

Mind of Darkness: Social Equality and Self-Autonomy as Feminist Premises of the Concept of Courageous Code in Yaa Gyasi's *Homegoing*

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Abstract

Yaa Gyasi's *Homegoing* presents the horrific sequences of black women's experience throughout history. Such experience encompasses the plights—both mundane and spectacular—of women's marginalization and deprivation. Gyasi's narrative style, by turns historical and racially intimate, evokes common themes of misogyny; and her novel abounds with deprived protagonists and androcentric entities. Focusing on black women's experience, this study theoretically attempts to explore the concept of feminist "courageous code" as an antithesis of misogyny to empower their social equality and self-autonomy. The study critically considers how Gyasi utilizes a historical aesthetic narrative in her writing to critique and unravel the unspeakable oppression experienced by black women. Interpreting the intersection of literary oppression and theoretical "courageous code," this study argues that Gyasi's *Homegoing* bridges the gap between the oppressed black women and patriarchal stereotyping, reinforcing the fictional expectations of her largely gender equality. The study, therefore, seeks to find authenticity, look for female subjectivity and self-autonomy; and it anticipates abjection of misogyny and all its implications via feminist "courageous code."

Keywords: courageous code, feminism, patriarchy, misogyny, stereotyping, subjectivity

1. Introduction

Feminism has multifarious and diverse critical insights involving the themes and ideas of the position of women in any society. There is tremendous interest in the possible way of preserving women's rights and equality in societies where women do not find any outlets for getting self-autonomy and social liberty. Feminism, as a critical theory, is concerned with women's issues highlighting the often-neglected genuine presence of female identity. The quest for female identity is central in feminism studies due to the objectives achieved by the Feminist Waves throughout history. Feminism faced, and has been facing, the radical change of perceiving women in different cultures or social backgrounds; whereby any female "belongs to a world definition where the male is the norm" (Dastarli & Cin, 2023, p. 46). Hence, feminism has a deeply evocative emphasis on what it means for women to live authentically, even within restrictive social milieus dominated by male mainstream.

In this sense, feminism attempts to provide a vivid picture of women's suppressed voices that strenuously call for gender equality and the effective roles of women in different walks of life. Being so, feminism opposes the traditional binary discrimination between men and women, especially when they are perceived on the grounds of equal rights and self-affirmation. As a rule of thumb, it tries to elevate the position of marginalized and neglected women through obliterating any gender-biased trend affected by masculine attitudes. The pursuit of gender equality lies at the heart of feminism as it attempts to dissolve the gender difference between men and women for the sake of establishing social equilibrium. By probing profoundly into equality, feminism offers viable solutions to women's plights negatively affecting their subjectivity by gender "activism at higher rates and with more effectiveness than past activists" (Han & Heldman, 2023, p. 30).

One of the essential tenets of feminism is to mitigate women's ordeals when they undergo sufferings or negligence. It reduces the effect of these sufferings with regard to creating possibilities for women as well as new social horizons for them to be free of, for example, patriarchal traditions. In this way, it belittles the persistence of gender stereotyping and how it could be opposed via empowering women's voices and social roles.

The purpose of this study, therefore, is to establish the positive role of feminist “courageous code” as a gender antithesis of misogynoir in Yaa Gyasi’s *Homegoing*. The elaboration of the concept of feminist “courageous code” derives from my own view of misogynoir as a pernicious look at black women from racial and patriarchal perspectives; and how these women could overcome such gender discrimination by social equality and self-autonomy.

2. Literature Review

Yaa Gyasi’s *Homegoing* is studied from different critical perspectives. Rogers Asempasah et al. (2022) apply ecocriticism to study the novel’s depiction of colonialism which left its apparent impact upon the characters deemed casualties of colonial wars. They (2022) contend that Gyasi portrays hostility exerted by humans against environmental nature. This is due to the fact that the inhumane exploitation of environmental species threatens the perfect existence of humanity; Asempasah et al. (2022) write: “*Homegoing* shows a rather hostile, exploitative, and unhealthy relationship between humans and nature. In Gyasi’s text, there are no taboos in place for protecting the natural environments, and the plant and animal species. Deemed not sacred and un-divine, the natural environment, precisely rare animal species have become victims of exploitation under colonization” (p. 5). Gyasi, say Asempasah et al. (2022), is concerned with improving environmental nature by protecting it from military destruction. That is, she emphasizes the necessity of creating safe havens for endangered species whose habitats are ravaged by devastating colonialism. By applying interdisciplinary colonial ecocriticism, Asempasah et al.’s (2022) study finds that the novel is an indictment of colonial missions inflicting perilous exploitation of natural environment; whereby “the subordination of nature to human activities is a reflection of the postcolonial state’s preoccupation with the materiality of nature at the expense of its ecological value to the ecosystem” (p. 11).

Furthermore, Stella Maymin (2022), in “The Shackles of History: The Hidden Protagonist of *Homegoing*,” examines the historical attributes of Gyasi’s *Homegoing*. The novel abounds with historical nuances that render its plot distinctive literary peculiarities concerning the view of society and individuals. Maymin (2022) maintains that the novel is set at a historical phase which looks into the characters in their social conditions influencing their personal experience and impression. The study interprets these characters as fictional replicas of realistic people who try to control history in order to guarantee a better future. Maymin (2022) precisely focuses on the novel’s characters; the protagonist of the plot plays the major dynamic role in the events. Strikingly, she (2022) explores history as the real protagonist of the plot; and it—as an allegorical and abstract idea—challenges the fictional characters that try to swerve its linear trajectory for their benefits; Maymin (2022) comments: “history itself is the protagonist in *Homegoing*, possessing more agency over the future than any individual character” (p. 176). In the long run, the characters could not defy this protagonist since it exceeds their ability and human potentials i.e., history could not be challenged and harnessed by them. Therefore, Maymin’s (2022) concludes that the novel’s protagonist, which is history, hinders the characters’ attempts to improve their society and individual experience because it controls them: “In *Homegoing* by Yaa Gyasi, the characters are unable to alter the trajectory of society nor their lives, as they lack the agency that history maintains over them” (p. 178).

Mar Gallego (2019) studies diaspora in Gyasi’s *Homegoing* by following a transnational approach to identify its narrative structure. Gallego (2019) claims that the novel provides a counter-narrative to defy the development of colonial enslavement. The oppressed African people are mistreated; which forces them to leave their homelands for other places. This migratory movement leads to diaspora per se since African people are forced to leave their homeland. In this case, colonial oppressors formulate their typical misconception of the enslaved people when they settle down in new lands. As a response, diasporic people resist such normative misconceptions to gain independent ethnic entity; and Gyasi—through the plot—makes “significant political and literary interventions to facilitate the recovery, wholeness, and sanctity of the violated and black body” (p. 1). Gallego’s (2019) interpretation of the “abjected” body entails the abject blackness of the African ethnicity marginalized in its new diasporic life. The study finds that enslavement is vehemently opposed by African diasporic people to prove “the need to rewrite the ‘official’ historiography of enslavement times by revisiting the processes of exploitation, commodification, and sexualization that enslaved women were subjected to” (p. 11).

Though the aforementioned studies relate to the subject of my study, I will offer an in-depth analysis of the oppressed African women depicted in Gyasi’s *Homegoing*. Like them, my study concentrates on the lower position of African women who receive marginalization and exclusion from their effective role in society. However, my study embarks on a different analysis of oppressed black women mistreated at the hands of persecutory patriarchy. It will shed light on two inextricable gender issues that are rarely tackled in the existing scholarship of the selected novel. First, it looks into feminist misogynoir, which is detrimental to women’s subjectivity, as an ethnic and patriarchal discrimination against black women. Second, it attempts to put forth the

essential theoretical tenets of the concept of feminist “courageous code” by dint of social equality and self-autonomy. The following section elaborates the methodological and conceptual framework of the study.

3. Methodology and Conceptual Framework: Misogynoir and Courageous Code

3.1 The Concept of Misogynoir

The concept of misogynoir encompasses the ethnic as well as gender bias against black women. In her seminal book *Misogynoir Transformed: Black Women's Digital Resistance*, Moya Bailey (2021) is the first theorist to elaborate the concept of misogynoir with regard to black women's experience. She (2021) contends that the concept of misogynoir relates to black women who suffered, and are still suffering, from colonial oppression and marginalization. Black women, argues Bailey (2021), are victims of racial segregation throughout history; and the concept of misogynoir is very crucial to grasp black women's experience which is “awakened to the profundity of the unique nexus of experience that is Black and woman on this planet and throughout colonial history” (p. 11). Bailey (2021) asserts that the ground impetus of the concept of misogynoir is the critique of perceiving digital media as “particular venom directed at Black women” because such media provides “negative representations” of black women (p. 13). Bailey (2021), in doing so, sheds light on the media's stereotyping of women's color and its negative implications.

In Bailey's (2021) words, the concept of misogynoir would be mitigated and reduced by giving a cultural space for black women to be safe from the media's misrepresentations of their image. For this reason, the feminist efforts to elevate the position of oppressed black women “will further improve the lives of Black women and their communities” (p. 14). The concept of misogynoir, furthermore, addresses the issue of oppressing black women, whereby violence against black women is primary; especially when digital media imposes cultural marginalization of these women; Bailey (2021) writes: “misogynoir describes the uniquely co-constitutive racialized and sexist violence that befalls Black women as a result of their simultaneous and interlocking oppression at the intersection of racial and gender marginalization” (p. 1). Bailey (2021) exposes the non-binary and gender-variant attitudes concerning the social margins of black women and the way they are persecuted. She (2021) calls the readers of her book to “address misogynoir in several arenas and locales” (p. 25). This is because she (2021) takes on the hapless dynamism of such noxious feminist reality.

My purpose, accordingly, is to expose such noxious feminist reality through Gyasi's *Homegoing*. My study offers critical grounds for the concept of feminist “courageous code” to defy the traditional misrepresentations of black women; and it provides them with generative and defensive reaction to misogynoir. Such reaction serves black women's collective demands to transform the pernicious oppression exerted against them into powerful subjectivity and self-autonomy to reduce misogynoir's negative impact upon them.

3.2 The Concept of Courageous Code

This study aims at exploring the concept of feminist “courageous code” by interpreting the narrative description of black women in Gyasi's *Homegoing*. The concept itself is awkward and quite epigonic, suggesting less of a vigorous or even anti-climactic, feebly following a very hard feminist act to follow. However, my argument describes black women's reaction to patriarchal stereotyping as “code” because it subjectively designates the remarkable black women's efforts to disrupt or “code” the norms of male mainstream culture in order to subvert negative patriarchal stereotypes for reclaiming their equality and subjectivity. In so doing, they create their own “code,” or presence, which is as powerful as men who share with them the same social peripheries. My aim, here, is to limit the poles of the concept of “courageous code” to social equality and self-autonomy as the laying premise for creating women's independent subjectivity emulating men's social hegemony.

The concept of “courageous code,” presumably, is the cardinal preoccupation of the feminist problematics, not simply of language, but of the medium of literature. It merely emphasizes the performance of intentional self-reflexiveness and self-consciousness of subjective autonomy and power to confront masculine hegemony, in a spirit of cultural anarchy and subversiveness. With varying results, the concept of “courageous code” designates a fiction which is more about women's subjectivity and its developing complexities to emulate androcentric social position. Moreover, it is less about the subjective reality of masculine attitudes. Neither it is an adoptionist of misandry; “courageous code” simply carries to its questionable and logical extremes the anti-rationalist and anti-realist trends of the dominant female stereotype, but with neither a solid adversary nor solid assertion in the quotidian masculine realism it defines itself against. Hence, it encompasses the social and self-autonomous co-opted trappings of androcentrism; and it turns its defiant principles into mass recognition of gender equality.

On the grounds that the concept of “courageous code” is all about the enhancement of female subjectivity, my

argument is so inclined to claim that this sounds persuasive to me since my study delves deep into the narrative layers of Gyasi's *Homegoing*. It goes without saying that critical categories are mainly related to the narrative components of the novel. The thematic peculiarities of the concept of "courageous code" rise above what Gyasi takes to be her aesthetic obsessive mode of the plot. As such, it means the splendid specimen of women subjectivity in whatever aesthetic narrative depiction which draws theoretical principles along behind masculinist views regarding black women. In this sense, I tend to argue that the concept of "courageous code" serves as a remedial antithesis of Bailey's concept of misogynoir in aesthetically committed narrative modes by taking primacy of contextual over textual insights of women subjectivity by examining social equality and self-autonomy related to black women in Gyasi's *Homegoing*.

As significant as the changes in a culture's conventional attitudes, the manifestation of the concept of "courageous code" are the core tenets that the novel reflects and inspires. My study discusses what Gyasi aspires to do in terms of aesthetic categories related to further approximation of the concept of "courageous code." In my view, the proper category of the concept of "courageous code" is neither a mere extension of feminist waves nor a mere intensification of certain aspects of feminism as a theory; nor on the contrary a wholesale repudiation or subversion of stereotypical male subjectivity. My elaboration of the concept of "outrageous code" attempts to discover an avant-garde perception of female social and subjective positions with regard to fourth-wave feminism. My argument provides inherent anti-linearity preoccupation with women's celebration of their subjective and private experience over the traditional public experience. Therefore, my study tries to prove how Gyasi deplores feminist misogynoir by discovering the concept of "courageous code" as a critical cast that repudiates the whole misogynistic enterprise as a gender aberration; and it sets forth the androcentric illusory conventions concerning the supremacy of men over women. In this sense, the nexus of my discussion of the concept of "courageous code" is the probability of departing into a new feminist perception of black women who confront drastic critical changes related to society and self-autonomy, not to mention androcentric attitudes.

My inclination to tackle the concept of "courageous code" via a social perspective emanates from the nourishment and empowerment of women's subjectivity within their familial milieus where they are severely deprived, neglected, exploited, marginalized and so forth. My focus point, here, is on the nourishment of women's gender independence sharply glimpsed in the realistic narrative traits of their life and subjective experience. As a result, they would be set free of their fantasy and objective reality imposed upon them in the bulk of traditional and social stereotyping of women; and it reflects my propensity to demonstrate how traditional and social restrictions might be mitigated for the sake of establishing effective female subjectivity.

In this sense, the concept of "courageous code" and its feminist strategy to emasculate oppressive female subalternity with courageous resistance of masculine mainstream. It also refers to the coherence and solidarity of women with the whole society. My analysis, therefore, applies feminist "courageous code" which appears in the form of "anti-self-flagellation" that is implicitly a mere subversion of misogynoir and its related racial and social androcentrism depicted in the selected novel. It unravels the radical masculine thinking which envisions black women's suffering from marginalization; whereby they could step into the wider space of social appearance and effectiveness.

4. Analysis and Discussion

Yaa Gyasi's *Homegoing* is a debut novel set in historical temporality where the primary events hinge on the descendants and posterity of two half-sisters Esi and Effia. They were born in different villages comprising Ghanaian diverse ethnicities. Each sister takes a different life path as they grow up. Esi falls victim to a terrible raid and is captured in the castle's dungeons to be later sold as a slave. Effia, in turn, marries rich Englishman, James Collins; and she resides with him in the luxurious Cape Coast Castle. In this castle, her sister, Esi, was imprisoned in its subterranean dungeons. The plot exposes the parallel lives of their posterity by tracing eight generations of their descendants; the narrative depicts enslavement and its aftermath upon the experience of native African and African American people.

The novel's chapters concentrate on different descendants of Esi and Effia whose mother, Maame, belongs to an ethnic Ghanaian group known as Asante. Each chapter highlights one generation of their descendants through successive generations. The novel's structure follows an intricate labyrinth narrative of the historical reproduction of eight generations. Military and colonial themes prevail the entire thematic aspects of the novel due to the meticulous portrayal of the Ghanaian Anglo-Asante wars. Racial segregation and slavery are also central themes regarding the treatment of African American people in America. Representing the eight generations, there are fourteen dynamic characters that play the whole fictional roles covering the colonial, ethnic, and historical attributes of Ghana on the brink of military and economic crises.

4.1 Oppression

Gyasi's *Homegoing* blatantly approaches the plights of black women. The entire narrative events are dominated by the experience of women from African origins; and they undergo different racial treatments including slavery. Some of these women meet each other when they are taken as slaves during oppressive slave trade depicted in the plot. Strikingly, some black women feel disappointed when they recognize their compatriots. In other words, their plight intensifies as they meet other African women who are severely oppressed at the hands of slave traders. Effia, for example, is disappointed by the mistreatment inflicted on her compatriot, Millicent: "Millicent was the lightest-skinned woman Effia had ever seen. Her black hair reached down to the middle of her back and her eyes were tinged with green. She rarely smiled, and she spoke with a husky voice and a strange Fante accent" (p. 14). Here, Millicent exemplifies the African negritude which is the authentic ethnicity of her and Effia's original African identity. Both women embody the stereotypical oppression of African women due to their color and ethnicity. The plot, therefore, highlights Gyasi's accentuation of black women's marginalization and exploitation for commercial purposes on the grounds of racial segregation.

Gyasi's portrayal of the African women's ethnicity is a mere incarnation of gender roles deformed by slavery and oppression. In this respect, Elizabeth Jackson (2023) discusses the mistreatment of black women through racial and ethnic disparities as a postcolonial view at gender roles and the possibility of reconciling them. She (2023) claims that slavery and oppression are decisive factors of creating forced diasporic living conditions; whereby oppressed women acquire diasporic identity due to the postcolonial nature of forced migration, displacement, globalization and so forth; Jackson (2023), consequently, contends that post-colonialism "has drawn attention to the inadequacy of conventional models of identity as an increasing number of people inhabit bicultural, multicultural, and diasporic identities generated by post/colonial displacement, globalization, and mass migration" (p. 101). Being so, the diasporic experience of black women is appropriated via postcolonial narrative discourse which unravels the imperial hegemony over the colonized ethnicity; especially black women. Therefore, black women face hardships to defend themselves "through self-representation which challenges the reductive imperial gaze and emphasizes the complexity of their experience and cultural identities" (p. 101). Jackson's (2023) explication of black women's plights offers a deep conceptualization of literary narratives concerned with exposing racial atrocities exerted by postcolonial conditions. To put it another way, the shaping of new identities during diasporic life are depicted by literary narratives; and these identities are genuinely affected by the new nations to which black women forcefully migrated; Jackson (2023) writes that such literary works are simply "narratives by numerous people whose identities are shaped by the experience of having grown up in three or more different nations" (p. 101).

Gyasi's *Homegoing* looks into the identity of oppressed women through their color as being mistreated by men. An anonymous man holds the responsibility of tormenting women, especially Ethe. The narrator refers to him as "H" person who gradually changes his mind regarding oppressing black women. He considers this action as racial and devoid of human morality, and therefore; he decides to pay fines to set them free: "He'd heard of black women coming to the jailhouse to look for their sons or husbands and being taken into a back room by the policemen, told that there were other ways to pay a fine. No, H thought, Ethe would be better off without him" (p. 146). The man's emotional reaction to women's oppression exemplifies men's marginalization of women's role to be effective in their society. He empathizes with black women since he is African and shares with them the same racial destiny and existential sufferings. As a punishment, he was chained with other African men and sold as a slave to work at coal mines outside Birmingham.

The banishment of the African man and the oppression of his female compatriots are a mere manifestation of the shared destiny of the African ethnicity of men and women. However, women's oppression reaches its extremes since they could not be saved by their male compatriots; and they could not reinforce their feminist subjectivity due to ethnic and masculine constraints imposed upon them. Similarly, feminism views the perception of suffering women, especially in tribal communities, by the social obstacles which hinder their quest for empowering their identity leading to their survival and independence as they "have shared an identity which encompasses memories of survival, mode of life, a specific culture, social and political organization as well as independent tribal leadership" (Orellana & Michelsen, 2022, p. 217). In this sense, African women are deprived of their human right to be equal to men. They are also victims of exploitation and racial misogynoir undermining their ability to establish their female subjectivity.

African women, in Gyasi's *Homegoing*, are disappointed with their social conditions. They could not find their path to survival and sustain the effectiveness of their identity. As a response, they attempt to create their own social roles and self-autonomy by finding suitable jobs in order to be independent of male mainstream. Willie, for example, is penniless. She relentlessly tries to get a job as a housekeeper. He comes across a wealthy black

family in Harlem. At first, she is happy with this work opportunity because she thinks that the family will help her due to their shared ethnicity, yet, she gets frustrated as she does not get the job; and this is ascribed to the family affected by the white people's lifestyle in Harlem: "it took Willie three more months to find work, but by December she was a housekeeper for the Morrises, a wealthy black family who lived on the southern edge of Harlem. The family had not yet resigned themselves to their own blackness, so they crept as close to the white folks as the city would allow. They could go no further, their skin was too dark to get an apartment just one street down" (p. 191). In another case, Anna, who is an African woman sold as a slave in America, quarrels with her mother because they suffer from poverty. She seeks work, or chores, as she promised her mother to help her find a job. She fails to get the job and her relationship with her mother worsens: "Anna had gotten in trouble with her mother that night, having skipped out on all the chores she had promised to do" (p. 106). In this sense, Willie and Anna embody the genuine deprivation of African women and the demise of the possibility of creating their own self-reliance. Their attempts to prove their existence and influential social role are halted by male-dominated society in which they are bought and sold as slaves.

Gyasi perceives the issue of color and its influence upon the social position of African women through the theme of hate. Catherine McKinley (2023), in this respect, approaches the hate of the oppressed women through colonial lens. African women become victims of severe racial treatment due to heteropatriarchal social systems developed by the colonial oppressors to inflict their hegemonic power over women. As a result, these women encounter harsh living conditions when they undergo gender-biased marginalization of men and the systems of "heteropatriarchal structures of settler colonial historical oppression drive an underlying and ... marginalized genders, and racialized peoples down every road, alleyway, dark street, and personal residence" (p. 18). Hating African women is appropriated in terms of the oppressive patriarchal system sustained by colonial foreign cultures. By the same token, Gyasi depicts the African women who are at odds with the British colonial culture. A man called Quey develops an uncanny aversion to London's lifestyle because it reminds him of the British traders. Strikingly, the cause of this aversive response lies in the way by which the British harmed an African woman, Cudjo. Consequently, he avoided everything related to the British culture: "it would be easy enough now to go see Cudjo, to talk as they used to, to tell him that he had hated London as he had hated his father, that everything about the place—the cold, the damp, the dark—had felt like a personal slight against him, designed for the sole purpose of keeping him away from Cudjo" (p. 62). Quey's disdainful reaction to the colonizers is stirred by his objection to the negative oppression of African women, including Cudjo.

The oppressive persecution of African women originates in the issue of color. The basis of this oppression is white hegemonic mistreatment of black women who truly face deprivation and marginalization. Here, the "white male hegemony" is blatantly evident when it is considered for defining the nature of marginalization; and the white patriarchy "stands in direct opposition to experiences that marginalized groups have historically faced and still face" (Noel, 2023, p. 125). As a rule of thumb, post-colonialism addresses feminism's treatment of women's marginalization by calling for a transformational state regarding the negative conditions of women. Being so, post-colonialism offers social awareness to mitigate the deteriorating conditions of women in patriarchal societies and taking them to more flexible social milieus: "the theory of postcolonialism offers social consciousness to imagine the transformation of rigid boundaries into a space more flexible, inclusive, and pluralistic" (Khan & Kochar, 2023, p. 157). Gyasi portrays the marginalization of African women by shedding light on the negative experience of black women and their ancestors. Quey tells Cudjo about his aversive reaction towards the colonizers that oppressed African women:

You were in England too long, Quey. Maybe you have forgotten that here, mothers, sisters, and their sons are most important. If you are chief, your sister's son is your successor because your sister was born of your mother but your wife was not. Your sister's son is more important to you than even your own son. But, Quey, your mother is not my sister. She is not the daughter of my mother, and when she married a white man from the Castle, I began to lose her, and because my mother had always hated her, I began to hate her too (p. 66).

The marginalization of African women is an indication of the quest for eradicating the black women. Michael Brown (2023) contends that the aversive practices of patriarchal attitudes against women are mere obstacles in the face of the possibility of reinforcing women's equality. This is because of the fact that these obstacles might be detrimental to the social and human conditions threatened by marginalization of women; Brown (2023) writes: "the cumulative destruction and erosion of Black lives and communities through systematic disinvestment and marginalization remains the core reality in America today" (p. 256). Brown's (2023) utilization of the word "erosion" implicitly refers to the patriarchal systems leading to eradicate the roots of equality between men and women. In essence, the eradication of women's rights or equality contradicts with the probable reconciliation

between men and women. Therefore, women strive for improving their social effective roles regardless the dominant patriarchal attitudes “to avoid a feminist identity that is based on shared victimhood, or a feminist subjectivity that arises out of being in pain” (Saraswati, 2023, p. 167). In this regard, black women’s search for feminist subjectivity is enfeebled by patriarchal marginalization which victimizes these women.

Gyasi’s *Homegoing* tackles the victimization of black women through historical slavery. Women were taken as slaves and treated by their masters in an inferior way. The effect of hating the foreign culture is quite obvious. Abena, who is an African woman, does not accept her husband’s Ohene Nyarko’s use of English language since it is the language of the colonial hegemony that reinforced the rise of patriarchy in her tribe: “she hated when he called her his “darling,” always spoke in English, as she had taught him when they were children after she’d heard her father say it once and asked him what it meant” (p. 128). As such, the colonial victimization of African women violates Abena’s cognitive view of human ethics which enable women to be equal to men.

The oppression of African women incarnates their poor social conditions; whereby they are deprived of searching for their feminist subjectivity. Being so, they are severely restricted as they could not cope with hegemonic masculine mainstream. They are relatively treated on the grounds of their bodies; or as Caroline Williamson and Nicoletta Mandolini (2023) put it simply, “the female body is framed as a space of expression of ‘subjectivity in dissent’ with regard to socially normalized spaces and the hegemonic subjectivities” (p. 270). Here, the hate of black women could not be mitigated even when they have the same social conditions shared by men. This is due to the fact that gender roles “incorporate Black Feminist studies (Black Feminism) to consider the intersections of race and gender as they pertain to traumatic experiences” (Apryl, 2023, p. 13). Hence, the gender attributes of misogynoir encompass the negative experiences of black women. Another cause of these experiences is the marginalization of black women due to racial matters because masculine matters “do not account for Black women as relevant subjects” (p. 99). Gyasi’s *Homegoing*, for example, approaches the negligence of black women as relevant and effective subjects in their society through Willie’s experience.

Carson exemplified the masculine hegemonic negligence of women. Willie is the object of this negligence as she could not feel free to do her personal affairs without Carson’s orders. Being a black woman, she is tormented by his demeaning look. He also does not care for her body; and simultaneously, she resists hating him while he does: “he had given her a mean look, and she was not sure which was worse. Seemed like her son was starting to hate her as much as she was fighting not to hate him” (p. 199). In this respect, Gyasi gives us a vivid picture of how black women are neglected and marginalized. They seem to be hapless in their patriarchal society charged by racial view of African women. Such views cripple their quest for establishing their feminist and gender identity, let alone their social equality. Marjorie is another woman who suffers from the oppressive marginalization of the patriarchal society. She hates the state of Alabama which reminds her of her oppression and inferiority. It also represents the negative negligence of her African family when they were sold as slaves in America:

She was entering high school, and while she had always hated Alabama, the newer, bigger school had instantly reminded her of why. Her family lived on the southeast side of Huntsville. They were the only black family on the block, the only black people for miles and miles and miles. At her new high school, there were more black children than Marjorie was used to seeing in Alabama, but it took only a few conversations with them for Marjorie to realize that they were not the same kind of black that she was. That indeed she was the wrong kind (p. 245).

Marjorie’s hatred, therefore, springs from her personal experience and deprivation. She and her family could not stand the hardships of patriarchal circumstances. As a rule of thumb, the stereotyping of women belittles their capacity to live equally with men in the same society; and women writers attempt to provide a “response to the deliberate and systematic subordination of women” (Schor, 2023, p. 3). Consequently, the response to women’s social impasses comprises discursive gynocentric writings that indict the marginalization of women. Women writers, in this case, unravel the possible outlets for these impasses by dint of gynocritical attitudes towards mitigating women’s plights by “novelists whose works revealed thoughts and feelings about the position of women in the family and society” (p. 3). In this respect, similarly, Katherine Tate and Belinda Robnett (2023) discuss the white patriarchal hegemony over black women. Black women suffer from double oppression i.e., marginalization and racial discrimination. They are socially marginalized as members of society and they could not obtain their economic or political rights, like men; Tate and Robnett (2023) comment: “Is feminism central in the politics of Blacks, and especially Black women? Feminists are criticized for addressing only White women’s concerns. Critics contend that feminism is an extension of White supremacy where the problems of economically and socially marginalized members of society are ignored” (p. 91). In the long run, black women lose their social, political, and economic privileges for the sake of becoming independent. Their social potentials are enfeebled by the dominant white patriarchal mainstream.

Gyasi's *Homegoing* highlights this white patriarchy. The oppression of black women is blatantly evident in the way they are imprisoned in dungeons for a long time. They are restricted in the compounds of Asanteland where they could not go outside Cape Coast Castle's demarcations. Esi is one of these oppressed black women; and she could gain her freedom as she was imprisoned in the compound for many months: "Esi had been in the women's dungeon of the Cape Coast Castle for two weeks. She spent her fifteenth birthday there. On her fourteenth birthday, she was in the heart of Asanteland, in her father's, Big Man's, compound" (p. 31). The oppression of black women is not only inflicted on Esi, but also on other black women in the dungeon compounds. Gyasi depicts the atrocity of white men against black women. A hundred and fifty black women are tormented at the hands of soldiers who have patriarchal mentality regarding the treatment of women; the following excerpt illustrates such oppressive treatment:

The soldiers looked around and the women in the dungeon began to murmur. One of them grabbed a woman on the far end and pushed her against the wall. His hands found her breasts and then began to move down the length of her body, lower and lower still, until the sound that escaped her lips was a scream. The women in the stack started to hiss then. The hiss said, "Quiet, stupid girl, or they will beat us all!" The hiss was high and sharp, the collective cry of a hundred and fifty women filled with anger and fear. The soldier who had his hands on the woman began to sweat. He shouted back at them all (p. 47).

The oppressive treatment of black women is a striking example of how patriarchy could negatively affect the position of women and their rights in the society. Julie Chi-hye Suk (2023) contends that gender, race, and class domination are decisive factors of creating violence against women. They are the detrimental effects of masculine mainstream which demolishes the sustainability of women's rights and equality: "the convergence of race, gender, and class domination with regard to violence experienced by poor women of color would lead to different priorities of resource allocation than those that emerge from responses to violence against white privileged women" (pp. 19–20). Here, Chi-hye Suk (2023) refers to "women of color" as the black marginalized women who could not avoid the surrounding patriarchal cruelty. Gyasi views this marginalization through the persecution of Esi and other women in the dungeons: "once night fell and the light receded, leaving only the darkness that Esi had come to know so well, the soldier snuck her out of his quarters. She had finished her crying, but still he shushed her. He wouldn't look at her, only forced her along, down, down, back to the dungeons. When she got there, the murmur had subsided" (p. 48). This persecutory treatment is a striking violation of black women's safety and social stability. However, it leads them to think about forming their own independent feminist subjectivity by revolting against patriarchal oppression. The next section elaborates black women's attempt to get rid of oppression by developing feminist "courageous code."

4.2 *Courageous Code*

The formation of independent feminist subjectivity is enhanced by the defensive reactions of women towards patriarchal oppression or marginalization. Rebecca Cook (2023) claims that the defensive reactions of women intersect with male domination which is opposed by "defensive priorities" which try to end up "marginalizing Black women's experiences" (p. 57). In this way, black women get gradually liberated from patriarchal oppression. In other words, black women take actions to end their plights inflicted upon them by the patriarchal hegemony "to confront the double marginalization of being both Black and female" (Wiggins et al., 2023, p. 117). In Gyasi's *Homegoing*, black women react against the oppression of the patriarchal society by developing the sense of hating the white men who torment them.

Marjorie is in disaccord with the white men. She hates them because they mistreated not only her, but also the other African women. For the first time, she dares to protest against their oppression. She tells her father about her new aversive feeling towards white people who oppress her black community's women throughout history; and how she protests against this oppression: "He [Marjorie's father] was out the door ... before Marjorie could protest. She had always hated it (Parenthesis added)" (p. 248). Furthermore, she does not like the rotten smell of the white community because she hates anything related to the society of the white patriarchal society. This is because she could not cope with men who oppressed her compatriots; and they remind her of the distant memory regarding the marginalization of African women: "Marjorie hated the smell of them... her inability to liken the smell to anything other than rotting fish. Every year, by summer, she would grow accustomed to the smell, and by the time the blossoms fell, the smell would be nothing more than a distant memory. But then spring would come and the smell would resurface, loudly announcing itself" (p. 251).

Marjorie's aversion embodies black women's yearning for defying the masculine domination and establishing their own feminist subjectivity. As such, I tend to describe this predilection as "courageous code" because women begin to resist patriarchy and its coding of female stereotypes; and they prove their own "subjective

codes” by following courageous defensive reactions to males that share them the same social milieus. In my view, the concept of “courageous code” is a self-affirmative position taken by women to combat and oppose masculine stereotypical image of women as passive and inferior. It also indicates women’s ability to withstand patriarchal oppression, even for a long time, in order to create their own self-autonomous subjectivity; and, in the long run, they could be equal and self-reliant in different walks of life. They could decide and take their own paths, just like men. In this sense, black women could get rid of what Kenji Yoshino and David Glasgow (2023) call “‘misogynoir’ and ‘toxic masculinity’” (p. 7). My perception of feminist “courageous code” is a gender-based antithesis of misogynoir repelling the traditional look at women from ethnic or discrimination perspectives. That is, misogynoir and its related racial and patriarchal nuances dissolve in the rectifying attempts of feminist “courageous code.”

To relate the concept of “courageous code” to Gyasi’s *Homegoing*, women of the village do their social duty concerning domestic affairs. They hold their responsibility in a perfect way. This indicates the nature of women’s significance to society which could not be integrated without their efficient roles: “the women of the village prepared food from sunrise to sunset; drums were made out of the finest wood, and the best singers were called upon to raise their voices” (p. 15). Gyasi, here, highlights the important social role of women who share with men the essential conditions in life though they are still affected by patriarchal stereotyping of women’s domestic roles. Yet, I perceive such stereotyping as primary recognition of women as mutual gender components of their society, though they are still neglected and socially restricted. For this reason, I consider this traditional stereotyping as an impetus to reinvigorate women’s “courageous code” by affirming their existence despite poor social privileges.

The traditional stereotyping of women does not go hand in hand with perception of women as equal to men. The gender discrepancies of women prevent them from being judged as effective as men. This is because they are victims of gender-based objectification. The result would be women’s reaction towards such objectification in order to belittle the social ordeals “experienced by Black women and girls in public institutions” (Wallace, 2023, p. 244). Being so, the sufferings of black women limit their capacities and social potentials, or, they are victims of misogynoir due to their racial origins. Men and women, consequently, are two opposites; and racial discrimination plays an integral role in weakening the possibility of enhancing their rights. Therefore, patriarchal stereotyping of black women attempts “to produce distinct experiences like misogynoir, which hovers over black women in straight and queer spaces” (Jeffries, 2023, p. 175). The perception of black women in the eyes of patriarchal stereotyping would lead to women’s aversive feelings of objectification. That is, they begin to search for gender equality.

I describe this gender equality as the premise for feminist “courageous code” which bridges gender gaps between men and women; and it offers black women further space and opportunity to prove their existence as well as effective social or gender roles. In fact, the concept of “courageous code” designates women’s initiation of power to emulate men’s rights. In Gyasi’s *Homegoing*, Cobbe is surprised by the rural women who tend to be independent. Effia, for example, exemplifies the feminist rebellious opposition of male authority. Cobbe feels satisfied with the idea of having his wife and daughter as the most important women in the village: “in the days following the chief ceremony, Cobbe had grown nervous about the broken promise of Effia’s womanhood, nervous that Abeeke would forget her in favor of one of the other women in the village. He had always said that he wanted his daughter to be the first, most important wife, but now even third seemed like a distant hope” (p. 17). Cobbe’s changing attitude towards the village’s women embodies the declining sequences of women objectification which had been rife in the village. Furthermore, the wife incarnates the commencement of feminist “courageous code” as she defies the inherited patriarchal view of women as inferior and deprived of equal rights. Here, the concept of “courageous code” provides women with female subjectivity more than ever. Women could gradually be equal to men in a persistent quest for stability and effective social roles.

As stated earlier, the concept of “courageous code” impairs the masculine objectification of women. It empowers women’s female subjectivity and self-autonomy when they strive for proving their right to be equal to men. This is because the concept of “courageous code” enables black women to have safe haven when they are “seeking refuge from white oppression”; and they could oppose men “who met her burdens with misogynoir—asking that her back be the bridge he walked on to achieve equality with the white man” (Mason et al., 2023, p. 177). Consequently, the sufferings of black women could be obliterated by feminist self-autonomy. For this reason, black women do not come into terms with “inequality and marginalization correlating to gender” (Bautista, 2023, p. 10). As such, the concept of “courageous code” is a reaction to the marginalization of women because of patriarchal structure; and it seriously aims at breaking down a certain patriarchal stereotyping regarding black women.

In Gyasi's *Homegoing*, Quoy empowers his black women compatriots. As previously mentioned, he develops aversive feelings towards the British colonizers. As a reaction, he begins to empower the black women in the village to be stronger than the white men. He says that his hatred of white patriarchy motivates him to work harder to encourage the women to oppose the white men, and; consequently, they will become strong and self-autonomous regardless of the white patriarchal stereotyping: "and this hate was good, at first. It made me work harder. I would think about her and all of the white people in the Castle, and I would say, my people here in this village, we will be stronger than the white men. We will be richer too" (p. 66). Quoy's strenuous attempt to enable women to oppose the white supremacy reflects the social attributes of the concept of "courageous code."

The concept of "courageous code" socially reimburses women's equality by reducing their dystopian living conditions. It offers solutions to any patriarchal attempts "to racialize and marginalize different communities of color" (Orbe & Harris, 2023, p. 158). This is due to the fact that "courageous code" is a social path "to challenge existing structures that reinforce racial oppression" (p. 158). In my view, the concept of "courageous code" ameliorates women's social independence and equality. In Gyasi's *Homegoing*, the concept of "courageous code" corresponds to Akua's decision making vis-à-vis feminist self-autonomy. She decides to go to the market ignoring the taunting remarks of men and women in the compound: "Akua liked walking to the market. She could finally think, without the scrutinizing gaze of the women and elderly men, who stayed around the compound, making fun of her for all the time she spent staring at the same spot on a hut's wall" (p. 164). On the one hand, women taunt her because she risks going to the market defying the masculine restriction of women's social roles. On the other hand, men taunt her because she is a woman and she must abide by the traditional regulation of women in decision-making or going outside. She became stronger; and her decisions make women, like Abee, stronger as she provides them with food to cook for their families: "After she swept, Akua would help the other women cook. Abee was only four years old, but she liked to hold the giant pestle and pretend that she was helping" (p. 163).

Akua's daring decision-making is one step towards creating feminist subjectivity for black women. Bailey (2021), who coined the term *misogynoir*, relates the oppression of black women to the dynamic gender created by culture: "for me, naming *misogynoir* was about noting both an historical anti-Black misogyny and a problematic intraracial gender dynamic that had wider implications in popular culture" (p. 762). As such, the concept of "courageous code" contradicts with the concept of *misogynoir*'s racial implications. Gyasi perceives the concept of *misogynoir* through the poor living conditions of black women in Harlem where the black community suffers at the hands of whites. For example, Robert is very sad because a white man provoked Willie, and he could not withstand such racial treatment: "one store had even hired Robert, but after a week there was a misunderstanding when a white customer had leaned in close to Robert to ask him how he could resist taking any one of the Negro women who frequented the store for himself. And Robert came home that night crying to Willie that it could have been her the man was talking about, and so he'd quit" (p. 190). Consequently, Willie is an exemplification of *misogynoir* as she is racially dehumanized by the white men in Harlem. However, the concept of "courageous code" would mitigate her suffering by proposing that; and she could be self-autonomous and defy gender discrimination surrounding her.

The concept of "courageous code" is largely characterized by its emphasis on women's subjectivity and equality for black women, or as Marie Bautista (2023) puts it simply, it is "specified by a rejection of essentialist and universalist norms that have defined women and femininity through traditional patriarchal constructs and an emphasis on empowerment through choice" (p. 29). In Gyasi's *Homegoing*, the women in the castle became free and independent, which makes Marcus wonder if he truly looks at them, or it was just an illusion: "there was almost no one milling around the Castle that day, save for a few women who were gathered around a very old tree, eating nuts and plaiting each other's hair. They looked at Marcus and Marjorie as the two of them walked up, but they didn't move. Marcus started to wonder if he was really seeing them in the flesh" (p. 271). Marcus could not believe his eyes since he could not imagine how strong and independent the oppressed black women had become. At the end of the novel, black women could gain their feminist subjectivity as they marry British soldiers. This means that they got their strength and power by opposing the hegemony of the white men. Black women, in turn, succeeded in affirming their subjectivity and social equality once they got independence and freedom to move to any place they liked without any oppressive restrictions:

It stands directly above the dungeons. You could walk around this upper level, go into that church, and never know what was going on underneath. In fact, many of the British soldiers married local women, and their children, along with other local children, would go to school right here in this upper level. Other children would be sent to England for school and they would come back to form an elite class (p. 271).

The concept of feminist "courageous code" pertains to the black women's long resistance to oppressive white

patriarchy which, ultimately, gives space for women's freedom and equality. Marriage is a genuine manifestation of women's independence and subjectivity as they relentlessly resisted the white patriarchal stereotyping and objectification throughout long historical spans. In this case, they could gain social equality and self-autonomy after a long struggle with white male mainstream. Being so, the concept of "courageous code" is a remedy of white patriarchy; and it is the antithesis of misogynoir which undermines black women's ability to affirm their existence as well as effective social roles per se. Gyasi's *Homegoing* – through historical narratives insights – is an obtrusive example of how black women could be self-autonomous and equal to men; and misogynoir could be emasculated by opposing such patriarchy via dogged "courageous code."

5. Conclusion

This study examined social equality and self-autonomy as the integral aspects of the concept of feminist "courageous code" in Gyasi's *Homegoing*. It approached the novel as a historical recount of the oppression of black women. By exposing the harmful effects of oppression, the study revealed Gyasi's perception of black women's marginalization as detrimental; and it severely affects their social roles. The primary objective of this study was an attempt to explore the concept of feminist "courageous code" which is derived from my own postulation of the oppression of black women; and it is hardly applied to study the selected novel. In this sense, the concept of "courageous code" is the core conceptual framework of the study. It represents the study's major contribution. The discussion of the concept in relation to the novel found that Gyasi is at loggerheads with the colonial residuals of perceiving black women in the light of misogynoir. That is, the hate of black women does not imply their gender qualities. It is essentially connected with their color and ethnicity, which is scarcely studied in the selected novel.

The significance of the study, therefore, lies in the theoretical exploration of feminist "courageous code" as an antithesis of the inherited patriarchal stereotyping of black women. In other words, the concept of "courageous code" obliterates such patriarchal stereotyping by empowering women's social status and self-autonomy. Another contribution of the study is the interpretation of black women through female subjectivity. To clarify, the fictional African women, depicted in Gyasi's *Homegoing*, are mere literary replicas of real African women who underwent racial oppression and marginalization at the onset of colonialism. Yet, they begin to formulate their self-autonomy by opposing the masculine mainstream and its androcentric insights. The discussion of racial oppression and marginalization was enhanced by elaborating the critical nuances of the concept of feminist "courageous code" which plays a crucial role in mitigating women's ordeals as well as bolstering their social equality and rights.

The feminist implication of this study resulted in a different view of African women on the brink of social and ethnic retardation. The study connected Bailey's concept of misogynoir with the conceptualization of feminist "courageous code" in order to demonstrate how African women could gain their independent identity and social stability after strenuous resistance and struggle of the traditional patriarchal stereotyping of black women throughout history. One last contribution of the study is the investigation of the development of African women's feminist subjectivity. Once they received racial oppression and marginalization, African women begin to be self-autonomous by transforming the harmful patriarchal stereotyping into powerful feminist subjectivity and social equality. Both of them are the fundamental premises of feminist "courageous code" which incarnates black women's social and gender privileges.

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