

Faith, Science, Addiction and Depression in Yaa Gyasi's *Transcendent Kingdom*

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Abstract Immigration may change a person's outlook on life and shape their cultural understanding. This kind of change can lead to either positive or negative outcomes, depending on the individual's faith and scientific beliefs and how they respond to the variables around them. The study explores the intersection of faith and science through the story of Gifty, a Ghanaian girl living in the United States, and the consequences of living in a completely different country. Gifty is a Ph.D. candidate in neuroscience studying the neural impact of addiction and depression on human mental health, which is influenced by her brother's death due to addiction and her mother's depression. She grapples with her mother's devout Christian faith and her own faith in the power of science. Through a postcolonial approach, the study attempts to examine Gifty's experiences in the United States and how these dynamics intersect shape her cultural and religious identity. The study finds that immigration can awaken a person's potential for better or worse. Gifty's mother continues to adhere to her faith and spirituality, while her brother Nana cannot resist the desires of his body, which ultimately leads to his death. However, Gifty believes in the power of science to change the world for the better and recognizes its impact on the human brain. Later, she realizes that believing in the power of God, faith, and science can change a person's life for the better.

Keywords immigration; intersection; faith; science; transcendent; addiction

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Introduction

A human being always struggles to find a better life for oneself and one's family. This desire leads people to seek refuge in a world that espouses social justice, equality, and open opportunities. Many individuals, especially from economically disadvantaged or politically unstable regions such as Africa and the Middle East, immigrate to America in pursuit of the American Dream, which is often seen as a haven for the most oppressed. Consequently, America becomes the destination for many who suffer from poverty, oppression, social restrictions, wars, and political unrest in their home countries.

In her novel *Transcendent Kingdom*, Yaa Gyasi explores the challenges faced by a Ghanaian family, particularly Gifty's family, upon their arrival to America. Contrary to their belief that all their problems would be automatically solved upon reaching America, they encounter a different and difficult life that takes a long time to adapt to. The family also seeks a church that can meet their spiritual needs, especially the mother, who is deeply concerned about maintaining their religious values and finding spiritual peace in a world that barely provides it.

Yaa Gyasi, born in Ghana in 1989, moved to the United States at a young age and spent her early childhood in Ohio, Tennessee, and later Alabama, where her father was a teacher at the University of Alabama. Her early experiences in the United States significantly influenced the life she was expected to lead. The poetry classes she took as prerequisites for her studies refined her passions and instilled in her the values of faith and ethics that she grapples with in her daily life. This is evident in the epigraphs she uses in *Transcendent Kingdom*, which reference Old's poem *The Borders*, and her appreciation of Gerard Manley Hopkins's *The Grandeur of God*, reflecting the struggle between faith and science. Gyasi's novel reflects her experiences as an immigrant in the United States and the challenges she faced in settling and adapting to the new Western lifestyle.

Life of Gifty's Family in America

Gifty's family dreams of leaving their home in Ghana, particularly Gifty's mother, who insists on immigrating to America and competes in the lottery for the opportunity. She believes that this will change their lives and secure a brilliant future for her son, Nana. However, not everyone in the family shares her enthusiasm

for leaving. Gifty's father is not as eager to leave their home for the new world as her mother, but eventually succumbs to her determination.

When Gifty's family wins the lottery and is selected to travel to America, the children are excited to find a new world that fits their ambitions and dreams. However, upon arriving in America, Gifty's father feels miserable and decides to move back to Ghana, leaving a void that cannot be filled by the mother's words or the sparks of American civilization. Nana, Gifty's brother, is deeply affected by his father's absence, as his father was a big fan of his games.

Later on, when Gifty is sent back to Ghana at the age of eleven to care for her ailing mother, she is left under her aunt's care, who revives in her the Ghanaian traditions and culture. Gifty is torn between her responsibilities towards her mother's ailment and her studies to accomplish her PhD. She learns to cook her mother's favorite local dish and takes care of her needs while struggling to balance her own aspirations. Yaa Gyasi intentionally chooses the names of her characters to reflect something about them. The name "Gifty" means "bleeding heart" in her mother's tongue, reflecting her share of the family's suffering and instability. Her mother believes that Gifty's misery arises from her abandonment of the Bible and the church and her indulgence with sinners.

Gifty's Family: Traditions versus Modernism

Sometimes, immigrants have their own means and ways to lead their life and express their impressions about the new world they move to. Some immigrants fight to keep their traditions, culture, and religious beliefs, adhering to their faith even after their settlement in the new world. However, some immigrants look at the new world, such as America, as a world of freedom, where everything is permissible, and the first thing they have to do is to take off their old traditions, even changing their appearance and style of life that fits with the culture and tradition of the new world. The immigrant does not hesitate to wear a new identity that matches the values of modernism. For instance, Gifty's mother keeps adhering to her faith and never offer any concession regarding her faith and beliefs. She always requests her children to maintain their beliefs and keep going to the church and reading the Bible, otherwise, they will lose their faith and their connection with their mother's homeland. Gifty's father, the Chin Chin Man, has a nickname for a type of Ghanaian food that he enjoys so much. He likes the African style of life, Ghana in particular. While Gifty's mother wants to give Nana the world, the Chin Chin Man has reluctantly agreed. They apply for the green card via lottery, and she wins, giving her a chance to move to America.

It is obvious that the religiosity of Gifty's mother continues even when she moved to America. Gifty's mother fasts and prays for three days, and it is certain that this is what brought about the pregnancy she was hoping for. Gifty's mother has a strong faith, not only in God but also in her people's treatment and their superstitions. She has waited for a long time for a son, and her faith in God to respond to her wish does not vanish. Later, she has a son named Nana, and Gifty always calls him her mother's 'Issac,' who comes to her after sincere prayers to God to grant her a son. The name is relevant to a biblical story, Issac being the son of Abraham and Sara, who was a promise of God to Abraham and his wife, Sara, and then Issac was born.

Despite Gifty's mother's faith and insistence on her daughter, Gifty illustrates that she no longer prays. When she was young, she had many questions about God, addressing her questions to her brother, Nana, who has given him another nickname: Buzz. Perhaps she will find healing answers to her questions in her writing to God, "If you're in space, how can you see me, and what do I look like to you? And what do you look like, if you look like anything at all?" (Gyasi 18). Such questions show the simplicity and innocence of Gifty, who wants to know everything about God and religion. And this instinct drives her later to find in her PhD study a solution to her brother's addiction and recognizing the reasons and behaviors behind.

Gifty also reconsiders her relationships with her classmates and friends, her mother's life, and her adherence to the faith and religion. Her mother's life and adherence to the faith and religion cannot give Gifty a space of freedom to live the free life of American culture, particularly at the first stage of her life in America. Gifty's mother, from the first day in America, begins looking for a church that satisfies her faith and beliefs. She is afraid that her daughter will sacrifice her cultural and Ghanaian values to live the western life with its flaws. Dating life has no limit and everything is open in America, and no limits for freedom. She is careful to protect her daughter from the impact of such a civilization. She wants her daughter to save herself for her husband in the future, she wants her to live the Ghanaian life with its details. As a result, she spends a time fearing the men and her connection with them. Further, Gifty, under her mother's domination, tells stories about her origin that she is a princess and her grandfather was a lion tamer. It is a mark in the family to exaggerate their origin and power."

Gifty's Mother and the American life.

The members of Gifty's family find themselves in a far cry from the promising land they had dreamt of and had etched into their memories about America. Gifty's father,

in his pursuit of employment, encounters not only a lack of suitable opportunities but also faces undue scrutiny from law enforcement due to his towering stature. This unwarranted attention becomes a source of humiliation, prompting him to retreat further into the confines of his home. Gifty's mother, similarly burdened, takes on the role of a home health aide for a man named Thomas—an elderly, racist individual. The church becomes a sanctuary for her, offering solace and respite from the daily struggles, but her employment with Mr. Thomas forces her to endure mistreatment in order to provide for her family's basic needs.

Africans arriving in America initially find themselves relegated to low-paying, undesirable jobs such as caretaking, janitorial work, and cleaning—positions that the native population tends to avoid. The harsh reality compels them to accept these roles as they strive to sustain their lives in America with limited alternatives. Gifty vividly portrays her mother's tribulations in her employment with Mr. Thomas, describing the degrading tasks she performs for him, alluding to the turnover of health aides before her. Gifty's mother perseveres through the difficulties, facing Mr. Thomas's insults and lack of appreciation, all for the sake of providing for her family.

Securing employment, especially for Black individuals, proves to be a formidable challenge, and Gifty's mother is compelled to take on a workload that five health aides before her could not bear. The ungrateful demeanor of Mr. Thomas, coupled with his perpetual dissatisfaction, subjects her to daily insults and psychological distress. Gifty paints a vivid picture of her mother returning home fatigued, physically and emotionally drained from the hardships faced at work. Life in America, with its inherent challenges, becomes even more arduous when confronted by individuals like Mr. Thomas, who exacerbate the struggles faced by African-American families. Gifty's father, employed as a janitor in a daycare center, earns meager wages under the table, further underscoring the family's financial hardships. The pursuit of the American dream becomes an elusive goal for Gifty's parents as they grapple with the harsh reality of economic instability.

One prevalent global health concern is the widespread prevalence of depression and anxiety, attributed in part to the fast-paced nature of contemporary living and the emergence of modern lifestyle-related ailments. The relentless hustle of daily life, combined with the demands of a rapidly evolving society, has significantly contributed to the escalation of mental health challenges worldwide. In the current era, individuals often find themselves grappling with a myriad of stressors, ranging from professional pressures to societal expectations, financial burdens, and interpersonal challenges. The constant bombardment of information through digital

channels, coupled with the pervasive influence of social media, further exacerbates feelings of inadequacy and isolation.

Moreover, the erosion of traditional support structures and the diminishing sense of community in many societies contribute to an environment where individuals may feel overwhelmed and disconnected. The pervasive influence of technology, while offering numerous advantages, also introduces new stressors, as individuals struggle to strike a balance between the virtual and the real world. To address this complex issue, a holistic approach that encompasses mental health education, destigmatization of mental illnesses, and the promotion of healthy coping mechanisms is essential. Additionally, fostering a supportive and inclusive community, both online and offline, can play a pivotal role in mitigating the impact of depression and anxiety on individuals. As we navigate the challenges of modern life, it is imperative to prioritize mental well-being, seeking a harmonious equilibrium between the demands of a fast-paced society and the cultivation of a resilient and flourishing individual. Delzell argues *Depression: The Last Research*:

If you're one of more than 17 million adults or 3.2 million teens in the United States with major depression, you may know that treatment often falls short. The latest research on this common mental health disorder, also called clinical depression, aims to help you feel better faster, and with fewer side effects. Right now, doctors don't have a precise way to tell which medication is best for you. That's part of the reason that many people with depression have to try more than one drug before they feel better. (1)

Gifty's mother's dream of providing her children with a better life in America clashes with the harshness of their daily existence. The pressures of making ends meet overshadow the pursuit of academic success and personal growth for Gifty and her siblings. The family finds themselves on the brink of financial despair, prompting Gifty's mother to voice concerns about their ability to sustain their current lifestyle. The National Institute of Mental (2023) Health defines depression: "Depression (also known as major depression, major depressive disorder, or clinical depression) is a common but serious mood disorder. It causes severe symptoms that affect how a person feels, thinks, and handles daily activities, such as sleeping, eating, or working" (1).

As Gifty affectionately nicknames her father "Chin Chin Man" and refers to her mother as "asaa," likening her to a berry that sweetens life, a stark contrast emerges in their roles within the family. While her mother shoulders the responsibility of

providing for the family, her father appears detached and unwilling to contribute to the challenges of immigrant life in America. Gifty's father, dubbed the "Chin Chin Man," reveals a reluctance to adapt to their new surroundings, showing a lack of initiative in securing a stable life for his children. Gifty's father, displaying a self-centered disposition, chooses the path of least resistance—returning to Ghana, leaving the weight of responsibility squarely on the shoulders of his wife and inexperienced children. His decision reflects a stark contrast to his wife's initial excitement about immigrating to America for a better life. Gifty's mother, despite enduring a life of hardship and deprivation, finds solace in the belief that her struggles will pave the way for a brighter future for her children.

The father's departure, however, leaves the family vulnerable in a new world where the lack of parental guidance exposes the children to potential dangers. In the absence of their parents' guidance, the children become susceptible to negative influences, such as drug dealers and delinquents in their community. Unprepared for the challenges that life in America presents, the children navigate an uncertain path without the necessary guidance, risking their well-being in a world filled with unforeseen dangers.

Transformations in Nana's Life in America

Nana, at the beginning of his life in America, seeks to satisfy his demands in playing games and finds his father's encouragement. His father, Chin Chin man, regrets leaving home because he cannot achieve something he may be proud of in the future. He begins to establish a comparison between his people, place, and this new world, finding himself forced to be there. He remembers the simplicity of his people and place, which brings comfort and tranquility to him, away from the hustle of American life. He finds American life, which cannot bring comfort and happiness to him. He may not be able to stand the modern life of America with its complications. Nana states, "In my country, people may not have money, but they have happiness in abundance...no one in America is enjoying" (69). The materialistic life makes the people in America like a machine that works and works without enjoyment. This kind of life dominates everything in America at the expense of the values and the health of human beings. Life becomes unbearable for the people who may earn their living barely. Gifty's mother becomes dependent on sleeping pills to forget her stress and exhaustion. She continues to lose weight and brings worry to Gifty, who starts to ask for advice from her classmate, Kathrine.

Gifty has few friends, despite her questions about God and his existence. She keeps defending the existence and the power of God in the class, which arouses

their disgusting and hating for her among her classmates. Her classmates and the people in America may not show the same concern about God and religiosity. Nana's faith is vulnerable and shaky, and he asks Pastor Tom about whether people living in remote African villages who had no chance to hear about Jesus would go to hell. Obviously, Gifty and her brother, Nana, are skeptical of their ideas on God, and they do not know how to describe their beliefs.

Nana adores basketball and becomes a team star. However, his father's return home affects Nana's sportive life, and he gets an injury that drives the doctor to prescribe OxyContin to him to heal his injury. Nana keeps using this kind of medication for a long time and gets addicted to such medication, which turns his life upside down. He becomes seeking for stronger drugs that satisfy his physical and mental desires. Gifty illustrates, "I just knew that Nana was always sleepy or sleeping. His head was always nodding, chin to chest, before rolling or bouncing violently back up. I would see him on one coach with this dreamy look on his face and wonder" (152). Nana becomes uncontrollable, and it is not easy to keep Nana's addiction a secret. Nana's addiction adds more burden and stress on the family, his mother in particular. There were times when Gifty and her mother saw him strung out in front of the carp-filled pond at Big Spring Park, and Gifty would think, "God, I wish it was cancer, not for his sake but for mine...I would have a better story than the one I had. I would have a better answer to the questions 'where's Nana? What happened to Nana?'" (160). Nana's addiction brings shame and humiliation to the family, besides the psychological stress and pain. Ngeh and Nalova pointed out:

Gifty sends a heartbreaking request to God; she cannot stand the pain of her brother's suffering. Death, according to her becomes the only way to freedom and the restoration of peace in her family. As a Christian, Gifty believes that when her brother dies, he will leave behind all the tribulations of the world to a more welcoming and peaceful place where there is no pain, no sorrow nor addiction—paradise. (57)

Nana's addiction and death leads Gifty to research this topic in her PHD study, attempting to find an answer to such a behavior. "Nana is the reason I began this work...this the science was away for me to challenge myself, to do something truly hard, and in so doing to work through all of my misunderstandings about his addiction and all shame" (160). Nana finds in his addiction a refuge from the harsh realities of life. "It feels amazing, like everything inside my head just empties out and then there is nothing left-in a good way" (145). Nana spends most the time

outdoors. It becomes an annoying fact the family needs to deal with it daily. The Mother and his sister Gifty spend their time searching for him “as the two of us drove around looking for him, I thought about how find Nana must have been, tired of our mother washing him in a bath tub like he’d reverted to his original state, tired of all the nothing in a bad way” (150). Gifty explains Nana’s conditions bitterly and what extent the drug addiction change his world to the world of babies who need the assistance of the mother in every movement. “I was sitting in the back with Nana’s head in my lap...snuffling...we go to the house he woke up, but in a zombie-like way that people who got high woke up. He didn’t know where he was” (161). Nana’s addiction makes him another man who cares nothing for his family’s suffering even he may not feel the people around him and their pains.

Drugs have destroyed not only Nana’s life but also his family’s life that leads Gifty to seek the assistance of God “Dear God, I wish Nana just die already, please, just let this be over.” The family wishes his death because he becomes hopeless case and his death may be a mercy to his family. “Nana’s addiction had become the sun around which all of our living revolved. I didn’t want to stare directly at it” (144). Gifty states that the life beside Nana becomes unbearable. He consumes their time and their efforts. Nana becomes drug addict and he does not care from where he has to get money for drugs and he steals money from his mother who spends hard times to collect the money for the necessities of daily life. Drugs makes the person selfish, thinks only how satisfy his desires. His drug addiction is uncontrollable and he does not show any resistance, but he finds himself drifting with the demands of his body, forgetting the pains he causes to his family. The more using drugs, the more the body needs. Eventually, he dies seeking the sensual pleasures which bring only to him destruction and then death. “How do I talk about the day he died... he got four days before we called the police,...so when the police knocked on our door at about nine o’clock to tell us that Nana had an overdose on heroin and died in the parking lot of a Starbucks, we were blindsided. We’d thought our routine will save us and save him” (180).

Drug abuse and addiction, under various aliases, pose a significant and escalating issue in numerous countries, particularly in America and European nations. This problem is particularly detrimental to the well-being of the youth and young generations, contributing to the erosion of societal foundations. The pervasive use of drugs, under various guises, is on the rise, wreaking havoc on the human resources and prosperity of affected countries.

The United Nations diligently monitors and compiles statistics on drug addiction, providing a sobering insight into the extent of the issue and its annual

escalation. The United Nations' 'World Drug Report, 2023,' along with its preceding publications, reveals alarming statistics pertaining to the prevalence of addiction among the youth. These reports shed light on the rapid growth of the drug trade and the corresponding surge in the number of individuals succumbing to addiction. It is imperative to recognize the gravity of this situation and work collaboratively on a global scale to address the root causes of drug abuse and implement effective measures to curb its proliferation. The United Nation World Drug Report, 2023, pointed out:

Drug use continues to be high worldwide. In 2021, 1 in every 17 people aged 15–64 in the world had used a drug in the past 12 months. The estimated number of users grew from 240 million in 2011 to 296 million in 2021 (5.8 per cent of the global population aged 15–64). This is a 23 per cent increase, partly due to population growth. Cannabis continues to be the most used drug, with an estimated 219 million users (4.3 per cent of the global adult population) in 2021. Use of the drug is increasing and although globally cannabis users are mostly men (about 70 per cent), the gender divide is reducing in some sub-regions; women account for 42 per cent of cannabis users in North America. It is estimated that in 2021, 36 million people had used amphetamines, 22 million had used cocaine and 20 million had used “ecstasy”-type substances in the past year. The proportion of female users is higher in the case of amphetamine-type stimulants (45 per cent of users are women) and non-medical use of pharmaceuticals (between 45 and 49 per cent of users are women), whereas the highest share of men is found in users of opiates (75 per cent) and cocaine (73 per cent). Opioids continue to be the group of substances with the highest contribution to severe drug-related harm, including fatal overdoses. An estimated 60 million people engaged in non-medical opioid use in 2021, 31.5 million of whom used opiates (mainly heroin). (12)

Nana's drugs addiction brings shame to him and to his family in his life and after his death. Nana's mother cannot stand her son death and she feels that she shares the large part of blame because her insistence to travel to America to help her family in a brilliant future that may not find in their home, in Africa. She gets depressed, calling the Lord by her mother language tongue, Ghanaian language “Awurade, Awurade, Awurade” (184). She regrets her insistence to travel to America, however, her regret may not change the reality of losing her son. Nana's father had wanted to take his son to Ghana, but Nana's mother refused and she was the one who was very

interested to immigrate to America, thinking life will be easier and promising, but she found the reality of American style of life is different.

Gifty's Scientific Research on Addiction

Gifty is a PHD student in neurosciences and she is studying the impact of drugs on the brain through experiments with mice. She was influenced by her brother's death, Nana from a heroin overdose when she was eleven. His death left very deep void in Gifty and the family in general. His mother started to feel depressed and she was blaming herself because she was very excited to leave Ghana on the hope giving Nana a better life and a brilliant future. Gifty's research is to understand the reward-seeking behavior in too much addiction and little depression. She concentrates on mouse's brain to trace the transcendent of the rewarding seeking behaviors of the mouse to be applied later on human ailments which match with human symptoms.

She attempts to help the community to resist drug addiction and she wants to raise awareness of the people towards drug attention and how it may start as a kind of relaxation and comfort and end in destroying the human brain and life. Eventually, Gifty's efforts come to be fruitful. The limping mouse stops pushing the lever after the optogenetic therapy. She wants to record her research results in a paper to get the results published and let the community get benefit from research results. In the end, Gifty manages to appreciate the ideas of walking with God to guide the human being to do the right thing in his scientific life or his daily life in general as the mouse- under study- needs some one's assistance to control the reward-seeking behavior, science and faith work together in human life and definitely the will be intercrossed in all the stages of human scientific life and human life in general. A human being may not arrive to his destination without a strong faith and the guidance of his/her God. Mankind needs to respond, but to accept his God guidance and the humans either.

If the person cannot seek assistance from the family or the community and continue pursuing his fancies and whims, definitely he will lose the right track and immerse himself/herself in illegal things or drugs addiction. He/she drives himself/herself to destruction and then death. Nana keeps ignoring the assistance from the people around him, particularly his family and he does not appreciate the grace of the family to be beside the person in such dark moments so that his life is ended taking overdose heroin. He prefers to live in his dreamy world, in his transcendent kingdom with drugs and other narcotics. He remains in such a kingdom and his soul moves to another transcendent kingdom in the hereafter.

Gifty, in the end, finds reconciliation with her faith and science enhances her

faith and her belief in God and commences to accept the voice of God and what she needs to do to be closer for her God. Prayers become appreciated and the voice of God comes from within. On the contrary, her mother has a strong faith and even life in America cannot change her faith and she seeks the church in America from the first days to keep herself and the family connected with their God who provides them with power to continue their life in spiritual peace. The mother sees God with her in health and ailment, in her straight and in her weakness, in home or in church so that she keeps praying and going to the church to find that comfort she needs in her life. The more she finds obstacles in her life, the more she be with God in prayers and worshipping.

Racial Prejudice, Evangelism and its Impact on the Family

Huntsville, Alabama, serves as a disturbing embodiment of racial prejudice against Black Americans, even within the shared faith that unites followers of evangelical beliefs, irrespective of their racial or ethnic background. Remarkably, the White community, particularly within the evangelical church, harbors a sense of superiority over Black Americans, accentuating their vulnerabilities to underscore a perceived lower societal standing.

The narrative exposes a troubling trend where the struggles of Black individuals, such as Nana's addiction, are unfairly isolated and not recognized as a pervasive issue cutting across different sects, ages, classes, races, and ethnicities within the community. This selective acknowledgment reflects a biased perspective that fails to address the broader realities faced by individuals from diverse backgrounds.

Throughout the storytelling, Gyasi consistently highlights instances of racial prejudice perpetrated by the evangelical church against Black Americans. A poignant example is illustrated in the quoted passage, where the narrator's small group within the church overtly expresses their disdain. The disdain is further underscored by the condescending assumption that someone fervently devoted to their faith as a "Jesus freak" would be inherently ignorant about scientific matters. This observation serves as a microcosm of the broader racial tensions permeating the community, shedding light on the deeply ingrained prejudices that persist even within religious circles. "...my small group didn't bother hiding their disdain for me... After all, what could a Jesus freak know about science?" (89).

In the backdrop of Alabama, Gifty grapples with racism from a tender age. A poignant incident unfolds in her kindergarten years when she fabricates a tale of being a Ghanaian princess to a classmate, only to be met with the dismissive

retort, “No you’re not. Black people can’t be princesses.” Racism, like an insidious undercurrent, permeates the fields where her brother Nana plays soccer, lurks in the unspoken biases of minor characters, and is subtly denied as she steps into each classroom: “When I was a child, no one ever said the words ‘institutionalized racism.’ We hardly said the word ‘racism.’ I don’t think I took a single class in college that delved into the psychological effects of years of personally mediated racism and internalized racism.”

Gifty’s formative years unfold in a society that denies her inherent beauty, strength, and significance. She reflects:

What I’m saying is I didn’t grow up with a language for, a way to explain, to parse out, my self-loathing. I grew up only with my part, my little throbbing stone of self-hate that I carried around with me to church, to school, to all those places in my life that seemed to affirm the idea that I was irreparably, fatally, wrong. I was a child who liked to be right. (147)

As a college student, Gifty’s pursuit of success propels her towards neuroscientific research, a realm elevated enough to transcend the treacherous terrain of subjective opinions altogether. This academic sanctuary becomes her refuge, a space where she can navigate the complexities of her identity and experiences without the weight of societal biases, signaling a profound shift in her journey. Gifty’s family stands at the intersection of profound community changes, where Nana’s descent into addiction and her father’s eventual departure from the American community to return to Ghana mark pivotal moments. The family becomes a canvas upon which the complexities of these shifts are painted, demanding resilience in the face of formidable challenges.

Nana’s battle with addiction is not merely a personal struggle but a reflection of the broader societal transformation encircling them. The community’s metamorphosis becomes a catalyst, pulling Nana into the clutches of addiction as a coping mechanism amidst the evolving landscape. Simultaneously, Gifty’s father embodies the harsh reality faced by Black men in America. The narrative intricately captures the perceptible changes in their surroundings, particularly how the atmosphere transforms when “big black men” navigate through societal spaces. The father’s attempt to shrink into himself, to mitigate the prejudice he encounters, is a poignant illustration of the toll exacted by systemic biases.

In parallel, Gifty’s mother shoulders the weight of multiple identities and ailments. The narrative paints a vivid picture of her experiences alongside her

husband, witnessing the altering contours of America through his struggles. The father's diminishing pride and the visible attempt to blend into an unwelcoming society lead to a state of homesickness and humiliation, ultimately culminating in his withdrawal from public life. The vivid image of him refraining from leaving the house encapsulates the emotional toll exacted by the changing societal landscape. Gifty's family becomes a microcosm, navigating the intricate dance between personal and communal upheaval. Their story unfolds as a nuanced exploration of identity, addiction, and the quest for belonging in a community undergoing profound transformation, "But walking around with my father, she'd seen how America changed around big black men. She saw him try to shrink to size, his long, proud back hunched as he walked... Homesick, humiliated, he stopped leaving the house" (27).

The narrative is a typical portrait of a Ghanaian immigrant family and how they grapple with faith, science, culture, religion and love. It illustrates the moments of weaknesses and the moments of power. Nana's addiction and his father's withdrawal from American life because he may not be able to stand the humiliation look of the America community at the Black, "In that moment, and for the first time in my life really, I hated Nana so completely. I hated him, and I hated myself" (173).

Gifty's mother navigates various languages and identities, revealing a lack of confidence and an underlying sense of embarrassment within the Black community. The nuanced exploration of her linguistic and identity shifts suggests that this adaptation is not driven by desire but rather stems from an inability to authentically convey her true self in this new cultural and linguistic landscape. The quote, "And I don't think she did this because she wanted to. I think, rather, that she just never figured out how to translate who she really was into this new language" (129), encapsulates the poignant struggle she faces in reconciling her identity with societal expectations.

Meanwhile, Gifty discovers that the faith and the church, though integral to her upbringing, fall short in addressing her brother's addiction or providing insights into its root causes. In her quest for solutions to her family's daily challenges, she turns to science and experiments, seeking a deeper understanding of her brother's addiction and her mother's struggles. The exploration of science becomes a means for Gifty to unearth remedies for her family's afflictions.

The quote, "...the more I do this work, the more I believe in a kind of holiness in our connection to everything on Earth. Holy is the mouse. Holy is the grain the mouse eats. Holy is the seed. Holy are we" (92), reflects Gifty's evolving perspective. It underscores her conviction that there is a sacred interconnectedness

between all living things, and through scientific inquiry, she seeks a holistic understanding of the world, including her family's challenges. The pursuit of scientific knowledge becomes a pathway for Gifty to bridge the gaps in her family's well-being, transcending the limitations of faith and tradition.

This profound exploration into the psyche and experiences of a Black immigrant family in America is both enriching and thought-provoking. Gyasi skillfully navigates the intricacies of racism, unveiling its subtle yet pervasive nature and the underlying tension it generates as events unfold. While, initially, Gifty and her family seem embraced by their white church and predominantly white small-town community, a gradual realization sets in that this benevolence is tainted with racist judgments, adding a layer of fickleness to the apparent acceptance. Unlike overt, headline-making racism, Gyasi unveils the insidious nature of daily, pervasive racism, eroding the confidence and self-worth of Gifty and her family, ultimately leading to devastating consequences.

Gyasi's prowess in character development, coupled with her distinctive voice and writing style, reflects the artistry of a gifted author. Reading her words is a pleasure, as they resonate with the mastery of a true literary craftsman. *Transcendent Kingdom*, with its focus on characters and their intricate development, stands as an exquisite and fascinating work that will captivate readers who appreciate the depth and richness of character-driven novels.

Gifty finds solace in the realm of science, immersing herself in the study of neural circuits associated with depression in rodent brains. While she possesses a nuanced understanding of these biological processes, she acknowledges the inherent limitations in drawing parallels between the brains of laboratory mice and the intricate complexities of the human mind. Despite this disparity, Gifty is compelled to delve into this limited understanding, aiming to extrapolate insights that can be applied to *Homo sapiens*, a species she describes as the most complex, uniquely convinced of its transcendence beyond the animal kingdom.

The profound loss of her brother Nana to addiction remains a silenced anguish for Gifty, leaving her with few confidantes and fostering unstable connections in the realm of romantic relationships. Amidst this emotional turbulence, her steadfast companion emerges in the form of Han, a fellow lab mate. Their bond is forged not only through shared scientific interests but also casual conversations that provide a rare outlet for Gifty's thoughts and emotions.

In the crucible of scientific exploration and the isolating silence surrounding her brother's addiction, Gifty's world is shaped by her commitment to understanding the intricacies of the mind and her selective connections with those who share her

intellectual pursuits. The narrative encapsulates the dichotomy between her pursuit of scientific knowledge and the poignant personal struggles that remain unspoken, revealing the complexity of Gifty's journey.

Conclusion

A particularly compelling aspect of the narrative revolves around Gifty's yearning to bridge the gap between science and faith. Her childhood journals bear witness to her intimate prayers, pondering the whereabouts of God and questioning His presence: "Dear God, I've been wondering where you are. I mean, I know you're here, with me, but where are you exactly? In space?" Gyasi masterfully maintains fidelity to Gifty's voice, accentuating this connection by juxtaposing the childhood entries with the adult Gifty's scientific pursuits.

As Gifty embarks on her quest for scientific answers, she grapples with the intricacies of spirituality, her beliefs, and the enigmatic aspects of the human spirit that defy scientific explanation. This struggle becomes even more complex as she navigates life as a closeted Christian among her scientific peers, revealing the additional layer of challenge she faces in an environment where her faith is met with skepticism. Outing herself to fellow students leads to a poignant reflection on the lack of serious consideration for her ideas, tainted by the prejudice against her as a "Jesus freak."

Transcendent Kingdom, in essence, becomes an experiment in storytelling. Gyasi crafts a narrator, Gifty, who serves as a mirror reflecting the reader's own lens of evaluation. Gifty's strength as a character and relatable protagonist stems from the crucible of pressure she endures. Gyasi's structural brilliance lies in the gradual revelations within each chapter, not as solutions to the story's larger puzzle, but as essential pieces that complete the intricate narrative. The novel is a testament to Gyasi's trust in Gifty as a narrator, allowing her to showcase the complexity of the human brain beyond a mere computational device. In Gyasi's Kingdom, there are no facile answers, only the hopeful purity emanating from Gifty's voice. Ultimately, this authenticity proves more than sufficient, offering readers a compelling and nuanced exploration of faith, science, and the resilience of the human spirit.

Gifty emerges as a character deeply engrossed in contemplation, a trait ingrained in her since childhood. Her trajectory into becoming a neuroscientist unfolds as a natural extension of her enduring fascination with profound existential inquiries surrounding the body, life, religion, and the divine. The exploration of key questions about humanity forms a central theme in the narrative, echoing the sentiments of Gifty's high school biology teacher, who emphasized the unique

complexity of humans as the only beings presuming to transcend their inherent kingdom.

The title of the book draws attention to a concept deeply embedded in Western philosophy, one that posits humans as exceptional due to their perceived transcendence beyond biological confines. This notion, rooted in both science and Christianity, perceives humans as distinct entities, with science attributing this distinctiveness to the complexity of the brain, and Christianity ascribing it to the existence of the soul. The novel, however, serves as a poignant revelation, shedding light on the profound shortcomings inherent in these frameworks that attempt to account for the intricacies of the human experience. Gifty's intellectual journey, intertwined with her scientific pursuits, unravels the limitations and flaws ingrained in these age-old myths that have permeated Western thought. Through her lens, we gain a nuanced understanding of the inadequacies in relying solely on the brain or the soul to define the essence of humanity. The novel becomes a powerful commentary on the need to reassess and transcend these conventional paradigms, challenging readers to reevaluate their own assumptions about what makes the human experience truly exceptional.

In the tapestry of immigration, Gifty's journey stands as a compelling narrative, a testament to the profound impact of cultural shifts on an individual's understanding of life. The intersection of faith and science, embodied in Gifty's quest as a neuroscience Ph.D. candidate, offers a rich exploration of the human response to variables encountered in the immigrant experience. Gifty's struggle, shaped by her brother's tragic addiction and her mother's unwavering Christian faith, forms a captivating lens through which we witness the clash and confluence of beliefs. In the crucible of postcolonial dynamics in the United States, the study navigates Gifty's evolving cultural and religious identity, unraveling the intricate threads that weave together the complexities of her existence.

Immigration, as illuminated through Gifty's experiences, becomes a catalyst that awakens the latent potential within individuals, pushing them toward better or worse outcomes. Her mother's steadfast adherence to faith stands in stark contrast to her brother Nana's tragic succumbing to the impulses of his body, ultimately leading to his demise. Yet, Gifty emerges as a beacon of hope, navigating the delicate balance between the transformative power of science and the profound impact of faith. Through her journey, the study underscores the notion that believing in the synergy of God's power, faith, and science can be a catalyst for positive change in human life.

As we conclude this exploration, it becomes evident that immigration, with

its intricate tapestry of challenges and opportunities, has the power to shape the trajectory of an individual's life. Gifty's narrative serves as a compelling testament to the resilience of the human spirit, capable of embracing the transformative potential of both faith and science. In the synthesis of these forces, a richer, more nuanced understanding of life unfolds—one that transcends borders and charts a course toward a better, more harmonious world.

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