



تقصى أغوار الأدب الأفريقي وإرثه: دراسة حالة لرواية الكاتبة يا جياسي عودة الروح

Exploring the Depths of the Afro - American Literary Heritage: Yaa Gyasi's Homegoing as a Case study

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الملخص:

يُعتبر تاريخ الأمريكيين الأفارقة النقطة السوداء في تاريخ الإنسانية، حيث أنه يُظهر البشر كوحوش يستمتعون بإيذاء الآخرين ويشعرون بالمتعة عند رؤيتهم يصرخون بألم. لذا، فإن هذه الورقة تسليط الضوء على تاريخ الأدب الأمريكي الأفريقي لمعرفة سبب امتلاءه بتلك الذكريات المؤلمة ولإظهار الشخصيات البارزة فيه. هذه الورقة هي دراسة تحليلية وصفية، بيانها مأخوذة من كتب وأطروحات ومقالات ومجلات ذات صلة من خلال دراسة الجوانب الثقافية والتاريخية في هذه البيانات عن طريق القراءة المتأنية باستخدام طريقة المقارنة والنقدية. قامت الباحثة بتحليل رواية *عودة الروح* للكاتبة يا جياسي كونها واحدة من الكتاب الأمريكيين الأفارقة الذين يسعون لإظهار الصورة الحقيقية لمعاناة السود أثناء وبعد العبودية. وقد أثبتت الباحثة أن الأمريكيين الأفارقة واجهوا وبلا رحمة شتا أنواع القمع والرعب والألم من العبودية والفصل العنصري والتمييز من المجتمع الأبيض بسبب لونهم وعرقهم. لذلك، فقد اعتُبر الأدب الأداة الأمثل لإخبار العالم بهذه المعاناة، وأصبح العديد من المؤلفين السود مثل يا جياسي أيقونات مشهورة في عالم الأدب بسبب إسهاماتهم الكبيرة في مجال الأدب الأمريكي الأفريقي.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الأدب الأفريقي الأمريكي، يا جياسي، عودة الروح، عصر العبودية K إرث.

Abstract:

African American history is the black spot in the history of humanity since it represents mankind as monsters who enjoy hurting others and feel the pleasure of looking at them crying loudly due to pain. Thus, the main purpose of this paper is to shed light on the history of Afro-American literature to know why African American history is full of gloomy memories and to highlight the well-known figures in it. This paper is an analytical and descriptive study and the data are taken from relevant books, theses, essays, and journals. The cultural and historical aspects of this data through close reading and by using comparative and critical methods are studied. Since Yaa Gyasi is one of the African American authors who wants to show the real picture of black people suffering during and after slavery. It was decided to analyze her novel *Homegoing*. This paper ends up proving that the Afro-Americans faced without any mercy all kinds of oppression, horrors, and pains from slavery, segregation, and the white community discrimination due to their color and ethnicity as it was protruded in *Homegoing*. As a result, literature was seen as a perfect tool to tell the world what happened to black people and many black authors like Yaa Gyasi became famous icons in the world of literature because of their massive contributions in the field of Afro-American Literature.

Keywords: African-American Literature, Yaa Gyasi, *Homegoing*, slavery era, and heritage.

1. Introduction

Literature undoubtedly is the perfect way of recording human experiences throughout the history of humanity. Since literature is the reflection of reality, the number of novels, stories, poems, excerpts, and other forms of literature help to demonstrate history and save it easily for the coming generations. Just like the African American literature which tells the unbelievable sufferings of African Americans

in the past. Since this history is the black spot and one of the most gruesome forms of inhumanity, all these miseries can never be arrested or forgotten from their minds. This particular genre is one of the most important literature in the new era because it represents black people's stories, and heritage and retells the black history of humanity during slavery and after it.

African American literature is the work that was formed in America by African-descent writers. It traces down the works that were written by slave writers like Phillis Wheatly in the late of the eighteenth century and other slave narratives during the Harlem Renaissance until it reaches the modern time through the hand of other black prominent figures like Colson Whitehead, Alice Walker, Maya Angelou, and others. In this genre, those authors tell in detail the life stories and experiences African Americans endure and tolerate throughout their lifetime. In "African American Literature from The Seventieth Century Till the Ninetieth Century," Abdalhakim Sobhi points out that,

African American Literature started from Africans who have suffered, struggled, and damaged, a cry for help and wrote just to get their point across to the white audience to prevail for a graceful and vibrant. African American writers represent novelists, short story writers, poets, and playwrights. They are represented in American literary movements including realism, naturalism, and modernism. (19)

Thus, the researcher is going to track down the most important events and the development of Afro-American Literature from 1746 until the modern time. Also, she is going to shed light on Yaa Gyasi's novel *Homegoing* as an example of Afro-American modern fiction that covers the history of African American people since literature is the mirror of reality.

2. Statement of the problem

The Afro-American people have a long and gloomy history full of struggles, oppressions, hatreds, and sorrows starting from the colonial era because it was the reason behind the existence of African people in America. Thus, they used literature to record what happened to them from the first moment they arrived in America, their suffering, their resistance against all the pains, and how they built a new world for their children despite all the difficulties. They tell the whole world about the history of slavery and the horror of being black in America in their writings.

Therefore, many researchers have started to investigate Afro-American history and track down its development through the fiction written by African American writers over the years. They have analyzed the Afro-American literary works and see how writers portray African-American suffering, fear, and heritage in their works. However, the researcher finds that there is a shortage of research that highlights Yaa Gyasi's novel *Homegoing* in electronic and online libraries as an example of Afro-American Literature; although, she is well known African-American writer in the modern period. Thus, this study is intended to investigate the history of African American Literature and apply the most important aspects that are seen in the work written by Yaa Gyasi and expose the suffering of the Afro-American people in the novel *Homegoing* from Slavery since it is the most prominent theme highlights in Afro-American Literature.

3. Objectives

This study aims to:

- Explore the history of African-American Literature from the colonial era until the contemporary era.
- Highlight the suffering of Afro-American people in the novel *Homegoing*.

4. Methodology

This study follows a critical, analytical, and descriptive method. It is based on the critical analysis of the collected data, which is critically described and examined by the researcher. The collected data include some sentences used in the text of Yaa's *Homegoing* and other resources that were taken from online resources and libraries that are related to the history of African American people and literature. The procedures that were used by the researcher are based on close reading and text analysis in light of the Afro-American Literary aspects. Finally, a conclusion is presented after the analysis of these data.

5. Literature Review on Yaa Gyasi's works

This paper is primarily concerned with studying Yaa Gyasi's novel *Homegoing* as an example of African American Literature, and

from the researcher's knowledge, several studies have been done on the novel *Homegoing* using various approaches. Thus, this part is going to present a glance at the available studies that deal with the novel *Homegoing*.

In 2020, Clara Avenoz's thesis entitled "Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah* and Yaa Gyasi's *Homegoing*: American Blackness and White Privilege Through the Lenses of the African Diasporic Experience" discusses how Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah* and Yaa Gyasi's *Homegoing* expand the meaning of blackness in the United States of America and provide unique perspectives on the working of racial inequality in the American society. Avenoz addresses the different experiences of migration from Nigeria and Ghana to America and the huge suffering of those immigrants. She finds that *Americanah* and *Homegoing* as post-colonial diasporic literature show their rich portrayals of history, identity, gender, and race. That's to say:

both novels prove that the experiences and perspectives of outsiders make visible the unconscious processes through which racial identification is imposed and privileges maintained, ensuring the reproduction of the material consequences of racial inequality. (27)

Finally, it is believed that despite the similarity in the setting of the two novels and the differences in the characters, events, and conclusion of each one, there is a monolithic suffering in the life of black people and there is no conclusion to this suffering unless there is equality between the white and the black people.

Siulienda Winata, in 2020, in her thesis entitled "Pan- Pan-Africanism as a Principle to Overcome Double Consciousness in African Diaspora Subjects: A Post-Colonial Reading of Gyasi's *Homegoing*" discusses how Gyasi highlights the suffering of black people from slavery and the negative impact of it on their life. She states that "because of the color of their skin, they have experienced racial discriminations which contribute to them having double consciousness" (7). Since this

thesis discusses the suffering of black people, Winata chooses two characters, Marjorie and Marcus, to highlight her points of view regarding this topic. Therefore, she believes that both Marjorie and Marcus suffer from colonialism and its impact which is considered to be the main reason for slavery at that time. The researcher also wants to highlight "the double consciousness, which emerges as the impact of colonialism and its consequence-racism", so she uses the post-colonial approach to shed light on this point (7). As a result, Winata uses the theory of characterization, the concept of double consciousness, and the concept of Pan- Pan-Africanism to emphasize the dangerous effect of colonialism in the life of black people during that period. The researcher concludes that both Marjorie and Marcus suffer from the clash of identity, the lack of freedom, and the double consciousness inside the black society and the white society. That's to say, on one hand, Marjorie and Marcus cannot get along with other Afro-American people because of their smartness and their way of thinking which is different from other Afro-American people, and on the other hand, they cannot communicate with the white community because of their color. Thus, they feel lonely and confused "because they cannot fully belong to American and African Culture" (68). Thus, they go back to Africa to find their missing souls and the missing African heritage aiming to be free from double consciousness, the lack of freedom, and the clash of identity. She adds that:

these Pan- Africanism principles help them to create a sense of belonging and ease the conflict resulting from having double consciousness. The principles are as follows: learning about African culture and history, cooperating with people of African descent, and doing a process of homecoming. (68)

Gyasi's *Homegoing* was studied in 2019 by Mar Gallego in her article entitled "Sexuality and Healing in the African Diaspora: A Transnational Approach to Toni Morrison and Gyasi." In this study, the writer emphasizes contextualizing the historiography of enslavement as an approach to analysis. Thus,

she finds that Gyasi has chronicled new forms of identity and agency that promote individual and generational healing as a form of protest and resistance against the toxic definition of hegemonic and sexuality. Finally, the writer believes that the African Diaspora concept would support the analysis of how the female characters, in the two novels, are seen as slaves who want to escape from America and go back to their homeland because of the oppression they go through. Therefore, the writer states that "both Morrison and Gyasi are intent on depicting moments of rupture and challenge of the hegemonic status quo that allows for an alternative politics of healing that can connect individual rebellious and dignified women to their future generations." (11)

In 2019, Gabriela Leiton in her article entitled "Homegoing as an identity in postcolonial contemporary women's literature" highlights "the role of returning to one's roots to find oneself in contemporary postcolonial novels" (3). In this study, Leiton tries to shed light on how Gyasi's *Homegoing* and Zadie Smith's *Swing Time* discover the missing identity and try to find the completion for the sake of one's name, words, and land in very attractive ways. At the end of this study, Leiton concludes that, [the] female postcolonial identity in contemporary literature changes the view on origin and past, proposing a re-discovery that implies knowing more about oneself, completing oneself, finding oneself, even when one did not know that was lost in some way: what I call the *postcolonial anxiety*. (4)

Therefore, all black people are ready to go back to their motherland which is the only place that has their roots, language, and name to find their own identity.

In 2018, Ava Landry's article entitled "Black Is Black Is Black?: African Immigrant Acculturation in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah* and Yaa Gyasi's *Homegoing*" explains the gap in African immigration and acculturation by using the theory of race, theory of ethnicity, and theory of acculturation. Landry also discusses the diaspora in

Americanah and *Homegoing* in which she finds that: the immigration of African people has contributed to reshaping the identity of black people in America. They slowly deepen their racial relation in the United States by navigating the different social spaces of whites, African Americans, and other black immigrants. (8)

Moreover, she states that "in both *Homegoing* and *Americanah*, the symbolic boundaries between the African immigrants and the African Americans are continuously reinforced through perceived interracial differences" (13). Lastly, Landry concludes that both novels show how the African immigrants expand on the idea of what Blackness means in life experiences, suffering, and cultural imagination.

6. History

6.1 African-American Literature from 1746 until 1900

This period is divided into three main eras the colonial era (1746-1800), the antebellum era (1800-1865), and the reconstruction era (1865-1900). Firstly, the colonial era helped shape black people's characters; however, in the American community, their works were not acknowledged due to the racial discrimination against those who had slave backgrounds. As it was stated by Abdalhakim,

Because of racism, many African American writings were not accepted as authentic works such as Frederick Douglass and Harriet Jacobs. Through poetry, sermons, letters, and slave narratives, African American literature of the colonial period was a means of breaking the bonds of slavery. (12)

During this era, exactly in 1773, the first book was written by a slave woman and was published despite society's bias. The slave Phillis Wheatly was kidnapped from Africa at an early age and sold to the Wheatly family. The Wheatly family teaches Phillis both reading and writing; then, they publish her first book entitled *Poem on Various Subjects*. Elisabeth Torfs states that "it is Phillis

Wheatly's *Poem on Various Subjects, Religious and Moral* published in 1773 that is now considered the first African American work of literature" (6). In these poems, Phillis compares her life in America under slavery and what she used to be before kidnapping. She discusses both freedom and slavery by comparing them as a binary opposite. After the Emancipation Proclamation and the Revolutionary War, the themes of slavery, slave narratives, and their suffering became common features in their works causing the flourishing of Afro-American Literature.

Second, the antebellum era occurred in Afro-American history before the Civil War in 1800 until 1865. This era encouraged black people to fight for their rights to be free, so many slaves like Frederick Douglass, Harriet Jacobs, William Brown, etc. used literature as a device to end slavery and to present the beauty of being black. Elizabeth Ann Beaulieu in her book *Writing African American Women: An Encyclopedia of Literature by and about women of color* believes that, in Antebellum fictions, mulattoes, rather than being crippled by their mixed racial heritage, are often the most admirable of the slave characters, possessing intelligence, bravery, and beauty beyond that of their darker-skinned counterparts (and, sometimes, their white masters). When they die- as they often but not always do it is because of external conflict with a racist society that has not made a place for them (though, their creator implies, it could and should), not because of an internal conflict between supposedly incompatible racial heritages. (650)

In this period some black female writers join the black men in their struggle for freedom. According to Abdulhakim, "feminist writers participate in the fight against slavery with black male writers" Both of them used oral and written fiction to present their strong desire for happiness, equality, and liberty (14). On the other hand, Torfs argues that some female authors like Harriet Jacobs in her work entitled *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* portray the life of slave women to inspire other black women to struggle for their rights "because of

sexual oppression, systematized rape, forced breeding, and responsibility for domestic tasks, black women suffered in more ways than black men" (7). Elisabeth Torfs in her thesis entitled "Alice Walker's Womanism Theory & Practice" highlights other female authors who did the same as Jacobs. She says,

Other women novelists are (the white) Harriet Beecher Stowe, who publishes *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in 1852, and Harriet Wilson, who publishes the autobiographical novel *Our Nig; or, Sketches from the Life of a Free Black, in a Two-Story White House, North* in 1859. (7)

Additionally, the first black feminist voice, the activist Sojourner Truth, gave a speech entitled "Ar'n't I a woman?" to encourage black and non-black women to fight for their rights to be treated equally and as human beings. As it was stated by Torfs,

The first explicitly feminist voice among these early black women authors is the ardent civil rights activist, Sojourner Truth. Although she cannot read or write, she is a talented deliverer of speeches, the most famous of which she gave on the 1851 women's rights convention in Akron, Ohio, and became known later as "Ar'n't I a woman?". (7)

Slaves in America were illiterate, so the reconstruction era focused on teaching them how to read, write, and act like civil and free people in every aspect of their lives the political aspect, social aspect, and economic aspect. In the reconstruction era, education and literacy were essential to everyone because they were used as instruments to gain their freedom and equality with the white people. According to Abdulhakim,

In the Reconstruction era, there was a great emphasis on education and literacy to obtain freedom socially, economically, or politically. Black slaves were illiterate. For this reason, many schools were established to teach writing and reading skills. (14)

In this period, the Afro-American pens and voices play an essential role in defining political freedom, lighting up the darkness, and

bringing back the sunlight to all black people. As a result, Afro-American literature such as stories, sermons, speeches, songs, prose, dramas, etc. flourished and spread all around the American community. For instance, in 1853 William Wells Brown's novel entitled *Clotel; or The President's Daughter* was considered to be the first Afro-American novel. Likewise, *Sympathy* is a poem that was written in 1899 by Paul Laurence Dunbar to assure the importance of obtaining their rights and freedom. There are many other outstanding authors and activists as Wells Barnett, William E.B. Du Bois, Booker T. Washington, Lucy Delaney, Frances Harper, and Anna Julia Cooper, etc. who have many contributions to shipping the Afro-American literature during the Reconstruction era.

6.2 African-American Literature during the Harlem Renaissance

Renaissance means rebirth and as was pointed out by Magdalena Hajkova, "the term of renaissance- rebirth, is not as proper as it may seem, for it is, in fact, the first blossom of fiction (belles-lettres) that resulted from various social changes" (19). This period occurred for the first time in Harlem, a quarter of New York City, and it implies the rebirth of the new Afro-American people and literature.

The Harlem Renaissance or the New Negro Renaissance is the era when the African American people have a new sense of confidence because they feel that they achieve their freedom and start to feel like human beings again. Torfs further explains that,

In poetry, fiction, drama, and essay, as in music, dance, painting, and sculpture, African Americans worked not only with a new sense of confidence and purpose but also with a sense of achievement never before experienced by so many black artists in the long, troubled history of the peoples of African descent in North America. (8)

Thus, the years between 1900 and 1940 were the golden era for the Afro-Americans because they changed the way they looked at themselves and the way they wrote literature. They start to write about their cultures proudly

leading the Afro-American literature and heritage to flourish. Engy Salama observes that,

This movement was led by a group of new young generation of writers and artists who were proud of their African American identity. They aspired to remove the concept of racial discrimination and achieve equality in the white society. They also insisted on improving both the content and the form of their works. (26-27)

The Afro-American people in general and authors in particular lost too many things like their characters, identities, beliefs, and families. However, the fire they have in their hearts does not fade or die even once pushing them to struggle more and to fight for their right to be treated equally with everyone. They refuse to stop their resistance until they reach their goals to be free and to be treated with respect. Hao Huang discusses in his article entitled "The Harlem Renaissance: Alain LeRoy Locke, W.E.B. Du Bois and the American Dream" that,

After the Civil War, emancipated Negroes began to strive for civic participation, political equality, and economic and cultural self-determination. But as Reconstruction drew to a close in the late 1870s, conservative whites regained power in the South. From 1890 to 1908 Southern legislatures passed laws that systematically disenfranchised most Negroes and many poor whites, excluding them from representation. (1)

The African Americans walk on the darkest road and risk their lives just to be seen as heroes in the eyes of the white people. Thus, they take part in both the Civil War and the First World War, standing side by side with their previous masters to fight their enemies. However, their sacrifice was neglected by the white community and no thanks or reward was given to them. Torfs believes that "the blacks, who served along the side of the whites during the First World War, come home to find none of the recognition their white allies receive" (8). Above all, some white people explode the racial tensions against the black people causing them to be abused again.

In 1919, a new crisis appeared and it was known as the Red Summer when a group of white people started to kill black people because of their own biases. Darryl Dickson-Carr mentions that their action is an attempt "to move African Americans back to their prewar status as second-class citizens" (6). As a result, many black people start to migrate to the north during the Great Migration period seeking a better life and new opportunities away from this unsafe environment. In their new place, they create their world with their ideology and they hope to have a better life. All these events inspired Afro-American authors with new ways of writing to fight against racial, inequality, and discrimination like Jean Tommer who was one of the most prolific authors of his time. Black women's writing increased as well and many well-known female writers like Toni Morison, Alice Walker, Harriet Jacobs, and Zora Neale Hurston struggled for their rights to have a better world to live in. According to Salama, "after this period, the women's writings began to increase as a trail of advocating the feminist identity and expressing the women's persecution in slavery such as Toni Morison, Alice Walker, Harriet Jacobs and Zora Neale Hurston" (27).

During this era, black people still could not fulfill their rights since the bias and prejudice toward them were deeper than what they thought and imagined. Huang believes that "unrelenting injustices forced the black intelligentsia to realize that prejudice against Negroes was deeply ingrained in American society"(1). Yet, they gain their self-determination rights in the Harlem Renaissance era.

In general, the Harlem Renaissance is the first light to a new era and a gift for all Afro-Americans because it raises their spirits, faith, and pride in themselves and it created a positive self-image for all black people that they could do and accomplish whatever they want regardless their skin color.

6.3 African-American Literature during the Protest Period

The protest era emerged from 1940 until 1959 to face the segregation and discrimination against the Afro-Americans. In comparison to the white community; the black ones are marginalized in every aspect of their lives. Thus, the civil rights activists and the black writers start this era with the hope to have their freedom and equality.

During the Great Depression crisis, African American people wish to have some help from the American government like the white people, but no one gives them a hand. They face the most difficult period of their lives after the slavery era, especially writers. They cannot obtain funds to support their writing career. However, at that time, few writers could publish their works by themselves, but they wrote to specific readers to describe their situation at that period. According to Rochelle Smith and Jones Sharon,

Literature that had protested as a purpose was especially distasteful to white readers who were not ready to face the realities of racism. The issue of racism continued into the Second World War due to the segregation between black and white soldiers. (469)

Many Novelists emerged in this period, and they made great contributions like Kchard Wright, Ralph Ellison, and James Baldwin.

Richard Wright is the father of literature in this period. In 1920, he published his well-known novel, *Native Son*. In this novel, Wright represents the life of a young black boy who finds himself isolated in the city due to his color. This novel links the realism he and all the black people face in the Northern environment with naturalism and protests against the bias toward them. Ralph Ellison is another important icon in this period. Ellison won the National Book Award due to his novel *Invisible Man* which was written in 1952. James Baldwin is the most prolific writer of this era. In 1949, he published his first essay entitled "Everybody's Protest Novel." In this essay, he criticizes both *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and *Native Son*. Baldwin believes that both of them did not fulfill their purpose in picturing the black people suffering. Not only those writers, but

also many other black writers such as Gwendolyn Brooks, Melvin Tolson, Langston Hughes, Lorraine Hansberry, and Ernest Gaines express their opinions about the civil rights movement and the black movement in their works. Others like William Attaway, Chester Himes, and Ann Petry write strong social protest novels.

Briefly, this era is the first light to the new Afro-American Literature. Likewise, the thoughts of the writers who belong to the protest era were translated by the new generations who sparkle during the contemporary era.

6.4 African-American Literature during the Contemporary Period (1960-present)

The free Afro-Americans in the north and those who ran away from slavery in southern America put their fingerprints in this era and made the globe sympathize with them. The African American Literature wakes up the principles of the nation and lets the river of justice pull them to the golden land; the land of freedom. According to Wilfred Samuels,

African Americans entered the 20th century with cadences of progression and precision grounded in determination, spirituality, and literacy. In *The Souls of Black Folk* (1203), which many consider the black master text or the African-American book of the 20th century, W.E.B. Du Bois, with, its seems prophetic vision, succinctly captures African Americans' dogged journey from children of emancipation to youths with dawning self-consciousness. (6)

Therefore, the Afro-Americans in this period felt their humanity again and felt proud of themselves.

Between 1960 and 1969 the Afro-American people started a new movement named the Black Power Movement aiming to define and liberate themselves completely. In these years, they sing the song of power to every black person and the term *black is beautiful* spreads all around America as their new slogan. As a result, black authors were inspired by this movement causing the black arts to become

"the aesthetic and spiritual sister of the black concept" to change the society (Torfs,11). Most of these works if not all of them were written to fulfill the need and willingness of Black Americans to be free and be treated just like white people. Maryemma Graham and Ward Jerry say,

In the first half of the twentieth century, African American writers were torn between masking and opening their expressions. Theaters were considered to be the only place to express reality and provide opportunities to focus on social problems. The theatrical possibilities of folk materials were explored. (423)

They write to support and encourage black people to keep on with their struggle, strive, and create a miracle that will break reality. They wanted to consolidate the black people's personalities, so some black writers like Nikki Giovanni, June Jordan, Mari Evans, Margaret Walker, William Melvin Kelley, and Eldrige Cleaver, burned themselves with their passion to change the reality and push the Afro-American people to the sunlight leaving no regret behind them.

1970, was the glory period for black women's fiction, so many black women writers became famous figures and helped to make Afro-American Literature flourish. As it was stated by Torfs, "The year 1970 especially is crucial for women authors" (12). Thus, from 1970 until nowadays and with the help of some black authors like Du Bois, Charles Chesnutt, Pauline Hopkins, Paul Laurence Dunbar, Sutton Griggs, and James Weldon Johnson, etc. the Afro-American female writers like Toni Cade Bambara, June Jordan, Audre Lorde, Maya Angelou, Toni Morrison, and Alice Walker attract the public attention to black women suffering and their lacking of freedom. They also play a crucial role in the field of African American literature and in changing the stereotypical image of black women from a negative image to a positive one.

Those writers contributed to the civil rights movement, the black power movement, and the women's movement; therefore, they tell the

reality of how black women suffered due to bias and sexual harassment by black men and the white community in these periods. Others like Toni Morrison, Alice Walker, and June Jordan focus on portraying black society and the relationship between black men and black women to criticize black men's domination and all kinds of discrimination against black women. Torfs says,

Alice Walker, Toni Morrison, and June Jordan publish their first novel. These novels, *The Third Life of Grange Copeland*, *The Bluest Eye*, and *His Own Where* respectively, focus on relationships within black communities rather than those between blacks and whites. (13)

Overall, many things change in the life of Afro-Americans and Afro-American Literature. The new generations came holding new ideas and faiths to bring new hopes to all African American people and the most prominent themes in their works revolved around the black people suffering from slavery, segregation, discrimination, and the Afro-American struggles against race and inequality. Also, the quick development in the lives of African Americans helps to show the whole world that they deserve to be treated equally with whites. Many black writers work very hard to gain this right causing them to be seen as the most prolific writers in comparison to others. Abdalhakim argues that,

For more than a century southern blacks wrote numerous prose narratives, which in their variety conformed to the autobiographical mode. There have been the fugitive-slave narratives and the ex-slave narratives; the spiritual, social, political, and personal autobiographies; the confessionals, exemplary lives, the diary-type and journal-type autobiographies; as well as the autobiographical novels. (38)

They use literature as a tool to narrate what happened to their ancestors in real life in the form of stories, so most of their well-known works concentrate on the slavery era to learn more from them to build a new world for themselves and to gain their rights. They write about the history of slavery and the horror of

being Black in America making the whole globe aware of it. They also highlight their long-suffering to gain their rights to be as equal as white people due to discrimination and bias. Thus, the Sun of Change rises in the black community with the help of African-American Literature. They reach their goal and hold themselves to the glory. As Martin Luther King says in his notable speech entitled "I Have a Dream,"

I have a dream that one day on the red hills of Georgia, the sons of former slaves and the sons of former slave owners will be able to sit down together at the table of brotherhood. I have a dream that one day even the state of Mississippi, a state sweltering with the heat of injustice, sweltering with the heat of oppression, will be transformed into an oasis of freedom and justice. I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character. (qtd. in Younge 15)

Yaa Gyasi is a famous African-American novelist and one of the African authors who is deliberately concerned with black people suffering from slavery and discrimination in the modern era. She uses her writing to highlight the pains they faced in America during the slavery era and after it in a very vivid and attractive way. Thus, this study discusses her novel entitled *Homegoing* and tracks down how the Afro-American people in this novel suffer from slavery generation after other.

7. The African- American Heritage in *Homegoing*

Slavery is an open wound and never heals even after millions of years. Generation after generation they still remember all the terror memories and record what happened to their ancestors. Thus, many Afro-American writers from the colonial era till the contemporary era retell the stories of their pains and suffering from the first moment of their kidnapping to their selling as slaves.

Yaa Gyasi is one of those writers and *Homegoing* is one of the modern novels which

covers the life of black people as slaves. In this novel, she describes the horrors of being locked in small dungeons underneath the Cape Coast Castle without enough air knowing nothing just feeling bodies on top of each other like goods. The horror of hearing the crying men and women loudly without any benefit and the feeling they felt when they found their bodies no longer belonged to them. As Spencer D.C. Keralis says, "alienated the enslaved from their humanness along with their freedom because, as property, the enslaved had value only about ownership, use, and exchange by person and under the law" (122). Gyasi pictures the endless tragedy of the slaves who killed their children to set them free and the slaves who were buried alive or were punished without any crime just as entertainment to their masters. She delves into all these gloomy memories and restates them in the novel *Homegoing*.

Gyasi begins the tale from the late 18th century in an Asante village, part of the Gold Coast and nowadays it is known as Ghana. The story tracks down the interconnected lives of two half-sisters, Effia and Esi, and their descendants across multiple generations. The events of the story are set in Ghana and the United States and span over two centuries by following the history of slavery and its impact on characters. Since the theme of slavery is considered to be one of the most prominent themes in Afro-American Literature, in *Homegoing* Gyasi tracks down the life of Esi and her bloodline who suffer a lot from it.

She offers a rich exploration of this theme by intertwining individual stories with broader historical contexts, engaging readers on multiple levels. She highlights the consequences of slavery across time and regions and depicts the physical, emotional, and psychological pain to both individuals and communities. As A.C. Ribeiro Costa highlights,

Gyasi discusses the issue [of slavery] through the characters of Effia and Esi, a half-sister from their mother's side, who end up in opposite positions- whereas Effia marries an English slaver, Esi is captured, enslaved, and

taken by force to the United States. Pregnant after a rape, Esi's descendants suffer from slavery in the South and later segregation and poverty. (139)

Gyasi sets up some key aspects that refer to the theme of slavery and it will be discussed in the coming paragraphs.

Esi Asare lives a happy childhood and everyone in her village loves her. Gyasi says that,

Esi grew up in bliss. The villagers called her ripe mango because she was just on the right side of spoiled, still sweet. There was nothing her parents would refuse her. Even her strong warrior of a father had been known to carry her through the village at night when she couldn't sleep. (34)

However, all this happiness faded after she got captured and sold into slavery. Esi faces all kinds of suffering and never escapes from it until her death and passes this destiny to her descendants. She describes painfully her new life in the castle saying, "There was no sunlight. Darkness was day and night and everything in between. Sometimes there were so many bodies stacked into the women's dungeon that they all had to lie, stomach down so that women could be stacked on top of them" (33). Generation after generation and the past continue to shape the present and Esi bloodline still find themselves prisoners and powerless in front of their antecedents' history. Thus, Gyasi shows through vivid storytelling the complexity and the difficulty of Esi's descendants who lived during the slavery era and after it. Many of them suffer from the barbaric treatment and the loss of identity. All their memories are horror, depression, and painful death. Therefore, the researcher goes deeper to investigate the type of life Esi and her descendants live in America as slaves.

The word slavery is associated with the brutal and dehumanizing treatment of the slavers and the slaveholders by presenting them as animals. As Keralis points out, the ethical equation between slavery and animal cruelty was common in eighteenth and nineteenth-century

representations of slavery. Slaveholders deployed a dehumanizing metaphor in describing slaves as brutes, and under chattel slavery which involves the outright ownership of slaves and their posterity and was historically often racially based slaves were reduced to living property, in legal status little more than animals. (121-122)

Gyasi vividly portrays the horror and the harsh treatment of the slave people on plantations, and the pervasive violence and exploitation they endure. She starts by presenting the life of Esi when she was a slave. From the moment of her kidnapping, she faces all kinds of brutalities and dehumanizing treatment from slave traders and people who kidnapped her. For example, Esi cannot forget the horror of the night she was captured. She runs to the woods and climbs the tree and waits for a long time before the enemy warriors burn the grasses, and the trees and throw stones, Esi and the other villagers fall to the ground like rotten fruits. Gyasi describes this scene in a very elegant way saying,

Time passed and passed. Esi felt like her arms were encircling fire instead of the tree, so badly were they burning. The dark shadows of the leaves on the ground had started to look menacing. Soon, the sound of screaming people falling from the trees like plucked fruit could be heard all around her, and then a warrior was at the bottom of her tree. He threw a rock at her, then another, then another. The fourth rock slammed into her side, but still, she held on. The fifth hit the lattice of her clasped fingers; her arms came undone, and she fell to the ground. (44)

Esi with other villagers was tied and the journey of terror began. They walked miles and miles till the blood came out from their feet and covered the leaves. According to Gyasi, "the calluses on Esi's feet split open and blood seeped out, painting the leaves she left behind. Ahead of her, the blood leaves of others" (45). They push them to walk day and night and never let them rest to heal the sores of their feet and those who cannot walk anymore from pain got beaten by soldiers till they could do it like

magic. As was quoted by Fatiha Barbar and Houria Mabrouki in their thesis entitled "Slavery in America: Origin, Struggle, and Resistance 1619-1865," "There was nothing to be heard but the rattling of chains, smacking of whips, and the groans and cries of our fellow-men. Some would not stir from the ground when they were lashed and beat most horribly" (15).

The same scene was seen in *Homegoing* when Gyasi describes the slave passage from their homeland to Cape Coast Castle saying, "For almost half of the week, they walked both day and night. The ones who couldn't keep up were beaten with the sticks until suddenly, like magic, they could" (45). Also, they did not give them enough food or let them sleep. They order them in a language they do not understand and beat them for reason or without. Let alone if they disobeyed the given order, they were beaten to death. For instance, when one of them, who is known as Fiifi, wanted to remove Esi's clothes, she launched on his face, so he smacked her very hard. Gyasi writes:

she launched a long, full stream of spit into his face. ... The chief came to stand next to him. What will you do about this, Fiifi? Will you let this go unpunished? the chief asked. He spoke low so that only Esi and Fiifi could hear. Then, the sound of the smack. It was so loud; that it took a moment for Esi to determine whether the pain she felt was in her ear or inside it. She cowered and sank to the ground, covering her face and crying. (47)

Then, when they arrived at Cape Coast Castle, kidnapers put them in small places without enough air causing many of them to face difficulty breathing. According to Barbar and Mabrouki, "the slave ships were designed to maximize their cargo, forcing bound slaves into extremely cramped berths with limited ventilation, where blood and excrement accumulated over time" (15). In addition, the slaves' women were roped in by the white soldiers with no mercy. For example, one night in the dungeon where women are locked some white soldiers enter it and start to grab and touch the slave women savagely making them

afraid. Gyasi argues that the soldiers looked around and the women in the dungeon began to murmur. One of them grabbed a woman on the far end and pushed her against the wall. His hands found her breasts and then began to move down the length of her body, lower and lower still until the sound that escaped her lips was a scream. (48)

Unfortunately, Esi was one of those unlucky women. A white soldier comes near Esi and drags her to his room and rapes the girl with no shame or mercy because she was too weak to fight due to the lack of food and the sores from the beatings which cover her whole body. As it was stated by Gyasi, he took her to his quarters above the place where she and the rest of the slaves had been kept. He put her on a folded tarp, spread her legs, and entered her. She screamed, but he placed his hand over her lips and then put his fingers in her mouth. Biting them only seemed to please him, and so she stopped. (48)

In a very cruel way, he raped her and after what he did, he looked at her horrified and disgusted as if Esi was the one who forced him to do that. Then, he dragged her back like an animal to the dungeon pretending nothing happened. A few months later, Esi gave birth to her daughter Ness.

Ness opened her eyes to find herself a slave and lived a hard life. Ness suffers from the violent treatment of the white people. Just like animals, she was sold in slave markets when she was three years old. Without any mercy, they took her from her mother by force and the suffering journey started. She works in place and was like Hell to her. Gyasi says, "She was in a place she would only ever describe as Hell" (69). In that place, slaves were seen as animals. As Markman Ellis states, "Slaves, like animals, were degraded to the status of things, considered as property, and as such not human- or at least, not human in the same way as the master"(95). Thus, their master wanted them to be married to produce new slaves. He monitored them all night if they did not sleep together, the next morning he whipped them in front of everyone. Ness was forced to marry a

new slave named Sam. Gyasi highlights that "the master of Hell, the Devil himself, with red-leather skin and a shock of gray hair, prefers his slaves married for reasons of insurance, and because Ness is new to Hell and because no one has claimed her, she is given to calm the new slave Sam" (78).

The barbaric and dehumanizing treatment was not only toward women but also men suffered more from this treatment like Sam. He was seen as an animal that needed to be tamed in his master's eyes, so Sam was beaten by him for everything. He also forced him to marry Ness and produce a new slave and he succeeded in doing so. After Kojo's birth, Sam tries not to cause any problems and never disobeys his master because if he does so Devil will harm or snatch his son and wife. As Gyasi states,

following the birth of their son, Sam had come to be all that the Devil had wanted him to be. Tame, was a good, hard worker who rarely fought or caused trouble. He would remember the way the Devil had beaten Ness for his folly, and when he held Kojo, called Jo, for the first time, he'd promised himself that no harm would come to the boy on his account (81).

The devil's brutal actions destroy Sam's personality and change him from a person who refuses to be a slave into a perfect slave because he wants to save the family, he was forced to create it.

The barbaric and dehumanizing treatment not only destroyed the black people's personalities but also, led many of them to lose their own identity, culture, and inheritance. Gyasi vividly presents this point in the novel through the events and the characters. Barbar and Mabrouki state, "The life of African slaves was difficult; they were not permitted to have a community based on their African traditions"(1-2). They were not allowed to use their language or follow their customs like what happened to the protagonists in the novel.

First, Esi after the brutal attacks on her village, realizes that she is a nameless woman with no identity, no land, no freedom, and no worth. If she is in pain or dies, no one will care

about her because, in the slavers' eyes, she is like goods to be sold and bought. Also, whenever Ness wants a bedtime story, Esi retells her own stories of how she was taken from her village and sold as a slave and never says anything about her childhood, her village, or her culture and heritage. She tells her about the Big Boat and how people were thrown into the ocean when they died. Gyasi sheds light on this point saying, even Ness's bedtime stories had been ones about what Esi used to call the Big Boat. Ness would fall asleep to the images of men being thrown into the Atlantic Ocean like anchors attached to nothing: no land, no people, no worth. In the Big Boat, Esi said, they were stacked ten high, and when a man died on top of you, his weight would press the pile down like cooks pressing garlic. (69)

Therefore, Ness grows up knowing nothing about her identity, culture, or inheritance and cannot pass anything to her children because her mother did not pass anything to her.

Second, slave people were not allowed to communicate using their mother tongue and if they were caught doing that by their masters, they whipped them for each word. For instance, Esi when her master heard Ness speak Twi, he whipped Esi five lashes for every word she spoke and five lashes for her silence. Gyasi represents the dehumanizing action Esi faces from the white master saying that "in Mississippi, Esi had spoken to her in 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" (70). Esi named her daughter Maame because she missed her mother, but her master did not like it because it was Twi name, so he lashed her until she changed it into Ness. Gyasi mentions that,

Before the lashes, her mother had called her Maame, after her mother, but the master had whipped Esi for that too, whipped her until she cried out My Goodness! Those words escaped her without thought, no doubt picked up from the cook, who used to say them to punctuate every sentence. And because those had been the only English words to escape Esi's mouth

without her struggling to find them, she believed that what she was saying must have been something divine, like the gift of her daughter, and so that goodness had turned into, simple, Ness. (70)

Therefore, Esi never taught Ness Twi, so she grew up remembering some words without knowing their meaning. As an example, she used to sing a song to Kojo and it was the same song her mother sang to her when she was a child, but she only remembers the words without knowing the meaning. Gyasi points out that, she began singing a little Twi tune her mother used to sing sorrowfully on nights when the work of slavery was particularly grueling, when she had been beaten for supposed insolence laziness, or failure. Ness didn't know what she was singing, for Esi had never taught her what the words of the song meant (81).

Thus, Ness finds herself with no idea where is she from and where can she go if she can escape slavery. She finds herself as a property without language, home, history, or legacy her main duty is to work. As Barbar and Mabrouki highlight, "the control of masters over their slaves was absolute and complete, they considered them as property, and subjected to work from sunrise to sunset in dehumanizing conditions" (27). She cannot even remember her mother's face and cannot pass anything to Kojo.

Kojo was much worse than his mother. He only knows his father and mother's names from Aku who takes care of him after his parents got captured by their own master. Also, he knows the South and what kind of life the slave people lived here. Gyasi states that "Jo only knew the south from stories Ma Aku told him, the same way he knew his mother and father, Ness and Sam. As stories and nothing more. He didn't miss what he didn't know, what he couldn't feel in his hands or his heart" (106).

Another incident that happened to Kojo led him to hate and ignore his own identity. When he was seven years old, he fell in love with a girl named Mirabel; thus, he asked Aku "what a man was supposed to do when he liked a

woman" (107). Aku told him to follow the Gold Coast traditions. She says, "Why, Kojo, in the Gold Coast, they say if you like a woman you have to go to her father with an offering" (107). The next morning, he follows the Gold Coast customs takes a frog, and goes to the girl's father to ask him for his daughter's hand, but both the Pastor and the girl's father do not like it. They were angry with Aku because she taught him to prohibit African witchcraft, so Kojo and Aku were not accepted to be in the church. Gyasi quotes that,

Back then, Jo had been in love with a girl named Mirabel, and in church the next Sunday, he'd brought her father a frog that he'd caught by the water the night before, and Ma Aku had laughed and laughed and laughed until the pastor and the father said she was teaching Jo the ways of old African witchcraft and kicked them out of the congregation. (107)

After that incident, Kojo never followed any of the Gold Coast customs that Aku used to tell him and preferred to do things like the Americans. Thus, his children never know anything about these customs leading to the loss of their identity. Also, because of the slave rules and slavers' brutal and dehumanizing treatment many black people became afraid to follow their traditions and legacies let alone teach them to their children; thus, the new generations grew up without any knowledge about their real identity, culture, inheritance causing many of them to suffer from loneliness and emptiness since they did not know they belong to were.

All in all, Gyasi vividly sheds light on black people's history during the slavery era and the modern era. In her novel, she focuses on one of the most shining themes in Afro-American Literature which is the theme of slavery and its effect on it to the modern generation. She presents the effects of slavery on individuals, families, and societies. Also, she endures through the events and the characters in the novel the horror of being black in America by focusing on the barbaric treatment of white people. All these discriminations and abuses produce a trauma to all black people generation

after the other. Iris Hinfelaar's master thesis entitled "The Transmission of Trauma in Toni Morrison's *Beloved* and Yaa Gyasi's *Homegoing*" in 2020 examines the idea of slavery traumas in both Toni Morrison's *Beloved* and Yaa Gyasi's *Homegoing*. She finds that both novels

Despite their [Morrison and Gyasi] differences in how the traumas of slavery affect later generations, they still both portray how important it is and will continue to be, to acknowledge that the trauma of slavery has impacted many people and will continue to impact the descendants that are alive today unless we confront and deal with these complex histories. (53)

That's to say, it is very necessary to highlight the trauma of slavery and its bad influence and sad side among the slaves in the past ages and their generations in the present and the future. Therefore, Gyasi presents black people as victims who suffered in the past and still suffer in the present due to human greed and narcissism.

8. Conclusion

In this paper, the researcher finds out that Afro-Americans have a long and sad history full of struggles, oppressions, hatreds, and sorrows starting from the colonial period since it was the main reason behind the existence of the African people in the first place in America until the modern time. Therefore, African people used literature to write about themselves, their suffering, and the way they resisted this pain. Not only resist, but also, they also built a new world for their children, and recorded what happened to them using fiction which was known as African American Literature. Also, she discusses Gyasi's novel entitled *Homegoing* as an example of Afro-American Literature. In the discussion, she vividly portrays the theme of slavery and how the characters in the novel suffer from it. She argues two important features related to the theme of slavery which are the bad treatment of the slavers and the loss of black people's identity. Then, she concludes, that all slavers were treated in very inhuman ways causing

many of them to die and to lose their self and heritage.

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