

In Between Two Shores: Longing, Quest, and Imitation in Yaa Gyasi's *Homegoing*

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ABSTRACT

This article examines Yaa Gyasi's Homegoing (2016), which traces the story of two half-sisters across seven generations from Ghana to America, to explicate the long-term consequences of the Transatlantic Slave Trade (TST) on diasporic identity (Hartman, 2007; Hirsch, 2012). The study analyzes how the reformation of fragmented and lost identities creates a precarious condition for diasporic individuals and subsequent generations (van Rens, 2023). Moreover, while focusing on the characters' negotiation of the uneasy space between cultures, languages, and historical claims, the analysis employs Bhabha's (1994) notions of hybridity, mimicry, and third space of enunciation, alongside Cohen's (2008) conceptualization of diaspora as an ongoing process. Through close textual analysis, the study identifies four recurring patterns in each chapter: fragmented survival, displacement, longing, and intergenerational trauma (Mohtahane et al., 2021). It argues that in Homegoing, hybridity and mimicry function not merely as theoretical concepts but as constrained strategies to manage power, resist erasure, and form new identities (Bhabha, 1994; Said, 1978).

Homegoing (2016) redefines home not as a fixed location, but as something inherited, contested, rooted, and reborn in memory (Gilroy, 1993; Patrizi, 2022). This reading contributes to diaspora studies by demonstrating how Gyasi links African and African-American histories within a single lineage while preserving the record of colonial imperialism. The analysis remains embedded in the central text while employing established theoretical lenses.

Keywords: Diaspora, Hybridity, Mimicry, Identity, Imperialism, Negotiation

INTRODUCTION

The Cape Coast Castle is the central site of Yaa Gyasi's *Homegoing* (Gyasi, 2016). Above it, Effia (half-sister of Esi) marries a British officer. Below it, in the dungeon, Esi is being held captive before she is shipped across the Atlantic. Through this single yet important architectural site, Yaa Gyasi builds a narrative of hybridity and mimicry that spans seven generations and two continents (Asempasah et al., 2022; Ojuola, 2024). The novel is not about healing but is about painful experiences and longing after it (Hartman, 2007).

Homegoing (2016) is often considered and studied as a home saga but at its core the novel actually explores the fragmented notion of identity, self and its rebuilding (Yerima-Avazi & Ekwueme-Ugwu, 2020). Each chapter hands the trauma, legacy and longing to a new descendant. Seemingly, the timeline moves forward but the emotions, trauma continually encircles back the traumatic diasporic and colonial violation. Yaa Gyasi's such intricacy is not accidental but that repeated cycle enacts the central claim of the novel: that diaspora is an unfinished process of life (Cohen, 2008; Gilroy, 1993).

This article reads *Homegoing* (Gyasi, 2016) through two conceptual frameworks. Hybridity and mimicry, the language of ambivalence and partial identification, is studied through the lens of hybridity and mimicry by Bhabha (1994). Cohen's theory of Diaspora (Cohen, 2008), is helpful for the better understanding of novel's explication of unsettled identity of characters throughout seven generations. Together these two frameworks help to sort out the core narrative of Yaa Gyasi's *Homegoing* (2016);

that deals with identity erasure and its formation and diasporic relocation and survival intricacy (Hall, 1990; Du Bois, 1903).

There is a twofold contribution of this article. The first one deals with the use of form by Yaa Gyasi to represent structure and content of fragmented identity and home quest. Secondly, it argues that hybridity and mimicry in Yaa Gyasi's *Homegoing* (2016) is merely not celebrated but serves as constrained strategies of survival within power dynamics that lasts forever and remains an unfinished business.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Diaspora and Postcolonial Identity

Diaspora as a literary term in studies has moved to models of process from models of victimhood. Cohen (2008) identifies diaspora as the imperative criteria of dispersal and memory of homeland that create new forms of culture. Whereas, according to Safran (1991), diaspora is a myth and a source of return. Hall (1990) argues that cultural identity is production, not an essence that is always in process (Hall, 1990; Gilroy, 1993). In addition to this, Bhabha (1994) says that colonial power produces hybridity as tension rather than just a mixture. He also says that mimicry is the pure description of colonized people's near-repetition of colonial discourse. It always menaces and confirms authority because it is never exact (Bhabha, 1994; Said, 1978).

Critical responses to *Homegoing*

Scholars have studied and noted Yaa Gyasi's novel *Homegoing* (2016) through the perspectives of trauma, history and longing memories with genealogy in order to link African and African-American experiences of dispersed community (van Rens, 2023; Mohtahane et al., 2021; Patrizi, 2022). There were few scholars who have paid attention towards the structural conditions manuscript of diasporic community (Yerima-Avazi & Ekwueme-Ugwu, 2020; Ojuola, 2024). This article fills this gap by linking Gyasi's formal structures to Bhabha and Cohen's theories and also to the four core thematic patterns identified in the thesis data.

Theoretical Framework

This study employs two complementary theories: Postcolonial Theory and Diaspora Theory.

Bhabha's Postcolonial Theory (1994)

Bhabha presents his views on hybridity, mimicry and third space of enunciation (Bhabha, 1994; Said, 1978). Hybridity on one hand illustrates the mixed cultural, language and traditional norms when colonizer and colonized cultures collide and Mimicry on the other represents imitation as a surviving strategy (Bhabha, 1994). Meanwhile, third space negotiates and redefines a fragmented identity (Bhabha, 1994; Ojuola, 2004).

Cohen's Diaspora Theory (2008)

Robin Cohen defines Diaspora as a continuous struggle and ongoing condition (Cohen, 2008; Safran, 1991). For him return is not just an inheritance but is a relating task in progress. Together these two theories explore how identity is formed through fragmentation even though belonging remains unfinished throughout generations (Cohen, 2008; Gilroy, 1993).

METHODOLOGY

This qualitative study analyzes the text through textual analysis. The primary text source is *Homegoing* (Gyasi, 2016). Method of involvement is the close reading of all chapters. Other than that thematic

coding is categorized into four parts such as Fragmentation, Erasure, Dislodgement and Relocation. All findings are interpreted through Bhabha and Cohen's lenses of hybridity and mimicry with the supporting scholarship from Hall, Gilroy and Safran (Bhabha, 1994; Cohen, 2008; Hall, 1990; Gilroy, 1993; Safran, 1991).

No interviews were conducted. All evidence is drawn from the novel and secondary academic sources.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Identity Fragmentation

The novel *Homegoing* (2016) explicates fragmentation of identity as the first and imperative visible condition. Quey, born to an African mother and a British father, got his education in England. When he returns to the Gold Coast, he feels unable to fit. "London, it had been gray, but not like this gray" (Gyasi, 2016, p. 68). This sentence sets the diasporic formation of character as it is the record of a sensory and cultural split that explicates his hybridity and mimicry (Bhabha, 1994; Mohtahane et al., 2021).

Critically, Quey forgets his British father and that identity for a while without any guilt. This is not only the explication of his diasporic identity but also reveals how provisional an identity is that it can be set aside easily. This explains Bhabha's notion of third-spaced living, which is utterly a constant negotiation, not merely a synthesis.

While on the American side, fragmentation of identity is explicated through diction. Ness, who is forced to speak and comprehend English although she always says that she does not like it to be heard from a Black mouth, as she is not accepting the language shift from African to English. This makes the internalized pattern of hierarchy where English is being the dominant in power and the mother language is gone/lost. Ness terming the cotton field as hell is actually the representation of her traumatic experiences that no other word can be fitted so well for her to explain her pain and longing.

Across both lines (Quey and Ness) fragmentation is not described as confusion but as a structural break caused by force that is inherited by each generation and must live inside.

Identity Erasure and the Quest for Self Definition

If fragmentation is a break, erasure serves as a permanent seal to that break. Kojo is the most prominent example of it when he renames himself as "Freeman" (Patrizi, 2022). The state marks emancipation by giving him a new identity and name. But this explores that only naming a person never stabilizes or guarantees the safety. When his wife was kidnapped and the proclamation of the Slave Act confirms that a name protects nothing, law can rename someone but cannot guarantee safety (Gyasi, 2016, p. 156).

Regarding identity erasure, mimicry serves as an imperative strategy for it. Effia's character illustrates both identity fragmentation and evident mimicry when her mother pushes her towards a British officer. The hope is that prominent proximity to power will mean survival always. Effia's character reveals that African women are termed as "wenches" not "wives" (Asempasah et al., 2022). This status will never give them the due rights and identification. She adapts the cultural and language acceptance and imitates it for survival and shapes her identity with the factor of mimicry as a survival tool, but at the end realizes only a fragmented and dispersed self. The imitation is only accepted as a survival strategy to serve colonial needs and is discarded after that (Bhabha, 1994).

Gyasi through her mouthpiece Yaw, a professor, explicates how they (British) shape our mindset. Yaw is teaching under colonial rule and fully acknowledges that the curriculum is limited and allows us to read only what they want us to know. He knows by the fact that return is an illusion for dispersed person but yet hopes for his return. He is always curious to know about his lost identity and wants to find his

identity as he is questing for self. The elders who knew about it are dead now. Thus, Yaw teaches and quests with limited acknowledgment he has, to rebuild something from the broken fragments.

Marcus in the 21st century marks and faces the erasure in the archive. He is a researcher and his dissertation on slavery finds a gap where his ancestors actually should be. The institution with records helps to create silence (Hartman, 2007; Hirsch, 2012). He uses an academic tool to recover what academia helped to hide. He is afraid of water and that is not in any record but is inherited and real. He tries to find his lost identity despite every hurdle.

Diasporic Dislodgment: Essence in Flux

Dislodgment refers to the state of in-betweenness without pause. The character of Marjorie embodies this very clearly. She is raised in Alabama and moves to Ghana for university. In America she is termed as Black. In Ghana she is known as "oburoni" means British –because of her way of talking and the way she behaves (Gyasi, 2016, p. 276).

The label appended to her identity changes with the location. She does not fit in anywhere. Her identity is in flux. The place where she lives is not where she belongs, and the roots are also not accepting her. In contrast, H's character shows dislodgment after the legal change. Originally demarcated by the arrival of emancipation, then by vagrancy law and later by forced labor in mines. Freedom does not end the condition of being moved and controlled.

This exemplifies Cohen's viewpoint. He says diaspora is not one scattering but is a continuing state. Each character in the novel does not inherit a homeland but the task of relating to one that is a continuous shift of political and social grounds.

Tormenting Relocation: Trauma across Generations

Relocation in Gyasi's *Homegoing* (2016) functions as movement across time, through the body, not the movement across space only. Esi, who is sold and kept captive for a long time, is the origin of slave ship trauma. After that, relocation appears as fear and silence. Marcus, Esi's descendant is afraid of water, unknowing what happened to Esi during the Transatlantic Slave Trade but that water fear is something he inherited and is passed on to him (Gyasi, 2016, p. 289). This illustrates the integrated trauma that is not just a narrative memory, but a memory with bodily reaction.

Recurring images in the novel are used by Gyasi to trace this movement: fire initially burns down villages, water takes people away, across the nations, names are given and taken away (old identity is erased, new is given). These images are seen returning in every chapter and link people to each other who actually never met.

The final scene of the novel is not actually a return to home, it is an acknowledgement. Both Marcus and Marjorie manage to touch the site of historical violence together with a limited and careful gesture of diasporic belonging. The water once an agonistic site of loss becomes a source of connection and contact for a while.

CONCLUSION

Homegoing's final statement does not offer an end or resolution but continuation. Hybridity and mimicry are not something to be completed, they will leave a permanent mark on personality and identity that will remain there as a permanent imprinted structure (Bhabha, 1994; Cohen, 2008).

Bhabha's theory of third-space of enunciation and Cohen's view of diaspora help us name this persistence. The novel's structure does the same thing. Gyasi refuses a single narrator with the healing ending, she represents reality and shows belonging as labor which would be done again and again in each generation (Hartman, 2007; van Rens, 2023).

The cost and consequences of diaspora along with hybridity and mimicry are evident in the novel through fragmentation, erasure, relocation and dislodgment. Gyasi's novel stands as a record of the unfinished business of belonging that carries historical trauma and quest for self across generations.

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