



## DIASPORIC CITIZENSHIP: SLAVERY, IDENTITY AND KINSHIP IN YAA GYASI'S *HOME GOING*

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### ABSTRACT

*Homegoing*, is the debut novel of Yaa Gyasi, a Ghanaian/American author. As such, the novel belongs to tradition of writings referred to as diasporic literature. This study explores how Yaa Gyasi, even though did not experience slavery, revisits this subject of slavery as a way of continuing the tradition of slave narratives like that of Frederick Douglas and Harriet Jacobs who experienced slavery. The study explores the representation of slavery in the novel, bringing out how slavery broke African kinship ties and left the characters in a form of identity crisis. This study argues that the novel is a representation of loss of kinship ties and identity and the search for same.

**Keywords:** *Diasporic literature, Homegoing, kinship, identity, Yaa Gyasi*

### ABSTRAK

*Homegoing*, adalah novel perdana Yaa Gyasi, seorang penulis Ghana/Amerika. Novel ini dikategorikan sebagai sastra diaspora. Tulisan ini mengeksplorasi bagaimana Yaa Gyasi, meskipun tidak mengalami perbudakan, meninjau kembali subjek perbudakan ini sebagai cara untuk melanjutkan tradisi narasi perbudakan seperti yang dialami Frederick Douglas dan Harriet Jacobs yang mengalami perbudakan. Tulisan ini mengeksplorasi representasi perbudakan dalam novel, mengungkap bagaimana perbudakan memutuskan ikatan kekerabatan Afrika dan meninggalkan karakter dalam bentuk krisis identitas. Tulisan ini berpendapat bahwa novel tersebut merupakan representasi dari hilangnya ikatan kekerabatan dan identitas serta pencariannya.

**Kata Kunci:** *Sastra diaspora, Homegoing, kekerabatan, identitas, Yaa Gyasi*

### INTRODUCTION

Issues on slavery, identify and kinship are explored predominantly in both African and African American writings.

These issues date back to the feminist writer, Aphra Behn's novel *Oroonoko/ The Royal Slave* (1688), the first European to explore the theme of slavery through the African and South American setting of kingship and the sale of Africans into slavery by Africans. Behn recounts the experiences of the protagonist, Oroonoko, an African prince, the only heir to his grandfather, the King of Coramantien, is lured into trading in selling African slaves to the whites and ends up captured as a slave. Behn's narrative resonates with Yaa Gyasi's *Homegoing* to a large extent. Even though Gyasi did not experience slavery, she revisits this subject of slavery as a way of continuing the tradition of slave narratives like that of Frederick Douglas and Harriet Jacobs who experienced slavery. Yaa Gyasi, though a Ghanaian, can be said to be following the tradition of most third-generation Nigerian writers whose writings have been

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characterised by their interest in diaspora, transnationalism and identity (Jones, 2011).

Yaa Gyasi was born in Mampong, in the Ashanti Region of Ghana. At the age of two, she moved with her family to America, and was raised in Huntsville, Alabama. She was educated at Stanford and the Iowa Writers' Workshop where she learnt much about her background on a research trip to Ghana which inspired the writing of *Homegoing*.

The novel tells the story of two African sisters, Effia and Esi, who are separated at birth. Effia "the beauty", after she reaches puberty, is given to a British slave trader as a concubine in a slave castle where many blacks are held in a subterranean dungeon, to be shipped west and sold into slavery. Curious about sounds coming from below, Effia is told they are produced by "cargo." She has no idea that among those held in dungeon and soon to experience the Middle Passage is Esi, the sister she never met. The rest of the narrative follows descendants of Effia and Esi over six generations in a series of monographs that alternate between the two family lines. The novel switches between various family members while moving about in time and place as well as between the Ghanaians and their American descendants up to the present day. The novel draws characters who are immersed in more than 250 hard, transformative years in the African-American diaspora, beginning with the account of present-day Ghana, with tribal rivalries being exploited by British and Dutch colonists and slave traders.

In *Homegoing*, Gyasi creates a family's intergenerational experience of slavery, in which one branch of the family participates in the commerce of slavery in Africa while the other is sent to America as slaves. Effia's heirs are the ones engaging in slavery and to bring out their activities of slavery, each of them is assigned a chapter. Quey reveals himself as born of African descent but is raised among whites and educated in England. He grows to become a slave trader while his son James, is so disgusted by his family's participation in the slave trade that he escapes to Efutu land (presently called Winneba) in Ghana, where he lives as a farmer. Two generations later, we are presented with Yaw, a historian and teacher who is working on a book with the telling title "The Ruin of a Nation Begins in the Homes of its People" which symbolises both Africans who sell their black prisoners to whites, and America where there is racism. The chapter on Majorie brings Effia's line up to date. Majorie is a Stanford graduate student whose boyfriend, Marcus, is a fellow student devoted to exploring his family's history. Unknown to them, they are from the same lineage. Marcus' ancestry traces back to Esi, Effia's sister, and came to include the enslaved Ness, Kojo the fugitive slave, H, the coal miner, Willie, the Harlem housekeeper, and her son Sonny, a heroin addict, all of whom suffer from slavery in one way or the other.

The novel also contributes to the works of Ghanaian writers like Ayi Kwei Armah and to some extent Ama Ata Aidoo. As a writer, Armah is pre-occupied with Africa's future and the search for the African identity which feature so prominently in almost all his novels. In Armah's *Fragments*, he explores the plight of the protagonist, Baako, a been-to and his girlfriend, Juana, a diasporic citizen who takes up employment as a nurse in Ghana. The two struggle to find their identity as Africans but society frustrates their path. This theme is also explored, in part, in Ama Ata Aidoo's *The Dilemma of a Ghost*. Through the character of Eulalie, Aidoo explores

the return of the African American to her roots and her inability to fit into the African society. Gyasi, thus, continues the tradition of her literary 'parents'. However, I argue that Gyasi's work is an exploration of a loss of identity and the search for it by Africans living on the continent and those living in the diaspora. The rest of the sections discuss issues of slavery and kinship, slavery and the loss and search for identity.

#### **METHOD**

The main source of data for this study is *Homegoing* by Yaa Gyasi. The novel, written in English, explores the lives of enslaved Africans and their descendants in America as well as Black people who live on the African continent. This research uses qualitative data which is collected entirely from textual sources, the primary source being the novel, *Homegoing* while the secondary sources are the books and articles that have been written on *Homegoing*, slavery as well as identity. *Homegoing* has been critically analyzed to bring about issues of slavery and how it affects kinship and identity.

#### **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

This paper examines how Yaa Gyasi's *Homegoing* (2016) revisits the topic of slavery, despite the author not experiencing it firsthand, and its impact on African kinship and identity. The central research question explores how slavery disrupts kinship ties and causes identity crises among the characters. The findings reveal that Gyasi's portrayal of slavery highlights the lasting effects on the characters' identities and their search for reconnection across generations. *Homegoing* thus contributes to understanding the ongoing legacy of slavery within the African diaspora.

##### **Slavery And Kinship**

In *Homegoing*, Gyasi raises a lot of questions about kinship. Jones (2010), defines kinship in simple terms as having "to do with aunts and uncles, matrilineages and patrilineages, and ascending and descending generations". Kinship, is achieved by sexual reproduction or social practice. In this way, the children or grandchildren of immigrants may be fully integrated as kinfolk; but for that matter, the offspring of two brothers are as much related because they were sustained by the same soil as because their fathers issued from the same parents (Sahlins, 2011, p. 4).

*Homegoing* reveals how wicked Africans could be in selling off their fellow Africans into slavery. The novel is a set of linked stories that start at the beginning of the West African slave trade in order to illustrate the ways in which West African elite were complicit in selling their own kin to the colonial powers.

Gyasi recounts how Africans captured their own kinsmen, enslaved them and sell them into Western slavery. Thus, the reader is reminded that it was not just the United States or Europe who was complicit in the slave trade. She does not idealize Africa in this act but gives an agentive role to Africans as being part of their own predicament. We see a Ghanaian woman naming her own people as being guilty. "Asante, Fante, Ga. British, Dutch, and American... and what does that say? We avenge lost lives by taking more? It doesn't make sense to me" (Gyasi, p. 98).

The novel portrays slavery as breaking kinship ties completely among Africans. For instance, in the same family, some can be slavers while others are

enslaved. This is seen in the portrayal of Effia and her sister, Esi. In the same Castle where Effia stays with her husband, the slave master, is where Esi lives among other slaves who suffer all forms of abuse including rape. Even her daughter she names Ness, who is born in America, resulted from her rape at the dungeon by a drunken soldier. Later, when Esi is shipped to America and Effia remains in Africa, kinship ties are broken. Esi is not even able to pick the stone which her mother gives her as symbolic of their family line, symbolising the fact that she has lost complete contact with her kin back home. This is symbolic of the African Americans who cannot trace their ancestry to any particular country in Africa. However, the “stones, alongside Maame’s descendants, have survived white colonization, the Gold Coast slave trade, the slavery system of the American South, exploitative share cropping and coal mining systems, poverty, addiction in urban centers, and more. Marzette (2021) mentions, “The stones become symbols of Maame, of motherhood, of the land, of home” (p.107).

Getting to the end of the novel, we see two characters, Majorie and Marcus, whom the reader has been able to identify as distant kin, now feeling a connection with each other. After Marcus realized that Marjorie was from Ghana, he inquired if she ever returned to Ghana. Marjorie replies that she’s been busy with schoolwork and has not been there since her grandmother died. “She gave me this. A family heirloom, I guess,” she said, pointing at the necklace. That was when Marcus realized why Marjorie never took it off (Gyasi, 2016, p. 294). Even though they feel that their bond is largely a combination of physical attraction and a parallel racial and political itinerary, the reader has been able to locate this connection through the narrative from the seventeenth century to the present day, from the West African coastline to the American South to California. Their decision to visit Ghana signifies their search for kinship ties with “home.” Marjorie convinces Marcus, “I bet you would like the beach in Cape Coast,” she said. “It’s beautiful there. Not like anything you would see in America.” Marcus then becomes convinced and agrees to go with her. At Cape Coast Castle, exactly where Marcus’s great-grandmother, Esi, left her family heirloom, Marjorie removes hers “from her neck, and placed it around Marcus’s. ‘Welcome Home’ (Gyasi, 2016, p. 300). This proves Marjorie wrong when she tries to argue that she is different from the African American. Their coming home together signifies that both Africans and African Americans are the same people separated by slavery.

### **Slavery and Identity**

Slavery is one of the major catastrophes that have ever been done and the one that existed for the longest period of time. Slavery has tortured millions of people around the world for almost four centuries, making it one of the greatest horrors of humanity (Cañellas i Bosch, 2018). Among the many ways in which slavery affected humanity is the way it changed the identity of those affected.

Identity can be defined from the psychological point of view as well as sociological point of view. Psychologists see identity as the set of qualities, beliefs, personality traits, appearance, and/or expressions that characterize a person or a group. Sociologists on the other hand, lay emphasis on collective identity in which an individual's identity is strongly associated with role-behaviour or the collection of group memberships that define them. According to Brubaker and Cooper (2000,

p. 6), identity “denotes a fundamental and consequential sameness among members of a group or category”.

The issue of identity in *Homegoing* is discussed from both sociological and psychological perspectives, with the argument that the novel portrays both the slaves taken across the ocean and those left in Africa as losing their identity. Identity in the novel is examined as a concept that highlights how actions—whether individual or collective—can be governed by particularistic self-understandings rather than by putatively universal self-interest (Brubaker & Cooper, 2000).

The novel has received a lot of critical attention with majority of them focusing on its representation of identity. However, a lot of these critical works have focused on the identity of those enslaved in the Americas. In his article: “Cultural Transition and Identity Issues as Part of Colonial Narrative in Yaa Gyasi's *Homegoing*”, Mamta Kerketta talks about identity problems and cultural change as they are portrayed in the novel. He contends that “perception of superiority of European culture is portrayed through many motifs and symbols in *Homegoing*, portraying the idea of European culture's superiority through a variety of motifs and symbols.” One of the prominent ways was the relationship between names and identity” (Gyasi, 2016, p. 22). Yerima and Ekwueme-Ugwu (2022) on their part, read *Homegoing* alongside Alex Haley's *Roots*, as novels that interrogate location as a fulcrum for hybrid identity creation for African characters in Africa, African Americans and African characters in the Diaspora. They argue that “regardless of regional difference and other nuances in the experiences of African American and African characters, hybrid identity creation for both African American and African characters, is tied to location—which, in this case, is Africa” (p. 368) and as such, they see the novels as representing location as a major influence on identity. In their article, “Rooting routes to trans-Atlantic African identities: the metaphor of female descendancy in Yaa Gyasi's *Homegoing*, Motahane, Nyambi, and Makombe (2021) examine how representations of female experiences of forced trans-oceanic African mobilities can potentially disrupt male-centred narratives and epistemologies, to become a critical site to read shifting trans-Atlantic African identities. Their study focuses on female experiences of being and becoming African and African American in America, which can be read as potentially illuminating and problematizing notions of African diasporic identities and in the process, charting new frames for re-imagining the present and future of African identities in the context of their pasts. Sackeyfio (2021) juxtaposes the characters' African identity with their alienation in America. She argues, “compelling experiences that re-connect Marjorie to Asante identity in Ghana are sharply juxtaposed with her alienation back in Alabama. Marjorie comes of age to racial dynamics as she is torn between her Ghanaian identity at home and the abrasive realities of blackness in America” (p. 25).

The major point of departure from this body of scholarship is the representations of lost identity and the search for it in the novel. The paper argues that loss of identity takes diverse forms in the novel; a case in point is that Esi's descendants who were shipped to America suffer from slavery which takes away their identity. In the same way, Effia's descendants who migrate to America on their own volition to seek greener pastures have identity crises just like their people back home. In effect, the novel portrays slavery as an inhuman activity that takes people

from their ancestral homes to new environments where they lose their identity while economic crises, natural disasters, civil wars, corruption, authoritarian governments, and military coups act as new forms of slavery which drive Africans to seek greener pastures in America where they lose their identity while those who stay back home also lose their identity due to colonialism. In the rest of the section, we discuss how the characters lose their identity even though they try hard to maintain it. This is in line with Clarke's postulation that in Fanon's writing there is the construction of colonial black identity and the powerful affectual dynamics of power and oppression in Zizek's writing, "we see the effect that the collapse of the nation-state has had on ethnic and cultural identities. In both cases we see how cultural identities are not only socially constructed, but psychologically constructed (Clarke, 2011, p. 511).

### **My Name, My Identity**

Names have been identified as very important markers of identity. In fact, Agyekum has rightly argued that, "People are invariably named, indeed, a human being without a name would be socially and psychologically less than a fully man." (2006, p. 208). In many African languages, personal names have a strong historical, socio-cultural and ethnopragmatic bearing that go beyond mere identity or referentiality. In most cases, the names are neither arbitrary nor asemanic .... In other words, they have communicative functions. Furthermore, the personal names of Africans play an important role in society, most often reflecting what normally happens in daily life and as a consequence follow certain patterns (Arko-Achemfuor 2018, p. 5). Agyekum (2006) and Bariki (2009) suggest that the circumstances and social contexts surrounding the birth of a child can influence parents' choice of name. These factors may include the child's gender, the parents' social and economic conditions, the birthdate, and their interpersonal relationships (p. 209).

In Africa, especially in Ghana, there are different categories of names. Among the Akans of Ghana, there are names to signify the day one was born, names that show gender, names that show the circumstances that surround one's birth as well as names that show one's family and ethnicity. Welnhofner (2017) asserts that understanding Akan names provides insight into Akan language, culture, philosophy, thought, environment, and religion. Agyekum also makes the case that Akan names have symbolic meanings that reflect the people's engagement with foreign cultures and religious beliefs.

Among the Akans of Ghana, the day names for female children are: Akosua/Esi (Sunday born), Adwoa/Adjoa/Araba (Monday born), Abena (Tuesday born), Akua/Aku/Ekua (Wednesday born), Yaa/Aba (Thursday born), Afia/Efua (Friday born), Ama (Saturday born). Day names for males are: Akwasi/Kwesi (Sunday born), Kwadwo/Kojo (Monday born), Kwabena/Kobina (Tuesday born), Kwaku/Kweku (Wednesday born), Yaw/Ekow (Thursday born), Kofi/Fiifi (Friday born) and Kwame (Saturday born). There are other names that suggest the circumstances surrounding one's birth. For instance, a child who is born when the parents have expected a child for a long time can be named Nyamekye (God's gift), a child whose mother dies at birth can be called Anto (he/she was born after the death of the parent) while a child born when the parents are enjoying peace and prosperity is named Afriyie or Abayie (he/she who has come well). A twin boy is

called Atta while a twin girl is called Attaa. The first twin is Panin while the last twin is Kakra. The child born after twins is named, Tawia while the one after Tawia is named Nyankomago.

There are also people who are named after lesser gods or river gods who are believed to have helped the parents to get those children. Examples of these names are Ayensu, Bosie, Afram, Nyamaa and Bosomtwe. According to Bariki (2009), the manner in which one was born can affect the name given to him/her. He argues that the manner may relate to the sequence by which the mother has given birth. Several of these names relate to the children's arrival sequence. Ordinal names include "Piesie", 'first born', made up of pie, 'erupt from a place', and "sie", 'anthill'. Here, the pregnant woman's stomach is compared to an anthill and the first-born is conceptualised as the one who has erupted from the anthill thus making an exit. The children who come after the "piesie" have names that morphologically correspond with the Akan numerals". A second born boy is Manu, a third boy is Mensah while a fourth boy is Anane. A second born girl is named Maanu while a third born girl is Mansa, followed by Anane. A fifth born is Enum, sixth born is Nsiah, seventh born is Nsowah, eight born is Awotwe, ninth born is Nkrumah while tenth born is Badu. These names can refer to both male and female. Moreover, the names also relate to the period of birth. Under these, he identified names that relate to sacred days in the Akan calendar like Fofie (sacred Friday), Adae (sacred Sunday), Dapaa (sacred Tuesday, Saturday). This category of names includes Afua Fofie, Kofi Fofie, Kwaku Adae, Kwasi Adae, Ama Dapaa, and Kwabena Dapaa.

The analysis of the naming system in the Ghanaian set up shows the importance of names as a marker of identity. That is why the character names in *Homegoing* is significant. Esi's name identifies her as a Fante woman who was born on Sunday. However, the generation after her does not follow any naming system. Esi names her daughter, 'Ness', because during her lashings she uttered 'My goodness!' the only English word that came to her mind and thought that word was divine and that was what saved her and her daughter's life. So, she named her Ness, the root being 'goodness.' And also, for the fact that her slave master, 'The Devil' would not let Esi name her daughter Maame, after her mother. The fact that it is Esi who gives her daughter a name also signifies her lost identity since child naming is the sole right of fathers. Since Esi gets pregnant as a result of her rape by drunken slave master, there is no man to name the child so she has to do it herself. Ness' son is called Kojo, meaning he is Fante boy born on Monday but his name is reduced to Jo which shows no attachment to his cultural heritage. The only time when Mr. Mathison calls Kojo by his full name demonstrates acknowledgement and honour to his culture and heritage. This resonates with Clarke's argument that there is a, "construction of colonial black identity and the powerful affectual dynamics of power and oppression" (Clarke, 2008, p. 511). Thus, even though African Americans try to keep their African identity through maintaining their African names, they lose it after some time because they need to develop a racial consciousness in that African immigrants must learn how to navigate the white social world and multiple black worlds, those of both African Americans and foreign blacks (Clarke, 2008; Landry, 2018)

Thus, after Kojo's name is reduced to Jo, his son born when his wife gets missing is named H. H does not even know why he is so called. Once, a co-worker

asks him, “how come you’re called H?”. “Don’t know” “...somebody must have named you.” “My old master say H is what my mama used to call me” (Gyasi, 2016, p. 165). H symbolises total loss of identity since he has lost touch of his family and his heritage. His mother got lost when she was about giving birth to him and “killed herself. Master said they had to slice me out of her belly ’fore she died”. He narrates his mother’s story. So, from birth, he has no knowledge of any family or kin. H’s descendants, Willie, Sonny and Marcus, all do not bear any African name showing the way they have for gone their African identity and have to negotiate a new form of identity.

This change of name and identity is not limited to only the Africans who were sold into slavery. Those who remain in Africa also have their names changed due to certain circumstances. For instance, the wenches of the slave masters at the castle have their names changed because their husbands cannot pronounce their names. In a conversation among the wenches, one of them, Eccoa says, “my husband cannot pronounce my name well. He wants to call me Emily” ... “If he wants to call you Emily, let him call you Emily” Adwoa said... “Better that than to listen to him butcher your mother tongue over and over (Gyasi, 2016, p. 24). Besides, Effia’s descendants who remain in Africa also get new names because of their circumstances, thus, changing their identity too. Effia’s grandson, James, though he was born and raised in power, chooses to marry the woman that he loved and settles as a lowly farmer wanting nothing to do with the plans his father had for him which included slave trade and loveless marriage. He became known as ‘Unlucky’, a name he made for himself because nothing he planted grew. He lost his identity in trying to make a name for himself by creating a simple life. His name “changed from James to Unlucky and no one knew him as the grandson of Osei Bonsu (The king of Asante) or James Collins (an influential slave master). They called him “the man without a name” (Gyasi, 2016, p. 133), thus, making him socially and psychologically less than a fully man” as argued by Algeo above (Agyekum, 2006, p. 208). According to James’ daughter, Abena, he should be “called Shame, or Fearful, or Liar” (Gyasi, 2016, p. 134). Agyekum argues that names “frequently describe the characteristics of the named individual”, which is why people acquire new names. In the case of James, his poverty gave him a new name.

James’ daughter, Abena lived a poor life not knowing where her parents came from and who their extended family members were. She becomes frustrated because no man wanted to marry her because of the hard luck of her father. She thought about how old she was, an “unmarried twenty-five-year-old woman was unheard of, in her village or any other village on this continent or the next” (Gyasi, 2016, p. 113). As a result, she leaves her father’s village in search of a new identity. Before she leaves, her father retrieves the buried black stone necklace and tells her, “This belonged to your great-grandmother Effia. It was given to her by her own mother” (Gyasi, 2016, p. 152). This was the first time she heard the name of one of her ancestors and, in “savoring the taste of the name on her tongue . . . she wanted to say it again and again. . . She touched the stone to her neck and said thank you to her ancestors” (Gyasi, 2016: pp. 152–153). She ended up in a missionary church. Abena’s daughter, Akua experiences constant nightmares in which she always saw and shouted ‘fire’. This made the villagers call her, Crazy woman. Thus, her circumstance gave her a new name while Asamoah, her husband who lost one leg

during the Asante-British war, was also called Crippled man. When Akua, the crazy woman burns her children, Yaw is the only one who survives but sustains a lot of injury. He grows to become a history teacher but he is referred to as the man with scared face. Thus, while slavery takes Africana away from their homeland making them lose their identity, other circumstances like poverty, bad marriage and disasters take the identity of those living in Africa.

### **My Language, My Identity**

Language plays a very crucial role in constructing one's identity. Language is essential in expressing one's culture and a means of communicating values, beliefs and customs. As a result, it plays a very crucial role in promoting feelings of group identity and solidarity. The motif of language as a form of identity is vividly explored in *Homegoing*. The characters of the diaspora as well as those who remain in Africa all try to retain their mother tongue. Esi teaches her daughter, Ness, a Twi song which she sings at church even though she does not understand it. When Maa Aku recognizes the song, she tells Ness "So you are an Asante and you don't even know" (Gyasi, 2016, p. 84). When Kojo's wife disappears in Baltimore, Ma Aku speaks to him in Twi: You will make it through this, . . . Nyame (the Akan name for God) did not make weak Asantes, and that is what you are, no matter what man here, white or black, wishes to erase that part of you. Your mother came from strong, powerful people. People who do not break" (Gyasi, 2016, p. 130). Here, language is used as a source of comfort and bond among the enslaved. This resonates with Azhar and Sutrisno (2023, p. 102) postulation that "authors of post-colonial writing tend to switch between codes; to insert their vernaculars as a token of identity". According to Sackifio, the retention "of linguistic origins invigorate strategies of resistance on multiple levels as enslaved women recover remnants of Ghanaian matrilineal identity in the work" (Sackifio, 2021, p. 21).

However, the language of the enslaved does not survive since they are not allowed to speak it. In Mississippi Esi had spoken to her daughter, Ness, in Twi until their master caught her. "He'd given Esi five lashes for every Twi word Ness spoke, and when Ness, seeing her battered mother, had become too scared to speak, he gave Esi five lashes for each minute of Ness's silence. Before the lashes, her mother had called her Maame, after her own mother, but the master had whipped Esi for that too, whipped her until she cried out. My goodness!" (Gyasi, 2016, p. 71). Esi and Ness's Ghanaian identity is being brutally stolen by forcing them to speak English instead of Twi, hence asserting the English language's purported superiority over Twi. It is clear that Ness had been denigrated for her background. Language therefore turns into a colonized tool in this sense. However, a person's entire personality changes and forms an identity that is authentic to them when they are allowed to use their own language.

In his essay "Decolonizing the mind," wa Thiong'o explores the connection between language and society. According to wa Thiong'o (1986):

*"Language conveys culture, and culture conveys the whole set of values that shape our understanding of who we are and where we fit in the world, especially through literature and art... Thus, language is intrinsic to who we are as a group of people with unique forms and personalities, histories, and relationships to the outside world (p. 16)".*

Thus, to deny one of his or her language is to deny one of his or her true identity. Darmawan (2023) suggests that language, when utilized as a potent tool of colonisation, not only assist the establishment of cultural supremacy but also serve to sustain colonial ideology and maintain control. Preventing one from speaking his/her mother tongue is a way the Whites exert control over the Blacks as represented in the novel.

This linguistic politics issue manifests itself later in the book as a form of cultural snobbery and stereotyping. When Marjorie, who stands in for Effia's sixth generation, first meets Akua, her grandmother, she converses with her in Twi, the exact reverse of how she communicates to her at home in America. She responds in English when her parents speak Twi, as her teacher had told them not to use their native tongue. The teacher's instruction exhibits a form of cultural snobbery and stereotyping. Because Marjorie is foreign-born and speaks a different language at home, her teacher believes that she is not a proficient English speaker. This episode is comparable to the previous one in the novel, as Esi and Ness are deprived of their African identity by being made to speak English over Twi in order to demonstrate English's superiority and thus, robbing them of their African identity.

### **The Search for Identity**

Ghana has been at the forefront of Pan-Africanism since her independence from Britain in 1957. This has made the country attractive to people of colour because of her commitment to inviting African Americans and other diaspora peoples to re-connect to the motherland as a place of homage. Since Ghana emerged as the first African country to gain independence from colonial rule, it became an inspiration for many Africans living in the diaspora. As a result, there have been various activities at the governmental level to promote the return of Africans in the diaspora to return to Ghana. Nkrumah's Pan-Black vision actively positioned Ghana as not just the Black Star of Africa but as the political Canaan for Black people everywhere. As a result, African Americans and Caribbeans, including W.E.B. DuBois, Maya Angelou, and George Padmore, relocated to Ghana (Asempasah & Bentum, 2023). Many of these diasporans saw Ghana as the country where they could call home. Beyond these, there have been several important legislative acts, institutions, and projects that have been enacted, established, and initiated to promote the return of diasporans to Ghana. One of such legislations is the Right of Abode Law, which was passed in 2000 and made Ghana the first African country to officially open its doors to Africans in the diaspora. The law allows that anyone of African descent can apply and be granted an indefinite stay in Ghana. In 2002, Ghana's Dual Citizenship Act was passed, making it easy for anyone who is already a citizen of another country to become a citizen of Ghana.

This call has reflected in the writings of prominent Ghanaian writers like Ayi Kwei Armah and Ama Ata Aidoo. In *The Dilemma of a Ghost*, Aidoo explores this return when Ato Yawson marries Eulalie in America. Eulalie is very happy to return to Africa to reconnect to her roots. Unfortunately, she is not accepted by Ato's family who see her as a descendant of slaves. Thus, in *The Dilemma of a Ghost*, Aidoo foregrounds in Eulalie's return to and encounter with Africa, the return of history to unsettle narrow definitions of home and kinship. According to Asempasah and Bentum (2023, p. 387), "central to the play is how Ato's family resolves this

insurgent incarnation of history in the form of an encounter with a 'stranger' who is not a 'stranger' but kin"

Armah's *Osiris Rising* (1995) and *KMT: In the House of Life: An Epistemic Novel* (2002) are functionalistic and serve as the climax to the search; therefore, they are doors to the African identity" (Kakraba & Addei, 2011, p. 426). Armah postulates in *Osiris Rising* that reunifying Africans living abroad with their home continent is a vital first step in rediscovering their true identity. Ast acknowledges that her self-realization was not possible in the American setting and that there was the need for what (Okoth, 2021). Refers to as "recuperative return" to Africa. Armah, continues to illuminate the concept of collective heroism or collective responsibility in the search for the true African identity. This is what one of the characters in the novel, Lindela, alludes to as "clearing new paths to better directions of our own" (*KMT: In the House of Life: An Epistemic Novel* refers to Armah's ongoing exploration of the concept of collective heroism or collective responsibility as clearing new paths to better directions of our own. In this novel, the search for the African identity is synonymous to the search for the self, a communal self with a collective identity but not the "isolated self". Armah's two novels are intelligent and beautiful representations of an African writer's unwavering ambition to communicate and establish a standard for the African diaspora. In both novels, he makes the point that black people everywhere must get back in touch with their African roots or reconnect with the continent. This is a necessary step that will greatly aid in the quest for self and, by extension, African identity.

In *Homegoing*, Gyasi continues this tradition of the search for African identity and home. This resonates with Brubaker and Cooper's (2000, p. 10) argument that identity is "something all people have, or ought to have, or are searching for". Marcus searches for his past through research and writing and he knew instinctively that his life represented the accumulated experiences of his ancestral lineage and the times during which they lived, spanning generations since slavery (Sackeyfio, 2021). Marjorie and Marcus return to Ghana in search of their true African identity. They visit Cape Coast castle and enter the part of the dungeons where female captives were held centuries ago before they were hauled onto the slave ships and there, Marjorie gives the black stone necklace to Marcus to signify their oneness. This resonates with what Armah echoes in *Osiris Rising* through Jomo, "The same power that sent us wandering into the furnace of slavery in America, that same god has pointed the way back to the cool, fresh waters of our royal home, Africa" (Armah, 1995, p. 141).

## CONCLUSION

In this paper, we have argued that Yaa Gyasi's *Homegoing* is a novel that raises serious questions about the inhuman nature of slavery. The novel presents slavery as destroying kinship ties in a way where families are torn apart, with one section engaging in the slave trade while the other suffers from it. We have also argued that a major damage caused by slavery is the loss of identity, where the enslaved are forced to forgo their language and speak the slave master's language. This loss of identity is compounded by the erasure of cultural practices, traditions, and the severance of familial bonds, all of which are central to an individual's sense of self.

Evidence from the study is crucial in so far as the issue of slavery continues to persist in the lives of Africans born in the diaspora. These Africans are exposed to several cultures by default and get confused as to which of them to identify with. As a result, they lose their identity. A major argument is that both the Africans living on the continent and those living in the diaspora lose their identity. Thus, while slavery takes Africans away from their homeland, making them lose their identity, other circumstances like poverty, bad marriages, and disasters continue to strip the identity of those living in Africa.

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