THE TRANSMISSION OF TRAUMA IN TONI MORRISON'S *BELOVED* AND YAA GYASI'S *HOMEGOING*

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Introduction

The popularity of slavery as a subject in novels, films, documentaries and public discourse only emerged in the last few decades of the twentieth century and has grown so exponentially that, as slavery historian Ira Berlin wrote in 2004, it "has a greater presence in American life now than at any time since the Civil War ended" (Berlin 1251). Before this time, the focus of public discourse on American history tended to shy away from slavery, along with other topics that were considered to be too harrowing or shameful. As Berlin explains, there was a deliberate attempt to exclude the topic of slavery from public discourse and politics (1257). Though it is understandable that many Americans did not want to discuss the gruesomeness of their problematic past, as many of them are descendants of the oppressors, this does not mean that silencing the past is excusable. In her interview with Christina Davis, Toni Morrison points out that there was also a great lack of discourse surrounding slavery within African-American communities. Morrison believes that it is very important for African-Americans to reclaim this particular part of their history as there is "a great deal of obfuscation and distortion and erasure, so that the presence and the heartbeat of black people has been systematically annihilated in many, many ways and the job of recovery is ours" (qtd. in Davis 224). By writing *Beloved* (1987) with a (formerly) enslaved woman as the protagonist, Morrison not only addresses slavery and the trauma that slavery entails from the perspective of a (formerly) enslaved female character, but she also reclaims the history of the vast majority of African-Americans. As Linda Krumholz argues, "the repression of the historical past is as psychologically damaging as the repression of personal trauma" and *Beloved* confronts readers with slavery and its legacies as giving rise to personal traumas as well as a national trauma (395-396). In her writing, Morrison challenges "the notion that the end of institutional slavery brings about freedom by depicting the emotional and psychological scars of slavery as well as the persistence of racism" (Krumholz 396). Besides breaking the taboo

surrounding slavery, Morrison also specifically addresses the Middle Passage with her dedication of "Sixty million and more." As Morrison explains in an interview with Angels Carabí, the Middle Passage, during which a large number of people died, was "violently disremembered … Millions of people disappeared without a trace and there is not one monument, anywhere, to pay homage to them because they never arrived safely on shore" (Carabí 106-107). By starting *Beloved* with a dedication to the disremembered, Morrison not only sets the stage for the novel as a story connected to slavery, but also aims to create a 'monument' for those who were enslaved, those who survived the Middle Passage and those who did not.

While Morrison wrote *Beloved* during a time when slavery was only marginally represented in public discourse, Yaa Gyasi wrote her novel *Homegoing* (2016) in a time when the topic of slavery received much more public attention and even had led to the emergence of a literary genre, sometimes called the "neo-slave narrative" (Rushdy 3). However, while Morrison broke the silence surrounding slavery, Gyasi breaks the taboo in public discourse around the roles of Africans themselves in the slave trade: one of the two family branches she describes in her novel is involved with capturing and selling other Africans to European traders. Ghana, where Gyasi was born and lived until she was about two and emigrated to the U.S. with her family, is a country where "the taboo surrounding the discussion of the slave trade remains active, in part because the ancestors of powerful members of the community were involved," as many prominent families that hold powerful positions stem from a lineage that can be traced back to slave traders (Okudzeto 356). According to Ghanese scholar and artist Senam Okudzeto, while some of these trader families might "not know precisely what their ancestors traded in," there "does not seem to be much effort to find out more about it" (350). In an interview, Gyasi explains that she only started to learn about the African involvement in the slave trade during a visit to Ghana's Cape Coast Castle where the tour

guide told her "that British soldiers who lived and worked in the castle often married local women – something I didn't know" (qtd. in Kellaway). Just as, according to Morrison, African-Americans have to confront the slavery past in order to heal, so do, Gyasi suggests, many West African countries, such as Ghana. The lack of public discourse surrounding African involvement in the slave trade is the result of a repression of the traumas that stem from this past, which means that this collective trauma is not addressed. Whilst it might be painful for West-Africans to take a closer look at their history connected to the transatlantic slave trade, it is necessary to do so not only because it will create a more complete history for a country, family or even an individual, but also because this confrontation is needed in order to start healing from this traumatic past. This does not mean that Gyasi's novel solely focuses on the complex history of African slave traders, but it comprises half of the novel and addresses the shame that later generations feel towards this part of their history by suggesting it is a repressed collective trauma. Another important aspect of *Homegoing* is the narrative of the members of the enslaved family branch and how they, and their descendants, are forced to deal with slavery and the notion of being treated as less-than-human, even long after slavery was abolished. Gyasi felt it was important to write *Homegoing* because for many people "slavery is something we have not gotten over, it is on people's minds and it affects us still" (qtd. in Kellaway).

Beloved and *Homegoing* lend themselves to a comparative analysis because they not only both deal with the trauma of slavery, but also give literary expression to way these traumas affect multiple generations, directly and indirectly and in different ways. Drawing on studies of trauma and trauma transmission by scholars such as Cathy Caruth, Gabriele Schwab, Tihamér Bako and Katalin Zana, and Ernst van Alphen, this thesis will examine how Morrison's *Beloved* and Gyasi's *Homegoing* represent the notion of transgenerational trauma in their novels. I will analyze the narrative strategies and imagery used in *Beloved* and

Homegoing to represent the transmission and the working through of trauma and how the main characters in these novels are affected by the trauma of slavery across the generations. I will argue that, while in *Beloved* Denver is traumatized not by being enslaved but by living with a mother who is traumatized by slavery, in *Homegoing* the recurrent tropes of a black necklace, fire, and fear of water in the stories of the various generations suggest that the collective trauma of slavery is transmitted from one generation to the next.

Chapter 1: Trauma Theory and Transgenerational Trauma

According to the OED, the word 'trauma' was first recorded in the English language in 1684; Steven Blankaart coined the word in his medical dictionary, where it referred to "a wound, or external bodily injury in general" ("Trauma"). The meaning of the word, however, has expanded since the late nineteenth century, as it can also be used to refer to "a psychic injury, esp. one caused by emotional shock the memory of which is repressed and remains unhealed," making it a psychic wound instead of a physical one ("Trauma"). The (transgenerational) trauma theories that I will use as a theoretical framework will refer to psychic traumas and their effects. Two studies that I will draw on are Cathy Caruth's *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative and History* (1996) and Gabriele Schwab's *Haunting Legacies: Violent Histories and Transgenerational Trauma* (2010). It is important to note that even though Schwab focuses on the transgenerational trauma connected to the Holocaust in her book, she believes that her "main theoretical explorations and arguments are pertinent to violent histories and transgenerational haunting more generally," such as colonialism and slavery, which is why this work and other works that include research on the Holocaust are included in this thesis, which focuses on slavery (8). Psychic trauma occurs when an individual experiences something that is so overwhelming that it cannot "be fully known and is therefore not available to consciousness," meaning that it does not fit into existing frames of reference (Caruth 4). Trauma can present itself in multiple ways, but "in its most general definition, trauma describes an overwhelming experience of sudden or catastrophic events in which the response to the event occurs in the often delayed, uncontrolled repetitive appearance of hallucinations and other intrusive phenomena" (11). This can have such a severe impact on an individual or a group that they transmit their trauma to someone else; this can happen with other people of their own generation as well as later generations.

The consequence of repressing trauma is that the trauma will inevitably return, or as Cathy Caruth puts it, “the experience of a trauma repeats itself, exactly and unremittingly, through the unknowing acts of the survivor and against his very will” (2). Disassociation from trauma is one of the ways in which trauma can be repressed. The decision to not think about, or repress, the trauma can be a deliberate action, something that someone is purposely repressing, but it can also be the mind’s unconscious response to trauma. However, as Schwab explains, traumatic memories can and will be unconsciously triggered by subtle sense experiences, like a certain smell, sound, or words, and might also reappear in the victim’s dreams, as the body is no longer able to consciously repress the trauma. The traumatic memories “come in memories of the body and its somatic enactment,” entrapping the subject in “the prison house of repetition compulsion.” Therefore, even when the subject is consciously working hard at repressing their trauma, “banning thoughts and memories,” they will “become a body in pain, leading a somatic existence severed from consciously or affectively lived history” (15). As Jennifer Yusin points out, trauma can also resurface when the subject is confronted with a situation that either resembles the threat that the original trauma posed, or in a different type of situation that frightens the subject (243). Trauma can also resurface in the subject’s unconscious when they are dreaming. The fact that people will always, in one way or another, be reminded of their trauma and therefore have to face their trauma does not automatically mean that people work through this trauma. Facing traumatic memories and their influence in an attempt to slowly start healing from a violent past is a decision that has to be consciously made. The decision to face one’s trauma is crucial, for “unless trauma is worked through and integrated, it will be passed on to the next generation” (Schwab 59). As Schwab explains, the most common way of trauma to be transmitted to another person is from parent to child. According to Schwab, this transmission of trauma occurs on the part of victims as well as perpetrators and often occurs unconsciously (16).

As Tihamér Bako and Katalin Zana point out, a "traumatic experience deeply shocks the traumatized person's feeling of security in the world." Even when that individual, or victim, is unable to speak about their trauma, their behavior, reactions, actions (or lack thereof) can create a "transgenerational atmosphere," a place where time and space are distorted in such a way that the threat of the traumatic event is still strongly felt by the victim and influences them in the present (273). When children are born into this transgenerational atmosphere, they experience two different worlds: "the frozen world of the past and the existing world of the present" (274). Bako and Zana further explain the transgenerational atmosphere and the transmission of trauma as follows:

> Generations can transmit trauma through more than one channel. First, there is a level of trauma experienced in a patient's own relationships .... The parents' relation to the world is reflected in their relation with their child, thereby establishing later patterns of attachment. Beyond the relational level, however, there exists a second level where transmission is scenic or non-verbal. At this level, the patient's experiences can be difficult to reach through verbal therapy and cannot be understood merely from an early relation or life event. This is the world encompassed by the transgenerational atmosphere. (279)

This transgenerational atmosphere is both helpful and harmful, because the fact that the trauma is shared means that the victim of the original trauma is no longer alone, or the later generation might be able to see this shared trauma as a way to connect with their parent. However, the effects of sharing a trauma also means that the later generation can be negatively affected by this violent and traumatizing past (284).

Another relevant term with regards to the transmission of trauma, is Marianna Hirsch's concept of "postmemory" (22), which refers to the memory that the second generation has regarding the traumatic past of their parent. The parent will have experienced

the trauma first-hand and has direct memories of this, even when they are repressed or there are gaps within their memories, but their children will not have these direct memories. Hirsch argues that the children of traumatized parents "grow up dominated by narratives that preceded their birth whose own belated stories are evacuated by the stories of the previous generation shaped by traumatic events that can neither be understood nor recreated" (22). They have to create the narrative of this violent past with stories, photographs, or writings, whilst also recognizing what certain silences might mean . Using Hirsch's concept of postmemory, Schwab argues that the children of traumatized parents can "become avid readers of silences and memory traces hidden" in their parents faces, while wondering if they will be able to ever create a complete picture of the past. This postmemory does not only include the trauma but the effects of the trauma as well; in some cases it even mostly consists of the effects as the second generation is unaware of the initial trauma (26). The lack of knowledge of the original trauma, however, does not mean that this trauma will not influence later generations, as the "traces of psychic life can be transmitted from person to person and from generation to generation" without the previous generation ever haven spoken of the trauma behind it (62). The children of traumatized parents, according to Schwab, "become avid readers of silences and memory traces hidden in a face that is frozen in grief, a forced smile that does not feel quite right, an apparently unmotivated flare-up of rage, or chronic depression" (26). The deliberate silencing of trauma is the most common way for trauma to be transmitted onto the next generation (45).

As Schwab points out, one of the reasons why the silencing of trauma has such an impact is that it often involves a sense of guilt and shame (59). For some people this could mean shame due to their own personal "guilt and shame, their crimes," but many victims also feel shame, whether it is shame because they survived where others did not or shame because of what had happened to them, feeling "what should be the aggressor's shame" (87, 174).

Schwab mostly discusses the feeling of shame on the part of perpetrator, claiming that this shame is so profound that their children, despite being unaware of the cause, will grow up in an environment that is filled with shame, absorbing "the guilt and shame they could *feel* rather than overtly *experience* in their parents," and eventually continue to transmit this guilt and shame onto their own children (107). Despite Schwab's focus on the descendants of perpetrators, the same could be said for the descendants of victims, because their feelings of shame and guilt are also transmittable, especially when they are forceful. Both Caruth and Schwab discuss the notion that the repression of trauma, according to Alexander and Torok's notion of the burying of the past in psychic "crypts," creates a haunting feeling. The trauma will remain in the background, constantly present, and reappear when it is not expected. This feeling of being haunted by something unknown, or a past that is known but is not addressed, will be transmitted across generations.

It is important to note, however, that the notions of transmission of trauma and postmemory are contested in some scholarly debates. While some critics, like Schwab, consider the transmission of trauma to be the transmission of the original trauma to someone else, there are other critics who believe that it is not possible for this original trauma to be transmitted to others. Ernst van Alphen, for example, argues that while the children of traumatized parents can sustain some form of trauma whilst growing up, this trauma is actually created because they are raised by a traumatized parent. While these two are related, the problems that the children of traumatized parents "have to struggle with are of a very different nature than those of the survivor parent" (482). As van Alphen argues that there is a difference between growing up with a traumatized parent and inheriting that initial trauma, he also strongly disagrees with Hirsch's concept of 'postmemory'. Van Alphen argues that memories are the remains of the actual events, only experienced by those who lived through those events. As a result of this, it is not possible to speak of postmemory for the 'memories'

of the children of traumatized parents, because “memories are missing, by definition.” Even when children gather knowledge to assemble an idea of what has traumatized their parents, this is based on historical knowledge and the memories their parents described, which is not the same as having memories of the original events. According to van Alphen, using the term ‘postmemory’ implies that these ‘memories’ are being inherited from the parents, a continuity that does not exist, as the children are creating an image of the past instead of actually remembering it (485, 486). Van Alphen, therefore, believes that growing up with a traumatized parent creates a new trauma, instead of a transmission of the original trauma. As Jennifer Yusin points out, postcolonial scholars also criticize the Westernization within trauma theory because many scholars attempt to use their Western concepts of trauma and apply those to non-Western traumas (239). Yusin argues that scholars need to focus more on how to apprehend traumas from a postcolonial perspective, paying attention to “the relation between what/who comes before and what/who comes after as structural, mutable, and transformable,” instead of the Western tendency to focus on how to name a certain traumatic response (253).

According to Caruth, trauma theory draws on imaginative literature; psychoanalysts such as Freud, whose work strongly influenced Caruth’s own theoretical model, turned “to literature to describe traumatic experience … because literature, like psychoanalysis, is interested in the complex relation between knowing and not knowing” (3). Schwab also analyzes the ways in which trauma is represented in literature, focusing on the way that authors address the theme of trauma on both an individual and a collective level, particularly the way that it is passed on to other generations. As she puts it, it is “through literature … that one can tap into experiences that were never fully known but have nonetheless left their traces” (19). It can narrate the unspeakable and draw attention to collective traumas that are so substantial that they will be present in, or haunt, many generations. As Schwab emphasizes,

literary works can help us work through historical traumas, such as the Holocaust, colonialism, and slavery, the consequences of which still impact the lives of victims today. Literary works like *Beloved* and *Homegoing* not only represent the effects of the traumas of slavery and the slave trade across generations of both victims and those complicit in their victimization, they also suggest that it is important to acknowledge these traumatic histories.

Chapter 2: The Transmission of Trauma in *Beloved*

Toni Morrison's novel *Beloved* is a historical novel about slavery, but as Hannes Bergthaller points out, it is "not so much about slavery itself as about its effects on those who live in its wake" (120). The core themes of the novel are those of trauma and healing, portrayed by characters belonging to three different generations that are all, in one way or another, affected by the trauma of slavery. Baby Suggs, who belongs to the older generation, was enslaved for most of her life but bought free by her son Halle's hard work, to live as a free woman only for a few years. She has a sober outlook on life and attempts to keep her emotions at bay because she was taught that her feelings and opinions did not matter. Halle's wife, Sethe, who belongs to the second generation represented in the novel, escaped slavery in order to protect her children and goes to extreme lengths to prevent them from being returned to slavery. She believes that it is better to leave the past in the past and does not realize that the repression of her traumas does not only have a negative impact on herself, but on her family as well. Denver, Sethe's daughter, has not experienced slavery herself, and therefore believes that it does not concern her, as she constantly refuses to know more about her mother's troubled past because "[t]he present alone interested" her (141).

All three women, and the generations they represent, are victims of slavery, even though they also offer resistance. However, their refusal to acknowledge the past only solidifies their traumatic histories which continue to haunt them, both literally, as the ghost of Beloved haunts their house, and figuratively, in their own minds. It is important for them to "remember their past and thereby to 're-remember,' to heal, both themselves and their fractured community" (Bergthaller 118). The novel has a third-person narrator, but the focalization shifts between the main characters, Sethe, Denver, Paul D, and Baby Suggs. Therefore, the reader is able to gain insight into what these characters are seeing and feeling, even characters that are no longer alive in the narrative present. As Linda Krumholz explains,

in "*Beloved* the reader's process of reconstructing the fragmented story parallels Sethe's psychological recovery: Repressed fragments of the (fictionalized) personal and historical past are retrieved and reconstructed" (396). While the trauma that is central to the novel is Sethe's infanticide, the reader gradually discovers the underlying traumas that have led Sethe to carry out the gruesome murder of her child. As Sheldon George points out, this narrative strategy not only allows the reader to follow Sethe's psychological journey, but also "encourages us to experience Sethe's pain, to insert ourselves into its narrative" (120). *Beloved* describes how the traumas of slavery do not only affect those who experienced it, but later generations as well, especially when the original traumas are repressed. The novel also portrays how important it is to narrate traumas to start healing from them. This chapter will discuss the ways in which *Beloved* represents trauma and its impact on multiple generations. I will argue that, even though the novel deals with transgenerational trauma as a result of repressing trauma, Denver is traumatized by living with her traumatized mother, and not because Sethe has transmitted her traumas onto Denver.

Sethe's (Traumatic) Journey

In the beginning of the novel, Sethe is working very hard to repress the traumatic events that are haunting her. While the reader is introduced to glimpses of the cause and symptoms of Sethe's traumas in the opening pages, it also immediately becomes evident that she is consciously repressing them, or attempting to do so, as "she worked hard to remember as close to nothing as was safe." Even though she is attempting to repress her traumas, "her brain was devious," as the slightest sounds, smells or sights could unleash the repressed trauma during moments when nothing "would be on her mind" (6). Even when Sethe tries to focus on happy memories, such as those of her children, the repressed trauma always resurfaces as a flashback or in other forms, which is why she tries to remember nothing. As she is convinced

that talking about the past could harm her in the present, and even in the future, she believes that "the future was a matter of keeping the past at bay," not just for her but for her daughter as well. Sethe considers the act of "keeping [Denver] from the past that was still waiting for her" as "all that mattered" (51). However, as Gabriele Schwab argues, "unless trauma is worked through and integrated, it will be passed on to the next generation" (59). Sethe's commitment to repressing her trauma is compared to "working dough" and in her view there is "Nothing better than that to start the day's serious work of beating back the past" (86). Sethe's act of pushing down her past is compared to pushing the dough over and over again. She does not realize, however, that her repressed memories keep resurfacing precisely because they are being repressed. As Cathy Caruth argues, "the experience of a trauma repeats itself, exactly and unremittingly, through the unknowing acts of the survivor and against his very will" (2). This means that, even though Sethe believes the repression of her trauma is necessary for her to survive, she actually will not be able to psychologically move forward until she confronts her trauma.

The arrival of Paul D, who was a part of her past as a fellow-slave at Sweet Home, forces Sethe to deal with some of her traumas because, she can finally begin to experience them by talking about them to him. In an attempt to catch up with each other, Sethe starts sharing some glimpses of the violent history she has always attempted to repress. In answer to Paul D's question about the scars on her back, the first of Sethe's traumas that is narrated is the scene where "those boys came in there and took my milk …. Held me down and took it" (19). She does not have to describe in detail how her back was split open, because Paul D, as a former slave at Sweet Home himself, is able to understand the things that she does not explicitly tell. Sethe realizes later that her "story was bearable because it was his as well" (116). Paul D can serve as a co-witness to Sethe's traumas, and vice versa, because he has also been enslaved, unlike Denver. Although Sethe is able to narrate some of her traumas to

Paul D, it is Sethe's resurrected daughter Beloved who teaches her "the profound satisfaction" of storytelling, which "amazed Sethe … because every mention of her past life hurt" (69). As Bergthaller explains, Beloved's "presence induces the characters around her … not only to remember the past they have been repressing, but also to shape it into narratives and relate these narratives to Beloved and to each other" (122). As Beloved asks for stories about events that Sethe has repressed, "she began telling …, she found herself wanting to, liking it" (69). Beloved initially has a positive influence on Sethe, because narrating her own traumas can "help the victims of slavery … to remember their past and thereby to 're-remember,' to heal, both themselves and their fractured community" (Bergthaller 118).

In response to Beloved's questions Sethe opens herself up to gradually retrieving memories of the past and re-remembers traumatic events related to her mother that she had repressed. When Beloved asks Sethe if her mother never did her hair, Sethe explains that she only has a few memories of her, because she "didn't see her but a few times." Even when Sethe was a baby, she did not experience her mother, because she "sucked [breastmilk] from another woman [named Nan] whose job it was" (72). The fact that Sethe knows that her mother never got the opportunity to breastfeed her is very important, because it explains why Sethe was so obsessed with giving her milk to her children, no matter the circumstances. As pointed out by Gilda Graff, the attachment issues that a parent has due to their trauma often creates a problematic attachment relationship, which can result in either the smothering or the abandonment of a child (191). It is Sethe's own distant relationship with her mother that contributed to Sethe smothering her children, as she became obsessed with them. Sethe did not even know her own mother well enough to recognize her by her face, and her mother taught her to recognize her by the "circle and cross burnt right in the skin" on her rib (72). Sethe's ability to recognize her mother ironically depended on the mark that branded her as someone's property, something which Sethe was unable to understand as a child, but even

then, she still realized “how important this was” (73). When reclaiming her memories of her mother, Sethe discovers that she is not the first one to commit infanticide, as her mother committed infanticide more than once. Sethe remembers that Nan told her that her mother had other children, but that she “threw them all away but you,” all of them without names. The reason for Sethe’s mother to commit infanticide with all her other children is that they were the result of rape by white men. She kept Sethe, however, giving her “the name of the black man” who Sethe’s mother “put her arms around” (74). Even though Sethe’s reasoning behind her own infanticide is different from that of her mother, it could be said that her own act of infanticide is something that Sethe has inherited from her, a repetition compulsion. Whilst in some cases, such as Denver’s, it could be said that the trauma is not inherited by the child but a result of growing up with a traumatized parent, Sethe did not grow up with her mother, meaning there is an argument to be made that this specific trauma has been transmitted from Sethe’s mother to Sethe.

Even though Sethe has opened herself up to retrieving memories of the past, this healing process is put to a halt when she is finally ready to tell Paul D about her infanticide. Even with Baby Suggs, who was there when schoolteacher came to take her and her children back after their escape, she never talked about it: “She and Baby Suggs had agreed without saying so that it was unspeakable” (69). Later in the novel, however, Sethe is confronted by Paul D, who shows her a newspaper clipping “with a picture drawing of a woman who favored Sethe” that was made after she committed infanticide (183). Sethe tries to explain to him, “I couldn’t let her nor any of em live under schoolteacher. That was out” and that she “took and put my babies where they’d be safe.” Confronted with the story of the murder, however, Paul D refuses to listen and to become a co-witness to her trauma, believing that this version of Sethe was different from the one he once knew, as she now “talked about safety with a handsaw” (192, 193). His inability to understand Sethe’s actions, leads him to compare

her to an animal, as he tells her she "got two feet," "not four," without realizing why he said it, suggesting that she should know better (194). Paul D, here, treats Sethe the same way as schoolteacher, as less-than-human. Sethe is still unable to fully narrate, and therefore bear witness to, her own trauma. From this moment, she is engulfed by the past, as she locks herself up inside the house with Denver and Beloved, believing that whatever "is going on outside my door ain't for me. The world is in this room. This here's all there is and all there needs to be" (215).

When Sethe finally realizes who Beloved actually is, she feels as though a weight has been lifted off her shoulders, but instead of facing the trauma of Beloved's death, she unconsciously becomes engulfed by it. At first, Sethe believes that now she does not "have to remember nothing. I don't even have to explain. She understands it all" (216). As she now finally recognizes Beloved as her daughter resurrected, she feels no need to acknowledge the trauma surrounding her death because she believes that the resurrection means that she "can forget" her violent act (217). Sethe also believes that Beloved understands why she had to kill her, that this was an act of protection. However, because Beloved is "an embodiment of the repressed past," Sethe's acknowledgment of Beloved as her daughter is not enough (Krumholz 400). While Sethe believes that she can become a peaceful family with her two daughters at first, eventually Beloved consumes so much of Sethe's time and energy that there is nothing left for anything else, not even Denver. Beloved becomes insatiable; no matter how much information Sethe gives her about the past, "the more Sethe began to talk, explain, describe how much she had suffered," the less this information seems to matter to Beloved (284). Even though Beloved started out as a positive, healing influence to Sethe, the compulsive, repetitive narration of all her traumas eventually entrap Sethe in a draining relationship with the past. By constantly repeating the same stories of the past, they no longer have the healing power that narrating traumas can provide, and instead Sethe becomes stuck

in a traumatic re-enactment. While “Sethe was trying to make up for the handsaw; Beloved was making her pay for it”; the potentially healing aspect of Sethe’s narration of her traumas has faded into an unhealthy obsession with the past (295). As Sheldon George explains, “Beloved makes present the traumatic past of slavery, repeating it in Sethe’s life,” something which Sethe does not see, as she confuses Beloved and her presence with the parts of her that were more precious than her own life. As Sethe is so frightened to lose Beloved again and becomes attached to her trauma, she ignores the impact on her own health and well-being: “Beloved becomes a cherished internal pain that Sethe refuses to give up” (George 119).

As Sethe is trapped inside her traumatic recall of the day schoolteacher came, she is no longer able to discern between reality and traumatic reenactment. Towards the end of the novel, Denver gets herself a job working “the night shift” of taking care of Mr. and Miss Bodwin and on the day she starts Mr. Bodwin comes to pick her up. When Mr. Bodwin arrives, Sethe is so consumed by her trauma that she is unable to differentiate this event from the event that led her to murder her daughter eighteen years earlier. To her, it is schoolteacher “coming for her best thing,” a repetition of the moment when she decided to kill her daughter because she felt it was safer for her to be dead than re-enslaved (308). The repetition of this moment can be seen in the way that this scene is narrated, as it is almost identical to the way in which the original trauma occurred, right down to the “hummingbirds [who] stick needle beaks right” into her head (308). Where, during the original trauma, Sethe turned towards her children, she now decides to target the man that she believes is a threat to her children, in an attempt to right the wrongs of the past. As Krumholz explains, “The reconstruction of the scene of the trauma completes the psychological cleansing of the ritual, and exorcises Beloved from Sethe's life” (403). Whilst, of course Sethe cannot rewrite history by going after the white man she sees coming for her daughter, she is finally able to break free from her

entrapment as she is no longer repeating the same story over and over again, but is finally acting.

Baby Suggs, the Healer

The role of Baby Suggs in the narrative is that of a healer, as her few years as a free woman were spent helping others heal from their traumas of slavery, though in the end she too was defeated when Sethe committed infanticide. As soon as she is free, she reclaims her own body when she looks at her hands and realizes that "[t]hese hands belong to me. These *my* hands," and is affected by the sound of her own heartbeat (166). Baby Suggs is no longer anybody's property and is no longer defined by others, but finally has the opportunity to claim her own identity, to see herself as a person. It is this insight into the meaning of freedom that allows Baby Suggs to help others heal from the trauma of slavery. As Bergthaller argues, "[t]hose who suffer from the trauma of slavery experience their bodies as fragmented or threatened by fragmentation. Overcoming the trauma means to restore the integrity of their bodies and to reclaim them as their own" (126). While this does not mean that Baby Suggs has overcome her trauma by reclaiming her body, it does mean that she is making an important first step towards healing from her trauma.

After her whole body was beaten down by more than sixty years of enslavement, she decides that "she had nothing left to make a living with but her heart" and "became an unchurched preacher," gathering the community of formerly enslaved men and women in the Clearing (103). The Clearing is an open field in the woods, but, as Krumholz suggests, the name also "signifies the necessity for a psychological cleansing from the past, a space to encounter painful memories safely and rest from them." Performing cleansing rituals, which Baby Suggs creates herself, she tries to heal former slaves "and enable them to seek a reconciliation with their memories, whose scars survive long (even generations) after the

experience of slavery has ended" (Krumholz 397). The way in which Baby Suggs creates and performs the rituals is also very important, as it "combines Christian symbolism and African ritual expressions, as is common in the African-American church" (398). It is evident that she rejects certain aspects of Christian doctrine because she has experienced how the Bible was used to justify anything: she "did not tell them to clean up their lives or to go and sin no more. She did not tell them they were blessed." Instead, she tells her community that "the only grace they could have was the grace they could imagine" (103). She provides her community with the opportunity and space to find grace by "reacquaint[ing] themselves with their bodies that [had] been violated by slavery," as she encourages them to love every single thing about themselves that they were taught not to love by those who once enslaved them (Ng 231).

However, Baby Suggs's chance to experience a reasonably fulfilling life as a free woman, engaged in preaching and healing is cut short soon after Sethe's arrival. This arrival in itself brings mixed emotions for Baby Suggs, as she is elated to see her daughter-in-law but also realizes that Halle's absence does not bode well. The darkness spreads when her community withdraws itself from her because "she had overstepped, given too much, offended them by excess" (163). After a feast, which started off as a celebration for Stamp Paid's "labor and his love," to be shared with others because it was too much food for just them, but ended up with overflowing amounts of food, the community wonders "Where does she get it all, Baby Suggs holy? Why is she and hers always the center of things?" (160, 161). The generosity of Baby Suggs and her attempts to help others have been twisted into something bad, as the other members of the community believe that the powers she possesses to do these things should belong to God, not to Baby Suggs and "it made them furious." Their anger is driven by jealousy, because Baby Suggs "had not even escaped slavery – had, in fact been *bought out* of it," still has a family, and hence in their view did not experience slavery

the same painful way that they had (162). As a result, they fail to warn her and Sethe when schoolteacher approaches 124 to reclaim Sethe and her children.

Sethe's infanticide has a destructive impact on Baby Suggs, not just because she saw it happen, but because she had to deal with its aftermath. She had to clean the two boys who were covered in the blood of their younger sister, and liberate Denver from her mother's arms. Moreover, Sethe's attitude after the murder turned the rest of the community against her family even more. When Sethe is arrested for the murder of her daughter, the community feels that "her head [was] a bit too high" and "[h]er back a little too straight," and she does not show enough shame or remorse for her actions (179). After everything that she had to endure – enslavement, the loss of all her children "to the people who chewed up her life and spit it out like a fishbone," and the loss of her grandchild – Baby Suggs' spirit is finally broken by the reaction of the community. After everything she went through "to have that community step back and hold itself at a distance – well, it could wear out even a Baby Suggs, holy" (209). The rejection of the community, initially due to their jealousy but strengthened by her daughter-in-law's murderous act, is more than she can take at this point in her life, and she decides to lie in bed for the rest of her days. However, as Andrew H.S. Ng points out, more than by the rejection of the community, her spirit is "defeated by slavery's cruelty" (238). This is evident when she "announced to Sethe and Denver the lesson she had learned from her sixty years a slave and ten years free: that there was no bad luck in the world but whitepeople. 'They don't know when to stop'" (122-123). However, even if the rejection by her community is the final blow, their withdrawal too is a response to their experiences during slavery.

Denver's Journey

Although she belongs to the generation that was never enslaved, Denver's life is still shaped by slavery, its aftermath, and the trauma of her mother's infanticide. Immediately after Sethe murdered her sister, one-month-old "Denver took her mother's milk right along with the blood of her sister" (179). Denver's literal ingestion of her sister's blood together with her mother's milk can be read as a metaphor for the transmission of traumas of slavery from one generation to the next, from mother to child. As I have argued, the most common way of transmission of trauma is from parent to child (Schwab 16). As Florian Bast puts it, "Denver's consumption of her sister's blood thus forms a powerful image of transgenerational transmission of trauma: Denver is being fed both the blood of her sister, killed by a former slave so she would never have to be one, and the literalization of her family's torturous history" (1080). Despite the ingestion of her sister's blood, Denver does not know why her mother killed her sister, because Sethe is determined to keep the past away from her. This shows that, even though the ingestion of Beloved's blood as a baby can be read as symbolically representing a transmission of the trauma that caused her mother to commit infanticide, Sethe still lacks knowledge about the original trauma.

Sethe's attempts to repress the past and keep it away from Denver harm Denver instead of protecting her. Denver grew up in a house that "was spiteful" as it was haunted by the ghost of her dead sister, representing the trauma of her murder (3). This house is a physical representation of what Tihamér Bako and Katalin Zana call a "transgenerational atmosphere," a place where second generations "experience the world as split," living in "the frozen world of the past and the existing world of the present" (274). In the beginning of the novel, it becomes clear that as a result of Sethe's infanticide Denver is isolated from the rest of the community, which ignores Sethe and her daughter due to the infanticide. Even her own two brothers were so afraid that their mother might kill them too that they left. Denver herself

shares this fear; as she puts it in an interior monologue later in the novel, she "spent all of my outside self loving Ma'am so she wouldn't kill me" (245). As the house had been haunted by the ghost of the daughter that was murdered, there is no escape from this trauma. Even though they are unable to connect this haunting to the repression of trauma, it is evident that they are possessed by their trauma. Both Sethe and Denver are unable to fully leave their home. Denver is physically able to leave her home, as seen by her flashbacks to going to 'school' or the day they go to the carnival, but, like her mother, mentally she is trapped inside her home and its surroundings. Both Denver and Sethe are entrapped by trauma, or as Krumholz puts it, "Denver is as trapped by Sethe's past and Sethe's inability to find psychological freedom as Sethe herself is" (404).

The psychological consequences of Denver's sense of isolation, caused by Sethe's traumas that led to her violent act, are clearly shown when she reflects that the "loneliness wore her out. *Wore her out*" (35). Denver is not even able to fully connect to her mother, not just because she is afraid that whatever it was that made her mother kill might happen again, or because Sethe is unable to tell her everything. What also isolates her from her mother and others is that she "never consciously experienced the trauma of slavery" which leads "to a significant difference in her relationship to her own (hi)story" (Bast 1080). Sethe's decision to keep Denver in the dark about her past is deliberate, as she sees it as another form of protection. However, as Krumholz explains, this "unacknowledged past keeps Denver from moving into the future" (404). This extreme feeling of loneliness is what causes Denver to cling on to the ghost of her sister, even before she reappears in bodily form, as it is the only other company she knows. It also "made her secretive," as "[y]ears of haunting had dulled her in ways you wouldn't believe and sharpened her in ways you wouldn't believe either" (117). This secretive attitude is another thing that Denver has learned from her mother, as Sethe never introduced her to open and meaningful conversations because she was unable to speak

about the past, which means that Denver never learned how to talk about her thoughts, feelings, or worries. When Denver, at a young age, is confronted with the truth of her mother's violent history, it is so immense and shocking that it is hard for Denver to give this knowledge a proper place. Unable to process what she is being told and what this means for her, she "went deaf rather than hear the answer" (123). This does not mean, however, that things that are too painful to talk about should remain unacknowledged, for the return of Beloved shows that repressing trauma might work as a short-term solution, but that confronting trauma and "giving testimony" are the only way "to heal a trauma" (Bast 1070). The fact that Denver is traumatized as a result of her mother's actions and behavior, driven by her traumas of slavery, corresponds with van Alphen's argument that the child of a traumatized parent becomes traumatized by that parent rather than inheriting the original trauma (482).

In both Sethe and Denver, Beloved ignites a need for giving testimony to the slavery past through storytelling. The discovery of the power of testimony comes to Denver through Beloved, not because she feels the pleasure of telling the stories in the way that Sethe does, but because when she tells them to Beloved, Beloved only has attention for her. When Beloved arrives, Denver immediately recognizes her as the older version of her dead sister, the haunting ghost who has come back to life. She sees it as her duty to take care of Beloved, doing whatever it takes to keep her happy as she is terrified of Beloved leaving and is determined not to "put up with another [person] leaving" her (145). Denver has already experienced more loss than she can bear, as her mother's traumas of being enslaved drove her to commit a horrible act, which later drove her brothers away, leaving Denver to desperately cling onto Beloved and the family she represents.

Even when Denver begins to realize that it might be Beloved who will hurt Sethe instead of the other way around, as she initially feared, she "felt helpless to thwart it, so

unrestricted was her need to love another" (123). Denver is consumed by her need to make Beloved love her, to have a friend, to be understood and have a connection that is too strong to break. However, she has become used to her loved ones leaving her and she is scared that Beloved might do so if she does not feed her stories. As Denver reflects, "It was lovely. Not to be stared at, not seen, but being pulled into view by the interested, uncritical eyes of the other" (140). This passage emphasizes how desperate Denver is to have meaningful relationships with other people. She is used to being "stared at" by the critical eyes of the town who judge her mother, and therefore her entire family. The fact that Beloved has "interested, uncritical eyes" is very important to Denver because it makes her feel that she is valued as a person. Denver starts telling Beloved the stories that interest her, because they include herself, and in telling she is "seeing it now and feeling it – through Beloved. Feeling how it must have felt to her mother" (91). By narrating the story of her birth in detail to Beloved to keep her attention as long as possible, Denver allows herself to experience the event, to engage with her, and her mother's, past. She is slowly opening herself up to her family's history, to the past that she spent so long deliberately rejecting. However, along the line of van Alphen's argument, Denver's ability to gain knowledge about her mother's history, her ability to connect with it, is not the same as having actual memories about this history and the traumas that ensued (486).

Denver does not only learn the importance of testimony, but also comes to recognize her special place within her family, as well as within history. As Denver is the only one "who did not personally suffer through the atrocities of slavery," she only comes into contact with these traumas through others, which allows her to distance herself from the original traumas (Bast 1079). As Bast argues, this means that Denver "is the only one who is not wounded in a way forbidding her to go past a certain point in recounting her past. She does not, in fact, remember the story but retells what she has been told, or fed as the case may be, by her

mother and grandmother." As a result, her trauma "is not direct but rather transgenerational," which creates a space for Denver to be able to "narrate and appropriate it", which means that her trauma is different than the original traumas of her mother (Bast 1081). This distance between Denver and the original trauma also enables her to break free from the entrapment inside the house later in the novel. Denver comes to realize that narrating the events of the past no longer have the healing effect that they once had on Sethe. Due to Sethe's compulsive retelling of the trauma, which I earlier described as a form of traumatic re-enactment, Beloved and Sethe no longer pay any attention to her, or their own well-being, "and little by little it dawned on Denver that if Sethe didn't wake up one morning and pick up a knife, Beloved might" (285). Denver realizes that the relationship between Sethe and Beloved has become unhealthy, and even though she originally thought Beloved was more important to her than Sethe, she cannot accept the fact that Sethe is slowly fading away. Denver recognizes "that her own well-being is tied to the preservation of this woman in whose tracks she follows" (George 126). Denver also wonders what Beloved would do if Sethe dies and realizes that "it was on her" to save herself and her mother (286). Denver decides to finally "leave the yard; step off the edge of the world, leave the two behind and go ask somebody for help" (286). The wording indicates that this is a big step for Denver, as she is used to being trapped inside this yard, inside the place where she is constantly haunted by her mother's past. For Denver, as for Sethe, her whole world is inside that area, as all her energy has been focused on Sethe and Beloved, and she is afraid to face the real world and see what is out there.

Denver eventually admits to herself that she also needs the help of the black community to save her mother. Whilst trying to figure out where she could go in order to get the help she so desperately needs; it is the voice of Baby Suggs that comes to her and tells her to "go on out the yard. Go on" (288). Just as during the healing rituals in the Clearing, Baby Suggs here "acts as a ritual guide," leading her towards the community (Krumholz 397). From

her grandmother, Denver learns the power of sharing her pains, griefs and traumas, because Baby Suggs had "offered up … her great big heart" to the whole community during her healing rituals. In the Clearing, people were asked to "laugh," "dance" and "cry" in front of each other, as Baby Suggs emphasized that it was important for people to let the rest of the community see their emotions in order to heal (103). At first, Denver is unable to actually narrate her problems, only telling people that she needs food because her mother "doesn't feel too good" (292). This disclosure eventually leads to the community stepping in, determined that nobody would starve to death, but in itself does not solve Denver's problem, because it only deals with the physical problems. However, because Denver has to go around town to return the containers the food was brought in, "a small conversation took place" (293). Denver, not used to people being willing to talk to her or being nice to her, wonders why they are having these conversations, thinking "[m]aybe they were sorry for her. Or for Sethe. Maybe they were sorry for the years of their own disdain" (293). But she comes to realize that the reason does not matter, because they are showing that they care about her. However, as "Denver's outside life improved, her home life deteriorated" because the food has strengthened Beloved, creating "a doomsday truce designed by the evil" (294), and Denver realizes that she needs even more help from the community.

Despite the fact that Denver is slowly opening up to the community, she realizes that she will not be able to free herself, or her mother, from Beloved until she tells the whole story: "Nobody was going to help her unless she told it – told all of it" (298). At first, the women in the community "fell into three groups: those that believed the worst; those that believed none of it; and those … who thought it through" (301). Despite the community's inhospitable feelings towards Sethe, the women in the community decide to intervene because they are able to recognize themselves in Sethe's story and disliked "the idea of past errors taking possession of the present" (303). As Sheldon George explains, "[i]t is Denver's telling

of her mother's tale to the community, and the ability of its members to find in this tale the unspeakable traumatic truth beyond what even Denver can articulate, that cause the gathering at Sethe's doorsteps of the thirty women who exorcise Beloved" (127). It is not necessary for Denver to narrate every single aspect of her story to these women, as they were formerly enslaved themselves, and "they shared in many of [Sethe's] miseries." In their shared experiences of slavery, the women recognize that Beloved is a "ghost of her past preying on her life, because Beloved is in some sense their ghost, too" (Krumholz 402). The "thirty neighborhood women" who arrive at 124 remind Sethe of the Clearing, as "the voices of the women searched for the right combination, the key, the code, the sound that broke the back of words" (308). Using what they have learned from Baby Suggs and her healing rituals, the women are able to help to release Denver and Sethe from the traumas that have entrapped them for all these years.

The Implications of the Epilogue

Even though the ending of novel seems to suggest that Denver and Sethe are freed from the traumas of slavery, represented by Beloved, the ending of the novel becomes much darker when the epilogue is taken into consideration. The epilogue describes how everybody "knew what she [Beloved] was called, but nobody anywhere knew her name. Disremembered and unaccounted for" and that her story "was not a story to pass on." The disremembering of Beloved does not refer to her family, but to the community, as "those that saw her that day on the porch quickly and deliberately forgot her" (323). As Jan Furman argues, Beloved is disremembered by the community "[t]o protect itself" because of the traumas of slavery that she represents (72). As Furman points out, when "the novel closes, [Sethe] is on the verge of new understanding. Her children are free" (75). However, even though Sethe and Denver have been able to face the traumas of slavery that impacted their family, and have started to

heal from them when they are freed from Beloved, the community continues to repress their collective traumas of slavery. They consider the story of Beloved, and slavery, as “not a story to pass on” (323). However, as Furman points out, Morrison herself has said that “this is not 'a story to pass on' but it's like a warning to Black people. This is not a story to pass on, to give to the next one, but the irony is that it is not a story to pass by. So it has both meanings” (qtd. in Carabí 111). By disremembering Beloved the community has placed her with the “Sixty Million and more” lost souls that were forced to partake in the Middle Passage, who were also “violently disremembered.” This means that even though Beloved’s story might be too shameful or painful to tell others, it is necessary for the African-American community to tell her story, and other stories about slavery. Despite Sethe and Denver’s personal liberation from this trauma and their possibility to heal, the epilogue suggests that the traumas of slavery will continue to influence future generations if these traumas continue to be repressed by future generations.

Beloved tells the story of the impact of slavery, not just on those who experienced slavery themselves, but on the later generations as well, as can be seen by the way in which Sethe’s trauma shapes Denver. The consequences of deliberately repressing trauma are made very evident in this novel, as the ghost of Beloved first haunts the house but later comes to face Sethe in person, forcing her to deal with her traumatic past. The resurrection of Beloved is a symbolic representation of Caruth’s description of the resurfacing of trauma. Due to Sethe’s inability to talk about her traumas and her conscious decision to repress them, her trauma comes back to haunt not only her but her family as well. Where Sethe’s enslaved mother was unable to be a mother to Sethe, Sethe, in turn, becomes obsessed with her children. Some of the tropes in the novel suggest that trauma is transmitted, for example Denver’s ingestion of her sister’s blood, or the haunted house which has an impact on Denver as well as Sethe. The novel, however, mostly suggests that Denver is traumatized by the fact

that she lives with a traumatized parent, rather than that Sethe transmits the original trauma onto her. *Beloved* also suggests that it is possible to heal from her traumas if the power of story-telling is embraced. It is Denver who eventually saves her mother, and herself, because she is distanced from the original trauma due to her lack of experience with being enslaved. The original traumas of slavery still heavily influences Denver, but she is able to learn from Baby Suggs, who showed her the power of the community. As Baby Suggs was able to face her own traumas by cleansing her body as a way of cleansing her psyche, she was not only able to start healing, but, more importantly, was able to help other members of her community to start healing from their traumas as well. Both Sethe and Denver learn the importance of "re-remembering," but Denver also learns that to be able to heal from trauma, one needs the help of a community because the trauma of slavery is too much for an individual to bear. *Beloved* also shows that whilst the acknowledgement of the past and its traumas is very important in order to be able to move on, it is also important to not let the past take over one's life. The epilogue, however, seems to suggest that despite Sethe and Denver's liberation from Beloved, the black community still represses the traumas of slavery that Beloved represents and that the traumas of slavery will continue to influence this community unless they address their own traumatic histories. Therefore, Denver is not so much traumatized by being enslaved but by living with a mother who is traumatized by slavery.

Chapter 3: The Transmission of Trauma in *Homegoing*

Yaa Gyasi's novel *Homegoing* tells the story of slavery and the slave trade from the perspective of two branches of a West-African family, one of which consists of those that were enslaved and the other of which consists of slave traders and their descendants. The novel traces the lives of Effia, who marries a slave trader, and Esi, who is captured and enslaved, two half-sisters, and the generations that follow them, spanning over two hundred and fifty years. The narrative of the novel alternates between these two family lines, as the chapters alternately switch from Effia's line to Esi's. Alternating between the two, each chapter also narrates the stories of the next generations, decades after the time of the preceding family chapter.

"Effia the Beauty" (9) is married off to James Collins, "the newly appointed governor of the Cape Coast Castle," which was a key trade post of the British on the West-African coast (14). It is not just Effia who, through her marriage to James, becomes involved with the slave traders, as her village, including her half-brother Fiifi, and their descendants are making money by conquering other villages in order to sell the captives to the British. Esi, on the other hand, is one of these captives that end up in the dungeons of the Cape Coast Castle, captured to be shipped off to America. As Salamishah Tillet points out, each "of the novel's subsequent chapters is narrated from the point of view of one of the sisters' descendants, who now live on both sides of the Atlantic" (406). Even though Effia might have been able to escape the gruesomeness of slavery that Esi, and many like her, were forced to endure, the novel shows that Effia and the generations that follow her still have to deal with trauma surrounding their history as slave traders. As Schwab argues, neither the descendants of victims nor perpetrators are able to escape from their past, as "[v]iolent histories generate psychic deformations [that are] passed on from generation to generation across the divide of victims and perpetrators" (16). Though Gyasi's narrative includes the family line of the

enslaved in America, the fact that the novel also portrays a family line of the African slave traders offers a perspective we don't often see in novels about slavery. West-African societies themselves tend to silence this part of their history, as Ghanaian scholar and artist Senam Okudzeto points out. Though the trauma of the enslaved is substantial and it remains important to keep addressing this trauma as the transmission of trauma continues, the collective trauma of the West-African slave traders is also transmitted to their descendants, who, the novel suggests, need to confront this aspect of their past. This chapter will discuss the ways in which *Homegoing* uses recurrent tropes of a black necklace, fire, and fear, to suggest that the collective trauma of slavery is transmitted from one generation to the next.

The Transmission of Trauma Within Effia's Family Line

Effia is not only the first character that is introduced in *Homegoing*, the theme of the transmission of trauma through generations also starts in her chapter. She was born the night "a fire raged through the woods just outside her father's compound," a fire that lasted for multiple days. We later learn that this fire was set by Effia's mother Maame in order for her to escape her enslavement. The impact of this fire, or what it symbolizes, was immense; as the omniscient narrator notes, Effia's father, Cobbe Otcher, "knew then that the memory of the fire that had burned, then fled, would haunt him, his children, and his children's children for as long as the line continued" (3). Jeffrey Prager indicates that "[t]raumatic experiences live beyond those who are the direct recipients," the fire, or the trauma of the capture, rape and enslavement it symbolizes, was so traumatic that its trauma would be passed down through the generations (18). Though Cobbe believes that this fire would haunt future generations, he tells his wife that they "will never again speak of what happened today," attempting to repress this trauma (3). As can also be seen in *Beloved*, the deliberate repression of trauma will ensure that the trauma keeps resurfacing, precisely because it is willfully repressed. The repression of

the trauma of her mother's capture and rape influences Effia, who grew up with a troubled relationship with what she believed to be her mother, Cobbe Otcher's wife Baaba, which distorted her idea of love. Besides showing a lack of warmth towards her daughter, "Baaba beat Effia" after with her father always beat Baaba back, "but that didn't stop mother from beating daughter" (4,5). Baaba eventually succeeds in marrying Effia off to the British governor of Cape Coast Castle, James Collins, which allows her not only to receive a large bride gift, but also means that Effia will be removed from her life. This marriage, however, led to Cobbe's "premonition of the dissolution and destruction of the family lineage, the premonition that he had had the night of the fire" (16). Even though it is not clear at this point in the novel what causes this "dissolution and destruction of the family lineage," in the course of the novel it becomes apparent that it is the capture and rape of Maame, as well as the decision to involve their family line into the slave trade, that would have a traumatic impact on the family lineage. Years later, when Effia returns to her village when her father is dying, she realizes that her village had become "so prosperous that they would forever be known as one of the leading slave markets in all of the Gold Coast" (26). However, unlike her father, Effia is not aware of the traumatic impact this will have on future generations. During this visit, Effia is told by her brother Fiifi that Baaba is actually "not [her] mother: your "father had you by a house girl who ran away into the fire the night you were born." He also tells her that the black stone necklace she always wears came from her biological mother (27). In Cobbe and Baaba's decision to repress the traumatic night of the fire, they also repress Effia's background, her connection to her biological mother. The fact that Maame had given birth to Effia whilst being enslaved by Cobbe means that Effia's descendants will not only have to deal with the trauma of being connected to slavers, but to the enslaved as well.

Effia's grandson James has experienced the effects that being a slave trader has had on his father Quey, the unhappiness that his work and political marriage brought him, and is

desperate to escape from his family history as slave traders in an attempt to break free from the transmission of trauma that takes place. As James is the result of a political marriage that was driven by the need to solidify the power of his father's village's business with the slave industry, he not only grows up with unhappy parents, but is also constantly reminded of the impact of being involved in the slave trade. James has grown up in an unpleasant environment, with his parents fighting often, making him realize "that his parents had never loved each other. It was a political marriage; duty held them together, though even that seemed to be barely enough" (90). Despite the fact that their marriage was forced upon both of them and they were clearly unhappy with each other, his parents still decide that James's marriage should also be a political marriage, as Quey remarks that they "have chosen a nice wife for him to marry when the time comes." This decision was not only made by them, but by James's great-uncle Fiifi as well, as he had chosen "Amma Atta, the daughter of Chief Abeeku Badu's successor," as James's future wife. This political marriage "would be the realization of a promise that Cobbe Otcher had made to Effia Otcher Collins years ago: that her blood would be joined with the blood of Fante royals" (92). The marriage of James and Amma Atta would also consolidate the family's power, bringing two powerful families within the West-African slave trade together. James, however, realizes that "he could never truly love" Amma, but also knows that "it didn't matter what he thought" (92). Like his father, he realizes that this marriage would never bring him any happiness, but he still believes he must go through with it because he is taught that he must do it to help his village prosper. Even when he falls in love with Akosua, he still believes he should marry Amma, because of the political power it will bring his family whilst Akosua "had nothing, and she came from nowhere" (99). During his marriage to Amma, however, James is unable to forget Akosua and realizes that his most powerful desire is "to get away. To lead a simpler life, as a farmer like Akosua's father, not as a politician like his own father, whose work for the British and the

Fantes so many years before had left him with money and power, but little else" (102). Like his father Quey, James realizes that working with the slavers will never bring him happiness, but James is the one who can no longer carry the moral burdens connected to this line of work and actually decides to free himself from it all. James leaves his town, making his family think he had gone one place "when really he had journeyed elsewhere" (105). The final part of his plan includes ending up in a tribal war, telling someone who recognizes him that he "must tell everyone that I died in this war," leaving his former life and family behind to find Akosua (109). James, here, is attempting to break free from the cycle of traumatic transmission that occurs within his family by stepping away from the slave trade and leading a simpler life. However, he later learns that he cannot break from the past entirely, as the transmission of traumas from this past will continue to haunt his family line.

Even though Akua, James's granddaughter, grew up without her mother, Abena, far away from other relatives, she still inherits her family's traumas, as her dreams are haunted by these traumas. Abena died when she was very young, meaning that Akua "had grown up in the missionary school," leaving her with no memories of her mother (177). Whilst eventually she has a reasonably happy life with Asamoah and their children, she is plagued by "horrible nightmares where fire consumed everything." At the core of the fire is "a woman holding two babies to her heart. The firewoman would carry these two little girls with her all the way to the woods of the Inland and then the babies would vanish, and the firewoman's sadness would send orange and red and hints of blue swarming every tree and every bush in sight" (177). Even though Akua does not know it, this firewoman is actually Maame, her ancestor, raging "against the loss of her children," Effia and Esi. Akua feels a kinship with the firewoman and wants "to ask her questions" (186). Her mother-in-law does not understand that her dreams are a response to trauma and considers her illness as "idleness," deciding that Akua is "sick and that she must stay in her hut until the sickness had left her body," forcing her to be

separated from her two daughters. When Akua dreams of the firewoman again, the firewoman asks Akua, “Where are your children? … You must always know where your children are” (187). After being locked inside for so long, with only the Firewoman to keep her company, Akua slowly loses touch with reality. Even when she is reunited with her daughters and has given birth to a baby boy, her dreams keep returning and Akua now sees the firewoman as someone “she knew so well” (197). One night, the impact of Akua’s dream goes beyond that of wandering in her sleep, as the firewoman holds “the two children that she had held the first time Akua had dreamed of her.” In her dream, Akua has “the urge to hold them, and she reached out her hands to them. Her hands caught fire, but she touched them still.” Though the dream is filled with an intense fire, Akua feels “calm, happy even, that the firewoman had found her children again at last” (197). Without realizing it, her dream has become reality as Akua awakes to find that she has killed her children by setting fire to the hut. Her daughters have died but her infant son Yaw is still alive, though badly injured. Akua believes that she “must still be asleep,” as she cannot remember anything that happened, but her nightmares have actually spilled into her life, as she unintentionally had given her children to the firewoman, Maame, who was desperately looking for her children. This event is a representation of what Caruth describes as “the experience of a trauma repeat[ing] itself, exactly and unremittingly, through the unknowing acts of the survivor and against his very will” (2). Even though Akua has not experienced the initial trauma itself, this trauma has been passed down through the generations and the lack of acknowledgement and narration of the trauma has eventually led to a reenactment of the trauma.

Even though Akua’s son Yaw grew up with horrific scars on his face, a result of his mother’s actions, the transmission of his family’s trauma onto him is not clear to him because he is has been separated from his mother, who thus was never able to tell him the truth. As Yaw was only a baby when he was burned in the fire, he only knows how he got it because of

other people's stories. Yaw is unable to hear an account of what happened from his father, who dies when Yaw is still away at school. His mother, still alive, sends him many letters through the years, begging "Yaw to come see her, but he never responded, and so, eventually, she stopped" (228). It is the influence of his domestic servant, Esther, that brings him to finally decide to go visit his mother. Even though he is initially standoffish towards Akua when they meet, even feeling anger when she puts "her hand on his scar," they eventually embrace and Yaw cries "more tears than he had ever cried before" (239, 240). He asks her to tell him "the story of how I got my scar," to which she replies: "How can I tell you the story of your scar without first telling you the story of my dreams? And how do I talk about my dreams without talking about my family? Our family?" (240). Even though Akua had grown up without her family, she has gained a lot of family knowledge over the years, finally learning herself that the "firewoman was an ancestor come back to visit me." She also tells Yaw that this ancestor is the one to whom "the black stone had belonged to," the black stone necklace that was passed down through all these generations. Akua had not been able to receive the stone from Abena herself, as she had long died, but she "went back to the missionary school to ask about my mother's family. The Missionary told me that he had burned all of my mother's belongings, but he lied" (241). Akua realizes that this black stone necklace is a connection to their family's ancestors, which she is finally able to share with her son. However, besides the necklace representing a connection with the family line, it is also a strong connection to their family's trauma. As Akua explains, "[w]hat I know now, my son: Evil begets evil. It grows. It transmutes, so that sometimes you cannot see that the evil in the world began as the evil in your own home" (242). Akua acknowledges that they are carrying traumas within themselves that they are unaware of but that this does not mean that the traumas have no effect on them. Akua understands that the evil that is within, or trauma of, their family has been, and will continue to be, transmitted across the generations. Even though

the family has stepped away from its involvement with the slave trade two generations ago, this trauma remains unacknowledged and needs to be narrated and faced in order to start healing.

Transmission of Trauma Within Esi's Family Line

Even though Esi grows up with Maame and, therefore, had a stronger connection to her family's ancestors, the traumas of her mother's past are hidden from her, just as they are for her half-sister Effia. During her childhood, "Esi grew up in bliss" as there "was nothing her parents would refuse her" (31). Her parents were very loving, especially Maame, "who had never been able to stay mad at Esi for longer than a few seconds" (33). Even though Esi is unaware of this, Maame's extreme devotion to Esi is caused by the loss of her other daughter, Effia, whom she had to leave behind when escaping from Cobbe's village. Eventually, Esi is told, by their enslaved domestic servant, Abronoma, that her mother "was once a slave for a Fante family. She was raped by her master because he too was a Big Man and big men can do what they please." Abronoma also tells her, "You are not your mother's first daughter. There was one before you" (39). When their village is under attack, Maame refuses to flee, telling Esi that she "can't do it again …. No more woods. No more fire." Being adamant in her refusal to flee, Maame "grabbed Esi's hand and dropped something into it. It was a black stone, glimmering with gold" and tells her that she has also "left one like this for your sister. I left it with Baaba after I set the fire" (42). Here, it becomes evident that Maame had started the fire to be able to escape her enslavement by Effia's father, leaving Effia behind to be looked after by Baaba. Esi realizes that "Maame was not a whole woman. There were large swaths of her spirit missing, and no matter how much Esi loved her, they both knew in that moment that love could never return what Maame had lost." She also realizes that "her mother would die rather than run into the woods ever again, die before capture, die even if it

meant that in her dying, Esi would inherit that unspeakable sense of loss, learn what it meant to be un-whole" (42). This unspeakable sense of loss is what Maame, in this moment, has transmitted onto Esi, and is something that Esi herself will transmit onto her own daughter. Esi fails to escape and ends up captured and placed in the dungeons of the Cape Coast Castle. As if being imprisoned in itself was not unbearable enough, Esi is taken out of the room by a soldier, to his quarters, where he "put her on a folded tarp, spread her legs, and entered her" (48). Shortly after the rape, Esi is dragged out of the dungeons, because she is about to be taken aboard a slave ship. She "flung herself to the ground and started to dig and dig" for the stone her mother gave her, but was removed by a soldier before she could find it (49). Esi is forcibly transported to another continent, without any family around her, as she has lost the last connection with her family's ancestry, symbolized by the loss of the necklace. However, the loss of the stone necklace does not signify that the transmission of trauma is lost as well, as Esi still bears the burden of her mother's trauma and will continue to transmit her own traumas to her children or even later generations.

The life of Esi's daughter Ness is filled with traumas, those passed down by her mother, as well as her own experiences whilst being enslaved. As a mother, Esi as a "solemn, solid woman who was never known to tell a happy story. Even Ness's bedtime stories had been ones about … men being thrown into the Atlantic Ocean like anchors attached to nothing: no land, no people no worth" (70). The numbness Esi experiences is a common response to trauma, and even when Ness is eventually taken away from her and sold she fails to respond emotionally: "Ness could remember reaching out for her mother, flailing her arms and kicking her legs, fighting against the body of the man who'd come to take her away. And still Esi's lips had not moved, her hands had not reached out" (70, 71). As Judith Herman argues, the "core experiences of psychological trauma are disempowerment and disconnection from others," and even though Ness is Esi's own daughter, her trauma "damages [her] ability

to enter into a trusting relationship" (145). Whether Esi's emotional numbness is created by the trauma of Ness's conception or by her other traumas is hard to decipher, but it is clearly related to her traumas. Ness herself "would always associate real love with a hardness of spirit," and she herself is often unable to show empathy or emotions, because she has not learned to reach out, leaving others with a negative perception of her (71). Besides being forcefully separated from her mother, most of Ness's severe traumas occur in "a place she would only ever describe as Hell" (70). At the plantation she calls Hell, she was forced to marry Sam, who came "straight from the Continent and speaks no English." Despite not being able to communicate with Sam, or knowing anything about him except for his stubbornness to refuse to speak English, Ness takes the blame when "Sam destroys the slave quarters" (80). The owner, whom Ness calls the Devil, "shows no mercy, even though he knows she is lying," even when Sam admits it was his fault, and Ness is "beaten until the whip snaps off her back like pulled taffy, and then she is kicked to the ground" (81). After this particular moment, Sam slowly learns English and he and Ness form a loving relationship and eventually have a child. Ness realizes that "You can't raise a baby in Hell" and starts to form a plan to escape (85). When her plan fails, and she surrenders herself so her son Kojo can escape with Aku, she tells her master her baby has died. The punishment to which Ness and Sam are subjected to is extremely brutal. Her master makes Sam "watch as Ness earned the stripes that would make her too ugly to work in a house ever again," after which she is so broken that she is unable to move. When Sam is hanged, "the Devil lifted [her head] for her. He made her watch. He made them all watch: the rope come out, the tree branch bend, the head snap free from body" (87). This image will continue to haunt Ness for the rest of her life, just like the permanent scars on her back will always physically represent her traumas.

Even though Ness's son, Kojo, is able to escape the slave catchers and grows up in freedom without memories of his parents, or knowing where his family came from, he is

unable to escape the trauma of slavery. As Kojo was raised by Ma Aku, who had helped him escape, he "only knew the South from the stories Ma Aku told him, same way he knew his mother and father. Ness and Sam. As stories and nothing more" (112). As a child, he "used to cry for Sam and Ness. The only thing that would pacify him was stories about them, even if the stories were unpleasant," so Ma Aku told him whatever she could remember about them. For a long time, he worries "that his family line had been cut off, lost forever. He would never truly know who his people were, and who their people were before them, and if there were stories to be heard about where he had come from, he would never hear them" (130). Even if he had known Ness, she couldn't have told him that much either, considering that she was the result of a rape, so there was no knowledge about her father's family line. Despite the fact that he grows up without his parents, they still influence him, especially when he himself becomes a parent, believing that being "a good father" is "like a debt Jo owed to his parents, who couldn't get free." He decides that he would always be there for his children, "the way his own father had not been able to be there for him" (115). Kojo was a baby when he was enslaved and does not even know "the name or the face of his own old master." Though he has forged free papers, his life is threatened by the new law, the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850, that would require the arrest of "any alleged runaway slave in the North and send them back south, no matter how long ago they escaped" (119). As his wife is a legally free black woman, initially he thinks that he, and his family, would not have to flee because they have papers to show them all as free-born people; only his are false. Kojo constantly made his children "practice showing their papers …. When he'd first started doing this, the children would burst into laughter, thinking it was a game," as they had grown up without the fear of being caught as they were born free. Even though his children first believe this to be a game, the fear that Kojo experiences is powerful enough to be transmitted onto his children without them realizing it. For a while, they believe that they might be safe, but "one day [his wife] Anna

didn't come home" (125). Kojo starts to look for her, especially worried because she is pregnant with their eight child, but realizes that he has "to accept what he was already starting to know in his heart. Anna and Baby H were gone" (126). He later finds out that Anna was taken into a carriage by a white man, and her abduction makes him realize that he would never see her, or their unborn child, again, since they are obviously sold into slavery. This shows that, despite his lack of personal recollections of slavery, Kojo's life is haunted by the traumas of slavery and is unable to escape it, even without having direct ties to his ancestors.

Reconciliation?

Yaw's daughter Marjorie grows up with more detailed knowledge of her family's history than most generations before her, but because she knows so much, she also carries the burden of this knowledge. This burden is symbolically represented by the stone necklace her father gave her, because she knows that it "had belonged to Old Lady and to Abena before her, and to James, and Quey, and Effia the Beauty before that. It had begun with Maame, the woman who had set a great fire. Her father had told her that the necklace was a part of their family history" (267). Even though Marjorie has learned her family history through her grandmother Akua, this does not necessarily mean that the chain of trauma transmission has been broken. The stone necklace represents the trauma of complicity in the slave trade, which had started with Maame's enslavement and rape, that has been experienced, and passed on, by past generations and that will be carried, close to the heart, by future generations. After Marjorie and her parents move to Alabama, Marjorie comes to learn the meaning of the color of her skin, realizing that the other black children at her high school "were not the same kind of black that she was. That indeed she was the wrong kind" (268). Here, "'white' could be the way a person talked; 'black', the music a person listened to. In Ghana you could only be what you were, what your skin announced to the world" (269). Her feeling of being different than

others is only reinforced when she is asked by an African-American teacher to read a poem that she wrote for "a black cultural event for the school," because she is told that "All you have to do is tell your story …. Talk about what being African American means to you." This confuses Marjorie because she does not consider herself to be African American, to which her teacher responds by saying "in this country, it doesn't matter where you came from first to the white people running things. You're here now, and here black is black is black" (273). As Ava Landry argues, "African immigrants arrive to the United States with a variety of different cultural heritages and identities, but they must deal with Blackness as a master status, or as their most salient social identity, in ways that are new, complex, and foreign" (127). Even though her past is different than that of African-Americans, Marjorie must learn what it means to be black in America. As Landry points out, when African immigrants live in America they "may come to realize that there is an expectation of racial solidarity on the part of multigenerational African Americans" (137). Even though Marjorie is already burdened with the family trauma of complicity in the slave trade, she comes to learn that as a black woman in America, she also has to identify with the traumas of African-Americans. Despite their need for solidarity from Marjorie, and other African immigrants, many African-Americans will reject her as one of their own because they believe that she does not share the traumatic history of slavery, as they are unaware of the traumatic history of West-African complicity in the slave trade.

Kojo's great-great-grandson Marcus's life is heavily influenced by the culmination of his family's traumas, despite his personal disconnect from his ancestry. He is deeply engaged with the history of black people in America and its connection to the history of black people in Africa. Even though his father, Sonny, had been damaged by all "the dope he used to use," Marcus is aware "that his father's mind was a brilliant mind," as Sonny was able to talk about things that "Marcus never saw in his history books, but that later, when he got to college, he

learned to be true" (285). Marcus is working on his Ph.D. dissertation in Sociology, "on the convict leasing system that had stolen years off of his great-grandpa H's life, but the deeper into the research he got, the bigger the project got" (289). Just like the whole narrative of the novel, Marcus believes that to explain one element, such as H's life, one has to understand everything happened earlier because it is all connected. Looking at Marcus's, or Esi's, family line in America it becomes evident that they are all affected by the traumas of slavery. Even though Kojo has no memories from being enslaved and grew up without his family, he is still very aware of the horrors his parents experienced, as Ma Aku told him everything she knew. For Kojo, the transmission of traumas of slavery lead him to be frightened about his and his family's safety, and he had "worked hard so that his children wouldn't have to inherit this fear" (125). Kojo's son, H, was taken from the family, along with his free mother Anna, and came into the world enslaved. Besides his own experiences of being enslaved, he also experiences the fear for his own safety, as the American justice system places him in the coal mines, to do work that killed many people, for a crime he did not commit. H also learns, like many family members preceding and following him, that despite the abolishment of slavery, being black in America equals being seen as less-than-worthy: "A mule was worth more than he was" (162). The notion that African-Americans are less-than-human, or less than white American at least, was created to justify slavery but haunts the African-American community long after slavery. H's daughter, Willie, is repeatedly treated as inferior and her skin tone even threatens her safety when two white men force her husband to assault her for their pleasure. Willie's son Sonny tries to fight the continuing inequality of African-Americans and their lack of safety by working for the NAACP, but unfortunately becomes addicted to heroin. As is pointed out in the novel, this drug is heavily associated with the poor layers of society, which at this time mostly meant the African-American community: "Harlem and heroin. Heroin and Harlem. Sonny could no longer think of one without thinking of the other" (257).

The fact that Marcus is looking into the inequality of African-Americans that had led to his grandfather H's imprisonment shows that every generation is heavily impacted by the continuing inequality of African-Americans, which often leads to lack of safety.

Besides looking at the influence of slavery on black people in America, Marcus is driven by "the need for studying and knowing his family more intimately." When trying to imagine his family, "he would sometimes imagine a different room, a fuller family," even going all the way back to "a hut in Africa" (290). This need to trace roots back to Africa are what make him connect very strongly to Marjorie, whom he meets at a party. Although he does not know her, or his distant family connection to her, he feels drawn to her, even opening himself up in a way that he normally does not do. Marjorie persuades him to visit the Cape Coast with her, where her parents and grandmother used to live. In Ghana, they visit the Cape Coast Castle, unaware of how their families both have historical connections to this former slave fortress. Marjorie eventually gives him her black stone necklace and tells him, "Welcome home," and as he touches it, he is "surprised by its weight" (300). The fact that it is left ambiguous whether Marcus is surprised by how heavy or how light the stone feels is very important. The heaviness of the stone may represent the centuries of trauma that are attached to it, and it being passed down the generations symbolizes how trauma is transmitted from one generation to the next. The fact that Marjorie, a descendant from both enslaved people and slave traders, gives the black stone to Marcus might mean that she is sharing her trauma with a descendant from the enslaved line of the family, bringing the traumas from both family lines together. If Marcus is surprised by how light it is, however, it can be read as the release of trauma as Marjorie and Marcus, two descendants from Maame, who lost her two children, are reunited at a place that contains both of their heritages. In this sense, it might show that Marcus feels lighter as he is finally connected to the place where his family has its origins, finding peace within himself. According to Landry, the gift of the necklace signifies that

Marjorie acknowledges that "she could still feel connected to her home without being physically rooted there." Landry further argues that "Marcus's willingness to receive the necklace represents a joining in and acceptance of the multiplicity of black identity" (144, 145). Even though this would suggest that the novel has a happy ending, the ambiguity surrounding the weight of the necklace or Marcus's perspective, suggests that these two descendants of Maame will continue to transmit some of the trauma that was transmitted onto them.

Homegoing not only tells a story about the traumas of the West-African slave traders and the enslaved in America, it also includes the narrative of the transmission of these traumas. This transmission of trauma mostly occurs from parent to child, which is, as Schwab has pointed out, one of the most common ways of transmitting trauma. The novel uses recurrent tropes, such as the black necklace, fire and water, to represent symbolically how trauma can be transmitted from parent to child. When a parent deliberately represses part of their own, or their families', traumatic history, this trauma will ultimately resurface again, as is most evident in the scene where Akua's dreams of Maame's traumas develop into a traumatic reenactment where Akua loses her children by inadvertently killing them. The novel also shows that children often reenact the behavior that was taught to them, whether that entails continuing with the family practice of slave trading or being unable to show emotions as a result of trauma. Even when there is a break with the family ancestry, as various characters are unaware of parts of, or their entire, family histories, this does not mean that the transmission of trauma has stopped. The black necklace is an elegant representation of how trauma can be transmitted to future generations even if they never know the initial trauma existed. Esi's descendants, who have lost the necklace and their direct connection with their ancestors, are also impacted by slavery and its legacies. Marcus, especially, is significant here, as he is driven by a need to research his family's history and realizes that the lack of

knowledge does not equal the end of trauma transmission, especially considering that the members of his family have all been forced to deal with inequality and lack of safety. The reunion of Marjorie and Marcus not only shows two descendants of Maame reuniting in the place where it all began, it may also exemplify the transmission of trauma. The fact that Marjorie gives her necklace, the symbol of her family's traumas, to Marcus might mean that it releases some of their families' traumas, but it also shows that the traumatic history of Esi's family line is reunited with that of Effia's family line. Though this novel shows that repressed trauma needs to be addressed in order to heal, like the epilogue of *Beloved*, it also acknowledges the notion that even when trauma is addressed, it will never fully go away. The remnants of the original trauma will always remain and will be passed onto later generations, even without them realizing that trauma has been transmitted. This novel, therefore, suggests that the traumas that are connected to West-Africa's history in the slave trade, as well as the traumas of the enslaved in America, will not only continue to influence descendant communities, but that the trauma of slavery, like the black necklace, is actually transmitted across generations

Conclusion

Toni Morrison's *Beloved* and Yaa Gyasi's *Homegoing* give literary expression to the idea that the traumas of slavery has shaped not only the generations who experienced slavery, but the later generations as well *Beloved* confirms the idea central to trauma theory, that trauma must be faced, and narrated, in order for the victims to start healing. Sethe's deliberate repression of her trauma first causes their home to be haunted by Beloved's ghost and, when this is not enough, Beloved returns as a person to make Sethe face her trauma. Baby Suggs spends her few free years in the role of a healer who attempts to help other victims of slavery start healing by accepting their bodies, abused and exploited during slavery, an alternative to Western talk therapy. All three women eventually learn the power of "re-remembering" the past that was too hard to face, either through storytelling or healing their mind by loving their bodies. Sethe and Denver, furthermore, exemplify van Alphen's theory that the child of a traumatized parent does not inherit the original trauma, but is traumatized by living with a traumatized parent. As argued by many (transgenerational) trauma scholars, trauma can be healed is by bearing witness to the trauma, which is only possible by narrating it and having a co-witness who is willing to listen and attempts to understand what is being said. With Baby Suggs's rituals, the novel imagines an alternative, seemingly African-based therapeutic method of healing the mind through healing the body. The epilogue of *Beloved* also represents how trauma continues to have an impact within the communities of slave descendants even when the individual characters who suffered from trauma have been able to start healing, if that community continues to repress their collective traumas.

Whilst both novels focus on the trauma of slavery, Gyasi also includes the narrative of the West-African slave traders into the story. This inclusion is not only there to confront West-African societies' failure to acknowledge their involvement with the slave trade, but it also portrays the idea that, as Schwab suggests, trauma affects descendants of both victims

and perpetrators. *Homegoing*'s narrative spreads across eight generations of two family branches, from the eighteenth century to the twenty-first century, ending with two characters who are engrossed in their family's ancestry and are searching for a place for themselves in that history. In *Homegoing* the transmission of trauma is represented through multiple tropes. There is the black necklace that is passed on through the generations, symbolizing the trauma that is transmitted to the next generation, and ends up reuniting Effia's and Esi's family lines. The fire that was started by Maame, and represents her traumas of enslavement and rape, returns to haunt Akua many generations later. The fear of safety that Esi's enslaved family line continues to share, even a century after the abolition of slavery, is connected to the inequality that African-Americans have experienced from their first moment as enslaved people to present time. This inequality is also seen in the racist notion of people of color being less-than-human, which was used to justify slavery. Marcus's realization that the traumas of African-Americans throughout history are connected to the beginning of slavery reflects the novel's message that society has to face, and keep facing, the traumatic history of slavery in order to move forward. Effia's family line shows shame for their family's involvement in the African slave trade, something that caused James to run away from his family in a vain attempt to break the cycle of transmission of trauma, and thus suggests the need for West-African societies to address this part of their history.

Both *Beloved* and *Homegoing* represent the notion that traumas need to be narrated, and witnessed by others, or they will continue to have a negative impact on multiple generations, not only the generations of the present, but also those of the future. Both novels also describe how traumas can continue to influence people even when the original trauma is acknowledged and narrated. However, *Beloved* portrays this influence as a child that becomes traumatized by living with a parent who is traumatized by slavery, whereas *Homegoing* suggests that the original traumas of slavery can be transmitted across

generations. This is a significant difference, because it suggests the novels engage differently with the question central to the scholarly debate on transmission of trauma: can trauma be transmitted or is it the traumatized parent who creates a traumatizing atmosphere for the child? Morrison and Gyasi both show the importance of the literature of slavery, as these narratives give voice to events and feelings that were deemed unspeakable. Despite their differences in how the traumas of slavery affect later generations, they still both portray how important it is, and will continue to be, to acknowledge that the trauma of slavery has impacted many people and will still continue to impact the descendants that are alive today unless we confront and deal with these complex histories.

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