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FROM COLONIAL DOMINATION TO DIGITAL HEGEMONY: CULTURAL ECOLOGY, GENEALOGICAL CONSCIOUSNESS, AND INTERGENERATIONAL TRAUMA IN ALEX HALEY'S *ROOTS*

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ABSTRACT
Colonial domination has left lasting social, cultural, and psychological effects on the African-American community, extending beyond the abolition of slavery. Alex Haley's *Roots* (1976) explores this historical legacy through the experiences of enslaved Africans, highlighting forced displacement, cultural erasure, disrupted genealogies, and intergenerational trauma. This study examines how colonial oppression undermined ancestral identity and cultural continuity, while exploring the role of genealogical consciousness and cultural memory in reclaiming historical belonging. Drawing on an interdisciplinary qualitative approach, the study analyses *Roots* through historical, anthropological, and genealogical perspectives, with Julian Steward's Cultural Ecology as its primary theoretical framework. It investigates how geographical displacement, the suppression of indigenous knowledge, the loss of African names, and the imposition of colonial identities weakened cultural traditions and ancestral connections. It also explores how African spiritual beliefs, communal practices, and ancestral narratives became sources of cultural survival, resistance, and identity reconstruction. Extending the discussion to the digital age, the study examines how digital hegemony may reproduce colonial patterns through unequal control over knowledge, cultural representation, and genealogical records. Ultimately, it argues that genealogical reclamation, cultural memory, and intergenerational transmission are essential to resisting historical erasure, preserving indigenous heritage, and promoting cultural autonomy and self-determination in an increasingly digital world.

KEYWORDS: Cultural Ecology, Colonial Domination, Digital Hegemony, Genealogical Consciousness, Intergenerational Trauma, Cultural Memory, Indigenous Knowledge.

INTRODUCTION
Colonial domination has had a deep and lasting impact on the social, cultural, psychological, and historical identity of African-American communities. Although slavery was formally abolished, its effects continued across generations through racial discrimination, cultural displacement, loss of ancestral connections, and the suppression of African traditions. The history of slavery is therefore not simply a record of past suffering; it is also a story of cultural survival, resistance, identity, and the struggle to recover forgotten histories. Alex Haley's *Roots: The Saga of an American Family* (1976) provides an important literary representation of this struggle. Through the story of Kunta Kinte and his descendants, Haley explores the experiences of enslaved Africans, their separation from their homeland, the loss of their original names and cultural practices, and their efforts to preserve their identity under oppressive conditions. As Raymond Gavins (2016) observes, *Roots* played an important role in bringing African ancestry, the history of slavery, and African-American genealogy into public discussion.

Colonial domination in *Roots* is represented through the control of African bodies, identities, traditions, and freedom. Enslaved Africans are separated from their families, communities, languages, and ancestral environments. Their original names and cultural identities are challenged by the forced adoption of colonial identities. Such experiences demonstrate how slavery attempted to break the connection between individuals and their ancestral past. Cultural erasure, therefore, becomes one of the most powerful instruments of colonial oppression. However, despite these attempts, African cultural traditions continue to survive through family relationships, oral narratives, spiritual beliefs, communal practices, and the transmission of ancestral memories.

The concept of Cultural Ecology, developed by anthropologist Julian Steward (1955), provides the main theoretical foundation for this study. Cultural Ecology examines the relationship between human communities, their environment, and their cultural practices. From this perspective, *Roots* can be understood as a narrative of cultural disruption and adaptation. The forced movement of Africans from their homeland to America changed

their social and cultural environment and threatened their traditional ways of life. Nevertheless, their customs, beliefs, family values, spiritual practices, and collective memories became important means of cultural preservation. The novel thus demonstrates that culture is not merely connected to geographical location; it is also sustained through shared experiences, inherited knowledge, and relationships between generations.

Another important aspect of the novel is genealogical consciousness, which refers to an individual's awareness of family origins, ancestors, and inherited cultural identity. Haley's journey to discover his African ancestry represents an effort to recover a history that slavery had attempted to destroy. Through ancestral investigation and family narratives, he reconnects with his historical roots and develops a stronger understanding of his identity and belonging. In this sense, genealogy becomes more than the study of family relationships; it becomes a means of recovering cultural memory, historical knowledge, and collective identity. The novel also highlights intergenerational trauma, through which the psychological and emotional effects of slavery continue to influence later generations. The suffering, separation, fear, and discrimination experienced by enslaved Africans leave lasting impressions on their descendants, demonstrating how historical oppression can shape the identities and experiences of future generations.

Historical memory and ancestral heritage are equally important to understanding the central concerns of *Roots*. Family stories, inherited traditions, and memories of earlier generations preserve experiences that may otherwise disappear from official historical records. These memories challenge the erasure of African history and help descendants understand their cultural origins. Similarly, cultural identity is maintained through language, beliefs, values, family connections, and collective experiences. Despite the destructive conditions of slavery, the determination of enslaved Africans to preserve their dignity, family relationships, and cultural traditions represents an important form of resistance and survival.

The discussion of colonial domination also extends to digital hegemony, which refers to the influence and control exercised through digital technologies, media platforms, information systems, and online knowledge networks. In the contemporary world, access to information and the power to represent cultures are not equally distributed. Dominant institutions and corporations often exercise considerable influence over how knowledge is collected, stored, shared, and represented. Couldry and Mejias (2019) describe this process through the concept of data colonialism, drawing attention to the appropriation of human life through digital data. This perspective provides an opportunity to examine how historical patterns of domination may continue in new technological forms. Although digital hegemony is not identical to historical colonialism, both raise important questions about power, cultural representation, ownership, and autonomy.

Against this background, the present study examines the relationship between colonial domination and contemporary digital hegemony through the major themes of Cultural Ecology, Genealogical Consciousness, Intergenerational Trauma, Historical Memory, and Cultural Identity in Alex Haley's *Roots*. It explores how cultural erasure affects ancestral belonging and how cultural preservation, genealogical recovery, and intergenerational transmission help reconstruct identities. It also considers the importance of protecting indigenous knowledge, ancestral records, and cultural heritage in the digital age. Ultimately, the study argues that remembering one's ancestors and preserving cultural traditions are essential acts of resistance against historical erasure and contemporary forms of domination. Through this approach, *Roots* is understood not only as a narrative of slavery and survival but also as a powerful reflection on cultural continuity, historical belonging, and the struggle for self-determination.

Background of the Study

Alex Haley's *Roots: The Saga of an American Family* (1976) is an important literary work that explores the history of slavery, colonial oppression, African ancestry, cultural identity, and the struggle for freedom. The novel traces the history of an African family across several generations, beginning with Kunta Kinte, a young man from the Mandinka community of Juffure in Gambia, who is captured and forcibly transported to America as a slave. Through Kunta Kinte and his descendants, Haley presents the painful experiences of enslaved Africans, including forced migration, family separation, racial discrimination, loss of cultural identity, and the denial of human dignity. The novel also highlights the determination of African people to preserve their cultural traditions and family connections despite generations of oppression.

The historical background of *Roots* is closely connected with the transatlantic slave trade, through which millions of Africans were forcibly taken from their homelands and transported to different parts of the world. Slavery was not limited to physical exploitation; it also involved the destruction of cultural traditions, languages, family relationships, and ancestral identities. Enslaved Africans were often given new names, separated from their relatives, and forced to accept unfamiliar social and cultural practices. These experiences created a lasting break between individuals and their ancestral histories. According to Eric Williams (1944), slavery and the slave trade were closely connected with the economic development of European colonial powers. Similarly, Orlando Patterson (1982) explains that slavery involved the social and cultural exclusion of enslaved individuals, including the denial of their recognised social identity and ancestral connections.

In *Roots*, Haley presents the experiences of slavery through the lives of different generations of the Kinte family. Kunta Kinte represents the struggle to preserve African identity under colonial domination. Even after being enslaved, he attempts to remember his African name, language, customs, religion, and family background. His determination to maintain his original identity reflects the importance of cultural memory and ancestral belonging. Although slavery attempts to separate him from his homeland and traditions, his memories become a

source of strength and resistance. His daughter, Kizzy, and later generations inherit the consequences of this historical violence. Through their experiences, Haley demonstrates how the effects of slavery continue beyond the generation that directly experiences it.

The novel also explores the importance of oral tradition and family history in preserving cultural identity. Stories passed from parents to children become valuable sources of historical knowledge when written records fail to represent the experiences of enslaved communities. The transmission of ancestral names, family stories, customs, and memories helps later generations maintain a connection with their origins. Jan Vansina (1985) emphasises the importance of oral traditions as sources for understanding the history and cultural experiences of African societies. In this context, *Roots* demonstrates how family narratives can challenge historical silence and restore a sense of belonging among descendants.

Another important aspect of the novel is the relationship between culture and the environment. Julian Steward's (1955) theory of Cultural Ecology provides a useful framework for understanding how African cultural practices are shaped by social and environmental conditions. In *Roots*, the movement of Africans from their homeland to an unfamiliar environment creates major changes in their traditional ways of life. Their languages, spiritual beliefs, family structures, food habits, and community practices are threatened by slavery. Nevertheless, certain cultural values survive through family relationships, religious practices, oral narratives, and collective memories. These practices demonstrate the ability of cultural traditions to continue even under conditions of displacement and oppression.

The novel further raises important questions about genealogical consciousness and the recovery of ancestral identity. Haley's search for his family history represents an effort to reconnect with his African origins and understand the experiences of his ancestors. His investigation shows that knowledge of one's family background can provide a deeper understanding of personal identity, cultural belonging, and historical experience. As a literary narrative, *Roots* therefore presents genealogy not simply as the tracing of family relationships but also as a means of recovering forgotten histories and challenging cultural erasure.

The historical experiences represented in *Roots* also provide a foundation for understanding intergenerational trauma. The physical and psychological suffering caused by slavery does not end with the abolition of the institution. Its effects continue through racial discrimination, social inequality, family disruption, and the loss of cultural connections. Marianne Hirsch (2008), through the concept of postmemory, explains how the experiences of earlier generations can shape the memories, identities, and emotional understanding of later generations. This perspective is useful in examining how the descendants of enslaved Africans continue to experience the historical consequences of slavery.

In the contemporary context, the study of colonial domination can also be extended to digital hegemony. Modern digital technologies influence how cultural knowledge, historical records, and ancestral information are collected, preserved, and shared. However, unequal access to digital resources and control over information can create new forms of cultural inequality. Couldry and Mejias (2019) use the concept of data colonialism to explain how digital systems can reproduce unequal relationships of power through the collection and control of human data. Although digital hegemony differs from historical slavery and colonial rule, it raises similar concerns about cultural representation, ownership of knowledge, and the right of communities to preserve their heritage.

Therefore, the background of this study establishes *Roots* as a significant literary representation of colonial oppression, cultural survival, ancestral memory, and identity reconstruction. By examining the novel through Cultural Ecology, Genealogical Consciousness, Historical Memory, and Intergenerational Trauma, the study explores how African cultural identity survives despite historical attempts at erasure. It also considers the relevance of these issues in the digital age, particularly the need to protect indigenous knowledge, ancestral genealogies, and collective cultural memory. Ultimately, the study argues that recovering ancestral history and transmitting cultural knowledge across generations are essential to preserving heritage, strengthening identity, and promoting cultural self-determination.

1.2 Rationale of the Study

This study explores how the effects of colonialism continue beyond slavery and influence the cultural, psychological, and technological aspects of modern society. Traditional historical studies often focus on the political and economic effects of slavery, while giving less attention to its impact on cultural identity, ancestral connections, and collective memory across generations. The forced migration of Africans during the transatlantic slave trade disrupted families, traditions, naming practices, and ancestral links. Alex Haley's *Roots* offers a valuable literary basis for examining these historical losses and their lasting effects through Cultural Ecology, Genealogical Consciousness, and Intergenerational Trauma.

2. Objectives of the Study

- To examine colonial domination and its impact on African cultural identity in Alex Haley's *Roots*, focusing on slavery, forced displacement, cultural suppression, and the disruption of indigenous traditions.
- To analyse the relationship between Cultural Ecology and cultural adaptation through Julian Steward's theoretical framework, examining how geographical displacement and changing social environments influence the preservation and transformation of African cultural practices.

- To investigate genealogical consciousness and intergenerational trauma in *Roots*, exploring how ancestral memory, family lineage, oral traditions, and inherited experiences of slavery shape identity, collective memory, and cultural resistance.
- To explore the transition from colonial domination to digital hegemony, examining how digital dependency, algorithmic inequalities, cultural commodification, and data exploitation create contemporary challenges to cultural identity, heritage preservation, and digital sovereignty.

3. Methodology of the Study

The present study adopts a qualitative, descriptive, interpretative, and interdisciplinary research methodology to examine Alex Haley's *Roots: The Saga of an American Family* (1976) through literary, historical, anthropological, and cultural perspectives. It employs close textual analysis and critical interpretation of the novel's themes, plot, characters, and narrative representations, supported by relevant secondary sources, including scholarly books, peer-reviewed journal articles, historical studies, and theoretical writings. Julian H. Steward's (1955) theory of Cultural Ecology serves as the primary theoretical framework, complemented by perspectives from genealogical studies, collective memory, and intergenerational trauma. The study focuses on colonial displacement, cultural adaptation, ancestral memory, and the preservation of cultural identity across generations. Furthermore, it extends the discussion to contemporary digital hegemony, examining the relationship between historical oppression and modern forms of technological control, particularly in relation to cultural representation, knowledge ownership, and digital sovereignty.

4. Theoretical Framework

The present study adopts an interdisciplinary theoretical framework combining Cultural Ecology, Postcolonial Theory, Genealogical Consciousness, Collective Memory, Intergenerational Trauma, and Oral Tradition to examine colonial oppression, cultural displacement, ancestral identity, and contemporary digital hegemony in Alex Haley's *Roots*. Julian H. Steward's Cultural Ecology (1955) serves as the primary theoretical foundation, explaining how geographical displacement and changes in social environments influence cultural practices and identity. Postcolonial perspectives drawn from Fanon (1967) and Said (1994) help examine the historical and psychological effects of colonial domination, while Noble (2018) extends the discussion to contemporary digital inequalities and technological control. Genealogical consciousness is explored through Nelson (2016) and Trouillot (1995), who highlight the importance of ancestral knowledge, historical recovery, and the representation of marginalised communities. Furthermore, Halbwachs (1992), Assmann (2011), and LaCapra (2001) provide insights into collective memory and the transmission of historical trauma across generations. Vansina (1985) emphasises the role of oral tradition in preserving cultural heritage and ancestral knowledge. Together, these theoretical perspectives help analyse how slavery and forced displacement disrupted African cultural identity, how Kunta Kinte and his descendants preserved their ancestral heritage, and how historical inequalities continue in contemporary digital spaces. Thus, the framework connects colonial domination with digital hegemony and highlights the importance of cultural preservation, genealogical identity, and digital sovereignty.

5. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The existing scholarship on colonial domination, cultural displacement, genealogical identity, intergenerational trauma, and digital hegemony provides an important foundation for examining Alex Haley's *Roots: The Saga of an American Family*. Haley's narrative represents slavery not merely as a historical system of exploitation but also as a force that disrupted African cultural identity, family relationships, ancestral connections, and traditional knowledge. Steward (1955) explains the relationship between culture, environment, and human adaptation, providing a useful framework for understanding how Kunta Kinte's forced displacement from Africa to America disrupted his relationship with ancestral land, community, and cultural practices. Similarly, Fanon (1967) and Said (1993) examine the psychological and cultural consequences of colonial domination, while Trouillot (1995) highlights how historical narratives often silence marginalised communities. Genealogical identity and ancestral recovery are further explored by Nelson (2016), who discusses the role of family history and DNA in reconnecting African Americans with their ancestral origins. Halbwachs (1992) and Assmann (2011) explain how collective memory and cultural knowledge are preserved and transmitted across generations, while LaCapra (2001) examines the continuing effects of historical trauma. These perspectives are particularly relevant to *Roots*, where Kunta Kinte's descendants preserve fragments of their African heritage through family narratives, ancestral names, and oral traditions. The significance of oral history in reconstructing suppressed cultural identities is also emphasised by Vansina (1985). In the context of diasporic identity and cultural displacement, Dash (2021), in his study of *The Namesake*, examines the relationship between ancestral memory, diasporic commemoration, and cultural belonging. His subsequent studies of Bharati Mukherjee's *Jasmine* (Dash, 2022a), Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Lowland* (Dash, 2022b), and Kiran Desai's diasporic fiction (Dash, 2022c) explore alienation, displacement, identity formation, and the psychological experiences of migration. Furthermore, Dash (2023) discusses diasporic vision and the relationship between cultural identity, globalisation, and displacement in *The Inheritance of Loss*. Although these studies examine Indian diasporic literature rather than African-American slavery, they offer useful comparative insights into the relationship between ancestral belonging and cultural identity. Contemporary scholarship extends these concerns to digital

domination. Couldry and Mejias (2019) introduce the concept of data colonialism to explain how human life and personal information become resources for technological and economic exploitation. Noble (2018) demonstrates how digital algorithms can reproduce racial discrimination, while Odumosu (2020) examines the ethical challenges involved in digitising colonial archives and representing historically oppressed communities. These discussions suggest that contemporary digital systems may reproduce certain inequalities associated with historical colonial structures through data extraction, unequal technological access, and the control of cultural representation. Taken together, the existing scholarship establishes important connections between colonial oppression, cultural adaptation, genealogical consciousness, collective memory, and technological domination. However, there remains scope for an integrated literary investigation of these dimensions through Haley's *Roots*, particularly in connecting the historical disruption of African ancestral identity with contemporary digital hegemony, cultural preservation, and digital sovereignty.

Further insights into the historical and cultural experiences of African communities can be drawn from several important scholarly books on slavery, diaspora, identity, and colonialism. Du Bois (1903), in *The Souls of Black Folk*, examines the psychological effects of racial discrimination and the struggle for African-American identity. Patterson (1982), in *Slavery and Social Death*, explains how slavery destroys social relationships, personal freedom, and cultural belonging. Mintz and Price (1992), in *The Birth of African-American Culture*, discuss how enslaved Africans preserved and transformed their cultural traditions in the Americas. Gilroy (1993), in *The Black Atlantic*, explores the relationship between African identity, diaspora, cultural exchange, and historical displacement. Eltis (2000), in *The Rise of African Slavery in the Americas*, provides a historical understanding of the transatlantic slave trade and its consequences for African communities. Blight (2001), in *Race and Reunion*, examines the relationship between slavery, racial memory, and the construction of American historical identity. Mbembe (2001), in *On the Postcolony*, analyses the continuing influence of colonial power on social and cultural structures. Hartman (2007), in *Lose Your Mother*, explores the relationship between slavery, historical loss, memory, and ancestral identity. Smallwood (2007), in *Saltwater Slavery*, investigates the experiences of Africans during the transatlantic slave trade, particularly the physical and psychological consequences of forced displacement. These works provide valuable historical and theoretical perspectives for interpreting Kunta Kinte's experiences and the struggles of his descendants in *Roots*. Collectively, they strengthen the understanding of slavery as not only a system of physical exploitation but also a process of cultural disruption, historical erasure, and intergenerational suffering. Their arguments support the present study's examination of ancestral memory, cultural survival, and the continuing struggle for identity and cultural sovereignty.

Recent contributions by Bipin Bihari Dash and his research collaborators provide further insights into postcolonial identity, marginalisation, memory, and social inequality. Dash (2026), in his article "Mapping the Inner Landscape: Exploring Emotion, Memory, Life, and Time in Psychological Novels," published in the *International Journal of Special Education*, examines the relationship between emotion, memory, psychological experience, and human consciousness. His discussion provides a useful literary perspective for understanding the psychological dimensions of historical memory and inherited experiences in Haley's *Roots*. Similarly, Maharana, Dash, and Suvadarshinee (2026), in their study of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's postcolonial theory, examine subalternity, marginalised voices, representation, and epistemic exclusion. Their discussion offers a relevant theoretical perspective for analysing the suppression of African voices and cultural identities under colonial domination. Furthermore, Maharana, Dash, and Suvadarshinee (2026), in their article on poverty, inequality, and inclusive development in contemporary Indian fiction, explore how literary narratives represent structural marginalisation and social exclusion. These studies provide comparative insights into the relationship between historical oppression, cultural identity, psychological experience, and the struggle for representation. Although they do not directly examine Haley's *Roots*, their theoretical and literary contributions support the present study's investigation of colonial displacement, ancestral memory, intergenerational trauma, and cultural resistance.

6. Research Gap

Although existing scholarship has examined slavery, African diasporic identity, ancestral memory, and cultural survival in Alex Haley's *Roots*, these themes are frequently discussed through separate historical, literary, and postcolonial perspectives. The present study seeks to bring these dimensions into an integrated analytical framework by examining how forced displacement disrupts cultural ecology, how genealogical consciousness facilitates ancestral recovery, and how intergenerational memory sustains cultural identity. It further extends this discussion to contemporary digital hegemony, particularly the unequal control over genealogical information, cultural representation, and indigenous knowledge.

7. DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

Alex Haley's *Roots: The Saga of an American Family* (1976) is a historical family narrative that explores the experiences of an African American family across several generations, beginning in eighteenth-century Africa and continuing through slavery, emancipation, and racial discrimination in America. Through the lives of Kunta Kinte and his descendants, Haley examines the relationship between colonial domination, cultural displacement, ancestral identity, family relationships, and historical memory. The novel is particularly significant because it presents slavery not simply as a system of physical exploitation but also as a process that destroys cultural

traditions, separates families, and weakens connections with ancestral origins. Haley reconstructs his family history through oral narratives, historical documents, genealogical research, and literary imagination, making *Roots* an important representation of African cultural survival and resistance (Haley, 1976).

The narrative begins in Juffure, a Mandinka village in The Gambia, where Kunta Kinte is born into a family that values cultural traditions, religious beliefs, community relationships, and ancestral knowledge. His father, Omoro Kinte, and mother, Binta, introduce him to the values and responsibilities of Mandinka society. His childhood reflects a close relationship between individuals, family, community, and the natural environment. His experiences of traditional education, agricultural activities, religious practices, and community life demonstrate how cultural identity develops through interaction with a particular social and geographical environment. This aspect of the novel can be understood through Julian H. Steward's (1955) Cultural Ecology, which explains the relationship between culture, environment, and human adaptation.

Kunta's peaceful life changes when he is captured by slave traders while collecting wood to make a drum. His capture represents the beginning of his forced separation from his family, homeland, and cultural traditions. He is transported across the Atlantic aboard the slave ship *Lord Ligonier* and sold into slavery in America. The Middle Passage exposes him to physical suffering, humiliation, fear, and the destruction of personal freedom. His experience represents the larger historical tragedy of the Transatlantic slave trade, through which millions of Africans were forcibly removed from their communities and transported to the Americas (Eltis & Richardson, 2010). Kunta's displacement is therefore not merely geographical; it is also cultural, psychological, and genealogical.

One of the most important events in the novel is the attempt by his enslavers to replace his original name, Kunta Kinte, with Toby. Naming becomes an instrument of domination because it attempts to remove his connection with his family and African identity. However, Kunta refuses to accept the imposed name and continues to remember his father, grandfather, homeland, and Mandinka traditions. His resistance demonstrates that identity cannot be completely controlled through external authority. His determination to preserve his original name becomes a symbol of cultural resistance against slavery and forced assimilation. Through Kunta's experience, Haley illustrates how colonial domination attempts to control not only the bodies and labour of enslaved people but also their memories, identities, and cultural histories.

Kunta's relationship with Bell, an enslaved woman, and their daughter Kizzy introduces another important dimension of the narrative: the destruction of family relationships under slavery. Kunta teaches Kizzy about her African ancestry and attempts to preserve the memories of his homeland through storytelling. However, Kizzy is sold away after helping another enslaved person escape by preparing a forged travel document. Her separation from her parents demonstrates how slavery treats family relationships as subordinate to the economic interests of slaveholders. Kizzy's experience also represents the transmission of historical suffering from one generation to another. Despite her separation from Kunta, she continues to preserve the stories and memories associated with her African ancestry.

Kizzy later gives birth to George, popularly known as Chicken George. Through his experiences, the novel explores the changing conditions of enslaved African Americans and their struggle for survival, dignity, and social recognition. George's life demonstrates how individuals attempt to establish their identity within an oppressive social system. Although his experiences differ from those of Kunta, he remains connected to his African ancestry through the stories transmitted by his mother. His descendants continue the family history through the period of slavery, the American Civil War, emancipation, and the continuing challenges of racial discrimination. The experiences of these generations demonstrate that the abolition of slavery does not immediately remove the social and economic inequalities created by colonial and racial domination.

The final part of the novel focuses on Haley's investigation into his family history. Through oral narratives, historical documents, archival materials, and genealogical research, he attempts to reconstruct his family's African origins. His journey to The Gambia and his interaction with a traditional storyteller, or griot, become significant in establishing the relationship between oral history and ancestral identity. The griot preserves family histories, names, cultural traditions, and collective experiences through storytelling. This aspect of the novel supports Vansina's (1985) argument that oral traditions are valuable sources for understanding the histories of African communities. Haley's research also demonstrates how family narratives can recover experiences that are often absent from official historical records.

In his concluding statement, Haley explains that the family history presented in *Roots* is based on carefully preserved oral traditions, supported by documentary evidence and extensive archival research. He states:

> To the best of my knowledge and of my effort, every lineage statement within *Roots* is from either my African or American families' carefully preserved oral history, much of which I have been able conventionally to corroborate with documents. Those documents, along with the myriad textural details of what were contemporary indigenous lifestyles, cultural history, and such that give *Roots* flesh have come from years of intensive research in fifty-odd libraries, archives, and other repositories on three continents. (Haley, 1976, p. 888).

This statement highlights the importance of oral history, genealogical investigation, and historical documentation in reconstructing ancestral identity. Haley's reference to family memories demonstrates how historical knowledge can survive through the transmission of stories across generations. His efforts to support these narratives through documentary evidence also reveal the importance of combining oral traditions with

historical research. From the perspective of the present study, this process represents an attempt to recover identities that were disrupted by slavery, forced migration, and cultural erasure.

The experiences of Kunta Kinte and his descendants provide a significant foundation for examining colonial domination and its effects on African cultural identity. Colonial domination operates through physical displacement, economic exploitation, cultural suppression, and the destruction of established social relationships. Kunta's removal from Juffure separates him from the environmental and cultural conditions that shaped his identity. His experiences demonstrate how the forced movement of individuals can disrupt their relationships with ancestral land, traditional occupations, religious practices, and community structures. Steward's (1955) Cultural Ecology helps explain this relationship by showing that culture develops through interaction between human communities and their environments. In *Roots*, the plantation environment forces Kunta and his descendants to adapt to unfamiliar social and economic conditions while attempting to preserve elements of their inherited culture.

The novel also demonstrates that cultural adaptation does not necessarily result in the complete loss of ancestral identity. Kunta continues to remember his African homeland, language, family relationships, and traditional values. His memories become an important cultural resource that he transmits to Kizzy. Although his descendants are physically separated from Africa, they maintain a symbolic connection with their ancestral homeland through storytelling and inherited traditions. Mintz and Price (1992) explain how African cultural practices were preserved and transformed through the experiences of enslaved Africans in the Americas. Similarly, Gilroy (1993) examines the relationship between African diaspora, cultural identity, and historical displacement. These perspectives help explain how African cultural identity survives through adaptation, memory, and cultural exchange.

Another important theme in the novel is genealogical consciousness. It refers to an individual's awareness of ancestral origins, family relationships, and inherited cultural identity. Kunta's refusal to abandon his original name represents his determination to preserve his genealogical identity despite the efforts of slaveholders to erase it. His memories of his father, grandfather, and homeland become essential elements of his identity. Through Kizzy and George, these memories continue across generations. Haley's reconstruction of his family history further demonstrates that genealogy is not simply the study of biological relationships but also a means of recovering historical experiences and cultural belonging. Nelson (2016) discusses how genealogical knowledge can help African Americans reconnect with ancestral histories disrupted by slavery. Trouillot (1995) similarly explains how dominant historical narratives often silence marginalised communities. From this perspective, Haley's narrative becomes an act of historical recovery and cultural resistance.

The relationship between genealogy and cultural identity is particularly visible in Kizzy's role as a transmitter of ancestral knowledge. Although she does not experience Kunta's childhood in Africa, she preserves his stories and passes them to George. Her efforts demonstrate that cultural identity can be maintained through family memory, language, and storytelling even when geographical connections are lost. The transmission of Kunta's memories also reflects Marianne Hirsch's (2012) concept of postmemory, which explains how later generations develop emotional connections with traumatic experiences inherited through family narratives and cultural representations. Kizzy and George become connected to an African past that they have not directly experienced but continue to recognise as an essential part of their identity.

Intergenerational trauma is another significant theme in *Roots*. The novel demonstrates how the consequences of slavery extend beyond individuals who directly experience physical violence and forced displacement. Kunta's suffering, Kizzy's separation from her family, and George's experiences of racial and social inequality illustrate the continuing effects of historical oppression. Halbwachs (1992) explains that individual memories are shaped by collective experiences and social relationships. Similarly, Assmann (2011) examines how cultural knowledge and historical experiences are transmitted across generations. These perspectives help explain how the descendants of Kunta inherit both the painful memories of slavery and the responsibility of preserving their ancestral identity. Caruth (1996) and Eyerman (2001) also provide useful perspectives for understanding the psychological and collective dimensions of historical trauma. However, the novel primarily represents inherited trauma through family relationships, cultural memories, storytelling, and social experiences rather than through scientific evidence of biological inheritance.

The importance of oral tradition is closely connected with these themes. In *Roots*, storytelling becomes a means of preserving cultural knowledge when formal institutions and historical records fail to recognise the experiences of enslaved Africans. Kunta's stories about Africa, his family, and Mandinka traditions provide Kizzy and subsequent generations with an understanding of their ancestral origins. The griot tradition further emphasises the importance of oral historians in preserving genealogy and collective memory. Vansina (1985) recognises oral narratives as important sources for reconstructing indigenous histories. Similarly, Hartman (2007) examines the relationship between slavery, historical loss, and the difficulty of recovering the experiences of enslaved individuals. These perspectives demonstrate that oral history can challenge the limitations of colonial documentation and restore attention to marginalised voices.

Haley's combination of historical research, oral narratives, and imaginative reconstruction also raises questions about the representation of suppressed histories. Official records of slavery frequently identified enslaved individuals through ownership, labour, and economic value rather than their personal experiences and family relationships. As a result, many aspects of their cultural and emotional lives remain inadequately documented.

Hartman's (2008) concept of critical fabulation offers a useful comparative perspective on the difficulties of reconstructing the lives of enslaved people from incomplete archives. Although Haley's literary method and Hartman's approach are not identical, both draw attention to the limitations of conventional historical records and the need to recover marginalised experiences. In this sense, *Roots* functions as a counter-narrative that challenges historical silence and emphasises the importance of African American family history.

The relationship between colonial domination and contemporary digital hegemony extends the significance of the novel into the present. Historical colonialism operated through territorial control, forced migration, labour exploitation, and cultural suppression. Contemporary digital hegemony operates through different mechanisms, including data extraction, technological dependency, algorithmic classification, and control over information. Couldry and Mejias (2019) use the concept of data colonialism to explain how human life and personal information become resources for economic exploitation. Although digital data extraction cannot be equated with historical slavery, both contexts raise questions about ownership, consent, control, and unequal power relationships.

Kunta's experience of forced renaming offers a useful comparison with contemporary digital identity systems. In the novel, slaveholders attempt to replace his original name with Toby and establish control over his identity. In contemporary digital environments, individuals are increasingly represented through personal profiles, databases, digital identifiers, and algorithmic classifications. These systems can influence how people are recognised and represented. Noble (2018), in *Algorithms of Oppression*, explains how search engines and algorithmic systems can reproduce racial discrimination and social inequalities. The comparison suggests that control over identity remains an important issue, although the historical and technological contexts are fundamentally different. Kunta's struggle to preserve his original name therefore provides a literary perspective for understanding the contemporary importance of personal identity, cultural representation, and data sovereignty.

Cultural ecology also offers an important connection between colonial exploitation and contemporary technological practices. In *Roots*, the plantation system benefits from the labour and knowledge of enslaved Africans while denying them control over land and resources. Their agricultural knowledge and traditional skills contribute to plantation production, but the economic benefits are controlled by slaveholders. In contemporary society, indigenous ecological knowledge, traditional agricultural practices, medicinal knowledge, and cultural information can also become commercially valuable resources. When external institutions collect and use such knowledge without meaningful consent or community participation, questions of knowledge ownership and cultural sovereignty arise. Steward's (1955) framework helps explain why the relationship between communities, their environments, and their traditional knowledge must be considered when examining cultural autonomy.

The novel's representation of emancipation further strengthens the comparison between historical and contemporary forms of inequality. The abolition of slavery through the Thirteenth Amendment in 1865 legally ended slavery in the United States, but it did not immediately establish economic independence or social equality for African Americans. George and his descendants continue to face racial discrimination and economic difficulties. This demonstrates the difference between formal freedom and actual control over social and economic conditions. A similar distinction can be observed in contemporary digital society. Access to digital platforms does not automatically provide individuals and communities with control over technological infrastructure, personal information, or the economic value generated from their data. Couldry and Mejias (2019) argue that data colonialism creates new forms of dependency through the appropriation of human information. Thus, the experiences of Kunta's descendants provide a historical context for examining the difference between participation and genuine autonomy in modern technological environments.

Digital technology also offers opportunities for preserving ancestral memory and cultural heritage. Digital archives, genealogical databases, oral-history collections, and online platforms can support the documentation of family histories and indigenous languages. They can extend the traditional role of storytelling by making cultural knowledge accessible to future generations. However, such developments also raise concerns about privacy, ownership, representation, and the commercial use of ancestral information. Communities must have meaningful participation in decisions concerning the collection, preservation, and circulation of their cultural knowledge. Digital archives become valuable instruments of cultural preservation when they support community ownership and respect indigenous traditions rather than placing historical knowledge entirely under external institutional control.

The connection between ancestral memory and digital sovereignty is therefore particularly relevant to the present study. Kunta's refusal to abandon his name and Kizzy's efforts to preserve his stories represent the importance of maintaining authority over personal and collective identity. In contemporary society, this struggle can be extended to the protection of genealogical information, cultural records, indigenous knowledge, and community-generated data. Digital sovereignty involves the ability of individuals and communities to exercise meaningful control over their digital identities, information, and knowledge systems. The preservation of ancestral histories through community-controlled archives and ethical digital documentation can help resist cultural exploitation and historical erasure.

The major findings of this discussion can be understood through the relationship between historical colonial practices and contemporary technological structures. The following table summarises the central analytical connections.

Table 1: From Colonial Domination to Digital Hegemony: Major Analytical Findings

Analytical dimension	Colonial domination in *Roots*	Contemporary digital context
Cultural ecology	Forced displacement from Africa and disruption of traditional relationships with land and community	Commercial appropriation of indigenous knowledge and ecological information
Genealogical identity	Forced renaming and separation from ancestral family relationships	Digital classification, commercialised genealogical data, and loss of control over personal information
Intergenerational trauma	Transmission of slavery-related suffering through Kunta's descendants	Continuing inequalities and the need to preserve historical memory
Oral tradition	Preservation of Mandinka history through family storytelling and griot traditions	Digital archives and online oral-history collections
Economic domination	Exploitation of African labour and denial of economic independence	Data extraction and unequal control over digital resources
Cultural resistance	Preservation of African names, language, religion, and ancestry	Data protection, community-controlled archives, and digital sovereignty

The findings demonstrate that *Roots* represents cultural survival as a continuous process of adaptation, memory, and resistance. Through Kunta Kinte, Kizzy, George, and their descendants, Haley illustrates how colonial domination attempts to destroy cultural identity by separating individuals from their families, ancestral lands, and traditional knowledge. Nevertheless, the transmission of stories, names, and cultural practices enables subsequent generations to maintain a connection with their African origins. The novel therefore presents ancestral memory as an important means of resisting historical erasure and reconstructing collective identity.

The analysis also establishes that the relationship between colonial domination and digital hegemony should be understood as a comparative examination of power rather than an assertion that both systems are identical. Historical slavery involved the ownership and exploitation of human beings, whereas contemporary digital hegemony operates through technological infrastructures, data collection, and informational control. However, both contexts raise important questions about ownership, economic inequality, representation, and the authority to control human resources and knowledge. This comparison extends the historical significance of Haley's narrative into contemporary discussions of digital rights and cultural sovereignty.

Finally, *Roots* demonstrates that cultural identity is closely connected with ancestral memory, family relationships, environmental belonging, and the transmission of traditional knowledge. Kunta's determination to preserve his original name, Kizzy's commitment to storytelling, and George's awareness of his African ancestry illustrate the strength of cultural memory across generations. Haley's narrative therefore establishes that resistance is not limited to physical opposition against oppression; it also involves preserving family histories, protecting cultural traditions, and maintaining connections with ancestral origins. In the contemporary world, this argument highlights the importance of protecting indigenous knowledge, genealogical information, and collective cultural identities from technological exploitation. The study concludes that the preservation of ancestral memory and community control over cultural and digital resources are essential to achieving meaningful cultural autonomy.

Recent scholarly contributions further strengthen the theoretical foundation of the present study by providing critical insights into colonial displacement, cultural memory, intergenerational trauma, and digital sovereignty. Gijanto and Horlings (2012) examine the relationship between African diaspora and West African historical archaeology, highlighting the importance of historical connections between Africa and its diaspora. Sesma (2016) discusses the marginalisation of African American experiences and the need to recover suppressed histories through heritage narratives. Morgan and Pallascio (2015) explore how digital media and participatory culture contribute to the representation and preservation of the transatlantic slave trade. Sutter (2020) examines the transmission of slavery-related trauma and family memories across generations, while Parry (2021) highlights the lasting psychological consequences of slavery and racial violence. Sayer (2021) emphasises the importance of representing the history of enslavement through local and community-based historical narratives. Amponsah (2023) investigates the relationship between Black cultural memory, digital participation, and

diasporic identity, demonstrating how digital platforms can strengthen collective historical consciousness. Similarly, Balogun and Kalusopa (2021) examine the digital preservation of indigenous knowledge and the importance of developing appropriate archival systems. Cocq (2021) highlights the need to consider indigenous perspectives in digital humanities to prevent cultural misrepresentation and unequal knowledge practices. Tuominen et al. (2023) further emphasise the importance of protecting indigenous digital cultural heritage through sustainable governance and community participation. Collectively, these studies strengthen the present research by establishing connections between historical memory, cultural preservation, ancestral identity, and technological power. They also support the argument that digital technologies should promote cultural continuity and community autonomy rather than reproduce existing structures of inequality.

CONCLUSION

This study has explored Alex Haley's *Roots: The Saga of an American Family* through the interconnected perspectives of Cultural Ecology, Postcolonial Theory, Genealogical Consciousness, Collective Memory, Oral Tradition, and Intergenerational Trauma. The analysis reveals how colonial domination and slavery fractured African cultural identity, disrupted familial bonds, severed ancestral connections, and undermined indigenous knowledge systems. Through the intergenerational experiences of Kunta Kinte, Kizzy, and Chicken George, Haley poignantly portrays the enduring struggle to preserve cultural identity through ancestral memory, storytelling, language, and inherited traditions. Drawing upon Julian Steward's Cultural Ecology, the study establishes that forced displacement signifies not merely the loss of geographical belonging but also the disintegration of the profound relationship between people, land, environment, and cultural heritage. Furthermore, the transmission of historical trauma and collective memory illustrates how the wounds of slavery transcend generations. Kunta's unwavering attachment to his African identity and Kizzy's preservation of ancestral knowledge emerge as powerful acts of cultural resistance against historical erasure and assimilation. Extending this historical inquiry into the contemporary world, the study identifies digital hegemony through data exploitation, technological dependency, and the commodification of indigenous knowledge. It therefore emphasises the importance of digital sovereignty, ethical preservation, and community ownership of cultural resources. Ultimately, *Roots* affirms that ancestry is not merely a connection to the past but a living inheritance that shapes identity, belonging, and collective consciousness. The preservation of ancestral memory and cultural heritage thus becomes an enduring expression of resistance, dignity, and cultural sovereignty in an increasingly digital world.

The study also highlights Haley's effective use of narrative techniques, language, and literary devices in shaping the historical and emotional depth of *Roots*. Through chronological narration, third-person storytelling, shifting perspectives, and a multigenerational narrative structure, Haley traces the experiences of successive generations while connecting individual lives with broader historical events. His vivid descriptions, realistic characterisation, dialogue, symbolism, imagery, and flashbacks bring the harsh realities of slavery, displacement, and racial discrimination into focus. The incorporation of African words and expressions, particularly Mandinka terms such as *ko* (a traditional stringed musical instrument associated with the banjo) and *Kamby Bolongo* (the Gambia River), preserves linguistic traces of Kunta Kinte's African heritage. Similarly, the repeated references to ancestral names, including Kunta Kinte, Omoro, and Kairaba Kunta Kinte, reinforce the importance of genealogy and cultural belonging. Haley also employs oral storytelling, traditional expressions, and references to African customs to recreate the cultural atmosphere of Juffure. These linguistic and narrative elements function as symbols of cultural continuity and resistance against colonial erasure. Thus, Haley's literary craftsmanship transforms family history into a compelling testimony of suffering, survival, ancestral pride, and the enduring struggle to reclaim cultural identity.

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Data Availability Statement

The data supporting the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflict of interest.

Ethics Statement

Ethical guidelines were followed throughout the research. Where applicable, informed consent was obtained from the participants, and their privacy and confidentiality were maintained.

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