

Transatlantic Dialogues: Memory, Trauma, and Polyphony in Yaa Gyasi's *Homegoing* and Toni Morrison's *Beloved*

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Abstract

This article examines the interplay of memory, trauma, and polyphony in Yaa Gyasi's *Homegoing* and Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, two major works that explore the African diaspora's enduring legacy of slavery across the transatlantic world. Through a comparative literary analysis, the study investigates how both novels employ polyphonic narrative structures to articulate the intergenerational impact of historical violence, while offering distinct approaches to memory and trauma. In *Homegoing*, Gyasi traces the divergent paths of two half-sisters across centuries using a multi-generational, multi-perspective narrative to map the transmission of cultural memory and trauma from Ghana to America. Conversely, Morrison's *Beloved* employs a lyrical, haunting narrative centred on Sethe's personal trauma, with the ghost of Beloved embodying "rememory" as a site of both oppression and healing. Drawing from trauma theory, narrative theory, and postcolonial scholarship, the article argues that both authors use polyphonic voices to reclaim silenced histories and assert agency within the African diaspora. While *Homegoing* emphasizes historical breadth and resilience, *Beloved* delves into psychological depth and communal restoration. The comparative analysis highlights their shared motifs and their divergent narrative strategies, and reveals how these texts engage in a transatlantic dialogue about identity, loss, and survival. This study underscores the contributions of the two novels to understanding the historical consciousness of the Black Atlantic and its relevance to contemporary discussions of race and memory. The article calls for further exploration of diasporic narratives to illuminate the global dimensions of the afterlife of slavery, and offers new insights into the power of literature to bridge historical ruptures.

Keywords: Transatlantic Dialogues, Polyphony, Memory, Trauma, Haunting, Homegoing

Introduction

The Transatlantic Slave Trade, which spanned "nearly four centuries", forcibly displaced millions of Africans, thereby creating a diaspora that continues to shape global cultural and literary

landscapes even today (Rupprecht). Yaa Gyasi's *Homegoing* and Toni Morrison's *Beloved* arguably stand as monumental works in African diasporic and African American literatures. They engage with the enduring legacies of slavery through innovative narrative strategies. Both novels grapple with the historical ruptures of the Black Atlantic, a term coined by Paul Gilroy to describe the transnational and intercultural space shaped by the forced migrations of the Atlantic Slave Trade, the Middle Passage, plantation slavery, and subsequent diasporic movements. By weaving narratives that traverse time, geography, and generations, Gyasi and Morrison illuminate the interplay of memory, trauma, and polyphony, and offer profound insights into the historical consciousness of the African diaspora. This article undertakes a comparative analysis of *Homegoing* and *Beloved*, and argues that their polyphonic structures (multiple, distinct narrative voices) serve as critical mechanisms for articulating the intergenerational impact of slavery, while their divergent approaches to memory and trauma reveal unique strategies for reclaiming agency and identity.

Homegoing traces the lineage of two half-sisters, Effia and Esi, from 18th-century Ghana to 20th-century America using a multi-generational narrative to map the divergent paths of their descendants. Each chapter introduces a new character and temporal setting, thereby creating a tapestry of voices that reflects the heterogeneity of the African diaspora. As Gyasi notes, her aim was to “tell a story that was as much about the African side of the diaspora as it was about the American side” (12). In contrast, *Beloved* focuses on the intimate, haunting story of Sethe, a formerly enslaved woman in post-Civil War Ohio, whose encounter with the ghost of her murdered daughter, Beloved, embodies what Morrison terms “rememory” - a process that describes the vivid, haunting memories that resurface involuntarily, feel almost physical, and can linger in places or be shared across generations even after the original person is gone. While *Homegoing* spans centuries and continents, *Beloved* delves deeply into the psychological and communal aftermath of slavery using lyrical and fragmented narration to externalize trauma.

The significance of comparing these novels lies in their shared engagement with the legacy of the Transatlantic Slave Trade and their distinct narrative strategies for addressing the issues of the crisis of memory and trauma. Both authors employ polyphony, a concept derived from Mikhail Bakhtin in *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* where he describes it as “a plurality of independent and unmerged voices and consciousnesses” (6). This narrative multiplicity allows Gyasi and

Morrison to represent marginalized voices and challenge monolithic historical narratives. However, their approaches differ - Gyasi's episodic structure emphasizes historical breadth, while Morrison's interwoven voices prioritize psychological depth. By examining these texts together, this article illuminates how they engage in a transatlantic dialogue by bridging African and African American experiences to articulate the collective memory of the diaspora.

The legacy of the Transatlantic Slave Trade is a central concern in African diaspora literature which seeks to "reconstruct the historical experiences of African peoples and their descendants" (Davies 4). *Homegoing* and *Beloved* are pivotal in this tradition as they address the impact of the Slave Trade on identity, family, and community. Morrison's *Beloved* which is often regarded as a cornerstone of African American literature, reimagines the historical figure of Margaret Garner who killed her daughter to spare her from slavery. In *The Source of Self-Regard*, Morrison describes her project as "writing the slave narrative not to be written by the slave" (103). Here, she emphasizes the need to reclaim slave narratives from the margins. Similarly, Gyasi's *Homegoing* responds to the underrepresentation of African perspectives in diaspora literature as it traces the ripple effects of slavery from the Gold Coast to Harlem. Gyasi states in a *New York Times* interview that, "I wanted to show how the choices made in one generation affect the next" (8). *Homegoing*'s dual narrative arcs (one in Ghana and one in America) embody this transnational perspective, while *Beloved*'s focus on the psychological scars of the Middle Passage situates it within the same paradigm. Their shared use of polyphony aligns with Bakhtin's assertion that polyphonic texts "do not merely contain a multiplicity of character voices, but also of ideological positions" (18). This multiplicity enables both authors to represent the diversity of diasporic experiences from the Asante traders in Ghana to the fugitive slaves in Ohio.

The comparative approach was chosen because of the complementary strengths of the two novels. *Homegoing*'s expansive scope captures the structural violence of slavery across centuries, while *Beloved*'s intimate focus reveals its emotional and psychological toll. As Hortense Spillers notes, the legacy of slavery is "the loss of a name, the loss of a family, the loss of a history" (203). Both novels address this loss, but their narrative strategies (Gyasi's linear genealogy versus Morrison's cyclical haunting) offer distinct lenses on memory and trauma. By analyzing these texts together, this article highlights their contributions to a transnational literary canon that challenges Eurocentric historical narratives.

It should be noted that despite the extensive scholarship on *Beloved*, and the growing attention to *Homegoing*, few studies have systematically compared their use of polyphony to address the challenges of memory and trauma in the works. Scholars like Cathy Caruth (1996) argue that “trauma is not locatable in the simple violent or original event in an individual’s past, but rather in the way it was experienced” (4). *Beloved*’s exploration of “rememory” has been studied as a narrative of traumatic haunting, yet its polyphonic structure is often underexplored. For instance, Deborah Horvitz notes that “Morrison’s narrative strategy allows the past to invade the present” (67). However, she does not fully address how polyphony facilitates this invasion.

Similarly, *Homegoing* has been praised for its historical scope, with critics like Stephanie Li arguing that it “reimagines the African diaspora as a series of interconnected stories” (112). However, the novel’s polyphonic structure and its dialogue with Morrison’s work remain underexamined. Existing comparisons, such as those by Yogita Goyal focus on thematic parallels but do not delve into narrative techniques. Goyal writes: “Gyasi’s novel extends Morrison’s project of reclaiming history, but with a broader geographical lens” (145). This article addresses this gap by analyzing how polyphony in both novels serves as a structural and ideological tool for articulating the crisis of memory and trauma.

The objectives of this study are threefold: firstly, to examine how *Homegoing* and *Beloved* use polyphonic narrative techniques to represent the fragmented histories of the African diaspora; secondly, to compare their portrayals of memory as a site of both loss and reclamation; and thirdly, to analyze their depictions of trauma as intergenerational and communal.

By situating the novels within trauma studies, narrative theory, and postcolonial frameworks, the article argues that their polyphonic structures enable a transatlantic dialogue that bridges African and American experiences, and offers new insights into the historical consciousness of the African diaspora.

This study, as noted above, employs a comparative literary analysis, drawing on primary texts (*Homegoing* and *Beloved*), secondary sources, and theoretical frameworks like trauma theory, narrative theory, and postcolonial scholarship. Trauma studies provide a lens for analyzing the two novels’ representations of the psychological impact slavery. Cathy Caruth considers trauma as “an event that is experienced too soon, too unexpectedly, to be fully known” (4). This means that

she sees trauma as an overwhelming event that strikes abruptly and prematurely, bypassing normal cognitive processing and leaving it unassimilated in the mind. As such, the experience evades immediate comprehension, and manifests later through involuntary repetitions like flashbacks, or nightmares. In essence, the unknowability of trauma stems from its disruption of linear time and narrative coherence. This theory highlights how survivors are haunted by what they could not grasp in real time.

The article also uses Marianne Hirsch's notion of "postmemory" to analyse the intergenerational narrative of *Homegoing*. She defines postmemory as "the relationship that the 'generation after' bears to the personal, collective, and cultural trauma of those who came before" (5). This means that postmemory is the indirect yet deeply personal bond that children of trauma survivors form with the experiences of their predecessors. It encompasses personal, collective, and cultural dimensions of inherited trauma. This relationship is rather vicarious since it is built through imagination, empathy, and transmitted artifacts like photos. Often, it feels overwhelmingly real, and dominates the identity and emotional life of the descendants. In essence postmemory bridges generations, thereby making the wounds of the past persistently alive in the present.

It must be stated that polyphony equally serves as a literary strategy for navigating the complex histories of the African Diaspora. As Kathryn Lachman observes, "Polyphony evokes the particular capacity of the novel to accommodate contradictory positions and multiple discourses without imposing any central authoritative view. Whereas a monophonic text affirms the point of view of its author, polyphonic writing embraces dissonance and ambiguity" (29–58).

Lachman's observation highlights the ability of polyphony to accommodate diverse and sometimes conflicting perspectives without privileging a single authoritative voice. This multiplicity is particularly significant because diasporic histories are shaped by displacement, slavery, migration, cultural encounters, memory, and resistance. By bringing different voices and experiences into dialogue, polyphonic narration can therefore represent the complexity and heterogeneity of Diaspora experiences while resisting any single, simplified interpretation of its history. This highlights the revolutionary role of narrative in challenging oppression, fostering empathy, and redefining human existence beyond passive consumption. Narrative is thus a dynamic act of mutual creation and liberation. Through their polyphonic narratives, Gyasi and Morrison create

spaces for dialogue, healing, and reclamation, thereby affirming the power of literature to bridge the transatlantic divide.

I. Memory and Trauma

Memory and trauma are central to African diaspora literature, and serve as mechanisms for reckoning with the historical violence of slavery. In *Homegoing*, for instance, the black stone necklace passed down through Esi's line becomes a tangible site of memory, and symbolizes continuity amidst disruption. When Marjorie, a later descendant, reflects on the stone, Gyasi writes that "It was a heavy thing, a reminder of all the stories she carried" (298). This aligns with Pierre Nora's notion of "lieux de mémoire" (sites of memory), which are "material, symbolic, and functional" spaces where "memory crystallizes and secretes itself" (Nora 7). In *Homegoing*, objects like the stone and places like the Cape Coast Castle serve as such sites, and constitute anchors for the fragmented history of the diaspora.

In *Beloved*, memory is cyclical and intrusive, as seen when Paul D suppresses his traumatic past: "He would keep the rest where it belonged: in that tobacco tin buried in his chest where a red heart used to be" (72). This metaphor illustrates the containment of memory and its potential to erupt. It aligns with Caruth's idea of the delayed impact of trauma. Conversely, *Homegoing*'s linear structure emphasizes memory as a reconstructive act. For example, Akua's dreams of the "firewoman" connect her trauma to that of her ancestors. This recurring motif suggests a postmemory that bridges generations and enables characters to reclaim their history. Both novels, however, use memory to resist historical erasure.

Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of polyphony provides a critical lens for analyzing the narrative structures of both *Homegoing* and *Beloved*. In *Beloved*, Morrison's polyphony is more interwoven as it blends voices through stream-of-consciousness and fragmented narration. The novel's climactic moment, when the community exorcises Beloved, exemplifies this. Morrison writes: "They spoke all at once, a chorus of voices, saying, 'You are not the one'" (309). This choral voice integrates individual and collective perspectives, and aligns with Bakhtin's view that polyphony creates "a world where all is dialogue" (40). Morrison's use of multiple narrative voices (Sethe, Denver, Paul D, and Beloved) resists a monolithic historical narrative, and allows each character

to articulate their own trauma. For instance, *Beloved*'s stream-of-consciousness chapter disrupts linear storytelling. It embodies the disorienting trauma of the Middle Passage.

Polyphony in both novels draws on African oral traditions which, as Isidore Okpewho notes, prioritize "a multiplicity of voices that interact and compete within the narrative framework" (112). In *Homegoing*, the storytelling tradition is evident in Abena's chapter where village elders pass down oral histories: "The stories of the old ones were told in the dark, by the fire" (105). Similarly, *Beloved*'s communal storytelling (as when Baby Suggs preaches) reflects this tradition: "She did not tell them to clean up their lives or to go and sin no more. She said, 'Here, in this place, we flesh'" (88). These oral elements enhance the novels' polyphonic structures, and enables them to represent the diverse voices of the diaspora while challenging Western literary conventions.

II. Postcolonial Discourse

Postcolonialism is an intellectual and critical approach concerned with the political, cultural, historical, psychological, and social consequences of colonialism and imperialism. It does not simply refer to a period that comes after colonial rule; rather, it examines the ways in which colonial structures, ideologies, racial hierarchies, and systems of representation continue to influence societies after the formal end of colonial domination. In literary studies, postcolonialism therefore pays particular attention to questions of power, identity, displacement, race, cultural difference, resistance, memory, and representation. It is especially concerned with the ways in which dominant groups construct representations of marginalised peoples and how literature can challenge those representations. Edward Said's influential concept of "Orientalism" is central to this understanding. Said describes Orientalism as "a style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction made between 'the Orient' and [...] 'the Occident'" (88). His argument demonstrates that representation is closely connected to power because the dominant culture can define and classify the people it represents. Although Said focuses primarily on Western representations of the East, his argument is highly relevant to African and African diasporic literatures where Africans and Black people have historically been represented through racialised assumptions of inferiority, primitiveness, and otherness.

Postcolonial discourse refers more specifically to the language, narratives, systems of knowledge, and forms of representation through which colonial experiences are produced, challenged,

remembered, and reinterpreted. It is therefore concerned not only with colonial domination itself but also with the struggle over who has the authority to tell history. Frantz Fanon's work is important here because he demonstrates that colonial and racial domination affects both the material and psychological dimensions of human existence. Homi Bhabha similarly complicates fixed notions of cultural identity through concepts such as "hybridity" and the "Third Space", while Gayatri Spivak's concept of the subaltern draws attention to people whose voices have historically been excluded from dominant systems of representation. As Leela Gandhi observes, postcolonial theory encompasses questions involving "hybridity, Orientalism, humanism, Marxist dialectics, diaspora, nationalism, gendered subalternity, globalization, and postcolonial feminism" (viii). These concerns make postcolonialism particularly useful for reading texts that deal with slavery, racial oppression, diaspora, historical trauma, and the reconstruction of identity.

These concerns are particularly visible in Yaa Gyasi's *Homegoing*, which traces several generations of a Ghanaian family beginning in the eighteenth century and extending into contemporary America. Through the separate histories of Effia and Esi and their descendants, Gyasi connects Africa, the Transatlantic Slave Trade, European commercial expansion, American slavery, racial discrimination, and the African American experience. The novel's significance from a postcolonial perspective lies partly in its refusal to treat African and African American histories as separate. Esi's imprisonment in the dungeons of Cape Coast Castle and her subsequent transportation to America represent the violent rupture through which Africans were separated from their families, communities, cultures, and homeland. At the same time, Effia's experience brings the reader into contact with the British presence on the Gold Coast and the complex African participation in systems surrounding the Slave Trade. Gyasi therefore presents slavery as part of a larger transatlantic history involving African societies, European powers, colonial expansion, and American racial structures.

The fragmented structure of *Homegoing* reinforces this historical perspective. Instead of concentrating on a single protagonist, Gyasi moves across generations, thereby demonstrating how the consequences of slavery are inherited by people who did not directly experience its original violence. The separation of Effia and Esi becomes a symbolic representation of the fragmentation of African families and communities through the Slave Trade. Their descendants continue to live with the consequences of that separation. In this sense, the novel presents history as something

that remains active in the present. The meaning of “home” itself becomes complicated because descendants of enslaved Africans must negotiate questions of ancestry, belonging, displacement, and cultural identity. *Homegoing* therefore illustrates a central postcolonial concern - historical violence can continue to shape identity long after the original structures of domination have formally disappeared.

Toni Morrison’s *Beloved* similarly confronts the enduring consequences of slavery, but it does so through a more concentrated exploration of memory, trauma, and individual subjectivity. Sethe, a formerly enslaved woman living in Ohio after the American Civil War, is unable to separate her present existence completely from her traumatic past at Sweet Home plantation. Morrison’s fragmented narrative demonstrates that slavery does not end psychologically when legal emancipation occurs. The past repeatedly returns through memory, relationships, bodily experiences, and the haunting presence of Beloved. Sam Durrant’s study of postcolonial narrative is particularly relevant here when he argues that postcolonial literature is concerned with “the unjust foundations of the present” and with opening “the possibility of a just future” (1). *Beloved* embodies precisely this relationship between the past and the present as Morrison reconstructs the history of slavery in order to show how its violence continues to affect the lives of its survivors and descendants.

Memory therefore becomes a crucial form of postcolonial resistance in both novels. Morrison’s use of “rememory” challenges the idea that the past can simply be forgotten, while Gyasi’s multigenerational narrative demonstrates that historical experiences can be transmitted through families and communities. Morrison’s novel thus transforms remembering into an act of resistance against historical erasure. Her narrative gives psychological depth and subjective agency to people whom slavery attempted to reduce to property. Similarly, Gyasi’s *Homegoing* recovers multiple generations of African and African American experiences that conventional historical narratives often separate.

Ultimately, a postcolonial reading of *Homegoing* and *Beloved* reveals that slavery, colonialism, racial domination, and displacement are not merely historical subjects but forces that continue to influence memory, identity, family, and belonging. Gyasi adopts a broad, transgenerational and transatlantic perspective, while Morrison moves deeply into the psychological experience of an individual and her community. Yet both writers use literature as a form of counter-discourse

through which they challenge historical silence, recover marginalised voices, and demonstrate that the past remains embedded in the present. Their novels consequently show that liberation involves more than the formal abolition of oppressive institutions; it also requires the recovery of memory, the reconstruction of identity, and the creation of narratives through which previously silenced people can reclaim their humanity and history.

III. Memory in *Homegoing* and *Beloved*

Memory in African diaspora literature serves as a critical tool for reconstructing fragmented histories and asserting agency against the erasures of slavery. Memory functions as a narrative thread through which *Homegoing* and *Beloved* explore the ways individuals and communities negotiate inherited histories. Rather than presenting the past as something fixed and distant, both novels show how it is continually reconstructed through stories, family relationships, places, and personal recollections. Memory consequently becomes a means through which characters confront fragmented identities, recover connections with their ancestry, and make sense of experiences that have shaped their lives. In this regard, Gyasi and Morrison demonstrate that remembering can be both painful and restorative, thereby allowing the past to become a resource for understanding the present and imagining a more coherent sense of self.

3.1 Memory as Historical Reconstruction in *Homegoing*

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The black stone necklace passed down through Esi's line, is a central site of memory. When Esi is captured and imprisoned in the Cape Coast Castle, Gyasi writes: "She clutched the black stone her mother had given her, the one that had been passed down from mother to daughter" (45). The black stone symbolizes the unbreakable maternal lineage passed down as a talisman of protection, wisdom, or inherited power from one generation of the women to the next. Her clutching it reveals deep emotional reliance anchoring her to her mother's strength in a moment of crisis. This gesture evokes themes of heritage and continuity where the physical object becomes a conduit for ancestral memory and female resilience. This object becomes a tangible link to ancestral history, and reappears in later generations, such as when Marjorie, her descendant, reflects that "It was a heavy thing, a reminder of all the stories she carried" (298). The stone embodies postmemory, and carries the weight of Esi's enslavement and the resilience of her descendants. As Stephanie Li notes, "Gyasi's use of objects like the stone creates a material continuity that counters the ruptures of slavery" (112).

Fire and water also serve as recurring motifs that structure historical memory in *Homegoing*. The "firewoman" in Akua's dreams symbolizes the trauma of the burning of her ancestor. Gyasi writes that "The firewoman would not leave her alone" (177). This vision connects Akua to the violence of the Asante wars and the Slave Trade, and illustrates how memory persists through postmemory. Similarly, water links the novel's African and American settings, evoking the Middle Passage. When Marcus visits the Cape Coast Castle he feels "[...] the water was calling to him, the water of the Atlantic" (297). This motif ties his American experience to Esi's transatlantic journey, thereby reinforcing the Black Atlantic's interconnectedness. The vast and insatiable water embodies the masculine counterpart to the firewoman. The oceanic lure contrasts with the black stone's solidity, weaving a tale of gendered struggles

Gyasi's narrative also addresses the silences in memory, a consequence of the disruptions of slavery. As Hortense Spillers argues, slavery resulted in "[...] the loss of a name, the loss of a family, the loss of a history" (203). Here, Spillers reframes the Middle Passage not merely as physical transport but also as ontological un-naming where the captive African is stripped of kinship structures and historical continuity. Without the name, kinship dissolves; without kinship, history becomes untraceable.

Characters like Ness, Esi's daughter, grapple with fragmented memories: "Ness did not know her mother's name, only that she had come from across the water" (67). Ness's ignorance about her mother's name underscores the violent erasure of identity wrought by the Atlantic Slave Trade. The phrase "across the water" is a simple memory marker for the horrible journey from Africa. The statement highlights the rupture in familial continuity where personal history is reduced to a directional origin (Africa). This symbolizes the dehumanizing effects of the Middle Passage. Gyasi uses this to highlight how history leaves gaps, and forces people to hold onto tiny signs of the past. Yet, Gyasi counters these silences through storytelling. Yaw, a history teacher, emphasizes the importance of history. He says: "We believe the one who has the power. He is the one who gets to write the story. So when you study history, you must always ask yourself, Whose story am I missing? Whose voice was suppressed so that this voice could come forth? Once you have figured that out, you must find that story too. From there, you begin to get a clearer, yet still imperfect, picture" (224).

This statement emphasizes that history is shaped by those in power who decide which stories are told and which are silenced. This makes any single narrative incomplete and biased. Therefore, true understanding requires seeking out silenced voices to challenge dominant narratives. This reflects Gyasi's project of reclaiming African and diasporic histories erased by colonial records.

Quey holds a similar opinion. As the biracial son of a British slaver (James Collins) and an Asante woman (Effia), he reflects on the power imbalance in historical records while working in his father's office at Cape Coast Castle. He comes to a very important realization: "We cannot know the truth of history until we tell our own stories" (90). This marks the first time a character in the novel consciously chooses to claim narrative authority over his life and heritage. Though he does not fully act on it (he later conforms to colonial expectations), the thought plants the seed for later descendants like Yaw to actively seek and tell suppressed stories. Thus, Quey becomes the origin point in the lineage for the novel's central theme - self-narration as historical truth-making. The narrator states:

The British had been writing their stories about the Gold Coast for centuries, and the Asante had been writing theirs. But the British had the power, and so their stories were the ones that lasted. Quey thought of his father's ledgers, the neat rows of numbers that told a story of profit and loss. He thought of the way the British had renamed the

Cape Coast Castle, calling it a ‘factory’ instead of a prison. We cannot know the truth of history until we tell our own stories, he thought. (90)

Quey’s realization critiques how colonial power controls historical truth by monopolizing narratives, renaming atrocities, and reducing human suffering to profits in ledgers - echoing Pierre Nora’s idea that accelerated history erases organic memory. The statement positions personal and indigenous storytelling as a vital *lieu de mémoire*, a deliberate act of reclaiming silenced truths against dominant erasure. It foreshadows the novel’s structure: each descendant’s chapter becomes a counter-story which pieces together a fuller history. Telling “our own stories” is thus both resistance and restoration, which is essential to knowing the past authentically. It marks a turning point where passive inheritance becomes active testimony.

This act of storytelling reconstructs memory, and aligns with Pierre Nora’s assertion that “memory is life, borne by living societies founded in its name” (Nora 9). According to Nora, true memory is alive, organic, and inseparable from the societies that embody and transmit it through rituals, oral traditions, and shared experiences. As such, memory dies when societies are broken, but can be reborn when descendants tell their own stories.

III.2 Memory as a Haunting Shadow in *Beloved*

In *Beloved*, Toni Morrison portrays memory as a haunting, cyclical force that disrupts linear time and individual consciousness. Morrison’s concept of “rememory” encapsulates this force. In a conversation with Paul D, Sethe, the protagonist of the novel, defines it thus: “Some things go, pass on. Some things just stay. I used to think it was my rememory. You know. Some things you forget. Other things you never do. [...] Places, places are still there. If a house burns down, it’s gone, but the place - the picture of it - stays, and not just in my rememory, but out there, in the world” (36).

Sethe’s words define her concept of “rememory,” where traumatic sites and events persist as vivid, shared mental “pictures” beyond individual forgetting, and haunt the landscape and collective psyche like indelible scars. This underscores Morrison’s exploration of the enduring legacy of slavery: physical destruction doesn’t erase the emotional and historical imprint which survivors and descendants involuntarily revisit. It’s a radical reframing of memory as external and communal, not just internal. In *Beloved*, this manifests literally through the ghost of Beloved -

symbolizing how suppressed histories resurface to demand narrative repair. Ultimately, it affirms that the persistence of memory can be both a wound and a weapon against erasure. The ghost of Beloved embodies this intrusive memory as it forces Sethe to confront her act of infanticide. Sethe says: “Beloved, she my daughter. She mine” (200). This fierce declaration by Sethe asserts absolute maternal ownership over the ghost-child Beloved who embodies both the infant she killed to spare from slavery and the collective trauma of the horrors of chattel slavery. This statement reclaims agency in a world that stripped enslaved mothers of the right to their own offspring. The emphasis on “mine” defies commodification and transforms her infanticide from horror into a radical act of love and protection. Beloved’s haunting presence makes memory both oppressive and liberatory as it compels Sethe to process her trauma while threatening to consume her.

The house on 124 Bluestone Road serves as a *lieu de mémoire*, a physical site where memory and trauma converge. Morrison describes it as “Spiteful. Full of a baby’s venom” (3). Morrison personifies the house as a repository of the pain of both Sethe and the entire community. Deborah Horvitz notes that “124 becomes a living entity, a space where the past invades the present” (67). This statement captures how the house on 124 Bluestone Road transcends a mere house to become a sentient, haunted organism pulsing with the unburied trauma of slavery. Ultimately the animacy of the house demands communal exorcism, thereby proving that historical wounds must be spoken of and witnessed to be survived.

Morrison also uses memory to explore communal dynamics. The community rejects and isolates Sethe after her infanticide, but their eventual intervention to exorcise Beloved suggests memory’s potential for healing. She writes: “They gathered, and the singing began. In the beginning the women had come with their men, but then the men had gone off to the field...They stayed and the singing began” (308). This moment marks the climactic communal exorcism of Beloved. The community’s collective song which is rooted in the spirituals and ancestral memory transforms passive haunting into active confrontation. The singing shatters the spiteful grip of the house, and enables Sethe to distinguish past from present, and Beloved to dissolve. The persistent singing becomes a communal force that breaks Beloved’s stranglehold of both Sethe and the house, thereby turning shared memory into a ritual of liberation. This collective act aligns with Hirsch’s idea that postmemory involves “not only the personal memories of the first generation but also the collective cultural memory” (34).

Denver's reintegration into the community, facilitated by her outreach to neighbors, further illustrates this question of communal liberation. Morrison writes: "Denver knew it was on her. She would have to leave the yard, step off the edge of the world, leave the two behind and go ask somebody for help" (243). Denver's epiphany here crystallizes her shift from paralysis to responsibility. Stepping beyond this haunted yard is an act of courage that breaks the cycle of silence. By seeking help from Lady Jones and the community, Denver converts personal desperation into communal action; and as such, proving that healing requires crossing thresholds into the world. Memory in *Beloved* is thus a dual force haunting individuals while enabling communal restoration.

The Middle Passage is another site of memory in the novel. It is evoked through Beloved's fragmented monologue: "All of it is now it is always now there will never be a time when I am not crouching and watching others who are crouching too" (210). This passage captures the temporal dislocation of slavery where memory collapses both the past and the present. Beloved speaks these words in her fragmented voice to signify that the Middle Passage is not just a memory but a constant present. There is no "before" or "after" but only an eternal "now" of suffering. As Avery Gordon observes, "Morrison's ghosts are not just individual memories but the collective haunting of a people" (166). Beloved's presence thus represents the diaspora's shared trauma, thus making memory a site of both pain and potential reclamation.

III.3 Comparative Analysis

While *Homegoing* and *Beloved* both use memory to navigate the history of the African diaspora, their approaches differ significantly in scope, structure, and tone. *Homegoing*'s linear, multi-generational narrative reconstructs memory as a historical continuum that emphasizes resilience across centuries. The black stone necklace, for instance, links Esi's enslavement to Marjorie's modern identity: "She wore the stone around her neck, as her mother had, and her mother had, and her mother before her" (299). This stone carries the pain and the strength of every mother across generations. It never speaks but it carries every scar, every lost name, every ocean crossed. By wearing it each girl keeps the family's story alive. This continuity aligns with Nora's view that memory "remains in permanent evolution, open to the dialectic of remembering and forgetting" (8).

In contrast, *Beloved*'s cyclical structure portrays memory as a haunting force that disrupts linear time. Sethe's rememory of her daughter's death traps her in a repetitive cycle. When Beloved vanishes after the exorcism Sethe is devastated. She tells Paul D: "She left me...my best thing" (272). This means that to her, Beloved was her only chance at redemption; the living proof of her sacrifice. But Paul D tells her, "You your best thing. You are." (172). In other words he tells her that she herself, not the child she lost, not the guilt she carries, is the most precious part of her life. Paul D's words reclaims her humanity as they signify that she is enough on her own.

Both novels, however, emphasize memory as a means of reclaiming agency. In *Homegoing*, Yaw's teaching of history asserts that history is usually told from the perspective of those who hold power. They are the ones who decide which history is recorded and remembered (226). This shows that history is never neutral. It is shaped and controlled by whoever holds power because he decides which narratives survive and which are erased. He warns that accepting a single version of the past means believing the victor's biased account while ignoring the silenced voices of the marginalized, such as enslaved Africans or colonized peoples. Similarly, in *Beloved*, the community's exorcism of Beloved empowers them to reclaim their narrative: "They said, 'You are not the one'" (309). This means that she is not the baby Sethe killed in 1855. This distinction is crucial because Beloved has grown into a monstrous, all-consuming figure embodying not just Sethe's daughter, but the collective trauma of "sixty million and more" lost to slavery. By naming her as something larger and older than the individual child, the women are able to separate personal guilt from collective horror. Their communal voice breaks Beloved's possessive hold on Sethe, and forces the ghost to recognize she has no rightful claim here anymore. As such, the community performs a powerful act of boundary-setting and healing which reclaims 124 and Sethe from the endless demands of the past. As Yogita Goyal notes, both authors "reclaim history from the margins, using memory to counter official narratives" (145).

The novels also share motifs that bridge their transatlantic settings. Water, which symbolizes the Middle Passage, connects *Homegoing*'s Marcus, who feels "the water was calling to him" (297), with *Beloved*'s evocation of "the sea that is not a sea" (211). These motifs reflect Gilroy's *Black Atlantic* where he says "the ocean becomes a space of memory and mourning" (16). However, *Homegoing*'s realism contrasts with *Beloved*'s magical realism, with the latter's ghostly presence intensifying the emotional weight of memory. As Spillers argues, "Morrison's work insists on the

presence of the past in the present” (206), while Gyasi’s broader scope historicizes this presence across generations.

The implications of these approaches are profound for understanding the African diaspora’s historical consciousness. *Homegoing*’s reconstructive memory offers a panoramic view of survival and adaptation, while *Beloved*’s haunting memory delves into the psychological toll of slavery. Together, they create a transatlantic dialogue, and affirm the role of memory in resisting historical erasure and fostering diasporic identity.

IV. Trauma and Its Aftermath

Trauma, as a central theme in African diaspora literature, encapsulates the enduring physical, psychological, and cultural wounds inflicted by the Transatlantic Slave Trade. In Yaa Gyasi’s *Homegoing* and Toni Morrison’s *Beloved*, trauma is depicted as both an individual and collective experience, and is transmitted across generations and embedded in the very fabric of diasporic identity. *Homegoing* portrays trauma as a systemic, intergenerational force across centuries, while *Beloved* focuses on its intimate, psychological impact within a single community.

IV.1 Trauma in *Homegoing*

In *Homegoing*, Yaa Gyasi depicts trauma as a systemic and intergenerational force. The novel’s multi-generational structure illustrates how the violence of slavery and colonialism reverberates across time. She therefore sees trauma not as the event itself but as the way an overwhelming experience bypasses normal understanding. Since the event happened before the mind is ready and without warning or preparation, the brain cannot process it at that moment. Instead of becoming a normal memory that can be recalled and placed in the past, the trauma remains literally unknown to the conscious mind. It returns later, uninvited, through flashbacks, nightmares, dreams or compulsive behavior, forcing the survivor to experience it again and again. Each character’s story reveals a facet of this trauma, from the physical brutality of enslavement to the psychological scars of displacement and loss.

Esi’s experience in the Cape Coast Castle dungeon marks the genesis of the trauma of her line. Gyasi writes: “Esi was in the dungeon, her body covered in sores from lying on the filthy floor, her dress long since torn away, her hair matted with blood and shit. Her mind a blank space [...]”

(47). This visceral depiction captures the dehumanizing violence of the Slave Trade. These harrowing images plunge the reader into the brutal reality of the women's dungeon beneath Cape Coast Castle. After weeks and months in the dungeon, Esi's body has deteriorated: open sores from the unsanitary stone floor fester on her skin, her clothes have been ripped off and her hair is caked with blood and human waste in the overcrowded lightless dungeon. The dungeon is not a place of waiting, but of deliberate degradation designed to break the spirit of the captives before the Middle Passage even begins. The sores symbolize how slavery attacks the body first, turning a once proud, curious girl into a commodity marked by suffering. The physical decay foreshadows the deeper erasure to come: names lost, families severed, identities reduced to cargo. Most poignantly, this moment occurs directly beneath the castle's upper floor where Esi's unknown half-sister Effia lives in comfort – two sisters, one bloodline, separated by a single floor yet worlds apart in fate. The sores on Esi's body become the first visible scar of the novel's central wound – the violent splitting of African families that echoes across generations.

Esi's trauma is inherited by her daughter Ness who endures plantation life. After a failed escape, Ness's master (called the Devil) punishes her and Sam very brutally to deter others from making such an attempt and also to reassert control. Ness endures a savage whipping that leaves her barely conscious and permanently scarred:

No, her scarred body was like another body in and of itself, shaped like a man hugging her from behind with his arms hanging around her neck. They went up from her breasts, rounded the hills of her shoulders, and traveled the full proud length of her back. They licked the top of her buttocks before trailing away into nothing. Ness's skin was no longer skin really, more like the ghost of her past made seeable, physical. (70-71)

The metaphor of scars as a map underscores the enduring presence of trauma. This aligns with Marianne Hirsch's concept of postmemory, where "the 'generation after' bears to the personal, collective, and cultural trauma of those who came before" (5). Intergenerational trauma is particularly evident in Akua's story where the psychological weight of the sufferings of her ancestors manifests in her dreams of the "firewoman." Gyasi writes:

The firewoman would not leave her alone. Every night she came, carrying her basket on her back, holding a burning baby in her arms. Some nights the Firewoman would drip fire like water as she walked towards Akua, and Akua would wake up screaming. Other nights the Firewoman would simply watch her, silent, until Akua woke up crying. (177)

This passage describes the recurring, prophetic nightmares that torment Akua throughout her adult life. This Firewoman is an ancestral ghost representing Maame (Effia and Esi's mother) who, centuries earlier, had set fire to her master's hut to escape enslavement, leaving a baby behind in the flames. This original desperate act of liberation becomes the symbol of unhealed generational trauma that passes down from generation to generation. For Akua, the dreams escalate until they cross into walking reality. One night she, possessed by the nightmare, sleepwalks and pours petrol on her own hut and sets it ablaze, killing her two young daughters. She emerges from the burning hut carrying their charred bodies, unknowingly reenacting the Firewoman's image and thus becoming the Firewoman herself in the eyes of the village.

Akua's inability to escape the Firewoman illustrates how ancestral wounds demand reckoning (often at terrible costs) before the cycle can begin to break. The past event returns compulsively across generations until it is confronted. Akua's mental anguish leads to her burning her own children; an act that echoes the traumatic legacy she inherits. This is in line with Stephanie Li who notes that, "Gyasi's portrayal of intergenerational trauma shows how the past shapes the present, even when it is not fully understood" (112).

Despite this pervasive trauma, *Homegoing* emphasizes resilience and survival. Kojo is Ness's and Sam's son who is smuggled to the North where he finds freedom. He marries Anna, a freeborn black woman with whom he has several children. Despite his legal freedom, stable family and steady employment (markers of life his parents could only dream of), Kojo lives in constant dread of slave catchers. This fear is grounded in the reality of the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 which allowed slave owners to reclaim escaped slaves even in Free States, and compelled Northern citizens to assist in the capture. Gyasi writes: "He could not shake the fear that one day the slave catchers would come. Even though he had been free for nearly ten years, even though he had a wife and a good job at the shipyards, he could not shake the fear" (97). In spite of all this trauma and fear, Kojo is still able to build a family. When Anna is captured while pregnant, he does not

collapse. Instead he keeps working and raising his children and providing for them. He embodies resilience forged not from triumph, but from the refusal to let trauma claim the next generation entirely. He carries the postmemory of his parents' horrors without ever knowing their full stories, yet he transforms that weight into protective love. In a novel full of broken lineages, his quiet perseverance ensures the line continues – proving that resilience often looks less like heroic defiance and more like getting up each morning to face a world that might take everything away from you.

Though Kojo himself was never enslaved, he carries the postmemory of his parents' terror - Ness's scars, Sam's lynching, and the family's violent separation. This fear is not irrational; it is the logical response to a system that refuses to recognize Black freedom as permanent. Even in freedom the past invades the present. Tragically this fear becomes prophecy as slave catchers do come for Anna (his wife) while she is pregnant, leading to her capture and disappearance.

His daughter Willie, facing racial violence and abandonment in Harlem, finds solace in singing. The narrator states that “As she sang she saw the notes float out of her mouth like little butterflies, carrying some of her sadness away, and she knew, finally, that she would survive it” (171).

The above quotation captures how singing remains her lifeline; it also echoes the novel's theme of cultural memory and resilience preserved through voice when everything else is lost. After her abandonment by her light-skinned husband, Robert, she does not give up. She resorts to cleaning houses to support her children. She is forced to give up on her dream of becoming a jazz singer because her dark skin barred her from the clubs. Singing in the choir becomes her quiet reclamation of voice and joy. Her extraordinary voice is discovered young, but Jim Crow and colourism silence her professional ambitions. Gyasi's narrative thus portrays trauma as a force that shapes but does not define the diaspora.

IV.2 Trauma in *Beloved*

In *Beloved*, Toni Morrison focuses on the intimate, psychological dimensions of trauma, centring on Sethe, a formerly enslaved woman whose act of infanticide haunts her post-Civil War life. Sethe's trauma is embodied by the ghost of her daughter, Beloved, who returns to confront her with the past. This haunting presence externalizes Sethe's guilt and pain, thereby illustrating

Morrison's concept of "rememory" where traumatic events persist in both consciousness and space.

Sethe's infanticide, committed to spare her daughter from the horrors of slavery, is the novel's central traumatic event. Morrison writes: "In the woodshed, they found Sethe's sons, Howard and Buglar, lying in the sawdust, bleeding. Sethe was holding her bleeding 'crawling already?' daughter, whose throat she had cut with a saw (175). This desperate act is driven by the ineffable sufferings at Sweet Home. The murder is revealed gradually through fragments and recollections, rather than in one direct sentence. The daughter is repeatedly referred to as the "crawling already?" child (with the question mark emphasizing her tender, precocious stage of development).

Sethe, having escaped Sweet Home plantation while pregnant with Denver, reunites at 124 Bluestone Road with her mother-in-law Baby Suggs and her older children (two boys and the toddler daughter). About a month later, Schoolteacher arrives with slave catchers to reclaim them under the Fugitive Slave Act. In a frantic act of maternal protection, Sethe grabs a handsaw and kills her "crawling already?" daughter by cutting her throat, and then attempts to end the boys' lives too, before being stopped. This act, reflects what Deborah Horvitz calls "the unbearable weight of maternal trauma" (67). Morrison uses this scene to illustrate the profound horrors of slavery which forces a mother to choose between the known terror of enslavement and the unknown death for her child. Sethe later defends it as love ("She was my best thing"), but the ghost Beloved, embodying the unburied trauma returns unbidden.

Paul D's trauma complements Sethe's. It is encapsulated in his metaphor of the "tobacco tin" heart. The narrator says: "Saying more might push them both to a place they couldn't get back from. He would keep the rest where it belonged: in that tobacco tin buried in his chest where a red heart used to be. The lid rusted shut" (73). This passage describes Paul D's internal decision during a quiet, intimate moment with Sethe on the porch steps of 124 Bluestone Road. After years of separation and suffering, they have reconnected, and Paul D has begun to share fragments of his traumatic past (his experiences in a chain gang, the horrors of Sweet Home, the loss of loved ones). However, as the conversation deepens, he senses the danger of revealing too much which could overwhelm both of them, and reopen wounds that might destroy the fragile hope of rebuilding together.

Paul D chooses silence. He metaphorically locks away the unshared pain (“the rest”) in a “tobacco tin” inside his chest; a rusted-shut container where his once-living, red heart (symbol of love, vulnerability, and feeling) has been replaced by cold metal. This is a powerful image of emotional survival under slavery and its aftermath. Men like Paul D (and many Black survivors) learned to compartmentalize trauma, thereby burying feelings so deeply that they calcify, thus protecting the self from further breakage but also preventing full emotional connection.

The “tobacco tin” becomes a recurring motif for Paul D’s guarded heart which is rusted and shut by years of brutality. When he is finally forced to confront his buried pain, the tin begins to crack open, allowing love and vulnerability to return. In essence this shows how survival often requires self-imposed silence and emotional armour, but true recovery (for Paul D, Sethe, and the novel’s other survivors) comes from risking the vulnerability of sharing “the rest.”

Morrison’s use of magical realism externalizes trauma particularly through Beloved who represents both Sethe’s murdered daughter and the collective trauma of the Middle Passage. Her monologue evokes the horrors of the crossing. She describes being trapped on a slave ship during the Middle Passage - the horrific voyage across the Atlantic where enslaved Africans were packed into the hold like cargo. Time has collapsed: “All of it is now” and “it is always now” (210). The terror of the ship, the crowding, the death, the smell, the fear - none of it belongs to the past. For Beloved, the event never ended. The horror is frozen in an eternal present.

Beloved isn’t just Sethe’s daughter here; she represents the sixty million and more lost to the Slave Trade. The quote forces the reader to feel the collapse of time and the impossibility of escape from the past. It’s one of the most devastating passages in the novel, and shows how the violence of slavery lives on as an eternal “now” in the bodies and minds of survivors and their descendants. This temporal collapse underscores the enduring nature of trauma, and aligns with Spillers’ view that the legacy of slavery is “a narrative of loss that continues to unfold” (206).

The community plays a crucial role in addressing trauma. Initially, Sethe’s isolation stems from the community’s rejection of her after her infanticide: “They did not want to know what she had done” (188). However, Denver’s outreach and the community’s eventual exorcism of Beloved offer a path to healing.

IV.3 Comparative Analysis

Homegoing and *Beloved* both portray trauma as a defining feature of the African diaspora, but their approaches differ in scope, tone, and narrative strategy. *Homegoing*'s broad historical canvas traces trauma across generations, thereby emphasizing its systemic nature. For instance, Esi's dungeon experience sets the stage for the struggles of her descendants, such as Akua's nightmares about the Firewoman (177). This aligns with Li's observation that "Gyasi's novel shows how trauma is not a singular event but a condition that shapes entire lineages" (112). In contrast, *Beloved* focuses on the intimate, psychological toll of trauma within a single generation - Sethe's infanticide and its haunting aftermath

Both novels highlight intergenerational trauma, but *Homegoing* does so through a linear progression, while *Beloved* uses a cyclical structure. Akua's act of burning her children parallels Sethe's infanticide, yet Gyasi's narrative moves forward to show healing through characters like Marcus, who reconnects with his heritage. Morrison, however, traps Sethe in a repetitive cycle, only broken by communal intervention. As Yogita Goyal notes, "Morrison's focus on the individual psyche contrasts with Gyasi's broader historical sweep, yet both address the diaspora's shared trauma" (145).

The novels also share an emphasis on resilience and healing. In *Homegoing*, Willie's singing and Kojo's family-building reflect survival strategies; while in *Beloved*, Denver's outreach and the community's exorcism suggest collective healing. However, *Homegoing*'s realist tone contrasts with *Beloved*'s magical realism, particularly in *Beloved*'s supernatural presence which intensifies the visceral experience of trauma.

The transatlantic scope of both novels is evident in their shared motifs such as water symbolizing the Middle Passage. Marcus's connection to the Atlantic echoes *Beloved*'s evocation of it as something monstrous, unnatural, or unknowable due to the traumas it carries. These motifs underscore the diaspora's collective trauma. As Avery Gordon suggests, "The ghost of slavery haunts not just individuals but entire communities" (166). By portraying trauma as both systemic and personal, *Homegoing* and *Beloved* contribute to a transnational understanding of the Black Atlantic, and affirm the role of literature in articulating and resisting the legacy of slavery.

V. Polyphony and Narrative Voice

Polyphony, as conceptualized by Mikhail Bakhtin (1984), offers a powerful framework for analyzing the narrative strategies of Yaa Gyasi's *Homegoing* and Toni Morrison's *Beloved*. Bakhtin writes that "The essence of polyphony lies precisely in the fact that the voices remain independent and as such are combined in a unity of a higher order than homophony" (Bakhtin 22). Here, Bakhtin draws directly from musical terminology where one dominant voice leads while others support it subordinately. Polyphony, by contrast, features multiple independent voices that are equal and autonomous, yet they harmonize into a higher unity. In the context of African diaspora literature, polyphony serves to amplify marginalized voices, resist monolithic historical narratives, and reflect the heterogeneity of diasporic experiences. Both *Homegoing* and *Beloved* use polyphonic structures to articulate the complex legacies of the Transatlantic Slave Trade, yet they do so in distinct ways - Gyasi employs an episodic, multi-generational approach, while Morrison weaves an interwoven, lyrical tapestry of voices.

4.1 Polyphony in *Homegoing*

In *Homegoing* polyphony arises from the novel's multigenerational structure of distinct yet interlocking narrative voices. As Stephanie Li (2018) notes, "Gyasi's polyphonic structure mirrors the diaspora's multiplicity, allowing each character to speak their own truth" (112). The novel's opening chapters exemplify this polyphony by contrasting Effia's and Esi's experiences. Effia, married to a British slaver, lives in the Cape Coast Castle where "She was to be a wife, not a slave" (14). In contrast, Esi is imprisoned in the castle's dungeon, "Her body covered in sores, her mind a blank space" (47). These parallel narratives establish independent voices, reflecting Bakhtin's idea that polyphonic texts "do not merge into a single consciousness but exist in dialogue" (40). The distinct perspectives of Effia's and Esi's descendants such as Ness on an Alabama plantation, Kojó as a fugitive in Baltimore, or Marjorie in modern-day Harlem, further exemplify this dialogue as each chapter offers a unique ideological position within the diaspora. This is evident when Yaw emphasizes the power of oral narratives: "We cannot know that which we were not there to see and hear and experience for ourselves. We must rely upon the words of others. Those who were there in the olden days, they told the stories to the children so that the children would know, so that the children could tell stories to their children. And so on, and so on" (226). This statement captures the fragile living chain of oral tradition which slavery tried to break. These oral

elements enhance the novel's polyphonic structure, and allows characters to assert their agency against the silencing effects of slavery.

However, the episodic nature of *Homegoing*'s polyphony presents challenges to narrative cohesion. Each chapter's shift in voice and setting can feel fragmented, as Yogita Goyal notes: "Gyasi's structure risks dispersal, but it ultimately coheres through recurring motifs like fire and water" (145). For instance, the "Firewoman" in Akua's dreams connects her trauma to her ancestors, while the Atlantic Ocean links Marcus's story to Esi's. These motifs create a thematic unity that mitigates the fragmentation. This is in line with Paul Gilroy's view of the Black Atlantic as "a system of cultural exchanges" (15).

V.2 Polyphony in *Beloved*

Toni Morrison's *Beloved* employs a more interwoven polyphonic structure which blends multiple narrative voices through stream-of-consciousness, fragmented narration, and lyrical prose. This approach aligns with Bakhtin's polyphony, where "the author does not speak in a single voice but orchestrates a dialogue among characters" (6). Morrison's voices - Sethe, Denver, Paul D, and Beloved - interact within the confined setting of 124 Bluestone Road, thereby creating a choral effect that reflects the collective trauma of the African American community. The novel's polyphony is evident in its shifting perspectives. Sethe's voice dominates, yet, Denver's perspective offers a generational counterpoint, and Paul D's voice adds another layer to this general tale of pain, while Beloved's stream-of-consciousness monologue disrupts linear narration, thereby evoking the disorienting trauma of the Middle Passage. This multiplicity of voices aligns with Bakhtin's view that polyphonic texts create "a world where all is dialogue" (40).

The communal voice in *Beloved*, manifested when the women exorcise Beloved, further exemplifies polyphony. This choral moment integrates individual voices into a collective act - reflecting African oral traditions. As Okpewho notes, "African oral performance often involves a communal voice that affirms shared identity" (112). This is evident in Baby Suggs' preaching about which the narrator states that she didn't instruct her people to reform their behavior or stop sinning. She didn't claim they were the specially chosen, the humble who would inherit the earth, or the pure ones destined for glory. Instead she told them that the only grace available to them was

the grace they themselves could envision, and that if they couldn't picture it, they would never possess it (103).

This communal voice resists the silencing effect of slavery. Baby Suggs refuses to offer promises of heavenly rewards because slavery has already stripped these people of dignity, autonomy, and basic humanity. And since their bodies have been violated, whipped, raped, and commodified, her radical message is one of self-love and self-claiming. This echoes Morrison's aim to "write the slave narrative not to be written by the slave" (103). Morrison's use of stream-of-consciousness and fragmented narration enhances the polyphonic effect, particularly in *Beloved's* monologue, which captures the collective trauma of the Middle Passage. This fragmented style challenges Western linear narratives.

V.3 Comparative Analysis

While both *Homegoing* and *Beloved* use polyphony to represent the diverse voices of the African diaspora, their approaches differ in structure, tone, and scope. *Homegoing's* episodic polyphony, with each chapter presenting a distinct voice, emphasizes historical breadth. For example, Ness's plantation narrative contrasts with Marjorie's modern perspective. This structure reflects Bakhtin's polyphony as "a plurality of independent voices" (6), and captures the diaspora's geographical and temporal diversity. In contrast, *Beloved's* interwoven polyphony integrates voices within a single setting.

Both novels share the goal of giving voice to the silenced. In *Homegoing*, Yaw's assertion that whoever has the power is the one whose version of history we end up believing because they are the ones who get to write the official story, challenges colonial narratives (226). It underscores the fact that history is not an objective record but rather a byproduct of power dynamics. Similarly, *Beloved's* communal exorcism reclaims narrative authority. The two novels' polyphony draws on African oral traditions, but *Homegoing's* episodic structure evokes a genealogical storytelling, as in Abena's village tales, while *Beloved's* choral voice, as in Baby Suggs' preaching, emphasizes communal performance. The reader's engagement also differs due to these structures. *Homegoing's* episodic shifts can challenge narrative continuity since it requires readers to connect various motifs. On the other hand, *Beloved's* interwoven voices demand active interpretation, as seen in the shifting perspectives of Sethe and Denver (205). Both approaches, however, create a

transatlantic dialogue, with *Homegoing*'s water motif echoing *Beloved*'s Middle Passage imagery. These motifs affirm the role of polyphony in articulating the history of the diaspora.

Conclusion

Yaa Gyasi's *Homegoing* and Toni Morrison's *Beloved* engage in a profound transatlantic dialogue, weaving together memory, trauma, and polyphony to articulate the African diaspora's complex history. By synthesizing the analyses of these themes, one realizes that these novels converse with each other through shared motifs, narrative strategies, and ideological commitments, while also diverging in scope and style. From their intertextual connections, their engagement with the legacy of the Transatlantic Slave Trade, and their broader implications for contemporary discussions of race, memory, and identity, the two novels are seminal works in transatlantic dialogues. Textual analysis reveals how *Homegoing* and *Beloved* bridge African and American experiences, thereby affirming the role of literature in resisting historical erasure and fostering diasporic consciousness.

Homegoing and *Beloved* are intertextually linked through their shared engagement with the historical and emotional legacies of the African diaspora. As Yogita Goyal observes, "Gyasi's novel extends Morrison's project of reclaiming history, but with a broader geographical lens" (145). Both authors use polyphonic narratives to amplify marginalized voices. This intertextual dialogue is evident in their shared motifs of water, fire, naming, and ancestral connections which serve as conduits for memory and trauma across the Black Atlantic.

The motif of water which symbolizes the Middle Passage, is central to both novels. In *Homegoing*, Marcus hates the ocean. The narrator states: "Marcus doesn't care for water; the ocean has always nauseated him. His father, Sonny, had told him that black people didn't like water because they were brought over on slave ships" (284). This inherited dread stems from the horrors of the transatlantic voyage where many enslaved Africans jumped overboard to escape bondage. Similarly, in *Beloved*, Beloved's monologue evokes the trauma of the crossing.

Fire is another shared motif; it symbolizes the destructive and transformative power of trauma. In *Homegoing*, Akua's "firewoman" dreams reflect the burning of her village and her own act of violence against her children. In *Beloved*, fire is implicit in Sethe's memories of the violence at Sweet Home, and the community's exorcism of Beloved.

Naming too serves as a site of reclamation in both novels. In *Homegoing*, characters like Yaw assert agency through storytelling. He says: “We cannot know the truth of history until we tell our own stories” (226). Similarly, in *Beloved*, Sethe’s naming of her daughter reclaims her identity from the erasure of slavery. These motifs demonstrate how *Homegoing* engages with *Beloved*, thereby extending intimate focus into a broader historical narrative.

However, the novels differ in scope and style. *Homegoing*’s episodic structure spans centuries, as seen in the contrast between Effia’s life and Marjorie’s modern identity. *Beloved*’s concentrated focus on Sethe’s trauma employs lyrical, magical realism, while Gyasi’s realism prioritizes historical continuity.

Both *Homegoing* and *Beloved* engage in a transatlantic dialogue which bridges African and American experiences through the Black Atlantic framework that emphasizes the interconnectedness of Africa, America, and Europe. *Homegoing* embodies this by tracing two lineages (one in Ghana, one in America) and highlighting the dual impact of the Slave Trade. The Cape Coast Castle, where Effia lives above and Esi is imprisoned below serves as a physical site of this transatlantic dialogue. Similarly, *Beloved*’s 124 Bluestone Road is a lieu de mémoire, as Pierre Nora says (7). Morrison writes: “124 was spiteful. Full of a baby’s venom. The women in the house knew it and so did the children. For years each put up with the spite in his own way, but by 1873 Sethe and her daughter Denver were its only victims” (3). This positions 124 Bluestone Road as a space where the trauma of the Middle Passage persists.

The Middle Passage is a central transatlantic motif in both novels. In *Homegoing*, Marcus’s visit to the Castle evokes this history. In *Beloved*, Beloved’s monologue captures the disorientation of the crossing. These passages reflect Homi Bhabha’s concept of the “third space,” a “hybrid site of cultural production” where identities are negotiated. Both novels thus create such spaces, with *Homegoing*’s dual narratives and *Beloved*’s communal exorcism reaffirming diasporic identity.

The novels also address the legacy of the Transatlantic Slave Trade through their polyphonic structures. *Homegoing*’s episodic voices, from Ness’s plantation narrative to Yaw’s historical reflections mirror the diversity of the African diaspora, while *Beloved*’s interwoven voices create a collective dialogue. This transatlantic dialogue resists colonial narratives, and align with Homi Bhabha’s view of “narrative agency” where marginalized groups “rewrite the nation from the

margins” (145). In *Homegoing*, Marcus’s research into his roots is an attempt to reclaim history; in *Beloved*, the community’s intervention reasserts collective agency in the face of historical trauma. These acts position the novels as transatlantic narratives of resistance and reconnection. Both texts stand as monumental works in African and diasporic literature. They weave together memory, trauma, and polyphony to articulate the enduring legacy of the Transatlantic Slave Trade. Through a comparative analysis, this article has explored how these novels engage in a transatlantic dialogue, thereby bridging African and American experiences to reclaim silenced histories and assert diasporic agency. *Homegoing*’s multi-generational, episodic narrative reconstructs historical memory across centuries; while *Beloved*’s intimate, lyrical structure delves into the psychological depths of trauma. Both employ polyphonic voices to represent the heterogeneity of the African diaspora, thereby challenging colonial narratives and fostering a transnational understanding of identity. In *Homegoing*, memory operates as a reconstructive force which connects generations through motifs like the black stone necklace. In contrast, *Beloved* portrays memory as a haunting presence embodied by Beloved’s return. Both novels use memory to resist historical erasure. Trauma, as explored in both texts, underscores the enduring impact of the Slave Trade. *Homegoing* traces intergenerational trauma through characters like Esi and Akua who are haunted by the “firewoman”; while *Beloved* focuses on individual trauma, particularly Sethe’s infanticide and Paul D’s suppressed memories. Yet, both novels highlight resilience as the way forward.

Polyphony is the structural backbone of both novels. *Homegoing*’s episodic voices, from Ness’s plantation narrative to Yaw’s historical reflections embody what Mikhail Bakhtin describes as “a plurality of independent and unmerged voices” (6). On the other hand, *Beloved*’s interwoven voices create a choral dialogue – many independent voices speaking at once and creating a collective, multi-voiced harmony with no voice dominating. Both draw on African oral traditions which resist colonial narratives,

The intertextual connections between the novels are evident in shared motifs like water and fire. Water and fire represent the destructive power of trauma. They appear in Akua’s dreams and implicitly in *Beloved*’s exorcism. Naming also unites the novels, with Yaw’s storytelling and Sethe’s naming of Beloved.

The transatlantic dimensions of *Homegoing* and *Beloved* position them as dialogues across the Atlantic, thereby bridging African and American histories. *Homegoing*'s dual lineages embody Homi Bhabha's "third space," a "hybrid site of cultural production" (36). *Beloved*'s 124 Bluestone Road serves as a similar site where the trauma of the Middle Passage persists. Both novels affirm the African diaspora's resilience, and offer a model for understanding global histories of race and identity.

Homegoing and *Beloved* stand as monumental works in African and diasporic literature. They weave together memory, trauma, and polyphony to articulate the enduring legacy of the Transatlantic Slave Trade. Through a comparative analysis, this article has explored how these novels engage in a transatlantic dialogue, thereby bridging African and American experiences to reclaim silenced histories and assert diasporic agency. *Homegoing*'s multi-generational, episodic narrative reconstructs historical memory across centuries; while *Beloved*'s intimate, lyrical structure delves into the psychological depths of trauma. Both employ polyphonic voices to represent the heterogeneity of the African diaspora, thereby challenging colonial narratives and fostering a transnational understanding of identity. In *Homegoing*, memory operates as a reconstructive force which connects generations through motifs like the black stone necklace. In contrast, *Beloved* portrays memory as a haunting presence embodied by Beloved's return. Both novels use memory to resist historical erasure. Trauma, as explored in both texts, underscores the enduring impact of the Slave Trade. *Homegoing* traces intergenerational trauma through characters like Esi and Akua who are haunted by the "firewoman"; while *Beloved* focuses on individual trauma, particularly Sethe's infanticide and Paul D's suppressed memories. Yet, both novels highlight resilience as the way forward.

Polyphony is the structural backbone of both novels. *Homegoing*'s episodic voices, from Ness's plantation narrative to Yaw's historical reflections embody what Mikhail Bakhtin describes as "a plurality of independent and unmerged voices" (6). On the other hand, *Beloved*'s interwoven voices create a choral dialogue – many independent voices speaking at once and creating a collective, multi-voiced harmony with no voice dominating. Both draw on African oral traditions which resist colonial narratives,

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