

DREAMSCAPES AND IDENTITY FORMATION OF MIGRANT CHARACTERS IN SELECTED AFRICAN DIASPORIC NOVELS

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Abstract

Dream is a significant lens for exploring human consciousness and psychological conflict in African diasporic literature. Existing scholarship on dream in African literature has largely focused on its figurative and metaphysical interpretations as historical repositories for preserving accounts of significant past events with limited attention paid to the inner emotional landscapes of diasporic characters captured in dreams using a psychoanalytic framework. Addressing this gap, therefore, this study undertakes a psychoanalytic reading of the portrayal of migrant characters' dreamscape and identity formation in two contemporary African diasporic narratives—Yaa Gyasi's *Homegoing* and NoViolet Bulawayo's *We Need New Names*—which are purposively selected for their in-depth representation of the intersection of dreams and identity formation. Deploying Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung's psychoanalysis, the narratives are subjected to a qualitative literary analysis. Dreams in the narratives function as symbolic sites where suppressed emotions, unresolved conflicts and fragmented identities surface through the unconscious. Gyasi foregrounds dreams as characterised by nostalgia and longing for home, while Bulawayo depict them as traumatic, nightmarish experiences that expose sufferings characters cannot consciously access. The authors deploy dreams not merely as narrative devices but as psychological portrayals of the diasporic unconscious, revealing how displacement shapes characters' lives.

Keyword: African diasporic literature, Representation of dreamscapes in migrant narrative, Identity formation, *Homegoing*, *We Need New Names*

Introduction

In African literature, generally, and particularly African diasporic literature, dreams serve as powerful narratives through which authors explore the complexities of identity, memory, trauma and displacement, which often characterise the lived experience of migrant characters. Far from being mere figments of imagination, figurative devices or supernatural phenomena beyond waking realities, dreams do not simply serve as scientific portals to rationalise peaceful or disturbing occurrences that occur during sleep, but reflect more depth into a character's wants, intentions and desires. In African diasporic narratives, they are symbolic landscapes where the psychological tensions of diasporic existence, particularly the experiences of double consciousness, cultural fragmentation and the yearning for rootedness are underscored, represented and analysed. Drawing on the Freudian notion of the dream as a disguised fulfilment of repressed desires and the Jungian psychology, which extends further on the concept of dreams, dreams are viewed as universal archetypes, possessing far more potential than simply desires and wishes. Jung (1969) assumes that dreams hold the supernatural power to transform the human self. He places greater emphasis on the dream imagery itself, encouraging the dreamer to “amplify” the dream by entering the dream's atmosphere, re-experiencing and examining its images more fully, rather than moving away from the images through free association. He senses that dreams seek to “express something that the ego does not understand” (Jung, 1969:10).

In his book, *The Collected Works of C.G. Jung*, Jung (1969) postulates that dreams may contain deep truths, philosophical insights, memories and even telepathic visions. Jung's position here is in response to Freud's stance on dreams as mere reflections of repressed wishes and fears. He suggests that dreams possess a wealth of significant information greater than what waking memories can conceive. Establish this claim, he maintains that “dreams are a natural expression of our imagination and use the most upfront language at our disposal: mythic narratives. They do not deceive, they do not lie, they do not distort or disguise. They are invariably seeking to express something that the ego does not know and does not understand” (Jung, 1969:189). Jung indicates that modern humans have strayed too far from the unconscious, and the solutions lie within the dream itself. Rather than suppress these dreams by

shifting away from the latent content that contains deep desires, he suggests a deeper examination of dream experiences. In addition, his theory on dreams was heavily influenced by religion, mythology and anthropology, as he sees them as cultural symbols and elements of social interaction and transformation.

These psychological insights are further established within the framework of cultural theory in African literature, which emphasises the metaphysical and communal significance of dreams in African worldviews, where dreaming functions not merely as an individual phenomenon but as a conduit facilitating connections between Africans in diaspora and their native land. By situating dreams within both psychoanalytic and African cultural frameworks, this study investigates how Yaa Gyasi's *Homegoing* and NoViolet Bulawayo's *We Need New Names* employ dreams as a narrative strategy that engages with memory, history and identity in the context of diaspora, portraying them not only as mirrors of inner turmoil but as instruments through which the complex psychological and cultural dimensions of diasporic experience are accessed and expressed.

In much of literary scholarship, dreams in African and diasporic literature are often examined as supernatural phenomena or cultural symbols, rather than as functional psychological processes. For example, works like *Myth, Literature and the African World* by Wole Soyinka and *Oral Literature and Modern African Literature* by Isidore Okpewho, a chapter in *African Literature: An Anthology of Criticism and Theory* (Olaniyan & Quayson, eds. 2007), highlight dreams primarily in relation to ancestral influence or spiritual prophecy. They are hardly seen with the in-depth complexity Freud and Jung describe, and the interpretation of dreams is often reduced to trauma, repressed memory and identity crisis. These interpretations, while valuable, overlook how dreams can serve as subconscious spaces for internal reckoning and identity reconstruction, especially in diasporic contexts.

Johnston (2024), in her dissertation titled "Death, Dreaming, and Diaspora: Achieving Orientation through Afro-spirituality," adopts a cultural theoretical framework to examine dreams as an Afro-diasporic ritual (ADR) micropractice, arguing that the act of dreaming assists individuals in the diaspora in navigating trauma and cultural dissociation. Central to her thesis is the claim that "dreaming serves as a mode of communication between spirits and living

beings, a vehicle for discovering and understanding diasporic identity and a resource to provide and synthesise information that concerns members of the diaspora" (Johnston, 2024:27). While Johnston's work offers a valuable cultural and spiritual grounding, this study extends her inquiry by analysing how African diasporic literature represents a reconfiguration of individual identity through the lens of Freudian-Jungian psychoanalysis. This involves paying close attention to dream content, cultural interpretation, characters' emotional responses, and the psychological effects of dreaming on identity formation. In doing so, this study offers an original contribution to literary scholarship by positioning dreams not merely as narrative devices but as transformative narratives that shape diasporic consciousness, healing and selfhood.

The theoretical approach is primarily psychoanalytic, employing a synthesis of Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung's ideas. Where Freud foregrounds repressed desires, unresolved conflicts and pathways to wish fulfilment, Jung extends this by establishing dreams as symbolic communications from the unconscious aimed at self-realisation and transformation. Together, these perspectives provide the basis for understanding how the selected authors portray the inner thought processes of diasporic characters, revealing suppressed feelings of displacement, double consciousness and nostalgia through their dreams.

Sigmund Freud provides a foundational understanding of dreams as expressions of repressed wishes, unresolved feelings and desires rooted in childhood experiences. Drawing on J.G.E. Maass' assertion that "Experience confirms our view that we dream most frequently of the things on which our warmest passions are centred" (Freud, 1899:42), Freud posits that dreams are unconscious wishes in disguise, divided into manifest content, which comprises the surface imagery drawn from daily activities, and latent content, the deeper stratum that harbours the unconscious desires of the id. In the context of diaspora, the disorientation of migration, exile, or forced removal resurfaces in dreams, producing dreamscapes where the homeland and the hostland overlap or clash, reproducing the fragmented experiences of diasporic life.

Carl Jung, while building on Freud's psychoanalytic tradition, challenges the Freudian notion of dreams as merely sites of suppressed desire, arguing instead

that dreams present a narrative directly from the unconscious through which shared aspects of the psyche are revealed (Jung, 1969). Jung distinguishes between the personal unconscious, shaped by individual experience, and the collective unconscious, a deeper, inborn layer containing universal archetypes that constitute "a common psychic substrate of a suprapersonal nature which is present in every one of us" (Jung, 1969:3). Despite the limitations of both perspectives, which remain Eurocentric and individualistic rather than communal, a synthesis of their ideas is central to this study. While Freud suggests that dreams represent repressed wishes of displaced individuals, Jung posits that these dreams possess a universal quality, with their content drawing from primordial traditions and culture, making both frameworks appropriate for a psychoanalytic reading of how authors portray dreams within diasporic fiction.

Dreaming within the context of diaspora is a more recent area of inquiry, increasingly recognised as a site where displaced individuals negotiate cultural memory, identity and sense of belonging. Scholars such as Paul Gilroy in *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (1993) have established that diasporic existence is marked by fragmentation, hybridity and a continuous search for orientation. Jaime Elizabeth Johnston's (2024) "Death, Dreaming and Diaspora: Achieving Orientation through Afro-Spirituality" comes closest to the concerns of this study, revealing how dreams in African diasporic texts function as vehicles for understanding the inner thought processes of characters. Johnston outlines three primary functions of dreams in the diaspora: communication through dreams as a means of receiving and collecting information, communication through embodied forms of spirits that manifest to convey information and communication toward a reimagined history and future through themes of collectivity and revolution. She further observes that dreaming across the African diaspora connects individuals to home, identity and community, granting agency to those who find themselves powerless in their waking lives.

Exploring Migrants' Dreams and Identity Formation in Selected African Diasporic Narratives

Gyasi's *Homegoing* and Bulawayo's *We Need New Names* are contemporary African diasporic narratives that thematise dreams. Both authors deploy

conscious narrative strategies to depict the deeper psychological structures that dreams reveal about their characters' diasporic subjectivities. Through the motif of dreams, the thematic thrusts of identity, racism, double consciousness and cultural dislocation are addressed as central to the experiences of Africans in diaspora who have been separated from their homes as a result of conditions pervading the African continent, particularly since the advent of colonial rule: economic hardship, political instability and cultural displacement. Some migrate to broaden their academic horizons or pursue wider career opportunities, yet the environments in which high hopes are held often harbour hostility, discrimination and cultural superimposition (Olaniyan, 2020, 2021; Olaniyan & Kehinde, 2024). These conditions intensify psychological conflicts around identity, for which dreams have long occupied a privileged position in psychoanalytic discourse as pathways to the unconscious, repositories of repressed desires and symbolic expressions of unresolved psychological tension.

Africans have long internalised the pains and shame of centuries of slavery, colonialism, racism and dehumanisation, suppression of these experiences until they find no means of escape and begin to manifest in diverse forms. In the diaspora, the struggle becomes even more pronounced as individuals attempt to give voice to conflicting emotions: double consciousness, displacement, cultural alienation and identity crisis. Authors like Gyasi and Bulawayo, who have themselves lived between continents, infuse their creative works with the psychological and cultural ambivalences of exile, encoding their own psyches into fictional realities of migration, racism and alienation. The concern here is, therefore, not with the physical experiences of characters but rather with the psychological impact of the diasporic experience as it exists in their minds.

Strumpell (1877:16) provides a foundational understanding of the dream state, asserting that "a man who dreams is removed from the world of waking consciousness" and that "our memory of the ordered contents of waking consciousness and of its normal behaviour is as good as completely lost." The critical insight here lies not in the temporal occurrence of dreams but in the psychological condition that produces them: a fundamental severance from present, ordered reality and the dissolution of conscious control over mental processes. When this characterisation is accepted, it becomes clear that such conditions can manifest in various psychological states beyond literal sleep.

Dreams, therefore, do not simply emerge when we close our eyes at night; they surface whenever the mind finds itself disconnected from the immediate, tangible present, whenever consciousness loses its anchoring in normative reality, allowing the mind to enter a dream-like state even while the body remains awake.

In the context of diaspora, these dreams are heavily centred on pangs of loneliness and a longing for home. Bulawayo's *We Need New Names* depicts the immigrant experience of cultural estrangement through her protagonist, Darling. Uprooted from her impoverished hometown (Paradise), Zimbabwe, to America, Darling encounters a profound sense of alienation, one compounded by an unfamiliar climate, cultural dissonance, and the absence of the friendships that once offered solace amid deprivation. Lacking the means to return, she is unable to reintegrate into her past or fully inhabit her present. Her primary mechanism of self-recovery is nostalgic memory: vivid, sensory recollections of Paradise, encompassing both its joys and its hardships that surface in dreams and intrude upon her waking life. Bulawayo portrays these memories with a fictional reality that blurs the boundary between past and present, while Darling's instinctive return to childhood songs, the moment of distress she experiences with her friends in a stolen car in America, running from the police, further underscores the psychological refuge that her waking dreams continue to provide:

Who discovered the way to India? Vasco da Gama!... Because I am no longer in a stolen car with Kristal and Marina, no longer in America on my way to the mall, I lift my voice better than Rihanna. I am home now, with my friends at school... (Bulawayo 2013: 99)

From a Freudian perspective, this passage reflects the return of repressed feelings of home and longing in Darling's consciousness, where Bulawayo moves her thoughts involuntarily from the trouble and fear she faces in a stolen car with her friends to her memories of singing songs as a child with her friends back in Paradise. Darling uses this unconscious parallel to shield herself from the worldly lifestyle she is pressured into emulating in America. Her memories

instantly create a defence mechanism, drawing her back to her innocent childhood. In addition, the author infuses the connection between home and identity into Darling's transiency between Zimbabwe and America through Darling's ability to preserve fragments of identity and selfhood in these dreams. Akinsete and Ojo (2021) explain the diasporic concept of home, referencing Bhabha saying, "The phenomenon of home is often associated with immigration," thereby validating Homi Bhabha's concept of 'unhomely' (1992:5) where he states that 'the home cannot only be seen as the physical residence where a person lives but is equally perceived as a place where someone can identify with the world-in-the home and the home-in-the-world'. Besides, Olaniyan and Kehinde (2024:11) posit that:

Unhomeliness is quite different from homelessness or houselessness. It concerns the psychological feeling of not being at home in one's spatial home. Most citizens of postcolonial countries of the world often experience unhomeliness, given certain hellish realities that have made their politics uncondusive to living.

Therefore, the idea of home is complex and goes beyond an ordinary edifice. Darling's sense of home and belonging in light of her alienating experience in America is found in her transient escapes to her home. Furthermore, Bulawayo does not explicitly describe the protagonist's psychological transient memories of her past as dreams; however, she creates a dream-like atmosphere through memories, tactile objects and phone calls to home, which are almost realistic in readers' minds. Darling says that:

I look at it like I've never seen a guava before, then hold it under my nose. The smell hits me where it matters, and I feel like my heart and insides are being gently pried open....how can she understand that each time I take a bite, I leave the house, leave the country altogether, and find myself back in my Paradise, in Budapest?" (Bulawayo, 2013:84)

The narrative is set against the backdrop of the post-2000 economic/political crisis in Zimbabwe, which saw many Zimbabweans migrate to other countries in search of greener pastures. After moving to the “America” of her dreams, Darling is caught in an isolated web of confusion and struggles to acclimate herself to the demands of American society. The place she and her friends once boasted about as the ticket to ending their suffering becomes the very thing that alienates her from them. Darling struggles with feeling caught between two worlds; no longer fully Zimbabwean but not entirely American either, and begins to find herself increasingly disconnected from her homeland as she is forced to imbibe a culture that is alien to her, like eating with a fork and knife, speaking with an accent and pretending that she does not see the same suffering that she has escaped from in Paradise. According to her,

I'm going to America to live with my aunt Fostalina, it won't be long, you'll see, I say, raising my voice so they can all hear. I start on a brand-new guava; it's so sweet I finish it in just three bites. I don't even bother chewing the seeds.” (Bulawayo, 2013:11)

Bulawayo draws an interesting parallel between this statement and the previous one above, in which the guava fruit serves as a powerful symbol that traces the psychological trajectory of the protagonist Darling from her childhood in Zimbabwe to her experience in America. Both statements reveal a profound irony; the guava that was once casually consumed to stave off hunger in Paradise becomes, in America, a vehicle for involuntary memory and psychological return. Darling encounters the guava with astonishment, as if encountering something simultaneously familiar and estranged. She looks at it like she has never seen a guava before, suggesting a sense of defamiliarisation with her culture. In Freudian terms, the guava triggers what might be understood as an instance of involuntary memory, where a sensory experience bypasses conscious rational thought and directly accesses the unconscious reservoir of childhood experience. The expression, “The smell hits her where it matters, and she feels like her heart and insides are being gently pried open” (84), shows her deepest desires; her nostalgia and longing for home. Her consumption of the fruit instantly transports her to her home, where she explicitly states that each time

she takes a bite, she leaves the house, Kalamazoo and the country altogether, and finds herself back in her Paradise, in Budapest.

The guava serves as a transitional object, from home to the world; it transports the immigrant back from displacement to origin, from fragmentation to an imagined wholeness. Her laughter while eating reflects her physical participation in this subconscious act. Aunt Fostalina's warning about constipation reveals the divide between their experiences. Her aunt, who has lived longer in America, has lost or ultimately suppressed this capacity. She sees only the guava in the physical sense, while Darling experiences it as a portal connecting her to home.

From a Jungian perspective, Paradise and Budapest function as components of Darling's personal unconscious that have become archetypal in their significance. They represent not merely geographical locations but are sites of belonging and wholeness. The guava, stolen from Budapest's gardens in her childhood, represents adventure, transgression, community with her friends, and the vitality of a self despite material poverty. In America, that same fruit does not possess the same ability to nourish her senses as the guavas in Paradise, which carry cultural significance. The guava is consumed without ceremony because she is psychologically whole, despite the material deprivation and trauma surrounding her. “I finish it in just three bites. I don't even bother chewing the seeds.” (Bulawayo, 2013:11). In America, she has achieved the material security she longs for but struggles with her identity. The guava must be examined, smelled, and ritualistically consumed because it has become the link to her home, where her true self lies.

Moreover, Jung's concept of individuation provides another valuable perspective. Individuation involves integrating the various aspects of the psyche, i.e., culture and society, to achieve wholeness. Darling's American experience represents a failure of individuation, but rather, radical dissociation. Her identity becomes a shadow, present but unacknowledged in her daily American life, erupting only through sensory triggers, such as the guava. The constipation that Aunt Fostalina warns about becomes symbolically apt: Darling cannot digest her past, cannot integrate it into her American present. It sits within her, unprocessed, causing discomfort.

Bulawayo's genius lies in making the reader understand that Darling's confident assertion in *Paradise* – “it won't be long, you'll see” (Bulawayo, 2013:11) – is ironic in ways her childhood self could not have comprehended. She imagines her experience in America as equal to heaven, not understanding that immigration would fundamentally alter her relationship to both places. Young Darling, who finishes a guava in three bites, becomes the teenager who must smell it carefully to capture fragments of home. The author portrays hope for migrants despite disillusionment and a chance to rebuild their identity.

In Yaa Gyasi's *Homegoing*, dreams manifest in much more profound ways and in greater depths. Dreams are just as real as waking life, capable of transforming or destroying. The novel's structure itself mirrors the logic of dreams, which are nonlinear, fragmented, yet profoundly interconnected. Each chapter follows a different descendant of the half-sisters Effia and Esi, creating a narrative that jumps across time and space much like the associative leaps of dreaming consciousness. This structure suggests that the entire novel operates according to a dream logic, in which past and present exist simultaneously, the dead speak to the living, and individual stories are revealed to be threads in a larger tapestry of collective history. Jung's position on dreams as possessing universal archetypes common to people of the same ancestral tapestry comes into full representation in *Homegoing*, where all characters, across geographical borders of Africa and America, are uniquely connected by their ancestors, Effia and Esi, and collectively experience the historical trauma and violence that begins in Fanteland, Ghana, and spreads to America.

Jung (1969:48) reveals that: “It is sufficient to know that there is not a single important idea or view that does not possess historical antecedents. Ultimately, they are all founded on primordial archetypal forms whose concreteness dates from a time when consciousness did not think, but only perceived.” This suggests that, whether directly experienced or not, the same history and ancestral heritage connect these individuals, and that they share a pre-existent manner of thinking embedded in the primordial culture and the subconscious. According to Gyasi (2016:199), “Marjorie raised her hand to the necklace. It belonged to the Old Lady and to Abena before her, and to James, and Quey, and Effia the Beauty. He had told her that the necklace was part of their family history and she was never to take it off, never give it away.”

Although a material object, the necklace is a carrier of immaterial meaning, a physical artefact that embodies the abstract principle of ancestral continuity. When Marjorie “instinctively” raises her hand to the necklace, Gyasi signals that her gesture is not merely habitual but emanates from a deeper level of awareness and an instinctual or archetypal response that precedes conscious deliberation. This instinctive movement suggests that Marjorie's connection to her ancestry operates not only through the conscious knowledge her father has transmitted but through something more primordial, something felt in the body and registered in the unconscious before it reaches articulate thought. The necklace is Marjorie's direct link to her ancestry and a representation of her identity – of a genealogy of Fante people, right from her parents to Akua, her grandmother and to Abena before her, and to James, and Quey, and Effia the Beauty, there traces a lineage backwards through time, establishing a chain of being, and symbolic continuity passed down across generations. Each person who wears the necklace adds their experience to its accumulated meaning, layering it with memory, intention and significance. Marjorie, living and schooling in the United Kingdom, experiences racism and identity conflict amongst her peers, but consistent in her appearance is her ancestral heirloom. Her father's injunction that Marjorie must “never take it off, never give it away” foregrounds that removing it would sever the connection to ancestry; giving it away would alienate oneself from one's history. The individual consciousness is already embedded in collective patterns, generated to think with forms and images that are not created but inherited, and that connection to ancestry is not merely sentimental or cultural but ontological; woven into conscious life. Through Akua and her memories of Maame, the fire woman, Marjorie connects with her ancestral past. She forges her way towards the future, utilising the necklace as a symbol of breaking bonds and unifying two separate lineages.

As represented in the foregoing, therefore, dreams serve a particular function that they may not serve for those with unbroken connections to their ancestral lands and cultures. Dreams become an archive, preserving the things histories omit or distort. They contain knowledge that cannot be accessed through rational inquiry or documentary evidence because that evidence is destroyed, suppressed, or never created in the first place. The enslaved were not allowed to write their own histories; their stories were told, if at all, through the distorting lens of their oppressors. Dreams, then, become a space where suppressed

histories speak, where the voiceless find voice, where the complexity and humanity denied in life can be affirmed in the surreal logic of sleep or activation of the subconscious. Gyasi and Bulawayo depict how dreams reveal the psychological cost of survival strategies that involve forgetting or dissociation, especially with characters like Darling and Marjorie. These characters attempt to distance themselves from their painful past, to assimilate into new contexts, to “move forward” without looking back. Yet their dreams betray them, insisting on remembrance when their waking selves choose to suppress these experiences. This creates an internal split, a psychic civil war between the part of the self that seeks integration into present circumstances and the part that remains tethered to traumatic history.

Diasporic Nightmares: The Antithesis of Dreams in Selected African Diasporic Narratives

Not all dreams are good or have a positive meaning. The central idea of this study is to reflect on how individuals in the diaspora who struggle with their identity and nostalgia for home can identify with subconscious connections to home through positive dream-like experiences of home. Upon a deeper psychoanalysis of these selected texts, it becomes more evident that specific dreams contain traumatic sequences that are psychologically distressing and point these characters towards more harm than good. Carl Jung's position on the universal collective unconscious, in turn, applies to negative or traumatic dreams – “The concept of the archetype, which is an indispensable correlate of the idea of the collective unconscious, indicates the existence of definite forms in the psyche which seem to be present always and everywhere” (Jung, 1948:56). African history bears the shadows of trauma at its very core – trauma of slavery, colonialism, violence, brutality, instability, and most of all, migration; where individuals leave their homes to seek shelter in America and Europe. Therefore, all her descendants share in the universal experience of trauma of some kind or another, whether directly or indirectly. Hirschberger (2018:1) defines the concept of collective trauma as

The psychological reactions to a traumatic event that affect an entire society; it does not merely reflect a historical fact, but the recollection of a terrible event that happened to

a group of people. It suggests that the tragedy is represented in the collective memory of the group, and like all forms of memory, it comprises not only a reproduction of the events but also an ongoing reconstruction of the trauma in an attempt to make sense of it.

Gyasi's *Homegoing* reveals the nightmares that plague characters who have been exposed to the horrors of Trans-Atlantic slavery, religious unrest, poverty and political instability. These experiences find their way into the dreams of these characters, causing a fragmentation from self and from home. In *Homegoing*, for instance, Akua experiences nightmares about her ancestor, Maame, the mother of Effia and Esi, “the fire woman,” who burns the village where she is taken hostage as revenge. This nightmare constantly torments Akua until she becomes too mentally unstable to care for her children. The fire woman psychologically manipulates her through her dreams to cleanse her family and placate the anger of her ancestral lineage. The nightmare culminates in horrific reality when Akua, in a dissociative episode, sets fire to her hut, killing her two infant daughters and severely scarring her son, Yaw. Akua cannot remember committing this act, and the boundary between nightmare and waking dissolves catastrophically. Maame's anger and vengeance from her separation from her children, Esi and Effia, are subconsciously transmitted to Akua, generations upon generations after the incident, which in turn passes trauma to her son Yaw, who is not just physically scarred but psychologically broken from the experience, bearing the anger of his trauma and shame until he meets Esther, who facilitates a reconnection with his mother and births his healing journey.

Dreams in the novel serve as a vehicle for conveying both historical trauma and heritage. Survivors of transgenerational trauma exhibit symptoms that arise not from their individual experiences but from the psychic conflicts, traumas, or secrets of their parents, relatives, or community (Schwab, 2010:45). For Akua's traumatised life, the family heritage is one of the main reasons. When Yaw finally reconciles with his mother and wants to know the story of his scar, his mother tells him: “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” (Gyasi, 2016:240). Marjorie, his daughter, grew up in

Alabama, culturally and geographically distant from Ghana and Akua's tragedy. Yet she experiences her own nightmares, primarily upon hearing the story of the fire woman from Akua, her grandmother. She is plagued by her dreams and waking memories of flames, of burning, of a terrifying presence she cannot escape, and develops a burning fear of fire:

Ever since she had heard the story of how her father and grandmother got their scars, she had been terrified of fire. When she was just a little girl, the firewoman of her grandmother's dreams had haunted Marjorie's own waking hours. She had only heard about her from her grandmother's stories on those days when they walked to the water so that her grandmother could tell her what she knew of their ancestors, and yet Marjorie thought she could see the firewoman in the blue and orange glow of the stove, in hot coals, in lighters. (Gyasi, 2016: 204)

These dreams reveal what contemporary trauma psychology would call an epigenetic inheritance trauma inscribed not just in memory but in ancestral DNA itself, passed through generations. Goldberg et al (2007) put forward the concept of epigenetics, which examines how specific mechanisms can alter gene expression and consequently influence a phenotype, without any change to the underlying DNA sequence. Contemporary research in epidemiology and related associative studies further suggests that the effects of trauma may be transmitted through human reproductive cells (Goldberg, Allis & Bernstein, 2007). This points to the powerful nature of dreams through which Beulah, a character in Gyasi's *Homegoing*, experiences similar episodes to Marjorie's. She is Jo's young daughter, Ness's granddaughter, and Esi's great-granddaughter. Her dreams reveal what Jung would identify as ancestral memory—a direct psychic transmission of her foremothers' experiences during slavery in America. She psychologically inherits these traumatic experiences to such an extent that she physically enacts them.

Beulah's running legs portray the sufferings of Ness, her grandmother, and her futile escape attempts to liberate herself from the hands of brutal slavemasters; her scratched arms recreate the physical violence inflicted on her; the marks of beatings, burnings, sexual abuse and marks deeper than her soul. Her silent tears express grief that could not be safely expressed during slavery. The archetypal image of running is central to Beulah's night terrors. Jo observes: "Beulah was running. Maybe this was where it started." (Gyasi, 2016: 125). Running as deployed here symbolises slavery's fundamental condition: the perpetual attempt to escape bondage. Ness runs from plantations to escape brutal enslavement, sexual violence and whipping. She is repeatedly beaten, raped by her enslaver and separated from loved ones. She attempts escape and is recaptured, punished and eventually witnesses the commodification and objectification of her son, who is sold away. Her suffering encompasses the deep and dark horrors of slavery – physical torture, psychological exploitation, and annihilation and destruction of familial bonds in black families. Esi, Marjorie's ancestor, is prevented from running, chained in dungeons, which Beulah reveals as she sleeps "still as death." This shows the manner in which slaves like Esi are "stacked on top of each other, without room to breathe or move." (Gyasi, 2016:314)

Gyasi shows the powerful nature of dreams, which can transmit their content across genealogies. It is also important to note that Yaw, Marjorie's father, who is directly affected by the fire, is not plagued by these dreams. In contrast, his own daughter, who is not directly affected and has no geographical links to Fanteland, is. However, there is a distinct connection between Marjorie and Akua, a relationship Yaw never has with his mother. This, therefore, presupposes the reason why Marjorie is not only affected by this nightmare but also grows increasingly aware of her fear of fire, which she finally overcomes through her bravery, coming into contact with her ancestral history through her grandmother's help.

In the two migrant narratives—Gyasi's *Homegoing* and Bulawayo's *We Need New Names*—dreams serve as powerful tools for understanding migrants' psychology and ancestral trauma, and for unravelling the possibility of healing. While much of this analysis has focused on the destructive nature of dreams,

how they transmit trauma, prevent return and fragment identity, a comprehensive psychoanalytic reading reveals a more solid truth: dreams possess transformative potential when characters can confront their fears and integrate traumatic content into conscious understanding. David Edwards (2015) reviews Carl Jung's works and underscores the importance of coming to terms with dream interpretations. According to him,

Humans are hardwired to recognise patterns within aspects of reality. Our dreams present a narrative from the unconscious; an aspect of our psyche is revealed to us through dreams. Through analysis, we are presented with an attempt by the conscious mind to understand what unconscious archetypal patterns are trying to tell us. If we can understand how they weave through our unconscious reality, we can understand how they affect the waking dream of our conscious life. (Edwards, 2015:4)

Gyasi's *Homegoing* fits into Edwards' (2015) stance on recognising the archetypal patterns dreams present and the effect on reality. Her novel emphasises collective inheritance and ancestral communication as a means of navigating reality. To Gyasi, dreams are not primarily about individual psychology but about how trauma and memory transmit across generations through mechanisms beyond conscious control. Her perspective suggests that dreams carry messages from ancestors that descendants must receive, interpret, and ultimately integrate to achieve any healing. Gyasi's perspective foregrounds the fact that dreams contain knowledge descendants need even when that knowledge is painful. Marjorie's fear of fire and her sense of the firewoman's presence connect her to family history she would otherwise not have access to. The author suggests that this connection, however frightening, is ultimately valuable. By experiencing her great-grandmother's trauma through dreams and inherited fears, Marjorie understands herself as part of a lineage, as a carrier of history that must be acknowledged.

Critically, Gyasi does not portray this inheritance as purely destructive. Unlike some authors who present intergenerational trauma as only a burden, Gyasi suggests it also creates connection and meaning. Marjorie's inherited dreams give her depth, roots and understanding of herself as part of something larger than her individual life. The black stone necklace that passes through generations symbolises this perspective: inheritance includes both trauma (the dreams, the scars) and strength (the survival, the connection). Gyasi's authorial perspective also emphasises storytelling as crucial for transforming dreams. The grandmother's deliberate narration of family history to Marjorie provides context, making inherited dreams meaningful rather than merely terrifying. The novel's structure itself reflects Gyasi's perspective on dreams. By moving across generations, showing how each generation's experiences create the next generation's inheritance, Gyasi portrays dreams as part of a larger historical flow. Individual dreams connect to collective history: slavery, colonisation and diaspora. The author suggests we cannot understand individual dreams without understanding this historical context, just as we cannot understand African diasporic identity without understanding the historical traumas that created diaspora. She does not suggest that inherited dreams disappear or that trauma is simply overcome. Instead, she portrays transformation as possible when descendants connect to their lineage, when they understand their dreams as ancestral messages rather than personal pathology, and when they find others who share this burden. In Gyasi's work, dreams are depicted not merely as manifestations of pain and trauma; rather, they serve as essential bridges that traverse the vast expanses of time and generations. Through these dreams, diasporic individuals are able to reconnect with their roots, fostering a deeper understanding of their origins. This connection is crucial for healing, as it enables them to navigate the complexities of their identities and ultimately discover their true selves. In this way, Gyasi illustrates the profound significance of dreams as a means of reconciliation with the past and a pathway toward personal and communal restoration.

Bulawayo's perspective on dreams is much more pessimistic, yet it offers the chance for hope. There are not many changes for Darling in *We Need New Names*, except that she comes to terms with the reality of their present identity and cannot take back the harm already done. Darling is in America, stuck with her waking dreams and memories of her life in Paradise, unable to return home

without a visa. Bulawayo suggests that Darling's dream-like experiences, as conveyed through storytelling itself, provide some relief but not resolution. The author portrays storytelling as acknowledgement rather than healing. Darling can tell what happens, can articulate her pain, but this articulation does not transform her circumstances or her psychic state. Dreams remain painful reminders of irreconcilable loss. Bulawayo's perspective, ultimately, is that some dreams diagnose wounds too deep for individual healing. Evans (2022:9) posits that "Bulawayo's work humanises how living in the diaspora impacts perceptions of the self and conveys previously unimaginable conditions and feelings to readers living outside the diaspora with raw, unique power."

Collectively, these authors employ dreams in their work to foreground that migration and diaspora must be understood not only through external markers (legal status, economic outcomes, social integration) but through interior experiences that dreams uniquely access and express. Their varying perspectives on whether dreams ultimately destroy or transform reflect honest differences about what healing means, whether it is possible, and under what conditions it is possible. This diversity of perspective enriches rather than undermines our understanding of African diasporic literature, suggesting that no single narrative can capture the full complexity of what it means to dream while displaced.

Conclusion

The foregoing psychoanalytic interpretation reveals that dreams in the selected narratives function as symbolic sites where characters' suppressed emotions, unresolved conflicts and fragmented identities surface through the unconscious. In Gyasi's *Homegoing*, dreams operate as mechanisms for confronting intergenerational trauma, as characters like Akua, Marjorie and Beulah reconnect with their ancestral past through nightmares that transmit traumatic content across generations, aligning with Jung's concept of the collective unconscious and archetypal inheritance. In Bulawayo's *We Need New Names*, the author constructs dream-like atmospheres through sensory triggers and memories that function as an internal compass, echoing Jung's notion of psychic compensation, where the unconscious supplies what conscious reality denies. Darling's recollections and waking memories of home serve not merely as a nostalgic escape but as psychological anchors, reflecting what Freud identifies as wish fulfilment, where the unconscious mind reconstructs what displacement has disrupted.

In all, the study identifies distinct patterns in the authorial portrayal of dreams across these narratives, arriving at the conclusion that the authors employ dreams as devices that grant access to the unconscious, revealing the psychological dimensions of diasporic experience that external narration alone cannot capture. This study, therefore, positions the psychoanalysis of dream portrayal in African diasporic literature as central to understanding how authors represent the unconscious lives of diasporic characters and the psychological processes of trauma, displacement and emotional reorientation that define their experiences.

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