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Introduction

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Toni Morrison has coined the phrase 'Foreigner's Home' in reference to spaces effectuated by the process of (im)migration. With regard to America, she contended during the 2012 America Festival in France that

> Everybody in America has come from some place else, except Native Americans. And immigrants who came because they were pursued, or because they wanted riches, or because they were bought, sold, told "Either you go to jail or you go to America," as they did in England. Everybody was from some place else. Thrown out or exiles. So the idea of home for Americans is fraught with yearning. It's a romantic place. It's a kind of utopia, just out of reach. So it's less a place than a mental state that you acquire when you are in a place where you are safe and nobody is after you, and people will help you. ("Interview")

Morrison's contemplations of the meanings of 'home' can be found in her literary narratives. To her, the quest for home bears within it the following inquires: "Where is the culture? Where is the history? And what is it? And having one. So the house becomes a haven or it can become a haven […] (*Profile*)." In concord with the African-American women's literary tradition which "provides a rich resource and a coherent commentary that brings into sharp focus the Black community's central values" (Cannon, 62) and consistently with her own objective of "writing for black people" (Hoby), Morrison's later novel *Home* ponders the roots and multidimensionality of the African-American sense of foreignness and pursuit of domesticity (the transformation of one's house into a haven) in the racially segregated America of the 1950s. Two primary approaches to literary studies that have been generally defined as a result of recapitulation of varied literary schools are aesthetic and cultural. "While aestheticians debated how most accurately to judge a text's degree of perfection or imperfection, cultural criticism has opened up for discussion how both literary texts and critical standards are produced and what social forces they may reflect" (Hall 2). Following the cultural approach to literary analysis that entails contextualization of a literary work, the aim of this discussion is to ferret out the sociological and political context that Toni Morrison envisions in *Home* while portraying African-Americans' endeavor to attain the sense of belonging within the mainstream American society. Bearing in mind the fact that cultural approach emphasizes the interdependence, or even cognitive competition, between literature and other fields such as history, psychology, sociology, journalism etc. the analysis involves a number of references to phenomena external to Morrison's work, evidencing the correspondence between Morrison's fiction and actual reality.

The African-American Sense of Foreignness

The storyline centers on the main character Frank Money's rediscovery of home, in the process of which certain antecedents that may account for black American

alienation from their native land are put forward. One event was forced exile that led to the creation of segregated black towns and a sense of black dislocatedness. Frank's family underwent forced exodus from Bandera County, Texas, which shattered black population's sense of home and security, and resettled in a fictional town Lotus, Georgia. Lotus represents the peculiar reality of so-called "colored towns" that Morrison describes in one of her interviews:

> It's like many areas that were segregated off from the white towns. They were black towns. They would call them "colored towns" and remember that Frank was, along with another black neighborhood, expelled. When he was young [….] whole cities would be freed, black people were just told to leave. The property taken, expropriated, and under the threat of death they got out of town. And he was born in this family in one such place. So the idea of the closed black town, village, hamlet was very pervasive. It still exists in certain parts of the United States. […] Of course, they did not give them water, and they did not give them electricity, and certainly no schools. It was a terribly oppressed version of segregation then, and in a different way, I suppose, now. ("Interview. America Festival.")

The dispossessed population came to realize that in racialist America one's domicile could be violated at any time, as the narrator in *Home* opines:

> You could be inside, living in your own house for years, and still, men with or without badges but always with guns could force you, your family, your neighbors to pack up and move – with or without shoes. Twenty-four hours, they were told, or else. "Else" meaning "die." (9–10)

Threatened, in escaping to new territory, they became homeless. Frank's family was seemingly fortunate as his grandmother Lenore allowed them to stay with her until they could move into their own house. Interestingly, Lenore herself was not the actual proprietor of her house. After her first husband, a well-off gas station owner, was murdered in Alabama, most probably by envious racists, Lenore fled to Lotus, Georgia, where she occupied abandoned property that had been willed to her husband by his cousin. Frank family's plight sheds light on the insecure black settlement during the period of racial segregation.

As time went on, the atmosphere of the segregated town induced familial alienation in the youth and they began to dream of home elsewhere. Lenore's mean-spiritedness, caused by the loss of her sense of homely quietude, turned out too overbearing. "Tight quarters, inconvenience, extra chores, an increasingly indifferent husband – her haven was destroyed" (88). Moreover, the busy elders did not have requisite time to attend to their children. Looking back, Frank recalls: "*When we got home we expected to be whipped or at least scolded for staying out so late, but the grown-ups did not notice us. Some disturbance had their attention*" [italics in original] (5). He now understands that the lack of adult concern that he and his sister Cee perceived with relief actually jeopardized their security. Unattended, "Frank and Cee, like some forgotten Hansel and Gretel, locked hands as they navigated the silence and tried to imagine a future" (53).

Other factors that induce senses of displacement and uncertainty within Frank are racial profiling and the impoverishment even black veterans may be subject to. Frank experiences particularly acute alienation when his pursuit of the citizen-soldier ideal remains ever illusive. Before recruitment he believed that "the army was the only solution. Lotus was suffocating, killing him and his two best friends" (35). His thought reflected the black soldiers' perception of military service which

> has historically served as a rite of passage through which young men prove their fitness for manhood […]. Add to this the emasculated position of black men in the South and the centrality of masculinity to military socialization culture […], and it is no mystery why black men sought to certify their masculinity by participating in combat. (Parker, 78)

For a time, Frank seemed to have succeeded in finding a domestic space, a sense of belonging to the broader nation, away from confining Lotus. "In the photograph he'd sent home, a smiling warrior in a uniform, holding a rifle, he looked as though he belonged to something else, something beyond and unlike Georgia" (53). Unfortunately, upon repatriation the black veteran feels like a stranger in racially segregated America for several reasons. First of all, he cannot afford decent living conditions, as "there [is] nothing in his pants pocket now but his army medal" (14). Secondly, because of racial profiling targeting black men, he remains susceptible to unwarranted stop-and-frisk policing. Added to that, while traveling across the country, he cannot even utilize freely public restrooms that only whites may utilize. On one occasion, he even has to relieve "himself in the shrubbery behind the station" (23).

In picturing the dilemma of the black veteran's sense of foreignness, Toni Morrison employs a number of signifiers relative to belonging, home, house, and family. The initial symbolic place that the returned veteran finds himself situated in after repatriation is not a welcoming home but a "nuthouse" (11), within which he, along with other patients, is subject to medical experimentation under sedation. Only after emerging to a condition from which he is able to pretend immobility to avoid further injections, does he manage to release himself from confining bed straps. His escape, however, does not provide settlement prospects, so he travels from one city to the next, unable to lodge in "rooming houses, hotels" (23) and "tourists homes" (25) either because of his race or lack of money. As time passes, Frank develops a sense of dislocatedness. When asked about his place of origin, he replies, "Aw, man. Korea, Kentucky, San Diego, Seattle, Georgia. Name it I'm from it" (28). Moreover, he considers legislation whereupon he is likely to be "sentenced for vagrancy. Interesting law, vagrancy, meaning standing outside or walking without clear purpose anywhere" (9). Paradoxically, the law classifies his state to be a transgression.

His dislocatedness also reflects his traumatized psyche. Physically as well as mentally he cannot be certain of the location he is going to find himself in and of the behaviors his psychological impairment may engender. Uncontrollable confusion haunts him, for instance, when he endeavors to recall the circumstances surrounding his arrest:

> He couldn't explain it to himself, let alone to a gentle couple offering help. If he wasn't in a fight was he peeing on

> the sidewalk? Hollering curses at some passerby, some schoolchildren? Was he banging his head on a wall or hiding behind bushes in somebody's backyard? "I must have been acting up," he said. "Something like that." He truly could not remember. Had he thrown himself on the ground at the sudden sound of backfire? Perhaps he started a fight with a stranger or started weeping before trees – apologizing to them for acts he had never committed. (14–15)

Additionally, the "medical industry" (122) does not provide healthcare but the opposite. For black people it is a social menace, as illustrated the incapacitation Frank experienced under 'care' of doctors at a mental institution, who injected him with drugs, and by the experiments of the white supremacist eugenicist that left Frank's sister barren. The latter may be approached as a literary allusion to white supremacist healthcare political practices that subjected black people to inhumane scientific experimentation referred to euphemistically as "medical abuses – particularly the Tuskegee (Alabama) experiment (1932–1972) and the high incidence of involuntary sterilization" (Dorsey qtd. in Nelson, 104) to curb the black population's growth over against whites. The objective of Morrison's fictional eugenicist has two foundations – the political stance of "a heavyweight Confederate" (62), influenced by ideologies lauded in books such as *The Passing of the Great Race* and *Heredity, Race and Society*" (65), and frustration resulting from awareness that his family line may come to an end, as he has fathered two infirm daughters. Sarah, a second black domestic employed by the doctor, informs Cee, "They're in a home. They both have great big heads. Cephalitis, I think they call it. Sad for it to happen to even one, but two?" (63). For this reason, the doctor "seemed pleased to hear" (64) that Cee had not born a child before he subjected her to experimentation.

Towards the Domestication of Foreigner's Home

As previously stated, Toni Morrison understands home in relation to a particular state of mind. Interviewed by Eleanor Wachtel, Morrison unequivocally states, "At home you feel that the world is beautiful, gorgeous, magnificent" ("Interview. CBC."). In *Home*, Frank Money harbors these feelings upon his journey towards self-awareness and self-affirmation, whereby he discovers possible means of transforming alienation into a sense of belonging even in overly unhomely spaces.

An occasion that triggers the outcast veteran's reconsideration of manliness and life's essence is a visit to Billy's family. The two men came to know each other by happenstance in a bar. Frank was impressed by the way Billy and his wife transcended the traumatic experience of their son, Thomas, who was permanently injured by a white policeman, who maintained that the boy "had a cap pistol. Eight years old, running up and down the sidewalk pointing it" (31). From that moment on, the family engaged in hard work and employed their religious faith to overcome rage and helplessness. Billy is proud of his son, deemed a "math whiz" (31). The child inspires Frank to think again about manhood, thoughts that the impaired veteran had repressed upon returning from foreign battlefields. Frank also discerns the crucial role that familial

unity plays in assuring the boy's sense of security and self-confidence at home, away from the violent and oppressive outside world.

Additionally to his observation of empowering parent-child dynamics with regard to homeliness, Frank also, in redefining the meaning of home, reconsiders life's gender and sexual spheres. For example, he recalls the hopes he once had at the beginning of his relationship with Lily. After the horrific images of torn and lacerated bodies on the battlefield, Lily's unimpaired physical beauty was healing. Furthermore, by way of an internal dialogue, he clarifies his true emotions "*You are dead wrong if you think I was just scouting for a home with a bowl of sex in it. I wasn't. Something about her floored me, made me want to be good enough for her*" [italics in original] (68). Frank, therefore, challenges traditional gender and sexual notions surrounding home. He feels that honest commitment to mutual support grants a sense of security and belonging. Probably, for this reason, he is not able to establish a permanent relationship, regardless of Lily's sexual attractiveness and her meticulousness about household maintenance as well as gender role division. For Frank, home has more to do with feeling than carnal satisfaction and orderly space.

A greater challenge to gendered patriarchal conceptions of home occurs when Frank observes a black married couple after a racist white mob attacks the woman's husband. The omniscient narrator relates that Frank assumes that the victimized man

> will beat her when they get home […]. It's one thing to be publicly humiliated. A man could move on from that. What was intolerable was the witness of a woman, a wife, who not only saw it, but had dared to try to rescue – rescue! – him. He couldn't protect himself and he couldn't protect her either, as the rock in her face proved. She would have to pay for that broken nose. Over and over again. (26)

For a while, Frank indeed seems to assume that black male domestic violence is an affirmation of black masculine prowess in order to compensate for the powerlessness felt in the outside world. This is reflective of a possible function served by black-on-black intimate violence noted by Mark Antony Neal as "a way of releasing pent-up frustration at one's oppression by "hurting an enemy" – a black enemy, in all but the most grievous circumstances, since the white enemy one might prefer to hurt [is] protected by the full force of white law and lynch law" (209). However, upon recognizing the value of homely serenity, Frank re-evaluates his earlier attitude towards the publicly assaulted husband:

> *Earlier you wrote about how sure I was that the beat-up man on the train to Chicago would turn around when they got home and whip the wife who tried to help him. Not true. I didn't think any such thing. What I thought was that he was proud of her but didn't want to show how proud he was to the other men on the train. I don't think you know much about love. Or me.* [italics in original] (69)

At this point he no longer adheres to a patriarchal conception of home as a space requiring the performance of traditional gender roles, particularly with regard to the misusage of masculine virility.

A breakthrough in Frank's journey towards domestication occurs when he attains a sense of fulfillment after rescuing his sister, Cee, from the life-threatening eugenic practices. The letter calling Frank to come to his imperiled sister's aid recalls familial connectedness that existed when he formerly took care of little Cee. "Maybe his life had been preserved for Cee, […]. Even before she could walk he'd taken care of her. The first word she spoke was 'Fwank'." (35). After Frank brings Cee back to Lotus, he begins to perceive the town differently as he sees it as a distinctive unit that empowers the black community to domesticate the foreign space.

One newly felt emotion is a sense of security, manifested by way of Frank's color discernment. Earlier, while traveling across his racially segregated nation, everything seemed colorless, in black and white shades. "All color disappeared and the world became a black-and-white movie screen. He didn't yell then because he thought something bad was happening to his eyes. Bad, but fixable" (23). After a time, he became increasingly "annoyed and a little frightened by the colorless landscape" (23–24). Although here and there the grass seemed to have "turned green" (24), it was in Lotus where he regained the ability to recognize the complete colors spectrum:

> The sun, having sucked away the blue from the sky, loitered there in a white heaven […] Crimson, purple, pink, and China blue. Had these trees always been this deep, deep green? […] Color, silence, and music enveloped him. This feeling of safety and goodwill, he knew, was exaggerated, but savoring it was real. (117–118)

Also the women of the community, who apply their natural healing power while treating Frank's sister, create the atmosphere of embracing and empowering unity. Miss Ethel establishes a "womanist home," where women reflect the womanist personae defined by Alice Walker as a woman who

> [a]ppreciates and prefers women's culture, women's emotional flexibility (values tears as natural counterbalance of laughter), and women's strength. Sometimes loves individual men, sexually and/or nonsexually. Committed to survival and wholeness of entire people, male *and* female. (xi)

The women who gather at Miss Ethel's engage in chores common to the cultural tradition of black women – singing, quilting and natural healing. Their preference for women's culture is also evidenced by their formation of a female enclave, from which Frank is temporarily ordered to remove himself while his sister recuperates.

Although seemingly female-oriented, the women, following womanist custom, empower both women and men. Cee's healing, as the consequence, fosters Frank's reconsideration of his past experiences of dislocatedness and alienation, enhancing his journey towards domesticity. First, he reconsiders his relationship with Lily as a stage towards mental empowerment, although they were not able to establish a traditional household. Frank is "now convinced his attachment to her was medicinal […] Effectively, […] Lily displaced his disorder, his rage and his shame. The displacements had convinced him the emotional wreckage no longer existed" (107–108). Secondly, upon revisiting, "cleaning and repairing his parents' house that had been empty since his father

died" (120), he feels at home in Lotus. He thinks positively of surrounding cotton fields, although "he had hated this place once" (120).

The embracing homely location facilitates development of Frank's self-awareness as he goes on to ponder "what else [is] troubling him and what to do about it" (132). He develops the courage to face the repressed battlefield memory of his lustful murder of the hungry Korean girl. Tormenting thoughts about the girl intertwine with those of Cee's unborn child. He hopes in "time to work it loose" (135) so that he might regain a sense of integrity and inner peace. He succeeds in doing so only after Cee and he rebury the profaned corpse of a black man, who was unwillingly killed by his son during a forced switchblades fight for a white racist crowd's amusement. Upon his grave, Frank places a marker that reads, "Here Stands A Man" (145). He reminiscences the sense of power, security, and familial bonding he felt at that moment. "*I stood there a long while, staring at that tree. / It looked so strong / So beautiful. / Hurt right down the middle/ But alive and well. / Cee touched my shoulder / Lightly. / Frank? / Yes?/ Come on, brother. Let's go home*" [italics in original] (147). The relief may also reflect the African-American traditional belief in death as home-going. For instance, during an African-American Christian funerals, "there is an opening hymn that captures the spirit of celebration and the joy of home-going for the deceased" (Armstrong, 101), and "[c]onsistent with the theme of home-going, the eulogist must uplift those gathered with a message of hope for a better future for the deceased" (102). Often liturgy includes spirituals expressing despair and hopefulness, for instance, "*Sometimes I am tossed and driven / Sometimes I don't know where to roam, / I've heard of a city called 'Heaven' / I've stared to make it my home*" [italics in original] (Jones, 86) or "*Steal away, steal away, / steal away to Jesus! / Steal away, steal away home, / I ain't got long to stay here*" [italics in original] (Jones, 74). The attitudes and emotions of Morrison's characters educed by the dignified reburial of the black male victim indicate salvific hope in death and concomitant ancestral unity. Also the surrounding nature radiates homeliness and comfort: "The sun had reddened and was about to set. […] Honeybees had gone home. Fireflies waited for night. And a light smell of muscadine grapes pierced by hummingbirds soothed the gravedigger. When finally it was done a welcome breeze rose. Brother and sister slid the crayon-colored coffin into the perpendicular grave" (144).

Conclusions

The alienation from the American homeland that Morrison's fictional characters experience echoes to a certain extent the condition Michael Walzer describes in his essay "What Does It Mean to Be an "American?" as follows, "To be 'at home' in America is a personal matter: Americans have homesteads and homefolks and hometowns, and each of these is an endlessly interesting topic of conversation. But they don't have much to say about a common or communal home" (592–593). In *Home*, Toni Morrison tends to individualize domestication in America. She portrays particular members of the fictional Lotus black community as 'homefolks and hometowns' that are outside the broader American national family. Frank's experience also is that of an individual searching for a spiritual essence of home over against unwelcoming, confining, or discomforting dwellings, signified epigraphically at the novel's beginning, from whence an unknown person, akin to Frank, speaks of estrangement from a domestic structure:

> Whose house is this? / Whose night keeps out the light / In here? / Say, who owns this house? / It's not mine. / I dreamed another, sweeter, brighter / With a view of lakes crossed in painted boats; / Of fields wide as arms open for me. / This house is strange. / Its shadows lie. / Say, tell me, why does its lock fit my key. (epigraph)

This is emblematic of Frank's remembrance of the childhood and young adult feelings he harbored in Lotus before military service while living at his grandmother's house, parental home, and later on as a psychologically devastated veteran at his lover Lily's apartment. In these spaces, the occupants turned out to be overly taken up by everyday chores and housekeeping, neglecting concern for each other's needs and feelings. Although his key fit the locks to doors of the houses, he did not feel secure.

Toni Morrison postulates that a sense of belonging might lead to a redevelopment of domesticity that Frank regains within foreigner's home when called upon to rescue his imperiled sister, together with the community of women healers who fostered a sense of communal security, with both arising out of resistance. Frank's assumption of responsibility for his sister motivates him to struggle against menacing acts. He breaks free from his bed straps in the "nuthouse" (11) (mental institution) and absconds to confront the white supremacist doctor in Atlanta. Likewise, in Lotus, the women healers resist "the medical industry" (122) with convalescent care and inculcate a spirit of resistance within the victimized. After Cee recovers, Miss Ethel counsels her on transforming the space where she once felt foreign to home:

> Look to yourself. You free. Nothing and nobody is obliged to save you but you. Seed your own land. […] Don't let Lenore or some trifling boyfriend and certainly no devil doctor decide who you are. That's slavery. Somewhere inside you is that free person I'm talking about. Locate her and let her do some good in the world. (126)

Taking Ethel's advice, Cee returns to her parents' residence, where she and her brother begin to transpose their house into a home.

The domicile that the siblings recreate symbolically challenges traditional patriarchal gendered households in several ways. First of all, they inhabit the space asexually. Secondly, Cee exhibits self-confidence despite her inability to fulfill a fundamental patriarchal maternal directive. Lastly, as the characters begin to furnish and equip their abode, no mention is made of fixed gender roles performance. The most significant purposes of Frank and Cee's home are to bring security and authenticity into their individual lives, and to empower the two siblings to face and transcend traumatic past experiences.

In turn, the broader black community of Lotus creates a homely milieu, free from negative external norms, be they racial or gendered or both. In terms of race, black men and women find pathways to transcend the hopelessness and helplessness resulting from their oppressive and atrocious experiences, providing feelings of home at least within the immediate black community. In terms of gender, the familial dynamics among them is a far cry from the dominant western patriarchal models of mainstream white society. Certain gender roles are even reversed. The women serve as healers, over against a "medical industry" (122) dominated by white male physicians and scientists.

The men are associated with well-cooked meals, contrasting with "classic Western traditions [in which] the kitchen figures as the most feminine of already feminized domestic spaces" (Dobbs, 116). When Frank sees two men playing the blues, he thinks "that somewhere nearby pork ribs sizzl[e] on a yard grill and inside the house there [is] potato salad and coleslaw and early sweet peas too" (118). In his own kitchen, Frank offers to help his sister cook.

In conclusion, Toni Morrison portrays the process of domestication in foreigner's home to evidence the fluidity of home, the "shifting quality of home" (Mayberry, 565). Home is perceived to be temporal, not eternal, a mental and emotional state that can be kindled and rekindled even in previously alienating locations, represented by the characters' reconnection with Lotus, the community they formerly disfavored.

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