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# "WELCOME HOME": THE UNHOMELY IN YAA GYASI'S *HOMEGOING*

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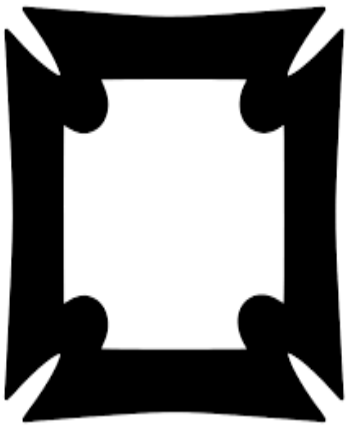

**ABSTRACT**

This paper critically examines the contested and ambiguous notion of the home in postcolonial and diasporic contexts, utilizing Yaa Gyasi's transformative neo-slave narrative, *Homegoing* (2016), as a focal point. By intricately tracing the story of seven familial generations over three centuries across Ghana and America, Gyasi portrays Atlantic deracination, diaspora, and transnationalism as both individual and collective experiences. In this way, as the novel's title suggests, the home, as both a physical and psychological space, is desired but also elusive. The perpetuation of homegoing, thus, connects characters despite physical, temporal, and generational separation, signifying that the emergence of the home and the return to the home are interconnected. This paper draws primarily on Homi Bhabha's reworking of Sigmund Freud's theory of the uncanny into his expanded notion of the unhomely—a condition in which the boundaries between the private and the public blur, creating a postcolonial space that is both familiar and estranged. In this regard, Freud and Bhabha together provide a framework for how characters within *Homegoing* engage with things left unsaid, unresolved histories, and unspoken truths that suddenly re-emerge within the political and social existence. This paper analyzes the establishment of an anchored yet ambiguous "non-place"—characterized by de-rootedness—which produces cyclical hauntings and a fractured sense of the home for subsequent generations. Ultimately, this paper concludes that, despite the pervasive sense of unhomeliness, the contemporary generation finds a tentative reconciliation with the home by returning to and reimagining their origins. In doing so, they transform the unsettling legacies of coloniality into spaces of decolonial possibility and redefinition.

**KEYWORDS**

Decolonial, migration, slavery, unhomely, Yaa Gyasi

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## Introduction

In postcolonial and diasporic texts and contexts, the notion of home is often ambiguous, marked by the tension between homing and (un)homing, belonging and otherness. Avtar Brah calls this paradox "a homing desire" that simultaneously critiques "discourses of fixed origins" (189). Although displaced groups may feel anchored to a specific setting, the concept of diaspora signals that "these processes of multi-locationality [exist] across geographical, cultural, and psychic boundaries" (Brah 191). This duality between homing—a search for locatedness—and (un)homing—a perpetual state of displacement—thus becomes both transtemporal and mutually interdependent (Aman and Dahlstedt 725). Since home is a contested concept, as John McLeod asserts, many diasporic writers suggest that it "can no longer be relied upon as a stable and stabilising [idea]" (143). The home instead transmutes into an unpredictable psychological space constructed from "the incomplete odds and ends of memory that survive from the past" (McLeod 142-143). Similarly, Homi Bhabha explores the dismal sense of the home in postcolonial fiction through his concept of the unhomely—a condition in which the boundaries between the private and the public blur, thereby creating a postcolonial space that is both familiar and estranged (141-142). While the act of homing carries a longing for a sense of rootedness and belonging, the experience of (un)homing involves the loss of that connection and the realization that what once felt familiar has become uncanny (Aman and Dahlstedt 725). In this essay, I use Bhabha's notion of the unhomely to frame my reading of Yaa Gyasi's *Homegoing* (2016) as a novel in which home is irretrievably lost but nonetheless desired and fantasized (Aman and Dahlstedt 726).

Gyasi's *Homegoing* follows the seven-generation lineage of Maame, an Asante woman whose descendants span Ghana and the United States. The novel begins with two half-sisters, Effia and Esi, who are raised in different villages, unaware of each other's existence, and separated by the transatlantic slave trade; Effia remains in West Africa and marries a British slave trader, while Esi is captured, imprisoned, and shipped to America as a slave. From this origin point, *Homegoing* traces the intergenerational consequences of enslavement and colonialism through a protagonist-per-chapter structure that alternates between Effia's and Esi's bloodlines. The novel ultimately closes with their last descendants, Marjorie and Marcus, who meet and return to Ghana for an attempted reconciliation. Throughout her text, Gyasi presents Atlantic slavery and its enduring aftermath as a communal and familial saga, centered on the desired but elusive concept of the home, as both a psychological ideal and a physical place. Gyasi documents characters in disjointed and dislocated moments, such as leaving one home to build another or witnessing the destruction of the home they have found. More specifically, Gyasi draws on the term "homegoing"—a "common euphemism for death in the African American Christian religious tradition, where funerals are sometimes called homegoing celebrations"—to signal "not just an ending but a possibility of other openings…hopes for redemption" (Goyal and Gyasi 474). Because the concept of the home can be problematic and challenging, both in the past and in the present, especially for African diasporic subjects who "envision their existence [of home] in terms of fragments and fissures, full of gaps and breaches" (McLeod 143), Gyasi refuses to romanticize or idealize it. This paper argues that in *Homegoing*, Yaa Gyasi deliberately portrays the home as both a site that engenders cyclical and fractured hauntings, and a decolonial space that disrupts colonial affairs and enables collective healing. The ambiguous nature and understanding of the home for African diasporic subjects is therefore tentative—signifying neither incompleteness nor finality.

While much of the critical discourse on Gyasi's *Homegoing* has predominantly focused on motifs of slavery, diaspora, memory, and intergenerational trauma, an emerging body of scholarship—including the works of DeLinda Marzette, Sarah Heinz, and Hasan Thamer Hasan—has turned attention to the novel's nuanced rendering of the concept of home. In "Children of Fire and Water: Motherhood, Migration, and Home in Yaa Gyasi's *Homegoing*," Marzette employs a thematic approach by analyzing the recurring natural elements of fire, water, and earth within the ancestral dimensions of home (102). Heinz, in "Beyond Sedentarism and Nomadology: Yaa Gyasi's *Homegoing* and the Ambivalent Desire for Home," examines how the concept of home produces both "positive and negative feelings," applying sedentarist, organic frameworks to Effia's narrative and nomadic, rootless paradigms to Esi's story (121). Comparably, Hasan's "The Concept of Home in Yaa Gyasi's *Homegoing*" frames the home through trauma studies, highlighting themes of displacement, cultural alienation, and the yearning for a space of belonging (340). Collectively, these readings establish how *Homegoing* represents the home as a mutable site of perpetual longing and loss, yet they tend to treat this fluidity metaphorically rather than as a psychopolitical process through which Gyasi reconfigures the colonial and psychic dimensions of belonging. Building on and extending these studies, this essay advances a psychoanalytic and decolonial framework, arguing that Gyasi's portrayal of the home not only maps the material and emotional landscapes of diasporic displacement and fragmentation but also explores the possibilities of healing across time. By conceptualizing the home as both an imagined return and as a process of internal reconciliation, this paper reorients the discourse from thematic and sociological readings toward a deeper engagement with the novel's mediation on the decolonization of belonging and the restoration of the diasporic psyche.

The essay develops this argument in four sections. I begin by examining the theoretical framework of the text, using Sigmund Freud's concept of the uncanny and Homi Bhabha's notion of the unhomely to outline the psychologically unsettled dimensions of the postcolonial home. While this essay mainly deploys Freud's and Bhabha's theories, I also incorporate Walter Mignolo and Catherine Walsh's framework of decoloniality as an undercurrent to showcase how Gyasi's narrative enacts the process of redoing and undoing colonialism within the home. The second section turns to the novel, exploring how Maame's status as an "originary non-place" (de Certeau 90) embodies a haunting unhomeliness that shapes her daughters' experiences of displacement within colonial histories of slavery. The third section continues to explore the inherited fractured and cyclical unhomeliness while more specifically analyzing how the home is confronted and reclaimed. The paper concludes, in the final section, by emphasizing the unhomely and decolonial representations of the home as portrayed by the first and last generations in Gyasi's *Homegoing*. Ultimately, the paper illuminates and demonstrates how *Homegoing* reimagines the home as a contested space where psychic and colonial wounds are both exposed and healed.

**The Unhomely in Postcolonial Literature**

In his historic essay "The Uncanny," Freud develops a theory of this concept by analyzing the German words *heimlich*—familiar or homely—and *unheimlich*—unfamiliar or unhomely (620). Freud argues against the dichotomous nature of these terms, insisting that the usage of speech has extended *heimlich* into its opposite *unheimlich*, thereby illustrating that the uncanny is "nothing new or alien, but something that is familiar and old—established in the mind and which has become alienated from it only through the process of repression" (634). Thus, thinking about the

home involves thinking about the unhomely, the *unheimlich,* which destabilizes the opposition between the known and the unknown. While Ernst Jentsch, in "On the Psychology of the Uncanny," focuses on intellectual uncertainty as the source of the uncanny, he similarly describes it as producing feelings of not being "quite 'at home' or 'at ease,'" ultimately suggesting that uncanniness arises from a lack of orientation (8). This sense of disorientation, as Jentsch notes, further highlights the uncanny's connection to anxiety and the instability of boundaries (9). In this way, Freud's definition of the uncanny exists in multiple dimensions and invokes spatial references to past and present, "construction and boundary, interiority vs. exteriority, private vs. public, and the concept of 'the home'"—thereby shifting the uncanny into a more worldly state of space (Wolfe). In *Homegoing,* characters experience the uncanny as "a past that is not past" (Sharpe 13) or, in other words, as a recurring, haunting presence that disrupts the present through a "constant recurrence of the same thing" (Freud 630). Thus, *Homegoing* captures the interplay between *heimlich* and *unheimlich* by framing the home as an unstable and fragmented concept, ultimately portraying the uncanny nature of the postcolonial experience.

In his essay "The World and the Home," Bhabha draws on and extends Freud's concepts to examine the complexities of migration in postcolonial fiction. According to Bhabha, the unhomely—or *unheimlich*—is not merely a physical state of displacement of homelessness, but "something of the estranging sense of the relocation of the home and the world in an unhallowed place…[that] creeps up on you stealthily as your own shadow" (141). He writes:

> In a feverish stillness, the intimate recesses of the domestic space become sites for history's most intricate invasions. In that displacement[,] the border between home and world becomes confused; and, uncannily, the private and the public become part of each other, forcing upon us a vision that is as divided as it is disorienting (Bhabha 141).

This shift, from the comforting familiarity of the *heimlich* to the unsettling strangeness of the *unheimlich*, manifests as fissures or ruptures in the "wider disjunctions of political existence"—things left unsaid, unresolved histories, and unspoken truths that suddenly reemerge (Bhabha 144). Bhabha's concept of the unhomely, therefore, stems from repression, signified by the very prefix "un," which Freud describes as "the token of repression" (637). Ultimately, Bhabha asserts that "the unhomely is the shock of recognition of the world-in-the-home, the home-in-the-world" (141), where the intrusion of the world fractures the boundary between "inside and outside, the insiders-outsideness" (149). More than just a reflection of this condition, postcolonial literature—like *Homegoing*—actively projects the unhomely experience by "haunt[ing] history's more public face, forcing it to reflect on itself in the displacing, even distorting image of Art" (Bhabha 152). In doing so, unhomely moments highlight how diasporic subjects must continually renegotiate their beginnings and sense of belonging in a space where home is never simply home, but always a place of redefinition.

To view the home through a decolonial paradigm is to recognize it as more than just a physical or geographic location; rather, it is a place rooted in the lived memory and lived reality of both diasporic imagination and resistance. Colonialism and its harmful effects disrupted many African communities' connections to their land and culture, fragmenting traditional understandings of home and replacing them with imposed structures of domination and displacement. Yet, beyond these externally enforced ruptures, some individuals and families have

enacted self-imposed forms of exile against the ongoing realities of coloniality and postcoloniality. For such individuals, home becomes a space that signifies both autonomy and estrangement. Decoloniality, as proposed by Walter Mignolo and Catherine Walsh, "undoes, disobeys, and delinks" from the modernity/coloniality matrix and "construct[s] paths and praxis toward an otherwise of thinking, sensing, believing, doing, and living" (4). It emerges as an actional confrontation with colonial violence and an ongoing re-existence in its aftermath—an undoing and redoing of belonging (Mignolo and Walsh 145-6). Moreover, decoloniality is a "posture, attitude, and action"—a way of living in the world that reimagines existence beyond colonial logics (Walsh 00:01:18-00:01:27). As Walsh asserts, colonialism remains incomplete; there have always been spaces of refusal—"borders, fissures, and cracks"—where other ways of knowing and being persist and continue to grow (00:03:04-00:03:09). It is through these lived cracks of coloniality—through everyday insurgencies and resurgencies—that decoloniality takes root. By viewing the home through a decolonial framework, *Homegoing* engages in a project of "occlusion and subverting the colonial cartography through the re-introduction of other modes of knowing and being" (Gallien 37). Gyasi's representation of the home—as a process of negotiation, adaptation, and resilience—thus participates in the larger decolonial project: a refusal of the world as imposed and an ongoing movement toward the possibility of what might be otherwise.

**Spectral Origins and the Unhomely Home: Maame, Effia, and Esi**

As Michel de Certeau suggests in *The Writing of History,* the "beginnings" of a story necessitate an "originary non-place," something "unspoken," which then generates a sequence of events (90-91). In this sense, beginnings can represent the narrative boundaries of the knowable, existing on the periphery of what holds meaning. In *Homegoing,* Gyasi constructs such a non-place through the matriarchal figure of Maame, who serves as the unspoken origin point by anchoring the family tree and, thereby, the novel. While foundational to the lineage, Maame's story remains largely absent, characterized by rootlessness as she has "no family, no background to speak of" (Gyasi 35). Her undefined and unknown personhood becomes a silent beginning that shapes the lives of her descendants while remaining beyond the reach of explicit narrative meaning, existing instead within the cracks and fissures of other characters' accounts. Maame's status as both a mother and "not a whole woman" (Gyasi 42) renders her emblematic of the unhomely: a condition that is simultaneously familiar and alien, echoing McLeod's framing of the home as an unstable and unsettling space (143). Her spectrality aligns with Freud's notion of the uncanny as something "secretly familiar…which has undergone repression" (637), particularly in the context of enslavement, where belonging is persistently dislocated. Maame's presence thus exemplifies Nicholas Royle's assertion in *The Uncanny* that "the beginning is already haunted"—meaning that Maame's unknowable presence is "ghostly" and concerned with "feelings of uncertainty, in particular regarding the reality of who one is and what is being experienced" (1). As a paradoxical locus of absence and origin, Maame's status as a non-place and her resulting unhomeliness function as co-constitutive ontologies. Her spectrality exemplifies de Certeau's idea of a non-place—a space without a stable position yet generative in its very absence (91)—while her disappearance, marked by silence and maternal rupture, renders her profoundly unhomely in both Freudian and postcolonial terms. Ultimately, Maame's near-erasure enacts a form of epistemic (un)homing, thereby producing a structural embodiment of the non-place through which the condition of unhomeliness becomes historically transmissible to subsequent generations.

Without clarity over Maame's origins, her daughters—Effia and Esi—inherit an undefined past that transforms their lives in disorienting and uncanny ways, marking the genesis of their unhomely condition. For Effia, her birth is shaped by a haunting dichotomy—an intimate act of protection overshadowed by the devastation of slavery. She enters the world in the aftermath of the fire that Maame sets to secure her own escape, a fire that, as Marzette states, is emblematic of "European colonizers" (102). Gyasi emphasizes this connection by describing the fire in terms that mimic the British colonial presence: "a fire raged through the woods…it burned, up and through, unconcerned with what wreckage it left behind" (3). However, while the fire symbolizes dominion over African peoples, it also becomes a personification of Maame herself as "the memory…that burned, then fled" (Gyasi 3), which, as Freud asserts, resembles the ghastly condition that will haunt subsequent generations (621). In this way, Effia's origins are marked by the uncanny—both by the familiarity of her "mother's…body" and the unfamiliarity of colonization and familial loss (Freud 637). Her father Cobbe's ominous declaration about her birth, "'We will never again speak of what happened today'" (Gyasi 3), reinforces this tension, showcasing the "token of repression" that she unconsciously inherits (Freud 637). This act of repression also mirrors the broader cultural patterns of the unspeakability of trauma, revealing how certain societies resort to silence as a way of dealing with traumatic pasts. Effia's existence, then, is defined by an enigmatic past that translates into a sense of displacement and a lingering lack of belonging, thereby embodying Bhabha's concept of the unhomely condition, where she is caught in a state of "insiders-outsideness" (149). Her feeling of being connected to and alienated from her inhabited home continues as she is raised by her abusive stepmother, Baaba, who actively represses her: "It was only when Effia didn't speak or question, when she made herself small, that she could feel Baaba's love, or something like it" (Gyasi 8). Effia's unhomely condition, which emanates both familiarity and estrangement, reflects the unsettling repression and eerie disconnection from her origins, ultimately exemplifying Royle's assertion that "the revelation of something unhomely [is] at the heart of hearth and home" (1).

While Effia's perspective of the home is shaped by Maame's absence, Esi's idea of the home is rooted in her disoriented relationship with Maame. From the outset, Esi's home materializes as seemingly blissful and idyllic, with villagers calling her a "ripe mango" as a symbol of her happiness and privilege, but also of something to be consumed, with sexual connotations (Gyasi 31). Although Esi "loved her mother," she was unaware of her past "wretchedness" (Gyasi 35), creating a dissonance in Esi's perception of home as she learns from a house girl that Maame "was once a slave for a Fante family" and that she was "raped by her master" (Gyasi 38). Gyasi's inclusion of the fact that Maame was enslaved by a Fante family—a group within her own African cultural sphere—signals a deliberate refusal to idealize the African past or to absolve African societies from their complicity in the transatlantic slave trade. In doing so, Gyasi deconstructs the romanticized notion of home and the fantasy of return, revealing that the seemingly peaceful and communal ideal of home is already fraught with trauma. Additionally, the familiarity of her mother, having never "spent more than an hour away from her…sight" (Gyasi 38), becomes disoriented and fractured as she is now only able to "picture…her own mother behind the dull metal of the cages" (Gyasi 39). Royle's claim that "there has to be a sense of home and homeliness…to think the unhomely" (25) captures Esi's literal and spiritual unhomeliness. Her mother's silent presence and lack of verbalized agency evoke the "stirring of the unspoken" (Bhabha 152)—thereby giving rise to an "uncanny voice of memory" (Bhabha 146). Esi's sense

of unfamiliarity is further intensified during a raid on her village when Maame exhibits deep psychological fragmentation, muttering words like "Sister, Baaba, fire" (Gyasi 42). In this sense, the unhomely space reflects the "externality of the inward" (Bhabha 150), where "Esi would inherit that unspeakable sense of loss, learn what it meant to be un-whole" (Gyasi 42). This incommunicability, as Bhabha asserts, "shapes the public moment"—generating a psychic obscurity that actively defines and structures the conditions of its formation (143). As Gilda Graff explains, transgenerational hauntings happen when traumatized people decide not to openly discuss their experiences with their children (193). Despite the silence from their parents, the children may experience the trauma in "uncanny" ways, suggesting the unconscious transmission of family dynamics from generation to generation (Graff 193). In this regard, both Effia and Esi experience the uncanny fusion of "the home and the world" from Maame's unspoken unhomeliness, where the haunted, unfamiliar space converges into the intimate, familiar home and vice versa (Bhabha 141). Thus, the imposed rootlessness destabilizes both the psychological framework that defines home and its physical structure, ultimately perpetuating "the un-spoken, unrepresented pasts that haunt the historical present" (Bhabha 147).

Similar to Esi's encounter with displacement, Effia's experience in her new home, the Castle, further entrenches her unhomely condition. When Effia is married off to James Collins—"the [white] governor of the Cape Coast Castle" (Gyasi 14)—she is compelled to reevaluate her understanding of home through the epistemological framework of her previous home. In an effort to make sense of her new surroundings, Effia refers to the Castle as a "village" (Gyasi 16), mapping familiar language onto an unfamiliar and unsettling space to, essentially, reimagine the home beyond the bounds of colonial dispossession and epistemic violence. However, despite her and James's attempts to create a comforting space, Effia becomes increasingly aware that the Castle is not simply foreign to her, but rather that it represents a dismal and morally compromised place entangled in the transatlantic slave trade. This realization becomes clear when Effia hears "a faint crying sound" from the dungeons and discovers that Africans are being held captive beneath her home (Gyasi 17). Upon hearing the anguished cries of enslaved Africans, Effia is struck by the piercing alarm of the unhomely (Bhabha 142), which includes her unknown half-sister Esi. As Bhabha discusses, "In the stirrings of the unhomely, another world becomes visible"—that of slavery, which ultimately leads to the "shock recognition of the world-in-the-home, the home-in-the-world" (141). Effia's home, therefore, becomes inseparable from the violence and displacement of colonialism, transforming her domestic sphere into an unhomely realm where comfort and oppression coexist. Though Effia recognizes that the Castle she lives in is a space of brutality for others, it is also where she raises her family—particularly her son, Quey—which begins her actional resistance towards the insidious forms of colonial power. As Cobbe observes, "the joining of a man and a woman was also the joining of two families. Ancestors, whole histories, came with the act…[and] the children were the embodiment of that unity" (Gyasi 21). In this light, the children of miscegenation, like Quey, embody the unsettling condition of the unhomely by existing between racial and cultural boundaries—being both African and European. Quey's hybridity destabilizes the colonial logic of apartness that depends on racial purity and epistemic control. Yet, his liminality also reveals the enduring grip of those systems, as he doesn't fully belong to nor represent either world. Through Quey, however, Effia enacts a quiet refusal of colonial complicity, as she deliberately protects him from the Castle's horrors by ensuring he "never saw the dungeons" and remaining unaware "of what went on" there (Gyasi 54). Although

this could be seen as reproducing the colonial structure by hiding the truth, Effia is instead preserving a space of relative safety and emotional refuge amid pervasive brutality. As Mignolo and Walsh state, "[i]t is the task of decoloniality to unveil" the logic of coloniality and modernity (140). *Homegoing* thus aligns decolonially, both acknowledging the ongoing mutations of colonial power and denying those structures full access to Black life. Essentially, Effia's experience of liminality within the Castle forces her to reconceptualize her home as an interstitial intimacy that both measures "dwelling at home, while producing an image of the world" shaped by enslavement (Bhabha 148).

Furthermore, as Effia's existence within the Castle embodies a difference within—an "in-between" temporality (Bhabha 148)—she inhabits the familiarity and alienation associated with belonging and otherness. Her experience encapsulates the unhomely condition, where the boundaries between the private and public are confused, therefore reinforcing the ethical-aesthetic framework that enables her to "see inwardness from the outside" (Bhabha 151). This positionality allows Effia to interpret her domestic life through the disorienting perspective of colonialism and the uncanny revelations of her past. For instance, the haunting violence of Effia's history surfaces when she reflects on her husband's reaction to the enslaved people:

> Effia had known, of course, that there were people in the dungeons…She had never thought of what James must think every time he saw them. If he went into the dungeons and saw women who reminded him of her, who looked like her, and smelled like her. If he came back to her haunted by what he saw (Gyasi 25).

Though mediated by James, this disturbing resemblance evokes the uncanny as Effia begins to unravel the borders between herself and those imprisoned below. It manifests as a subconscious recognition of her own repressed connection to slavery—her mother's captivity and the unknown fate of her sister. In this moment, Effia becomes attuned to the spectral presence of familial trauma, as the Castle's ghostly discourse unveils the "fully realized presence haunted by undecipherable languages" of both personal and collective histories of subjugation (Bhabha 150). Upon learning of the happenings below her home, Effia exclaims, "'You white people. My father warned me about your ways. Take me home. Take me home right now!'" while her husband replies by asking, "'You want to go home?'"…"'Your home is no better'" (Gyasi 17). For Effia, the recognition of having lost her origins becomes starkly apparent, and her displacement within the Castle intensifies her sense of being unmoored. This moment, in particular, captures the unhomely condition that "creeps up on you stealthily" (Bhabha 141), a sensation that Effia experiences as the voices gradually rise toward her, which ultimately reveals that her home is a space of fragmentation and repression.

Like Effia, Esi embodies "dwelling in a state of incredulous terror" (Bhabha 141); however, her experience in the Castle's dungeons epitomizes what Bhabha describes as a "freak displacement"—a condition in which the enslaved "are of the world but not fully in it" (152). Gyasi opens Esi's narrative in medias res with the declaration, "The smell was unbearable" (28), withholding context and thereby creating a liminal space that mirrors the fragmented, disorienting, and performative nature of the enslaved experience. In this sense, the dungeon, as a "house of slave-memory," is not a resting place but rather the "unhomely, haunted site" (Bhabha 146) where Maame's spectral enslavement circulates, displacing Esi both spatially and psychologically.

Moreover, Esi's transition from the dungeon to the open water deepens her estrangement. As Gyasi writes, "They took them out into the light. The scent of water hit her nose. The taste of salt clung to her throat" (48), which shifts Esi from the dungeon's spatial unhomeliness to the abyssal void of the Middle Passage. As both a tangible reality and a haunting symbol, the ocean overwhelms Esi, marking her entry into what Achille Mbembé terms a "form of death-in-life" (21). The experience of slavery, resulting from a "triple loss: loss of a 'home,' loss of rights over his or her body, and loss of political status" (Mbembé 21), evokes a sense of rootlessness in Esi. She exists in an unhomely condition—neither fully alive nor completely dead, but in a "*state of injury*" (Mbembé 21)—where the very notion of home is fractured and inaccessible. This estrangement is compounded by the aesthetic alienation of slavery, in which the violence and suffering are privatized—removed from public visibility—and rendered into a silent, unhomely reality (Bhabha 144).

Esi's "freak displacement" also exists within what Bhabha identifies as "the ambivalence of psychic identification—the space where love and hate can be projected or inverted" (145). Within the dungeon, Esi actively retains fragments of memories, which she frames as "happy things" (Gyasi 28). However, these positive reflections are presented as hypotheticals—"Esi would have married him…when the palm trees could be tapped for wine" (Gyasi 28)—highlighting that even the most intimate recollections have become unfamiliar, distorted by trauma. In this way, Freud's concept of the uncanny—the return of something once familiar that has become strange through repression (634)—emerges as a central mode of psychic experience for Esi. Her idealized memories, once sources of comfort, are transformed into haunted sites, most evidently when a white British soldier sexually assaults her. In an attempt to dissociate, Esi "closed her eyes…pretending that she was the little girl in her mother's hut on a night that her father had come in…Wanting to understand what kept pleasure from turning into pain" (Gyasi 48). What was once an innocent observation becomes tainted by trauma, as she reflects, "She had been wrong when she'd watched her parents that night as they worked together in her mother's hut. There was no pleasure" (Gyasi 48). This distortion portrays Freud's notion of "constant recurrence[s] of the same thing" from the past (630), as Esi's traumatic rape mirrors her mother's assault by her enslaver. Another instance where Esi's past comfort collapses into present terror is when she remembers "walk[ing] for miles with her father before" while trudging towards her own enslavement (Gyasi 43). Here, the once homely memory is rendered unhomely, distorted by the rupture of enslavement into a form of psychological exile. However, Esi's resurgent thoughts—both because of and instead of colonialism—showcase the decolonial realm of acknowledging and resisting the ongoing violences and dispositions waged against African bodies. Decoloniality, then, emerges in *Homegoing* through what Mignolo and Walsh claim as the "energy of delinking (disconnect) to re-link (re-connect) with praxis of living" (147). Esi opposes and delinks herself from enslavement by recalling "happy things" (Gyasi 28); however, as her romanticized visions fracture under the weight of lived violence, they become an attempt to redo belonging and livelihood. Moreover, what Bhabha calls the "metaphoricity of the houses of racial memory" captures the way domestic spaces—once symbols of belonging or familiarity—are now haunted by the violence of history (147). The home becomes both spatially unhomely and psychologically uncanny, ultimately existing as an archive of familiar and strange trauma.

**The Unhomely Home and the Decolonial Return: Marjorie and Marcus**

Similar to Effia and Esi, the contemporary generation, Marjorie and Marcus, inherit a fractured and cyclical understanding of the home from their ancestors. For Marjorie—Effia's progeny—her existence epitomizes Bhabha's racial and cultural "in-between" unhomely subject, as she is Ghanaian by heritage but raised in the segregated American South. Her sense of home—whether in West Africa or the United States—is marked by cultural dissonance, as neither place fully represents nor embraces her. Marjorie's bicultural identity mirrors Effia's hybrid status as an African married to a European, which reflects the continuous return of past experiences (Freud 630) as well. Moreover, Marjorie's experiences are influenced by what Gabriele Schwab terms "haunting legacies"—"things hard to recount or even to remember, the results of a violence that holds an unrelenting grip on memory yet is deemed unspeakable" (1). Schwab draws largely from Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok's *The Shell and the Kernel*, which argues that "what haunts are not the dead, but the gaps left within us by the secrets of others" (171). In their work, Abraham and Torok advance a theory of transgenerational haunting, in which "repressed secrets are passed from one generation to the next if they are 'encrypted' as unprocessed and traumatic information" (Lane 3). Because Marjorie bears and inherits ancestral memories, she lives a life shaped by trauma passed down through generations, most notably through an overdeveloped fear of fire that stems from the haunting experiences of her grandmother, Akua, and her ancestors, Effia and Maame. Although Marjorie has never directly encountered fire, she recalls how "the firewoman of her grandmother's dreams had haunted her own waking hours" (Gyasi 274), thereby illustrating the uncanny return of Akua's and Maame's trauma as a psychological inheritance. This lingering trauma resurfaces when her schoolmate plays with fire, prompting Marjorie to ask him to put it away, as "every so often she could still feel her heart catch when she saw fire, as though the firewoman's shadow still lurked" (Gyasi 274). This moment symbolizes both the destructive force of the past and the reckoning she must face in the present. Marjorie also describes an overwhelming, inexplicable sensation: "This feeling came from time to time. Her grandmother called it a premonition, the body registering something that the world had yet to acknowledge" (Gyasi 281). Her grandmother's insight that "the evil in the world began as the evil in your own home" (Gyasi 242) highlights the intimate, homely origins of collective torment. In this regard, Marjorie's life is shaped by both psychic hauntings and colonial dislocation—living in unhomely spaces, carrying uncanny memories, and inheriting traumas that transform her into a site of contested identity. Furthermore, when her grandmother dies, Marjorie cries out, "*Me Mam-yee, me Maame. Me Mam-yee, me Maame*" (Gyasi 283), a haunting retelling of the name that Effia, severed from her mother by enslavement, could never speak. In this moment, as Bhabha describes, "the things…not [said];…the unnamed, the unmentioned" (144) of enslavement reemerge through the gaps of the present. This final act of mourning, calling out the unspoken and unknown name, enables Marjorie to bridge "the home and the world" as well as the past and the present (Bhabha 148). In doing so, she disobeys coloniality and transforms her fragmented unhomeliness into one of reclamation.

Marcus, Esi's last descendant, is likewise haunted by his past in different yet equally uncanny ways. While Marjorie is afraid of fire, Marcus's fear manifests as an aversion to water, particularly the ocean. When he was young, Marcus's father "told him that black people didn't like water because they were brought over on slave ships…The ocean floor was…littered with

black men" (Gyasi 284). This fear, rooted in the symbolic weight of Esi's experience in the Middle Passage, carries an uncanny influence as it is embedded in a traumatic memory Marcus himself never experienced but nevertheless inherits. For Marcus, his fear of water, thus, represents an inherited psychological mark—a "haunting legacy"—that unconsciously links him to his forebears' trauma (Schwab 1). In this way, as Christina Sharpe affirms, "the past that is not past reappears, always, to rupture the present" (9), creating a persistent sense of unhomeliness for Marcus. This fissure in his psyche transcends into his everyday experiences, particularly within his contemporary academic studies. As a doctoral candidate in sociology, Marcus struggles to hone the scope of his research as he "wanted to focus his work on the convict leasing system that had stolen years off his great-grandpa H's life" (Gyasi 289). However, he acknowledges that this racial apparatus cannot be examined in isolation, as "the deeper into research he got, the bigger the project got" (Gyasi 289), thereby illustrating the "recognition of the home-in-the-world" (Bhabha 141). By challenging the narratives of convict leasing, Marcus engages in a decolonial praxis of unearthing and reframing subjugated histories to dismantle colonial epistemologies. Beyond recalling history, Marcus reclaims history. As Bhabha notes, "it is precisely in these banalities that the unhomely stirs, as the violence of a racialized society falls most enduringly on the details of life:…how you can live, or not; what you can learn, or not" (149-150). For Marcus, then, the unhomely is not defined by overt violence, but by a more insidious form of accumulated silences and exclusions lodged in the ordinary. Though he is not enslaved or imprisoned like his ancestors, his freedom feels abstract, caught "between the banal act of freedom and its historic denial" (Bhabha 150). His recognition that the present is shaped by a heritage of exclusion and silence reveals that the unhomely is not just inherited—it is continually produced through lingering structures of coloniality. This ongoing negotiation reflects Marcus's effort to delink from those inherited colonial logics and to imagine new modes of being within the enduring aftermath of empire. His search for home thus becomes a decolonial act of re-existence—an insistence on what Mignolo and Walsh state as "an otherwise of thinking, sensing, believing, doing, and living" (4)—that captures how "she [Marjorie], and he, and everyone else, existed in it—not apart from it, but inside of it" (Gyasi 296) as a way of understanding and rearticulating how the past continues to inhabit the present.

In *Homegoing*'s closing chapter, Gyasi portrays a restorative return as Marjorie and Marcus embark on a physical and psychological journey to Ghana that begins to reconcile their inherited and fractured understandings of home. In a 2017 interview with Klaus Stierstorfer, Homi Bhabha observes that "emergence and return are complicit with the concept of home" (Kläger and Stierstorfer 15). His dual perception positions home as both a source of stability, which represents the "thereness" of homeliness, as well as a complex space of return after displacement, where the individual must negotiate reconnection and reconciliation (Kläger and Stierstorfer 14). Bhabha's framing sets the theoretical foundation for understanding Marjorie and Marcus's journey as a productive encounter with disorientation, relocation, and ambivalence that defines diasporic identity. As they arrive, their physical journey transitions into a confrontation with the hauntings of the past. Marjorie and Marcus embark on a tour that takes them to the Cape Coast Castle—Effia's and Esi's fractured and displaced home—where the present encounter becomes both a literal and symbolic homegoing, with Marcus remarking, "If ever there was a place to believe was haunted, this was it" (Gyasi 298). The Castle, as a space of ancestral rupture, functions as a site where the terror of slavery is imprinted upon the landscape, thereby disrupting any comforting

notion of home as a space of belonging. The dungeon's description—"Down into the belly of this large, beached beast…a room that still smelled, faintly" (Gyasi 298)—takes on a visceral quality, transforming the space into an almost tangible embodiment of the pain that remains embedded within the walls of the Castle. As Marcus sees a sign that reads "*Door of No Return*," he is abruptly confronted with the trauma of his ancestry, with his sudden sickness reflecting an inherited disorientation (Gyasi 299). Here, the Castle becomes a symbol of both familial connection and fracture, forcing Marjorie and Marcus to confront the ambivalent nature of the home. Thus, the concept of the unhomely emerges not as an intrusion of the external world into the home, but as a recognition that the home has never been separate from colonial forces.

Gyasi's *Homegoing* closes with Marcus and Marjorie challenging their uncanny and unspoken ancestral fears of water and fire, respectively. As Marcus "finally lifted his head up from the sea to cough, then breathe, he looked out at all the water before him, at the vast expanse of time and space," Marjorie "walked to where he stood, where the fire met the water" (Gyasi 300). Marjorie and Marcus confront their unhomely hauntings in order to resist the colonial traumas they embody, together forging a transtemporal moment of reconciliation and healing. Their collective journey to the land of their ancestors collapses centuries of separation, encapsulating Bhabha's vision of "vernacular cosmopolitanism"—the notion that one can exist both "at home abroad" or "abroad at home" (Huddart 53). By exploring the idea of home in both metaphorical and literal terms, Gyasi showcases Marjorie and Marcus's reconnection in Ghana, affirming home not as a static location, but as a space of productive disorientation and internal division, which ultimately results in a reclaimed kinship and familial understanding of their generational beginnings. Moreover, Marjorie's "Welcome home" to Marcus fulfills Bhabha's second temporality of home—the return made real—by bridging "the home and the world" into a lived, reconciled experience (148). With this simple expression, Marjorie reclaims Ghana's physicality and a longed-for, intergenerational unity that transcends the boundaries of time. This homegoing becomes a decolonial act of "re-existence," affirming the continuity of life beyond colonial rupture (Mignolo and Walsh 7). The gesture of "welcome" signals an ongoing process of repair in which the home is recast as a space of relational renewal rather than final resolution, especially since decoloniality is "not a done deal, a condition to be reached, or a stage of critical enlightenment" (Mignolo and Walsh 99). In returning, Gyasi's characters do not undo the past; they reconstitute its meaning, transforming inherited trauma into a renewed possibility of belonging. Thus, while Gyasi does not offer a complete resolution to the understanding of home, she ensures the conditional reclaiming of a communal space, noting that "Not everything could be put to rights…but I think there's something really satisfying about the idea of restoration" (Goyal and Gyasi 484). By concluding *Homegoing* with the phrase, "Welcome Home," Gyasi reimagines the home decolonially as both a site of ancestral hauntings and a space for collective restoration.

**Conclusion**

Thus, while the unhomely is, as Bhabha argues, a "paradigmatic post-colonial experience," it also resonates in "fictions that negotiate the powers of cultural difference in a range of historical conditions and social contradictions" (142) as exemplified in Yaa Gyasi's *Homegoing.* By beginning with a non-place through Maame, Gyasi evokes the unhomely, emphasizing the unsettling interplay between familiarity and unfamiliarity, the private and the public, and the concepts of home and world that reverberate across seven generations. From Effia's and Esi's

unhomely existence to Marjorie's and Marcus's decolonial return and the interrelatedness between them, Gyasi depicts the internal and external struggles of colonization within the home. As Mignolo and Walsh assert, "decoloniality is not a condition to be achieved in a linear sense," as coloniality will probably never disappear, but is the "ongoing serpentine movement toward possibilities of other modes of being" (81). Similarly, Bhabha states that "In the House of Fiction, there is a stirring of the unspoken, of the unhomely…today" (152), emphasizing the necessity of diasporic subjects resisting the dominant order within the borders, margins, fissures, and cracks of their lived experiences. Gyasi utilizes the unhomely condition present within Effia's, Esi's, Marjorie's, and Marcus's conceptualizations of home as a decolonial method to reclaim restricted spaces. Through their distinct yet interconnected ways of delinking and relinking colonial variations, they work to construct an otherwise decolonized reality shaped by the possibilities of redefinition. Both as individual and collective processes, the characters that I have explored both portray the duality between homing—refusing aspects of coloniality—and (un)homing—recognizing and inhabiting coloniality. Homegoing, then, as a process of returning to an originary place—both physically and psychologically—does not signify finality, as the concept of the home remains fluid and elusive. *Homegoing*'s tentative reconciliation of the unhomely condition emphasizes the critical importance of disrupting dominant narratives, wherein the "world forcibly [enters] the house of fiction in order to invade, alarm, divide, dispossess" (Bhabha 152).

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