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**“Taking Away Your Name Is the First Step”:
The Transgenerational Trauma of Slavery and
the Shaping of Identity in Yaa Gyasi’s
*Homegoing***

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Abstract

This dissertation aims at analyzing how slavery, racism, and segregation have created a trauma that has contributed to shape the identity of millions of African Americans, and how this trauma has passed on from one generation to another in Yaa Gyasi's *Homegoing* (2016). The increase of trauma studies and trauma fiction has helped to give voice to the millions of souls that suffered the consequences of slavery, and thus pervious literature of the cultural trauma multiplied. The originality of this paper is in that no previous analysis on the reshaping of identity after slavery has been made about the newest transgenerational fiction of *Homegoing*, which presents a genealogical story through the history of slavery and its consequences on both African and African American population.

Keywords

Slavery, trauma, identity, *Homegoing*

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Introduction

Slavery has gone down in history as one of the major catastrophes that men have ever done and the one that existed for the longest period of time. Since it began approximately, on the 15th century, slavery has tortured millions of people around the world for almost four centuries, becoming one of the greatest horrors of humanity. The trauma slavery left on millions of people around the world cannot be measured, yet thanks to the rise of trauma theory into literary studies, novelists have found a way of conceptualizing trauma and creating a new genre of ‘trauma fiction’ (Whitehead 2004). This has brought the interest of many authors to express the horrors and suffering of millions of Africans and African Americans throughout generations in novels like *Beloved* (1987) by Toni Morrison or Yaa Gyasi’s *Homegoing* (2016). Some of the theories used for this paper analyze the issue of trauma from a more European perspective after the trauma of the Holocaust (Caruth 1995; Hirsch 1983) but the theory of trauma is common in the different historical events and hence, other works used for this paper focus more on the theory of postcolonial trauma and the trauma related to slavery (Eyerman 2004; 2004; Craps 2013). As Davis (2006, 37), Caruth (1995, 67) and Eyerman (2004, 160) explained, the consequences of slavery were not only to abolish and erase one’s history, but also one’s identity. Trauma needed not to have been experienced for a subject to suffer its consequences and could be transferred from one member to another of a group without having been expressed nor experienced (Eyerman 2003; Hirsch 1983; Whitehead 2004). Previous literature regarding transgenerational trauma and identity has been focused on Toni Morrison’s *Beloved* (1987), a novel which “innovatively draws on the discourse of trauma to . . . [remember] the African-American experience of slavery” (Whitehead 2004, 82), but there are not many analysis of identity in the newest *Homegoing* (2016). With her novel, Yaa Gyasi remembers slavery and gives voice to the story of millions of Africans who were taken.

Homegoing narrates the separation of two sisters and their descendants as a consequence of the slave trade. The story starts “the night Effia Otcher was born into the musky heat of Fanteland” (Gyasi 2017, 3)¹ and the two branches of the genealogical tree (see fig. 1) separate. Each side of the family will have to fight their own battles: from being kidnapped and taken through the Middle Passage to the “other side of the pond” (39) to struggling for a future that does not involve working as a slaver. The story starts in the early 1760s with Effia and continues through fourteen chapters up the late 1990s, with Marcus and Marjorie. With each generation,

¹ Further references to the 2017 Penguin Random House edition of Yaa Gyasi’s *Homegoing* shall be indicated by parenthetical references containing page numbers.

the effects of slavery, colonization and racism are seen in both Africa and America. Besides, although fiction, *Homegoing* narrates real historical events like the war between the Fantes and the Asantes, the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 or the Great Migration to the North. All these events have their effect in the fourteen different characters that *Homegoing* comprises.

The aim of this dissertation is to analyze how identity is shaped after the traumatic memories of slavery, and its remnants, throughout generations in Yaa Gyasi's *Homegoing*. It will first examine the issues of slavery, trauma and identity in the novel within the context of slavery in both Africa and America, and it will also focus on the traumatic memories that have passed from one generation to another and, thus, from one character to another, shaping the identity of those individuals who are in America and of those who stayed in Africa, who despite not suffering slavery directly, do suffer its consequences. It will secondly focus on how racism, taking the form of "daily micro-aggressions" (Craps 2013, 26) increased in the United States after slavery ended and haunted the African descendants to the point of making them confuse about their identity and forcing them to create a "double-consciousness" that Du Bois (2009) explored in *The Souls of Black Folk* and that is exemplified towards the end of the novel. This second block will be longer than the previous and the following one for its major implications with the novel. Lastly, the paper will focus on the issue of returning home and the connectors, which are reflected in the cyclic frame of *Homegoing*, since the story ends in the same place it started. It will also analyze how the connectors that appear throughout the story help to reinforce the idea of the traumatic memory passing from one generation to another.

Slavery, Trauma, and Identity

In *Homegoing*, Effia is bought as a wife by the British colonizer James Collins, just like many other girls in her village were married to other British officers. These marriages were another way for the British to have control over the villages and the leaders. Their way of controlling, as Rebeca Shumway explains it in *The Fante and the Transatlantic Slave Trade* (2011), was called "panyarring", a usual word in the eighteenth-century literature that meant "to seize or capture" (59) goods and people. It was made in order for the British to ensure that tribes would be loyal to them and not to other trading companies (Shumway 2011, 60); as Cobbe Otcher tells Effia "they trade goods with our people" (7). The phrase is ambiguous for Effia, who understands it as the British making business with them and trading goods, not people. This kind of business was similar to slavery in the sense that family members were separated. Young girls were taken from their families as a way for the colonizers to ensure the loyalty of the tribe; the girls were forced to marry white men and thus forced to adopt a new identity as black wives

of white men or “wenches” (19) as the British soldiers of the Cape Coast castle in *Homegoing* called them. It was “a word the soldiers used to keep their hands clean so that they would not get in trouble with their god” (19) since they already had a wife back in England. This new “wench” was given, sometimes, a new name, and this was the “first step” (118) to strip them of their identity, as it is the case of Eccoah, whose husband wants to call her Emily because he “cannot pronounce [her] name well” (24), or the case of “Millicent’s mother” who “had been given a new name by her white husband” (9). In the end, besides kidnaping the native girls and making them their wenches, they took their names too.

In America, slaves were forced to adopt a new name too; that name would be more American or white, and less African or black, and it would be followed by an American surname too. The issue with names is present in *Homegoing* from the very first story, as previously explained: while Effia is in the castle, she is told by Eccoah that her husband wants to call her Emily and she is answered by another wench: “if he wants to call you Emily, let him call you Emily . . . Better that than that to listen to him butcher your mother tongue over and over” (24). By not “butchering” their language they are allowing their own selves, their identity, to be butchered. Another name that is taken is Ness’s, for Esi had called her Maame, like her mother, before their master found out. It is because the master found it out that Esi was lashed until she gave Ness a different, English, name. Since the only thing that came out of her was “[m]y goodness!” (71), that was the name that her daughter was given: Ness. In that case, it was a process of assimilation that slaves had to go through. The late descendant of Effia, Akua, lived a similar experience of assimilation with names when she was given the English name Deborah, by the Missionary (183). In her case it was not a relationship between an empowered master and his slave but one of “student/teacher, heathen/savior” (185). The problem with names, as erasers of identity, continues within the descendants of Esi. As Kojo’s white boss tells him, “taking away your name is the first step” (118): the “first step” to take away the very essence of yourself, your personality, your identity. In this manner Ethe, H’s girlfriend expresses her anger towards H after he calls her by the name of another woman: “[a]in’t just about everything I ever had been taken away from me? My freedom. My family. My body. And now I can’t even own my name?” (175). Although Ethe and H do not live during the time that slavery was active, her speech reflects the importance of having a name that gives you your own identity. Slave owners put all their effort in erasing all traces of the African identity that slaves had, not only did they take their names but also their language. Whipping was common in plantations and it was a way for masters to feel powerful over their slaves; that is, a way for whites to feel powerful over blacks (Davis 2006, 329). In *Homegoing*, masters’ superiority is performed when

Esi is whipped for speaking Twi with her daughter. Not only are masters making clear that their African language is not allowed in America they but also that they are above blacks. They are ripping Esi's language, Twi, out of her with whippings. Hence, an essential part of Esi and Ness's identity is erased, and Ness never gets to speak properly her mother's tongue.

On the other hand, the Englishmen would have children who, besides having an English name and not a native one, as Millicent, who was the "half-caste daughter of a Fante woman and a British soldier" (9). They would inherit the struggle for an identity, as is the case of Quey: "he was one of the half-caste children of the Castle, and like the other half-caste children, he could not fully claim either half of himself, neither his father's whiteness nor his mother's blackness. Neither England nor the Gold Coast" (56). Quey does not have a unique identity and, in fact, he thinks he has "neither" of them. This problem in colonized Africa in the 19th century has its reflection in the segregated America of the 20th century: both Quey and Sonny are in conflict with identity because they do not know how to define themselves. Quey feels neither English nor African, and Sonny, years later, is confused and does not know whether he is African, American or both; they are shaping their hybrid identity, an identity which is "never total and complete" and that is always "in motion, pursuing errant and unpredictable routes" (McLeod 2010, 148); which means that an hybrid identity as Quey's is never going to be a "complete" identity, never pure, never one or the other, but both. What is more, Quey has another problem with identity although it has nothing to do with biological roots, but with "the business of slavery" (69) that is constantly mentioned, and that is the nature of the Collins' family business. The slavery business passes on to the next generation as another kind of trauma, in the same way traumatic memories do. First, it was James Collins who worked as a slave trader, then Quey, who accepted it as burden and as "sacrifices [that] had to be made" (69), and later James's work, although he is the one who breaks the chain and runs away to escape and be his "own nation" (107), that is his own self with his own identity.

In *The Fante and the Transatlantic Slave Trade* (2011), Rebecca Shumway claims that "many African societies faced the constant threat of an outbreak of violence, as did Africans living in slave communities in the Americas during the eighteenth century, because of the inherently violent nature of slavery and slave trading" (15). This was something very present in *Homegoing* since Effia's descendants lived with the fear of being attacked by other tribes and sold into slavery, while Esi actually lived that attack. The thing is that "the trans-Atlantic slave trade contributed to the Western tendency to identify all blacks with slavery, regardless of their nationality or social status" (Kaba 2001, 8) and because of that Esi, who despite being the daughter of a Big Man and, therefore, from a high status, was abducted from her village and

sold into slavery. After all, it did not matter who was who before because, to the whites, all blacks were the same. Slavers did not like blackness, and they tried to whiten their slaves by changing their names, language and culture, and despite everything they kept repudiating them. The whites took something of the Africans and made them American, yet they did not like them. Africans had not a crisis of identity: how should they feel? What should they be? African? American? As Landry observes: “African Americans [had] more cultural similarities with White Americans” (2018, 16), which is obvious since the first generations of Africans that landed in America were forced to talk and act like Americans, that is to leave their black identity behind and start creating one that looked more American than African.

The Consequences after Slavery

Slave trade ended, and soon slavery was done too after the Civil War (1861-1865), but the trauma endured and so did the crisis for an identity. It was a period of reconstruction for the country, and a period of reconstruction of identity for black people; they were not slaves anymore and they had to define themselves. Racism emerged, though, and black people were not accepted, they were not American, and after all that time, they were not African either. In *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity* (2004), Neil Smelser claimed that “many African American intellectuals in the late nineteenth century revived the memory of slavery as a historical blessing in the sense that, even though a trauma, it gave black Americans a positive basis for identity in a world that had revoked the postslavery promise of full citizenship by the imposition of Jim Crowism in the South and discrimination in the North” (54). Rather than “positive”, it should be said that it was neither positive nor negative but something in between: confuse and ambiguous. After slavery, blacks in America became a mix of African and American, and thus they created a new identity that included both, a “double-consciousness” (Du Bois 2007, 8), which meant to be “both African and American, loyal to a nation, but no to its racist culture” (Eyerman 2004, 162). In *Homegoing*, Sonny reproaches Amani for not being into “Back to Africa business” but still “using an African name”, to what Amani cleverly responds “[w]e can’t go back to something we ain’t never been to in the first place. It ain’t ours anymore” (255). Amani is embracing this double-identity; she might not really be into the “Back to Africa” movement because “being more than two generations removed” and feeling no connection with Africa, “blurred [the] notion of heritage” (Delgado-Tall 2001, 301). The “Back to Africa” movement tried to bring African Americans closer to their roots, yet slavery, racism and time made it difficult, if not impossible. As Ava Landry (2018) observes, African Americans had similitudes with white Americans because the first generations of Africans that

arrived in America, slaves, were forced to talk, eat, and act like Americans, and same happened with later generations. Still, Amani struggled, as many others did, in creating her African American identity. It was slavery and its trauma that had defined their identity as African American (Eyerman 2003, 16), and it was now in their hands to create their own identities.

Trauma needs not to have been directly experienced (Eyerman 2003, 3) and it is “communicated without ever having been spoken . . . [residing] within the next generation as silent present of ‘phantom’” (Whitehead 2004, 14). Sonny, Amani and many other African descendants had healed from a little part of the trauma of slavery by creating a new identity after theirs had been taken many years ago, even if they did not remember and even if it had not been told yet. Still, they kept suffering from other traumatic consequences of slavery: discrimination and, as Stef Craps calls it, “micro-aggressions” (2013, 26). Sonny’s thoughts after being released from jail are the perfect representation of the life of many black Americans: “How many times could he pick himself up off the dirty floor of a jail cell? How many hours could he spend marching? How many bruises could he collect from the police? How many letters to the mayor, governor, president could he send? How many more days would it take to get something to change? And when it changed, would it change? Would America be any different, or would it be mostly the same?” (244). His thoughts depict those “micro-aggressions” that present day Americans (even though Sonny’s story is around 1950s and the time of the Civil Rights Movement) live: “being denied promotions, home mortgages, or business loans; being a target of a security guard; being stopped in traffic; or seeing one’s group portrayed in a stereotypical manner in the media” (Craps 2013, 26) and many other “aggressions” like police brutality and racial profiling, like Sonny being thrown up in jail (244). Sonny’s life and situation are the reflection of the present African American population and the proof that the cultural trauma of enslavement has shaped the identity and personality of millions of slave-descendants, for “the issue of how to remember slavery . . . has never been completely resolved among groups of African Americans who continue to come to terms with its meaning for their cultural identity” (Smelser 2004, 49). So, not only does it affect one’s own identity, like Sonny in *Homegoing*, but also the identity of an entire collective who struggle to find their place in the American society, who struggle to define themselves.

Although her father did suffer slavery, Willie was entirely free of that burden, and she got to grow free of the chains in the period of reconstruction of the country. She moved to Harlem in the early 1900s, a time of prosperity for the United States with the American Dream and the Roaring 20s, yet not for Willie. As she arrived at Harlem, she had to face the reality of racism. Willie was “too dark” (209) for everything: “too dark to sing at the Jazzing”, “too dark

to get an apartment just one street down” (209) in Manhattan, where white people would live, “too dark” to be married to a “white” man... Being “too dark” segregated Willie and many other black Americans in Harlem and in all America. The problem of being “too dark” is later explored within Marjorie’s chapter, for she is “not the same kind of black” as her schoolmates but the “wrong kind” (268). Although Willie’s husband, did not have such problem for he “looked so white” (209) that could pass as one, and he did not have to suffer from “micro-aggressions”. He could get the job he wanted and go to “white” bars as if he were one of them. It is in one of those bars, The Jazzing where Willie first witnessed a minstrel show. Minstrel shows “were the most popular form of entertainment in antebellum America” (Hughes 2006, 28), but also in postbellum America, as seen in *Homegoing*. In the novel, Willie works at The Jazzing, where they perform this kind of shows, reducing African and African American to childish figures (Hughes 2006, 28) and making fun of African people by means of songs and childish performances. These shows were supposed to portray the “joyous” life of the black slaves (Du Bois 2009, 169) and “how grateful they should all be to have such kind masters to take care of them” (212), but minstrel shows were not telling the truth, they were making fun of a situation and not revealing the cruel reality of slavery, typically in the South; but that “wasn’t the South that Willie knew” and “it wasn’t the South her parents had known either” (212).

Two characters that, as a consequence of slavery, never get to know their family nor their identities are Kojo and his son H. Kojo never gets to meet her mother, Ness, and consequently he does not fully speak her language. A part of his identity is erased, and he has to adapt and create a new one: he and Ma Aku become “runaways” (119), and Kojo learns and knows about “the South from the stories Ma Aku told him, same way he [knows] his mother and father”(112). Ma Aku becomes the motherly figure that Kojo could not have, and it is thanks to her and her stories that Kojo learns a bit of his story, apart from a little Twi, his mother’s language. Kojo and Ma Aku are escaped slaves, but they get “free papers” in Baltimore, and Kojo receives the surname “Freeman” (112). Furthermore, Kojo himself tries to create his own identity, first of all with his new condition as free slave and his new surname, and second, because he refuses to be called by his full name and prefers the shorter version, Jo. This is when his employer tells him that “taking away [one’s] name is the first step” (118), the first step to strike one from their identity. On the other hand, as slavery began to disappear, so did “the voice of direct experience” (Eyerman 2003, 16) and thus Kojo’s children were born free; however, they live in constant fear of being kidnapped and sold after the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850, which is also the trigger for Beulah’s night terrors. Hence, the child suffers

traumatic dreams of an experience she did not live but that is present not only in his father's memory but in the memory of the entire collective (Hirsch 1983, 3). They are all being haunted by the ghosts of slavery, by a silent presence that passes on from one to another as a trauma.

The other character haunted by the remnants of slavery is Kojo's son, H, "once slave, once free, now slave again" (162), for he was born slave (since his mother was kidnapped while he was still in the womb), became free, and later became a slave again in the mines. His becoming slave again was the result of a "micro-aggression": he was thought to have been "studyin' a white woman" (158), and although H claimed that he did not do it, he was answered "don't matter if you was or wasn't. All they gotta do is say you was" because "white folks can't stand the sight of [H] . . . nobody want to see a black man . . . walkin' proud as a peacock" (158). Additionally, after being freed and joining a union of workers from the mines, H exposed the reality of the situation of black people after making clear the different sentences white and black people get for the same crime, killing a man (172), which is a clear example of police profiling. As Sonny says later in the story: "in America the worst thing you could be was a black man" (260). Apart from those "micro-aggressions", which in cumulative form result in trauma (Craps 2013, 26), H struggles hardly with identity and the first indication is his name, a bare letter. He never meets neither his mother, nor Kojo, nor anyone from his family and he never learns nor speaks his mother-tongue, an essential part of his African descendance, for he does not know where he comes from.. What he inherits, apart from his letter-name is the collective memory and trauma, of slavery, which he himself suffers as a sentence for his alleged crime. Additionally, H receives the physical side-effects of slavery since he is constantly whipped and scarred. The scars on his back and forearms are a reminder and a marker of him as a slave, for since "[i]t had been nearly twenty-five years since the end of slavery . . . free men were not supposed to have fresh scars on their backs, the evidence of a whip" and thus H "knew that he couldn't go back to the free world, marked as he was" (167).

Finally, the result of the separation of the two sisters, Effia and Esi, is the reunion of their last descendants, Marjorie and Marcus. Both of them live in the America of the late 1990s and they are the ones that know the most about their ancestry. Marcus does not get to know anything from his genealogical line before H, but in his research he realizes that he could not "talk about Great-Grandpa H's story without also talking about his grandma Willie and the millions of other black people who had migrated north, fleeing Jim Crow" (289); he does not know his real story, but he can imagine, and this is why he accepts on going to Africa with Marjorie, to understand who he is. On the other hand, Marjorie is told by her grandmother Akua the story of her necklace, of her heritage, and how "it had belonged to Old Lady and to Abena

before her, and to James and Quey and Effia the Beauty before that. It had begun with Maame, the woman who had set a great fire . . . the necklace was a part of their family history” (267). Marjorie knows the story of her family back in Africa and her identity is entirely African; now that her parents have moved to America, she has to face centuries of everything that the other side of her family, Effia and Marcus’s line, has suffered from years, racism and segregation. The significant rising of African immigration to the United states in the late twentieth century triggered a wave of different problems that the African population that migrated had to face: the problem of blackness and the struggle for accepting and recognizing one’s identity (Landry 2018, 1-3). Marjorie is “not the same kind of black” as her schoolmates, in fact, she is the “wrong kind” (268). She is categorized by them as “white girl” (269) because she is not acting as any other of the girls, African American, would. The problem is that since Marjorie is black, the girls from the school and the rest of the African American community see Marjorie as one of them, an African American. Her teacher tells Marjorie to “talk about what being African American means to [her]” (273) to which she responds that she is not, and thus an emotion of hostility emerges between them, as a reflection of the hostility between Africans and Americans (Goyal 2014, 60). They resent Marjorie for being the “wrong kind” of black and hence they place her “at the bottom of the racial hierarchy” (Landry 2018, 11). In a sense, she has also the problem of being “too dark” but her darkness, in contrast with Willie, includes culture, because “there ‘white’ could be the way a person talked; ‘black’, the music a person listened to” (269) They are looking down at Marjorie for speaking differently, with her African accent (268), and for not considering herself African American (273): in other words, for not putting herself at the bottom of the hierarchy and for not understanding that “it doesn’t matter where [she] came from to the white people running things” (273) because she is black independently of her birth place, Africa or America.

Returning Home: Cyclic Frame and Connectors

As cyclic story, *Homegoing* joins some characters with others through elements that are repeated in different chapters, and thus in different times and different “sides of the pond” (39) as a reflection of Africa on one side and America at the other side of the Atlantic. These connectors are elements that pass from one generation to another, sometimes literally and sometimes in a more abstract way. They are a reflection of how the memories of trauma pass to next generations and are “perpetuated by the family member’s collective memory” (Passalacqua 2010, 145). The element of fire plays a significant role all throughout the novel. Effia, the first character introduced, was born on the night of a great fire that burned everything.

Her father, Cobbe, knew “that the memory of the fire that burned, then fled, would haunt him, his children, and his children’s children for as long as the line continued” and he believed the fire to be “the premonition of the dissolution and destruction of the family lineage (3, 16) and this is indeed what happens. Fire appears in Effia’s branch of the family four generations later with Akua, who has terrible nightmares about a firewoman who “[rages] about the loss of her children” (186). These babies are indeed Effia and Esi, the two separated sisters, for the fire meant the separation of the two sisters and their bond. In Akua’s time, the fire means the death of her two daughters and the scarring for life of her son Yaw and herself; but fire is something that destroys and scars them, like the whip of slavery. Fire in *Homegoing* is connected to slavery as they are both the cause of suffering and separation of the generations, and something that “haunts” (3), that passes on. It is something evil, and as Effia tells her son Quey: “evil is like shadow. It follows you” (63). This evilness has followed them through generations, as a shadow, as a “phantom”, as the trauma of slavery through generations.

The stone necklace is also a heritage that seems to pass from parent to child throughout the generations. It belonged to Maame, Effia and Esi’s mother, and it was split in two so it could be passed on to the two daughters. Esi loses hers in the dungeons at Cape Coast and it is never found again, but Effia’s necklace passes on up to her last descendant. The necklace also works as a reminder of the evilness of slavery, of the pain and consequences it produced and how they are transmitted. Effia’s family branch never suffered slavery in the flesh, but they suffered the repercussions and the (symbolic) weight of the stone necklace, slave trade and colonization, while Esi’s family did not wear the weight of the necklace but the direct weight and consequences of slavery, as some of the members were sold as slaves in plantations. As a cycle, although Esi’s branch never gets to know their history nor anything about the stone necklace, the necklace does return to Esi’s last descendant, Marcus, when Marjorie puts her own necklace around the boy’s neck and says: “[w]elcome home” (300). The fact that Marcus is receiving the stone on the same place where her ancestor Esi lost it, Cape Coast, and the fact that the stone does return to Esi’s family reinforce the cyclic idea of the connections.

After those connectors there are some less evident; they are little hints that surely reinforce the idea of the cyclic frame of the story and the interconnection between the stories. One of them is the name “Abronoma” or “Little Dove”, which is the name that Maame and Esi give to the slave they buy as a house girl. A song is written about her after she fails to do a task: “*The Dove has failed. Oh, what to do? Make her suffer or you’ll fail too!*” (37, 84) and both Esi and Ness sing it. Ness knew that Esi “used to tell the story of how she’d been cursed by a Little Dove long ago” (70). The name “Abronoma” appears again in the other branch of the

family: it is the nickname that Yaw gives to his daughter Marjorie, who “always hated it when her father called her Dove”, and which makes her “feel small somehow, young and fragile” (272), as if she somehow knew how powerful and bad that name was in the past for some of her ancestors. In fact, it was because of Abronoma that Esi’s village was attacked and she was sold into slavery, it was because of the Little Dove that her hell started. A personal hell full of misery and suffering, a hell that also passed on to her daughter, considering Ness referred to her previous plantation as “Hell” (70-87), and to her previous master as the “Devil” (74-119). Other minor connectors are seen in Marjorie’s “sweet tooth reserved for chocolate” and her mother’s joking “that Marjorie must have been birthed from a coca nut” (266). The chocolate and cocoa relate to the story of Marjorie’s ancestors, James and Abena, and their struggle in having good crops. After the village gains profit from the cocoa beans, it is a nice remembrance with Marjorie liking so much something that was good for her ancestors, and that her mother joking about the cocoa nuts. On a sadder tone, scars are connecting symbols as well: Akua wears them on her hands, and her son Yaw on the face, and they work as a visual reminder of the consequences of the evilness of fire. On the other hand, Ness and H wear “the evidence of whip” (167) on their backs, and thus their stories are connected not only because they are grandmother and grandson, but because they carry on one of the very worst consequence of slavery: the scars of the whippings, the scars of slavery.

Premonitions and visions are also connectors of the two families in “opposite sides of the pond” (39). The first premonition is Cobbe’s with the fire and “his daughter and the white man” (16), this premonition symbolizes the beginning of the “dissolution and destruction of [his] family lineage” (16). Later on, on the other branch of the family, Willie experiences a “premonition” or “forward memory” (205) of her future life in Harlem, which reflects the black migration to the North during the Reconstruction period and gives her a bit of hope. Willie has another premonition, though, one “of loneliness” (207), which foretells Robert leaving his wife and child, Willie and Sonny. The last premonition is Marjorie’s, which felt like “the body registering something that the world had yet to acknowledge” (281), this “something” for Marjorie is pain; pain and suffering that follows something evil, like the ghost of slavery throughout all the generations. Nightmares and dreams are common too and they also seem to pass from one generation to another: Akua suffers from terrible nightmares about a firewoman, as previously explained, nonetheless Beulah, one of Kojo’s children, suffers from “night terrors” about “a little black child fighting in her sleep against an opponent she couldn’t name . . . because in the light that opponent just looked like the world around her. Intangible evil. Unspeakable unfairness” (120). Kojo realizes that his child is suffering from a trauma that has

been “communicated even without having been spoken and that resides within [his children] as a silent present of ‘phantom’ (Whitehead 2004, 14) that haunts them in their sleep. As for visions, Willie tells his grandson Marcus that “maybe he had the gift of visions” for Marcus could imagine “a different room, a fuller family” (290). His visions are a reflection of the past of his ancestors, one that had not been the two sisters separated, could have been his as well. Marcus imagines “a crowd watching a young woman carrying a bucket on her head; sometimes in a cramped apartment with too many kids, or a small failing farm, around a burning tree or in a classroom” (290); they all are visions of Esi’s past watching Abronoma carry a bucket full of water, Kojo and Anna with their seven children, James, Akosua and Abena’s farm, the tree were Akua saw a man being burnt and Yaw’s classroom. The cycle of *Homegoing* is closed when, Marcus, who got to see somehow all his ancestors, crosses the “Door of No Return” (299) like her ancestor Esi did decades ago, and “returns” to the place where everything began, finally going home.

Conclusion

All things considered, *Homegoing* has proved conclusive in the idea of the reshaping of identity of black people through generations after the trauma of slavery. In the last decades, trauma studies and trauma fiction have raised linked to traumatic historical events such as the Holocaust or slavery, being the later the subject of this study. Works like *Homegoing* have helped to give voice to those souls that lost their voice, language, names and identities on account of the cruelties of slavery that, once ended, continued on in the form of segregation, racism and other “daily micro-aggressions” (Craps 2013, 26) that, as a whole, traumatized millions of African Americans and still traumatize them up to this day. The trauma of slavery came in the form of an eraser of identity. After slavery ended and they became free, African Americans felt confusion because they did not know what or how to feel, either African as their ancestors, or American. That is when the question of “double consciousness” (Du Bois 2009, 8) raised and helped, somehow, African Americans to accept and embrace their new identity, in spite of racism and segregation.

In *Homegoing*, all fourteen characters present their own story and their own trauma. Slavery, the greatest horror of humankind, erased the identity of millions of slaves in different ways: in Africa, by means of arranged marriages between British officers and native girls, by means of re-naming or by whipping one’s language, a central part of their identity; in America by inducing inhumane labor in plantations, by re-naming them as well, by kidnaping and re-selling them into slavery and by segregating them. All those actions stripped the characters in

the novel and the millions of fellow blacks of their individuality, personalities, and identity, yet they gave them a new one, that of African Americans. The cyclic frame of *Homegoing* and its different connectors help to reinforce the idea that the trauma passes on to following generations, changing, being transformed and taking different forms: from necklaces, names, dreams, visions and nightmares and to scars. Scars that the trauma left in the descendants of slaves in both a physical and symbolic way.

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Appendix

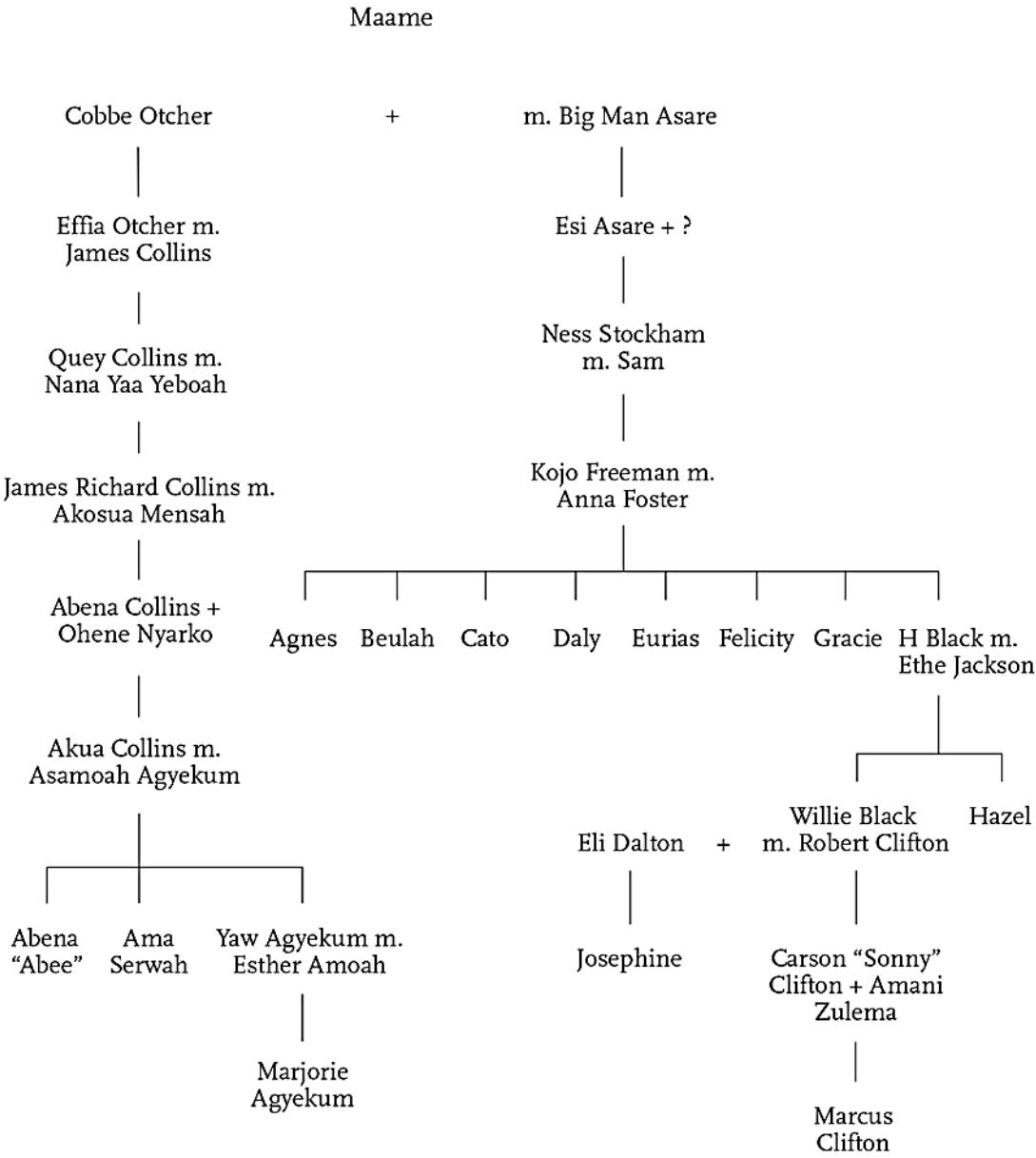


Figure 1. Genealogical tree of the two separated sisters, Effia and Esi, included in the 2017 edition of *Homegoing* by Penguin Random House.