

## Home in Toni Morrison's *Home*

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**ABSTRACT:** This paper deals with Toni Morrison's (1931) *Home* (2012) in relation to theories determined by Homi K. Bhabha (1949). Because Toni Morrison is an African-American novelist in the context of white writing community, defining and constructing a new identity for the characters is implicitly understood in her fictions through analyzing elements such as class, gender, race and poverty which influence her character's identity in male-dominated societies or by colonial powers. Moreover, this paper sheds more light on the concepts like "liminal", "ambivalent", and "hybrid identity" of the colonized people reconstructed in a "Third Space of Enunciation" or "in-between" spaces based on Bhabha's definition of colonial discourse and identity. The idea of "unhomeliness" popularized by Bhabha indeed concerns being separated from home that affects migrants' identities, especially the Blacks who wander in this novel. Finally, by considering the characters' conditions, it can be concluded that the imperial power is indifferent to the future of the Blacks and endangers their lives by forcing them to be engaged in wars, doing medical and eugenic experiments on black women in order to rescue the rich, whereas through infertility of the black women marginalizes them. In other words, the homeless and wandering characters are haunted until they are far from their homes or uprooted and they cannot achieve the stability of their identity. On the contrary, by homecoming they will reconstruct their identity and acquire their authenticity again because for them returning home means stability of identity.

**Keywords:** Hybrid Identity, Home, Liminal, Ambivalent, Unhomeliness.

### INTRODUCTION

Toni Morrison (1931), an African American novelist in the context of white writing and the Nobel Prize-winning, was born on February 18, 1931, having the name, according to her birth certificate, Chole Ardelia Wofford. Morrison herself has said that Toni was a nickname she acquired as a young adult and she regrets having used the name when she published her first novel, but to Morrison and her family she is still referred to the name she was born with, Chole Wofford. Publicly, she is known as Toni Morrison because of her marriage with Harold Morrison. Morrison's family moved from southern States to North as so many African Americans did in the exodus known historically as the Great Migration, in search of better economic opportunities and greater freedom from the often violent manifestations of southern racism. Morrison tries to clarify the problems of the black people, in-between generations and immigrants by using different techniques such as stream of consciousness. She wants to indicate the problems of those who are forced to leave their homes. Morrison recalls her grandparent's stories and her world is inspired with a sense of place, community, purpose and identity which motivate her fabric imaginative world.

*Home* (2012) is about Frank Money, and deals with the warrior's struggle to return home. There are various problems which make the journey challenging for Frank Money. The story is about the most painful experiences of people, such as the war between Korea and the United States, medical experiments on some poor people for genetic investigations, violence against children and women specially, the black American women and brutality in the history of race in America. The writer writes in the modern and present world, but she tries to relate different

events which refer to past and future by using the stream of consciousness technique and remembering the past events. This novel has important significations of uprooting, homecoming and ownership.

Once two persons encounter each other, one of the questions which comes into their mind is the question of home, which is where he/she lives or where he/she belongs to. In general, home means the place where a person belongs to and it is equal to the birthplace, while some people believe that the concept of home refers to fatherland or motherland. No one can deny this fact that home has a meaning beyond a house or a shelter; although these concepts are used alongside its other meaning such as town, city or country. Shelly Mallet, in "Understanding Home: A Critical View on Literature" (2000), states that "in English the term home derives from the Anglo-Saxon word, ham, meaning village, estate or town, home and house are related but not conflated. Home is a virtual place and is the place of belongings" (63).

There are other views and various definitions about home clarified by many scholars such as Karan. R. Lawrence who states: "Home is equated with woman and additionally she in effect is home itself, for the female body is traditionally associated with earth, shelter and enclosure" (qtd. in Smith, 2001). Therefore home is the place where one belongs to; on the contrary, other things such as customs, dressing, language and accent, religion, race and history belong to it and all of them construct the behavioral characteristics of human beings as their identity. In fact, the person is characterized as a human being by such belongings and he/she can be identified from other people. Home is the place of culture and identity; therefore, those who lose it will suffer critically searching for their true being and identity. They will have the desire of homecoming to reconstruct their identity.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

### ***METHOD: Homi K. Bhabha and Hybridity***

Homi K. Bhabha, in *The Location of Culture* (1994), at first deals with the categories of class, gender, generation, institutional location and geopolitical locale each of them refer to identity in the new world. In his arguments, the important point is the process of "cultural differences" which takes place in an "in-between" space for making a new identity. It is for the appearance of such spaces in which both subjective and common experiences of community interest or cultural value are transformed (2). He asserts that these differences in communities whether antagonistic or "affiliative" are complex and continuing transformations which cause cultural "hybridities" that are found during "historical transformations" (ibid).

Bhabha argues that the "interstitial" space between fixed identifications makes the possibility of a cultural "hybridity" (ibid 3). He challenges the binary oppositions critically; on the contrary, he has an "architecture[al]" use of "stairwell" as a "liminal" space, "in-between" form of identity, "which is a symbolic interaction between upper and lower, black and white" (ibid 4). Additionally, he criticizes such binary oppositions defined in terms of center/margin, civilized/savage, and enlightened/ignorant, in order to suggest that cultures interact, transgress and transform each other in a complex manner than binary oppositions.

Bhabha focuses his discussion on postcolonial migration which is related to the narratives of cultural and political diaspora, such as social displacements, poetics exile, political and economic refugees. He believes that the people who are forced to live in foreign territories, in fact they live in a "boundary" that is a space "from which something begins its presence in a way that is called ambivalence" (ibid 5). According to Bhabha, ambivalence is an encounter with 'newness' in which it renews the past and changes the performance of the present.

Bhabha often deals with the works of Toni Morrison (1931- ) and Nadine Gordmire (1923- ) and tries to explain "unhomely" spaces among the dominant powers, and believes that they focus on the social and cultural displacement in their unhomely fictions (ibid 12). Consequently, a migrant who lives in a foreign territory encounters such a "hybridity", "liminality" and in-between spaces in which he is under the influence of two different worlds, the colonized and the colonizer. In fact, he suffers from a kind of no-belonging status, and hybrid identity. He tries both to adapt himself to the changes and construct new conditions for himself by recreating home and writing about it, through which he expresses his desire for returning home. This kind of writing obviously is seen in the works of African-American writers who attempt to create a new identity in the "Third Space of Enunciation" (ibid). They see themselves in a dangling position; therefore, they want to make an authenticity by making a new home. Melancholy, nostalgia, vagrancy and homesickness as the most important signs are represented in the works of these writers to challenge the colonial and the imperial powers.

### ***Home: A Place of Constructing Identity***

Toni Morrison, in *Home* (2012), focuses on the roots of racism and slavery by using the stream of consciousness technique. The story is set in the mid-twentieth century, pre-civil rights era in South America, where

the Blacks were treated violently and forced to leave their home. The main character of the novel is Frank Money moved from Texas to Lotus. Bandera County was his first home where he was forced to leave under threat by hooded men within twenty four hours. Losing home meant losing future as his homeless sister, Ycidra Later known as Cee, was born on the road without having no roof over her head and his grandmother predicted this homeliness as a “worthless and sinful future” (Home, 44). In other words, when Frank and his family left their home, in fact, they lost their beloved things, properties, ownership and their future; for instance, his mother, Ida, cried when she was living her properties.

At the beginning of Frank’s story he appears shoeless because when he was in the hospital “they had taken his shirt and laced boots but his pants and army jacket [...] were hanging in the locker” (Home, 8). Regarding the following sentences quoted from Home, it can be concluded that the writer tries to show the violence against the Blacks by the dominant power; in other words, it refers to the hegemony of the superior colonizer over the inferior colonized:

Still, before escape, he would have to get shoes somehow, someway. Walking anywhere in winter without shoes would guarantee his being arrested and back in the ward until he could be sentenced for vagrancy. Interesting law, vagrancy, meaning standing outside or walking without clear purpose anywhere. Carrying a book would help, but being barefoot would contradict “purposefulness” and standing still could prompt a complaint of “loitering”. Better than most, he knew that being outside wasn’t necessary for legal or illegal disruption. 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. (Home, 9)

Being in this condition, being “barefoot” is a risk of being arrested by the police; on the other hand, it reminds him of his childhood memories when he and his family were forced to leave their home. Moreover, it indicates the most painful memories of their migration to an unknown and strange location such as Lotus. He remembers all their sufferings in the imposed dislocation when they were forced to abandon their all properties and their belongings. He describes this migration in these words “the sole of my shoe flapped until pap tied it up with his own shoelace” (Home, 40). One might refer to the inner sounds of the author:

Talk about tired. Talk about hungry. I have eaten trash in jail, Korea, hospitals, at table, and from certain garbage cans. Nothing, however, compares to the leftovers at food pantries. Write about that. Why don’t you? I remember standing in line at Church of the Redeemer waiting for a tin plate of dry. Hard cheese already showing green, pickled pig’s feet-its soaking stale biscuits. [...] You don’t know what heat is until you cross the border from Texas to Louisiana in the summer. You can’t come up with words that catch it. Trees give up. Turtles cook in their shells. Describe that if you know how. (Home, 40-1)

Toni Morrison describes past and present life of the black people simultaneously; in Philip Page’s (1965- ) words, she tries to combine the “personal experience” of this character to “the past of a cultural heritage” (18). Concerning these two forms of being “barefoot” whether in present, in the street after escaping from hospital, or during the difficult and long journey and vacating home from Bandera County to Lotus, and being under threat shows the severe violence against the Blacks in America during the 1950s. It is implicitly stated that America is not still a safe place for the black people.

This violence against the black people shows that the American community has not accepted the Blacks as a member of its own; in other words, this marks on the gaze of the superior toward the inferior. The superior power considers him and other black people as savage, barbarous and uncivilized who are dangerous for his society. When Reverend Locke “gave him a worried glance. Not nervous, just worried. They must have thought you was dangerous. If you was just sick they’d never you let in” (Home, 13). Actually, it can be said that this violence against the black people shows a “dichotomy” (Baradaran Jamili, 263) between White/Black, superior/inferior and the colonizer/colonized.

Although Frank Money is a person who joined the army, an “integrated army” (Home, 18) and made many services for this country, this community ignores his services and does not accept him as a citizen. It influences his life in such a way that he feels unhomeliness as Bhabha argues, unhomeless does not mean homeless. Bhabha notes that “this process is relocation of home to another territory where the occupants cross to another culture, however to be unhomed is not to be homeless” (1994).

Frank went to Korea and had been in the battle field where he lost his two friends but he and the others like him have no acceptance and authenticity, even though the relation between the colonizer and the colonized is a mutual relationship. As Leila Baradaran Jamili, in *Virginia Woolf: Travelling, Travel Writing and Travel Fictions* (2009), states the colonized and colonizer need each other, therefore they have a “coexistence”, one exists because of the other’s existence. She compares this relationship to “two opposite sides of a seesaw, whose up-and-down or to-and-fro movement is essential for their survival” (262).

Morrison, in *Home*, portrays such a relationship as a relation which is a beneficiary for the colonizer rather than for the colonized. For instance, the white community considers the Whites as the superior power, uses the dead bodies of black people and sends them to medical schools for doing more investigations in order to cure the White sick individuals. One might refer to the dialogue between Frank Money and his friend Reverend Locke:

Reverend Locke grunted. "Have a seat," he said, then, shaking his head, added, "You lucky, Mr. Money. They sell a lot of bodies out of there." Bodies? Frank sank down on the sofa, only vaguely caring or wondering what the man was talking about.

"Uh-huh. To the medical school."

"They sell dead bodies? What for?"

"Well, you know, doctors need to work on the dead poor so they can help the live rich." (Home, 12)

As far as Frank experiences these hard conditions and he recognizes the injustice about himself and other black people, he sees himself in a state of non-belonging. He finds this home as an unhomey home, as Bhabha attributes it to these people. He lives in the state of unhomeliness. As he states "not totally homeless but close" (Home, 27, our emphasis), he has wandered in the streets of Seattle. He does not know to which culture, country or city he belongs. Morrison shows this situation during Frank's conversation with Watson Billy:

It was that quick down-home friendliness that led Frank to talk freely to the man on the Stool next to his who volunteered his name.

"Watson. Billy Watson". He held out his hand.

"Frank Money".

"Where you from, Frank"?

"Aw, man. Korea, Kentucky, San Diego, Seattle, Georgia. Name it I'm from it.

"You looking to be from here too?"

"No. I'm headed on back to Georgia." (Home, 28)

Another aspect of this violence against the black people refers to the moment when he hears about Billy Watson's son, Thomas, who has been injured by the police. A policeman shoots at him because he has had a toy gun in his hand and the police man thought that it was a real one at that time. Thomas was just eight years old:

When Billy introduced his son to Frank, the boy had lifted his left arm to shake hands.

Frank noticed the right one sagging at his side. Now, shuffling the deck, he asked what happened to his son's arm. Billy arranged his hands in rifle position. "Drive-by cop," he said. He had a cap pistol. Eight years old, running up and down the sidewalk pointing it Some Redneck rookie thought his dick was underappreciated by his brother cops. "You can't just shoot a kid", said Frank. "Cops shoot anything they want. This here's a mob city." (Home, 31)

Morrison wants to show the marginalization of the black people in the society and the situation in which they are not considered as human. The White community does not accept any right for the Blacks. Similar to other states which treat the black people as cargo and believe that Black is equal to a slave, one might refer to Reverend Locke who talks with Frank "well, an integrated army is integrated misery. You all go fight, come back, they treat you like dogs. Change that. They treat dogs better" (Home, 18). Toni Morrison challenges this hard condition of the Blacks, and wants them to recognize their abilities to overcome such difficulties as Philip Page, in *Dangerous Freedom: Fusion and Fragmentation in Toni Morrison's Novels* (1995), states "they try to accept them not escaping" (18).

On the contrary, Thomas is the manifestation of this change who distinguishes his abilities and thinks more than the others. When Frank talks to him, he realizes that he is a different boy:

"My name is Thomas", said the boy.

"Oh, okay, Thomas. I hear you good at math".

"I'm good at everything."

"Like what?"

"Civics, geography, English..." His voice trailed off as though he could have cited many more subjects he was good at.

"You'll go so far, son."

"And I'll go deep." (Home, 31-2)

This conversation continues and Thomas asks Frank some questions about his background which influences Frank's mind severely:

A short silence followed while Thomas placed a folded blanket on top of a pillow, tucking both under his dead arm. At the bedroom door he turned to Frank. "Were you in the war?"

"I was."

"Did you kill anybody?"

"Had to."

"How did it feel?"

"Bad. Real bad."

"That's good. That it made you feel bad. I'm glad."

"How come?"

"It means you're not a liar."

"You are deep, Thomas." Frank smiled. "What you want to be when you grow up?"

Thomas turned the knob with his left hand and opened the door. "A man", he said and left. (Home, 32-3)

In this novel, Toni Morrison reminds us of humanity and focuses her arguments on identity. As Harold Bloom, in Bloom's *Modern Critical Views: Toni Morrison* (2005), believes "Morrison's world is richly imbued with a sense of place, community and identity" (4). After the conversation between Frank and Thomas, Frank recalls his memories of his two homeboys who were killed in the battlefield while he was not able to rescue or help them. As the writer states that they had shouted and asked for help but Frank did not do much for them and this refers to his worst nightmares. "But the mare always showed up at night, never beating her hooves at night" (Home, 33). He suffered from these images like the image of a "zoot-suited man" which appeared and disappeared or the other images, for instance:

"Hey! Who the hell are you? What you want?" Frank rose from the bed and moved toward the figure. After three steps the zoot-suited man disappeared. Frank went back to bed, thinking that particular living dream was not all that bad compared to others he'd had. No dogs or birds eating the remains of his comrades, like the hallucination he'd had once while sitting on a bench in the city park's rose garden. (Home, 33)

Or other pictures that did not go away, especially when he was alone:

Whatever the surroundings, he saw a boy pushing his entrails back in, holding in his palms like a fortune-teller's globe shattering with bad news; or he heard a boy with only the bottom half of his face intact, the lips calling mama. And he was stepping over them, around them, to stay alive, to keep his own face from dissolving, his own colorful guts under that oh-so-thin sheet of flesh. Against the back and white of that winter landscape, Blood red took center stage. (Home, 20)

These images influence his inner character or identity, and shows that his world is a scattered one, like the scattered pictures that he sees every day and night, in reality and dream. His world is a black and white landscape. Occasionally, its colors disappear and then they reappear. Actually, homelessness has affected his identity, and the rest of his life is involved in this loss. He gambled his army pay and lost it, had different jobs and lost them even he lost his girl friend, Lily, who had a positive influence on his recovering from the nightmares. But he had a single connection by which he could have been linked to his home and it was his sister, Ycidra. His sister is the only reason that could help him to return home and reconsider his identity. She is his belonging.

Among all of these dreams and hallucinations, suddenly he remembers his sister and believes that what had been the reason "no Russian-made bullet had blown his head off while everybody else he was closed to die over there" (Home, 34) was his sister. Therefore he thinks that he is alive because of Cee:

She had been his original caring-for, a selflessness without gain or emotional profit. Even before she could walk he'd taken care of her. The first word she spoke was "Frank". Two of her baby teeth were hidden in the kitchen matchbox along with his lucky marbles and the broken watch they had found on the riverbank. [...] the only thing he could not do for her was wipe the sorrow, or was it panic, from her eyes when he enlisted. He tried tell her the army was the only solution. Lotus was suffocating, killing him and his two best friends. (Home, 35)

Morrison, like the other counterpart scholars, Homi K. Bhabha, believes that wandering in the world causes an ambivalent status and a non-belonging situation in which the colonized subject does not know to which culture belongs. This is because they have been deprived from their true being and identity. What Morrison declares in her story is remembrance of past by her characters and their assiduities to reconstruct their identity. As Bhabha states the personal and public lives are interrelated, and he believes that "the unhomely moment relates the traumatic ambivalences of a personal, psychic history to the wider disjunction of political existence" (1994).

It is obvious that wandering of this character in the world of non-belonging and unhomeliness reflects his inner world which is unstable and unpredictable in his behavior. Being far from home and what he experienced during the war in Korea has deprived him from humanity and he is suffering now because he has committed violent actions, killing a little Korean girl scavenging for food like an animal. Although he had been always a good brother for his sister during the days his parents had to work sixteen hours a day on plantations for getting money to buy a home. He confesses his sin at the end of the story while he had told that the guard shoots at the little girl:

I have to say something to you right now. I have to tell the whole truth. I lied to you and I lied to me. I hide it from you because I hide it from me. I felt so proud grieving over my dead friends. How I loved them. How much I cared about them, missed them. My mourning was so thick it completely covered my shame. [...]

I shot the Korean girl in her face.  
I am the one she touched.  
I am the one who saw her smile.  
I am the one she said “yum-yum” to.  
A child. A wee little girl. I didn’t think. I didn’t have to.  
Better she should die. (Home, 133-4)

He stood in dread of stating that event, and was haunted by images from his past. He wanders aimlessly, not quite sure about his own self, humanity and his identity. On the one hand, he is worried about what happened in Korea, on the other hand, he tries to do something for his sister and rescue her, when he received a letter from Sara that she had written Cee is in danger. He thought that Cee was gradually dying in the hands of a strange physician named Dr. Beau who had been perhaps involved in eugenics experiments. In this novel Frank, based on Bhabha’s perspective, lives in a state of being between two different cultures, one is his own Black culture and the other is the White society where he lives.

Bhabha uses the Freudian term “Unheimliche” or the “Unhomeliness” (1994), to suggest what is involved in the construction of hybrid identity of a colonized individual, like Frank Money, is an “estranging sense of the relocation of home and the world—the unhomeliness—that is the condition of extra territorial and cross-cultural initiations” (ibid). The colonized subject encounters two different worlds, one of the colonizer and the other of the colonized that are clashing with each other and none looks like his home, consequently feels unhomeliness.

Morrison portrays physical and psychological abuse of the Blacks through the memory of the past while she challenges the domination of the colonial rule over the colonized people and puts into question this condition and its influence on their identity. The dominant power deprives them from their true being and their identity. She reconstructs the history of America, slave trading and subjugation of blacks whether the women or men through her works, as Bhabha argues that the displaced and the non-nationals must invent their own “history” (1994: 9), through art, especially literature, which “renews the past, refigures it as a contingent in-between space that innovates and interrupts the performance of the present” (ibid 10).

## CONCLUSION

Toni Morrison like other African-American writers has tried to reflect the difficult conditions of the Blacks, especially the women in her literary works such as her recent slim novel, Home (2012). Basically, she uses the stream of consciousness technique and remembrance of past events during the writing of her works; therefore, what influences her power of imagination is the sense of place, community and identity. In her recent fiction she tries to clarify the difficulties of the Blacks who wander and are homeless in the world, and marks on its consequences which result in the instability of their identity.

By referring to Bhabha’s studies on postcolonialism, his idea of ‘Third Space of Enunciation’ where the “hybrid identity” of the colonized subject is formed (1994), he argues that a new form of identity is reconstructed between the world of the colonizer and the colonized. In Bhabha’s perspective, the construction of the hybrid identity is an “estranging sense of relocation of home and the world” (ibid 11). Entering the ‘Third space’ shows the potentiality of constructing an unstable identity. Toni Morrison challenges the issues related to migrants who were uprooted by war and wandered in the world portraying the notion of ‘unhomeliness’ determined by Bhabha.

Morrison, in Home, challenges the existing conditions for the Blacks, in fact, she wants to show how the homeless and ambivalent people have been deprived from their identity as far as they are subjugated by the dominant powers, and they have been drawn to war and its terrors, eventually they have been taken away their home and their humanity. Morrison shows that home is the place for constructing identity.

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