial violence, apartheid, and political conflict. Critics like Kurtz (2023) argue that the application of trauma theory in African literatures not only enhances literary critique but compels a rewriting of the theory in order to acknowledge community-based approaches to trauma and healing. African theories of trauma highlight the socio-centric framework, valuing harm as placed in the communal weave of society and not as a solitary event (21).

Pathbreaking scholarship highlights that trauma in African literature addresses not isolated, singular incidents but long-standing, cumulated ones, where trauma is both historical (connected to the collective memory of slavery, colonization, and exile) and ongoing (connected to violence and marginalization) (21). Furthermore, literature is also a locus of change, where performances of recalling and narrating recast the shared process of healing and rebuilding identity.

African researchers counter Western notions of trauma that center on individualized diagnosis, such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and instead place the prominence of cultural memory, oral tradition, and group rituals at the forefront in their ability to promote recovery and resilience (22). The trauma is hence reinterpreted in African scholarship to include cultural and historical specificity, noting that healing often means rebinding communal ties and reconnecting to ancestral pasts. The very structure of narrative,

broken, multi-voiced, and non-linear, mirrored in the working of trauma within consciousness and memory (21,22).

By situating trauma as a power which surpasses personal boundaries and is heavily determined by history, space, and community, African trauma theory underscores the necessity for interdisciplinary, intercultural dialogue. In this way, trauma theory, refined by African experiences, provides a powerful interpretive lens to explore fractured identities, silenced histories, and possibilities for healing found in literary texts like Yaa Gyasi's *Homegoing*.

Cathy Caruth's Concept of Deferred Trauma

Cathy Caruth's work profoundly shapes contemporary trauma theory, particularly through her concept of deferred or "belated" trauma, a psychological response to trauma that is not immediate but processed and re-experienced later, often in disruptive or unconscious ways (8). Regarding Freud, Caruth writes: "trauma is not locatable in the simple violent or original event in an individual's past, but rather in the way that its very unassimilated nature, the way it was precisely not known in the first instance, returns to haunt the survivor later on" (8).

Caruth defines trauma as suffering repeatedly: survivors are not only hurt by the first event but have agitated feelings at the delayed recurrence of that hurt in memories, dreams, nightmares, or intrusive thoughts. This "double trauma" both encompasses the initial psychic shock and its delayed legacy, wherein affect can only be undergone long after (8). She argues that what makes a trauma an event is its impossibility of full integration into the ordinariness of everyday consciousness, a lesion or lack that incapacitates sequential accounts.

More recent publications validate the applicability of deferred trauma to the understanding of marginalized testimonies, especially within war, forced displacement, and colonial violence contexts. In literature and history, in Africa, Caruth's theory provides a critical methodology for reading narratives in which confrontation with trauma is rendered challenging due to silencing, repression, or social amnesia. African slavery or genocide literature usually has protagonists experiencing trauma indirectly, through inherited memory, silences, or symbolic representation, showing the ripple effect of trauma generation after generation (8,21).

Narration, or the act of telling trauma, is also an important aspect according to Caruth. "Speaking



trauma" enables agency since the survivor is attempting to establish meaning within the unnamable and to reclaim self (8). Present research emphasizes repetition, narrative, and art as ways that enable communities to transition from ongoing wounding through trauma to processes leading to resilience and recuperation (22). Caruth's theory thus makes it possible to have a complete understanding of African traumatic experiences, where silences, cultural memory, and ritual support long-term effects of violence in the past (8).

Marianne Hirsch's Theory of Postmemory

Marianne Hirsch's postmemory theory has also been important when it comes to understanding how trauma is experienced and transmitted by generations who did not actually live through inaugural events but possess their long-term psychological and cultural heritage (7). Originating first in Holocaust studies, postmemory is defined as the relationship to the "personal, collective, and cultural trauma of the preceding generation," constituting identity through intense affective connections instead of individual memory (p. 103).

Postmemory is existing with stories, images, and intuited feelings that still construct identity without direct experience of trauma (7). In African cultures, specifically among inheritors of victims of slavery, colonialism, and apartheid, postmemory accounts for how traumatic pasts "live on" within oral traditions, family stories, ritual performances, and communal cultural practices (21).

African literature is extremely likely to invoke postmemory, coping with silenced or suppressed histories and affording space for previously marginalized voices within narrative prose and poetry (Hirsch, 2008). This is observable in works such as *Homegoing*, where generations inherit not just ancestors' pain and silence but also resilience, creativity, and healing mechanisms (21).

Recent work in African studies expands postmemory beyond family to encompass community and diasporic communities that construct belonging and communal memory (21). Yet, threats of traumatically repetitive or poisoned boundaries between personal and inherited agony pressure concerns with authenticity and moral witnessing (7).

Despite challenges, postmemory facilitates understanding of how wounds of history, specifically those marked by erasure or silence, become living elements of individual and collective identity. Postmemory is used by African communities to facilitate traumas' legacies,

brokering the process of translating wounds into narrative agency, activism, and hope (7).

Postcolonial Perspective on Identity and Trauma

Postcolonial theory gives needed vision for seeing how colonial occupation inflicted deep psychological, cultural, and social wounds on the colonized. In the case of Africa, postcolonial theories underscore how colonialism overturned identities, sabotaged cultural continuity, and made trauma normal within broader power and domination structures. Two principal intellectuals, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o and Frantz Fanon, leave us with seminal work on the crossover between colonial trauma and identity formation.

1. Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's Decolonizing the Mind

Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o (1986) broke new ground in postcolonial scholarship by highlighting the impact of colonialism on African languages, cultures, and identities. In *Decolonizing the Mind*, Ngũgĩ argues that colonialism's worst legacy is its cultural colonization, which suppresses local epistemologies and languages at the expense of European languages and knowledge forms. This cultural imperialism leads to psychic colonization whereby African individuals adopt the values and narratives of their colonizers, leading them to discontinue their association with their own histories and identities (11).

Ngũgĩ posits that language is one of the central battlefields in the battle for freedom and identity recovery, contending that the retrieval of indigenous languages is at the heart of the recovery from colonial trauma and regaining cultural pride. He insists that literature and cultural production must contend with decolonization, not politically but epistemologically, so that Africans can speak in terms of their own experience without the colonial mediation of terms. This "*decolonization of the mind*" provides an essential context for understanding how postcolonial trauma operates not just as historic violence but as ongoing cultural struggle (11).

Frantz Fanon's contribution is a psycho-political critique of colonial trauma in relation to the psychological injuries inflicted by colonial domination. Fanon, a revolutionary psychiatrist and theorist, points out that colonialism is not simply economically and politically oppressive but also a profound psychic violence that organizes both the subjectivities of the colonizer and colonized (23).

Fanon expounds the concept of sociogenic trauma and asserts that the dehumanizing colonial environment leads to neuroses and mental illnesses



among the colonized due to alienation from their culture and identity as well as dehumanization. His observation in working with patients during the Algerian War revealed the impact of colonial brutality on producing anxiety, paranoia, and internalized inferiority complexes, which are not within the person but a product of the colonial system itself (23,21).

Moreover, Fanon's diatribe against the "Manichean" colonial order, dividing society into rigid dualities of superiority/inferiority, oppressor/oppressed, illustrates how colonial trauma dismantles identity, compelling the colonized to wrestle with self-knowledge and liberty. His writing teaches us that colonial trauma is written into the very construction of subjectivity, in which racialized hierarchies cause psychic injury that survives formal independence (24,25).

Fanon also imagines revolutionary violence as a way of reclaiming agency and healing colonial wounding, but not as a destination, but as a step in the process of deconstructing domination that is sustained through psychological harm (26). This underscores the interconnectedness of political decolonization and psychological recovery from colonial trauma.

Combining Ngũgĩ and Fanon in the analysis of Homegoing

Both Ngũgĩ and Fanon's contributions illuminate core aspects of how colonialism traumatizes identity and memory, setting a framework to analyze Yaa Gyasi's *Homegoing*. Ngũgĩ's emphasis on cultural reclamation through language and epistemology complements Fanon's focus on psychological wound and resistance by violence or cultural assertion. Together, they demonstrate that colonial trauma affects African identities on multiple registers, psychological, cultural, linguistic, and political.

This two-theoretical framework is essential to understanding *Homegoing's* representation of disjointed genealogies and identity crises created through slavery and colonial histories. The novel's characters grapple with internalized histories and dislodged memories that Ngũgĩ and Fanon's theories enable us to excavate, finding trauma as psychic wound and cultural tear left behind that must be actively resisted and healed.

Diaspora Studies and Hybrid Identities

1. Paul Gilroy's Black Atlantic

Paul Gilroy's seminal work *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (1993) sets the ground-breaking template for understanding

African diasporic identities across limiting national or ethnic categories(2). Gilroy argues that the African diaspora can be thought of as a transnational and intercultural formation constituted through traumatic displacement in the transatlantic slave trade and continuing social, political, and cultural legacies. Gilroy introduces the term "*Black Atlantic*" to denote a metaphorical and cultural terrain that encompasses Africa, the Americas, the Caribbean, and Europe, where identities are negotiated through intricate histories of exchange and perpetual mobility rather than settled notions of homeland or ethnicity (2).

One of the central aspects of Gilroy's theory is the recognition that diasporic Black identities are hybrid and mobile, constituted both through enforced displacement and by cultural creativity. Drawing on W.E.B. Du Bois' concept of *double consciousness*, the instant of looking into one's own eyes through the eyes of a racist world, Gilroy illustrates how *Black Atlantic* subjects negotiate various, oftentimes contraindynamics. This double consciousness carries both the pain of dislocation and the possibility of emergent new forms of culture out of cross-cultural encounter and opposition (2,27).

Gilroy particularly concentrates on cultural forms such as music (jazz, blues, reggae, hip-hop), literature, and religious practices as vital modes of identity negotiation and political expression. These forms act as "countercultures of modernity" that challenge dominant Eurocentric discourses and create alternative narratives of Black history and belonging (2). For example, the musical innovations traced in Gilroy's work illustrate how African diasporic cultures continuously transform inherited traditions, expressing collective memory and trauma while asserting agency.

In the context of Yaa Gyasi's *Homegoing*, Gilroy's *Black Atlantic* theory illuminates the narrative's exploration of fractured genealogies and diasporic hybridities. The novel's multi-generational, multi-spatial shape reflects Gilroy's notion of a non-linear diaspora, with identities in continual negotiation in the face of historical trauma and cultural survival. Every character is a node in the networked *Black Atlantic* space, negotiating inherited suffering and forging new syntheses of culture. The novel's attention to the lasting legacies of slavery and colonialism attests to Gilroy's understanding of diaspora as trauma and creative possibility (2).

Gilroy's focus on memory and historical consciousness also enhances literary analysis by bringing to light the ways in which diasporic cultural productions serve as reservoirs for the Middle Passage and colonial histories. In this



sense, *Homegoing* is less a story of loss than a work of cultural preservation, healing, and invention that brings into relief the dynamic, resilient nature of Black diasporic identities.

2. Stuart Hall's Diaspora Identity

Stuart Hall's cultural identity and diaspora work extends and expands Gilroy's vision by emphasizing identity as a process of ceaseless becoming rather than an essence. Hall theorizes diasporic identities as hybrid, fragmented, and continually produced through the interplay between memory, history, and present lived experience (5). Hall argues diaspora identity is created through "difference and continuity," indicating that while diasporic subjects are connected to homeland origins, their identities also emerge from new cultural contact and dislocations. This dialectic recognizes that uprooting does not lead to cultural erasure but to complex negotiations that produce plural, multifaceted identities. These identities are not static but constantly are redefined through cultural, social, and political tensions (5).

Central to Hall's theory is that diasporic identity is built in terms of narratives of cultural memory and narrative, which provide communities schemata by which to make sense of their shared past and speak of their belonging in new contexts. This process allows the expression of hybridity, blending of diverse cultural influences that challenge essentialist or nationalist definitions of identity (5).

Hall's definition is particularly well-suited to African diasporic literature, where displacement, disorientation of culture, and resilience are highlighted. *Homegoing* illustrates these thematically by following people who navigate selves fractured by slavery and colonial uprooting but who also undertake acts of memory retrieval and cultural remaking. The novel's multigenerational chronology chimes with Hall's idea of "identity" as dialogic and provisional, developed by repeated encounters with history and culture.

Furthermore, Hall stresses the importance of cultural practices, such as language, music, ritual, and narrative, to reproduce and refigure diasporic identities. These practices serve as arenas of resistance and self-affirmation wherein groups can stake their claim within host societies while navigating their relationship to homelands of origin (5). By locating diaspora as a "condition of hybridity," Hall repositions away from a broken or incomplete conception of diasporic identity, and instead embracing it as a site of strength, adaptability, and innovation. This model is essential

for understanding works like *Homegoing* that trace both the histories of trauma and the actual formation of diasporic identity through memory and culture.

Textual Analysis

Introduction

This chapter is allocated to a close textual analysis of Yaa Gyasi's *Homegoing*, with particular reference to the presentation of identity formation across generations and intergenerational transmission of trauma within family lines. Here, in this chapter, how Gyasi works up the topic of the impact on the characters by slavery and colonialism across generations using Trauma Theory as the central analytic approach will be examined. Trauma Theory provides insight into the manner in which historical violence, such as slavery, generates psychological trauma passed down through generations (28). The critique will highlight the ways in which characters such as Effia and Esi, and their children, are able to traverse the vexed heritage of their shared past, bringing about the affective and psychological weight they carry. By this chapter, we would like to unpack how Gyasi uses her text to present the insidious yet profound effect of transmitted trauma on identity, culture, and kinship.

1. Portrayal of Identity Formation across Generations In *Homegoing*

Yaa Gyasi's *Homegoing* begins with a powerful scene:

"The night Effia Otcher was born into the musky heat of Fanteland, a fire raged through the woods just outside her father's compound" (p. 10).

This fire becomes more than a backdrop; it is a metaphor for the generational trauma that will haunt Effia, her children, and her children's children. As her father, Cobbe Otcher, notices,

"the memory of the fire that burned, then fled, would haunt him, his children, and his children's children for as long as the line continued" (p. 10).

The theme of legacy across generations is central to *Homegoing*, and it is in the long shadow of slavery and colonization that Gyasi explores how identity is formed, destroyed, and re-formed.

Effia is looked after not by her actual mother but by Baaba, Cobbe's second wife, who had just given birth to a son three months earlier (p. 10). This early separation from her biological mother sets the stage for a confused identity. Effia grows up under Baaba's violent and tyrannical rule, not knowing that Baaba is not her biological mother. When Effia begins puberty, she reports to Baaba, "I have gotten my blood" (p. 18), the classic indicator of



womanhood. Baaba immediately asks, "Who else knows?" (p. 18), which means that she wants to keep this milestone a secret. When she asks her, Baaba assaults:

"Who are you that you assume that you can challenge me, eh? In the event that you don't do what I say, I will make you never speak once more." She then ties Effia's tongue so firmly that "for the remainder of the night, Effia tasted her own blood" (p. 18). This stifling comes to symbolize the concealment of truth and identity from generation to generation.

Baaba subsequently gifts Effia a black stone pendant which "shimmered as though it had been coated in gold dust" (p. 22), telling her, "Take this with you when you go. A piece of your mother." Baaba's act, as paradoxical as it is, reveals the layers of concealment and deception. While Effia has never been told the truth of her own birth, this stone is her only material link to her true mother. It is not until years later, though, when her half-brother Fiifi shares it with her, that the full truth is revealed:

"She is not your mother, you know. Baaba. Our father had you by a house girl who went off into the fire the night you were born. She is the one who gave you that stone you wear around your neck" (p. 33).

Effia's life thus begins and continues in the absence of knowledge, a theme that echoes across both her and Esi's bloodlines.

Esi, Effia's half-sister, is also born of Maame, but unlike Effia, she is raised in the heart of Asanteland and eventually captured and imprisoned in the women's dungeon of Cape Coast Castle.

"Esi had spent two weeks in the Cape Coast Castle's women's dungeon. She spent her fifteenth birthday there" (p. 34).

Effia and Esi never meet each other, nor do they ever learn about one another's lives. Their separate fates form a dramatic arc of a story: Effia marries a British soldier and remains in the Gold Coast; Esi is brought to America as a slave. These two sisters, both born of the same mother, are representative of the bifurcation of African identity due to slavery, one line remains on the continent, resisting colonialism, while the other is severed completely, forced through the transatlantic horrors of the Middle Passage and chattel slavery. Esi learns more about her past from another captive later:

"Your mother was once a slave for a Fante family (Cobbe Otcher). She was raped by her master Cobbe Otcher because he too was a Big Man and big men can do what they please, lest they appear weak, eh?" (p. 44).

The image Abronoma continues to speak, "You are not your mother's first daughter. There was one before you" (p. 44). Esi knows she has a sister, Effia, but in time to do something about it. The second image formed by Gyasi is a horror:

"Now all Esi could imagine was her own mother behind the dull metal of the cages. Her own mother, huddled with a sister she would never know" (p. 45).

This realization transforms Esi's identity from one grounded in her immediate suffering to one rooted in a broader, tragic lineage. Maame had tried to keep part of that lineage alive:

"Esi's mother grabbed Esi's hand and dropped something into it. It was a black stone, glimmering with gold. Smooth, as if it had been scrubbed carefully for years to preserve its perfect surface" (p. 47).

The stone is the same as the stone Effia wears, and it is a generational thread. Maame tells her, "I have kept this for you. I wanted to give it to you on your wedding day. I—I left one like this to your sister. I left it with Baaba after I lit the fire" (p. 47). These stones are what slavery and colonialism tried to erase: history, family, and identity. Also, but also fearful it would be removed from her, Esi swallows the stone:

"And when the men had finally turned their backs and left her there, forgetting for a moment to remove her wrapper, Esi removed the stone from against her cheek and swallowed it" (p. 51).

The swallowing of the stone is a physical as well as spiritual act of preservation. It shows how the most sacred parts of identity must be hidden, internalized, and sometimes buried in order to exist. She is raped by a British soldier shortly afterwards:

"He put her on a folded tarp, spread her legs, and entered her. She screamed, but he put his hand over her lips, then put his fingers in her mouth" (p. 53).

She becomes pregnant immediately. As she is led on board the slave ship, she screams, "No, my stone!" (p. 55). She thinks back to the last thing that bound her to her mother, her sister, herself, now lost. The anguish and desperation in her voice mark the brutality of cultural dismemberment.

These dual stories show how descendants must grapple with broken heritages. Effia's descendants remain in Ghana but are conditioned by colonial institutions. Her son Quey gets into the slave trade business, caught between his British father's and the Fante heritage. On the American side, Esi's people endure the brutality of slavery and racial prejudice. Each generation tries to recapture or redefine who they are. Characters like H, who is in prison and works as free labor under the guise of freedom, or



Willie, who tries to maintain her family whole in Harlem, continue this struggle.

The novel then re-enters the circle to a reunion. Marjorie, a direct descendant of Effia, and Marcus, a direct descendant of Esi, meet in the current time. They share histories and, at last, a segment of the past. Marcus holds the black stone, Effia's, Esi's, now his. The ultimate summary of the larger theme: identity is not born but rather something sought, struggled over, and sometimes rebuilt from ash. The cultural heritage created through slavery and colonization may be heavy with pain, breaking, and hurting, but it is not lost. It is found in names, in stories, in stones.

2. How Trauma is Transmitted Through Family Lineages in The Novel

Trauma is inherited as a genetic code, transmitted through silent gestures, painful memories, and symbolic artifacts. Gyasi illustrates the psychological and symbolic effects of historic violence that has not been reconciled, rendering apparent the manners in which past atrocities reverberate across generations.

Effia's origin begins in fire, a symbolic theme for devastation and separation that will haunt her descendants. When she is told by her half-brother Fiifi, "Baaba is not your mother." (p. 33), it not only opens up Effia's fractured identity but also the beginning of a traumatic lineage. Effia's life is built on silence and lies, and her inherited suffering is concealed in the black stone, a reminder of her real mother, Maame, who left one daughter behind to escape slavery.

Esi, Effia's sister, lives a life her sister is lucky to evade. "Esi had been in the women's dungeon of the Cape Coast Castle for two weeks." (p. 34). This ghastly setting constitutes the foundation of her trauma. The fact that Esi never meets Effia represents how history tears families apart, denying them connection and reconciliation. The trauma that Esi experiences, raped in the dungeon by a soldier, who "spread her legs and entered her" as she screamed and he covered her mouth with his hand (p. 53), is not a singular event. It is the start of a wound that will reopen across generations.

The violence that impregnates Esi is not only physical but also historical. When Abronoma tells her, "Your mother was once a slave to a Fante family. She was raped by her master Cobbe Otcher (p. 44), Esi learns that she is also a product of violence. Maame, her mother, was raped, and that rape led to the birth of Effia. Esi herself is conceived through rape in the castle dungeon. Both daughters

are born of pain and separation, with no opportunity for reconciliation.

This legacy of trauma continues with Ness, Esi's daughter. Ness, born into slavery, explains how deep the trauma is:

"Each year since the one in which she had been torn from her mother's arms had felt like ten years" (p. 76).

Her mother, Esi, had been a "solemn, solid woman who was never known to tell a happy story." We notice in this description the anesthetizing effects of pain. Trauma is not only transmitted in memory but in the impossibility of pleasure. It is passed on in tone, attitude, and absence. Ness's own life is brutal, "She is beaten until the whip snaps off her back like pulled taffy, and then she is kicked to the ground" (p. 86). These are not isolated moments of violence but echoes of the suffering her grandmother and mother experienced.

Esi, too, had seen cruelty in the dungeons. She had seen Afua, another enslaved woman who gave birth in the dungeon, die. "By morning, Afua had died. Her skin was purple and blue, and Esi knew that she had held her breath until Nyame took her" (p. 36). These are the moments that show how trauma is observed and absorbed, permeating the psyche of the survivor.

When Ness is trying to save another captive woman, she weeps, "Don't come down, whatever you do," screaming in broken Twi to Aku, who has her child Jo (p. 92). Even in a moment of terror, Ness still has a fragile hold on her culture, her language, her heritage. But it is a culture under siege, and the psychological strain of maintaining identity under cruelty is enormous.

Kojo, Ness's son, experiences another variation of inherited trauma. When his pregnant wife Anna is kidnapped, he is told, "Go home to your kids, Kojo. I'll start looking for her right now" (p. 131). Kojo later learns, "They sold her and the baby too" (p. 134).

We witness this cycle of devastation and disruption once more in H, a free Black man who is kidnapped and re-enslaved. A white man negotiates his price: "How much you want for him?" "Twenty dollars a month," says the deputy. The other man says, "Now, you know we don't pay more than eighteen, even for a first-class man" (p. 163).

Even in freedom, Black men such as H are dehumanized and commodified. When he objects, "Y'all can't do this! I'm free!" (p. 163), he is disregarded. The psychological effect of being diminished from man to property, again and again, wears away at one's identity.



H's trauma is not his own. His mother, Anna (Kojo's wife), died in childbirth after she is kidnapped and sold:

"My old master say H is what my mama used to call me. They asked her to name me something proper before she gave birth, but she refused. She killed herself. Master said they had to cut me out her belly before she died" (p. 168).

The withholding of her child's name was a rebellious act in itself, and the violence of that birth lives on in H's name, or, more precisely, the lack of it. His identity begins where something is lacking, in pain.

The trauma is also transmitted through time and into Effia's line. Akua, a descendant of Effia, has nightmares about a "woman made of fire," a woman who is accompanied by two fire children.

"Before you were born, I began to have bad dreams," she tells her child. "Even before the dreams began, I wasn't well. The Missionary killed my mother at school in Kumasi. Do you know it?" (p. 242).

The firewoman is not a dream but an incarnation of ancestral pain. It is this vision that induces Akua's trance state in which she kills one of her own children. Trauma here becomes madness, and madness becomes legacy.

Later, Akua recounts an interaction with a someone in the dream:

"Do you know that there is evil in your lineage?" I thought he was speaking about me, the things I had done, and so I nodded. But then he said, "This thing you are carrying, it does not belong to you." (p. 243).

The trauma she carries is ancestral. The priest in the dream identifies the black stone as a connection with the firewoman:

"The firewoman was an ancestor who had come to visit me. He told me that the black stone had been hers and that was why it had become hot in his hand."

The psychological burden is literalized in the stone that has been warmed up, the inherited, absorbed, reactivated trauma.

The story of the missionary who killed Akua's mother (Abena) also illustrates how colonial and religious violence compound individual trauma.

When Akua confronts the man, she insists, "Where is her body? What have you done with her body?" and the Missionary replies, "I burned it in the forest. I burned it with all her things. God forgive me!" (p. 192).

The act of erasing her mother's body is symbolic of how colonization attempts to erase cultural memory. The forest is a graveyard of identity.

Akua's trauma gets passed on to her son, Yaw, who grows up to hate her. He has a scar from when she attacked him in her sleep. Yaw becomes a teacher, someone who instructs others on the importance of history, but he cannot reconcile his own. It is not until he speaks with his mother that he begins to understand the inherited trauma that she holds. She tells him,

"No one forgets that they were once captive, even if they are now free. But still, Yaw, you have to let yourself be free" (p. 244).

This is the paradox of inherited trauma, freedom is possible but not without reconciliation with the past. Symbolism is rampant in *Homegoing*. The black stone, passed down from Maame to Effia and Esi, is a physical representation of that which was lost and that which is left behind. When Esi swallows the stone before she is shipped off to America, she ensures its survival within her body. Generations later, her descendants lament its loss. Meanwhile, Effia bears her stone unaware of its origin until the secret is revealed by Fifi. The stone grows warm in the priest's hand because it is a living remnant, filled with ancestral grief.

Trauma is also recorded in silence. Effia's marriage to James Collins is marked by a mutual denial. "After that initial day in the Castle, James never spoke to Effia about the slaves they kept in the dungeon, but he spoke to her often of beasts. That was what the Asantes traded most here. Beasts. Monkeys and chimpanzees, even leopards" (p. 31). This silence regarding human suffering is itself an inheritance of violence. Effia, caught between complicity and ignorance, represents the inner conflict that continues through the generations.

When Baaba spits upon the earth at Effia's feet and says, "You are nothing from nowhere. No mother and now no father. What can grow from nothing?" (p. 33), she utters the destruction of identity beginning in slavery. But something does grow from that "nothing", a lineage of survivors who inherit pain as well as strength.

Gyasi's *Homegoing* ultimately asserts that though trauma is passed down, so too is resilience. The novel does not offer easy healing but suggests that acknowledgment and connection, such as the final meeting between Marjorie and Marcus, can begin to break the cycle. Marjorie, descended from Effia, and Marcus, descended from Esi, represent the two branches of the tree finally bending toward each other. In their reunion, holding the black stone again, history begins to come full circle. The trauma remains, yet so does the promise of healing.



3. Sociocultural Impact of Slavery on Gyasi's Characters

Effia's birth, as presented in the opening scene of *Homegoing*, is a sad metaphor of family and cultural breakdown caused by slavery. The chaotic fire that occurs at Effia's birth is a metaphor of the traumatic life ahead for her and the chain of misery that will follow through generations. The fire imagery that "burned, then fled" (p. 10) echoes the ferocity and sudden dislocation of displacement, slavery as the cause of the broken ties of family members, culture, and heritage. Cobbe Otcher's realization that the fire will "haunt him, his children, and his children's children for as long as the line continued" (p. 10) illustrates the persistence of generational trauma. The fire is an enduring metaphor for the blemish of slavery, with its effects still shaping the self-image and relationships of Effia and her descendants.

Baaba's behavior towards Effia offers another depth to the observation of how trauma is passed from one generation to the next. Baaba's cruelty, most particularly the physical and emotional cruelty she inflicts upon Effia, "For the rest of the night, Effia tasted her own blood" (p. 18), is that which reveals the deep wounds Baaba has inherited from her own slavery and oppression. Baaba's cruelty is not an independent act of malice, but one that communicates inherited pain. Baaba, whose history is shaped by trauma due to slavery, is no longer in a position to take care of Effia and love her so that she can recover. This cycle of violence continues to cement the complex relationship between mother and daughter where violence and love are interwoven so that Effia's identity is further shattered.

The black stone Baaba offers to Effia symbolizes the fractured relationship between Effia and her heritage. The stone symbolizes a lost identity, a piece of Effia's biological mother that she would never be aware of.

"Baaba gave her a black stone pendant that shone as if dusted with gold. 'Take it with you when you leave, a piece of your mother.'" (p. 22).

This is an ironic gesture. Even though it is a link to Effia's heritage, it is also an indication of how disconnected Effia has been from who she is. The stone is a marker of the violence that separated Effia from her heritage. Slavery is the origin of this disconnection, and Effia must carry this symbol of dislocation, both gift and source of pain for what was lost.

Effia's family's participation in the slave trade complicates their relationship with her father, Cobbe Otcher. The slave trade's commodification of human

life is found in the trading of daughters for commodities.

"The white man came to take Adwoa away," Effia said. "Her father nodded. 'The white men live in the Cape Coast Castle. There, they trade goods with our people'" (p. 13).

This human life sacrifice to commodities such as iron and millet reveals the dehumanization at the heart of the colonial economy. Effia's family, entangled in the slave trade, is complicit in this exploitation, and it shapes Effia's concept of herself. The violence of slavery and loss of autonomy shape Effia's character to be unable to rise above the systemic forces determining her fate. This complicates her relationship with her father, as she becomes aware that her life is intertwined with a violent and oppressive system that she cannot escape.

Esi, Effia's half-sister, experiences a more direct and brutal impact of slavery. Esi's imprisonment in the dungeon of Cape Coast Castle is an expression of how slavery physically and psychologically strips away identity. "Esi had spent two weeks in the women's dungeon of the Cape Coast Castle. She spent her fifteenth birthday there" (p. 34). The dungeon is symbolic not only of the physical enslavement of the slave, but also of the stripping away of identity and of humanity. Esi is traumatized both physically, in that she is imprisoned in the dungeon, and psychically, in that she is ensnared in the memory of slavery which took place in the past. Her very existence becomes bound to the violence of the slave trade. Esi, much like Effia, carries the burden of a stolen identity, one that has been erased through colonial violence and exploitation.

Esi's trauma is compounded by the rape she endures and the legacy of violence passed down from her mother, Maame.

"Your mother was once a slave for a Fante family. She was raped by her master Cobbe Otcher. You are not your mother's first daughter. There was one before you" (p. 44).

The identity of Esi is formed by the violence of slavery, which has branded her very existence. Maame's abuse is transferred to Esi, and the trauma is passed on. This excerpt shows how the violence of slavery is not singular but rather one that travels across generations, impacting not only the one who suffers but also their offspring. Esi's existence, and the violence she faces, are a direct result of the exploitation of women and the dehumanization of African people during the transatlantic slave trade.

The black stone that Esi receives from her mother symbolizes the emotional legacy of slavery,



much like the stone Effia receives. Maame attempts to leave a legacy of culture through the use of the stone, but the experience of slavery has spoiled that heritage. Esi, instead of holding onto the stone as a reminder of her heritage, swallows it. "Esi took the stone from against her cheek and swallowed it" (p. 51). The swallowing of the stone is used as a dramatic symbol of internalizing trauma. Esi's decision to consume the stone instead of keeping it reflects how the trauma of slavery must be held inside, buried deep within. The stone, once a symbol of connection to her heritage, becomes a source of internal pain, suggesting that the trauma of slavery is internalized and often suppressed, carried silently by the descendants of the enslaved.

Quey, Effia's son, also faces the burden of slavery's legacy. His involvement in the slave trade and his conflict within himself about his double identity as Fante and British show the omnipresent inheritance of the trauma of the past. "Every time he (Quey) witnessed the bomboys leave for a canoe overloaded with slaves, he remembered his father waiting on the cape Coast Castle beach to welcome them" (p. 68). Quey's own participation in the slave trade also highlights the cycle of violence and exploitation. As he tries to figure out his identity, the ghost of his father's participation in the slave trade haunts him. The legacy of slavery is one that Quey cannot avoid, and his moral dilemma highlights the depth of the profound psychological wounds inherited across generations. The trauma of the past continues to affect Quey's identity and his view of where he fits in the world.

Ma Aku's dismissal of colonialism and the imposition of European systems of belief is also a significant aspect that indicates the impact of slavery on how the characters view themselves.

"The white man's god is just like the white man.

He thinks that he is the one god, just like the white man thinks he is the only man" (p. 127).

Ma Aku's rejection of European religion and doubting who taught the white man what a witch was challenge the colonial forced imposition of European norms onto African cultures. The words are the internalized beliefs forced by colonialism and the harming of African identities. Ma Aku's explanation suggests that the African people themselves were to blame for being subjugated, either by embracing the outside system or by failing to resist it. Colonizers' beliefs internalized by the Africans dissolve the African cultural selves, making them subordinate to the colonizers and causing them to crumble under their own self-image.

The relationship between James and Akosua also demonstrates the tension between self-identity and colonial forces. James, who was the son of powerful colonizers, is troubled by his legacy.

"He was a son of a Big Man, the grandson of two Big Men himself, and he wanted to have a life for himself and not a life decided for him" (p. 140).

James' guilt is symptomatic of the cultural expectations placed upon African people, and on those with privilege or power. His urge to move away from the demands of his family is a reflection of the tension between maintaining traditional identities and conforming to the colonial authority. James' dilemma is the case of trying to reconcile personal desires with the prevailing forces of history and social desires.

Akosua's opposition to marriage with James is one of resistance against the social spheres that desire to impose a particular identity on her.

"I am from Kumasi, and when I was young, I disobeyed my parents to marry your father. He came for me. He came all the way from Fanteland" (p. 140).

Akosua's choice to wed James, against her family, is a resistance to the social orders that colonialism has constructed and the existing African hierarchy. This resistance is representative of the difficulty of negotiating identity in colonial culture where individual desires are bound to contradict social norms. Akosua's decision to wed James, in being a rebellion, is likewise an entry into the colonial system, and the tension between personal freedom and societal taboo is firmly established.

By tracing the life stories of Effia, Esi, and their children, *Homegoing* fundamentally reimagines how slavery and colonialism have spawned old, profound wounds to the characters' understanding of identity, family, and self. From the disjunctive kinship relationships to the multigenerational internalized trauma, the novel illustrates the sociocultural impacts of slavery and colonialism that permeate the life of the character. The wounds of displacement and oppression are not historical; they are dynamic forces that determine the lives of characters and their freedom, self-definition, and identity processes.

Summary, Conclusion, and Recommendation

This concluding chapter synthesizes the core insights derived from the textual analysis of Yaa Gyasi's *Homegoing*, offering reflective conclusions on the intricate interplay of identity formation and intergenerational trauma. It also outlines avenues for future research, suggesting how the themes explored can contribute to broader scholarly discussions



V. Summary of Findings

Our textual study has shed light on the deep influence of historical violence, namely slavery and colonialism, on the constructing and reconstructing of personal and collective identities through successive generations in *Homegoing*. The novel, by using its double narration of half-sisters Effia and Esi, clearly demonstrates how trauma is not just an occurrence but an ongoing force that echoes down through time, shaping the lives of descendants in ways that are unpredictable.

The discovery of Effia's early pages portrayed the nefarious manner in which concealed trauma operates. The blaze that consumes her birth, and one which is described as a ghostly presence that would haunt her lineage, creates an overarching metaphor for the injuries of history. Effia's first experiences, particularly the suppression of her nascent womanhood by Baaba ("for the rest of the night, Effia tasted her own blood"), show how personal identity is suppressed and distorted through family secrets and autocratic control. The black stone necklace, originally given to Effia, is a poignant symbol of a broken history, a tangible link to a mother and a history deliberately erased. Effia's journey reflects the experience of those who remain on the African continent, entangled in the evolving dynamics of local power structures and the encroaching colonial presence, often unknowingly perpetuating aspects of the very systems that would devastate their kin.

In stark contrast, Esi's narrative trajectory, beginning with her harrowing imprisonment in the Cape Coast Castle, immediately immerses the reader in the direct, brutal impact of the transatlantic slave trade. Her trauma is one that is corporeal, taking in the physical and psychological violence inflicted upon tens of thousands of Africans. That her mother was raped by Cobbe Otcher, the same father to Effia, gives us a glimpse of the entrenched, systemic violence which tore apart families and identity across a sea. Esi's courageous act of swallowing the black stone before her forced departure to America becomes a powerful emblem of internalized resistance and the desperate, defiant act of preserving one's heritage against overwhelming forces of dehumanization. Her path represents the forging of identity in the crucible of the diaspora, where memory and belonging become paramount struggles.

The subsequent generational vignettes vividly illustrate the mechanisms of intergenerational trauma. From Ness's terrorized existence and her mother's "solemn, solid" presence,

to the re-enslavement of H and the spiritual agony of Akua, again and again the novel demonstrates how wounds of the past manifest in the guise of modern-day suffering. The inability to talk of happiness, the aggressive cycles of repetition, and the psychological weight of preservation of cultural identity under siege all attest to the insidious, often invisible, passing of trauma. The incessant reference to the Castle and the residual impact of the "white man" function to underscore the permanent legacy of colonial and racial oppression on the psyche and social fabric of the descendants.

The novel's masterful threading of these unrelated lives culminates in the symbolic union of Marjorie and Marcus, descendants on both sides, who finally bridge the great historical divide. Marcus of the black stone, a material link across space and time, marks the novel's ultimate point: identity, even constructed in agony and broken by history, is not irretrievably lost. It is a constant process of search, struggle, and reconstitution, often found in the shards of names, legend, and symbolic objects that bind past to present.

VI. Conclusion

Homegoing is a novel, not only of history but of the profound resonance of slavery and colonialism as living forces shaping identity. Gyasi does not think the past is prologue but a living, substantial dimension of present realities. The lives of Effia and Esi and their children demonstrate that identity is never a closed, monolithic entity but a rich tapestry from personal choices, household narratives, and large historical currents. The novel upsets conventional notions of identity by revealing it as something living, often marred, but ultimately well-enduringly strong. It strongly argues that in order to truly understand contemporary identities, particularly those constructed out of the wake of such tragic history, one must step into the lengthy shadow of the past, crediting its indelible traces.

Recommendations for Future Research

Several research possibilities for future scholarship are envisioned from this reading:

Diving into Healing and Reconciliation: While this analysis focuses on transmission of trauma, other studies can delve into the novel's reflective depiction of healing, resilience, and the possibility of reconciliation along historically fractured lines, particularly through the eventual reunion of the two halves of the family.



The Poetics of Silence and Memory: A more focused exploration of the narrative strategies of Gyasi, her use of fractured memories, silences in the text, and recurring symbolism, may help shed even greater insight on how the novel formally contains the experience of intergenerational trauma and act of remembrance.

Comparative Diasporic Literature: Widening the scope to comparative analysis with other pieces of contemporary African diasporic literature could shed greater insight on salient thematic points of identity, homecoming, and ancestral reparation on transnational and transcultural planes.

The Role of Gender and Power Relations: More discussion of the manner in which gender intersects with power relations (colonial, patriarchal, and familial) in creating the experiences of trauma in women and their agency in identity formation across the chronology of the novel.

Pedagogical Applications of *Homegoing*: Examining how *Homegoing* can serve as a valuable pedagogical tool in the classroom for encouraging discussion about historical trauma, racial identity, and the residual impacts of slavery and colonialism in communities across the globe.

These recommendations set forth to continue the in-depth critical examination of *Homegoing*, employing its rich text to continue making a broader academic contribution to scholarship about historical memory, identity studies, and the human spirit's resilience in the face of great tragedy.

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